

Infesting our country: Discursive illusions in anti-immigration border talk

Abstract

Postmodern attempts to understand diverse communities living in close proximity within urban spaces may create a positive image of migration and immigration despite ongoing negative portrayals of migrants and immigrants in popular discourse and mainstream media. One such example includes the varied discourses used to depict individuals wishing to cross national borders. Recent and vivid reminders of the precarity of cross-border lives can be found in online and print newspapers reporting family separation, death, kidnapping, and extortion (cf. AUTHOR, 2018). This paper investigates how, despite the need to flee dangerous regions, online and print newspapers rely on negative portrayals of migrants and immigrants to forward nationalist positions. Specifically, using the Discourse of Illusion (AUTHOR, 2015) as our main analytic framework, the analysis demonstrates the ways in which dehumanization is central to forwarding ideological positions against migration and immigration. Our findings are then used to discuss larger issues of how media is transforming the ways in which political ideologies are constructed and circulated.

Introduction

The attention sociolinguists place on the lives of individuals in contact with culturally distinct communities may give the impression that the world is not only increasingly more diverse, but also that there are benefits to living in such a state (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011).

Indeed, postmodern terms, such as “superdiversity,” have become defining characteristics of cutting-edge sociolinguistics research (e.g., Androutsopoulos, & Juffermans, 2014), which at times can unintentionally suggest a utopian world where communities live harmoniously together. These academic depictions stand in stark contrast to media representations of migrants and migratory trends where “foreigners” or “refugees” are used as both pejorative and blanket terms.

In academic discourse, for instance, it is commonly suggested that the boundaries that traditionally define and confine societies into neighboring geographic spaces are not only fluid, but also possibly imagined (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Blommaert, 2015). This line of thinking is further expanded to the observation that the geographic separation of culturally-similar communities residing on opposite sides of government-imposed national boundaries is contrived and belies the natural spatial trajectories of human migration (e.g., Nicholls, & Uitermark, 2016). Studies that look into the lives of communities living near such borders are often positioned within a larger paradigmatic movement that rejects binary oppositions (e.g., us versus them, native versus foreigner, citizen versus alien), and as such, must be commended for confronting the problems associated with viewing nation and nationhood as fixed constructs that historically reflect those members of society in positions of power and privilege.

While sociolinguists are cognizant of, and indeed write extensively about, the lived experiences of communities dealing with issues of migration and immigration, the world that is depicted in postmodern research is emblematic of a subjectivity that sometimes belies commonsense ideologies and discourses. For example, “superdiversity” is a term that champions diversity and celebrates immigrants and migrants, but at the cost of directly confronting the discriminatory ideologies that exist in mainstream society (although

immigrants and migrants experience different levels of discrimination and challenges, for stylistic purposes, we sometimes use the two terms interchangeably). It is important to directly address such ideologies, as communities seeking a new life in a new country are thrown into larger societal debates where their movement from one region to another is often depicted as a problem or even an existential national threat. The ongoing political rhetoric of President Donald Trump, and the social views of his millions of supporters, are vivid examples of this. Such discourses are a reminder that language and intercultural communication research must continue to examine how discourses and ideologies pertaining to migration and immigration are created and circulated in mainstream society.

The current study attempts to do precisely this. That is, the analysis below contributes to scholarship on social action in intercultural communication in general, and cross-border discourse in particular, by examining how online and print newspapers construct and circulate anti-immigration discourses. The paper is particularly concerned with the ways in which negative portrayals of the cultural Other are used as political discourse (cf. Wodak, 2015). Such a focus deserves continued attention in the intercultural communication literature given the precarity of communities living in extreme conditions fueled by war, poverty, and genocide. The analysis builds on the growing body of cross-border research by uncovering the discourses and ideologies that are used to resist immigration and migration. Such a focus allows scholars to view online and print newspapers as intercultural spaces that participate in the depiction of the cultural Other as a symbol for or against political positions. This paper contributes to an understanding of social action in intercultural communication by reminding readers that the study of anti-immigration discourses and ideologies is much more than an academic exercise in that the ability of individuals and communities to live meaningful lives is shaped by news-reporting institutions.

Anti-immigrant discourses

Anti-immigrant discourses are fraught with political and cultural tension, often providing a space for academics to study the representation of minority groups particularly, and human

behavior more generally, in turbulent political contexts. Such discourses stem from the exigencies of pressing social issues, exist to forward (often divergent) ideological commitments, and can be identified in many domains of life, including political speeches, debates on social media, and immigration laws. Scholarship on anti-immigrant discourses thus provide a window into a particular zeitgeist, allowing researchers to uncover not only the discourse structures that frame immigration positions, but also the social and political issues that shape a nation, including notions of nationhood and the homeland.

For instance, in their comparative discussion of anti-immigration positions in Australia and Spain, Leach and Zamora (2006, p. 51) note that political discourse related to national border protection stems from a history of fear-mongering and painting "immigrants and refugees as a social problem." The authors argue that border protection discourse allows governments to address globalist ideologies that, in the views of those individuals and institutions that seek to defend so-called national sovereignty, threaten old ways of knowing and belonging. In other words, anti-immigration discourses do not merely represent ideological positions, but also function as resources for political groups to resist cultural and economic "disruption" brought about by changing demographics.

Similarly, Park's (2008) study of the discursive construction of refugees in the United States notes that portrayals of immigrants in government welfare publications change over time and according to the social and political climate of a region. For instance, while the refugee identity was championed prior to WWII, such people were framed as problematic during and after the war. For instance, Park (2008, pp. 779-780) observes

In the face of the irrefutable and swiftly amassing refugee populations throughout Europe, the characteristics that had in the past constructed the refugee as the ideal to hold against actual immigrants became the very qualities that marked actual refugees as especially problematic immigrants.

Anti-immigration discourses are thus dependent on constructing the refugee or immigrant as troublesome and problematic. Park's observations remind us that the effectiveness of anti-immigration statements is not always dependent on the construction of national citizens as victims, though this is certainly a discourse that exists in newspapers (cf. AUTHOR, 2018). Rather, the efficacy of anti-immigration discourses is located in the fear and panic that is established in and through the construction of the cultural Other.

Continuing this line of observation, Gabrielatos and Baker (2008, p. 30) observe that terms, such as "illegal refugee" and "bogus immigrant," are integral to the ways in which the conservative and tabloid media in the UK promote fear and panic in immigration debates. Using corpus-based tools and critical approaches to discourse, the researchers offer a number of noteworthy findings regarding anti-immigration ideologies, including the observation that the UK press conflates legal terminology, such as "immigrant" and "asylum seeker," to simultaneously erase the important situational reasons that compel families to move to a new country and paint the cultural Other as a collective object of danger.

The strategic though superficial use of lexical collocations, such as "illegal refugee," is integral to anti-immigration discourses: words often used alongside "immigrant" or "refugee" cast a shadow over those individuals and families seeking refuge in a new country. For example, the term "illegal" allows anti-immigration proponents to replace an image of families needing to flee a country with a more alarming picture of faceless communities undermining the moral, cultural, and legal systems of the host country. In recent years, as Kingsolver (2010) demonstrates, the word "terrorism" is frequently used within arguments for anti-immigration to establish similar depictions. Drawing on the role of metaphor in shaping perceptions, Kingsolver (2010) also shows that such lexical strategies are not merely a means of constructing and circulating anti-immigrant ideologies, but "illegal," "bogus," "terrorism," and other similar constructs are part of larger systems of power and discrimination.

It should be clear in the research discussed thus far that anti-immigration discourses are inherently political and thus possess the ability to shape how society views

immigrants. That is to say, the circulation of anti-immigration discourses within society, including most notably the language used in mainstream media, shapes how the individuals and communities of host countries understand issues of settlement, migration, and other similar phenomena. The belief systems of host countries, namely those communities that belong to the dominant culture, are investigated in Dandy's (2009) work on immigrant discourses in Australia. She observes in her research on talk radio and public forums demonstrates that the existence of anti-immigration discourses in public spaces is significant, as such belief systems, as Dandy (2009, p. 230) argues, "create a climate in which discriminatory and hostile behaviour can seem acceptable." This observation is a reminder that anti-immigration discourses do not merely function as resources to participate in policy debates. Such discourses can influence the quality of life for those individuals that seek to settle in a new country.

In addition to negatively shaping real lives and experiences, anti-immigration sentiment has a homogenizing effect on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. The erasure of important differences between and across community types is dependent on a binary opposition that depicts the cultural Other as alien and the host country as native. Similar observations are made by KhosraviNik (2010); through the use of critical discourse analysis, he examines the representation of asylum seekers and immigrants in British news media, concluding that often the technical distinction between categories of people in anti-immigration discourse (asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants) is not accounted for in the production and interpretation of their discourses, which inevitably form sharp "us" versus "them" categorizations.

Related to more recent developments in border protection discourses emerging from the United States, Winders (2011) explores how competing political movements feed into larger narratives of the "Latino immigrant" in the American South. Such movements, while representative of divergent ideological positions, create a "politics of *representation*" where "immigrants are never just workers, just racialized beings, or just social beings. Instead, they are all these things at once" [original emphasis] (Winders, 2011, p. 609). For example, pro-

immigration positions reject the depiction of the cultural Other as belonging to a monolithic community that should be viewed as problem to society – a discourse, as noted above, adopted by conservative media outlets - but do so by privileging the "sameness" of immigrant groups and host communities. Highlighting the humanity that all communities share allows progressive proponents to move away from the depiction of immigrants as foreign and unfamiliar. In so doing, however, proponents of progressive immigration policies portray immigrants as a homogenous group that, despite important ethnic and political differences, possess the same cultural history and reasons for migration.

As demonstrated in this literature review, interest in anti-immigrant discourse continues to grow and generate much scholarly discussion. Despite the important contributions made in such work, the discursive construction of any political event or issue is about practice and social effect, audience and context, as well as history and future. The studies cited, while revelatory in terms of how anti-immigration discourses are constructed, circulated, and contested, are situated within, and thus based on, idiosyncratic events and issues. Political circumstances vary from one region to another. Add to this an ever-evolving, and at present very turbulent, socio-political landscape shaped by conflicting narratives of resistance and acceptance, protectionism and globalization, together with the expanding role of digital media in the shaping of "fake" and "real" narratives of struggle. For example, the most recent images and discourses of millions of refugees fleeing persecution and civil war from places like Syria, Myanmar and South Sudan, though only select examples, have intensified other debates on immigration, immigrants, migrants¹, and other similar political issues. Ongoing anti-immigration discourses and debates pertaining to transnationalism in nations, such as Britain, Italy, United States where the rise of both right-

¹ NGOs define immigrants and migrants in terms of the following: "An immigrant is someone who makes a conscious decision to leave his or her home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there. Immigrants often go through a lengthy vetting process to immigrate to a new country. A migrant is someone who is moving from place to place (within his or her country or across borders), usually for economic reasons such as seasonal work." (<https://www.rescue.org/article/migrants-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-immigrants-whats-difference>) This paper adopts both terms to cover both person movement as well as intentional relocation.

wing politics and isolationist campaigns like Brexit or Border Walls, demonstrate that work in this area is timely, and cannot be truly exhausted.

The aim of this study is to build on this growing body of work by uncovering how, despite the humanitarian needs of many communities, society uses narratives of illusion to forward anti-immigration positions. Although similar work on anti-immigration discourses exists, the particularities of the current border separation policies in the United States and other similar geopolitically-significant countries represent a small body of work. The analysis presented below explores such contexts and issues using Discourse of Illusion (AUTHOR, 2015) as our main theoretical framework.

Framework and Data Analysis

The Discourse of Illusion framework argues that subjective versions of reality offered as narratives of truth by typically powerful gatekeepers in society (e.g., political leaders, religious figures, business tycoons etc.) eventually become naturalized into social consciousness once they are accepted by audiences. These narratives offer prevailing representations of events, issues and societies, persuasive since they can evoke sentiments of fear or prejudice, and resonating with audiences because the truth offered aligns with pre-existing ideologies. Of interest here is not necessarily the falsity or subjectivity of the offered versions of reality, but rather the process through which they acquire a status of "truth." In other words, the focus of the Discourse of Illusion is on the actual discursive process through which specific conceptualizations of reality (be they of an event or issue) become recognized as the dominant framework within which understanding of that reality operates, eventually giving rise to discursive illusions.

This particular framework is appropriate for our study since the discursive representation of migrants and immigrants is a complex, sensitive issue with numerous socio-political and cultural implications, requiring an appropriately multi-perspectival methodology. Such an approach allows a closer look into how anti-immigrant portrayals are formed in the media as a result of warring intentions, power struggles between discourse

clans, and socio-historical contexts which influence these versions of reality. A combined analysis incorporating dimensions of historicity, linguistic and semiotic action, linked to an account of some of the social effects of these actions will enable the exploration of the dynamic discursive processes that give rise to the discursive tensions which permeate the representations of refugees (AUTHOR, 2015). This paper will thus critically analyze the data from the perspective of three interrelated components:

1. *Historicity*: our construction of reality is often a result of the recontextualization of past knowledge and experience into present day action; to analyze which the framework draws on the concept of *structured immediacy* (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2011), focusing on “how participants enrich the here-and-now of action by connecting it to the past” (66). Analysis at this level involves looking at temporal references, invocation of past events or sociocultural/political history, and recontextualization of present occurrences in terms of these past events. In doing so, we discover how situating current activities in history through reference to the past “‘thicken’ the descriptions of people and activities – providing them with meanings they would not have had otherwise” (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2011, p 80).

2. *Linguistic and semiotic action*: subjective conceptualizations of the world are often made most obvious through metaphorical rhetoric; to analyze which the framework borrows elements of critical metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black 2004, 2005) to analyze the intention in the creation and diffusion of discursive metaphorical constructions. Analysis at this level involves looking at various metaphors/metaphorical representations which can “bring to a discourse event traces of previous uses and of previous discourse events” (Cameron, 2003, p. 27).

3. *Social impact*: the inherent ideological bias in the language and actions of individuals/groups engender both positive or negative representation of self and other groups in the context of complex issues, and which can be analyzed through Jayyusi's (1984, p. 183) concept of *categorization* that explicates how people "organize their moral positions and commitments round certain category identities." Analysis at this level involves identifying three components of category formation: self-organized groups (united by common beliefs and commitments); type categorization (predicting actions believed to be "embedded in the features of that categorisation" [Jayyusi, 1984 p. 24]); and descriptor designators (assigning labels with both an ascriptive and descriptive function to "types" of people in those groups).

Mainstream news reporting of cross-border discussions are taking place in a number of countries, though in recent years there has been a heightened awareness of such issues given the political rhetoric of President Donald Trump. Cross-border discussions are sometimes folded into other sociopolitical issues, such as economic policy, unemployment, education, and crime. Immigration and migration are thus based on isolationist beliefs and a general lack of openness to the cultural Other but are also (more importantly) inextricably connected to perceptions of wellbeing, quality of life, and standard of living. For example, a desire to ban Muslims from entering into the United States is not merely an immigration issue but also part of a larger narrative of protecting the local workforce and securing the southern border.

Given these sociopolitical issues, the present investigation is timely given that many countries are currently experiencing an ideological struggle between isolationist policies and humanitarian activism. For instance, the observations made in this study come at a time when hundreds of thousands of refugees from different war-torn countries are seeking protection from socio-political instability and violence. An investigation of the news reporting of immigration and migration, especially in representing the associated groups of people as

dangerous, presents opportunities to critically unpack the ideological underpinnings of cross-border discourse.

Data for Study

The primary data set comes from news reporting of migrant and immigrant issues and events. The data comprises a range of e-articles in the form of opinion, report, and editorial news pieces taken from widely-circulated media sources written for mostly conservative audiences (e.g., *Breitbart*, *The American Spectator*, and *The Telegraph*), primarily from the UK and USA. These news pieces were written from 2016 to 2018 and cover various geopolitical contexts.

Where available (platforms which featured or articles that enabled) user comments posted in response to the articles were also reflected on, and some have been presented below. User responses to these news pieces are examined to understand how members of society interpret, and contribute to the circulation of, anti-immigration discourses.

The criteria for data selection included articles that appeared under the search terms “illegal immigrants,” “migrants,” “asylum seekers” or “refugees” (as the definition of these are often conflated) in general contexts across Europe, UK and USA. We collected data from primarily English-language newspapers, therefore, were not able to include representations conveyed in European languages. In such cases, we turned to previous academic studies to compare and contrast our analysis. As such, this article also draws on a secondary corpus of data comprising news and views expressed in a variety of academic sources in order to better inform our understanding of the representation of refugees across different socio-political contexts and languages.

Analysis

News reporting of cross-border events, both positive and negative, are situated within larger societal narratives where immigrants and migrants are central participants in notions of

nationhood and nationalism. All news reports of immigration and migration must thus be understood as not merely sources of information dissemination, but also ideological constructions that feed into political narratives and policy debates. The movement of people from one region to another is a particularly sensitive and highly contested issue, as those individuals and communities seeking refuge are sometimes victims of crime and violence. Thus, fear and danger cast shadows over even the most positive depictions of immigrants and migrants. In the data set presented below, where a negative portrayal of a migrant community is the main rhetorical objective of a news piece, the circumstances that compel such communities to cross borders (e.g., war, genocide, persecution) are replaced with a host of domestic fears: crime, terrorism, and changing demographics.

Example 1 – The Telegraph²

The crime rate among migrants in Germany rose by more than 50 per cent last year, according to new figures that have raised concerns the populist far-Right may seize on the issue in the run-up to September's elections. The number of suspected crimes by refugees, asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants rose to 174,438 in 2016 — an increase of 52.7 per cent, according to the interior ministry... While the general crime rate in Germany fell slightly last year, Islamist-inspired crime rose by 13.7 per cent, according to the figures.

(Huggler, 2017)

Example 2 – The Telegraph

Over 100 African migrants forced their way into the Spanish territory of Ceuta on Wednesday after storming a barbed-wire border fence with Morocco and attacking police with caustic quicklime, a local official said. In the second assault on the Spanish border in a month, seven police officers were lightly injured when migrants threw quicklime and battery acid as they tried to scale the fence, a spokesman for the Spanish government's representative in Ceuta told AFP, adding that some 115 migrants managed to enter the tiny territory... The assault on the border

² The Telegraph is a daily British Broadsheet; it's considered to have a conservative slant (<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/03/07/how-left-or-right-wing-are-uks-newspapers>)

comes as Ceuta was marking Islam's Eid al-Adha religious feast. Over 600 African migrants got past the double border fence on July 26, in the biggest run on the border since February 2017. (Our Foreign Staff, 2018)

Example 3 – Comment Central³

Italy cannot cope with the thousands of new migrants arriving every day from across the Mediterranean – well over 86,000 so far this year... If this situation continues it will have disastrous effects for every nation in the EU, including, for the next few years at least, the United Kingdom. Since the migrant crisis began making headlines in 2014, it has been made much worse by German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, throwing open Germany's doors to welcome as many migrants as possible. Her naïve open-door policy, which broke the EU's own laws on processing asylum seekers in the first country they land in... 80 per cent of migrants arriving in the EU have had no documents proving their identity. (Fiuza, 2017)

Example 4 - CNBC⁴

My fight is not against a religion, my fight is against the political use that is made today of this religion, for the number of immigrants who have come to France. We've seen it clearly. Massive immigration leads to communitarianism. Communitarianism is in reality the basket from which Islamic fundamentalists draw their combatants of tomorrow against France. (Caruso-Cabrera, 2016)

In the preceding extracts, we see, in opposition to the humanitarian perspective, the typical anti-immigration narratives surfacing across countries in the European Union (Richardson & Colombo, 2013; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson 2013). This could be because the “relationship between media discourse and political representations of asylum seekers reflects the intersection between the imaginings of national identity and populist politics”

³ Comment Central is platform for news and policy debate featuring a range of perspectives.

⁴ CNBC is an American business news channel with a left-centre editorial slant (<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/cnbc/>)

(Gale, 2004: 334). Not that we underestimate the complexity of the relationship between political and media discourse, or the various manifestations of one in the other in different sociocultural contexts. However, at least in the data we collected, we noticed, with regards to negative depictions of migrants and immigrants, that traditional and new media seem to oftentimes exploit “items that allow the personalization of politics, the illustration, staging, and dramatization of political contest... and negativity” (Jungherr, 2014, p. 241). This line of argument has also been reiterated by Mieriņa & Koroļeva (2015) who argue that “far right ideology among youth is driven by the fact that young people often have little interest in and, accordingly, not a very good understanding of politics... [thus] frequent use of different media channels leads to further worsening of attitudes towards minorities... [in this way] media are at least partly responsible for the recent spread of populism and far right views in Europe” (p. 199). This recent rise of populist political ideology, which attempts to rally “ordinary” people around the idea that their interests are not being served by establishment politicians, has led to widespread isolationist sentiment (cf. Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Thus, use of intertextual quotes by official government sources (“populist far-Right may seize on the issue,” “according to the interior ministry,” “a spokesperson for the Spanish government”) or in the direct words of political leaders themselves (“my fight,” “against political use that is made of this religion” – Marine Le Pen), reiterate the thickening of media filters on societal perceptions of immigrants by far-right politics.

Frequently conflating the definitions of refugees, asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants under the more culturally generic designation “migrant,” the extracts above bolster discursive illusions about the danger that immigrants pose, recontextualizing past and future moments to justify current prejudice (“crime rose last year,” “migrants got past...on July 26,” “since February 2017,” “were likely to lead,” “If this situation continues,” “for the next few years,” “migrant crisis began making headlines in 2014,” “We’ve seen it clearly,” “draw their combatants of tomorrow against France”). Use of temporal references create a sense of continuity, to the effect that different political and migration contexts become consolidated into a reductionist narrative about dangerous immigrants flooding

Western democracies under the guise of asylum. Such linguistic strategy have the effect of dislocating individuals from their unique sociocultural and political circumstances (i.e., why they are leaving their countries, what they are escaping from, what they are trying to achieve), and simply converting them into a generic past lesson to learn from.

Similarly, use of quantitative assessments ("rose to 174,438," "rose by more than 50 per cent last year," "Islamist-inspired crime rose by 13.7 per cent," "115 migrants managed to enter the tiny territory," "600 African migrants got past," "well over 86,000 so far this year," "80 per cent of migrants arriving") dehumanize involved persons, removing their individuality, and homogenizing them as part of a "self-organised group" (Jayyusi, 1984) that adheres to common practices and radical ideology. Migrants and immigrants are attributed, based on past events, actions typical of their type, what Jayyusi (1984) refers to as "type categorisation." In other words, phrases and words depicting threat ("Islamist-inspired crime," "forced their way," "storming," "attacking," "threw quicklime and battery acid," "scale the fence," "assaulting," "draw their combatants") are stereotypically used to represent immigrants as lawless and violent, becoming a blanket categorization for all migrants, and certainly those coming from Islamic nations.

The overarching narrative derives from an equally reductionist cause and effect paradigm within which the singular act of allowing any migrant to enter a nation could become a catalyst for crime and fundamentalist communitarianism ("cannot cope," "disastrous effects," "migrant crisis"), triggering protectionist sentiments. In this regard, the two issues of migration and national security are conflated; the concept of asylum positioned in terms of border protection. Asylum and migration may not be in themselves issues of concern, but they become so upon the assumption that "terrorists may abuse asylum procedures to move into a country, asylum and refuge become an issue within more broadly defined anti-terrorism policy... Refugees and asylum seekers are drawn into this security debate because asylum procedures are an instrument of regulating free movement" (Huysmans, 2006, p. 64). This assumption allows far-Right and populist leaders to manipulate common perceptions of *security* through its most basic, and

dangerously simplistic, meaning of “freedom from danger or harm” or “the preservation of a group’s core values.” Such a definition, however, tells us little about what “danger or harm” might mean; which group needs to be protected; by whom or from what threats” (McDonald, 2005, p. 299), leaving ample scope for misinformation and exaggeration in the media.

In the following section of the analysis, we move beyond the general narrative that gate-keepers of society (i.e., political parties and news media) generate to focus on how these subjective conceptualizations of reality are absorbed into social consciousness. To do so, we focus in more detail on reader reactions to news articles on immigrant issues by conservative media.

Example 5 - Brietbart⁵

More than 1,000 people have been murdered or injured on European soil since 2014, in attacks carried out by Islamist asylum seekers and refugees, research has revealed. Analysis by the Heritage Foundation found that asylum seekers were involved in 32 of 194 Islamist plots that have targeted Europe over the past four years, resulting in 357 deaths and 1,678 injuries... Noting that the terror threat on the continent has soared since 2016, when German chancellor Angela Merkel opened Europe’s borders, the the [sic] U.S. think tank warned that mass migration from the Global South made it “disturbingly simple” for Islamic extremists to enter EU nations.

(Hale, 2018)

I wonder how many rapes in the last five years were committed by Muslim "refugees".
And what percent they were of the total:
70%?
85%?
2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

⁵ Brietbart is an American [far-right](#) news and commentary website

An elected politician's responsibility is to the citizen's of their country. NOT to one single other person. NOT to 7 billion other people that are NOT citizens.

The simpering morons that voted for this are malicious thieves, robbing from taxpayers and the poor to inflate their own self esteem, with a psychopathic disregard for consequences.

There is NO reason for any of those so called immigrants, migrants or fake refugees to be anywhere in Western Europe.

There's no labour shortage, when there's unemployment. That's just deliberate wage repression. Imagine being able to conquer an entire continent, rape at will, destroy the economy (just wait for the total destruction/hangover from this Sickness) by appealing to people's vanity.

54 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

This extract from an article in Brietbart employs similar linguistic tropes and discursive tools as the anti-immigrant narrative emerging from European populist politics, including conflation of different definitions of migrants, drawing on temporal referencing and quantitative assessment of migrants to describe their threat to Western nations. In addition, the extract uses phrases and words that connote violence ("murdered," "injured," "targeted Europe," "attacks," and "threat"), invoking a similar topos of threat (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999). An interesting detail here is the use of numerical figures as opposed to percentage points to denote the statistics, one could assume because from a cognitive standpoint "32 of 194" may sound more numerous than 16%.

More importantly, however, in the comments posted by readers (anonymized) under the news story we see the real emergence of discursive illusions. Both comments also conflate the terms "immigrants, migrants, refugees," casting doubt through various linguistic means (quote marks, negative adjectives, question marks) to indicate their lack of sympathy for and suspicion of the real intention of refugees. For example, use of quote marks around the word refugee, and adjectives "so called" and "fake" insinuate mistrust in the intention with which migrants move to America- not for a better life as professed by liberal media and left-wing parties, but rather to "rape," "murder," and "injure." More interestingly, the term "refugee" seems to function as a metaphor for foreign criminals and terrorists, a label disguising the true nature of migrants, who, further through an invasion metaphor, are waiting to "conquer an entire nation." Here criminalizing the Other not only implies a certain

moral superiority, but gives legitimate power to the moral side, implying they are on the side of the law (cf. Lazar & Lazar, 2004), and outsiders who are alien to this civilized culture remain a threat to human security. Thus, as Lowry (2002, p. 31) points out, the narrative turns to a new definition of *refugee crisis*, one where “the crisis of concern isn’t necessarily that crisis experienced by refugees, but rather the crisis that refugees allegedly pose to receiving states.”

In fact, the second comment more explicitly reverberates the protectionist sentiment in a hyperbolized negative representation (Van Dijk, 1999) of liberal and left-wing leaders as "malicious thieves" and "simpering morons," denying them any justification or credibility by declaring them unstable and "psychopathic." An open-door policy to migration is metaphorized as a "Sickness," instituted for the sake of moral vanity, insinuating the non-natural order of xenophilia, an unwanted disease that needs to be cured. As such, for sitting and contesting governments around the world,

national security concerns frame how they chose to conceptualize human security... [within this] paradigm there is no discussion of the ways in which national security interests can negatively impact human security... National security agendas and human security needs are not compatible in the lives of those seeking asylum, as national security measures can in fact contribute to human insecurity... In the domestic context, human insecurity is thought to be under threat from “other” people and other places. (Lowry, 2002: 30)

Example 6 – The American Spectator⁶

Globalists claim immigrants provide added value and vitality, bringing new ideas into closed, fearful societies composed of aging citizens who want to protect their self-interests. But these claims are one-sided. For millions of established residents in the U.S. and Europe, uncontrolled immigration

⁶ The American Spectator is a conservative American news media website

threatens safety, schools, livelihoods, and quality of life. Slums, crime, filth, and parasitism might be coming to a once tidy neighborhood near you.

(Sewall, 2017)

I was in the Eternal City last week, and had the occasion to talk to a local about "Papa Francesco", whom she adored, despite her being an atheist [as apparently the vast majority of Italians in Italy today are]. I told her, as a weekly Mass going Catholic, I would not tolerate "Papa Francesco's" wholly erroneous position on immigration. She asked me to explain. I explained the consequences of immigration of certain religious groups, e.g., female genital mutilation, which she was entirely ignorant of. She then volunteered that she lived in a mixed neighborhood, and observed that Muslim women were required to walk, heavily veiled, in front of their husband, so he could watch her and be certain her head was not moving left or right to evaluate some other male. She found that abhorrent and intolerable and indicative of a group who should not be permitted to live in the E-U.
SAY IT. GET THE NEWS OUT. INFORM PEOPLE.
See the Democrat cockroaches run for cover.
5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Enforce current immigration law! And, Build the Wall!

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Example 6 demonstrates the same disparagement for "globalists" as the earlier extract did for liberals, use of the verb "claim" signaling doubt with regards to the presupposition of the statement. The extract also draws an illusive and delineating *us* vs. *them* divide between "established residents" and "uncontrolled immigration," dehumanizing refugees through metaphorical conceptualizations of them as "filth and parasites," reinforcing the earlier disease metaphor, and invoking common fears about the "Others." Demarcating and asymmetric categories such as these are a prominent feature of the discourse of illusion, working to lay ground for future action, amplify the scale of an event or crisis, and retain moral superiority and legitimate power over the cultural Other (cf. cultural stereotyping and false consciousness; Jost & Banaji, 1994). In a series of parallelisms, the extract reinforces the difference between civilized Western culture ("safety, schools, livelihoods, quality of life") and the barbarism of those invading their lands ("Slums, crime, filth, and parasitism"). As Lazar and Lazar (2004, p. 227) emphasize, "public moral order is built up normatively vis-à-vis the articulation of the aberrant "other" or "threat" which, at the same time, justifies the identification, division and excision of the threat". Asymmetric category sets (Jayyusi, 1984) that create definite divides between groups of people in terms

of exclusion and inclusion, established and unfamiliar, civilized and barbaric can be seen as invoking the discourse of illusion where because of a more powerful side there is an unequal distribution of rights and knowledge, consequently only "one side of the story" is seen as valid. As such, the narrative is effective in coalescing distinct issues of cultural identity, way of life, and human security into an oversimplified truth, conditioning "established residents" to feel threatened about both their way of and physical well-being.

This fear resurfaces in voices of the readers who demonstrate sociocultural prejudice against the Other or non-western entity, best understood as what has often been described as a form of Orientalism (Said, 2003, pp. 42-43), that is "a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")."

Orientalism, both as a concept and as a strategy for outcasting, contributes to the construction of the discourse of illusion. As a concept, it is born out of our cultural background, even our political affiliations. It is a product of our subjective conceptualizations of reality. The repercussions of Orientalization, primarily the outcasting of minority groups, illustrate the naturalizing of subjective versions of truth, proliferated by powerful discourse clans. It remains an effective "discursive strategy for maintaining as "core" a unitary western moral order, and for out-casting the "other" to the 'periphery'" (Lazar & Lazar, 2004, p. 234). The first reader comment reinforces this divide by clearly distinguishing between Christianity as the traditionally normative religion of the European order, and Islam as the deviant other, associated with unnatural practices such as "female genital mutilation" and being "heavily veiled," homogenizing all Muslims as a "group of people who should not be permitted to live in the E-U." In perpetuating these negative categorizations, "cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British or "civilised" norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who also suffer from biological racism" (Modood, 1997, p. 155).

Furthermore, both comments also parrot the partisan representations of liberals and democrats in the media in conceptualizing them through an insect metaphor ("Democrat

cockroaches"), implying their incorrigibility and dirtiness; and secondly, by showing support for Trump's ban of nationals from predominantly Muslims countries, and building a physical wall to keep out Mexicans.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis explored how negative portrayals of immigrants and migrants draw on a set of discursive resources to dehumanize individuals and communities seeking refuge from war and poverty. Conservative media homogenizes immigrants and migrants by conflating their unique subjectivities into a collective reality of parasitic danger. News media reports that support anti-immigration policies transform the cultural Other into an existential threat to domestic ways of knowing and living, generating distinct divides between the normative, civilized Western order and the barbaric, communitarian Other (unfortunately often explicitly labeling such communities as Islamic). Such generic images of the cultural Other are integral to how consumers of news media interpret such (mis)information: such discourses transform immigration and migration issues into a concrete us versus them debate. In fact, we found in our research that anti-immigration discourses are, more often than not, situated within a larger culture of Islamophobia in the United States and beyond, which casts Muslims and followers of Islam as dangerous; more problematically, these belief systems also help thwart opportunities for communities living in extreme conditions of war, poverty, and genocide to seek refuge from real danger.

More worrying still, is the conflation of anti-immigration and national security discourses that give rise to a fairly reductionist explanation for major social and cultural crises, including increase in crime, terror alerts, unemployment, and the general burden on national resources, generating a self-victimizing narrative. Although we can argue that both positive humanitarian and negative anti-immigrant narratives are the consequences of subjective conceptualizations of reality, however, only the latter poses the danger of increasing hostility and xenophobia (Mieriņa & Koroļeva, 2015). Such a narrative argues that letting dangerous foreign elements into the nation can lead to increase in violence,

deterioration of country ideals, and corrosion of a civilized way of life. It even goes as far as to label liberal or leftist political parties and governments who advocate an open-door immigration policy as traitorous to their own citizens.

As such, conservative news media reporting of cross-border events, coupled with the political rhetoric of President Donald Trump and other like-minded politicians and followers, have presented those interested with ample opportunity to critically examine anti-immigration discourses. However, our purpose here is not simply to examine the discursive construction of migrants and immigrants in newspapers, but rather to bring about further awareness of how such largely subjective and ideological discourses shape the lives of targeted communities. The devastating images of children torn from their parents at the southern border in the United States, bloodied in Rohingya refugee camps, or near death on water-logged boats as they escape to European shores, are vivid reminders that anti-immigration and anti-migration discourses impact real lives and communities around the world. Therefore, while the observations made in this study contribute to a growing body of scholarship concerned with how ideologies prop up state policies, anti-immigration discourses are much more than an academic exercise (Jones *et al.*, 2017).

Critical discourse analytic work is in a unique position to bring about change in society in that its theoretical framework represents both a tool for understanding pressing social issues and a resource for social action. The critical observations made in this paper, for instance, form the foundation of an interdisciplinary course for media and journalism students. In the spirit of “restoring power to civic language” (cf. Komska, Moyd, & Gramling, 2019), equipping future professionals with the skills needed to uncover the ideological facets of state policies, and the discursive construction of political rhetoric, will help confront the discrimination and oppression that exists in many societies. The elite discourses of online and print newspapers are not only objects of our inquiry; they are the very tools for shaping perceptions and changing lives.

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