

CASE STUDY #10 by D. McCormack

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE MATERIALITY OF THE “CLIMATE MIGRANT”

The “migrant crisis” has become a familiar media trope. The President of the United States, Donald Trump, portrays Latin American migrants, immigrants and refugees as a threat to American security (Durkin & Lakhani, 2018). His politicization of Latin American migrants as part of “a growing humanitarian and security crisis” (Rucker & Sonmez, 2019) calls on heightening the American security apparatus. The “climate refugee” or “climate migrant” is increasingly a human rights subject and scholarly focus (AI, 2018a, Baldwin, 2014; Bettini, 2017). In this root cause analysis, I examine the “migrant crisis” through the lens of climate change to illustrate why citizens of Latin American countries are leaving their lands. I focus on racism, extraction and the Canadian state as factors contributing to migration legitimized through Eurocentric ideologies.

One impact causing current Latin American migration is

loss of arable land from extreme weather conditions. In their article, “The Unseen Driver Behind the Migrant Caravan: Climate Change” (Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018), the authors describe a range of climate related issues causing Latin Americans to migrate. The authors critique Trump’s politicizing of the “migrant caravan” and call for action, yet do not attend to the structural and institutional causes of climate displacement. This is a common theme in climate migration discourse.

My inequalitree highlights how international trade agreements and legal regimes, including the World Trade Organization, NAFTA and the United Nations simultaneously contest and maintain climate impacts contributing to displacement. State borders, immigration law and jurisprudence assist by allowing free flow of capital across borders while restricting the movement of people (Dougherty, 2016; Hill, 2014;

ATLANTIC OCEAN

PACIFIC OCEAN



ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS of climate change and the materiality of the "climate migrant"

From Perera's "Ineqaulitree," used here with appreciation. Leaves represent daily impacts (Perera's "everyday symptoms"), the trunk represents structure and institutions, and roots represent root cause ideologies.

Kassam, 2017).

Western Eurocentrism, white supremacy, colonialism, militarism, neoliberalism, extractivism and consumerism assist Canadian transnational corporations in displacing Latin American people who become part of the "migrant crisis". Several authors highlight how these ideologies racialize Latin American people as primitive "dangerous others" or "premodern victims". These tropes legitimate them as expendable labour and bodies within and beyond their territories or borders and contributes to capitalism and ongoing colonial land theft (Baldwin, 2014, p. 1474; Bettini, 2017; Dougherty, 2016, p. 24).

Farmers across Central America, including Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, are losing their arable land to flooding, drought, crop failure, biodiversity loss and plant disease from rapidly changing extreme weather patterns (Milman, Holden and Agren, 2018). These impacts lead to food insecurity, lack of potable water, loss of income and inability to pay bills. The recent "Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change" (Carrington, 2019) documents similar climate issues across the global south. These effects are compounded into systemic

issues of hunger, poverty, displacement, dispossession, inequality and criminalization creating an expendable mobile labour supply vulnerable to gangs and militarism. The figure that emerges is the "climate refugee" (AI, 2018b; Bettini, 2017).

Eurocentric legal and economic systems legitimate climate migration. Free trade agreements and Western neoliberal economic systems create state dependence on extraction industries and consumption to support global economies. The Canadian state and Canadian corporations depend on this system for their economic sustainability (Dougherty, 2016; Hill, 2014; Watts, 2018). In 2018, Canada was named one of the top three countries contributing to climate change through production of Canadian tar sands oil for a global energy market. International trade law upheld by the World Trade Organization counters Canada's ability to resist oil company lobbying (Watts, 2018). Canadian transnational mining companies represent a significant percentage of corporations displacing Indigenous and Afro-descendent people from their lands in Latin America. Neoliberal global trade laws, national legal systems and military enable this displacement

(AI, 2016, 2018b; Dougherty, 2016; Hill, 2014; Kassam, 2017).

The United Nations is also part of this framework. Canadian mining firms have been brought before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights for environmental destruction and human rights violations in Latin America. They are accused of polluting land and hiring police and paramilitaries to forcibly remove Latin American people from their lands (AI, 2016, 2018; Dougherty, 2016; Hill, 2014; Kassam, 2017). While necessary under current frameworks, appealing to these institutions reinforces Eurocentric structures as sources of salvation and detracts from acknowledging how these structures also separate people from their lands through racialized tropes such as "climate migrant" (Baldwin, 2013).

As a Canadian citizen, I benefit from mining in Canada and Latin America because these mining operations contribute to the wealth of the Canadian state's economy and infrastructure. As a white cis-heteronormative colonial settler in the global north I am insulated from climate effects while living on Indigenous land governed by the white settler Canadian state. Global and national jurisprudence support unequal distributions of wealth attained

through global trade laws and extraction. As a white Canadian citizen, I am a benefactor of climate change displacement supported by ideologies obscuring Canada's role in the "migrant crisis" and legitimating my rights as a Canadian citizen. This was historically achieved through colonial Eurocentric legal, economic and knowledge systems enforced through European institutions and military (Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Currently, international Eurocentric institutions, economies and democracies continue the colonial project upheld as an international system maintaining equality.

Baldwin explains how "the figure of the climate-change migrant designates a form of racial Other" (2013, 1474) and asks us to consider how climate racialization forms perceptions of Latin American people "to sustain specific racial inequalities or to reinforce specific racial imaginaries" (1487). Trump's trope of the "migrant crisis" and perceptions of Canada as benevolent nation plays on "white immigrant anxieties" (1487) through "climate refugees" while hiding how the United States and Canada benefit from racialization of these migrants. As a white Canadian, I benefit from whiteness and from ongoing

settler-colonialism legitimating racism via neoliberal institutions and ideologies. As a student in this class I seek to reveal and transform these oppressive systems.

Climate migrant futures: a hopeful approach

My case study examines the "climate migrant" and "climate refugee" as a powerful discourse and present material reality obscuring and reifying the Western structures and ideologies underlying climate migration in South and Central America (Baldwin, 2013; Bettini, 2017). Climate migration discourses emphasize climate change induced impacts causing Latin Americans to leave their lands. Food insecurity, water scarcity and land loss from flooding, drought, heatwaves, biodiversity loss and pollution are displacing South and Central Americans dependent on the land for their survival (EJF, 2014; Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018).

In Central America, agriculture is a global commodity comprising more than a third of employment. Harvest failures disrupt local subsistence strategies leading to food insecurity. Dependence on global laws and economies created through trade agreements such as the North American Free

Trade Agreement (NAFTA), means loss of arable land leaves farmers vulnerable to poverty and displacement (Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018). One such impact is highlighted in the story of an Indigenous Ch'orti' Mayan man from Honduras forced to abandon his lands and migrate after several droughts caused repeated failure of his maize and bean crops. The revenue loss forced him to leave his land and family in search of work (Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018). Since 2012, Central American coffee farmers have experienced failure of seventy-percent of their crops from a fungus called leaf rust spreading as a result of warming nights caused by climate change. Coffee and maize are global commodities that leave farmers in poverty when their farms become untenable. This increasingly motivates migration (Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018).

An obscured impact of climate change is the "climate refugee" as a racialized figure informing policies legitimizing Western institutions and structures that simultaneously silences "climate migrants". Giovanni Bettini (2017) and Andrew Baldwin (2013) illustrate the extensive security and humanitarian discourses surrounding climate migration reinscribe colonialism through calls for increased

borders and international treaties. These discourses fail to acknowledge the climate injustices of Western states caused by legally justified extractivism and militarism (EJF, 2014; Milman, Holden & Agren, 2018).

Bettini states these racialized discourses are not neutral and "render accessible to governments those vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, attempting to mould the populations at the margins of the post-colonial present into subjectivities docile to the neoliberal rule" (2017: p. 36). The impacts of this racialized trope are material climate injustices that include increased policing of "climate migrants" into a migrant neoliberal labour force. It silences Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples defending their lands from the climate injustices of multinational extraction companies exacerbating climate change and climate migration. Materially, this discourse perpetuates displacement by ignoring rights to self-determination and drawing South and Central Americans into global institutions based on Eurocentric notions of nation, property and citizenship.

Building an egalitarian climate future for "climate migrants" requires diverse approaches to

climate change. A preliminary structural approach must acknowledge climate migration is a serious humanitarian issue requiring immediate action (AI, 2018a, b; EJF, 2014; Taylor, 2017). Nation-states must reduce their emissions following guidelines set out in The Paris Climate Agreement. International protections for climate refugees must be adopted by extending the Geneva Refugee Convention to include climate refugees (Bettini, 2017, Taylor, 2017).

As a top emissions contributor, Canada must stop mining tar sands oil to meet these guidelines (Watts, 2018). Emissions reduction in Canada will help mitigate climate change and reduce climate induced disruptions in South and Central American land, lessening displacement. This approach involves a trade-off for Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples because it bolsters the racist international nation-state framework rooted in white supremacy, neoliberalism, globalization and extraction. Baldwin and Bettini argue these solutions ignore racialized causes of climate displacement.

Positive climate futures require challenging the material implications of the racialized "climate migrant." Bettini suggests conflation of "climate

refugee" protection with better neoliberal policies leads to a stronger global north and legitimizes exploitation. He suggests "climate migrant" discourse is a climate justice issue necessitating consideration of alternate futures and incorporate voices of climate migrants and Indigenous peoples resisting extraction and exploitation of their lands and bodies for global profit (2017).

A hopeful climate future acknowledges the rights to self-determination called for by Indigenous peoples and challenges the centering of state-led initiatives. Nation-states must ratify and abide by the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as called for by Indigenous peoples globally (Dougherty, 2016; Moore et al. 2015). UNDRIP demands Indigenous self-determination rooted in Indigenous knowledge and free, prior and informed consent of mining activities on Indigenous lands. Multinational extraction industries will be prevented from exploiting Indigenous lands and perpetuating climate destruction, displacement and military violence against Indigenous and Afro-descendent people (Amnesty, 2018d; Moore et al. 2015).

The climate future is attuned to mobilizations of racialized “climate migrant” discourses perpetuating climate injustices. Baldwin suggests the trope of the “climate migrant” should “necessitate sensitivity to racialization in a way that challenges the racial hierarchies it sustains” without which we “risk overlooking how the sociological discourse of climate change itself becomes a key site through which the category of race is written anew” (1487). Revealing how racialization reaffirms neoliberal colonialism creates possibilities for Indigenous voices to be heard and creation of approaches that foster sustainability, resilience and community instead of displacement.

This argument is salient for South and Central American Land Defenders. Amnesty International and Mining Watch report how Indigenous and Afro-descendent land defenders are stigmatized, criminalized and murdered by paramilitaries and police working with the state and multinational extraction companies to force evictions of Indigenous and Afro-Descendent peoples from their traditional lands in Peru, Paraguay, Honduras and Guatemala (AI, 2018a, 2018d; Moore et al, 2015). Canadian mining companies are the primary extraction industries in South and Central

America and are complicit in this displacement (Moore, et al. 2015). Their practices are enabled through state and international laws legitimating their authority to displace. Racialization is the ideological rationale. Canadian extraction competes with agriculture for land and leads to displacement of already marginalized Indigenous and Afro-descendent populations (Moore, et al. 2015).

Racialization of land defenders deems their resistance to dispossession criminal while legitimating dispossession, disposable labour and capital accumulation by wealthy nations. Neoliberal ideologies, laws and militarism enable displacement. Revealing how racist ideologies support Western suppression of resistance to exploitation of South and Central American lands can challenge this approach and prevent displacement, criminalization and death of Indigenous peoples. A trade-off is that revealing and challenging hegemonic ideologies and structures can lead to heightened nation-state legal reforms and militarism to maintain hegemony.

TIMELINE of climate change and the materiality of the “climate migrant”

Events related to climate, race, and the Fenix mine; inspired by the opening activity of Conversations.

My timeline begins with the continuous settlement and complex civilization of Indigenous South and Central American peoples over 11,000 years before colonization of the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese in the 15th century. The transatlantic slave trade of the 16th to 19th centuries brought millions of African people to the continent leading to populations of mixed Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples (Galeano, 1997).

In the 1900s, the Washington Consensus legitimated neoliberalism throughout Latin America by supporting dictatorial governments that allowed foreign investment to exploit land and peoples while extraction industries expanded (Dougherty, 2016). In 1994, Canada, Mexico and the United States signed NAFTA to create trade agreements for these countries. These agreements created protections for foreign investors through state laws allowing litigation against states for not creating favourable conditions for foreign profit (Dougherty, 2016; Moore et al, 2015).

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted in 1998 to protect people defending their lands from human rights violations by multinational corporations resulting from free trade agreements (AI, 2018a; Moore et al, 2015). Upholding nation-state commitments to this document has proved challenging. In 2015, Global Witness reported 122 murders of land defenders protecting environment, land and territory in Latin America, the highest numbers for killings of land defenders in the world (AI, 2016). In 2008, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the United Nations to challenge discrimination against Indigenous peoples and promote their rights to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent. Canada did not initially agree to the document but endorsed it in 2010 (Dougherty, 2016; Moore et al, 2015).

Since signing NAFTA, Canadian mining companies have expanded throughout Mexico and Latin America. They comprise 70 percent of Mexico’s mining industry and continually displace South and Central American peoples to create conditions for extraction (Kassam, 2017; Moore et al, 2015). Between 2002 and 2012 Latin American mining investments increased by 100 percent (Dougherty, 2016). Since the 1990’s, the Canadian state has intervened in Peru’s laws to reinforce neoliberal approaches that create a framework for Canadian mining expansion. The Canadian International Development Institute cooperated with the Peruvian Ministry of Mines and Energy from 1998-2011 to stop protests to allow mining activity (EJF, 2014).

Climate change displacement became an acknowledged climate issue in 2014 when the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment report on climate impacts highlighted security concerns related to the emerging climate crisis and raised climate migration as a significant crisis needing heightened international security and humanitarian frameworks (EJF, 2014). Leaf rust ravaged coffee plants throughout Central America since 2012, decimating 70 percent of coffee farms and leading to ongoing displacement: one of numerous examples of climate induced migration benefiting the Canadian state supported by ideologies that obscures Canada’s role in creating and maintaining the “migrant crisis.”

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