An American story of hope
A narrative analysis on the role of hope within the Biden administration’s biographical narrative after January 6th

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of hope within the Biden administration’s biographical narrative during the year after the Capitol attack on January 6th. The thesis provides for both an exploration of the case and how hope within national identity representations can be analyzed, as well as the value of hope after a disruptive event with consequences for the nation’s self-understanding. Previous research has focused mainly on fear of the outside or internal anxiety as drivers of state identity representations while implicitly assuming the occurrence of universality or a stable identity within the state. Instead, the theorizing on hope proposed by the thesis suggests that the American subject is unfinished and incomplete within its identity representations and requires hope to move forward, while also immunizing notions of fear and anxiety. While a complete identity can never be reached, American identity representations are sustained by manifesting hope for the future. Even though the American collective subject may never reach its desired unity, the hope that it someday might allow for the continuation of identity representations of the striving subject.
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to research problem

Several theoretical strands engaging themselves with core emotions within national identity representations and questions of state legitimacy focus on fear or anxiety. Within the realist, Hobbesian perspective, the legitimacy of the sovereign state derives from its role as a protector from anarchy and the fearful outside (Rumelili 2020, Walker 1993, Esposito 2010). While the sovereignty discourse emphasizes physical security, ontological security scholars suggest that state legitimacy also depends on the ontological security of the Self - the feeling of confidence and security in one’s being and identity (Steele 2008:51).

On January 20th, 2021, the 46th President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden, was set for his inauguration with the enormous task of trying to bring together a damaged nation. Two weeks earlier, when Biden’s presidential victory was to be certified by the United States Congress, a mob of Trump supporters tried to violently attack the Capitol building and stop the election from being certified (Britannica, 2023). Anarchy had loomed inside the national borders. The fearful outside had become the inside, and the American democratic identity was questioned. However, President Biden could not proclaim himself a Leviathan to restore control but is subject to democratic checks and balances. In his inaugural address, Biden (2021a) described American history as a struggle between the ideals the U.S. aspired to and the grim reality on the ground.

While a disruptive event in itself, the capitol attack also represents more significant trends of identity and narrative contestation. Scholars generally point toward a U.S. self-understanding as a superior nation (McMillan 2017 4-5, Eliassen Restad 2019:67, Hehir 2023:207). This notion of the U.S. as exceptional also fosters collective hope for the future among Americans (Gilmore & Rowling 2018:273). However, this exceptional story had become under evermore contestation during the previous Trump administration, which rejected the exceptional, global, and diverse America and instead pursued an ethnocultural narrative of a “white, Christian race with material interests to pursue abroad” (Eliassen Restad 2019:64-66). On a global stage, the future of American hegemony depends on whether the U.S. can remain stable and embody the ideals it projects outward (Ikenberry 2018:22).
The ideational foundation of U.S. hegemony with a vision of progress and aspiration stands in contrast to the domestic development, with features such as violence, polarization, and distrust toward state institutions that are common characteristics within disintegrating states. The notion of the U.S. as exceptional thus stands in contrast to a declining national democratic development (Barnett 2021:3, 8, 16, Burke 2021:469, 471), along with a narrative contestation that renders the American story ambiguous and divided about the past, present and future (Restad 2019:91).

With his eyes set on the future, however, Biden proclaimed that “together, we shall write an American story of hope, not fear” (Biden 2021a). Over the years, aspirational tropes of hope and change have been an important albeit elusive concept in American politics and presidential rhetoric (Löflmann 2021:549, Loren 2023:2). Within political science itself, however, hope is understudied (Hehir 2023:208), and also hope as a part of national identity representations. Instead, influential works such as Campbell (1998:133) argue that discourses of danger and fear have been vital to discursively craft American identity representations. Recalling the Hobbesian notion of how the sovereign state gains legitimacy as the protector of the fear of the outside, Campbell (1998:49) suggests that this early-modern “evangelism of fear” with constant threats was passed down to the modern nation-state to build its legitimacy and representations of national identity on.

Trying to nuance the focus on fear, ontological security scholars suggest that fear results from the subject’s internal anxiety. Instead, scholars should focus on the anxiety of trying to hold a nation-state together and provide ontological security. Identity representations are not merely about differentiating the Self in relation to others but more fundamentally regard internal anxiety. Several authors point toward the creative potential of anxiety. However, they often stop short of exploring this potential in depth (Kinnvall & Mitzen 2020, Krickel-Choi 2020b, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020, Browning & Joenniemi 2017). Similarly, Campbell (1998:81) also notes the potentiality of fear as a creative force.

This thesis seeks to build on this constructive or creative potential of fear and anxiety by suggesting that it needs to be explored with the concept of hope. Hope provides a perspective where identity is neither crafted solely through discourses of fear and danger nor primarily regards anxiety management of a Self that already has a stable identity (Campbell 1998, Krickel-Choi 2020a, 2020b, Steele 2008). Instead, identity is never stable but always
contingent and striving, and thus, it cannot be represented solely from the basis of fear and anxiety but needs to be comprehended within the perspective of hope.

1.2 Research problem

In the Hobbesian premise of sovereignty, the state gains legitimacy by protecting its citizens within the state against the fearful anarchy of the outside (Walker 1993, Rumelili 2020:261, Esposito 2010:21-23). Analyzing this discourse, Campbell (1998:133, 170) suggests that especially American national identity representations have become discursively constructed on discourses of fear and danger or as an “ideational process of imagination that positions the U.S. against the un-American other” (Löffmann 2021:546). R.B.J. Walker (1993:3-4, 12, 24, 45, 145, 151) problematizes this sovereignty discourse based on distrust and fear of the outside and suggests that it implies that a perfect universality can be applied within states. Thus, the discourse on fear of the outside is dependent on an implicit assertion of progress and hope within states (Esposito 2010:21-22). Within political science and security studies, the fear of the outside or the Other is an ordinary subject within the study of identity representations. While this has been problematized with regards to Othering taking place within national borders (Campbell 1998), or that the insecurity of the national subject stems primarily from the anxiety of the Self (Steele 2008), it is rarely explored from the perspective of hope on the inside, and, crucially - the importance of displaying hope on the inside after a situation like the Capitol attack, when this assumption of universality within a state has been shattered.

For ontological security scholars who focus on the security of the Self, fear is not the core emotion driving identity representations. Instead, it is anxiety about the uncertainty of existing itself (Steele 2008:61, Browning & Joenniemi 2017:38, Rumelili 2020:259-263). The focus on anxiety leads to the assumption that the legitimacy of the nation-state comes not only from its ability to provide security from the fearful outside world but also to manage collective anxieties and uncertainties of the future (Rumelili 2020:264-265). For example, Agius (2021:386) suggests that the U.S. has experienced ontological insecurity and internal anxiety over the narrative contestation about the Self.

With regards to the United States after the Capitol attack, it is in many ways a “classic” case for the ontological security perspective, where the narrated identity and understanding of the
Self is disrupted in a critical situation, displaying an ontological insecurity and anxiety (Steele 2008:51). However, a “classic” ontological security approach would be to explore how President Biden seeks to restore ontological security and manage anxiety through narration. This assumption implies that there is an ontologically secure identity to restore in the first place (Browning & Joenniemi 2017:32, 35, 40), because if the Trump administration was an aberration, it is Biden’s role to return to normal routines through anxiety management (Agius 2021:385). Agius, however, implies that during Biden’s inauguration, the U.S. was narrated as an unfinished subject, and this becomes challenging for ontological security theory which “relies very much on the idea of a consistent Self over time (Agius 2021:401).

This thesis asks whether the politics of subjectivity can be comprehended more nuancedly by exploring the role of hope rather than assuming that the subject sustains identity representations by fear of the outside or by managing internal anxiety. If the American subject is, in fact, unfinished, there must be some aspiration to strive toward, where hope is integral to upholding a “sense of Self as a long-term project” (Milona 2020:111-112). While hope is often confined to the realm of philosophy or theology (Hehir 2023), it is often implicit within political science. Hope is integral to societal stability, resting on the premise that hope can be realized within the existing social contract (Hehir 2023, Snow 2018, Moellendorf 2006). While anxiety or fear often arises regarding uncertainty (Rumelili 2020:259-263, Steele 2008:51, 61), uncertainty is also a critical factor within hope, but uncertainty with possibility (Huber 2023:82).

The perspective of hope provides a new dimension to the notion that identity is built on discourses of fear and danger or anxiety management and preservation (Campbell 1998, Steele 2008, Krickel-Choi 2022b). While not disregarding the analytical value of exploring the fear of the outside or anxiety on the inside in crafting identity, it is suggested that this needs to be complemented with hope. Instead of assuming a universality on the inside, a Lacanian theorizing of hope aims to show that while the subject lacks a complete identity, it is nevertheless driven by a desire to attain fullness, manifesting itself in a fantasy of a complete identity (Lacan 2019). Hope becomes a necessary ingredient within the subject’s desire and fantasy and in the sustainment of the collective subject, the nation-state, itself (Lacan 2019, Esposito 2008/2010/2011).
1.3 Aims & research question

This thesis aims to explore what happens when the traditional dichotomy between fear on the outside and universality on the inside (Walker 1993) is shattered. By a theoretical framework and empirical analysis, it seeks to challenge the premise that the United States builds its identity representations primarily through anxiety management or objects of fear. Finally, it also pursues an understanding of the vitality of hope within the collective subject, the nation-state, and its biographical narrative. Through a theoretical framework combining insights from Jacques Lacan and Roberto Esposito, the subject is conceptualized as lacking a complete identity but is inevitably driven by a desire for a complete identity. This desire is intrinsically related to hope.

- How can previous theoretical assumptions about state identity representations driven by fear and anxiety be nuanced by an account of hope in the case of the Biden administration’s first year, where the assumption of universality and a stable identity has been shattered?

Since the thesis investigates the United States, the analysis cannot be directly transferred to another context. However, it seeks to provide a framework on how states as unfinished subjects try to build identity representations of hope. The case of the United States and the Biden administration after the Capitol attack becomes intriguing in this regard, both because it challenges the dichotomy of the sovereignty discourse of universality on the inside and fear on the outside and because it does not assume that the collective subject can be narrated back into routines as anxiety management. If the national subject and its identity representations are deemed as unfinished, it needs something to keep striving forward - hope. It should be noted that studies have analyzed the prevalence of representations of hope or fear within election messaging (see, e.g., Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou 2017). However, this thesis seeks to explore hope within the context of crafting identity representations for the national subject itself.
1.4 Disposition

The following section outlines the previous research, including both literature focusing on the role of fear and anxiety within identity representations with references to the American context, a critique of this research, and the concept of hope. After that, the theoretical framework builds on the concept of hope by an exploration of the works of Lacan and Esposito. The method section outlines the narrative method and biographical narrative, research approach, conceptual definitions, and operationalization. Subsequently, the Biden administration’s biographical narrative is analyzed. Lastly, the analysis concludes with a discussion, followed by contribution, limitations, and further research.

2. Previous research

This previous research section argues that an emphasis on fear in a Hobbesian sense has shaped modern Political Science and International Relations. While constructivism has tried to give way to other emotions, notably ontological security studies and the emphasis on anxiety, it still misses the role that hope can play. By implying that states can be ontologically secure, it reinforces the notion that anarchy permits universality and stability within the state based on the sovereignty paradigm. Lastly, the perspective of hope will be presented as it has been analyzed in academic research.

2.1 Hobbesian fear and discourses of danger

Walker (1993:63) problematizes International Relations as a field governed and disciplined by the Hobbesian notion of state sovereignty, which assumes that while the international arena is doomed to anarchy, a perfect universality and stable identity can be applied within states. The notion of outside anarchy gives “the tacit condition that makes all claims to universality within states possible” (ibid:151). Instead of state formation and community being contingent, it is regarded as a natural-given necessity to shelter from fear of the outside (ibid:179). In this reading, fear is the origin of the political and the legitimacy of the creation of the sovereign state (Esposito 2010:34-35). It is important to note that this reading of the Hobbesian is not meant to serve as a simplified interpretation of Hobbes’ work, but as Sparks et al. (2022:3-5, 10) points out that the fear of others initially derived from Hobbes has shaped common imagination within International Relations with a focus on threats from the outside. This imagination shapes the notion that identity representations are crafted on fear,
where the United States is positioned against an un-American other (Löflmann 2021:546). However, as we shall see with anxiety, Esposito (2010:22-23) suggests that this fear can be constructive and that it alternates with hope.

Similarly, Campbell (1998:3-5) suggests that modern state identity, especially in the U.S., has been created by linking it to danger, which becomes a precondition for state identity representations because to comprehend who we are, it is necessary to articulate what we as an identity fear. This requires “an emphasis on the unfinished and endangered nature of the world” (ibid:48). Thus, Campbell contends that modern life is “disciplined by discourses that tell us what to fear” (ibid:70), institutionalizing fear and making it a basis of identity. As Esposito (2010) and Campbell (1998: 81, 133, 170) assert, fear can be a creative and positive force, where the U.S. requires a discourse of danger and fear to sustain its imagined community and constitute American identity.

2.2 Ontological security and anxiety

Trying to provide a perspective rooted in constructivism and state subjectivity while diving deeper into intersubjective emotions, ontological security studies do not posit fear or threat of the other as the primary driver of state identity representations, but rather anxiety of being and managing this anxiety to become ontologically secure (Steele 2008:32, 61). Instead of physical security, ontological security refers to the security of being and identity and feeling like a continuous subject over time (Kinnvall & Mitzen 2020:240, Steele 2008:51).

Several ontological security scholars argue that anxiety is an abstract feeling related to uncertainties that we feel are within our agency but cannot truly grasp, making us feel anxious about the future. However, anxiety can be made more concrete by turning it into fear by attaching it to specific objects and threats (Rumelili 2020:257-263, Steele 2008:64, Kinnvall & Mitzen 2020:241, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020:878, Browning & Joenniemi 2017:38). For example, Löflmann (2021:548) suggests that the Trump administration exploited anxiety over a changing American national landscape by pointing out alien Others on the inside. Connecting anxiety to Hobbesian fear and the objective of legitimacy and survival, Rumelili (2020:264-265) understands state management of collective anxiety regarding the future and the state’s survival by narratively ordering the present and controlling the future.
However, Kinnvall & Mitzen (2020:240-241) mean that anxiety can trigger many emotions, among them excitement and anticipation, which has not been sufficiently explored. Drawing on Lacan, they suggest that anxiety can lead to various outcomes for the subject - “driven by fear or by hope” (ibid.246-247). What role anxiety plays also regards whether a state can feel ontologically secure or not. Some authors suggest that while all states experience a sense of anxiety, it does not mean that they are not ontologically secure since anxiety does not have to be a psychological prison but can have transformative and liberating effects (Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020:889, Krickel-Choi 2022b:14-15, 17).

At the same time, the tendency to focus on anxiety management and continuity of identity representations often leads to a presumption that the self has an established identity (Browning & Joenniemi 2017:34, 40; Agius 2021:401). Krickel-Choi (2022a:11) argues that there is an implicit assumption within ontological security that its core is sovereignty. In this sense, the premise of universality and a presumptive established identity is often implicit in ontological security but passes unnoticed.

**2.3 Critique of previous research**

While ontological security studies nuance our understanding of state identity representations beyond fear and physical security towards anxiety and ontological security, it can also be argued that anxiety receives both an overused and underdeveloped role. However, several authors note that anxiety can play a positive role, often without further elaboration (e.g., Browning & Joenniemi 2017, Krickel-Choi 2022, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020). Furthermore, by suggesting that the subject can be ontologically secure (Krickel-Choi 2022b:1, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020:877, 882), as well as the general tendency not to problematize the implicit role of sovereignty (Krickel-Choi 2022a:2), it can be put forth that ontological security studies reinforce the notion of an assumed universality within the state (Walker 1993).

Identity representations might be crafted on anxiety management and turning anxiety into objects of fear, such as scholars contend that the Trump administration did (e.g., McMillan 2017, Löflmann 2021). However, if the American subject is indeed unfinished at its core (Agius 2021:401), it begs whether there might be other unexplored wells for the sustainment of the national subject. Furthermore, if a domestic insurrection brings down the assumption of universality on the inside, as on January 6th, the collective subject requires something to
persevere. While an ontological security perspective would suggest that Biden practices anxiety management and a “return to normal” (Agius 2021:384), authors point to a general sense of insecurity and ambiguousness that has incused the American national subject (Hofstadter 1996:51, 56). Furthermore, the persistent yet underdeveloped hints that both fear and anxiety can be productive require examination. The last section of this previous research will thus turn to the concept of hope.

2.4 Hope

Hope is a concept that is generally undetermined and can be studied in many ways from several perspectives (Huber 2023:82, Loren 2023:8). Most importantly, hope is often implicitly mentioned without being explicitly studied. While hope is noted as prevalent within American public rhetoric (Loren 2023:2, Löffmann 2021:549), the thesis seeks to dive deeper and suggest the importance of hope for identity representations. In a simplified sense, one can define hope as a belief that something is possible but not certain (Huber 2023:82, Blöser 2020:62). In general, hoping is a matter of orienting ourselves toward the future and imaginatively exploring its possibilities. Importantly, hope is not a mindless desire, but there is a range of probability that this hope might be realized (McGeer 2004:104-105, Moellendorf 2006:413, 416).

As the careful reader might notice, hope is not mere optimism but emphasizes uncertainty, just like anxiety (Loren 2023:6). Previous authors have noted the complementary relationship of hope and fear in reacting to and navigating the future’s uncertainties and the present’s dangers (Bodei 2018.18, Milona 2020:100), as well as the creative potential of fear and anxiety (Esposito 2010, Campbell 1998, Kinnvall & Mitzen 2020, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020, Browning & Joenniemi 2017). Thus, one might be enticed to argue that hope is the aspirational, productive, and understudied side of fear and anxiety.

For the sake of the thesis, however, the point is not to argue for a causal relationship between hope and fear or anxiety but rather that hope is a fundamental part of subjectivity and identity. Kierkegaard writes that hope is “critical to becoming a Self” (Michener 2020:79-80). In the same sense, McGeer (2004:101) argues that to be a subject with an agency that moves forward; one requires hope, which is “valuable for identity in the sense of upholding our
sense of Self as a long-term project” (Milona 2020:111-112). As Bovens suggests, the subject cannot be sustained by constant anxiety but needs to have the “mental play that is constitutive of hoping” (Bovens 1999:670-672, 675).

Fundamental hope does not necessarily need to be directed toward an object. Instead, Huber (2023) suggests fundamental hope as a comprehensive setting against specific hopes. This mindset holds that while the future is characterized by uncertainty, it is still “open to our intervention” (Huber 2023:82). In this sense, hope is a fantasy of the future, which “binds the present to the future, entailing a promise of reaching an end-point” (Linderoth & Sineevara-Niskanen 2019:645). While hope is grounded in belief and desire, it is also related to faith. Faith provides the grounding for hoping that enjoyment is possible (Huber 2021:72, Blöser 2020:73-74).

Some scholars argue that hope has the value of a political and democratic virtue, where hope guides our strive toward a better society and impels individuals to believe in the possibilities of democracy (Moellendorf 2006:423, Snow 2018:419). Huber (2021:729-732) links hope to trust in a democracy. Since democracy shows the demoralizing limits of what one agent can do alone, we must share a sense of collective agency in the commitment to democracy. Thus, hope "inspires us to keep going amidst the obstacles of democratic life and strengthens trust in fellow citizens” (Huber 2021:733).

While fear is bound up with suspicion, hope is connected to trust (Huber 2021:719, Sparks et al. 2022:4), where a hopeful national narrative can provide legitimacy to a democratic government. While fear legitimizes the state through threats from the outside (Sparks et al. 2022:4, Campbell 1998:56, Esposito 2010:27), previous theorizing on hope suggests that hope can be equally vital for state legitimacy. Regarding how a state can gain legitimacy through anxiety management (Rumelili 2020:264-265), it can be argued that hope provides a vital piece of understanding national identity representations.
3. Theoretical framework

The previous research focusing on the importance of fear of the outside and anxiety management will be challenged by a theory combining the insights from Jacques Lacan and Roberto Esposito with the concept of hope. In line with how previous research on hope suggests that it is vital for the sustainment and identity representations of the subject (Michener 2020, McGeer 2020, Milona 2020, Bovens 1999), the theory suggests that the collective subject has hope as an inherent part of the Self by desire. While the previous research on anxiety and fear, respectively, suggest these as drivers of state identity representations, the theory provides tools to comprehend hope as a vital driver of state identity representations. The theory understands the intersubjective community as having an incomplete identity, albeit constantly desiring and fantasizing about becoming a more complete version of itself. The Lacanian desire can encompass fear and anxiety, but most importantly, a portion of hope to keep the national fantasy alive.

3.1 Lacan and the dialectic of lack, desire, and fantasy

Bodei (2018:18, 53) argues that politics is not merely about taking different interests into account but needs to operate in terms of and take into account the “incommensurability of desires and their objects” (ibid:15). Because the subject does not have a stable identity, there is an incommensurability between desire (to be whole) and the object (being whole). The lack of a stable identity leads the subject to fantasize about achieving identity completeness, which Lacan calls enjoyment. While this fantasy of enjoyment cannot be realized, the subject will not stop seeking it due to the desire driving it (Stavrakakis 1999:35, 45-46, Solomon 2015:27-28, 33-35). Below is a simple model to illustrate this.
According to Lacan (Solomon 2015:29), the lack is created because we try to attach our unique identity representations to existing signifiers within discourse, which are general and cannot fully represent us. On a community level, however, this lack will be further explained in section 3.2 with Esposito's notion of the lacking community (2008).

Lacan (2019:5, 20, 125) means that the desire for identity fullness sustains the existence of the subject to the extent that the core part of being a subject itself is about desire driving us forward. Now, the careful reader might ask what all this has to do with hope. While desire can encompass fear of the Other, and anxiety of being created by lack, it tends toward a hopeful endpoint. This hopeful endpoint is a state of enjoyment and perceived completeness. The subject tries to confront living with lack by fantasizing, envisioning, and anticipating future enjoyment. Similarly, hope provides us the agency to move forward, upholding ourselves through the mental play of hoping and sustaining ourselves as a continuous project (McGeer 2004:101, Milona 2020:111-112, Bovens 1999:675). It can thus be argued that hope is a vital part of desire and fantasy, and since the subject, in many ways, is its desire, hope is a part of the subject.

Even more so, desire is a force the subject considers and counts on for survival (Lacan 2019:101). This is akin to a sense of fundamental hope that we have the capacity of agency to envision a hopeful future and uphold the Self as a striving project (Huber 2023:82, Milona 2020:111-112). This reading of Lacanian desire provides an understanding of the subject’s identity, sustainment, and survival of being, which hinges not only on fear of the outside nor anxiety management but also on hope itself. It suggests that hope is not merely a discursive force but also an affectional one inherent within the subject through desire and fantasy.

The desire for a complete identity sparks a fantasy about achieving identity and security, which gives the subject hope that this will come true. In this fantasy, lack can be transferred to an object or something the subject is missing, which becomes an obstacle to achieving enjoyment. However, crucially, the subject becomes attached to not the existing object or objective but the fantasy itself (Lacan 2019:109, 310-312). In this sense, what the subject becomes attached to is hope.
3.2 Esposito, community and immunity
While Lacan provides a dimension of how the subject lives with the lack of identity and the role of hope as subject sustainment, Esposito develops how all communities live with this lack. Esposito (2008:x-xii) means that when the individual subject enters an intersubjective community, she donates her individuality to the larger being of the community. The community is thus the result of a sacrifice of individuality and subjectivity toward the larger community. Community is not a property of the members' stable identity but a shared obligation to sustain something characterized by lack (Esposito 2010:6-7, 16). Esposito’s insights on community develop the Lacanian notion of the lack of a complete identity and the impossibility of ontological security since the possibility of a complete identity is sacrificed in creating a community, as well as emphasis on the collective obligation to sustain the community and collective hope (McGeer 2004:125) in a democratic setting. This makes hope more than a discursive strategy propagated by elites, but crucially something the community, the nation, needs to sustain its core, ultimately characterized by lack.

However, it would not be appropriate to completely write out fear or anxiety, given the substantial body of research pointing to its importance within identity representations (e.g. Campbell 1998; Steele 2008). While the Lacanian reading suggests that hope is a vital part of fantasy and desire, Esposito (2011:7-9) would add that to sustain hope, one must also consume fear and anxiety. This “consumption” takes place within the immunization paradigm. When a body receives immunity from a disease, a small part of this disease is also transmitted to the body. While a hopeful fantasy at first seems to have little to do with immunization, the point is that one has to consume fear and anxiety to sustain hope. A hopeful fantasy thus seeks to incorporate threats, fears, and anxieties - whatever they may be - and immunize them by drawing on hope. However, while the subject might attempt this immunization, traces of the thing immunized are always left on the subject. While hope can prolong the subject’s striving, the subject via immunization also incorporates parts that impede hope (Esposito 2011:8-9). Hope in a national fantasy can never finally eliminate fear or anxiety but can try to trick and deceive it by incorporating it into itself (ibid:39, 97).

Crucially, Esposito nuances our idea of hope in line with Lacan’s notion of the subject's fundamental incompleteness. While immunization by drawing on hope might shelter from fear and anxiety, it also becomes part of the subject. Also, it shelters the community from reaching enjoyment and a complete identity (Esposito 2011:46, 52). Immunization is a bodily
metaphor, but all communities share the immunity apparatus, which can stimulate the societal body as a call for action (Esposito 2011:16, 18).

3.3 Summary of the theoretical framework

Intersubjective communities, such as the nation-state, display a collective desire manifesting in a fantasy for a complete identity, but this ultimately cannot be realized. Instead, the possibility of a stable and secure identity is lost in creating the community itself, where individual identity is sacrificed to create community. This lack leads the subject to desire and fantasize about reaching enjoyment, a complete identity of the community, in this case, the nation-state of the United States of America. Hope is inherent within desire and crucial to sustain the fantasy and the subject itself. In a democratic community, hope becomes a collective duty, something to be sustained by the community members living with lack (Lacan 2019; Esposito 2008, 2010).

From this perspective, seeking identity representations by sustaining a collective desire and fantasy is not merely about anxiety management nor creating objects of fear or threats in the shape of an Other. Instead, hope is fundamentally present in the fantasy, both in trying to reach an end-point or the object of fantasy and how the subject becomes attached to the fantasy - the hope itself (Lacan 2019:109, 310-312). Because desire is the subject’s fundamental being, the fantasy of keeping hope for enjoyment and a complete identity alive is vital for the sustainment of the subject. The immunization paradigm further builds on the premise that fantasy can never be fulfilled, for elements creating fear and anxiety can never be eliminated, only incorporated within the subject (Esposito 2011; Lacan 2019). All there is to do is to try to convey hope to keep the fantasy of unity sustained. The incorporation of hope within Lacan and Esposito’s works builds on the previous research, and shows the underexplored potential of hope and the productive or creative side of fear and anxiety. In this sense, this underexplored side becomes more than that - it shows the potential of hope within identity representations.
4. Methodology

4.1 Research approach

While the relevance of this thesis has been argued with reference to a critique of a previous focus on fear and anxiety as drivers of identity representations, which reinforces the notion of universality on the inside, a vital part is to show how one can analyze hope empirically. This is done by analyzing the Biden administration’s narrative during Biden’s first year as President after the January 6th U.S. Capitol attack. Tracing narratives leads the thesis to adhere to an interpretive research approach that prescribes social reality as constructed by intersubjective meanings. Language, where meaning is shaped and distributed, becomes constitutive of how we perceive our world (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012:40-43, 46). This approach does not deny the existence of a non-discursive reality; however, things achieve meaning within discourse and narratives - our primary layers for understanding social reality. This thesis mentions “subjectivity” a lot, which adheres to the notion that the subject, in this case, the collective subject of the United States, is socially constructed with no permanent or stable identity. The fantasy that desire gives spark to has the function of overcoming or concealing this lack (Edkins 1999:22, 98). Within the nation-state, there is thus no “real community to be found beyond the fictional communities that underpin political thought” (Edkins 1999:2).

In recent years, emotional approaches have become more mainstream within international relations and political science, which assumes the existence of state emotions such as fear or anxiety (Gustafsson & Hall 2021:974, Steele 2008:16, Sparks et al. 2022:3-5). While the thesis holds that the potential of hope is understudied, it does not strictly adhere to “emotional international relations” but rather a theoretical and critical stance that seeks to challenge previous understandings of state identity representations and sustainment. It is more about sustaining identity representations through affect than emotions themself. The approach of the thesis can be exemplified by Chantal Mouffe’s (2008) thoughts on democracy and politics, where she argues that political discourse is a site of identification and affect to provide meaning-making and hope for the future - sites of socio-political identification in democratic politics need to sustain peoples’ desires and fantasies of enjoyment to sustain democracy itself (ibid:31, 33-35).
4.2 Research design and choice of case

The empirical analysis studies the Biden administration's biographical narrative. It seeks to uncover representations of hope within identity representations during the first year of his presidency, the year after the January 6 Capitol attack. The narrative itself is the empirical object of study, which is analyzed by a method of narrative analysis along with the theoretical framework, which will be made visible through operationalizing questions.

A narrative entails a story-telling and a normative description of a situation. It displays a limited or contextual agency on behalf of the storyteller, which is not as inherent in discourse analysis (see, e.g., Patterson & Monroe 1998:316). Thus, a narrative analysis was deemed more suitable than a discourse analysis. As mentioned by Restad (2019), the U.S. is in a state of narrative contestation over the nation's story, which gives limited agency to President Biden as a narrator. While the word “hope” is mentioned a few times (e.g., Biden 2021g, 2021q), a mere mention of the word does not sufficiently indicate a narrative with identity representations built on hope. Instead, it is about the narrative's overall tone, structure, and sequentiality (see, e.g., Kleres 2011). To discern this overall tone, one has to focus on the visibility of affectional appeals within discourse, such as representations like analogies, figures of speech, comparisons, and metaphors - for example, darkness representing fear and hope representing light (Koschut et al. 2017:482-486; Gustafsson & Hall 2021:974).

The analysis is a case study with a specific time period and place. While the analysis cannot be generalized outside of the case, it can provide for an exploration of the theory (Thomas 2011:512, 514). The case is a subject; the object is the theoretical framework that can be explored by the subject, where the subject is “manifested in its capacity to exemplify the analytical object of study” (ibid:514). Thus, this particular case is theory-consuming.

4.3 Narrative analysis and the biographical narrative as a fantasy

The empirical analysis studies the Biden administration's biographical narrative. It seeks to uncover representations of hope within identity representations during the first year of his presidency, the year after the January 6 Capitol attack. The narrative itself is the empirical
object of study, which is analyzed by a method of narrative analysis along with the theoretical framework, which will be made visible through operationalizing questions.

This thesis applies a narrative ontology, which means discerning how subjects comprehend the world and their subjectivity through narratives - where narratives become identity representations, which represent and constitute a particular understanding of the Self and the world (Somers 1994:606-607, Patterson & Monroe 1998:315). More specifically, this thesis will use the concept of biographical narrative, which organizes the nation-state's history into a story of the national Self (Steele 2008:20), and is a "conceptualization of subjectivity as a story" (Bradbury 2012:347).

The concept of biographical narrative is derived from ontological security scholars (see, e.g., Steele 2008). However, instead of discerning anxiety management, this biographical narrative will focus on the role of hope in desire and fantasy and the immunization of fear and anxiety (Lacan 2019, Esposito 2011). Fantasy itself can be understood as a narrative, a "frame that offers a kind of promise that it might still reach a whole sense of Self" (Solomon 2014:675). Furthermore, a fantasy narrative offers solutions to problems of lack and suggests that enjoyment can be reached, often by drawing on an idealized scenario (Eberle & Daniel 2019:1271). Bradbury (2012) suggests that, like fantasy, hope in a narrative allows the subject to live imaginatively, where we "may be able to conceive ourselves, our identities, in new terms, remaking our political landscape lie in our subjectivity" (ibid:348).

While biographical narrative and narrated fantasy are sometimes regarded as separate (e.g., Eberle & Daniel 2019), Berenskoetter (2014:268-274) emphasizes how the biographical narrative is constituted by simultaneously giving meaning to the past - the experienced space, as well as the future - the envisioned space, which stimulates hope and anticipation. The experienced and envisioned space links hope and history, shaping collective imagination. This understanding of the Self is incomplete as it constantly evolves in motion with a fantasy of the envisioned space. Berenskoetter's (2014) approach to biographical narrative aligns more with this thesis' ontological assumptions about the incomplete subject due to his drawing on Heidegger. For Heidegger, the community is not built on fullness but rather an emptiness, living with a constitutive lack of commonality (Esposito 2011:95-97).
4.4 Conceptual definitions

While the analysis undertaken here is not a conceptual analysis but a narrative analysis, it emphasizes the concept of hope. It is thus vital to provide a more precise definition of how representations of hope can be discerned and analyzed in the material before starting the analysis. Without it, it would be difficult to answer the overarching research question of How can previous theoretical assumptions about state identity representations driven by fear and anxiety be nuanced by an account of hope in the case of the Biden administration’s first year, where the assumption of universality and a stable identity has been shattered?

The concept of hope does not have a strictly agreed-upon definition, apart from a belief that something is possible but uncertain (Huber 2023:82, Blöser 2020:62). How the researcher uses concepts to outline theoretical assumptions affects the overall argument. It is thus of importance to view what I interpret as representations of hope not as all-encompassing but through a critical lens, since when using concepts, the researcher contributes to the social construction of the world in a certain way by delineating specific phenomena (Krickel-Choi 2022b:7). While hope requires some indicators of how to find it in the narrative based on the previous literature, it is essential to note that this is interpretive science - and thus subject to different interpretations. Lastly, this conceptual definition does not describe how one feels regarding representations of hope but how we can find traces of it in discourse.

However, since this thesis has also devoted much time to discussing fear and anxiety, these concepts will also be considered. Although hope can be a novel way of understanding identity representations within narratives, if fear and anxiety were to be completely neglected, it would be challenging to show the value of focusing on hope. It should be noted that there are multiple ways to apprehend these concepts. Without conceptual definitions, however, the narrative analysis would be fruitless.

- **Fear** will be regarded as directed toward a specific object, threat, or situation. This definition includes an element of certainty in fear, which points us toward specific phenomena and makes it an Other. Furthermore, fear provides a sense of suspicion and distrust (Walker 1993, Rumelili 2020, Campbell 1998, Sparks et. al. 2022, Esposito 2010).
• *Anxiety* is about an inner state of uncertainty and unease, being insecure in one’s identity representations and what the future holds for their continuity, but without naming anything specific to direct this anxiety toward (Rumelili 2020, Steele 2008, Kinnvall & Mitzen 2020, Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2022, Krickel-Choi 2022b)

• *Hope* is also characterized by uncertainty but with the notion that what we desire is possible. Hope is a sense that the future is open to our intervention and is related to faith, trust, desire, belief, and agency as a force driving the Self forward (Loren 2023, Huber 2023, Milona 2020, Linderoth & Sineevara-Niskanen 2019, Huber 2021).

As noted in the previous research, there is a prevailing notion that the state builds its identity representations and legitimacy by protecting against the fear of an Other, as well as how this fear becomes institutionalized where what “we” fear is who “we” are. In this reading, society becomes disciplined and identity representations constructed by discourses laying out what we should fear (Campbell 1998:48, 70). Alternatively, the premise for ontological security is that the state gains legitimacy and creates representations of identity by not only protecting against fearful Others but also by collective management of the anxiety stemming from being a subject (Rumelili 2020, Steele 2008, Krickel-Choi 2022b). Because both of these strands contend that fear and anxiety can lead to positive and productive effects (Campbell 1998, Esposito 2010, Rumelili 2020, Krickel-Choi 2022b), the thesis suggests that the concept of hope needs to be brought to the forefront to grasp the potential suggested by previous authors.

### 4.5 Operationalization

The overarching research question, *How can previous theoretical assumptions about state identity representations driven by fear and anxiety be nuanced by an account of hope in the case of the Biden administration’s first year, where the assumption of universality and a stable identity has been shattered?* has been split into three operationalizing questions that will guide the analysis.

According to the theoretical framework, hope becomes a driving force of the subject as part of its desire, manifested in a hopeful fantasy of national completeness (Lacan 2019). Nevertheless, a complete identity will always be impossible due to the sacrifice of individuality when entering a collective community (Esposito 2008, 2010). The subject tries to immunize anxiety and fear by drawing on hope, but this leaves traces on the subject, which contributes to the notion that desire and fantasy can never be fulfilled. However, the
continued striving and preservation of hope is necessary for sustaining the collective subject characterized by lack (Esposito 2008, 2011, Lacan 2019). The operationalizing questions serve to explore how the theoretical framework can be applied to an empirical material, and are as follows:

1) How are representations of hope visible in the biographical narrative and connected to American identity and the sustainer of the United States?
2) How are representations of hope connected to a fantasy of the future, and is there an object of hope?
3) How can representations of hope simultaneously be understood as an immunization of fear and anxiety?

Furthermore, these operationalizing questions will be reflected in the structure of the narrative analysis. While the use of Berenskoetter’s (2014) biographical narrative approach provides a methodological tool for discerning a fantasy of hope (Solomon 2015, Eberle 2019), a narrative analysis often displays a more explicit structure to outline the existence of a narrative. Besides, the material does not exhibit a clear delineation between experienced and envisioned space. To discern how hope is narrated, one requires different parts of the story to show the overall storytelling. Hope is then not an isolated phenomenon but exists within the narrative, its elements, and its overall structure and configuration. The narrative structure also concerns agency - a vital component of hope - whether the Self is an agent or an object (Kleres 2011:184-188, 190-193). To provide further transparency as to how the narrative is discerned, Spencer’s (2016) categorization will be used. These categories are not all-encompassing, however, they provide a narrative structure but are simultaneously flexible enough to incorporate a substantial part of the theory that forms the operationalizing questions, and are as follows:

1. Setting - Fear and anxiety looming
The setting is a normative description of where the narrative occurs with specific phenomena or characteristics. The setting indicates why characters act as they do and why the narrative becomes emplotted in a certain way (Spencer 2016:27-28). As we shall see, the setting focuses a lot on the presence of fear and anxiety within the nation and the surrounding world.

2. Characterization - The role of hope within American identity representations
Characterization regards attributes, labels, agency, and identity representations of the central characters (Kleres 2011, Spencer 2016:29-31). The central character of this narrative is the character of the United States. Within characterization, we can discern whether representations of hope are visible when characterizing American identity representations.

3. Emplotment - A fantasy of the future

Emplotment is the logic of the narrative’s parts and what it points toward needing to be done in the future, the main point to be deduced from storytelling (Spencer 2016:16, 32-35). Emplotment points toward the envisioned space (Berenskoetter 2014), and the objective of fantasy (Lacan 2019).

These categories provide a narrative structure that can incorporate the operationalizing questions. Characterization relates primarily to Q1, and Emplotment to Q2. Setting relates mainly to Q3; however, one needs to analyze the entire narrative framework to understand the immunization process by hope. The operationalizing questions and the overarching research question will ultimately be answered in the concluding discussion.

4.6 Material

The material analyzed consists of 25 speeches from Biden, from Inauguration Day in 2021 until the “anniversary” of January 6th in 2022. The time period chosen is just short of a year. These speeches relate to how the notion of universality on the inside has come under scrutiny and issues relating to fear and anxiety - such as division, polarization, and a shattered self-understanding by narrative contestation. However, most importantly, these speeches seek to tell a story of American national subjectivity and identity representations, and the goal of the analysis is to discern if these representations can be comprehended in relation to hope. It should be noted that some speeches and remarks primarily regard jobs or the economy, but the point is that the overall narrative tropes come back in a broad array of speeches. What will be read from the speeches is not policy per se but the overall narrative that accompanies Biden’s first year in office - an overall narrative of hope. A broad array of speeches also validates the existence of a coherent narrative over different policy areas.

The speeches chosen are directed to the overall citizenry and not specifically party-affiliated. For example, fundraising speeches for the Democratic National Party have not been included.
It can be assumed that fundraising speeches for the DNC would include more antagonistic elements toward the Republican party or former President Trump. However, only speeches that direct themselves to the entirety of the nation, and not just a particular party has been chosen. This is because the thesis does not seek to investigate the role of hope within the Democratic Party but the role of hope within narratives regarding the whole national collective subject after the assumption of universality on the inside has been shattered.

Choosing speeches from Biden means that they can be regarded as representative of official or elite discourse in the United States. According to Lowndes, the presidency is a “cultural institution meant to represent - in a very literal sense - the American people” (Lowndes 2013:469). Throughout history, presidential power has projected a vision of national identity that is not merely discursive but also works through affection and identity representations (ibid:471, 496). Still, a large part of the citizenry that did not vote for Biden might not comprehend his narrative as hopeful or feel represented within it. As mentioned by Restad (2019), the U.S. is in a state of narrative contestation over the nation's story. The use of biographical narrative relates to state identity; however, Biden’s biographical narrative is a normative narration of these identity representations. The point is not to provide one single definition of American state identity; as mentioned, the theoretical framework posits the collective subject as unfinished and incomplete; instead, the thesis seeks to provide a perspective of how one can comprehend hope within identity representations to sustain the national subject.

While the data used did not have a narrative status prior to the analysis (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012:79), and not in the way I theoretically apprehend it as a hopeful fantasy, American politics is about imagination (Campbell 1998), and there are vital storytelling elements in the material that further makes a narrative analysis suitable. It is, however, essential to note that I, as a researcher, contributed to the creation of this as a particular narrative of hope (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012:39). The point is, however, not to establish a singular or objective truth about the use of hope (ibid:82), but rather to provide for how hope can be approached within the narrative.
5. Analysis

5.1 Setting - Fear and anxiety looming
In his inauguration speech, President Biden described the setting as a “winter of peril and possibility”, which hints toward both the uncertain and dangerous, but also opportunity. For example, inauguration day was described as a historical day of democracy and hope, but also as a rebirth from a crucible - a remarkably different test of democracy:

This is democracy’s day. A day of history and hope. Of renewal and resolve. Through a crucible for the ages America has been tested anew and America has risen to the challenge […] Over the centuries through storm and strife, in peace and in war, we have come so far. But we still have far to go. (Biden 2021a).

While the President narrates a day of history and hope, as well as renewal and resolve after a crucible through the ages, the setting is even more defined by representations of fear and anxiety. The President describes himself as having inherited a “nation in crisis” (2021j). Closely related to this trope of crisis is the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, which is described as “unprecedented […] a brutal attack on our democracy” (Biden 2021g).

Folks, not even during the Civil War did insurrectionists breach the Capitol of the United States of America, the citadel of our democracy — not even then. But on January the 6th, 2021, they did. They did. (Biden 2021t)

Close your eyes. Go back to that day. What do you see? Rioters rampaging, waving for the first time inside this Capitol a Confederate flag that symbolized the cause to destroy America, to rip us apart. […] Even during the Civil War, that never, ever happened. But it happened here in 2021. (Biden 2022)

When the events of January 6th are narrated, Biden draws on the experienced space, by highlighting one of the most traumatic events of it - the American Civil War. The event on January 6th was disruptive in the sense that not even during the Civil War was the Capitol breached. There are also connotations to the Civil War with the Confederate flag, and how it symbolized the destruction and division of the United States. The description of the attack on January 6th displays representations of fear, as a dangerous and threatening event itself, but
also by drawing on the horrors of the Civil War. Furthermore, it is a representation of fear in the sense that it symbolizes distrust:

The Big Lie is just that: a big lie. The 2020 election — it’s not hyperbole to suggest — the most examined and the fullest expression of the will of the people in the history of this nation. This should be celebrated — the example of America at its best. But instead, we continue to see an example of human nature at its worst — something darker and more sinister. (Biden 2021r)

But the struggle is far from over. The question of whether our democracy will long endure is both ancient and urgent. As old as our Republic. Still vital today (Biden 2021j).

The experienced space of the past is drawn upon to suggest that the insurrection also represents a larger, historical question of whether democracy will endure. And history suggests that because America has not ceased, it has the possibility to rise again. However, it also implies that there are fears and anxieties in the American societal body that have always been there. While the event of January 6th is described as “un-American” (Biden 2021t), it is still a part of the Self, and the “pain and scars from that day they run deep” (Biden 2022). While the greatest threat facing America is domestic terror, there has always existed a wide-ranging problem with white supremacy in the United States (Biden 2021d). Although the subject can try to overcome threats emanating from the Self, they can never be fully defeated (Esposito 2010).

To provide grounds for a hopeful narrative, however, the President needs to strike a balance between a setting of anxiety and fear, but where the divisions are not so grave that these elements cannot be immunized by drawing on hope (Esposito 2011). While the nation has never been so divided since the Civil War (Biden 2021n, 2021o), the nation is at the same time not “nearly as divided as we make it out to be” (Biden 2021d). Division is hindering enjoyment, but it is not so much so that a fantasy of enjoyment cannot be sustained (Lacan 2019). Again, the experienced space of the Civil War serves to cement the danger of the setting but also to suggest that America has been through storm and strife before.

The setting also takes place on the international arena. Democracy is not only at risk in the

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1 The “Big Lie” refers to the notion that the 2020 election was stolen or rigged in Biden’s favour, see: https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/19/politics/donald-trump-big-lie-explainer/index.html
United States but all around the world (Biden 2021, 2021e). Furthermore, America cannot lead the world by its example if the values of democracy are in danger on the home front (Biden 2021c, 2021j). In this sense, representations of fear looming in the form of division, distrust, and a broken nation are connected with anxiety and doubt over one’s Self. Furthermore, other countries have started to doubt America:

I’m serious, heads of state — I give you my word as a Biden — said, “Are you really back? I mean, how can I — we believe you, Joe, but will the country ever get it together?” (Biden 2021s)

And you just — I can’t tell you how much — you know, everyone was so down the last years about: Is America still the — the, you know, the fount of change? And are we still the country that has hopes and develops and pursues the most unlikely things to happen? (Biden 2021f)

The present setting is characterized by an uncertainty about democracy and the core of the United States itself, whether it is a country that still has hopes. This uncertainty also reflects a larger global democratic struggle taking place within states (Biden 20211). This struggle is related to a sense of rapid acceleration in the world, where the world is changing away from what we thought once were true of it. At a summit with the European Union, President Biden recited a poem about this rapid change as a terrible beauty - while exciting, it also gives rise to collective anxiety (Biden 2021m).

I think we’re in the midst of terrible beauty having been born — a great shift in technology, a great shift in the development of the world, and it’s causing great anxiety in each our countries and uncertainty among many of our colleagues of what’s going to be their place in the world (Biden 2021m).

Biden narratively brings up the presence of anxiety, stemming from doubt and uncertainty of a world of rapid change and one’s place within it. Collective anxiety also attracts populists that are trying to exploit the anxiety stemming from the uncertainty of our times (Biden 2021m), which leads to “increasing dissatisfaction of people all around the world with democratic governments that they feel are failing to deliver” (Biden 2021x). The promise of America and the future of democracy is cloaked by uncertainty:

That promise is at risk, targeted by the forces that value brute strength over the sanctity of democracy, fear over hope, personal gain over public good (Biden 2022).
Can our democracy overcome the lies, anger, hate and fears that have pulled us apart? (Biden 2021j).

Biden suggests that representations of fear have diminished the nation-state, a negative marker to craft identity representations around. Instead, the nation should be guided by hope. Nevertheless, the presence of fear and anxiety is very much there, inherent within the American subject and in the world around us. Representations of fear and anxiety are very abstract, there are the “populists” (Biden 2021m) and those who value “fear over hope” (Biden 2022), and while these forces may be dangerous, they are part of the setting, narrated as something the American subject might have to live with.

The presence of fearful objects provides a setting with anxiety and doubts of the Self and its future. However, it should be noted that this is a setting, a description of the landscape of the narrative, but it is not the characterization of America. All the while, they are part of America, not denied but brought up to the surface. The elements of fear are not described as merely foreign in character but global, as we see examples of “human nature at its worst” inside the United States (Biden 2021r). This makes the envisioned space anything but certain, where there is “nothing guaranteed about our democracy, nothing guaranteed about our way of life” (Biden 2021q). The present setting does not merely serve to describe anxiety and fear looming, but also narrate it as a defining moment in American history:

We’re at a great inflection point in American history. How we handle the next 4 to 10 years is going to determine where we’re going to be 30, 40, 50 years from now. It’s one of those moments in American history. (Biden 2021k).

5.1.1 Discussion

The setting is marked by fear and danger in the form of domestic terrorism, democratic decline and American nature at its worst on display during the insurrection on January 6th. Furthermore, there is a notion of collective anxiety stemming from a rapidly changing world, where American democracy both fails to deliver but also due to its internal problems also risks a diminished role on the world stage. However, the President simultaneously suggests that hope is present (Biden 2021a), but also that the term “inflection point” might be one of rapid change, with American democracy at stake, but it is not necessarily a hopeless situation.
The experienced past is narrated to both point to the urgency and danger of the situation, but also that the United States as a subject has had internal problems before and overcame them. While these internal problems are hindering enjoyment, they are not so grave that the fantasy of a complete nation cannot be sustained (Lacan 2019). It points toward a narration where one might not be able to eliminate threats from the Self, they can be immunized within a hopeful fantasy.

Threats, regarded as a representation of fear, are mentioned as part of and emanating from the Self, and not merely from the outside - such as domestic terrorism, threats toward democracy and the insurrection on January 6th. While the world may be rapidly changing, the real threat emanates from the United States, where the nation is plagued by division and has not stood by its values as a global leader should. However, these representations are also part of the setting, and it begs the question of exploring how these are also part of the Self within the next narrative chapter, characterization.

5.2 Characterization - The role of hope within American identity representations

Recalling the setting and its elements of fear, Biden draws on the experienced space to characterize American history as a struggle between an ideal trying to be reached, and reality knocking us down:

Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, and demonization have long torn us apart (Biden 2021a).

By acknowledging the role that representations of fear have played within American history, Biden makes a point of the unfinished American subject due to the problems that reside within it that cannot be fully eliminated (Lacan 2019, Esposito 2010). While Lacanian fantasy often plays out as an illusion that the nation can be “whole” or “great” again (see e.g., McMillan 2017), Biden displays that national fantasy is a matter of struggling and strife. In
fact, the soul of America is and the attempt to immunize worser angles and strive toward its ideal is a battle itself, further underlining the incomplete nature of the American subject:

The soul of America is animated by the perennial battle between our worst instincts — which we’ve seen of late — and our better angels. (Biden 2021l).

While these instincts are there, it has always been a “bane on our existence” (Biden 2021d). Thus, there is a need to appeal to better angels of the American subject, such as hope. Biden suggests that hope resides within the American spirit, of “finding light in darkness” (Biden 2021h), and not giving up on goals with hope and vision (Biden 2021f). America has never lived up to its ideals, but “never ever ever walked away from it” (Biden 2021p).

And while we’ve never fully lived up to those words, we have never given up on them. They continue to animate us, and they remind us what, at our best, we as Americans believe: We, Americans — we believe in honesty and decency, in treating everyone with dignity and respect, giving everyone a fair shot, demonizing no one, giving hate no safe harbor, and leaving no one behind (Biden 2021q).

Othering, a representation of fear, is a worse angle of American nature, but still there. With regards to fantasy, there is an American ideal, but the main point is that Americans have never given up on the struggle toward reaching it. In this sense, the object of fantasy is about sustaining fantasy itself (Lacan 2019), of sustaining hope within the national subject. Hope is also to be found within the individuals making up the collective subject:

Folks, this is a special nation, a great nation. And there is a timeless truth about America. The most powerful idea in the history of the world [beats] in the hearts of the people of this country. (Biden 2021q)

We were built on an idea: the idea of liberty and opportunity for all. We have never fully realized that aspiration of our founding, but every generation has opened the door a little wider, and every generation has opened it wider and wider to be more inclusive, to include those who have been excluded before. It’s a mission handed down generation to generation: the work of perfecting our union. (Biden 2021l)
The United States is an idea that resides in the hearts of its citizens, a flame of hope that must be kept alive. Furthermore, the mission of opportunity is passed down from the experienced space toward the present, and it is an obligation of the community to sustain hope that the nation can be perfected. Hope becomes vital for the American character, because the United States can only exist as long as people believe in it, and this belief resides within the individuals of the community (Esposito 2010).

Empathy — empathy is the fuel of democracy, a willingness to see each other — not as enemies, neighbors. Even when we disagree, to understand what the other is going through (Biden 2021l).

We need to remember the government isn’t some foreign force in a distant capital. No, it’s us. All of us. “We the People.” For you and I, that America thrives when we give our hearts, when we turn our hands to common purpose (Biden 2021h).

Within democracies, hope can also be a democratic virtue to foster trust toward institutions as well as one another as democratic agents (Snow 2018, Huber 2023). It points toward the value of hope (Huber 2023) - if we have trust and empathy toward each other for a common purpose, and sees the government as an embodiment of the people, America can thrive. To create trust however, and to strive toward the ideal of fantasy, one must face the truth about the American story:

One of the great gifts of the spirit of independence — and think about this: One of the great gifts is our capacity to see ourselves whole and see ourselves honestly — what we’ve gotten right, what we’ve gotten wrong. It’s a measure of the greatness of America, and we are a great nation. We don’t seek to bury the wrongs. We face it. We work to make it right. (Biden 2021q)

It’s a story that’s neither simple nor straightforward. That’s because the story is the sum of our parts, and all those parts are fundamentally human. And being human is to be imperfect, driven by appetite and ambition as much as by goodness and grace (Biden 2021r).

This characterization of what creates American greatness, to face and not bury their wrongs, provides a clue as to why representations of fear and anxiety are so prevalent in the setting, because it is a part of the collective subject that is there. The American story as a sum of its imperfect parts can be read in the light of the impossibility of community (Esposito 2008, 2010).
One might ask how a display of imperfections and worser angles can display hope. In line with how hope is bound up with trust in a democracy (Snow 2018, Huber 2023), restoring trust might instill hope that for all its imperfections, the United States can become more like its ideal. Crucially, representations of fear and anxiety cannot be immunized if they are not accepted as part of the Self, such as how America has “allowed a narrow, cramped view of the promise of this nation to fester” (Biden 2021b). However, since the American subject is about striving, it is imperative that faith and hope is kept “alive in our hearts, alive in the work of our hands; alive not only in the history we read but the history we’re making” (Biden 2021q). This is vital for the striving yet incomplete subject in an “ongoing struggle to live up to our highest ideals and to heal our divisions” (Biden 2021w). But while the United States is about struggle and strife, is is evermore about possibilities, as Biden remarked to Chinese President Xi Jinping:

He said, “Can you define America for me?” I said, “Yeah, I can, in one word — one word: possibilities.” Possibilities. It’s what America is built on. It’s one of the reasons why we’re viewed sometimes as being somewhat egotistical. We believe anything is possible in America. Anything is possible in America. (Biden 2021p)

5.2.1 Discussion

The characterization of the United States displays a discrepancy between an ideal Self which the subject desires and builds a national fantasy about, and its recurring worser angles throughout history and in the present days. However, that is also the core of the American Self - an imperfect nation struggling to reach its highest ideals. It is a story bound up with hope in the sense that while uncertainty is present, the possibilities never cease. While there is a battle for the soul of the nation between fear and hope (Biden 2021a), or a narrative contestation (Restad 2019/20), the American soul is also a battleground in itself.

Although hope is part of the American character, in terms of possibilities, democratic trust, faith, and believing that the ideal can be reached, so has hate, fear, and demonization been. It leaves traces that can never be erased, and there is a recognition of the imperfectness of the community (Esposito 2010, 2008). This can be argued as a representation of hope in the sense of establishing trust and responsibility for the world which we seek to inhabit.
Furthermore, it relates to agency and how the idea of America is kept alive in the hearts of its citizens. It is up to each generation to renew the promise of America as a lightning torch. While the ideal can perhaps never be reached, the important thing is to keep the faith, sustain hope and believe in the idea of America. In this way, hope becomes a legitimizing factor for democracy, alive within all of us as democratic agents (Huber 2023).

Biden attempts to connect the present characterization of America along with the nation’s experienced space. Even if the struggle continues, America has come far. At the same time, there is a cracked character of America on display, plagued by fear, anger, and division, a skewed promise that renders people to lose hope, faith, and trust in government and one another. These are instincts that need to be immunized. It can be argued that Biden attempts to do this by narrating the experienced space together with the present, that the American subject is forward-striving, believes in possibilities, the idea of the United States and of extending the promise of trying to perfect the subject.

Biden pits fear and hope against each other, and that the American subject must choose fear over hope. At the same time, hope is the natural choice because it is inherent in the American subject as aspirational and struggling but never giving up. With regards to ontological security, Biden clearly narrates a struggling subject. While there is no finite or secure identity of the American subject - America is an idea, the sum of its imperfect parts, and a struggling soul. There is no finite or secure identity of the American subject, but the identity itself is about struggling. However, this is not narrated as an anxiety of the Self, but as a torch of light in darkness, a character strength of never giving up, keeping the faith and not losing hope. To be an incomplete subject is not merely “anxiety management” - it is simultaneously the subject’s strength and its fountain of hope - it is being guided by a fantasy narration of hope that sustains the American subject.

5.3 Emplotment - A fantasy of the future

While the setting displayed representations of fear and anxiety, the characterization narrates the American subject where hope is a vital part of its identity representations as a striving and
aspirational, yet incomplete subject. In the emplotment, Biden delivers for us the missing objective towards reaching enjoyment:

To overcome these challenges – to restore the soul and to secure the future of America – requires more than words. It requires that most elusive of things in a democracy: Unity […] I know speaking of unity can sound to some like a foolish fantasy. I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new. (Biden 2021a)

Once again, what can be regarded as the “illusory” nature of fantasy is left on display. With regards to the setting and its representations of fear and anxiety, unity might actually sound like a foolish fantasy. Drawing on the experienced space, however, the forces of division are not new, but they are also part of the subject, which has managed itself so far. Furthermore, there is a link between restoring trust, hope, and confidence in democracy at home and America’s role on the world stage (Biden 2021a, 2021c):

That’s why it’s so damn important we demonstrate — everybody says, “Biden, why do you keep insisting on trying to bring the country together?” That’s the thing that’s going to affect our wellbeing more than anything else: how the rest of the world responds to us — knowing that we actually can, in fact, lead by the example of our power again. And I think we can do it. We got to do it (Biden 2021u).

You know the criticism I got when I said I’m going to unite the country. They said, “You can’t unite the country.” Well, if we can’t unite the country, we can never get some of these problems solved. And that goes to trust. Why can’t you unite the country? Why isn’t there a willingness to trust? (Biden 2021s).

Biden draws a link between the international and domestic arena, and suggests that the decline of trust and disunity leads to the U.S. not being able to lead by the example of their power on the international stage, as Barnett (2021) & Ikenberry (2018) suggests. Furthermore, the theme of unity also points to the importance of trust within a democracy (Huber 2023, Snow 2018). If the country cannot be more united, the problems of representations of fear and anxiety taking hold within the setting will not cease. A vital part of the narrative emplotment is thus the importance of the continued fight for democracy. Speaking on Memorial Day²,

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² Memorial Day is a U.S. national holiday that honors the memory of fallen service members of the U.S. Armed Forces.
President Biden drew a link between the experienced space, the envisioned space, and the role of hope that lies within it:

Now as then, unity is essential to life; liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And so we remember those who gave their all in the cause of unity, in the cause of a nation that endures because of them […] For in remembrance lies not just our history, but our hope. Not just our solemn remembrance, but our renewed purpose. Not just our solace, but our strength (Biden 2021l).

In this way, hope is part of the American story. It is transferred from the experienced space, to the present and toward the envisioned space into the future, providing purpose, strength, and comfort. Hope is connected to a fantasy of the future (Linderoth & Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019), imbued with historical memories providing the continued sustainment of the subject. However, this also means “honestly confronting all that we must do to make our nation fuller, freer, and more just” (Biden 2021l).

For this work — the work of democracy — is the work of our time, and for all time. And if we do our duty, then ages still to come will look back on us and say that we too kept the faith. And there’s nothing more important, nothing more sacred, nothing more American than keeping the faith (Biden 2021l).

Just as the American subject is marked by the continuous battle for its soul, the work of American democracy cannot be completed but is a constant endeavor. Biden also implies that it is a collective duty for the community to keep the faith and not lose hope (Esposito 2008, 2010). The combination of experienced and envisioned space serves to underline the importance of not losing hope, and continue the journey of an American story of hope:

“Let’s remember all those who came before us as a bridge to our history so we do not forget its pain, and as a bridge to our future so we never lose our hope” (Biden 2021g).

Each day, we’re reminded there’s nothing guaranteed about our democracy, nothing guaranteed about our way of life. We have to fight for it, defend it, earn it […] My fellow Americans, now we’re the guardians of that very idea of America. It’s up to us to save it, to preserve it, to build on it, and I know we will (Biden 2021q).

In another era when our democracy was tested, Franklin Roosevelt reminded us—In America: we do our part. That’s all I’m asking. That we all do our part. And if we do, then we will meet the central challenge of the age by proving that democracy is durable and strong. (Biden 2021j)
In the emplotment, we find a clue as to what a leader in a democracy does when the illusion of universality on the inside has been shattered (Walker 1993), when fear and anxiety looms in. We do not lose sight of our hope, because sustaining hope and faith is a shared duty in a democracy. The President cannot proclaim himself a Leviathan to force the country to come together. And while unity is the goal, it might sound like a foolish fantasy in itself. Thus, Biden has to try to instill confidence, responsibility and hope within the community to come together. It is a necessity which “falls on all - all of us - every one of us - every American” (Biden 2021q).

It is the people’s work to preserve democracy and the American dream, and stand up against the fear and hate that led to the Capitol attack (Biden 2021t). The emplotment shows a strong emphasis on the agency and the determination of the American community, which must keep the hopeful national fantasy alive (Lacan 2019). In this sense, identity representations built on hope do not draw their strength from fear of the outside, nor anxiety management as an ontologically safe subject that needs to be restored, but a shared fantasy of the future, which can come true but only if we work together towards it. In the same way, democracy does not happen by accident, but because people believe in it:

> It happens because people unleash the irresistible power of their dreams and their determination. Democracy is what makes it possible for hope and history to rhyme. And today, hope and history lie in our hands (Biden 2021x).

Democracy allows for hope and history to rhyme, it allows us to draw lessons from the experienced space and extend our hope into the future. However, since the defense of democracy requires an effort on the part of society to foster hope toward democracy and its institutions, government leaders have a responsibility to create trust and furnish hope in a democracy to provide it with legitimacy (Biden 2021x). Speaking at the Summit for Democracy, Biden addressed his fellow heads of states in democracies:

> Will we allow the backward slide of rights and democracy to continue unchecked? Or will we together — together — have a vision and the vision — not just “a” vision, “the” vision — and courage to once more lead the march of human progress and human freedom forward? I believe we can do that and we will if we have faith in ourselves, in our — and in our democracies, and in each other (Biden 2021w).
To stop the division and democratic decline, democracies need to have a vision of the future which stimulates hope and anticipation, and have hope that they can provide for their citizens, as to “make sure we remain a nation of possibilities” (Biden 2021v). The fears and anxieties within the setting does not have to determine the future - “we just need to show the will - the will to save and strengthen democracy” (Biden 2021r).

Just remember, our late friend John Lewis said, “Freedom is not a state; it is an act.” And we must act, and we will act. For our cause is just, our vision is clear, and our hearts are full. (Biden 2021r)

Freedom has no end state, nor a mode of being free, but it is an ongoing struggle. The striving subject requires aspiration and hope that things can change. However, the emplotment of this story does not end with a happily ever after, nor would a hopeful narrative with Lacanian elements do - the subject cannot reach a complete identity. The point of hope is to keep the striving collective subject going, to provide the democratic state with legitimacy, as well as be a common obligation for the community to sustain (Esposito 2008, 2010). The idea of America is an ongoing struggle, because it is an idea that needs “vigilant stewardship” (Biden 2022).

And together, we shall write an American story of hope, not fear. That democracy and hope, truth and justice, did not die on our watch but thrived. (Biden 2021a)

I said it many times and it’s no more true or real than when we think about the events of January 6th: We are in a battle for the soul of America […] Believe me, I know how difficult democracy is. And I’m crystal clear about the threats America faces. But I also know that our darkest days can lead to light and hope (Biden 2022).

5.3.1 Discussion

In the emplotment, Biden presents the objective of unity, and while it may sound like a foolish fantasy one should strive for unity. Within fantasy, one needs hope to sustain the fantasy and the Self. While unity is the objective, the point of fantasy is also the fantasy itself (Lacan 2019), because the striving and incomplete American subject requires a hopeful fantasy to continue the project of the Self. Unity is discursively related to hope and not fear, which also relates to hope as a democratic virtue supposed to render trust in one another instead of fear and distrust. Through tropes of remembrance, history, hope, purpose and strength there is a
clear linkage with the experienced space that builds a bridge towards an envisioned space, where hope becomes a leitmotif. It shows that not only is hope a fantasy of the future (Linderoth & Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019, Berenskoetter 2014), but it also resides in the experienced space by drawing on history and recalling past victories, where the better angels of the American subject have prevailed.

Keeping the faith is described as the epitome of the American subject. Since the American soul is a battle that cannot be ultimately won, it is vital to keep hope and faith. The community must sustain hope, because if they lose it the community will disintegrate by virtue of its worser angles, which shows the value of constantly trying to immunize or hold back negative traits within the subject (Esposito 2011). In this sense, the defense of the idea of America falls on every American. The emplotment provides a strong emphasis on agency, determination, and how hope can inspire to “keep going amidst the obstacles of democratic life” (Huber 2021:733). With hope and vision, we can strive forward and shape the world we seek to inhabit, create more resilient democracies and diminish collective anxiety. It is thus also a responsibility of government leaders to create the conditions for hope within a community. Intriguingly, to counter fears and anxieties emanating from the inside, democratic leaders need not only to create reforms but more overarchingly have vision - a hope as a fantasy of the future.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Concluding discussion

This thesis has aimed to explore the role of hope within the Biden administration’s biographical narrative, with a theorization that poses the collective subject as incomplete in its identity, nevertheless driven by a desire for a complete identity where hope is a vital part of this desire. Previous research within the realist or constructivist strand has often focused on the importance of fear or anxiety within identity representations, assuming that the state can have a universal inside or a stable identity. The situation Biden inherited as President after the Capitol attack on January 6th provided a situation where anarchy loomed in and shattered the assumption of universality on the inside and suggested that the U.S. did not
have a stable democratic identity.

Theoretically, this thesis aimed to show the value of analyzing hope within identity representations and the value of this hope after a disruptive situation in the national Self. President Biden’s biographical narrative during his first year in office was subsequently analyzed to explore a theory of hope. The overarching research question, *How can previous theoretical assumptions about state identity representations driven by fear and anxiety be nuanced by an account of hope in the case of the Biden administration's first year, where the assumption of universality and a stable identity has been shattered?* was split into three operationalizing questions that guided the analysis's narrative structure. These operationalizing questions and the overarching research question will be reflected upon below.

**How are representations of hope visible in the biographical narrative and connected to American identity and the sustainment of the United States?**

Recalling the definition of hope and how to find it within the narrative, hope is an uncertainty with the notion of possibility, a sense of the future being open to our intervention, related to faith, desire, belief, and agency as a force driving the Self forward. Hope can also be a democratic virtue to foster trust among citizens and toward democratic institutions.

To begin with, representations of hope are made visible throughout the narrative, for example, in terms of linking history and hope or that America must choose hope over fear (Biden 2021a). Below this surface level, Biden narrates the American subject as a constant struggle between its better angels and worst instincts (Biden 2021l), pointing to the American identity's unfinished and incomplete nature. According to the theory, the incomplete identity leads the subject to identify a lack, sparking a desire and fantasy imbued with hope to overcome this lack (Lacan 2019).

While the experienced space of American history has been a constant struggle, and the future might be as well, hope resides in the American spirit of finding light in the darkness, keeping the faith, and never giving up the constant endeavor to perfect the United States with hope and vision (Biden 2021f, 2021i). As much as the American soul is incomplete, hope is also
inherent within the representation of America as an aspirational idea defined by possibilities. The notion of the United States as an aspirational idea, with citizens keeping the faith and not losing hope, drives the Self forward, and hope becomes vital in the biographical narrative.

Hope is also portrayed as a democratic virtue of empathy and trust toward one another and government, where the nation-state is created from “We the People”. The idea of America is passed on from generation to generation, it is a belief that must be sustained and fostered within the hearts of citizens as the guardians of this idea (Biden 2021q). Sustaining the nation-state and maintaining hope toward it becomes an obligation of the community characterized by lack, but it needs hope to keep striving (Esposito 2010). The President cannot demand and order that the national identity representations be regarded as complete, but needs to instill shared agency, confidence, and hope in the collective subject.

The emphasis on collective agency, together with the notion of empathy toward one another and a government of the people and for the people, underlines Huber’s (2021:729-732) argument that hope is a vital ingredient within collective agency as a commitment to the idea of democracy. Democracy is also essential together with hope so that it can rhyme with history and the future can be revitalized (Biden 2021w, 2021e). With hope and vision, there are possibilities for the national fantasy that sustains the American subject, that it can become an improved version of the Self. This biographical narrative displays fundamental hope (Huber 2023) as essential to American identity representations. As Gilmore & Rowling (2018:273) contend, this is also related to the U.S. as exceptional as a ground for collective hope where nothing is impossible in America. With regards to the problem of an assumed universality or stable identity on the inside of states (Walker, 1993) - the American subject is narrated as imperfect on the inside. However, this does not mean hope is lost; on the contrary, it makes hope indispensable to sustaining the subject.

*How are representations of hope connected to a fantasy of the future and is there an object of hope?*

First, let us reintroduce the concept of fantasy. The subject has an incomplete identity and experiences a lack. Lack leads to a desire to overcome this lack, manifesting in a national fantasy, anticipating that enjoyment and a complete identity can be reached (Lacan 2019). As discussed in the theory section, a vital part of desire and fantasy is hope, which provides the
agency to move forward as a continuous subject through the mental play of hoping that fantasy will be reality (McGeer 2004, Milona 2020, Bovens 1999).

As discussed, hope is essential to American identity representations as an unfinished yet striving project. Just as fantasy strives on the hope that enjoyment will be possible, America has never lived up to its ideals but has never walked away from nor given up on them (Biden 2021p, 2021q). Hope throughout the narrative is the hope for an ideal. This is a fantasy of the future because perfecting the United States is an obligation passed down from the experienced space towards the present and future imbued with hope and historical memory (Biden 2021l). The pain of history shall function as a bridge to the future so that we do not lose hope (Biden 2021g). Regarding the fantasy of the future, there is also an emphasis on vision and democracy as a work of all time, not just past or present times (Biden 2021v).

Representations of hope in this fantasy are not merely in the sense of grand illusions of greatness but also more humbly as an ideal that a perfect version of the Self can be reached and thus, Americans should not lose hope of that version. When worse instincts take hold, they seem to breach the fantasy, but at the same time, they reinforce the notion of never giving up or losing hope but always striving towards making fantasy a reality. As noted, the fantasy of national enjoyment is an ideal to be reached. America is not perfect, but if collective trust, hope, and faith can be sustained, we can better strive towards that ideal as a guiding light in times of darkness.

At the same time, there is also an object of hope that the fantasy tends toward - unity. The value of unity is not only about healing domestic divisions but also America’s role on the global stage. With unity, there is nothing beyond the nation’s capacity, and America can win the future. As Lacan posits, hope is transferred to an object or objective, a unity that the subject is missing, thus becoming an obstacle to achieving enjoyment (Lacan 2019). However, simultaneously, Biden admits that unity is elusive and might sound like a “foolish fantasy” (Biden 2021a). Does this mean that President Biden’s biographical narrative of the United States displays an incommensurability between desire and objective? (Bodei 2018). In one sense, the community can never receive a stable identity or complete unity (Lacan 2019, Esposito 2010). At the same time, desire and fantasy sustain the American subject as striving. The American subject becomes attached to the hope that unity can be reached, and not merely
the objective of unity - but fantasy itself, where the notion of collective hope sustains the community and its continued strife toward enjoyment (Lacan 2019, Esposito 2010).

How can representations of hope simultaneously be understood as an immunization of fear and anxiety?

The theory suggested that while the main focus of the thesis regards hope, fear and anxiety still have a part to play as becoming immunized by a hopeful narrative. The hopeful narrated fantasy seeks to incorporate threats, fears, or anxieties and cannot eliminate them but needs to immunize them as part of the Self (Esposito 2011). In the narrative, fear is represented as a description of specific phenomena or objects as threatening, dangerous, or fearful, othering of characters or objects, and a sense of suspicion and distrust. Anxiety, on the other hand, is a state of uncertainty and unease, being insecure in one’s identity representations and what the future holds for their continuity, but without naming anything specific to direct this anxiety toward

As noted in the setting, representations of fear are found with regard to the insurrection on January 6th, threats from domestic terror, democratic decline, as well as anger, division, rage, lies, racism, nativism, and demonization that have pulled Americans part based on a skewed promise of America that values fear over hope (Biden 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021j, 2021q, 2022). An attempted immunization of these fears can be said to be done in two ways. First, by referencing the experienced space and that the U.S. has had such problems as division and white supremacy before and overcame them. There is no denying that these are parts of the subject, just as immunizing threats emanating from the Self does not mean they are eliminated. Othering and demonization is a worse instinct but still part of American nature and history, just as in the Civil War. The community is a sum of its parts, and these parts are human and imperfect (Biden 2021r, Esposito 2010, 2008). Secondly, Biden tries to narrate hope for the future as inherent within the American subject and never giving up on its ideals and better angles. The primacy of hope within the ideal American character speaks for itself. Great nations do not seek to bury their wrongs (Biden 2021q) but seek to overcome them by drawing on collective hope.

Regarding representations of anxiety, there is uncertainty and doubt about America’s global role and leadership, America’s vision and hope, and whether democracy itself will endure related to January 6th. Furthermore, there is an inflection point on whether democracy can
deliver amongst rapid acceleration in the world that gives rise to collective anxiety about the Self. All this leads to nothing being guaranteed about American democracy and the American way of life (Biden 2021c, 2021e, 2021f, 2021m, 2021v, 2021j, 2021l, 2021n, 2022). There are no easy solutions to these anxiety-inducing problems. What is narrated, however, is that uncertainty can actually lead to possibilities if we can foster a collective sense and trust that the future is open to our intervention. In this way, uncertainty tilts toward hope instead of anxiety. Uncertainty does not have to mean doubt and unease - but possibilities. While the inflection point is a turning point, it does not necessarily have to be negative - if we keep the faith and hope.

As Restad (2019) suggests, the presence of representations connected to fear and anxiety suggests the existence of a counter-narrative or narrative contestation. This narrative contestation goes beyond concrete problems and is more related to one's worldview. The biographical narrative tries to immunize a worldview filled with representations of fears and anxieties and instead embrace a view of the collective Self and the surrounding world based on hope. With regards to anxiety management and disruptions, there is the sense that America has lost touch with something that it once was, but also that this previous Self has contained many horrors and wrongdoings. Thus, what shines even more through the narrative is that America is an idea, an incomplete subject that requires hope to keep on striving.

*How can previous theoretical assumptions about state identity representations driven by fear and anxiety be nuanced by an account of hope in the case of the Biden administration’s first year, where the assumption of universality and a stable identity has been shattered?*

Campbell (1998) suggests that identity representations of fear often focus “on the dangerous and unfinished world” (Campbell 1998:48). The world that President Biden narrates may be unfinished. However, the focus is not on danger but instead on possibilities and visions of the future. While the Capitol attack breached the assumption of universality on the inside and fear on the outside, President Biden is also straightforward about the better and worse sides of America. These go back in history and into the present. The continuity of the American subject is thus not a lost fantasized state of unity or a previous state of stability, universality, and ontological security, but that the American subject is a continuous struggle.
There is an object of hope that is possible but not certain - that America will reach unity. Even if this unity cannot be reached - the point of fantasy is the fantasy itself, to keep hope that the American subject will continue to aspire toward an ideal. There is an incommensurability between desire/fantasy and object, but an incommensurability that is needed to sustain a fundamental hope within the subject and that guides the biographical narrative. While a universality on the inside is impossible, this does not mean we cannot hope for it within the envisioned space. To sustain collective hope is an obligation of the community, and even if fears, anxieties, and problems in the past cannot be eliminated, they can be attempted to be immunized by hope. Either way, these traits will be recurring since American history is a struggle, and thus, hope is necessary.

Hope is also narrated as providing legitimacy for the democratic state, regarding trust in democracy and one another, as opposed to a polarizing narrative. Even if the nation-state might not have a stable identity or a universal inside, hope provides for continued strife and sustainment of national fantasy. Hope nuances our understanding of identity representations because it both regards being hopeful as a part of U.S. identity representations and, more fundamentally, that hope sustains a fantasy of someday reaching its better angles. It might be so that the collective subject experiences identity anxiety and tries to manage this, perhaps by pointing out objects of fear. However, the thesis has tried to suggest that this is not the only way and that hope has an underdeveloped potential within identity representations. Furthermore, perspectives on fear and anxiety often rely on an implicit assumption of stable identity and universality, which this account of hope does not have. Instead, collective identity is always unfinished but gains vitality by hope.

6.2 Contribution, limitations, and further research
This thesis has taken on the endeavor of trying to theoretically challenge prevailing assumptions within Political Science and International Relations about the role of fear and anxiety within identity representations by suggesting the vital yet underexplored potential of hope. With regards to security, hope is in many ways connected to security in the notion of sustaining society as well as aim toward the future. On the empirical side, the thesis has tried to show the importance of hope for an unfinished collective subject. However, it bears both limitations and points for further research.
One might ask why the theoretical critique has been focused on realism and constructivism - and not liberalism, which has a generally hopeful and progressive view of the world (Hehir 2023:206). The theoretical point of approaching hope in this way is that hope is not merely a political view of progress, but that hope is a vital part of identity representations, just as previous research has suggested about fear and anxiety. However, it could complement the case study if it was studied along with an account of American liberalism and whether it influences the vitality of hope within identity representations.

With regards to ontological security, it can be questioned whether the whole role of hope within Biden’s narrative was really just anxiety management all the time. One might look at it so, but as the previous research suggested, there is an underexplored potential of the creative and productive role of anxiety which provides for an exploration of hope. One could perceive hope as a part of anxiety management, but this thesis has sought to theoretically and empirically illustrate that hope can be a vital part of identity representations in themself.

Fear is in the analysis represented not merely in regards to fearful object, but rather the fear of fear itself and that it will take hold. It could be questioned whether this also alienates citizens who are not deemed as hopeful, where the notion of “progress” often implicitly delineates themselves from those who allegedly look backwards. With the immunization paradigm, threats from the inside are not externalized but rather internalized. Still, it might be an Othering of “those who do not hope”. This is an intriguing paradox which could be further researched.

Several authors have also suggested that there might be a negative impact of hope which provides a search for an unobtainable end (Hehir 2023:209, Linderoth & Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019:645). This is akin to the notion that desire and fantasy can never be fulfilled (Lacan 2019). This could be a topic for research in the future, since the thesis cannot account for whether hope is positive or negative. Rather, it seeks to provide for how it can be studied and how previous theoretical understandings can be nuanced by an account of hope.

Furthermore, the thesis has focused on national identity representations which mostly regard the inner state of the nation - the American “character” or “soul”. This thesis has suggested that the point of hopeful identity representations is to sustain an unfinished collective subject and its identity representations. However, since it is connected to America’s place in the world
it implies the difficulty of separating foreign and domestic policy when it comes to identity representations, which is another intriguing aspect.

A last critical question is whether hope is an appropriate term. Just as ontological security scholars have challenged whether fear is an appropriate term instead of anxiety, this could very well be applied to hope as well. Hope can be investigated in a myriad of ways, and a myriad of different areas, such as the environment, during ground conflict or information warfare, and it could also benefit from a historical perspective on the role of hope throughout history. Hope does not necessarily have to be investigated from the standpoint of Lacanian desire or fantasy, or the obligation of community, but this has been a first step along the path. What this thesis has sought to do is bring hope to the forefront and show that it plays a valuable and intriguing role worth investigating - and that we should not assume a priori that fear and anxiety are the primary drivers behind representations of national identity.

7. List of references

7.1 Literature


### 7.2 Empirical material

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