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Representation of unaccompanied migrant children from Central America in the United States: Media vs. migrant perspectives

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Abstract

This chapter examines the representation of unaccompanied minors fleeing Central America (namely Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) in U.S. online national news sources over a one-year period and compares this to the way these children talk about their own perceptions of migration and their motivation for moving. Data collection consisted of online news reports on unaccompanied minors from Central America in the United States as well as interviews with children collected from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations. Multimodal critical discourse analysis reveals a qualitative difference in discourse (e.g., use of metaphor, metonymy, deixis and visual elements) that varies depending on whether the sources are media reports or personal accounts from the children themselves.

Keywords: unaccompanied migrant children, Central America, media discourse, multimodal critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

Public discourse on migration tends to minimize, marginalize and dehumanize migrants utilizing multiple strategies to portray them as the “Other” (Santa Ana 2002). This chapter continues the book’s focus on media discourse and its impact on institutions, policy, and public view of migrants/migration. Not unlike the other chapters in this section, our analysis is multimodal, exploring migration discourses across different media. However, we address one particularly overlooked and understudied type of migrant: (unaccompanied or separated) child migrants. For the purposes of this study, we will use the umbrella term “migrant” to refer to unaccompanied children who are the focus of this chapter. The majority of these children are already or will be eventually classified as refugees, but we adopt “migrant” as the over-arching category. Migrants are “individuals who are moving or have moved across an international border or within a state away from their habitual place of residence, regardless of: (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. (Garin, Beise, Hug and You 2016: 14). UNICEF defines refugees as:

individuals who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, are outside the country of their nationality and are unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Santa Ana 2002: 14)

Given this definition and recognizing that the majority of the unaccompanied or separated children coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador are fleeing dangerous and violent situations that put them in danger of harm (see below: Background), there is no doubt that most of these children are refugees. Hence, we recognize that they will or should eventually be given the status of “refugee” but using the

term “migrant” allows us to include children in similar situations as refugees with the same protection concerns but whose refugee status has not been formally ascertained.

According to UNICEF, in a report released September, 2016, children under the age of 18 make up “a disproportionate and growing proportion of those who have sought refuge outside their own countries” (Westcott 2016: para. 6), and consist of half of all refugees, despite being only a third of the world’s population. In 2015 alone, 100,000 unaccompanied children filed claims for asylum across 78 countries (Garin et al. 2016: 38). These children, traveling on their own, “risk some of the world’s worst forms of abuse and harm” (ibid: 3) and “are at great risk of exploitation and abuse by smugglers and traffickers” and until now, have been too often “relegated to the fringes of the world’s debates about migration and displacement” (Westcott 2016: para. 9).

This chapter seeks to examine this understudied population and its representation in media discourse focusing on one group of child migrants: unaccompanied minors fleeing Central America (namely, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) with the United States as their destination. We explore the way in which U.S. media discourse represents these children in public discourse, but also how the public discourse contrasts the way these children talk about their own experiences. In doing so, as in Butulussi’s work (Chapter 7, this volume), we reveal how metaphors, along with other elements, are used to reveal ideologies/viewpoint of different speakers as well as relations of power and agency.

2. Background

In October 2011, the U.S. government, as well as the governments of Belize and Costa Rica, documented a significant increase in unaccompanied and/or separated children traveling to their countries from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Since the start of 2014, this increase accelerated, and by the end of 2014, an estimated 77,200 children were apprehended at the U.S. border – most of whom were from Central America (Lind 2014). By the summer of 2014, so many migrants (many of them children) were arriving at the U.S. border that the issue garnered widespread national media attention and became

a politicized topic in media discourse at the time, referred to by the Obama administration as a “humanitarian crisis” but often in media discourse as the “border crisis”.

According to Stinchcomb and Hershberg, reasons for the sharp increase in migration from Central America include lack of access to jobs and basic services which have fueled social exclusion and given increased power to gangs leading to extreme violence, family violence (resulting from social exclusion and family disruption, including parental absence and neglect), drug trafficking, and the inability of “resource-deprived and overburdened” police forces and judicial systems to protect children and families, often due to their “complicity with organized crime groups” (2014: 2). Many blame the United States’ involvement in Central America in the 1980s for “planting the seeds for the instability and turmoil” that started these problems and hence find it ironic that now the “chickens have come home to roost” (Corchado 2014) yet the United States government has not taken responsibility for creating the conditions for the crisis to occur.

Because of the sheer quantity of migrants (and particularly, children) arriving, and increasing political pressure, the Obama administration (and the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] in particular) attempted to initiate an “aggressive deterrence” strategy which consisted of a media campaign launched in Central America that emphasized the risks and consequences of attempting to migrate without legal authorization, an increase in the detention of women and children waiting for their hearings (instead of releasing them immediately on bond, as previously done), and an increase in border protection measures in the U.S. and Mexico (Hiskey, Córdova, Orcés and Malone (2016, para. 2). This seemed to work, as numbers decreased somewhat in 2015. However, as noted by Hiskey et al. (2016) men, women and children have found other ways to come and continue to make the trip. In fact, in January 2016, customs and border patrol apprehensions had increased 100% since the same time the previous year (Hiskey et al. 2016: last paragraph). This increase can be accounted for by the “unprecedented levels of crime and violence” that have overwhelmed this area and has “produced a refugee situation for those directly in the line of fire, making no amount of danger or chance of deportation sufficient to dissuade those victims from leaving” (ibid).

In 2016, due to the lack of success in deterring migrants from making the journey or protecting them on their journey once they arrive, the Obama administration announced a partnership with Costa Rica, as well as the United Nations, to help identify those who urgently need protection in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. These most vulnerable people (and particularly those who have no option to remain in the region until their applications are processed) were to be transferred to Costa Rica to undergo refugee “processing” to the U.S. or another country (Holpuch 2016). In addition, the Central American Minors program (CAM), which provided “qualified children in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras a safe, legal, and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey” (In-country Refugee/Parole Processing, 2016: 1) was expanded “to extend eligibility for the program to certain qualified family members” (Holpuch 2016: para. 9). Moreover, an agreement was reached with Mexico to increase its capacity to process asylum claims and for both countries to improve access to asylum for those fleeing violence in these countries. Finally, a number of U.S. agencies (USAID, DOS, DHS, MCC, and IAF) offered to provide assistance intended to improve the living conditions of youth and families.

Unfortunately, as the Trump administration has moved into power, many of these programs are in danger of being discontinued or have already been discontinued. Most importantly, President Trump’s executive order on February 1, 2017 halted the CAM program (Linthicum 2017). This order was later thwarted by courts, but the reduction in number of refugees admitted to the United States (from 110,000 to 50,000) was allowed. Most of those places for refugees have already been taken, and fewer than 12,700 slots remain (Robles and Semple 2017). Hence, unaccompanied children currently seeking refuge in the United States face an even more difficult path, especially because the administration is reconsidering the classification of these children (from refugees to undocumented migrants) which means if apprehended, they will face arrest, detention or immediate deportation instead of asylum (Gordon 2017).

For those children already in the United States, they face daunting obstacles such as the continual state of limbo many experience while waiting for their hearings, being without documents and the constant worries and fears that go along with this, poverty, and dealing with

trauma from their journey. These conditions have been exacerbated by the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration.

3. Relevant research

Unaccompanied child migrants in general are an understudied population, and hence there is not a large body of research on their presence and representation in media discourse. This is also because the greatest increase in child migration has occurred only recently and hence there is research underway momentarily that has not yet been published. One important study that does focus on unaccompanied children from Central America is Antony and Thomas (2016). In this analysis of reader response to news about unaccompanied minors and the abuse they have encountered by the U.S. Border Patrol, the authors found the lingering presence of discourse traditionally used to talk about Mexican immigrants. This discourse (that responded to media reports of child migrants arriving at the U.S. border) featured the characterization of child migrants as a "drain on U.S. economic resources, disease-infested parasites, and the offspring of irresponsible families" (Antony and Thomas 2016: 14). Additionally, readers feared the children would provide "channels" for terrorists and criminals to infiltrate the U.S. and they expressed doubts as to the motives of the children (*ibid.*). Another interesting finding of the study was the way in which readers drew on the discourse of global compassion (which sought to advocate for the children) to do the opposite. That is, readers hijacked the language of compassion and used it as a basis to advocate for deportation and other harsh punishments for the children. The authors conclude that it is the job of immigration scholars to pay attention to how counter discourses (such as global compassion) are invoked and utilized in order to reframe dominant logics.

Another important study focusing on media portrayal of child migrants from Central America (from which this chapter builds on and expands) is Catalano (2017). In this study, the author examined one community's media discourse about the Central American child migrants and found a local dialog that featured opposing discourses that both dehumanized and humanized the children, but unfortunately dehumanizing discourses prevailed. Metaphor analysis of the media

discourse revealed dominant metaphors comparing immigration to dangerous moving water (e.g., flooding, pouring), in which scenarios the children themselves were the water. In addition, the author noted the use of deixis to “Other” the children and the reasons they came as well as images that marginalized activist voices speaking on behalf of the children. For a similar study that examines the same discourse across the U.S., see Strom and Alcock (2017).

What has been largely absent from research about unaccompanied children (with some exceptions, such as ethnographic work from Heidbrink 2014 and Terrio 2015) has been “the voices of unaccompanied migrants themselves” who have not often been given the opportunity to “craft and circulate their own narratives, thereby preserving the autonomy and dignity of the human experience” (Antony and Thomas 2016: 17). Hence, this paper seeks to fill this gap by augmenting analysis of media discourse with counter voices from unaccompanied or separated migrant children themselves.

4. Theoretical foundations

Critical discourse studies (CDS) is a “problem oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 2011: 357). CDS “emphasizes the way in which language is implicated in issues such as power and ideology that determine how language is used, what effect it has, and how it reflects, serves, and furthers the interests, positions, perspectives, and values of, those who are in power” (Waugh et al. 2015: 72). Recent CDS scholarship has been increasingly influenced by the field of cognitive linguistics (CL), which is an approach that views the study of language as a mental phenomenon. One of the ways in which cognitive linguistic perspectives have merged with CDS has been in the area of critical metaphor analysis (CMA). This term was first coined by Charteris-Black (2004) and refers to analyses that consider the use of metaphor as tools of persuasion and manipulation and their role in shaping public opinion in media discourse (particularly in terms of minority/marginalized groups). Critical metonymy analysis has also emerged recently, focusing on how metonymy leads to metaphors that

influence public opinion and become powerful rhetorical tools that are often echoed and repeated in mainstream media discourse (Portero-Muñoz 2011). Whereas metaphor refers to the comparison of two entities that are alike in one particular way, metonymy often motivates these metaphors to occur by forcing readers/viewers to go through the mental process (known as construal operations) in which one entity stands for another it is associated to or related to in some way. A good example of this can be seen in the discourse of Donald Trump Jr. in which he compared refugees to candy in the following quote, “If I had a bowl of skittles and I told you just three would kill you. Would you take a handful? That’s our Syrian refugee problem” (Horowitz 2016). In this logic, the reader/listener must understand first that “skittles” is the name of a popular candy in the U.S. in order to compare the way candy is eaten to the refugee vetting process. This understanding of skittles and the later metonymy of “Syrian refugee problem” motivate the metaphor REFUGEES ARE POISONOUS CANDY although the analogy is not correct, since refugees go through a highly selective and detailed vetting process (unlike when you scoop some skittles from a bowl into your mouth) but also because it compares refugees to food. It is this type of use of metaphor/metonymy (especially those that are less obvious) that need to be countered in CDS/CL analyses.

Additionally, we are interested in the way that public discourses are connected to each other over time and the way that metaphor/metonymy are used in political discourse to “(dis)qualify political developments, social groups or even individuals as threatening the identity or continued existence of a nation state” (Musolff 2012: 303). In this chapter, we conduct a diachronic analysis by comparing data collected in 2014 (see Catalano 2017) with data from 2016 to see if the discourse has changed at all since migration policies have changed and a major election season (in which the issue was given a central role in political debates and candidate platforms) was underway. In Musolff’s (2016) book *Political Metaphor Analysis*, the author demonstrates how diachronic corpus analysis can reveal origins of “metaphor scenarios” that draw on past historical contexts and utilize them in current contexts. Hence, breaking down and understanding the history of these metaphor scenarios in public discourse can aid us in understanding the way in which child migrants from Central America have been represented since they became a frequent topic in U.S. news reports in 2014, and the capacity for this representation to affect public opinion and political agendas.

Acknowledging the multimodal nature of our data, we recognize that meaning is communicated not just through language but through other modes such as visuals, gestures, materials, etc. and that often, these other modes are doing things that are different or have different effects than language could have. Hence, we also utilize social semiotics (Machin and Mayr 2012; van Leeuwen 2008) to analyze semiotic resources such as video and image. A social semiotic approach to CDS focuses on *describing* the available choices of signs used in communication so that we can understand better what it is that people are doing with them.

Finally, we draw on ethnography as a source of thick, rich description (Geertz 1988) contextualized through both language and culture (Agar 1996) that allows us to explain migrant experiences in multiple ways through the voice of the participants. We recognize the indispensable link between ethnography and CDS in contributing to a fuller analysis of societal issues (Krzyzanowski 2011), and exploring “the beliefs, values and desires” of participants (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 62). We believe that ethnographic sources are valuable additions to any critical (multimodal) discourse analysis because they contextualize the discourse through the conceptual systems of the people that are living those reported experiences and thus can supplement or contrast the way in which participants are represented in public discourse.

5. Method

In Catalano (2017), the author investigated how unaccompanied child migrants were represented in a local community in the United States in 2014, at the time when the increase in child migrants began to gain media attention. In this chapter, we build on this analysis, investigating how the children are represented in national news sources two years later (2016), when migration of unaccompanied/separated children began to increase again and gain renewed attention in national media discourse particularly due to the impending election.

Nine articles were found in Google searches using key words germane to this analysis (i.e., “migrant children”, “Central American children”). Criteria for selection included whether articles were published in national U.S. online news sources during the year 2016, and if they

contained the topic of unaccompanied children from Central America. The articles were then assigned a text number (e.g., Text 1, Text 2; see Appendix A). Analysis occurred in three phases. First, the authors read through the file with all the nine articles found including nonverbal data and manually coded for ways in which migrant children were represented. After initial coding, the authors found that the use of metonymy and metaphor were dominant strategies used in the discourse, while deixis and visual data surfaced as secondary data. A text-only file was then created to examine and code the data, as well as count and categorize metaphors and metonymies. Finally, visual elements were examined for their interaction with the verbal texts and for the representation of child migrants.

The second data set consists of secondary data garnered from nine articles from the years 2014–2016 that feature interviews with unaccompanied child refugees done by humanitarian organizations such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Because this is a vulnerable population that is not easily accessed, we chose to utilize this less publicized data to bring forward the voices of child refugees and compare the way they talk about their migration experiences to that of the media discourse from our two other data sets. In particular, we examine the metaphors used by these children to help us understand their experiences better and compare these to the discourse found in national media reports. Because “within conversation a relatively small number of words are metaphorically used” (Steen et al. 2010: 85), we did not find enough metaphors in our small data set to conduct an analysis like that of the first data set. However, we selected the most prevalent for discussion in the next section.

6. Findings

6.1 National coverage (2016)

We will now address results from our corpus of national coverage in 2016. This data marks a second period (see Catalano 2017 for the first) in which child migrants from Central America have been in the national spotlight, hence many of the articles allude to the 2014 increase in child migrants. Table 1 reveals metaphors/metonymies similar to

Table 1. Metaphor and metonymy with target domain: Unaccompanied child migrants

<i>Type totals</i>	<i>Source domain percentage (%)</i>	<i>Examples of motivating metonymies</i>	
Dominant	DANGEROUS WATER 35.8%	<i>surge, pouring, flooded, swamped, wave, stem the flow</i> (ACTION OF WATER FOR ACTION OF CHILDREN)	39
Secondary	NUMBERS 17.4%	<i>thousands, the numbers, the masses</i> (NUMBER FOR AGENT)	21
	----- 14.7%	<i>vulnerable young people, well-liked kid, these children</i> (ATTRIBUTE FOR ENTITY)	16
	CRIMINALS 12.8%	<i>paroled, illegally, illegal</i> (ATTRIBUTE FOR ENTITY)	14
Occasional	BURDEN 4.6%	<i>opening doors</i> (US is container, migrants are unwanted guests), <i>spending nearly a billion dollars on shelters</i> (COUNTRY FOR HOUSE, MIGRANT FOR UNWANTED GUEST)	5
	SOLDIERS 4.6%	<i>fight, battle</i> (MIGRATION FOR MILITARY CONFLICT)	5
	OBJECTS 4.6%	<i>processed, powerful magnet, political football</i> (OBJECT FOR AGENT)	5
	ANIMALS 3.7%	<i>rounding up, corralling, catch and release</i> (ACTION OF COWBOY FOR ACTION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT)	4
Total	100%		109

those found in Catalano (2017) with the addition of numbers as an important secondary source domain. Similar to the 2014 data, our analysis also found most of the 2016 discourse to be negative and/or de-humanizing (85.3%) whereas 14.7% represented the discourse of global compassion and humanization, slightly less than in 2014, in which it was 16.3%.

While we do not claim that our data represents all the national coverage on the issue during this time frame, comparing this corpus to the 20 texts examined in Catalano (2017) provides a representative sample of typical discourse about the child migrants in U.S. discourse between these two years at both the local and national level. As in Catalano (2017), Table 1 shows ample evidence of the dominance

of metaphor scenarios in which child migrants are viewed as dangerous water. Below we provide a few examples from the discourse (bold added).

- (1) *Immigrants fleeing gang violence in Central America are again **surging across** the U.S.-Mexico border, approaching the **numbers** that created an immigration crisis in the summer of 2014. While the **flow of immigrants** slowed for much of last year, nothing the U.S. government does seems to deter the current wave of **travelers**.* (Text 4, May 31, 2016)
- (2) *Refugees from Central America are **pouring into the United States**, a trend from 2014 that seems to be resurfacing along the U.S.-Mexican border this year. Many of them are children, **sent on the long journey alone**.* (Text 5, June 7, 2016)
- (3) *The Obama administration has grappled with how to respond to an **influx of migrants** from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, which spiked in 2014 with the arrival of **thousands** of unaccompanied children **streaming over the border** in South Texas.* (Text 6, July 26, 2016)

In Examples (1)–(3), child migrants are represented in terms of *surg-ing, flowing, streaming, pouring* waves that are *unregulated*. In addition, the use of aggregation in Examples (1) and (3), illustrate a view of migrants in terms of numbers (e.g., *thousands, the numbers*) and present the government as incompetent in deterring the children from coming. These findings align with A’Beckett’s study which examined metaphors in discourse from victims from the conflict zone in Eastern Ukraine (Chapter 11, this volume) and found patterns of migrant representation in the British media such as *numbers* and *masses of water*.

In Example (2), the parents are implicitly blamed and judged as incompetent in the phrase *sent on the long journey alone*. This finding is similar to Antony and Thomas’s findings in which many online comments referred to parents of child migrants as *unfit* (2016: 6–8). Furthermore, this strategy of proving that parents are lacking in parenting skills and family values is commonly used in racist discourse as another way of showing how “they” are not like “us” (cf. Catalano 2014).

The title of Text 4 is “U.S.-Mexico Border Sees Resurgence of Central Americans Seeking Asylum”. The metonymy *resurgence* is particularly interesting because it draws on the original use of the term *surge* (found three times in Catalano 2017 and 11 times in the national data from 2016). Adding the pre-fix *re* (and suffix *-ence*) nominalizes the word and emphasizes that this is the second time around for this *surge* to occur. While appearing somewhat innocent, the term *resurgence* is ideologically loaded because it collocates with words such as violence, hate, and diseases such as yellow fever and tuberculosis, as well as military surges such as those used by the United States to increase military force in Iraq. Case and point, in Google search of the term, 61% of collocations of the word *resurgence* were found to be negative while 7% were neutral and 32% positive. Hence, the majority of the contexts in which the word is used is negative. This may seem like a logical term to use when talking about a re-occurrence of a particular event, but consider how the reader might perceive of the issue had the journalist referred to the repeated increase in unaccompanied child migrants as a re-occurrence, re-nascence, comeback or return? What is also surprising about these findings is that this same type of discourse appeared not only in conservative news sources such as *The New American*, but news sources that are considered to be progressive or liberal (e.g., *The Washington Post* and *National Public Radio*) and hence supportive of policies that treat the children humanely and advocate for their rights. Yet, the same use of water metaphors occurs, demonstrating the naturalization of these metaphor scenarios (Musolff 2016) over time to the point that even people that work in the best interest of migrant children do not always recognize the danger of these metaphors in their own use. In Example (4), we see how border patrol agents express their frustration at not being able to do their job (bold added).

- (4) While the **swelling numbers** don't seem to alarm the Homeland Security Department, its border officers are clearly frustrated. Two weeks ago, the agents' union president, Brandon Judd, testified at a congressional hearing. “What happens is if you are arrested in the United States and you ask for any sort of asylum, what we do is **we will process you, and we will walk you**

right out our front door, give you a pat on the back and say, 'Welcome to the United States.' And they're good to go," he said.
(Text 4, May 31, 2016)

In this example, child migrants are first referred to as *you* (as in *if you are arrested... we will process you...*) to include the audience in the discussion and put them in the position of the child migrants but then after the union president gets to the part of the story where the migrants are released from custody, he uses *they*. This functions to distance the migrants as they are no longer the responsibility of the border patrol. In addition, child migrants are de-humanized with vague metonymies such as *process* (ACTION FOR RESULT) which "mask the actual events of the arrest (which may include handcuffing, fingerprinting, searching, photographing, and eventually filling out paperwork for deportation)" (Catalano and Waugh 2013: 420). In the next example (Example 5), we see the re-appearance of the IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS metaphor which according to Santa Ana has been replaced by IMMIGRANTS ARE CRIMINALS in discourse about Latinos and/or Latino migrants in the U.S., but we still find traces of this metaphor here (2002, 2013) (bold added):

(5) *Chris Cabrera is a Border Patrol officer and union official in south Texas. He says all the families surrendering to seek asylum are distracting his member agents, when they should be chasing drug and human traffickers. "Our agents are so caught up with **rounding up** the ones that are turning themselves in, **corralling them** and getting them to the station, that we don't have adequate resources to get the ones that are trying **to get away**," Cabrera says. (Text 4, May 31, 2016).*

Above, this border patrol officer compares child migrants to animals that need to be wrangled, such as in the classic American Western. Example (5) supports Santa Ana's (2016: 95) findings that border patrol agents are portrayed (and portray themselves) as the "American cowboy archetype". According to Santa Ana, when journalists involve border patrol agents as protagonists in their news stories, they evoke the American Western genre in which "the violent act can become morally right when it occurs within the confines of a code...in defense

of one's life and property" (Grant 2012: 60–63, as cited in Santa Ana 2016: 100). The basic narrative of this story archetype is that the border patrol agent is the hero who "stands outside of a society that is threatened by uncivilized villains. They can only be stopped if the hero moves with violent prowess to defend the town folk who live at the edge of civilization" (2016: 100). Hence in Example (5), the agent – as the "stoic warrior defending the patriarchal order" – (Santa Ana 2016: 111) is lacking the resources to keep the children from getting *away*.

This story-type of the cowboy Western in which the children are animals or non-humans is repeated in immigration legislation and policy such as the "catch and release" program (mentioned in Text 4), which refers to the releasing of people that have been arrested for not having legal authorization to be in the country (a policy, we might add, which the Trump administration is in the process of eliminating). This unofficial name for the policy comes from a similar policy applied to the conservational fishing policy in which after capture, fish are unhooked and let go. Thus, the well-known policy applied to animals has been applied to humans. In addition, the language of crime (which fits neatly into the cowboy scenario) has also been applied to immigration policy (which is repeated and was found in the data) in which the word *illegal* is over-used and immigration policies adopt criminal justice terms such as *parole* which even if they don't refer to people being released after serving time, still evoke crime frames. Hence, besides providing evidence for movement scenarios related to the larger immigration discourse in the U.S., this data illustrates the American Western scenario in which violent outlaws (drug traffickers and people trying to enter the country without authorization that threaten the town folk) get away because the cowboys (border patrol) are distracted with *rounding up* the animals (e.g., child migrants) that are being *corralled* into the U.S. detention centers. The crime frame is not uncommon in media discourse on migration and can also be seen in Arcimaviciene's work (Chapter 6, this volume). The following images (1–2) reinforce this frame of crime and law and order:

In Photo 1, which discusses the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) statistics related to recent apprehensions of child migrants, the children are seen behind a wired enclosure resembling a cage. The camera angle is equal, but it is a longshot and therefore we cannot see the faces of the children. The viewer only sees groups of children sitting



Photo 1. *U.S. Customs and Border Patrol's numbers indicate a **new surge** of Central American minors, according to a Pew Research Center analysis.* (text, 3, May 9, 2016) – credit U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (bold added). See original photo at: <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/border-apprehensions-of-unaccompanied-minors-from-central-america-may-top-2014-levels-8277763>

close together and appearing to look down (except for one, who appears to look at the guard). The CBP officer in the photo is sporting a gun, which is aimed at the ground, and his body and gun are pointed toward the children and he is looking toward them as if watching intently what they are doing. The photo is interesting from a metonymic point of view as the officer's uniform, gun and wired fencing could be easily placed in the genre of crime/prison scenarios. Yet, what is being pictured are innocent children who have escaped violence in their countries looking for nothing more than a safe place to live. By introducing the topic with words such as *surge* and providing these type of images, a cowboy scenario is invoked once again in which the agents are the heroes protecting us from the *surge* that threatens our lifestyle.

In Photo 2 (see below), the headless, faceless children are referred to as *detainees* in the caption below it. While the word *detainee* technically refers to people being held in custody (usually for political reasons), it has largely been found in contexts such as Guantanamo (where the detainees were suspected terrorists), or other terrorist suspects and thus has a very negative connotation nestled in the frame



Photo 2. *Young detainees walk in a line in June 2014 at a border protection processing facility in Brownsville, Tex. The Obama administration is expanding a relief program created late that year.* (credit Eric Gay/AP, text 7, July 26, 2016). See original photo at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-to-expand-refugee-program-for-central-american-minors/2016/07/26/242ab0cc-533f-11e6-bbf5-957ad17b4385_story.html?utm_term=.9c88950b857e

of crime. Besides the caption, the photo shows a long line of children appearing to queue up for something. It is clear from the photo that these are children, yet de-humanizing terms such as *detainees* and *processing* along with the fact that we cannot see their faces do not allow us to empathize with them and their situation. Just as the accompanying article does little to humanize the children nor does it highlight their voices and perspectives, the photo does not help in any way to create empathy for their cause by allowing us to see and engage with the children in any meaningful way.

In addition to the dehumanizing way in which the migrant children were represented in the data, as in Catalano (2017), we did also find some discourse (14.7%) of global compassion which called on the morality and empathy of readers to look beyond political agendas and uses deixis to show spatial proximity to the children but as part of a strategy to make readers feel empathy and the need to act on their behalf. Unlike Antony and Thomas (2016), we did not find any examples of the language of global compassion used to advocate for deportation and other harsh punishments for the children. Example (6) is illustrative of the data we did find (bold added).

(6) *With its partners, UNICEF said it is working to address the causes of migration. “We must remember that children, whatever their status, are **first and foremost children**,” Forsyth said. “We have a duty to keep **them** safe in a healthy and **nurturing** environment.”* (Text 9, August 23, 2016)

Above, readers who sympathize with the children’s cause are invited to be part of the ingroup due to the use of the inclusive *we* which denotes both the speaker and the addressee (Petersoo 2007) and connects the audience to the children emotionally, calling on their moral values to help readers decide to do the right thing. In addition, Example (6) highlights the fact that they are *children*. However, as Heidbrink notes (2014: 50), often humanitarian discourses (such as in Example (6)) utilize the language of vulnerability in order to increase children’s chances of obtaining asylum, but in the process, they are depicted as devoid of agency in the decision to make the journey (when this is often not the case). In addition, divesting the children of agency ignores the incredible courage and resilience they display in traveling on their own across national borders.

Despite humanizing images and verbal text that featured some individual stories as well as voices of humanitarian organizations and activists working on behalf of the children, powerful politicians, government agencies, and community activists with anti-immigration agendas dominated the public discourse about the children with largely dehumanizing discourse that does not take into consideration or feature the voices of the children. As a result, this negative discourse has had more power in shaping public opinion about their plight.

6.2 Counter voices: Metaphors of migrant discourse

We now shift our focus to the voices of the children as found in a corpus of interviews (both transcribed from interviews and in video format) of child migrants taken from both national media coverage from 2014–2016, as well as interviews published on humanitarian organization websites, including the UNHCR and Unicef. In Example (7), the child interviewed utilizes the dominant metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY

(and the submetaphor IMMIGRATION IS A JOURNEY) to explain his mother's decision to send him to the United States (bold added).

(7) *The situations at **home** only promoted a feeling of **death**. [...] I think **this journey** is seen as a **journey of hope**," he said. "It's seen as a **journey of life**. It's seen as a **journey of better opportunities** [...]. (Text 12, November 18, 2014)*

Above, the *journey* is equated with *hope*, *life*, and *better opportunity*. A similar idea is expressed in Text 11 (in the video) featuring an unaccompanied minor from El Salvador expressing why he never wants to return (Example 8, bold added):

(8) *La única que me espera a mí es **la muerte**. [**Death** is the only thing waiting for me]. (Text 11, June 18, 2014)*

Hence, backward movement (returning to the country of origin) is equated with *death*, which is personified, conjuring up chilling images of the Grim Reaper standing on an abandoned street corner tapping his fingers awaiting the arrival of the speaker. This metaphor is used effectively by the speaker (who is not named in the video) to show the dire circumstances in which children like him make the dangerous move to leave their country. Example (9) also illustrates LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which draws on larger orientational metaphors in which future events are ahead (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 16) and Event Structure submetaphors such as ACTION IS MOTION and DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION (Kövecses 2015: 4). In Example (9), *vida* 'life', is represented as *corriendo* 'running/flowing', an action that visualizes the forward movement as positive advancement on the JOURNEY (Example 9, bold added).

(9) *Esta **vida** que **estamos corriendo** es lo más difícil, cansado con sueño.[..] Le digo a mis amigos que **no nos echamos par' atrás**. [This life that **we are living** (literally 'running') is the most difficult, tired, sleep-deprived. I tell my friends that we cannot **fall back**] (Text 15, July 15, 2016, from video)*

Interestingly, the metaphorical linguistic expression *la vida que estamos corriendo* reveals a slightly different cultural entailment of the universal LIFE IS A JOURNEY than in English. The literal translation¹ – “the life we are running” – does not have an exact equivalent in English, but one can say one is “running for his/her life”, meaning that one is escaping a dangerous situation whereas in “the life we are running”, the interlocutor is not referring to one specific event, but life as a whole and the process of living, not escaping. However, like Kövecses (2015), we believe that this difference in metaphor (and our interpretation of it) is closely connected to the context in which the utterance was stated. Hence, interpreting the expression *la vida que estamos corriendo* as part of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is dependent on our understanding of the context of the interviewee. In this case, Gaspar Marcos is talking about his life in the United States after escaping from Guatemala when he was 13 and coming to the U.S. by himself. An orphan since age five, Gaspar must work to support himself, and sleeps three hours a night in order to work and go to school. During the video that films his daily life, he is shown running from school, running down the stairs to his job, and boarding trains to get to and fro. Hence, it is possible that Gaspar used this metaphorical expression because it fits with his life in which he did escape from a dangerous situation, but also the life he currently holds, which is extremely busy and in which he must move quickly from one responsibility to another. Thus, it is knowing Gaspar’s past experiences of escaping Guatemala, but also his present bodily experiences of running from one task to the next, and the effort he must put forth just to live day to day that allows us to interpret this correctly, as part of the IMMIGRATION IS A JOURNEY metaphor.

In the second part of Example (9), the JOURNEY metaphor continues with *no nos echamos par’ atrás* [we cannot fall back], which signifies that returning to their home countries would be backward movement that is viewed as negative. This again demonstrates the political reality of the unaccompanied minors and the choice they make to migrate to the U.S. While our limited data supports Catalano’s (2016) findings that when migrants talk about their migration experiences,

1. Translations originate from the video subtitles in the original articles, except in our discussions of literal meanings.

the JOURNEY metaphor is dominant in their discourse, we showed earlier that this was not the case with media discourse, which often referred to migrants' journeys, but not metaphorically.

A secondary metaphor commonly found within this data set are the metaphors GANGS ARE PREDATORS/MIGRANTS ARE PREY. Below Lucas Anderson describes the journey through Mexico on his way to Texas from Honduras (Example 10, bold added):

(10) *It's like crossing the United States, with so much security, technology and, worse, **criminals hunting us down** as though **we're animals**.* (Text 10, 2014 [no date listed])

In this example, the young man (age 20) reveals his perception of the criminals that live off migrants like him who participate in the *hunting* of migrant children. At the same time, he vocalizes the recursive way in which the criminals perceive of migrants to be *animals* as well. Positioning the criminals/gang members as predators and migrants as prey needing protection exposes the power dynamic in which powerful people take advantage of vulnerable people. In Example (11) (bold added), Edgar uses a similar metaphor, but refers to the gang members he escaped by staying in a shelter run by missionaries:

(11) *I spent two months and 21 days there," Edgar said. "I needed to be there for my **protection**, because they [the gang] were **hunting** for me.* (Text 13, March 26, 2015)

These animal metaphors in which migrants are viewed as prey reveal a perception of weakness, but also lack of control. In contrast, the gang members are both criminalized and given agency, as they are the social actors with power in this societal hierarchy. The connotation of this pairing of metaphors is clear in that it subordinates the child migrants to the gang members. While Santa Ana (1999: 201) has demonstrated how the IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS metaphor is used to justify "the denigration of certain groups of people" there is a nuance to the way in which the migrant children are using the animal-based metaphors here. Here, the use of animalistic prey/predator metaphors functions to underline the denigration that has occurred societally, in order to legitimate their reasons for escaping and seeking refuge in

the United States. When *hunted*, the instinct is to flee. Another example of the predator–prey scenario can be seen in metaphors that migrant children use to talk about the infamous train on which many migrant children hitch a ride on in order to get to the United States (many do not make it or choose to stay in Mexico). This secondary metaphor is present in the data set as TRAIN IS PREDATOR/ MIGRANTS ARE PREY. Below, Pedro talks about his journey from Honduras to the United States. He describes hitchhiking through Guatemala, sleeping on the streets, begging for food for several weeks, then finally crossing the border into Mexico, where he boards “la Bestia” [the Beast] as the train is often called.² In Example (12), Pedro describes the train in the following way (bold added):

(12) *It is a voracious creature who grabs you and pulls you down onto the tracks. If it gets a taste of the foot, it wants the whole leg. If it gets the leg, it wants all of you.* (Text 19: 33 [no date listed])

In this metaphor, the train is a *voracious creature* that seeks to prey on and eat the bodies of the migrant children. Through personification, Pedro provides a window into his view of the train as a powerful predator (and as a result, he reveals his own vulnerability as prey). At the same time, the metaphor reveals that he is fully aware of the precarious nature of transport available to him as he makes the journey north. In Heidbrink’s (2014: 91) interviews with child migrants, she was informed by numerous youths of how the trains would “slow to fifty kilometers per hour allowing migrants to grab hold of ladders and pull themselves on top of the trains or stow away in open cars, risking losing a limb or worse”. As one youth told the author (bold added):

(13) *Your feet are just a snack. Your legs are dinner.* (Text 20, [no date listed])

This metaphor repeated in both Text 19 and 20 demonstrates that the children often characterize themselves as at risk, in this case, of

2. In addition to “La Bestia”, Heidbrink (2014: 91) notes that the train migrants take across Mexico is also referred to as “El Diablo” [The Devil], and “El Expreso de la Muerte” [Death’s Express].

disembodiment from powerful machines that at once serve as transportation to their end goal as well as potential for grave danger. However, the willingness of the children to flee in spite of the risk demonstrates a strong sense of agency in facing this predator in order to reach the final destination on their journey towards a better life. And, unlike media sources such as those described in this chapter, ethnographic interviews such as those above reveal that although child migrants do understand their vulnerability through the PREDATOR/PREY metaphors, they still demonstrate agency (not to mention bravery and resilience) in making the choice to undergo the journey.

7. Conclusion

As in Catalano (2017), this analysis of national news coverage two years later also revealed a dominance of water/movement scenarios which equate migrant children to dangerous water and present them as a threat, despite a small percentage of the discourse dedicated to global compassion and pleading on their behalf. In addition, we found evidence of media discourse that gives voice to border patrol narratives that harken to the classic American Western in which border patrol agents are cowboy heroes saving the townsfolk from the bad guys, e.g., criminals and gang members supposedly trying to enter the country, while wrangling up the cattle (e.g., children) that keep them distracted from their task.

Interestingly, the way that migrant children talk about their experiences in our data starkly contrasts that of the media, particularly in the use of metaphors. For example, while media discourse was dominated with water metaphors, no water metaphors were found in the discourse of the migrant children (albeit we cannot generalize this since our sample was small). Metaphors that did feature in their discourse included IMMIGRATION IS A JOURNEY AND IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS (more specifically, IMMIGRANTS ARE PREY and GANG MEMBERS/BORDER PATROL/TRAINS ARE PREDATORS). Analyzing and understanding the metaphors used by migrant children as they tell their stories demonstrates the diverse conventions of social discourse that characterize power struggle and positioning of different groups of people within society (Fairclough 2015) and provides a way to begin to return agency

to these children as they represent their own lives through their own language use, thus adding their viewpoint to the greater social discourse, and exposing their own choices and decision-making power as well as bravery and resilience in conditions when they are highly vulnerable and experience great fear.

It is hoped that by exposing metaphors that show how these children are dehumanized and contrasting them with the children's own accounts of the devastating reasons why they were forced to flee their countries, policy makers and law enforcement will be compelled to see these children as they are: children, and not detainees, or cattle to be rounded up. Additionally, by including the contextualized verbatim talk with rich description provided by ethnographic interviews, it allows for the return of compassion and empathy (Arcimaviciene, Chapter 6, this volume). This positions the children not as the metaphor, but rather as a human being using metaphor to make sense of the world around them. Through the point of view of the children, we offer a distinction in the way metaphor is used differently by different groups. This reveals how metaphor is often used to strengthen political ideologies while pushing back using the children's own language to provide a contrasting perspective that invites empathy to return to the greater discourse.

Furthermore, we hope that their dangerous stories of survival and journeys that equate return to their country to *la muerte* as well as their heartbreaking tales of survival in a life in which they are always corriendo inform readers of the challenges they face once they arrive in the United States as well as their important contribution to society. Aligning with this book's focus, we encourage more research that features migrant experiences and provides an alternative perspective that counters dehumanizing media discourse such as that found in this chapter, which has the power to shape public opinion about migrants and can result in devastating policy changes for them.

Appendix A. Texts used in the corpus

U.S. National Coverage 2016:

- Text 1: Eyder. February 25, 2016. "Why a Single Question Decides the Fates of Central American Migrants." *NPR.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2016/02/25/467020627/why-a-single-question-decides-the-fates-of-central-american-migrants> 08/09/2016
- Text 2: Hennessy-Fiske, Molly. March 10, 2016. "Central American Immigrants Fleeing Due to Violence, Poverty, and Now Fears of Trump's Proposals." *LA Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/nation/immigration/la-na-immigration-children-families-20160308-story.html> 08/09/2016
- Text 3: Lemons, Stephen. May 9, 2016. "Border Apprehensions of Unaccompanied Minors from Central America May Top 2014 Levels." *Phoenix New Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/border-apprehensions-of-unaccompanied-minors-from-central-america-may-top-2014-levels-8277763> 08/09/2016
- Text 4: Burnett, John. May 31, 2016. "U.S.-Mexico Border Sees Resurgence of Central Americans Seeking Asylum." *NPR*. Retrieved from: <http://www.npr.org/2016/05/31/480073262/u-s-mexico-border-sees-resurgence-of-central-americans-seeking-asylum> 08/09/2016
- Text 5: Marizco, Michel. June 7, 2016. "New Surge of Central Americans Seen on Border." *Arizona Public Media*. Retrieved from: <https://www.azpm.org/s/39608-new-surge-of-central-americans-seen-on-border/> 08/09/2016
- Text 6: Hirschfeld Davis, Judy. July 26, 2016. "U.S. to Admit More Central American Refugees." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/27/us/politics/obama-refugees-central-america.html> 08/09/2016
- Text 7: Nakamura, David. July 26, 2016. "U.S. to Expand Refugee Program for Central American Minors." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-to-expand-refugee-program-for-central-american-minors/2016/07/26/242ab0cc-533f-11e6-bbf5-957ad17b4385_story.html?utm_term=.1a89ade51b8f 08/09/2016
- Text 8: Blake, Paul. August 16, 2016. "NC Community in Months-Long Battle to Bring Home Undocumented Teen, Despite Election-Year Controversy." *ABC News*. Retrieved from: <http://abcnews.go.com/US/nc-community-months-long-battle-bring-home-undocumented/story?id=41375119> 08/09/2016
- Text 9: Lederer, Edith, M. August 22, 2016. "UN: Thousands of Central American Children Seek to Enter U.S." *AP*. Retrieved from: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/38b3d9fa838542eba277727160a358a2/un-thousands-central-american-children-seek-enter-us> 08/09/2016

Interviews with unaccompanied children:

- Text 10: Corchado, Alfredo. 2014. "Putting Brakes on a Dream." *The Dallas Morning News* Retrieved from: <http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/migrants/> 08/09/2016
- Text 11: "Update on the Status of Refugee and Migrant Children: The Impact of Philanthropy." June 18, 2014. *GCIR: Grantmakers concerned with immigrants and refugees*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gcir.org/childrefugeesmigrants> 02/10/2016
- Text 12: Brekka, Kira. November 18, 2014. "Migrant Defends Mother's Decision to Send Him Unaccompanied to the U.S." *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/18/unaccompanied-minor-crossing-us-border_n_6178694.html 02/10/2016
- Text 13: "Closed Doors: Mexico's Failure to Protect Central American Refugee and Migrant Children." March 26, 2015. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/31/closed-doors/mexicos-failure-%09protect-%09central-american-refugee-and-migrant-children> 02/10/2016
- Text 14: Phippen, J. Weston. October 15, 2015. "Young, Illegal, and Alone." *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/unaccompanied-minors-immigrants/410404/> 02/10/2016
- Text 15: Carcarmo, Cindy. July 15, 2016. "Nearly 1 in 4 Students at This L.A. High School Migrated from Central America – Many Without Their Parents." *LA Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-belmont-%20high-school-20160710-%20snapstory.html> 02/10/2016
- Text 16: Ramirez, Tanisha Love. July 18, 2016. "A Glimpse into a Day in the Life of an Unaccompanied Minor." *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/a-glimpse-into-a-day-in-the-life-of-unaccompanied-minor_us_578ce366e4b0a0ae97c2a93f 02/10/2016
- Text 17: "The Quiet Crisis of Central America's Unaccompanied Migrant Children." August 23, 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/honduras_86561.html 02/10/2016
- Text 18: Garin, Emily, Beise, Jan, Hug, Lucia. and You, Danzhen. September 7, 2016. "Uprooted: The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children." *UNICEF*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/uprooted/> 02/10/2016
- Text 19: Terrio, Susan J. 2015. *Whose child am I?: Unaccompanied, undocumented children in US immigration custody*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Text 20: Heidbrink, Lauren. 2014. *Migrant youth, transnational families, and the state: Care and contested interests*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

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