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### A Conversation about Detainment

The United States has increasingly become more politically polarized, especially through the leadership of President Donald Trump. Through his rhetoric and policies, some are influenced to believe that migrants are a major problem that must be dealt with immediately. Under Trump's zero-tolerance policy, asylum-seekers, in particular, are targeted into detention centers where they are punished for crossing the border under the pretenses of illegality. In order to approach the conversation around whether asylum-seekers deserve detainment, one must begin to understand the complexity behind the forces that lead asylum-seekers to require refuge and the major concerns within detention centers. Based on the course readings and discussions, it is evident that this difficult conversation must be approached with an open mind and realization of moral responsibility.

One must begin to consider the forces that push individuals to become asylum-seekers in the first place because there is substantial evidence that proves their motivation for illegally crossing the border. Families attempting to escape instability, violence, and persecution find themselves embarking on dangerous journeys in order to seek safety within the United States. Katherine C. McKenzie, an asylum-seeker case attorney reports that in 2016, "over 65 million individuals were displaced from their homes due to human rights abuses, and 262,000 people applied for asylum in the USA" (Mckenzie 137). For asylum-seekers, remaining in their home country is even more dangerous than the unknown territory they are willing to fight for. Jennifer

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Nagda, a policy director of the *Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights* says that asylum-seekers are “willing to take the chance that something might happen on the journey because it's a chance” (Hunter-Hart). They believe that “the harm that will befall their children or themselves in their home country is a certainty” (Hunter-Hart). Parents are forced to make extremely difficult choices whether to stay in their dire situations or find a way to get themselves and their children out of their unstable country. Asylum-seekers choose to take risks in pursuance of a sanctuary that would provide peace and protection. Compared to the terror asylum-seekers are trying to escape from in their respective countries, an opportunity to cross the border is seen as a blessing.

After conceptualizing the factors that push people to search for asylum, the next step in approaching the conversation, regarding the detainment of asylum-seekers, would be to discuss the significance of moral obligation. Rather than believing the assumption that asylum-seekers are criminals for breaking the law, it is our responsibility to protect those who are fleeing from danger. As discussed in class, nation-states are complicated entities that fail to provide legitimate help for those in urgent need. Institutions, like the federal government, purposely deny and prevent asylum-seekers from crossing the border because of “fundamental assumptions, not empirical evidence” (Sajjad). The government frames certain individuals as threats to society, in turn placing them in detention centers as a means of sustaining national control and power. With

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this approach, asylum-seekers are dehumanized and not given the basic rights they deserve. The film, *Children at the Border*, accurately depicts the mistreatment of immigrant families and minors at the Mexican border. Through the emotional visuals of children being actively separated from their families, Trump's zero-tolerance policy is relentless and degrades anyone seeking refuge. While the harsh immigration policies implemented by our government are complex, we as humans still assume that the asylum-seekers are not our obligation to deal with. Individuals, like those affected in Mexico or Central America who are fleeing uncertainty, do not have a stable nation to fall back on. They are vulnerable because both their home country and the United States fail to protect them. In order to reason with someone who has a strong position on detainment, one should take the first step in claiming moral responsibility for those who are constantly forgotten and neglected.

The most shocking element that should be communicated to someone who believes that detainment is necessary, is the reoccurring presence of neglect within detention centers. People are forced into overcrowded spaces for indefinite periods of time. In May 2019, The Department of Homeland Security recognized that a detention center in El Paso has "cells designed for 35 people holding 155 people" (Dickerson). There are no enforceable standards that regulate the lack of medical treatment, mental health care, or legal representation detainees are facing. Other systematic failures present within detention centers include the unsanitary conditions that act as dehumanizing methods of showing asylum-seekers that they are not worthy of basic human

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rights. “The overwhelming majority of children have not bathed since they crossed the border,” says Elora Mukherjee, the director of the Immigrants’ Rights Clinic at Columbia Law School. Resources that are often taken for granted, such as soap, a toothbrush, and toothpaste, are not available for young children at the border. Finally, the damaging repercussions of isolating children from their families is the most catastrophic form of neglect present in detention facilities. Being apart from loved ones causes children to experience “wreaking dramatic and long-term damage, both psychologically and to the physical structure of the brain” (Wan). The brain is then altered for a lifetime, causing detainees to experience immeasurable long-lasting effects of their detainment.

Detaining asylum-seekers for illegally crossing the border is a pressing humanitarian crisis that has detrimental consequences for individuals in pursuit of safety and security. By pointing fingers without substantial evidence and compassion, an individual with a strong position on detainment fails to realize the consequences of their actions, thus continuing the vicious cycle of ignorance. Someone who believes in detainment, for whatever reason, must be reminded of the driving forces that lead individuals to seek asylum, the issues within detention facilities, and the moral responsibility that must be implemented in all aspects of humanitarian crises.

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