

Prophetic Resistance at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Sr. Norma Pimentel's Campaign Against Anti-Immigrant Media Narratives

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Abstract: As a nun with the Missionaries of Jesus and recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. “Keep the Dream Alive” award, Sr. Norma Pimentel has dedicated her life to aiding and advocating for immigrants in crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. This essay employs Kenneth Burke's cluster method to examine three of Sr. Pimentel's TED Talks (2019–2020), demonstrating how she constructs a prophetic persona to challenge anti-immigrant narratives. Grounded in scholarship on prophetic, political, and border rhetoric, this essay reveals how Sr. Pimentel strategically aligns her discourse with Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) to critique the media's anti-immigrant doctrine and reframe immigration through a lens of humanization.

Keywords: *rhetoric, borders, immigrants, prophetic persona, cluster method*

“A child looked up to me after she was reunited, and she said, ‘*Hoy no voy a llorar . . . Today I'm not going to cry,*’ and I said ‘*Por qué, mi hija?*’ She said, ‘*Tonight I'm going to be with her*’” (TED, 2020, 10:59–11:25). After enduring a harrowing month of separation in a detention facility, the child and her mother were finally reunited. From 2019–2020, Sr. Pimentel used her platform in various TED Talks to critique the inequitable treatment of immigrants along the Rio Grande Valley border, bringing attention to their harsh living conditions—lack of food, showers, and proper care for extended periods. She also condemned harmful media rhetoric that sought to criminalize immigrants, urging Americans to resist biased portrayals and instead “open their hearts to immigrants” (TEDx Talks, 2019). Her rhetorical strategy invokes a call to action, challenging the public to reconsider dominant narratives about immigration and to approach the issue with a sense of empathy and moral responsibility.

Since the early 1990s, the United States has allocated significant taxpayer resources toward the construction of a border wall aimed at separating the U.S. from Mexico. Along the wall, added surveillance of immigrants by border patrol and the media has historically aided in the production of anti-Latiné rhetoric. This surveillance of immigrants has been coined “borderveillance,” which is described by Fojas (2021) as “the operations of a vast network and infrastructure of oversight, control, and management of regions that symbolize the bounded and secured nation, marking these regions as permanent fields of the visible” (p. 29). This borderveillance is constructed by the media to gain spectatorship into the status of immigrants, the border, and detainment procedures, while also providing visibility to the public. Borderveillance and media bias on the border have been around and discussed for years, and prior to 2012, media-biased reporting on the illegal apprehension of Latiné citizens reached a critical point, with journalists framing it a border crisis: “More than 85% of people apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol trying to enter the United States were Mexican citizens” (Reidy, 2023, “*Roots of a crisis*”). This has created a “banopticon,” similar to Foucault's (1977)

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panopticon model, which seeks to control and surveil without making itself known to the general public, further emphasizing the role the media plays in the production of anti-Latiné rhetoric.

As of May 11, 2023, the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border has shifted toward a state of panic due to the end of Title 42: “The authority allowed U.S. officials to turn away immigrants who came to the U.S.-Mexico border on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19” (Long, 2023, *“What is Title 42 and what did it do?”*). As Trump’s emergency health holdover policy has ended, Biden’s promise to “take a more ‘fair and humane’ approach to immigration” continues to fail as tent and border cities have become increasingly overcrowded, with no additional funding sent to these locations to aid immigrants attempting to gain asylum (Reidy, 2023, *“Encounters at the southern US land through the years”*). The new asylum rules that have been espoused are mandatory screenings for immigrants seeking asylum, with the screenings being set in place to determine if immigrants are facing a “credible fear of persecution in their homeland” (Long, 2023, *“New asylum rules”*). Yet, many are turned away as a result of overcrowding, and whether fear is present among asylum seekers, their petitions are refuted. In response to overcrowding, border patrol stations are intended to serve as temporary housing for immigrants. However, agents have increasingly displaced immigrants to countries without providing financial aid (Long, 2023). As of 2024, immigrants continue to face a lack of food and shelter, violence, extortion, trafficking, and exclusionary rhetoric, all while trying to gain citizenship, seek asylum, and avoid deportation.

Sr. Pimentel, sister with the Missionaries of Jesus, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, and recipient of the Martin Luther King, Jr. “Keep the Dream Alive” award, oversees the charitable arm of the Diocese of Brownsville. There, she oversees the different ministries and services in the areas of the Rio Grande Valley through disaster relief, clinical counseling, pregnancy care, and food programs (National Immigration Forum, n.d.). Among other forms of activism, Sr. Pimentel uses her role as a nun with the Missionaries of Jesus to resist the media’s stigmatization of immigrants. In response, she has been the subject of public attacks from the conservative lobbying group CatholicVote as they urge for stricter protocols on the border and continue to criticize Sr. Pimentel’s advocacy for immigrant support: “A lawsuit was filed by the conservative political advocacy group—CatholicVote—to access communications between the Biden administration and Catholic humanitarian entities at the Southern Texas-Mexico border” (Lavenburg, 2022, para. 1). With the criticism from conservative lobbyists and other media entities, it is apparent that the border crisis is not one caused by immigrants but is shaped by public policies and further amplified by the media’s polarization of current events. The current immigration challenges can be traced back to the legislative changes during the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, under Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency, as the act reunited immigrant families and attracted skilled laborers from the Global South (University of Arizona, n.d.). Administrations from Nixon to Trump have continued introducing legislative measures to address immigration. However, these policies have exacerbated humanitarian crises at the border, as the construction of physical barriers and the expansion of ICE operations have contributed to a rise in immigrant deaths (University of Arizona, n.d.). While these policies were designed to address security and control, they have failed to account for humanitarian costs, which has amplified the suffering of immigrant populations.

Using Kenneth Burke's cluster method, this essay analyzes three of Sr. Pimentel's TED talks from 2019 and 2020 that have amassed over 52,000 views: *Restoring Human Dignity at the U.S. Southern Border*, *The Border Crisis in the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Can I Inspire You to Open Your Hearts to Immigrants?* Burke's (1941) cluster method is a technique that assesses "what goes with what" (p. 18). Scholars have long applied this method to analyze and critique a wide variety of texts, from poetry to public address (Berthold, 1976; Garner & Calloway-Thomas, 1991; Ivie, 1974; Ivie, 1980; Vining, 2022). The cluster method identifies symbolic unification and traces the underlying motives within texts. As Berthold (1976) explains, "Burke's method offers an objective way of determining relationships between a speaker's main concerns, as well as providing a fresh perspective for rhetorical critics seeking to uncover motives and character" (p. 302). By identifying positive and negative symbolic clusters, this essay reveals how themes emerge through symbols that carry historical weight—particularly in relation to the construction and development of anti-Latiné rhetoric perpetuated by the U.S. media.

Drawing from existing scholarship in political, border, and prophetic rhetoric, this essay analyzes the significance behind Sr. Pimentel's TED talks. It demonstrates how she utilizes a prophetic persona to ignite exigency in her audience, encouraging them to shift away from demonizing immigrant propaganda circulating the media and toward a position of benevolence for immigrant lives on the U.S.-Mexico border. According to Johnson (2010), "the construction of a prophetic persona is a way to gain support, build authority, and invoke the cultural traditions of audiences" (p. 268). Through Sr. Pimentel's rhetoric, parallels emerged between her discourse and the rhetorical tradition of Paul VI in the *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), which underscores the need for immigrant support through a global model of acceptance. This essay argues how Sr. Pimentel strategically equips a prophetic persona and the rhetoric used in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) to critique the media's anti-immigrant doctrine while aiming to move U.S. publics toward a framework of immigrant humanization.

The Adoption of a Prophetic Persona and the Rhetorical Strategies of Paul VI

Sr. Pimentel's development of a prophetic persona, identified by Johnson (2010), divides itself into four parts: (1) grounding rhetoric in the sacred, (2) sharing of the real situation, (3) critiques and challenges, and the emergence of a (4) pragmatic hope (pp. 276–280). Rhetoric that emerged from the positive and negative clusters underscores the association of immigrants as sacred, sharing the "media situation" in which anti-Latiné rhetoric is grounded, critiques and challenges towards the media, and a pragmatic hope rooted in immigrant humanization. Kosho (2016) explains how media portrayals, including images, descriptions, and the labeling of immigrants, significantly influence public attitudes and immigration policies. Far-right media outlets often amplify anti-immigrant sentiments by employing dehumanizing rhetoric and perpetuating fear-based narratives that frame immigrants as security threats (Kosho, 2016). However, it is also important to acknowledge that liberal media can contribute to anti-immigrant sentiments by reinforcing stereotypes tied to national security concerns (Kosho, 2016). While Republicans generally prioritize increasing border security and deportations, Democrats have also supported policies that reinforce criminalization and marginalization of immigrants. This is reflected in data showing that 59% of Democrats and 91% of Republicans consider increased border security an "important goal" (Oliphant & Cerda,

2022, “*Wide partisan and ideological differences on immigration policy*”). This emphasis on security has often fueled narratives that depict immigrants as potential threats, further entrenching dehumanizing perceptions. Constructing narratives that highlight immigrants’ pursuit of freedom can be instrumental in reducing dehumanization by shifting the focus from fear-based portrayals to humanizing their struggles and aspirations, countering rhetoric that frames them as threats.

From these clusters that emerged, the language used to develop a prophetic persona mimics the language of Paul VI in the *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), which addresses the need for people to participate in social and political reform: “From all sides, there rises a yearning for more justice and a desire for a better-guaranteed peace in mutual respect among individuals and peoples” (para. 2). This “mutual respect” indicates a grounding of immigrant lives in the sacred, as it further humanizes them and their experiences. Throughout his decree, Paul VI (1971) underscores the dual responsibility in media consumption and production: individuals are tasked with critically assessing the media they consume to avoid detrimental impacts, while media institutions bear the ethical obligation to produce content that does not inflict harm. Sr. Pimentel draws upon this framework, critiquing media outlets that disseminate damaging narratives about immigrants, arguing that such portrayals not only distort public perception but also contribute to the marginalization and dehumanization of vulnerable populations.

Paul VI’s *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) was constructed during a time of global upheaval marked by urbanization, poverty, and the displacement of marginalized groups (California Catholic Conference, 2015). These conditions echo many of the challenges facing immigrants today, particularly those near the U.S.-Mexico border. In the *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Pope Paul VI underscores the socio-political transformations facing society; this includes the shift away from agrarian economic systems and the struggles of immigrants to find employment (Britannica, 2024). These issues remain similar today, as global inequality continues to fuel immigration crises along the U.S.-Mexico border. With acknowledgment of this historical continuity, my analysis of Sr. Pimentel’s work creates nuance, as her advocacy can be connected to the tradition of Catholic social teachings that prioritize the immigrant population. This is also reflected in Paul VI’s insistence on the Catholic Church’s involvement in addressing peace and justice, as his leadership through the Second Vatican Council underscores a balance between solidarity with global counterpublics and adherence to the teachings of the Catholic Church (“Pope Paul VI,” 2014). Sr. Pimentel’s rhetorical strategy similarly invokes a balance of positioning the Catholic Church as an advocate for immigrants while resisting conformity to address this population as *other* in media narratives. This essay addresses how Sr. Pimentel continues the rhetorical tradition established by the *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), which advocates for equity, justice, and human dignity in the face of structural violence and stigmatization of immigrants.

The rhetorical approach that Sr. Pimentel uses here is similar to the approach of Paul VI (1971), which discusses the influence of social communication as one way to influence the public: “Naturally, the public authorities cannot ignore the growing power and influence of the media of social communication and the advantages and risks which their use involves for the civic community and for its development and real perfecting” (para. 20). Paul VI (1971) emphasizes the importance of truth in media communication, highlighting the responsibility of media producers and consumers to ensure accuracy and

ethical consideration in the information they spread. He notes that media often neglects how their messages are received by the public, stating, “The men who hold this power have a grave moral responsibility with respect to the truth of the information that they spread, the needs and the reactions that they generate, and the values which they put forward” (para. 20). Building on this notion of media’s moral responsibility, Sr. Pimentel extends these concerns to contemporary immigration discourse, emphasizing global acceptance, ethical media representation, and policies that prioritize immigrant welfare.

Sacredness of Immigrant Lives at the U.S.-Mexico Border

Positive rhetorical clusters emerged in Sr. Pimentel’s discourse through her grounding of immigrant experiences in the sacred, framing these lives as sacrosanct. By invoking the sacred, Sr. Pimentel constructs a narrative that emphasizes the spiritual value of human life on the U.S.-Mexico border: “I’m here to honor the sacredness of life that I see at the border in South Texas” (TED, 2020, 0:13–0:25). This rhetorical move appeals to a religiously oriented U.S. public, encouraging identification with the spiritual dimension of the immigrant experience. Such a framing allows audiences to shift their perceptions away from the secular depictions of immigrants as merely political subjects and instead toward a view that humanizes and elevates their struggles as deeply connected to moral and spiritual imperatives. As Flores (2003) notes, positive representations of immigrants are crucial in reconfiguring the dynamic between the U.S. public and immigrant counterpublics, laying the groundwork for the humanization of immigrant lives (p. 365).

In contrast to the pervasive use of dehumanizing rhetoric that frequently demonizes immigrants, Sr. Pimentel’s rhetorical strategy operates through a moral imperative, calling for the global recognition of immigrant dignity. She urges the U.S. public to take action, not only by voicing support but also by advocating for policy changes that restore respect for those on the U.S.-Mexico border. Sr. Pimentel states, “There are many others that dedicate hours to help these families, they risk their lives to help these families because they are convinced that this is important to restore the dignity of these families that are there suffering” (TEDx Talks, 2020, 5:04–5:42). In doing so, she highlights the sacredness of immigrant voices and experiences, stressing that the worth of U.S. lives should not be privileged over those of immigrant lives. This rhetoric challenges a longstanding hierarchy, reframing the conversation to assert that all lives—regardless of national identity—carry intrinsic value.

Social Advancements and Humanization of Global Counterpublics

The rhetoric of the Catholic faith has increasingly focused on social involvement, with Catholic encyclicals highlighting the need for social progress and the humanization of global counterpublics. In *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), the importance of equality is emphasized, underscoring the belief that all people should have the opportunity to participate in society. Paul VI (1971) specifically addresses the necessity of humane treatment for immigrant populations, a sentiment echoed in Sr. Pimentel’s call for U.S. publics to “do something about what we are seeing at the border” (TEDx Talks, 2020, 8:54–9:10). Paul VI (1971) critiques the *othering* of immigrants, which renders it even more difficult for them to achieve social recognition from both religious and U.S. publics: “We are thinking of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make

any sort of social vindication” (para. 17). This marginalization parallels Sr. Pimentel’s observation of how the media amplifies fear among U.S. publics, reinforcing the image of immigrants as *other*. Such labeling exacerbates the divide between U.S. publics and immigrant counterpublics, denying immigrants proper treatment due to their status as “non-citizens” (TEDx Talks, 2019, 1:10–1:23). The increasingly stringent immigration laws in the United States only deepen this divide, as non-citizenship status becomes even more ambiguous and is further shaped by the media’s portrayal of immigrants.

Over the past 50 years, various legislative actions and policies have deepened these divisions, further complicating the state of immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border. Beginning with Nixon’s Operation Intercept in 1969 and extending through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), each administration has introduced measures ostensibly aimed at addressing immigration challenges (University of Arizona, n.d.). However, these actions—ranging from amnesty programs to crackdowns on the illegal hiring of immigrant workers—have created an intricate and often contradictory legal system. This system is further distorted by the media’s portrayal of immigrants, which consistently reinforces negative narratives and intensifies public fear. As a result, the complex legal and media landscapes have made it even more difficult for immigrant populations to be seen as fully human, undermining the moral imperative that Sr. Pimentel and Catholic teachings advocate for: the sacredness and dignity of every life.

Paul VI (1971) further emphasizes the vital role immigrants play in the economic and cross-cultural advancement of a country while simultaneously lamenting that they continue to be denied any form of social vindication. He critiques nationalism as a harmful framework that, rather than fostering unity, often leads to divisive practices such as apartheid, colonization, and imperialism. Paul VI (1971) advocates for a more inclusive approach, asserting, “It is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate” (para. 17). This perspective echoes Sr. Pimentel’s critique of U.S. indifference, which she describes as “destroying our very humanity, making us merciless in the face of human suffering” (TEDx Talks, 2020, 8:44–8:55). Both Paul VI and Sr. Pimentel challenge the hegemonic narratives that corrupt national policies, calling for a global perspective that not only welcomes immigrants but also fosters cross-cultural integration.

Paul VI (1971) humanizes the immigrant experience by advocating for a universal brotherhood rooted in justice and peace: “It is everyone’s duty, but especially that of Christians, to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for authentic justice and the condition for enduring peace” (para. 17). Sr. Pimentel reinforces this call for justice and peace, rooting her advocacy for immigrants in her Catholic beliefs and acts of service. She emphasizes that immigrants “are here only because they want a chance at life to take care of their families, and so if you were to come, you would also get to know them” (TEDx Talks, 2020, 3:22–3:30). The overlap between Sr. Pimentel’s personification of the immigrant experience, her Catholic beliefs, and the humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border aligns with a liberation-modeled ministry. This approach, often used within the Black church to address community social issues (Pace, 2019, p. 113), serves as the foundation for Sr. Pimentel’s movement toward the humanization of immigrant lives on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Sharing of the Real Situation: Emergence of a Banopticon

Negative clusters emerged from the media's criminalization of immigrants, as addressed by Sr. Pimentel: "So many people want to convince us that immigrants are criminals" (TEDx Talks, 2019, 1:45–1:55). This has led to extreme surveillance by the U.S. Border Patrol, ICE, and the media, creating what is described as a banopticon. The banopticon, as defined by Bigo (2006), refers to the surveillance of minority groups with the intent to remove them from public space due to perceived threat of future behavior (see Martinez-Aranda, 2022, p. 75). The construction of the banopticon can be traced back to the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11, which led the U.S. government to take extreme precautionary measures to address global insecurity. Following 9/11, the United States witnessed an increase in the surveillance and detainment of immigrants, instilling fear among the general public about the presence of immigrants. This intense surveillance has persisted, contributing to ongoing concerns over the perceived threat that immigrants may pose.

Media coverage often generates a distorted view of immigrants attempting to gain citizenship and residency in the United States. Sr. Pimentel adopts a prophetic persona by sharing the real situation at the border as she describes the experiences of immigrants. She challenges the negative depictions of immigrants, emphasizing that defamation only amplifies the voices of harmful media outlets, perpetuating cycles of exclusionary rhetoric. Sr. Pimentel calls attention to the separation of families in detention centers and the inhumane portrayal of immigrants by the media: "We've seen in the media all this negative rhetoric that we hear about immigrants . . . they are demonized like they're not human . . . that we can discard them and we can get rid of them" (TED, 2020a, 8:15). She critiques the demonizing propaganda circulating in the media, noting its dehumanizing impact on immigrant populations: "I call it propaganda. It's a way to look at the immigrants as something that I'm supposed to be scared about" (TEDx Talks, 2019, 1:28). The media she refers to is steeped in misinformation and bias, fostering fear among U.S. audiences. According to Ono and Sloop (2002), mainstream media operates as a platform where political issues are constructed, debated, and often distorted (p. 2). Sr. Pimentel's rhetoric compels her audience to critically engage with the harmful narratives surrounding immigration, urging them to embrace a more humane and empathetic perspective rooted in truth rather than fear.

Immigration rhetoric is constantly shifting borders, in which they change what they mean publicly while also influencing the way they affect people (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 5). For instance, when President Biden issued an executive order limiting asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2024, conservative media outlets critiqued the policy for being too lenient, portraying Biden as weak (Nerkar, 2024). Left-leaning media outlets also expressed their frustration with the Biden administration, accusing them of adopting policies similar to Trump's, as they critiqued the harmful impact the order had on immigrants (Nerkar, 2024). Scholars have also noted the media's role in polarizing public attitudes toward immigration. Studies have shown that even neutral or centrist media can impact moderate individuals, shifting their political and voting decisions as immigration continues to be a focal point of coverage (Schneider-Strawczynski & Valette, 2023, p. 31). This polarization is further amplified during elections, where media framing can often alter public perceptions and impact political agendas. The shift in borders that happens as a response to the media is due in part to this bias from journalists who are viewed as credible by the U.S. public.

Fear continues to grow in the minds of many U.S. citizens, prompting media outlets to perpetuate misinformation about the future behavior of immigrants, often framing them as seeking to harm U.S. publics. While right-leaning media often portrays immigrants as pollutants, criminals, and rapists, liberal media is not exempt from perpetuating anti-immigrant narratives (Binder, 2024; Cisneros, 2008; Hoewe et al., 2020; Seminara, 2024). Even liberal outlets that take a more sympathetic stance have occasionally reinforced stereotypes by linking immigrants to national security concerns or framing them as economic burdens (Gabriel, 2023). The *New York Times* reported a significant rise in both anti-Latiné and anti-immigrant rhetoric following the inauguration of the Trump administration in 2017 (Gabriel, 2023). Under the Trump administration, a xenophobic and anti-immigrant atmosphere intensified, with restrictive immigration policies resulting in many immigrants being confined to tent cities in southern Texas and northern Mexico. In response, an ad hoc network of local volunteers and organizations emerged to provide assistance to families detained or stationed in these tent cities.

Sharing of the Real Situation: Argumentative Topoi

Negative clusters emerged from Sr. Pimentel's rhetoric on the continuance of anti-Latiné discourse in the media: "What we are constantly seeing being reflected in the media are people [immigrants] coming in caravans and invading our country" (TEDx Talks, 2019, 1:19–1:26). Sr. Pimentel further discusses criminal rhetoric that is used as argumentative topoi to delegitimize immigrants in the United States. As a result, she uses her rhetoric to reconstruct the perception of immigrants: "When I see the word 'immigrant,' I see this child who is at the bridge right now and he's freezing together with a thousand other kids" (TEDx Talks, 2019, 2:40). This reconstruction of immigrants goes against the monstrous rhetoric constructed by media outlets, while also painting a clearer picture as to why immigrants are fleeing their countries to come to the United States: to gain citizenship and seek asylum. Sr. Pimentel also examines how immigrants are suffering due to this demonizing propaganda emerging from media coverage: "What we see in our mind [about immigrants] is the images that we're constantly given in the media" (TEDx Talks, 2019, 0:54–1:00). When looking at how the border is represented in the media, it poses an *othering* element for those residing in the United States, and according to Levina & Bui (2013), what has perturbed society is the unease that ethnic difference creates (p. 235). This *othering* that is being conducted by the media has been emulating fear in the minds of both immigrant counterpublics and U.S. publics.

Sr. Pimentel highlights the struggles immigrants face, calling out the widespread apathy in the U.S.: "In the words of Pope Francis, we can break away from this globalization of indifference and this 'I don't care attitude' about what we are seeing in our world today" (TEDx Talks, 2020, 8:21–8:28). The rhetoric used to break away from indifference is similar to the passage in *Octogesima Adveniens* that describes the need for a "change of attitudes and structures" (Paul VI, 1971, para. 45). This change is necessary both inside and outside the Catholic Church, as it describes the need for liberation: "Today men yearn to free themselves from need and dependence. But this liberation starts with the interior freedom that men must find again with regard to their goods and their powers" (Paul VI, 1971, para. 45). This liberation begins with the development of autonomy and "interior freedom," which translates in this context to a need to produce narratives that are not swayed by the mystification created by media outlets about

immigrants. Paul VI (1971) accentuates the importance of interior freedom as it overcomes the need for hegemony: “The ambition of many nations, in the competition that sets them in opposition and which carries them along, is to attain technological, economic and military power” (para. 45). This competition disregards the prioritization of current inequalities going on in the United States that those in political power seem to overlook, as economic and technological domination seem to overtake priority. Paul VI (1971) states the importance of creating ambition to enact change through prioritization of current political situations: “This ambition then stands in the way of setting up structures in which the rhythm of progress would be regulated with a view to greater justice, instead of accentuating inequalities which would unceasingly compromise peace” (Paul VI, 1971, para. 45). Through ambition to enact change, one must be able to create judgment by accessing information through reputable news platforms that provide multiple perspectives.

Sr. Pimentel’s rhetoric inspires advocacy and calls for political action by providing examples of how people can contribute to the support of immigrants. For instance, she condemned U.S. immigration policies such as family separations under the “Remain in Mexico” program during her speech at the Magdalene Circle’s annual luncheon, an organization that brings women of faith committed to collective social impact together (Catholic Charities Diocese of Trenton, n.d.). To counter these policies, Sr. Pimentel encourages reaching out to immigrants in local communities to provide support and ensure their belonging and safety (Catholic Charities Diocese of Trenton, n.d.). Moreover, she calls for political action by urging people to hold elected officials accountable (Catholic Charities Diocese of Trenton, n.d.). Through her advocacy, she encourages political lobbying and invites people to visit the border themselves, where they can witness the border crisis and engage in volunteer efforts.

Recognizing the significant sociocultural and political contributions of immigrants, it is crucial to actively reshape narratives to ensure a more just and equitable representation that acknowledges their role in driving societal progress: “The United States was built, in part, by immigrants—and the nation has long been the beneficiary of the new energy and ingenuity that immigrants bring” (American Immigration Council, 2021, para. 1). Therefore, these positive representations create a broadened view of the benefits that immigrants provide to the national and global economy. These positive representations need to emerge from the media, as that is one way to influence U.S. publics, while also leading them toward a globalization of acceptance.

Critiques and Challenges: Globalization of Respect for Immigrants

Negative clusters emerged in Sr. Pimentel’s TED Talks that further identify the harm the media is doing to Americans’ perceptions of immigrants: “Hatred is destroying us, it’s destroying our country, it’s destroying our families” (TEDx Talks, 2019, 6:54–7:05). The media’s consistent production of anti-immigrant rhetoric contributes to a dangerous cultural atmosphere in which immigrants are systematically dehumanized. Sr. Pimentel critiques the media’s framing of immigrants, which often positions them as threats, criminals, or burdens to society. This negative portrayal fosters fear, division, and hostility among the public, contributing to a broader social discourse that *others* these individuals. In response to this, Sr. Pimentel calls for globalized respect for immigrants and recognition of their humanity. Drawing from her personal experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border, she describes the urgent need for policies that do not exacerbate human

suffering but rather seek humane solutions that honor the dignity of all lives: “We must have policies and procedures that do not contribute to the human suffering . . . We can find solutions that are respectful to all human life” (TED, 2020, 9:54–10:09). Sr. Pimentel’s critique extends beyond the treatment of immigrants themselves and touches on the broader consequences of biased media coverage. Media has a profound influence on shaping public perceptions, often using emotionally charged language that reinforces existing stereotypes and prejudices. She calls for the public to reclaim its humanity by rejecting these narratives: “I think that it is up to us to reclaim our humanity and do something about what we are seeing at the border” (TEDx Talks, 2020, 8:54). This statement highlights the need for the U.S. public to evaluate critically the media they consume in an age where misinformation and sensationalism are ubiquitous. As Paul VI warned in *Octogesima Adveniens*, individuals must remain vigilant against the persuasive power of the media, which has the capacity to shape public opinion through selective reporting and bias. This critique is particularly salient today, as the media continues to play a role in influencing how society understands immigration and immigrants. In light of this, Sr. Pimentel emphasizes the importance of rejecting the “echo chamber” mentality, where individuals uncritically accept the perspectives presented by media outlets, leading to the further entrenchment of divisive ideologies.

Sr. Pimentel’s critique is particularly relevant to the ways in which the media perpetuates harmful labels, such as “illegal aliens,” which dehumanize immigrants and reduces their existence to legal status. As Sr. Pimentel notes, “What we see in our mind is the images that we’re constantly given to us in the media, and more than likely that’s what everybody sees: when you see immigrants, you see ‘illegal aliens’” (TEDx Talks, 2019, 0:54–1:00). This oversimplified and pejorative label shapes public discourse in ways that undermine the complexity of immigrant experiences and identities. Through her critiques, Sr. Pimentel calls on the U.S. public to challenge the pervasive narratives that frame immigrants through a lens of criminality and illegality. By advocating for a more nuanced understanding of immigration, she urges the public to reject the rhetoric of dehumanization and, instead, foster empathy and solidarity with those seeking refuge and opportunity in the United States.

A Pragmatic Hope Rooted in Humanization

Positive clusters in Sr. Pimentel’s rhetoric reflect a profound hope in humanity: “It is then that we are present to them [immigrants], and we can make their humanity a part of our own . . . And we’d recognize we are part of the same family” (TED, 2020, 6:17–6:32). Sr. Pimentel advocates for a pragmatic hope, acknowledging that change will not be immediate but reaffirming her commitment to doing everything possible to encourage the American public to move beyond fear and embrace a path of acceptance, respect, and humanization. As Sr. Pimentel asserts, “You know, sometimes, no matter what job we have, we must never forget to recognize the humanity in others. Otherwise, we will lose our own humanity” (TED, 2020, 2:37–2:50). This statement emphasizes the critical need to confront the desensitization of humanity and the imperative need to promote compassionate and humane treatment of immigrants entering the United States. Through her role as a nun with the Missionaries of Jesus, Sr. Pimentel confronts the criminalization of immigrants, advocating for a shift toward benevolence. This call for benevolence echoes the teachings of *Octogesima Adveniens*, which warns of the dangers inherent in hegemonic structures (Paul VI, 1971).

The hegemonic structures mentioned by Paul VI mirror the framework of whiteness that *others* minority groups in the United States. He observes that “egoism and domination are permanent temptations for men . . . in order to strike at the roots of newly arising situations of injustice and to establish progressively a justice which will be less and less imperfect” (Paul VI, 1971, para. 15). In response to this, Paul VI (1971) emphasizes the Catholic Church’s responsibility to address marginalized groups and help integrate them into a society driven by competition and dominance: “The Church directs her attention to those new ‘poor’—the handicapped and the maladjusted, the old, different groups of those on the fringe of society” (para. 15). These groups include immigrant and Latiné communities living on the border who struggle to gain citizenship and seek asylum while navigating the dehumanizing rhetoric perpetuated by U.S. media. Sr. Pimentel’s work, alongside the teachings of the Catholic Church, seeks to move away from frameworks of whiteness that prioritize the hegemony of one racial group over others, advocating instead for a society grounded in moral responsibility.

Toward a Latiné Rhetorical Framework Rooted in Catholicism

In her TED talks, Sr. Pimentel crafts a compelling rhetorical framework that challenges prevailing narratives about immigrants, drawing from her direct experiences volunteering in tent cities along the U.S.-Mexico border. She emphasizes the need to humanize immigrants, positioning them as integral members of our communities: “Immigrant families are not criminals. Immigrant families are like our families, like our neighbors. They’re good people who are entering our country and coming to the United States because they’re fleeing violence and want to be safe” (TED, 2020, 8:31–8:58). Through this framing, Sr. Pimentel employs a rhetorical strategy aimed at dismantling the media’s dehumanizing discourse, urging her audience to move beyond a “globalization of indifference” and toward a commitment to recognizing the lived realities of immigrants, which the media’s anti-immigrant rhetoric often distorts. By shifting her audience’s perspectives, Sr. Pimentel challenges hegemonic structures that perpetuate exclusion, urging a reconsideration of the dominant narratives that frame immigrants as threats rather than as individuals seeking refuge.

Through a Catholic framework, Sr. Pimentel emphasizes the moral obligation to accept and humanize immigrants for Christian audiences, particularly those who contribute to the production of harmful rhetoric against this population. With continued anti-Latiné and anti-immigrant rhetoric, a repatriation campaign is set to emerge if *othering* of immigrant lives continues to permeate the media. Sr. Pimentel aims to continue the fight against the media, as she uses a prophetic persona and the rhetoric of Paul VI to urge the public to open their hearts to immigrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.

This essay makes a critical contribution to scholarship on immigration, bordervilleance, and the banopticon. It is imperative to look at religious figures and the roles they play in influencing publics to adopt a humanitarian approach. It is then that we see the emergence of Latiné rhetoric through Sr. Pimentel’s standpoint as an advocate for immigrants. Thus, Sr. Pimentel’s politicized approach in her TED talks and the experience of volunteering at the border creates a pathway to address contemporary Latiné religious figures and how they enter into humanitarian debates.

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