

Media Discourses that Normalize Colonial Relations: A Critical Discourse Analysis of (Im)migrants and Refugees

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Abstract

The im(migration) and refugee crisis that are being exacerbated under the Trump administration, is a manifestation of empire-building and the long history of colonization of the Global South. A Marxist-humanist perspective recognizes these as consistent aspects of a clearly racist global capitalism that functions in the interest of multibillion dollar U.S. –based corporations and increasingly transnational corporations. Trade agreements, international economic policy, political intervention, invasion or the threat of these, often secure corporate interests in specific countries and regions. The authors use critical discourse analysis to examine the discourses around Mexican, Central American, and Syrian im(migrants) and refugees as examples of how U.S. mainstream media discourses normalize relations of domination between the U.S. and the Global South and by extension, between its peoples. The article posits these communities as an important revolutionary class for today.

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Keywords

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1. Media Discourses that Normalize Colonial Relations

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Case of (Im)migrants and Refugees Amidst notions of a post-coloniality is the reality that colonialism remains a permanent fixture of our global capitalist system. While traditional forms of colonialism are no longer as prevalent, the sociopolitical and economic relations that exist between the Global North and the Global South are no less defined by domination, forced dependency, and dispossession (Magdoff, 2013). The United States, in particular, continually and systematically reaches out to gain ever-increasing control and manipulation of the rest of the world (Chomsky, 2017); this, notwithstanding, that the United States remains a colonial settler society, with its goals of elimination of Native communities and its demand for a substitute cheap labor in Black, Chicana/Latina, Asian, and other Communities of Color (Glenn, 2015; Monzó, in press). Marx, first theorized the necessary relationship between colonization and capitalism in his famous chapters of *Capital* on “primitive accumulation” and, although written in the 1800s, it remains highly instructive to today’s global capitalism (Marx, 1977).

We see this clearly in this Trump era, which has brought forth an increasing hysteria against the “Other,” in particular against im(migrants) and refugees from Mexico, Central America, and the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East. The racialized discourses that demonstrate disdain for peoples who merely seek a place of refuge from poverty and persecution has roots in colonial relations and the capitalist goals of accumulation. The inhumanities we are currently seeing at the U.S.-Mexican border, where thousands of people seeking asylum are being forced into concentration camps, is not unlike the denial of refuge to so many Syrians seeking refuge from a civil war in which the U.S. has no doubt played a part (Cohn, 2018).

How the reality of living within a settler-colonial state, and continually investing and engaging in the destruction of peoples across the Global South becomes normalized and acceptable to the vast majority in society has much to do with discourses that help create and perpetuate the “American unconscious,” which involves a blind-like faith that the U.S. is built on the ideals of democracy, freedom, and equal opportunity, even while drowning in evidence to the contrary (Lichtman, 1993). It also has to do with discourses that perpetrate a violent and false deficit rendering of the racialized “Other,” creating a xenophobic fear of immigrants and refugees and White nationalist fervor.

The corporate media is a critical component in this societal hazing (Chomsky, 2002). While sometimes expressing sympathetic views and critical of dehumanizing policies against immigrants and refugees, the corporate media nonetheless carry discourses that reflect and perpetuate colonial and imperial relations that exact a racist and misogynist criminalization against these communities (Macías-Rojas, 2016). Marcuse recognized the potential dangers of technological innovation, including the mass media, which today is represented not only in TV and newspapers but also in the explosion of the internet and social media. Marcuse argued that although technology has the potential to challenge oppressive structures by making possible the attainment of our human needs and desires, that technology is controlled by those who have the power to create a false consciousness, means that technology is unlikely to be used to challenge the status quo. As a Marxist, Marcuse recognized the need for a revolutionary class but was doubtful that today’s working class, who have the ability to meet many of their falsely constructed

needs and desires, would be able to recognize, much less, challenge, the structure of oppression within which we live.

In this paper, we engage a critical discourse analysis of media discourses against so-called “immigrant” and “refugee” communities from distinct parts of the world but whose racialization and violent colonial depictions share important similarities - Syrian and Mexican and Central American refugees and immigrants. Following Marcuse, we recognize that the working class, especially in the U.S. today, is highly fragmented, especially by race, and we posit these im(migrant) and refugee “Others” as one of today’s potential revolutionary class.

2. Colonialism, Empire, and the Accumulation of Capital

The current attack on “immigration” and specifically on Black and Brown migrants and refugees particularly Mexican, Central American, and Muslim, is portrayed by politicians and their corporate media supporters as a necessary safeguarding of the “American way of life.” By this, they spread false narratives that these im(migrants) threaten our economic well-being (“they take our jobs”) and our physical safety (“they are terrorists”) and fuel fear and hate among the general population toward these communities (Macías-Rojas, 2016). These false narratives fail to recognize that migration patterns are responses to relations of domination between the Global North and South, exacerbated by global capitalism and the incessant drive for empire that sustains the capitalist mode of production (Robinson, 2008).

Marx’s critique of capitalism, which recognized “dispossession” as an essential aspect of capitalist production, helps us understand how colonialism and imperialism are permanent features of capitalism and thus helps us make sense of why negative discourses of the “Other,” in this case Muslim and Latin American peoples, have a structural dimension.

After decades of vilifying Marx or at best rendering his work “utopian,” we are finally experiencing a resurgence of interest in Marx, as capitalism has proven itself incessantly more and more destructive to people and nature and his theories have become increasingly instructive to today’s realities. Of course, this destruction is not evidenced equally across the world but rather afflicts more acutely the Global South, where people are increasingly displaced from poverty, war, and/or environmental disaster and forced to seek “refuge” in the more industrialized capitalist world.

In his concept of “primitive accumulation,” Marx articulated that the greatest accumulation of capital occurs not through the working day but through the centralization of capital in the hands of a single capitalist. Marx (1977) demonstrated that while the process of accumulation through labor extraction is slow, centralization is capable of quick and tremendous growth. Traditional forms of colonization provided exactly this centralization of capital at the hands of the imperial country.

Marx used the example of Ireland who was at the time experiencing a significant depopulation due to the potato famine of 1846 and the significant exodus from Ireland to the United States. At the same time, farms were being highly centralized with the wealthiest capitalists buying off smaller farms. While workers lived under extreme pauperization, the total social capital of the country was significantly prosperous. Marx argued that the capital growth of Ireland was

especially beneficial to the English aristocrats who sought to buy meat and wool from Ireland at the cheapest possible prices for the English market but more importantly the unemployed population of Ireland was especially beneficial to the English bourgeoisie who employed them as cheap labor, which in turn brought down the wages of the English working class.

Today, we see a more contemporary version of this process with the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to the Global South, where parts are made in poor countries where workers, often Native women and Women of Color, are hyper exploited, and the products made are then shipped back to the United States and other more industrialized countries to later be imported into the same economically impoverished countries and the goods are sold at prices where the workers cannot come close to affording them.

Of course, colonization had and has much to do also with land appropriation and the capital that can be accumulated as labor is made to put the land to use and extract its resources for production and capital accumulation. Although Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation has often been misunderstood as a necessary process *igniting* capitalism, Marx referred to this process as “so-called” primitive accumulation to mark its *continually necessary* function to the system of capitalism. Since awareness that colonization was enacted through an unfathomable genocide and violence against Native peoples, has made traditional colonial relations “unacceptable,” it has shifted into processes of domination that *appear* as “choice” transactions, circumventing the critique of violence and coercion, but that have the same economic, social, political, and psychological effects of colonization. We see further examples of neo-colonial practices in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), “land grabs,” and the War on Drugs/Terror, which taken on new forms of continued social, economic, and political control and or influence over, and extraction of resources of the Global South and the hyper exploitation of their labor.

The most important early anti-imperialist Marxist work came from Rosa Luxemburg (2015) who described the devastating brutality by which Native peoples were violated. She argued that imperialism was a necessary component of capitalism because the “unlimited expansive capacity of the productive forces” and the “limited capacity of social consumption” required imperial expansion to create more markets for consumption in the pre-capitalist world. Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson (2004) argue that Luxemburg placed too much emphasis on the need to absorb buyers from non-capitalist societies. Indeed, we see today that imperialism is not confined to pre-capitalist societies. Instead, Hudis points out that Marx was correct when he recognized that production did not necessarily require exchange value (the money form); Marx argued that in certain industries, the product, in its use form, can be inserted, as means of production, into new cycles of production. Thus imperialism serves not merely the purpose of expanding markets but more importantly for the appropriation of extensive sources of means of production, which produce much greater concentration of capital and therefore support the capitalist goal of consistent and expanding accumulation.

Nonetheless, Luxemburg’s contribution to Marxist analysis was crucial as she denounced colonialism and imperialism and both recognized and repudiated the racism inherent in the colonial project, describing to the world the horrors inflicted upon native peoples and challenging ideologies that they need be “civilized.” She saw beauty and value to their communal ways and focused her most important work to the role of imperialism in capitalism. More than any other

Marxist before her, Luxemburg adopted an internationalist stance and gave her life to the cause of humanization. She wrote from prison in 1917:

I am just as much concerned with the poor victims on the rubber plantations of Putumayo, the Blacks in Africa with whose corpses the Europeans play catch ... I feel at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.

While genocide, epistemocide, and enslavement in the service of empire continue (often through state legitimized violence such as war, mass imprisonment, deportation, and police brutality), the vast majority of peoples accept and condone continued colonial “territories”, neo-colonialism, and imperialism as a result of a constant bombardment of media distortions and discourses that portray “aliens” as dangerous (physically or economically) and U.S. assault on the Black and Brown bodies as “necessary” to preserve “democracy” and ensure the well being of “Americans.”

3. Racist Ideology and Global Capitalism

In the US, the mainstream media is a billion-dollar industry owned by a small number of large corporations that control, determine, and decide information fluidity (Chomsky, 2002). As such, the news we receive is highly influenced by corporate interests and agendas. The corporate media as a whole is an entity that exudes capitalist ideology; through the stories they tell and the advertising that pays, the media has significant influence over the ways in which we live in society, what we value, and the needs and desires we construct as a society. As Marcuse has pointed out, the media (along with other technological advances) have been put to use by those in power to normalize capitalist values and desires, including the value for competition, meritocracy, individualism, and the incessant desire for and belief that we need things.

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When it comes to discourses about the racialized “Other,” the corporate media, as will be seen below, tells stories that fulfill their interests and cover lightly, or even eliminate, information that contradict these discourses. Since the majority of the public receive information from a second hand source, such as the news media, it is imperative to understand that the information is selected and controlled by these financial giants and their beneficiaries. For example, it is no accident that the significant emphasis on deportation of predominantly Mexican undocumented workers is part of the billion-dollar prison and military complexes and that while much is said about the large number of undocumented workers in this country, little is said about plans to increase guest worker programs because we do not have American workers to fill the agricultural, construction, and other employment sectors.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) has made an important contribution to our understanding of ideology and hegemony. Gramsci proposed that both the state and civil society function to sustain the ideologies consistent with those of the ruling class and which support their control of society and the system that serves their interests. The state serves this function through coercive tactics, militarization, and policing. Civil society does so through the continual bombardment of ideologies and narratives that are presented as “normal,” or “natural.” The media is a critical tool of hegemony, perpetuating this “common sense,” which for U.S. citizens includes narratives of the U.S. as the “leader of the ‘free world,’” benevolent supporter of “democracy,” a place of “unlimited opportunities.” Under the bombardment of these narratives, U.S. citizens, especially the dominant group, develop a historical amnesia, that allows them to support national and

international policies that they believe will help maintain their position of privilege and that, to them, justify inequality, dehumanization, war and destruction.

Racist narratives that depict people as “Others,” other countries, as “foreign,” and immigrants as “alien” function to create distance between U.S. citizens and the rest of the world and to normalize ideas about “us” before them or “America first,” wherein “America” is made out to be White, invoking the historical amnesia that this land has been inhabited by Native peoples for thousands of years before the first colonizers arrived. In the U.S., racialization and racism are central aspects of everyday life. While the privilege that Whites hold is often invisible to them, People of Color are very cognizant that racism shapes both dominant discourses, material conditions, and opportunity structures. The dialectic between race and class ensures divisions between groups. Narratives that feed specific ideologies about particular groups are often exploited by the media in ways that encourage support for the continual relations of domination and imperialist activities that the U.S. engages in across the world. As Marx indicated in his analysis of the relationship between the Irish and the English, racism can become an important way in which to ensure the continuation of the status quo and to turn people with similar class and other interests against each other.

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life ... He regards himself as a member of the ruling nation, and consequently, he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. (Marx, 1870, p. 12)

Marx continues:

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this. (p.13).

This is certainly what has happened to the Muslim, Mexican, and Central American communities in the U.S. Media portrayals of these groups, although different, demonstrate important parallels, such as continual vilification and criminalization, bans from travel to or entering the U.S., denial or hyper restrictions to asylum or refugee status and the hyper vigilance of proper documentation.

Herbert Marcuse, in his important essay, “The End of Utopia” tackles consciousness and the development of needs. His argument is that needs and desires of a people are created through the dominant social reality. He argues that the idea of utopia, as impossibility, must be shattered and that instead we must recognize that we do have possibilities for a world in which human beings have needs and desires consistent with freedom and human dignity. Certainly, social consciousness plays an important part in the development of needs, whether or not we recognize the need to create spaces for all peoples can find safety, education, and live with dignity.

Media discourses are especially crucial in this effort as they reach mass audiences and can, theoretically, change public opinion. However, as Marcuse points out, we need to be careful of the new technologies that although they have potential for transforming society, they are more likely to be manipulated toward ends that support dominant oppressive structures since these are consistent with the needs of the powerful. For Marcuse revolutionary consciousness can only be achieved by those who reject the needs and desires created by capitalism.

Marcuse challenges Marx's conception of the working class as today's revolutionary class, arguing that technology has made available to the working class today, many of the same desire and needs that capitalism creates. For example, in the U.S. many working class people live lives that seem affluent in that they have the things that the capitalist class has, even though these may be of lesser exchange value, such as a car, iPhone, etc. As such, he argues, today's working class is unlikely to be revolutionary since they do not see themselves on the fringes of society even though they are more exploited than ever before.

Certainly, this along with the racism that divides the working class seems to explain why the White working class in the U.S. have supported Trump and his racist policies in favor of mass deportations, travel bans, and family separation. They see a world that has changed culturally and linguistically and scapegoat communities of color as responsible for the stagnant economy that challenges their ideology of U.S. opportunity and social mobility.

Although different racialized groups are associated with different stereotypes and incorporated (or rejected) into societies in diverse ways, the clear parallel among migrants and refugees is that they are placed in subordinate positions in relation to the White dominant group and that this relation of domination persists not only within U.S. border but also in our treatment of their countries of origin. Although differences exist, one general trend is that "immigrant" groups are depicted as "dangerous" to the people in the U.S. and to "our way of life." This narrative criminalizes Mexican and Muslim peoples, making them out to be "criminals," "terrorists," and "undesirables." At the other spectrum are narratives of pity, which exemplify sympathy and desires to "help" peoples who are then depicted as "needy" and "dependent," without ever acknowledging that the only way to solve the "problem of immigration" is by changing the capitalist system which feeds off of the exploitation of the Global South. Either narrative, makes it plausible to accept U.S. involvement and/or intervention in their countries' politics and activities and desensitizes U.S. citizens to U.S. imperialism and the destruction of other communities and peoples.

4. Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourses are sets of semiotic meanings (language - oral, textual, and visual) that both reflect but also constitute social reality and position people as social subjects in particular ways and with particular identities. Discourses are never neutral expression but rather impart social meanings that are embedding in specific practices and communities. Discourses are, thus, always embed with particular social meanings associated with power differences and ideologies.

Norman Fairclough (1999, 2001) has made important contributions to understanding how discourse is often used to support capitalism's goals, including the use of neoliberal discourses on "flexibility" to encourage worker acceptance of downsizing and pay cuts and the discourse of

“new economies” to support restructuring, including outsourcing and other cuts to social services. Jan Blommaert has discussed globalization as the new “historical phase” of capitalism, which demands that social phenomena, including language use and discourses, be analyzed and understood in local, national and transnational relations and through movement and shifts. Specifically, Blommaert focuses on the rise of migration as a result of global markets, which have exacerbated previous national and international inequities and significantly affected migration. Social conditions present possibilities for the development of discourses that, generally, reflect ruling class ideologies and interests.

Certainly migration patterns, whether from Mexico, Central America, Syria or any other country must be examined as both functions of local conditions but also as pieces to a broader puzzle of global economic relations that create the impossibility or perceived impossibility of survival or acceptable living conditions within once home country and as part of a large historical process of migration. In this sense, analysis of migration patterns must take into account not only the social conditions that pull people towards more stable economies and push people out of their home countries but also the historical conditions of migration that have brought peoples with similar language and culture together to establish enclaves in particular areas. Furthermore, the process of globalization, as a phase of capitalism cannot take a class-reductionist position that ignore the salient process of racialization and the colonial histories and relations that have impacted migration patterns and the discourses of particular peoples, communities, and countries. The ways in which particular communities and their migration patterns have been popularly and politically defined in the U.S. has much to do with the history of U.S. relations with these countries, U.S anti-communist rhetoric that made people fleeing so-called “communist” or “socialist” regimes almost automatic refugees, and the disqualifying of economic reasons for “im(migration),” since accumulation by dispossession is the foundation of capitalism.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides researchers with the tools to dig into specific narratives and discourses to ask questions of “how” language and visuals are used and “why” such narratives are erected, which promotes political intervention and social change (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In media discourse, not only what has been said is important, but also what is not said by the media. Often media narratives are presented as neutral and audiences internalize messages without pondering what information is missing, what information provided are only half-truths, what stereotypes are taken for granted. However, with a critical focus, one can de-neutralize media narrative and detect their hidden meaning and agenda (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Although there are significant cultural, linguistic, and political differences between Mexican, Central American, and Syrian im(migrants) and refugees, these differences are often collapsed into the broader narratives about “threats to this country.”

Of course there are important similarities and parallels among these groups. Whether economic or war refugees, they come to the US in search of a more secure life, economic and/or physical safety. The stories of these communities and of the political, social, and economic conditions they face in their countries, as reported by the media, can be examined through CDA approaches to gain a greater understanding of the hidden and structural reasons for the struggles they face as well as to better understand the U.S.’s responses to these communities seeking help. For example, the words “immigrant” and “im(migrant) implies a foreign identity based on the border parameters of the U.S. In reference to Mexico and Central America, the word immigrant hides a

collective memory of migrant patterns used historically within the Americas. The (Im) prefix to the word migrant plays into the social and economic exploitative equations Marx calls primitive accumulation. Furthermore, it hides the fact that im(migration) is currently a global phenomenon that has almost nothing to do with choice migration but rather is a forced reality led by global capitalism, wherein less “developed” countries have no choice but to relocate to more industrialized countries, where a more robust economy exists due to the hyper exploitation of the Global South and the fact that war and destruction is kept always at bay from these more industrialized borders. The term immigration to describe human beings looking for their space to exist and subsist systematically devalues and erases the importance of migrant patterns and political realities into discursive language serving the needs of capital.

5. Mexican and Central American Refugees

The history of racial, economic, and political tensions within The United States and its neighboring Mexican and Central American communities is long, extensive, and complex (Ngai, 2004). The exploitative and forced migrations by Mexican and Central American communities into the United States become effects and consequences strategically calculated by a capitalist approach in its trajectory for profit and accumulation. As we speak, hundreds of refugees and (im)migrant families await at the border seeking asylum and refugee status as their countries can no longer provide the economic and social opportunities for living (Cohn, 2018).

Within the United States, media portrayals from news casts such as Fox News, CNN, Telemundo, and Univision to name a few, have used language and discourse to denigrate, and desensitize its viewers from the inhumane conditions being experienced by (im)migrant communities searching for a better life (Macías-Rojas, 2016). For instance, in the case of Central American (im)migrants searching a new life in the U.S., Fox News described it as a “critical crisis” for the Americans, and that the many Central American families seeking humanitarian supports in the U.S. are doing so for financial benefits, therefore not “true” asylum seekers (Grate, 2019). In reality, the Central American families waiting at the border, particularly those from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are escaping from inhuman conditions back home, such as violence, corruption, and climate change (Flores, 2019). Although we can find narratives from both sides of the argument, the ones that paint a negative picture of the (im)migrants would further reinforce any misunderstanding of the situation and the (im)migrants’ true intention for relocating to the U.S.

When we understand the historical conditions that delineate the relationship between the United States and Mexico, we can conclude that the communities migrating north are truly economic refugees rather than “illegal immigrants”. The term of “illegal immigrants” disarticulates and rearticulates the political, economic, and cultural reality of people into those of criminality and invasion. The historical conditions between the United States and Mexico relay a different backdrop, one based in an imposing colonial set of values, and violence that demonstrate our current (im)migrant debate today.

Such new outlets mentioned above systematically align ideologically with a western perspective of borders, a division in the land that separates Indigenous communities who historically have been the same community. New outlets deem migrant communities as criminal, irresponsible, and exploitative. Images and videos flood the media with (im)migrant communities crammed into

corral prison cells, where people are seen as defiant, resistant, and irrationale for attempting such harsh experiences (Macías-Rojas, 2016). The media does not contextualize within its news the destabilization or rather imposed policy, such as NAFTA, that destabilizes the hometowns of such (im)migrants in the first place. Nonetheless, the reality is distinct, majorly from such framing narratives. The United States is implicated in the destabilizing conditions experienced within these countries.

Juan Gonzalez (2000) and Eduardo Galeano (1973) have demonstrated the intervention and manipulation that still currently pull cheap, physical, and exploitative labor to U.S. borders. As Gonzalez and Galeano document, The Monroe Doctrine is important in understanding the entitlement and control over countries within the American Continent. After decades of war and colonial imposition by European entities such as Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, France, and Germany, President James Monroe instituted in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine, which specifically, declared the American Continent as a “New World” with a different system distinct to those of the “Old World” of Europe (Gonzalez, 2000, Galeano 1973). The Doctrine was meant to stop any further interference and colonization from Europe upon the American Continent; likewise, the United States would also stop interfering with the colonies of Europe. This doctrine intentionally gave the United States control and dominion across the Americas. Countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, fell under the presumed “protection” and oversight of the United States (Gonzalez, 2000, Galeano 1973).

Such policy opened the doors, and further gave the United States free reign to continue its own colonizing project. Motivated by an ideological premise of Manifest Destiny, the God Given Right to conquer and expand westward, the United States instituted a distorted entitlement and authority over the American Continent (Acuna, 2011; Galeano, 1973). The history of U.S. intervention in Latin America is long and extensive, specifically, within the Civil Wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The United States, fueled and backed oligarch, dictators, and military regimes over Indigenous, poor, and working-class populations. The United States implemented puppet governments in these countries that would serve the best interest of the United States, over the civil and human rights of the country’s populations (Gonzalez, 2000, Galeano 1973). Corporations that produced oil, tobacco, sugar cane, and bananas, to name a few, were controlled and governed by US entities, exploiting the lands, and products for the benefit of the United States, while the populations of those communities, labored at unlivable conditions without any access to the benefits of the products they produced. The United States, used its resources to back assassinations, implement and fund coup d'etat, create sterilization programs in Guatemala amongst Indigenous women, and fully trained oppressive military leaders within the School of the Americas, who’s training grounds are found within the United States (Gonzalez, 2000, Galeano 1973).

The relationship between the United States and Mexico, likewise, reflects the imposition of policy and ideology over the American continent (Acuna, 2011). The Treaty of Guadalupe ended the Mexican American war in 1848, turning over a large area of land over to the United States (Acuna, 2011). The states of California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, and a small section of Wyoming were surrendered in an unfair war motivated and instigated by Manifest Destiny on behalf of the United States. Overnight, Mexican and Indigenous families living within these lands, were forced to assimilate into a new identity and way of life. The introduction of borders was enforced and communities were pushed to assimilate and respect the demarcation and

sanctions that define the United States. Up until this point Indigenous and Mexican communities migrated up and down the continent following crop and migration patterns as they have done for generations, yet, this geographical and traditional way of life became illegal with the implementation of a border (Acuna, 2011; Gonzalez, 2000).

Fast forward to the current political climate that perpetuates dominant rhetoric framing, (im)migrants as “illegal immigrants”, further enforces a colonial strategy where language is used to erase historical accounts, and the collective memory of (im)migrant populations is deemed as irrational and oppositionary (Apple, 1979/2004). For example, a recent report by CNN (Sands and Alvarez, 2019) on the significant increase of migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexican border quotes “an official” who states, “This is dangerously elevating the time in custody and poses serious, significant safety risks” to agents as well as migrants... “ The idea that migrant families, many of whom are children alone, who are seeking refuge pose a “safety risk” to the border agents feeds into ideologies already long established about the “criminality” of im(migrants). The same report goes on to quote the Director of ICE who feels that the release of families, due to lack of space and adequate conditions in holding cells, “...obviously has a negative impact on our public safety efforts.” While appearing neutral by discussing the difficult plight in caring for the many children and families detained at the border, the report fails to document the U.S’. long history of involvement in Latin America, the conditions that push and pull families to the border, or migrant perspectives on what is happening at the border. Furthermore, the report in no way challenges the safety concerns posed to agents with statistics to show that the ones who face peril in these border holding and encampment cells are the migrants as evidenced by the fourth death of a young migrant child being held.

The infamous and slanderous discourse of Mexican’s as “rapists” who bring drugs and crimes to the U.S., perpetuated by President Trump in 2015, began an all out war against Mexican im(migrants) and extended already extremely high levels of deportations (begun by President Obama) to persons without any previous criminal records other than coming to the U.S. to work. The attacks on Mexican and Central American undocumented workers attacked DACA recipients, Dreamers, and includes the goal of building a wall. The most recent legislation attempts against predominantly Mexican and Central American im(migrants) involves a “merit-based” system that facilitates immigration to those persons who are already highly educated and presumed to “contribute” to the U.S. economy. Appearing to be supportive of Mexican im(migrants), NBC News recently released a report indicating that a large number of Mexican (im)migrants are highly skilled workers with higher education degrees in the U.S. (Gamboa, 2019). While this study contradicts the slanderous lies that Trump reported, it feeds right into the discourse that im(migrants) who enter the U.S. for economic reasons and do not hold academic degrees are here to “take our resources” and do not contribute to the economy. Furthermore, it normalizes the idea that immigration is a process of choice and that the host country is supposed to get something in return, completely bypassing the fact that migration is spawned by a global capitalism that puts the Global South at risk to the benefit of the Global North, including of course, the United States.

6. Syrian Refugees and U.S. Interests

The Syrian war has now lasted close to a decade. No one would have predicted this war would last this long and at the moment, there is no evidence of peace in the horizon. The crisis started as a local conflict and turned into a full-blown proxy war, involving several major nations, including the US, Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The most recent U.S. involvement in Syria was in April 2018, when the U.S. along with France and Britain launched military strikes in several Syrian government controlled sites (BBC, 2018).

Despite claims to humanitarian intentions, the U.S. active involvement in Syria promotes capital gains and fulfills corporate interests. According to Ekman (2012), the U.S. military invasion of Iraq was a clear example of U.S. involvement in the Middle-East for the purposes of securing oil, however, the media justifies the U.S. involvement in the region as peacemaking efforts. By showing the audience the devastating aftermath of war but not the key players that caused the wreckage, the media ignores U.S. responsibility in the Syrian Civil War and stresses only U.S. military intervention in the region.

Currently, the U.S. proxy war in Syria has allowed the U.S. to maintain control over the majority of oil fields, the largest freshwater reservoir, and significant gas fields in the country. Indeed, the areas of U.S. focus in Syria all possess great financial value; hence, some question the U.S.’ true intention in Syria (Webb, 2018). To put things in perspective, the biggest oil facility in Syria is the al-Omar oil field, which produces approximately 50 million dollars monthly from its oil production (Masters, 2017). U.S. military forces took over this oil field in 2017. Thus, the U.S. currently controls a crucial industry of the Syrian economy. However, this information is not addressed by mainstream U.S. media. Instead, humanitarian reasons are highlighted. By “mainstream media,” the authors are referring to the large mass media outlets in the U.S. that have significant viewership and corporate sponsorship. These are able to influence large segments of the population. For example, *CNN*, *New York Times*, *Fox News*, *TIME*, and *The Washington Post* would all be considered “mainstream” or “corporate” U.S. media.

Within the chaos of proxy wars, the ones that suffer the most from this long war are the Syrian people. To this day, more than 5.6 million Syrians have become refugees and fled to other countries, while 2.9 million Syrians reside in hard-to-reach corners in war torn Syria, unable to connect with any humanitarian aid (World Vision, 2018). In 2017, we saw the executive order of the Muslim ban, which aims to stop the peoples of a handful of predominantly Muslim countries from entering the U.S. on the premise of homeland security. In 2018, only 44 Syrian refugees were granted entry to the U.S., which is approximately 6,000 fewer than in 2017. Nonetheless, facing such a humanitarian crisis, the U.S. mainstream media dedicated little space to Syrian civilians’ needs or the status of Syrian refugees, compared to their reporting on Assad and Russia’s destruction in Syria. It is a paradox that the U.S. decided to intervene in the Syrian crisis for humanitarian reasons, yet the media chooses not to focus on that very aspect. The media is nearly silent on the U.S.’ contribution to the catastrophe of the Syrian refugee crisis. For example, little is said about the fact that U.S.’ bombings have resulted in significant Syrian civilian casualties and the need for Syrian families to relocate due to losing their homes. An important question is how we can become involved in a war for so called humanitarian reasons and yet not accept the very people who are fleeing? The 44 Syrian refugees relocated in the U.S.

in 2018 is a small percentage of the Syrian refugee population. In addition, although the majority of the Syrian refugee population is Muslim, U.S. State Department Refugee Data (2019) indicates that the majority of Syrian refugees accepted in the U.S. since 2017 are Christian applicants. It is worthy to ask why there is such hesitation in bringing Muslim refugees into the country.

The mainstream media, generally, uses “othering” language when covering topics on Arab and Islam, for example, adding tonal emphasis on “Islamic” when describing terrorist activities in the Middle East. Additionally, they tend to stress “terrorism” in conjunction with adding the tonal emphases. In contrast, White domestic terrorism is often depicted as an act of trauma. In the Las Vegas massacre of 2017, the mainstream media did not emphasize that the gunman, Paddock, was “White.” Rather, Paddock was referred to as a “psychopath,” someone who might be mentally ill. In other words, the mainstream media did not emphasize Paddock’s skin color, nor the word “terrorism” when discussing Paddock, which is usually how they are depicted when the act is committed by people associated with Islam. According to the FBI (2018), terrorism is defined as both internal and domestic. Domestic terrorism is defined as “perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, asocial, racial, or environmental nature.” Interestingly, the FBI website used the Las Vegas shooting as an example of domestic terrorism, even though the U.S. media hardly reminded the public of this truth. It seems the media reserves the word “terrorism” for certain groups of people.

This kind of “word trick” influences the audience’s perspective, creating an attitude of “othering” certain groups of people, and an “us versus them” mindset. This “othering,” the negative stereotypes associated with them, and criminalization creates fear toward the Middle East region and its people. This makes the public less empathetic or even apathetic to the suffering of the Syrian refugees. To keep the “others” away from “us,” the media continues to produce fear through language and to create separation, so that “others” remain stigmatized and marginalized.

Islamophobia is an epidemic that we see in our society. Perhaps then, it is not hard to understand why the U.S. mainstream news media prefers to spend time and energy reporting on the chaos and destructions in Syria, and not on the miserable conditions or the urgent need of the Syrian refugees. Through language, the news media also removes agency, causing the public to turn a blind eye or build apathy for those who became homeless during the Syrian crisis.

U.S. involvement in Syria is not solely for the benefit of the Syrian people, but mainly for its capitalist accumulation. Using Syria as a battle ground, several powerful countries, such as the U.S., Russia, Iran, and Turkey, fight to gain or maintain control in the Middle East. Herman (2007) reminds us that in cases where the U.S. or its allies have caused negative outcomes in other countries, the media uses a more passive language in order to remove agency. This is how the idea of a “good war” is created by our news media—to highlight the humanitarian purpose for entering a war, and at the same time, eliminate information that would reveal its self-serving and capitalist intentions.

If the news media focused heavily on the distress of Syrian refugees, who are the ones who experience the unfortunate results of this full-blown proxy war, it would redirect the public’s attention on the real suffering of human beings, and not on supporting our presence in

Syria. Together with the news media’s negative representation of Islam and its people, the Syrian refugees sink even deeper in a void, away from the public’s eyes.

Conclusion

The Mexican and Central American (im)migrants and Syrian refugees are just two recent examples of how the U.S. corporate-owned-media use discourse to normalize their imperialist activities and at the same time create White nationalist fervor in the U.S. and xenophobia against the non-White Other who is made to be “alien” and criminalized. We must not ignore or downplay the power behind corporate media, as they continuously penetrate the “American unconscious” with their agenda, with and without the public’s consent. It is imperative that we as consumers of media interrogate media discourses and the language choices that are made to deceive the public and consider the agenda behind every news story. Mexican (im)migrants, Syrian refugees, and all others whom fit into this category can find their voice in our society, if the public no longer blindly follows the corporate media that perpetuate a dominant narrative of history, and reproduce dominant frames of illegality that do not align with a critical view of history. It is ironic and unethical to support the dominant narratives that we have discussed in this paper; yet, we lack the spaces where the real stories, sans political ideology, can be learned and a true consciousness developed.

A ray of hope for a better world beyond capital and its imperialist doctrine that is destroying not only humanity but the Earth we depend on may lie in these same communities. Marcuse (1964) argued that working class may be unable to recognize its own exploitation and/or unwilling to risk the comforts they have gained through the technological advances that have made capitalist desires available (albeit along with increased exploitation) to them. Yet, the disastrous conditions that have resulted in tremendous migration and the loss of human dignity associated was not as prevalent in Marcuse’s time. Today’s migration patterns, the advent of social media and globalization, have allowed many people to recognize not only the plight of so many displaced peoples but also to see the parallels that exist between different types of migrants, including im(migrants) from across the world who seek to escape from poverty and refugees who seek to escape political persecution. These communities are racialized working class peoples whose exploitation goes beyond the extraction of surplus value and alienation as workers. These are displaced communities whose dehumanization cannot be hidden through false ideologies of market “freedom” or “meritocracy. Their criminalization, the indignities of running from “la migra,” the pain of being separated from their children and being jailed for seeking refuge, the arrogance of racial profiling, the protection for White supremacists, and the horrors of being labeled a terrorist, cannot be easily bought off with the possibility of having the next new commodity. Raya Dunayevskaya (2003), coined the Black masses as the vanguard of the revolution precisely because their conditions of unfreedom were such that they could not easily forget their long history as slaves and the conditions of destruction and police brutality that their communities were forced to live under. Indeed, it was the Black masses that led the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and many other movements followed on their coat tails. Today’s Latinx and Muslim communities are growing important grassroots movements and coming together as they recognize their shared conditions of dehumanization within the U.S. context. For example, in 2017, OOCORD (2019) founded the Muslim Latino Collaborative, a consortium of 14 Latinx and Muslim organizations seeking to extend and solidify greater power by uniting around their

shared concerns and civic engagement (we predict that these communities will come to represent a strong revolutionary Reason and force). We need to prepare to support them and to develop ties to other marginalized communities of color so that together we can bring down the monster of capital and establish a truly free and human society.

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