



## *Introducing Students to Critical Border and Migration Theories in an Era of Xenophobia*

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### **Abstract**

*With the current rise of xenophobia, particularly in the United States, critical border and migration theories need to be introduced in the classroom. Critical border and migration theories refer to a range of theories, that often go by differing names, which seek to problematize the modern nationalistic perspectives on borders and migration that center largely on the desire of the nation-state instead of the rights of migrants (Carens, 1987; Juss, 2004; Author 1, 2018a). It is also strongly correlated with the concept of open borders. This article provides a broad understanding of these critical theories from a philosophical, ethical, and economic perspective and the rationale for why these more abstract and universal ideas of migration and borders should be introduced in the classroom despite the controversy they can generate. This focus is of particular importance in an era where the rights of migrants are often limited or disregarded completely.*

**Keywords:** *critical borders and migration, open borders, teaching immigration*

### **Introduction**

**T**he topic of immigration is one of the most controversial in American society. There are those who want to completely seal up borders and those who want to be more generous to those seeking asylum and a better life. However, often the actual ideas about the sovereign rights of nation-states to stop migration is never questioned neither is the idea even considered that human migration should be an unalienable right (Bregman, 2014; Carens, 1987). The focus of this article is the need to introduce these ideas of critical borders and migration, especially during a time in the nation where the antagonism towards immigration is growing not only in the United States but throughout the world (Hagopian, 2015). Special consideration is given to the importance of these critical concepts in the United States educational system.

### **Modern Immigration Context**

#### **The United States**

The United States society has reached a tragic point in our understanding and relationship with borders and migration. An over attachment to “sovereign” borders and a hostility towards foreign migrants has helped lead to the rise of dangerous demagogues in our political process that puts not only immigrants, but the whole democratic system, in jeopardy. In the past, some of these anti-immigrant attitudes were disguised in the language of national defense or security. It was not

appropriate to publicly and directly go after certain immigrant groups. However, with the rise of President Donald Trump, the anti-immigrant rhetoric has become more direct and vicious. Policies that were once seen as extreme have become normalized. An example of this antagonism towards the immigrant community occurred on September 5, 2017, when President Donald Trump announced that the Justice Department would be rescinding DACA (Shear & Davis, 2017). This was a move that was part of a larger pattern of anti-immigrant policies from the Trump administration in its first year in power.

The administration also announced that they would be increasing deportations and targeting a broader swath of the undocumented population, not just those who are criminals, which was the group primarily targeted under the Obama administration (Medina, 2017). The Justice Department under Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, also took a more hardline approach to immigration issues including seeking to rush immigration cases through the judicial system, thus potentially limiting any true due process (“Sessions’ Plan for Immigration Courts,” 2017).

In early 2018, the Trump administration announced that it would be the official policy of the United States to separate children from their parents at the border (Horwitz & Saccehetti, 2018). This policy was even extended to some of those who are seeking asylum (Pearle, 2018). In May of 2018, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, stated that school boards had the choice if they wanted to set policies where schools could hypothetically call ICE on students (Balingit, 2018). It was also seen in the fall of 2018 when it was revealed that the Department of Health and Human Services had been moving money from programs such as Head Start and cancer research to support the arrest and deportation of immigrants (Moritz-Rabson, 2018). These anti-immigrant policies that were once considered quite extreme have become mainstream and, due to the constantly changing news cycle, may not garner as much press attention as they would otherwise.

In some ways in American society, it has become completely appropriate to stereotype and discriminate against individuals because of their immigration status. As Basik (2012) highlights, there is an ethical disconnect between the idea of equality within the nation-state, which “most citizens of wealthy countries naively claim they want,” (p.411) and the acceptance of international inequality. This is why country of birth or immigration status are considered valid forms of discrimination in a way that race, gender, or sexual orientation would not be (Basik, 2012).

Some politicians have intensified this ‘legitimized’ discrimination by garnering support through kindling antagonism and fear towards immigrants. For example, in the 2018 primary election in Georgia, one of the gubernatorial candidates drove around in a deportation bus promising to stomp out the crimes of illegal immigrants (Swenson, 2018). South Carolina’s governor, Henry McMaster, wanted to make sure that local jurisdictions could prove that they were not sanctuary cities (Lovegrove, 2018).

There has also been a greater hostility towards legal immigration. Though political conservatives used to make an argument against illegal immigration but for legal immigration, this stance changed in the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Beinart, 2018). The number of refugees the U.S. is accepting is at record lows. The refugee cap is 50,000 for 2018 compared to 231,000 in 1980 (Ingraham, 2017). In 2017, the Trump administration began attempts to reduce the number of green cards issued annually, especially to family members of immigrants, which has been derogatorily labeled chain migration (Haile, 2018). Many American politicians are actively fighting not just illegal immigration but in many cases legal immigration as well. Though this strategy may have always been part of the motives for a portion of the far right in America, it recently has become more evident and unapologetic.

This antagonism against immigrants has not only been seen at the governmental level. It has also been able to flourish at a societal and educational level. Many teachers have reported a

direct effect of the election of Trump in their classrooms (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Directly after the 2016 election, there were reports of students using Trump's victory as an excuse to bully other students. One California student purportedly printed out fake deportation notices to give to minority students the day after Trump's election (Mortimer, 2016). Xenophobia, which has always existed, has been able to be more openly and unabashedly expressed in American society.

## Europe

There also been a similar rise of xenophobia in Europe. This has been especially the case as the number of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa rose dramatically in 2015 and 2016. For example, the number of first-time asylum of claims to Europe countries rose from 259,00 in 2010 to 1,322,000 in 2015 (Guild & Carrera, 2016). This increase in refugees caused more reactive attitudes in Europe. In a survey from 2015, immigration was seen as the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest threat to Europeans up from 33% in 2013 (Hunyandi & Molnar, 2016). The highly controversial vote in Great Britain to exit the European Union in 2016 was at least partially due to these demographic changes and the desire to restrict immigration into Great Britain. A poll taken right before the election, found that 75% of those supporting the position to leave the European Union said immigration was the primary motivation (Cohen & Lapinski, 2016). As Richard Hall (2016) points out, "The 'leave' campaign's focus on migration played a significant role" (para. 12). They did this "by using the plight of civilians fleeing conflict and instability to further its case" (Hall, 2016, para. 14). The former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, cautioned Europe from accepting more migrants in 2018 out of the fear that this would lead to more right-wing populism (Wintour, 2018). Hamid (2019) posits that this populism is specifically bolstered due to the fact that many of the refugees are from Muslim backgrounds and thus it can help to fuel Islamophobic sentiment.

Another example of this antagonism towards immigrants has been in Hungary. As Hume (2018) highlights, the re-election of the current prime minister, Victor Orban, was largely due to his xenophobic stances. Hume states that the xenophobic policies of leaders like Orban have led to a type of standoff with the European Union who is still calling for countries to fulfill certain refugee quotas. Hunyandi and Molnar (2016) show how xenophobia is at alarmingly high levels throughout other countries in Central Europe as well such as Poland, Czech Republic, and Italy. They cite the European barometer, which shows that over 60% of Hungarians, Czechs, and Bulgarians strongly disagree that their nations should be helping refugees. Huyandi and Molnar argue that there has been a "securitization" of the debate, which has allowed for governments to call for more stringent measures against increased immigration.

Even in Western European nations, there has been a rise of xenophobic and right-wing parties. In the French election in 2017, the staunch nationalist, Marine Le Pen, came in second place. Hasan (2017) argues that her rise was due to the normalization of xenophobia in the French political context, so that her comments no longer seemed so far out of the mainstream of acceptable public thought. Le Pen tried to distance herself somewhat from her more controversial father by removing him from the party for his more blatant xenophobia and anti-Semitism, but Serhan (2018) argues that the attempt to soften the image of the more hardline xenophobic position became difficult as this was still the core base that Le Pen drew from. Germany also is experiencing strong xenophobic responses to growing diversity and the refugee crisis. Nielson (2018) reports on a recent study out of Germany that showed that 44% of Germans want a ban on Muslim immigration. He reports that a database from Der Spiegel Magazine shows that there has also been a dramatic increase in right wing demonstrations and rallies in Germany.

## Relation to the Classroom

The question is how society, and particularly educators, can confront these attitudes. Some may call for a re-examining of people's hatred and fear towards immigrants. This approach is certainly valid and has to be part of the larger conversation. There is a need to understand what drives people to this hate and fear and how false narratives regarding immigration could play a role in exacerbating these feelings. There are many prominent false narratives such as immigrants being more prone to criminality, immigrants being a drain on the economy, and immigrants posing a risk to national security (Author 1, 2018b). All these faulty and incomplete narratives have to be critiqued in the education system. However, while focusing on these two areas may be beneficial, it may be necessary to take it a step further and understanding how to deconstruct the current nationalist view towards borders and migrations where the rights of the nation-state are supreme and the rights of migrants are almost non-existent. It is difficult to truly combat nativism and xenophobia while continuing to uphold the traditional nationalist constructs. At best, our current framework can produce a level of paternalistic compassion where immigrants may "receive mercy" if the dominant group in their "goodness" decides to bestow it, but it leaves those without proper documentation no inherent rights. The current framework does not lead to actual justice or equality (McCorkle, 2018a).

This theoretical critique of borders and migration is relevant to the field of education because a deconstruction of popular assumptions about borders and migration can help lead to a greater sense of belonging among immigrant populations, particularly immigrant students as they no longer accept the limiting and degrading narratives related to their immigration status. It also can lead to a sense of empowerment (Frank, 2006) as students being to see themselves as agents of change rather than helpless entities at the mercy of the system. Ultimately, this also can transform the perspective of the non-immigration population as well as one's immigration status become less tied to one's worth or social value. It can help break down some of the xenophobic structures that have been created over time. This hopefully can lead to a greater unity and sense of belonging (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001) for the immigrant population. The frameworks of critical border studies (Lakko, 2016; Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009), critical migration (Bauder, 2013), and open borders (Bregman, 2016; Carens, 1987) will be essential in re-examining the way immigration and borders are discussed in the classroom and the underlying structure that is forming popular opinions about immigration.

## Critical Border and Migration Studies

Critical border and migration studies is not a field that has been as clearly defined as other critical theories like Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005;). It is certainly not an area that has been highly explored in the field of education. There are scholars, particularly in the fields of geography, political science, and international relations, who look specifically at the issue of borders and present a critical perspective on the modern assumptions of nation-states and borders (Laako, 2016; Salter and Mutlu, 2012), The issue of critical migration encompasses migration studies, arguments for more open borders, and Critical Latino studies (Olden, 2015; Osorio, 2018). The critique of borders and migration policy overlap in many aspects. Many authors do not use the actual term critical border or critical migration studies in their work as this field has not been codified or formalized extensively.

## Philosophical and Historical Roots

The philosophical foundations of critical border and migration studies were present long before these terms were actually used. One of the great enlightenment philosophers, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1754) sets the groundwork for a deconstructed understanding of borders through his work which critiqued the idea of property. As he states,

The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said “This is mine,” and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody. (p.5)

Though this was particularly related to the issue of property, the idea that the earth at its most intrinsic level could actually truly belong to any individual or nation is shown to be not only unethical but illogical and absurd. If the earth belongs to all of humanity than the claims of any individual or nation-state have little moral binding to them. Beyond this, these “claims” are the source of many of the problems and violence in world history.

Other past leaders and philosophers such as John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington also laid a foundation for a more open immigration system. Locke (1690) stated that every man should have a right to decide “what government he will put himself under” (cited by Basik, 2012, p. 407). George Washington (1778) spoke of his “hope” that “this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.” Likewise, Thomas Jefferson (1774) spoke of, “a right, which nature has given to all men, of departing from the country in which chance, not choice has placed them, of going in quest of new habitations.”

This idea of a more open immigration system was seen in the early years of the United States where immigration was almost completely open. For example, between 1880 and World War I, less than 1% of the immigrants who came to Ellis Island, which totaled over 25 million, were denied entrance into the country (Ngai, 2014). Even the now highly guarded Mexican-American border was almost completely open. Migrants from Latin America were allowed to freely enter, often without even having to face any type of security (Ettinger, 2009). In fact, immigrants from the Americas, particularly Mexico, were exempt from many of the later immigration restrictions because of their strong presence in the agricultural industry of the American Southwest (Ngai, 2014).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the idea of restrictive immigration became more prominent in both the United States and around the world due to modern realities as well as racial fears. In the United States, the first racial restrictions began as a profoundly racial issue with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act (Railton, 2013). Later, other restrictions were placed on individuals from countries such as Syria and Greece. In the 1920s, the U.S. government passed more formal immigration restrictions, which implemented quotas based on country of origin. This system gave more opportunities to those coming from Western Europe (Daniels, 2004). Much of the modern immigration system is based on the changes made in the 1960s under President Lyndon B. Johnson who tried to remedy some of the racial and ethnic bias in the immigration system while also keeping a restriction on the number of immigrants coming from each country (Waters & Reed, 2007). This more restrictive trend has not just happened in the United States, but around the world as wealthier

nations have sought to stop the influx of individuals coming from more developed nations (Block, 2015). Many people have assumed that developed countries have had restrictive immigration policies and that there are no alternative perspectives. This restrictive view toward immigration is present both in some scholarship, but even more in popular political, economic, and social rhetoric. Since restrictive immigration is the primary contemporary policy in developed nations, there is a need to deconstruct the prominent narratives to make room for fresh perspectives to emerge.

### **Critical Border Scholarship**

Critical border scholars seek to break down some of the assumptions inherent in a more restrictive immigration approach. Noel Parker and Nick Vaughn-Williams (2012) question the notions that populations have towards borders, specifically in the modern globalized society. Though borders are often portrayed in positive terms of protection and security, they also point out “the work that borders do as foundations linked to violence, force, and the deployment of a logic of exceptionalism” (Parker & Vaughn-Williams, p.585). At the minimum, they seek to problematize the oversimplified assumption that the border is a “territorially fixed, static, line” (Parker & Vaughn-Williams, 2012, p. 586). Other scholars such as Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen (2010) look at how borders are “social constructions” (p. 3). This does not mean that they are not important, but rather they are negotiable and unstable. They are not ultimately natural or sovereign. Though on one level individuals may realize this reality, on another level borders and national boundaries are often given an almost sacred, yet undeserved, respect.

Hannah Laako (2016) expands on these ideas by seeking to “decolonize” our views of borders by changing the perspective from the desires and prerogatives of the nation-state to the “people that inhabit them” (p. 177). She places special attention on the area of the borderlands where the lines of national distinction are often blurred. Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) further critique the idea of borders and describe them as “a particular kind of relationship, one based on deep divisions and inequalities between people who are given varying national statuses” (p. 6). They also note the oppressive nature of borders which “follow people and surround them as they try to access paid labour, welfare benefits, health, labour protections, education, civil associations, and justice” (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, p. 6). Borders are not just lines in the sand; rather they are social constructions that can be a prison to keep people in or an impenetrable barrier to basic human rights. Individuals “illegal” immigration status can follow them around and be impossible to escape regardless of the time that passes or the astounding personal accomplishments. The authors argue firmly that a focus on human rights when it comes to immigration is not enough. For these human rights to be realized, there has to be a questioning of the sovereignty of borders and even the whole modern idea of citizenship.

Some scholars look at the practical implications of this over attachment to borders. Chazal (2013) argues that even when organizations like the International Criminal Court seek to move toward a more “cosmopolitan and borderless world” (p. 707) in order to establish human rights, they often “proliferate” border and state control by having to bow to the interests of the more powerful nation-state (p. 725). Little (2015) also points to the reality that any changes in belief to the normative functions of nation-states and borders is “unlikely to be direct or sequential” (p. 445). It will take a much higher level of complexity and imagination. The attachment that individuals have created towards borders has been established over decades and centuries. Therefore, the work to break down these attachments will not be simple. Other authors question the actual tools used in the implementation of border security. Salter and Mutlu (2012), argue that the measures

meant to create greater security (drones, smart borders, and biometric passports) actually cause greater anxiety among the populous and are often very inefficient for creating a truly safe society.

### **Critical Migration Scholarship**

A deconstruction of views toward borders can naturally lead to a critique of the way we view immigration and the rights of migrants. The two areas also naturally overlap, and many of the theorists could be relevant in both areas. Critical migration theory begins to question whether nation-states have the right to restrict migration, outside of general, reasonable security measures. Do restrictions on borders defy fundamental human rights and dignity? Harald Bauder (2013) problematizes the nationalist “framing” of immigration which “normalizes the territorial nation-state as legitimate agent of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 56). His goal instead is to “produce collective identities that transcend the nation.” He quotes Anderson, et. al (2011) who state, “Migrants are not naturally vulnerable; rather the state is deeply implicated in constructing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices...[‘Migrants’] are constructed as objects of control, rescue, and redemption rather than full human beings” (p. 57). In this way, militarized borders and strict migration policies act as a type of dehumanizing force that cripples otherwise capable and self-sufficient human beings. It can also turn them into objects that deserve our paternalistic compassion rather than individuals who deserve equal justice. Schulze-Wessel (2015) argues that modern borders almost exclusively exist to control more disadvantaged and undocumented groups while they are often quickly “opened” to more affluent populations. As she states, borders are not only “reinforced and expanded in response to undocumented migrants; it also means that they (undocumented migrants) represent the defensive, blocking, and controlling function of the border.” (Schulze-Wessel, 2015, p. 57). She also argues that modern undocumented immigrants are much like the stateless refugees that the international community sought to embrace in the wake of World War II. However, unlike that time, there is less international consideration given to the plight of modern undocumented immigrants. Modern individuals may look back with horror when nations refused to accept Jewish refugees who were escaping Hitler’s Germany, but that same moral outrage is not often seen when developed nations turn away those fleeing from modern violence and persecution in places like Syria and Central America.

Fortier (2006) also highlights this disparity between wealthier and more impoverished migrants. For more affluent migrants, their “hyper-mobility” is seen as a sign of progress and encouraged. For them, they are part of the globalized, increasingly shrinking world. However, for poor migrants “immobility” is seen as a “necessity” (Fortier, 2006, p. 318). Villalon (2015) pairs the ideas of critical migration with critical feminism and points out how females are often the greatest victims of restrictive migration policies and xenophobic attitudes as this stress can lead to greater intimate partner violence where female immigrants are often in a particular place of vulnerability. They usually do not have the same access to resources and may also be fearful of reporting abuse to the authorities because of their immigration status.

The ultimate goal of a critical approach on the issue of borders and migration “involves rejecting the nation-state as a necessary frame through which to examine human mobility” (Bauder, 2013, p. 61). McNevin (2014), in her study on migration security on the Indonesian island of Bintan, has similar thoughts. She seeks to move the discussion of human mobility beyond “territoriality” and “imagining the political subject—mobile or otherwise—without the state or territory as its foremost container concept” (McNevin, 2014, p. 306). She also questions why the “transgression” of border policy is often treated as either a threat (in the case of human migration) or as a measure of “sovereign defense” such as “offshoring technologies” (McNevin, 2014, p.307). The

categories and discussions about borders and migration are often too limiting. There is an inconsistent view of the rights of crossing and transgressing borders, which tends to benefit the powerful and disadvantage the most desperate and impoverished.

Joseph Carens (1987) continues with this critique by questioning whether it is within the “legitimate mandate” of the state to “prohibit people from entering a territory because they did not happen to be born there” (p. 254). He also sees a moral imperative in having a more open immigration system than what currently exists. He gives an interesting analogy to the modern restrictive immigration system. He compares citizenship in wealthy Western democracies to feudalism where one’s future prospects are almost completely based on one’s place of birth. As he states, “like feudal birthright privileges, restrictive citizenship is hard to justify when one thinks about it closely” (Carens, 1987, p. 252). Many may shudder at the inhumanity and lack of dignity involved in the treatment of serfs in the Middle Ages but may not be conscious of how developed nations set up their own modern systems of injustice. Aygül (2013) gives an example of this injustice with the European visas restrictions in comparison to more liberal policies in Turkey. He argues the more restrictive system of Europe tends to promote capitalism more than human rights. On the other hand, Tsianos and Karakayali (2010) argue that despite the best efforts of the nation-state, immigration is exceedingly difficult to control, and it is not a good use of funding to continue to invest in structures like camps for undocumented immigrants. Modern restrictions are not only inhumane, but they are also often impossible to enforce and a futile activity for nation-states.

### **Open Border Theorists**

A critical look at borders and migration relates strongly to the broader ideas of open borders, and it could be argued that the critique of border and migration policies lead to a more open border approach. Those in the field of economics have explored this concept most thoroughly. Perhaps in contrast to some of the other scholars, some of the open border economic theorists are more conservative politically and see open borders as a logical extension of a more open market system (Tabarrok, 2015). These scholars have argued for the idea of open borders from a perspective of economic viability (Basik, 2012), but also from a moral and ethical standpoint. One of the leaders in this field, Dutch scholar, Rutger Bregman (2016) argues that borders are already fairly open to everything except humans, which creates a true level of injustice. He gives an illustration of the ethical problems with closed borders that keep individuals from certain markets. He states,

Say John from Texas is dying of hunger. He asks me for food, but I refuse. If John dies, is it my fault? Arguably, I merely allowed him to die, which while not exactly benevolent, isn’t exactly murder either. Now imagine that John doesn’t ask for food, but goes off to the market, where he’ll find plenty of people willing to exchange their goods for work that he can do in return. This time though, I hire a couple of heavily armed baddies to block his way. John dies of starvation. Can I still claim innocence? (Loc. 2381)

This may be a perspective that is rarely considered. Are those in the developed world to blame for the death of so many around the world by creating restrictive border regimes, which leaves many with few options and without access to markets which could help them provide a living for their families?

Bregman goes on to state that our current immigration system is “apartheid on a global scale” (Loc. 2439). He believes borders themselves are the “greatest form of discrimination” (Loc. 2434). Other such as Basik (2012) ask similar questions. “Why, unlike race, sexual orientation,



physical handicaps, and IQ, is national origin still deemed a permissible basis for political discrimination?" (p.411). It is an intriguing approach to looking at the morality of borders. If citizens treated people inside their borders the way they treat those outside looking to come in, they would be seen as highly intolerant, discriminatory, or even inhumane. However, there seems to be a strong dissonance to the values of tolerance and compassion when it comes to migrants (Basik, 2012). Perhaps, if people could begin using the same language of equal rights that they apply to other minority and disadvantaged groups to migrants, they could start to change the whole conversation on immigration.

Basik (2012) goes on to argue that there is a moral necessity to having more relaxed border policies due to the fact that those who want to migrate are often the ones who are the "losers" of trade liberalization. This points to an argument that many have made that if capital has the right to move, it should also be a right of labor. Juss (2004) argues for open borders based on the notion that the right to migration is the most important of human rights and is foundational to human community. He also deconstructs the notion of "sovereignty" of the state in their prerogative to make restrictions towards immigrants. As he states, "national sovereignty" is "not a state of affairs. It is not a fact. It is simply a doctrine" (Juss, 2004, p. 321). Many have assumed for so long that nations have the absolute right to decide who comes into their borders that they may have failed to see the faulty foundations of these assumptions. Juss (2004) also argues that the current restrictive policies of borders are in opposition to many of the ideals at the source of modern international human rights policies.

There are also many economic arguments for the position of open borders. Bregman (2016) explains how open borders would make the world more prosperous as the free movement of labor would increase economic expansion. He argues that it is a much more effective way to deal with third world poverty than economic aid which often goes through too many third parties to actually improve the lives of citizens. Opening the borders would help more of the wealth of the developed world go directly to those in the developing world. He goes as far as saying it is the necessary next step in the evolution of our society.

Kennan (2012), in his work, relieves the fear that a more open system would suppress the wages of those in the receiving country. He states that as long as restrictions are lifted gradually "there is no implied reduction in real wages" (p. 17). Others such as Storesletten (2000) argue that a more open immigration system in developed nations like the U.S. could be a way to offset the possible economic and fiscal challenges of the aging baby boomer generation. In some aspects, this is already occurring in the U.S. as undocumented immigrants often unjustly pay into systems such as Social Security and Medicare without being eligible for the benefits. With much discussion in developed nations about cutting benefits for aging populations, more open borders could help resolve some of the funding issues. Confronting the idea that more immigration is a source for the destruction of organized labor, Munk (2012) sees the increase in immigrant labor as an opportunity for a new form of unionism that could protect the rights of all workers. Though immigration has often divided the working class historically, much of the strong unionism and workers' right movements in U.S. history involved immigrant communities and immigrant leaders (Bengston, 1999; Michels, 2014).

### **Relation to Other Critical Theories**

As stated above, the ideas behind critical border and migration studies have largely been absent from the critical work being done in education. That is not to say that these ideas are not at times implicit in certain critical frameworks. However, there should be greater effort to draw links

between areas such as critical race theory, critical Latino studies, and critical migration and border studies.

For example, in critical race theory, Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) lay out the argument that race is a substantive construct when determining equity and that true change can only occur when challenging the actual unjust paradigm, not merely by adding in aspects of multicultural education. Critical border and migration studies could very much speak to the critical race theories both in the fact of the inherently racial aspects of how immigrants are seen and accepted and the substantive large role that national origin plays in the issue of equity. As Bregman (2016) argues, national origin is the greatest area of inequity. Also related to Ladson-Billings, a truly just change in immigration is not going to come about by mere language that stresses diversity and inclusion, but an actual reimagination of the whole idea of how we view immigration.

Critical border and migration studies also related to the larger field of Latinx Critical Studies (Fernandez, 2002; Poblete, 2003). These critical theories very focus much on a re-examination of the history between the United States and Latin America, a focus on the role of colonialism, and intentionality in focusing on injustices that have accompanied the Latino experience, particularly in the United States (Stefancic, 1998). This Latino Critical Perspective “highlights and deconstructs influential structures of oppression that harm clients” (Kiehene, 2016, p. 120). Kiehene argues that push for more ethnic studies and the resistance of English-only policies could be tangible struggles that the ideas of a Latinx Critical Perspective could address.

There are of course some major differences between critical border and migration studies and Latinx Critical Studies (or perspective). For one, Latinx Critical Studies is very much a phenomenon based in the United States with the issue of the oppression of the Latinx population in North America. It also is specifically about one ethnic group as opposed to a more global concept. However, the ideas of Latinx Critical Studies could be strengthened with more emphasis on an actual critique of the border and migratory constructs and likewise the study of critical border and migration studies can be informed by a greater cultural and socio-political understanding of the long term effects of restrictive ideas towards migration and borders on certain ethnic groups in the destination country.

## **Relation to Education**

### **K-12 Environment**

If educators can introduce these theories to students, both immigrant and U.S. born students, it could be helpful in not only reducing xenophobia and nativism but also creating a greater sense of belonging and empowerment for all immigrants, regardless of legal status (Abu El-Haj; 2009; Ramirez, Ross, & Jimenez-Silva, 2016). There is a need for educators to be exposed to these ideas to help them develop a more inclusive approach toward their students, particularly those who are undocumented or have DACA status. The goal of these critical theories or “border pedagogies” is to create an environment which “repositions people on the margins as creators, thinkers, and knowers. This constitutes the very condition of possibility as youth are given the opportunity to reclaim their agency” (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016, p. 284). This moves the position from one of “deficit-based practices” to one that “celebrates the rich cultural identities of the students” (Ramirez, Ross, & Jimenez-Silva, 2016, p. 320). Similarly, immigrant students will become deterred in “their desire to become part of the larger society” if they are discriminated against or blocked in their attempts towards integration (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, p.

506). It is therefore essential, for a greater sense of belonging, that both immigrant and non-immigrant student populations, as well as educators, are introduced to the ideas embedded in critical border and migration studies.

The ideas of critical border and migration theories have particular relevance in the classroom. Lilia Fernandez (2002) applies a critical perspective to the Latino and immigrant experience in the school setting. She cites Daria Roithmayer (1999) who states that, “the classroom...is a central site for the construction of social and racial power” (p. 48). If we are to change the views about immigrant students and the rights of immigrants, it must begin in the education system. Authors such as Abu El-Haj (2009) argue for a whole new framework for how we describe citizenship and democratic participation in its relation to young immigrant populations. As he states, “participation and critical engagement, rather than a sense of national identification...prove a stronger base for developing engaged and active young citizens” who are seeking to create a “more just and peaceful” world (El-Haj, 2009, p. 281). The goal is to move students away from the idea of citizenship being primarily about the legal status in a nation-state and more about their responsibilities and rights as members of American society, and more importantly the world community.

Though there could be a strong level of relevance in all the subject areas, the area of social studies may be particularly relevant to this discussion. In a recent study McCorkle (2018a) undertook with undergraduate students about their experiences in the social studies classroom, many stated that their high school teachers rarely discussed issues of immigration. McCorkle (2018b) lays out how history can be used to inform modern immigration issues and truly break down restrictive ideas about borders and migration. Through helping students both see the natural aspect of immigration and understanding the growing restrictions over time, it may be possible to break down some of the more restrictive and nativist thinking in the present. The Organization Teaching Tolerance (2019) has strong tools for helping to highlight the stories of young immigrants, which could be especially relevant in a social studies or language arts classroom.

In some aspects, these ideas have been implemented by organizations like the Tucson School District, which offered Mexican-American History (La Raza) classes at their schools (Phippen, 2015). Though the central focus may not have been framed in terms of critical border theory, it provided a historical understanding that did not marginalize the works of immigrants but rather placed them and their rights in the center of the historical discussion. When the schools did this, they saw academic improvement among the student population. In fact, students who took these courses, 87% who were from Latino backgrounds, were 51% more likely to graduate from college than their peers who did not take the courses. (Cabrera, Milem, & Marx, 2012). However, due to political pressure, the state of Arizona later banned the classes despite their educational benefit to students. Some saw the teaching as subversive and undermining national ideals (Phippen, 2015). For this reason, especially at the K-12 level, similar critical teachings may have to be implemented in a more subtle way. The general population may be averse to these critical theories. Some may see them as radical, and others may see them as too dangerous for society. For many, the modern narratives of migration are so ingrained in the American story that imagining a different system seems foolish.

With that stated, Depenbrock (2017) highlights that in reaction to the ban in Tucson (in addition to the election of Trump), other districts have started offering more ethnic studies programs. Some of these programs will likely take a less confrontational, inclusive lens while others may take on a more critical lens based on ideas such as Critical Race Theory and Critical Latino Studies. However, there needs to be an emphasis on understanding the underlying concepts of borders and migration in the context of the modern realities of oppression and injustice within the United States or developed nations. Without these critical border and migration theories informing

these ethnic studies program, the instruction could be filled with logical inconsistencies. You cannot critique the treatment of immigrants and undocumented immigrants without using a critical lens to examine the whole notions we have about restrictive migration. This second part has often been avoided by politicians and those in power who call for equality among those who are already in the nation, but simultaneously uphold the ideals of restrictive migration. The disconnect creates an unsustainable paradigm (McCorkle, 2019).

### Teacher Education

There is also a special emphasis that needs to be placed on these critical theories in teacher education programs. Though there may be a rightful emphasis placed on issues like critical race theory, multiculturalism, an even equity for immigrant students, there appears to be less emphasis on understanding the realities of the immigration system (Rodriguez & McCorkle, in Press) and then truly deconstructing the modern notions about borders and migration. There may be a hesitancy of some teacher educators to pursue this path given the controversy that surrounds this issue.

In a similar way to the K-12 setting, teacher educators do not need to pontificate to the students to hopefully cause them to accept this theoretical position. Rather, they just need to first offer it as an option. The idea of migration as a human right and borders as largely unjust constructs is so far from the mainstream of current political thought that it may be the first time these ideas are even considered. It can also be helpful to personalize the issue and really look at it through the lens of morality and basic human rights as Carens (1987) and Bregman (2016) do.

### Conclusion

Educators and teacher educators should find ways to introduce these critical theories into their class discussions. The current framework for discussing immigration produces at its best a sense of compassion, but cannot lead to a liberating framework based in justice and human rights (McCorkle, 2018a). Though these critical theories have been needed throughout our national history, they are of particular importance now as we once again see nationalism and xenophobia rise both in the United States and through much of the industrialized world. Until students begin to see immigration as a human right or at least consider that possibility, we will never have a just immigration system.

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