GOVERNMENT-MEDIA CONNECTIONS IN THE PORTRAYAL OF NORTHERN TRIANGLE MIGRANTS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

by

HELEN BARAHONA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment to the requirements

of Departmental Honors in Political Science

at the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Irvine, California

June 2023

Signature Page

GOVERNMENT-MEDIA CONNECTIONS IN THE PORTRAYAL OF NORTHERN TRIANGLE MIGRANTS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

I approve of the thesis of Helen Barahona:

CL

Thesis Advisor

Cecelia M. Lynch

Professor, Political Science

School of Social Sciences

June 12, 2023

Date of Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my dear friends and family, thank you for encouraging me to take on this project. Thank you for supporting me through every step of the way – I truly appreciate your kind words. To my professor, Cecelia Lynch, who has been an inspiration and incredible research advisor, thank you for everything. I could not have done this without your guidance or expertise.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to call attention to the political turmoil in Central America that has led to a migration crisis in the US. Given the shared history of violence and trauma, this study specifically focuses on the northern region of Central America known as the Northern Triangle Countries (NTCs) which consist of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. My analysis begins by providing historical context for the neo-colonial relationship between NTCs and the US through an analysis of the legacy of colonialism in Latin America. While there exists a great deal of literature on the topic of Central American migration, this study places particular emphasis on the policies implemented during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, because of their enduring impact on the ongoing portrayal of Northern Triangle Migrants in the media. Using an interpretive research design, this study looks at the ways in which three of the main circulating newspapers in the US — The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Washington Post – portrayed Northern Triangle Migrants and compares them to depictions of NTCs, their peoples and their contexts from 1980-1990 made by Reagan Administration officials, using primary sources obtained from the Reagan Presidential Library. Through a critical discourse analysis, this thesis attempts to explicate the combined role of the government and the media in advancing dominant narratives that criminalize Central American migrants. Findings of this

study point to a pattern of interdependence between government and the media that reflects the idea that discourse is constructed by those in power, but with important limitations. For example, my findings indicate that the government's insistence on framing NTC migration as only an economic issue was taken up by the news media. However, findings also point to a narrative resistance found in the discourse that emerged in opposition to hegemonic discourse. This resistance framed the issue in terms of historical responsibility and political violence, and some but not all media sources reflected this debate.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1970s the United States saw a rise in the number of migrants from a more diverse set of Latin American countries (Tienda, Sanchez 2013: 48). Ravaged by civil wars, natural disasters, political instability, and economic crises many Northern Triangle migrants fled to the US in search of asylum. Consequently, the number of Latin American migrants from NTCs steadily increased after the 1970s. While Mexicans have always constituted a large percentage of the number of undocumented migrants from Latin America residing in the US, this ratio has become more balanced throughout the years. From 1960 to 1970 the percentage of the Mexican born population living in the US decreased from 73 percent to 48 percent (Tienda, Sanchez 2013: 55). At the same time, the percentage of the Central American-born population in the US rose. Essentially, these immigration trends led to the creation of stricter legislation that made enforcement the focal point of immigration reform. Signed into law by Ronald Reagan in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) marked a shift in the tactics used by the US government to reduce the volume of undocumented migrants. Moreover, as the migration crisis persisted, news coverage of this phenomena garnered

more and more attention in the media. As a result, this thesis was written with the intention of uncovering the role of policy and media framings in shaping public perception.

Using the research question "How did the legacy of Ronald Reagan's presidency help set the precedent for the modern rhetoric surrounding migrants from the Northern Triangle region?" as a guiding point, this thesis aims to shed light on the narratives, stereotypes, and biases that emerge in government and media discourse. This topic is of relevance for many reasons. First, it provides insight into the combined role of government and the media in creating hegemonic discourse. Second, it recognizes the significance of understanding the time, space, and contexts in which discourse is created to fully grasp its meaning. The objective of this thesis is to expand on the existing body of literature about the portrayal of Central American migrants by conducting a qualitative study that specifically looks at national archives and newspaper articles from the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal produced throughout the duration of Ronald Reagan's presidency. The goal of this thesis is to understand the ways in which the media and the government work hand in hand to influence the discourse surrounding Central American migrants. Through my analysis, I hope to challenge oppressive discourses that have shaped our understanding and perception of the Central American migration crisis. Selection of the materials analyzed was done in two phases, one focusing on the national archives accessed through the Ronald Reagan Presidential Archives and the other focusing on the newspaper articles accessed through the Proquest Database. After carefully selecting the materials to be analyzed, each document was then reviewed several times to familiarize myself with the data and with the intention of searching for common themes, narratives, and frames to create a codebook. Through an intertextual analysis of national archives alongside 11 carefully selected articles accessed through the Proquest database, findings revealed that media discourse

tends to reflect the framing of discriminatory ideologies embedded in our governing institutions, although it can also contest the arguments involved in such frames. Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge that discourse is at least partially constructed by those in power and that it has the ability to influence public opinion for the long run, although dissenting views also matter. While the role of government figures and mass media influencing social attitudes has been extensively documented, this thesis addresses the research gap by focusing on a specific administration, time period, and group.

BACKGROUND

It is impossible to discuss the Northern Triangle migration crisis, before first acknowledging the role that both Spanish colonial rule and the US government have played in the destabilization of Central America. Even after the NTCs gained independence from Spain, Central America continued to exist at the mercy of colonial powers. Although the U.S. did not attempt to conquer the Northern Triangle like the Spanish had, the U.S. adopted new forms of colonialism in the late 19th century that allowed it to dominate NTC politically and economically (Chomsky, 2021: 9). Similar to the nature of Spanish colonialism in the Northern Triangle, neocolonialism is rooted in beliefs of European supremacy that establishes a domination-subjugation dynamic between colonial powers and non-colonial ones (Chomsky, 2021: 8). Guided by older ideologies of European superiority, the United States established a neocolonial relationship with NTCs that intensified during the Cold War and gave rise to years of violent conflict and trauma.

The Cold War was a fight for supremacy between the Soviet Union and the United States – the two nations that emerged as superpowers after World War II – yet the two nations never

(directly) battled one another (Schlesinger, 1967: 23). Instead, the Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a series of proxy wars, most of which took place in third world countries. Left-leaning parties that had communist tendencies were supported and backed by the USSR, while right-leaning parties that were against communism were supported and backed by the US. Essentially, the Cold War was not simply about antagonisms between the two major superpowers, but a battle of ideologies centered around views on communism. There is no denying that the Cold War had particularly devastating consequences for NTCs that must be explored in order to understand the larger social, political, and economic factors at stake.

The first major U.S. intervention in the Northern Triangle occurred in June 1954 in Guatemala at the start of the Cold War. In an attempt to overthrow Guatemala's 25th President, Jacobo Arbenz, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) launched Operation PBSuccess (Streeter, 2000: 61). While Abrenz did not take office until 1951, Arbenz had long gained the CIA's attention for his efforts to end Ubico's authoritarian regime during the Guatemalan Revolution and later as the Minister of National Defense (1944 to 1950). As Juan José Arevalo's successor and Guatemala's second democratically elected president, Arbenz sought to expand on the social reforms enacted by Arevalo and ignite change in Guatemala by giving more power to the people. Although President Arbenz had no official affiliation with the USSR, nor was he a member of the international communist party, in the eyes of the US he posed a threat to democracy and US interests because of his involvement in the Guatemalan Revolution and because of the social reforms he was instituting. In particular, the United States was wary about Arbenz's Agrarian Reform Law, Decree 900, which redistributed 1.4 million acres of land from wealthy corporations to peasant families (Gleijeses, 1989: 465). Since a grand portion of the uncultivated land in Guatemala belonged to the United Fruit Company, a US owned corporation, this land was

one of the main targets for the reform. To the rural indigenous population in Guatemala, President Arbenz was a beacon of hope but for the US his land reform represented the growing influence of the communist movement in Latin America. In short, Arbenz's left-leaning policies were beginning to garner attention from other Latin American countries as a model for radicalization which is why the US felt compelled to put an end to his presidency. Arbenz's political influence coupled with the US' effort to protect American profits, led President Eisnhower to approve the CIA's plan (Ferreira, 2008: 61). However, rather than attacking Arbenz themselves, the CIA's plan was to first encourage Guatemalan military officials to overthrow the president and then provide them with the necessary funds and aircraft to carry out the operation. In the end, the coup d'état launched against Arbenz not only put an end to his presidency, but also marked the end of the Good Neighbor Policy that had been implemented during Roosevelt's presidency in 1933 and the Guatemalan Revolution that had been going on for nearly a decade. Since the Good Neighbor policy had been implemented with the intention to improve the relationship with the US and Central America through a promise of nonintervention, ending it meant that the US could now use militarized forces to carry out its plans (Friedman, 2003: 570). Note that "the Good Neighbor policy masks the extent to which the U.S. government exerted pressures that while not taking the form of outright military intervention…far exceeded the boundaries of noninterference" (Friedman, 2003: 570). In other words, the 1954 coup only officially ended the Good Neighbor Policy – the US had broken its promise much before that. The intervention in Guatemala resulted in a series of revolutions in Central America that led to massive destruction and displacement.

The anti-communism rhetoric that shaped the Cold War continued even after 1954 and set forth a multitude of counterinsurgency tactics in El Salvador. Starting with El Salvador's 1950

constitution, the U.S. gradually increased its hegemonic control over El Salvador's infrastructure by strengthening its military and economic ties. Revisions to El Salvador's constitution allowed for the development of a political system in which the states right to intervene in the nation's economy was expanded and the military adopted "measures aligned with post-second world war ideas" that sought to crack down on communism (Molinari, 2013: 33). Essentially, these changes placed greater emphasis on political modernization and impacted the agricultural sector the most since there was much international pressure (mainly from the U.S.) for industrialization. This push towards industrialization only served to further amplify El Salvador's dependence on the US market. The so-called "glorious" years, a 20 year time period in which El Salvador was experiencing great economic growth, is in large part due to the changes brought about by the 1950 Constitution. Albeit, this economic growth primarily benefited those of a higher socio-economic status – Salvadoran elites. In that aspect, the dynamic between El Salvador and the US is similar to the one in Guatemala because in both relationships the US played a pivotal role in shaping their political and economic infrastructure by centering the issue of the left-wing movement at the forefront of the agenda. To put it simply, the US enforced its dominance by providing assistance only if NTCs agreed to combat left-wing forces. Additionally, in an effort to minimize the spread of communism, the US developed a counterinsurgency infrastructure in El Salvador in 1963 that allowed it to have even greater control over the country's armed forces (Molinari, 2013: 34). The emergence of leftist movements in El Salvador during the 1960s was met with hard opposition from US backed Salvadoran armed forces and a new legal framework. By providing training to the local armed forces of El Salvador, the U.S. could strengthen its political ties to El Salvador by advancing a pro-government campaign while simultaneously spreading anti-communist propaganda. At the same time, the Catholic church was adopting a

Liberation theology that fostered ideas of radicalization that prompted counter-hegemonic discourse (Wood, 2019: 516). The work of the Catholic Church and of Christian Base Communities had a profound impact in unionizing Salvadoran (and Guatemalan) peasant families by functioning as a political forum where people could express their grievances and concerns. As leaders of the Catholic Church, radicalized peasant intellectuals responded to US counterinsurgency tactics by mobilizing the masses through a spiritual awakening.

Tensions between military officials, peasant leaders, and US forces not only impacted the political landscape of El Salvador but Honduras as well. Devastated by the US involvement in El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras served as the base for the 1954 coup and the destination for Salvadoran migrants. The radicalization of peasants along with the industrialization of El Salvador's agricultural sector generated high levels of migration from El Salvador to Honduras. Given that Honduras had more job opportunities, thousands of Salvadoran farmers were lured by US companies to work in Honduras-based banana plantations. Another reason for the migration of Salvadorans can be explained by the land availability in Honduras. In comparison to El Salvador, Honduran peasants had more land to themselves (Chomsky, 2021: 147). Subsequently, as migration rose and the number of Salvadoran farmers working on Honduran soil increased, relations between the two countries took a turn for the worse. In many ways, the infamous "Soccer War of 1969" is a direct consequence of nationalist conflict between El Salvador and Honduras caused by US involvement in Latin American affairs (Cable, 1969: 660). Although the so-called "Soccer War" gets its title from the riots that occurred after the 1970 FIFA World Cup Qualifier, the title is somewhat misleading as it oversimplifies the longstanding animosity between Honduras and El Salvador into a dispute about soccer. It overlooks the historical context of both nations needed to fully understand the underlying causes of the war and the

impact they had on the domestic and international affairs of NTCs. Moreover, aside from apprehension over migration Honduras was also faced with natural disasters that brought about political transformations.

In fact, the destruction caused by Hurricane Fifi in 1974 served as the catalyst for new land reforms in Honduras. However, Law 170 was not very effective in addressing the concerns of Honduran peasants, as the size of the land provided was insufficient and difficult to farm (Parsons, 1978: 8). Honduras' growing population meant that many would remain landless even with the implementation of Law 170. Yet, the Honduran government's openness to helping Honduran peasants was overall seen as a positive gesture, especially in comparison to the situation in Guatemala and El Salvador. Notably, this gesture did not stop left-wing guerillas from continuing to organize and fight against the Honduran oligarchy. Well throughout the 1970s and 1980s Honduras continued to serve as the host for a mixture of military officials, Salvadoran migrants, guerilla fighters, drug lords, and members of the CIA causing it to play an integral role in the civil wars fought in Guatemala and El Salvador (Chomsky, 2021: 150-151). Having American troops stationed in Honduran soil also meant that it was easier for the US to carry out its counterinsurgency operations targeting "church-based, student, peasant, and other movements that challenged its economic goal of remaking Honduras as a paradise for foreign investment" (Chomsky, 202: 152). As peasant radicals emerged as leaders of social change in the 1980s, they were tortured and killed by the US and Honduran troops spurring even more violent conflict within Honduras. In the eyes of the US, reformism was seen as a threat to its ideologies, so it was often labeled or associated with communism. In other words, the US justified its involvement in Central American affairs by allegedly fighting against the spread of communism.

Drawing from Nora Hamilton and Norma Stortz Chinchilla's framework for analysis on Central American migration, the recent surge of migration from NTCs to the U.S. can be understood in the context of "historical and contemporary dimensions, economic and political dimensions and domestic and international structures" (Hamilton, Chinchilla, 1991: 76). That is to say, the escalation of migration from NTCs in the 80s can be attributed to a variety of "push" and "pull" factors that work in tandem with one another. Yet to some extent, both "push" factors in the NTC and "pull" factors in the U.S. can be traced back to ongoing colonialist ideologies and neocolonialist interventions that persist and continue to shape the ways in which the US interacts with NTCs and the rest of the world. The dynamic between the US and the Northern Triangle is similar to core-periphery relations in colonialist structures. While the US did not achieve territorial acquisition of the Northern Triangle, it exerts its dominance through the proliferation of free trade markets, and military interventions (Ryan, 1991: 288). Subsequently, patterns of migration are influenced by the political and economic instability brought by the US as a result of the implementation of neoliberal ideologies in the market and internal political conflict that typically occurs in response to such changes. To put it another way, the interdependence relationship between the US and NTCs, benefits the US a lot more which causes political and or economic dislocation in NTCs that motivate people to immigrate.

Furthermore, the recent migration crisis requires a discussion of foreign policies, immigration reforms set in motion during the presidency of Ronald Reagan and its profound implication on the current portrayal of Central American migrants. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Reagan's rhetoric proved instrumental to framing the situation in NTCs. Applying the Domino theory to this context, Ronald Reagan's attitudes toward NTC can be attributed to a fear that communism would persist and in order for it to be stopped decisive action had to be taken

(Slater, 1987: 105). The Domino theory refers to the idea that if one domino falls then the entire row falls. In this context, the Domino theory is employed as an analogy where each domino represents a single country. That is, if one country falls victim to communism then the other countries will follow. Using this logic, Ronald Reagan's administration supported and funded authoritarian regimes to ensure that Central America would not fall in the hands of the Soviets (Lynch, 2011: 2). At the same time, the measures employed by Reagan created conditions that contributed to large-scale migration waves and eventually led to the enactment of stricter immigration reforms. In sum, the real or imagined threat of communism had critical consequences for NTCs and can offer insight for the distrust against Central American migrants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical section and framing of this paper draw heavily on the research of previous scholars' work on migration, Central America, and US intervention. The studies referenced in this paper have been helpful in developing a methodology that is suitable for the research question presented and providing context for the issue of the Central American migration crisis. Theories of representation and conceptual frameworks for media have also been especially relevant to selecting a methodology that is fit for the research question posed. In this paper, the connection between media and government is explored throughout the span of Reagan's two-term presidency. This topic is of much importance in the political field because it examines the link between the government and the media in shaping discourse to advance the agenda of hegemonic structures. This literature review begins by offering a brief explanation of relevant terms and concepts followed by a discussion about the theoretical frameworks used and an overview about the existing body of literature.

Key Terms and Concepts

Migrant

As defined by the International Organization for Migration, the term "migrant" refers to individuals who have temporarily or permanently moved outside of their country of origin, it does not offer insight as to how long their stay is or cause of migration (Douglas, Cetron, Spiegel, 2019). In this thesis, the use of the term Northern Triangle Migrants refers to individuals from the Northern Triangle Region (Guatemala, El Salvador, & Honduras) that have crossed international borders to get to the US.

The Refugee Act of 1980

The Refugee Act of 1980 act marked the adoption of the United Nations definition of 'refugee' which originated from the 1951 Refugee Convention. Based on the definition provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR): "a person outside his or her homeland, unable or unwilling to return or otherwise claim its protection because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" is considered a refugee (Martin, 1982: 101). In a way, this new definition narrowed the number of people granted refugee status because unlike the previous definition provided by the US government for a 'refugee', it no longer included those who had been affected by natural disasters, displaced by military activity or civil conflict (Martin, 1982: 101).

Sanctuary Movement

The Sanctuary Movement was born out of opposition to the changes in humanitarian assistance caused by the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980. Under this act, refugee status was granted to someone who was fleeing their country and could provide proof that they had a

"well-founded fear" (UNHCR, 2010: 14) of political persecution". Notably, under this new definition, a large number of Central Americans were not granted refugee status, nor eligible to apply for asylum, because of the argument brought forth by the US government that they had been active participants in the civil wars (Campbell, 2016: 476). Yet, migrants escaping communist countries, like the USSR, were considered refugees even though the argument used against Central American migrants could be applied to them too (Campbell, 2016: 477). Although the act denounced discrimination, its provisions were discriminatory in nature because they endorsed the legal exclusion of certain groups by favoring some immigrant groups over others. The Refugee Act of 1980 blatantly discriminated against Central American migrants, in spite of the US government's role in the destabilization of NTCs via neoliberal policies and its attempt at stopping the spread of communism by funding authoritarian regimes. Consequently, the use of the term 'refugees' has widely been contested in academic spaces because of the rights and protections associated with each label. Denying Central American migrants the possibility of applying for asylum or being classified as refugees puts them in a vulnerable position. As a result, the Sanctuary Movement was started by faith-based organizations in an attempt to provide a safe haven for Central American migrants fleeing from their country of origin. The Sanctuary movement has been compared to the efforts made by abolitionists during the US civil war. To be more specific, it has been compared to the Underground Railroad because both incidents are considered acts of civil disobedience (Villarruel, 1968: 1429). In both cases, the US government responded by prosecuting those involved in the movement, however, one key difference between the two is that the Sanctuary Movement did not exist as a clandestine operation and instead represented an act of resistance and defiance against the US government (Campbell, 2016: 476).

Inspired by Liberation Theology, the Sanctuary movement sought to mobilize individuals to stand up against the discriminatory policies established by the US government.

Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

First introduced into congress in 1981, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), represented an effort by the Ronald Reagan administration to address what it called the migration crisis. After five years of contentious deliberation, the two chambers of congress – the Senate and House of Representatives – reached a compromise and passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act in October 1986. A month later, Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, signed the legislation and IRCA 1986 became a law. Ultimately, IRCA's provisions sought to reduce immigration by including provisions that would increase funding for border patrols, provide sanctions for employers who hired undocumented migrants and offer legalization to those who had resided in the US for a substantial amount of time (White, Bean, Espenshade, 1990: 93). Although IRCA offered legalization to a number of people who had entered the US illegally before 1982, its provisions were mostly meant to discourage immigration. The IRCA of 1986 was split into six (6) main sections – Title I: Control of Illegal Immigration, Title II: Legalization, Title III: Reform of Legal Migration, Title IV: Report, Title V: State Assistance for Incarceration Costs of Illegal Aliens and Certain Cuban Nationals, and Title VI: Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development, and Title VII: Federal Responsibility for Deportable and Excluded Aliens Convicted of Crimes. Each title focused on a key provision that in theory, would reduce the volume of undocumented migrants. The primary provision is established in Title I and makes it unlawful for US employers to hire undocumented migrants. This provision would require employers to ask for employers to verify the legal status of their employee and to keep proof of

the verification/hiring process for at least 3 years after employment termination. Title II of the Act would allow undocumented migrants to adjust their status if they filed an application within 18 months, could provide proof that they had been residing in the US before January 1, 1981 and has no history of felony. Part A Title III distinguished between temporary agricultural workers from other types of workers. If US employers were able to demonstrate that there are not enough US workers (citizens or residents) then they could petition for a worker from another country to be given a visa for work purposes. This allowed US employers to exploit and capitalize from the labor of undocumented migrants without granting them any rights or offering a pathway to legalization. Part B of Title III increased the number of H-2 visas from 600 to 5,000. The rest of the provisions were smaller in scale and are not directly related to this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Critical Linguistics (CL) was developed by scholars interested in sociolinguistics to uncover the relation between the use of language and structures of power. CDA relies on the concept of history, power, and ideology to examine the way in which discourse is contextual and serves to give social practices meaning (Fairclough 2001: 21). CDA does not call for a specific method or approach and instead functions as a guiding framework for interpretation processes that seek to create discussions about power relations within society.

The work of Aviva Chomsky and Latoya Tenisha Reid were crucial to the development of this thesis. In the initial stages of the research process Chomsky's book on the history of Central America was helpful when writing the background section of this thesis as it contained a detailed overview of NTCs long history of violence and trauma. "Central America's Forgotten

History" delves into the history of European colonialism and the resistance movement that marked Central America's current political and economic state. Chomsky's book informed my understanding of the role that the US played in the destabilization of NTCs through its neoliberal policies. US involvement in Central American affairs is often overlooked in lieu of looking at immigration trends, but Chomsky offers a nuanced analysis of the way in which the two are connected. While this book does offer a comprehensive overview of Central American history, this thesis seeks to expand on Chomsky's work by specifically focusing on the connections between the Reagan administration documents and major newspaper articles to evaluate the extent to which Reagan's presidency has influenced media portrayals. Latoya Tenisha Reid's dissertation was pivotal to determining a methodology that was appropriate for this study. Reid's choice to use a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to analyze the portrayal of Central America offered an appropriate methodology for the examination of national archives and newspaper articles. However, while this thesis only looks at American publication sources, it addresses the research gap by specifically focusing on the government-media documents published during Reagan's presidency during the 1980s.

METHODOLOGY

Given the scope of the research project, an interpretive approach was utilized to analyze both primary and secondary sources. Drawing from Cecelia Lynch's criteria for interpretivist work, this research places much emphasis on the significance of constructing meaning out of social phenomena. This paper contextualizes the representation of Northern Triangle migrants and attempts to "denaturalize dominant explanations, exposing them not as truth but as narratives that are discursively constructed" (Lynch, 2013: 14). In adopting an interpretivist approach, the

intention of this research is to understand the meaning behind why Northern Triangle migrants are presented in the media in a particular way. This paper seeks to create discourse about power relations between the US and Central America and provide context for the negative representation of Northern Triangle migrants in the media. Beyond demonstrating causality, this paper attempts to explicate the codification of immigration policies and reinterpret what it means for the Central America diaspora. It emphasizes the significance of linguistics in constructing the dominant narratives that surround Northern Triangle migrants and the harm in basing "reality" on a single "truth" (Lynch, 2013: 22).

Using a critical discourse analysis framework, this paper examines articles published between 1980-1990 from major newspapers in the US that mention Central American migrants and archives accessed from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. A critical discourse analysis was the chosen methodology for this paper because it uses an interpretive paradigm to showcase that knowledge is socially situated. A CDA allows for the deconstruction of ideologies embedded in the system that maintain and reinforce harmful power relations. It is a method of data analysis that not only looks at the use of language but the underlying messages hidden in the discourse that give social practices meaning. Although discourse analysis often includes verbal communication this thesis is limited to written text. All documents analyzed came from the Ronald Reagan archives or from secondary sources obtained through Proquest's Online Database.

Phase 1: Archives

Situated vis-a-vis the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, archival research was conducted in the Reagan Libary's Research Room to analyze the discourse found in official government documents during the Reagan Era (1981-1989). The first stage of the archive

selection process involved creating an appointment with the archivist to discuss the topic of the thesis and identify which collections are relevant to the topic. After looking through the list of collections available and with the assistance of the archivist on site, six boxes were checked out in the archive room for further inspection. The boxes identified as potential sources for this study came from five different collections: “Latin American Affairs Directorate” “Media Relations Record” “Sweet, Robert W. Files (DPC)”, “Policy Development Records”, and “Ulhamann, Michael: Files”. Since the time spent at the Reagan Library was limited due to location and funding constraints, the archivist recommended briefly looking at the files and taking pictures of what seemed relevant. After the visit, the files were inspected in greater detail and organized into folders based on subject or document type. While I inspected a total of six boxes from five collections prior to, during and after the passage of IRCA 1986, not all files collected proved to be relevant for this research. I focused on several files from Reagan Administration officials just prior to passage of the Act in 1985, as well as dissent from members of the Sanctuary Movement after passage.

Using the research question as a guiding point, archives were scanned, organized, and sorted into folders based on the topic to facilitate the comparison of the archives to the newspaper articles.

Phase 2: Newspaper Articles

For the purpose of this research, major newspaper sources were selected based on their average print circulation in the US and accessibility. Using the key words “Central American Migrants”, secondary sources were obtained from the electronic database of Proquest accessed through the University of California, Irvine’s Library subscription to find relevant newspaper articles. Since the initial search results for “Central American migrants” yielded 330,761 results

the search was modified based on an inclusion criteria of U.S. newspapers published between 1980 to 1990 from the New York Times, The Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal. The key words "Central American Migrants" were typed in the search bar instead of "Northern Triangle Migrants" because the term Northern Triangle was not used until the early 1990s. Although the term Central America includes seven countries (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) most of the people migrating came from the Northern Triangle region so the use of the key words "Central American migrants" is appropriate for the purpose of this thesis.

After using the filter options, Proquest's database yielded 294 search results: *New York Times (212), The Washington Post (pre- 1997 FullText) (48), and Wall Street Journal (34)*. At first, three large files were created (based on publication title) and uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to further narrow down the number of articles, but this strategy proved to be inefficient. Depending on the size of the file, OpenAI could take anywhere from a couple seconds, minutes to several hours. The estimate for the AI coding process for one document (roughly 500-1000 words) was 30 seconds, but for files containing 100 documents it was around 9.5 hours. Although files of up to 50mb could be uploaded, the AI coding feature available through Atlas.ti performed better with smaller files, making it necessary to download all 294 results as individual files and upload each document one at a time. It should be noted that the AI coding option is a beta feature and issues were encountered during the AI coding process. Even when smaller files were uploaded, there were hiccups in the program that prevented the user from using OpenAI properly. Considering the fact that Atlas.ti software is not licensed by UCI and was accessed through a 5-day free trial it felt more feasible to analyze each document manually than to use AI coding. Initially, it was anticipated that AI coding would facilitate and

drastically speed up the initial analysis process, but given the timing, funding, and accessibility constraints manual analysis was deemed a better fit. Programs similar to Atlas.ti including Dedoose, MAXQDA, NVivo, and QDA Miner were identified as potential alternatives, but all required a monthly paid subscription or license. Other qualitative data analysis software that did not require a license or monthly subscription were assessed, but none were particularly useful or appropriate for this stage in the research process.

Due to the large number of files (294), the first round of analysis consisted of looking through each article's abstract and skimming the text using an exclusion criteria to briefly identify which documents were relevant to the research question. Articles in which Central American migrants were not the focal point or were briefly mentioned were disqualified. Even though an advanced search was conducted using the filter options, there were many instances in which articles were included in the search results but contained the key words "central" "american" or "migrants" as separate terms so it was crucial to scan through each article. Of the 294 documents assessed, 53 of them: *New York Times (36), The Washington Post (pre- 1997 FullText) (10), and Wall Street Journal (7)* were found to be potentially useful in the first round of analysis. Rather than focusing on quantity, this thesis was more concerned with quality, so a second round of analysis was conducted. The second round of analysis was more thorough and required taking a closer look at the text.After this step, 11 articles: *New York Times (7), The Washington Post (pre- 1997 FullText) (2), and Wall Street Journal (2)* were identified as useful to the thesis paper and selected for a more in-depth analysis.

Table 1

Number of Publications yielded from the Proquest Database

U.S. Newspapers	Number of Publications

New York Times	212
The Washington Post (pre-1997 Fulltext)	48
Wall Street Journal	34
Total	294

Table 2

Number of Relevant Publications (1st Round of Analysis)

U.S. Newspapers	Number of Publications
New York Times	36
The Washington Post (pre-1997 Fulltext)	10
Wall Street Journal	7
Total	53

Table 3

Number of Relevant Publications (2nd Round of Analysis)

U.S. Newspapers	Number of Publications
New York Times	7
The Washington Post (pre-1997 Fulltext)	2
Wall Street Journal	2
Total	11

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Part One: Archives Analysis

In an attempt to analyze legislation implemented during Reagan's presidency, this thesis uses a similar research design as Carol Bacchi's to examine what the problem is and how it is being represented within the context of the Central American migration crisis. Carol Bacchi's work was used to analyze the selected archives because it has been used in previous studies to

unravel social practices hidden in government documents. In using the '*WPR*' ('*What's the Problem Represented to be?*') approach, an analysis of primary sources is conducted with the goal of unraveling the discourse hidden in the Reagan administration documents situated vi-sas-vis the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. The 'WPR' approach functions by using the six questions, listed below, as guiding points (Bacchi 2012: 21).

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

IRCA 1986

While previous reforms like the Immigration Act of 1965 attempted to limit migration to the US by placing ceilings on the number of persons (per country) escaping political persecution, IRCA used a different strategy. Signed into law November 6, 1986 by Ronald Reagan, IRCA set forth provisions that placed limits on the number of people migrating to the US from other countries; it called for increased security, stricter border controls in the Mexico-US border and sanctions against employers who hired undocumented workers (Finch, 1990: 245). Though it did not target a specific immigrant group, the Reagan administration response to critique of the Act indicated that the provisions primarily targeted those coming from Latin American countries (see discussion below). Additionally, the cutoff date for (January 1, 1982) those eligible to apply for

legalization excluded a number of Central Americans since many of them did not start migrating to the US until the Civil Wars of the 1980s. Not only did the provisions of IRCA 1986 deny many Central Americans the possibility of applying for legalization but it also framed immigration as an economic issue. In fact, several of the memorandums created by Reagan's administration both urged stricter immigration reform and emphasized the need for employer sanctions to limit migration. In a testimony addressed to the National Security Council on the subject of H.R. 3080, the Immigration Control and Legalization Amendment Act of 1985 (leading up to the 1986 Act), Attorney General Edwin Meese asserts that immigration is fueled by the prospect of better job opportunities:

> Concerning legislation, let me begin by saying that the administration stands by the commitments we have made in the past to specific legislative reforms of the immigration laws. Much illegal immigration is caused by the easy entry of illegal immigrants into jobs that are very attractive when compared to employment opportunities in their homelands. Through a provision making it illegal to hire aliens who lack authorization to work in the United States, this problem can be addressed effectively. Employer sanctions are a credible and effective tool in dealing with such illegal immigration (Attorney General Meese 4 Sept. 1985)

General Meese approves of the provision that would give sanctions to employers who hired undocumented workers because he believes that this is the main reason why migrants are coming to the US. In a separate memorandum, Attorney General Meese also notes that allowing immigrants to work is a discriminatory practice that puts American citizens and legal residents at a great disadvantage:

> In fact, S.1200 addresses a most pernicious form of employment discrimination that

> currently exists where employers knowingly hire easily exploitable illegal aliens in preference to American citizens and permanent resident aliens. Additionally, permitting high levels of continued illegal immigration is itself inhumane and discriminatory. It discriminates against American minorities and the young, some of whom are displaced from their jobs by illegal aliens. It also results in discrimination against those overseas who wait, often years, to immigrate legally (Attorney General Meese, 11 Sept. 1985)

Meese affirms that by hiring undocumented workers employers are discriminating against citizens and residents of the US because it creates competition and they serve as an obstacle for those seeking employment. Similarly, Alan Nelson, Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service, expresses his distrust of migrant workers:

> "Many people confuse the illegal worker and the illegal alien welfare cheater with the legal immigrant who has come to contribute to this country as well as benefit from it….Through the placing of sanctions on the knowing hiring of illegal aliens or who are not authorized to work in the United States, the bill addresses one of the the primary reason aliens enter illegally or, after legal arrival, violate the conditions of their arrival" – (Alan Nelson, 9 Sept. 1985)

The selected excerpts shown above reveal a common pattern among the Reagan administration files. Alan Nelson's statement makes an important point to distinguish undocumented migrants from legal migrants. Whereas legal migrants are presented as law-abiding individuals, illegal migrants are referred to as "welfare cheaters" a phrase that holds political significance and has historically been used as a derogatory term against BIPOC communities. Note that while the memorandums do not specifically mention NTC migrants, given the historical context, it can be argued that the text targets Latin American migrants. As is

evident in the memoranda, the issue of immigration is typically mentioned together with the topic of the US labor force. Using Bacchi's six questions to analyze the text, it can be said that the problem being presented is increased immigration and that it is being portrayed as an issue that can be solved if employer sanctions are established. There is an underlying assumption that migrants are leaving their country not because of political persecution but for personal economic motivations. The use of the term "illegal aliens" was identified as a recurring term that was used to denote the legal status of migrants. However, the representation of immigration and the use of the term "illegal alien" is problematic because of the message conveyed. "Illegal alien" is a label that holds much political weight – it is not neutral– because it implies that migrants are criminals (Rubio 2011). It is degrading and dehumanizing because it fails to consider the extraordinary circumstances which lead migrants to leave their country of origin, and instead poses migrants as criminals. As pointed out in Luis F.B. Plascencia's work, there are two main problems that arise when using the term "illegal alien": (a) there is an overemphasis on the agency of migrants and (b) it hardly acknowledges the role of US actors in "shaping human migration from the former to the latter" (Plascencia, 2009: 379).

Soon after the implementation of IRCA 1986, opposition over the terminology used to describe Central American migrants arose. In a letter written to President Reagan, the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth describe Central American migrants as refugees rather than "illegal aliens":

> The testimonies of these refugees, of religious workers in Central America and of human rights agencies have led us to the conclusion that tremendous political and social upheaval in the region is at the root of the displacement of millions of Central Americans and the flight of hundreds of thousands of them to the United States. We

> believe that the foreign policy of the United States is directly responsible for that upheaval. (Sister Mary Canavan, 5 Oct. 1988)

In this letter, the use of the term refugee is intentional and it functions as a political signifier of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth' views on immigration. Unlike the documents written by the Reagan administration, the letter acknowledges the role of the US in the displacement of Central American migrants. Additionally, by providing context for the Central American migration crisis, Sister Mary Canavan of the Sisters of Charity, writing on behalf of the Sanctuary Movement addresses one of the main problems identified by Plascencia – the lack of recognition of the United States' influence on foreign affairs and immigration patterns. Sister Mary Canavan's letter also brings attention to the limited agency that Central Americans have:

> In November 1968 the United States Senate acceded to the United Nations protocol relating to the status of refugees which declares that a person with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion should not be returned to her/his homeland. Refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador continue to flee to our country to escape the threat of persecution, imprisonment, torture, and death and, as such, are truly "extended voluntary departure" status to these persons by broadening the current law for Refugee Nationals to include as eligible Guatemalan and Salvadoran "newcomers" (Sister Mary Canavan, 5 Oct. 1988)

By highlighting the experiences of Central American migrants and describing their reasons for migrating, Sister Mary Canavan offers an explanation as to why the label refugee is more appropriate. However, Sister Mary Canavan's plea was met with opposition by the Regan administration. On President Reagan's behalf, a response was sent to Sister Mary Canavan on November 1988 detailing why EVD is not applicable to Central American migrants:

> Regarding your concerns about the refugee situation in the United States, we have opposed the issuance of Extended Voluntary Departure (EVD) status to large numbers of refugees because the United States simply cannot afford to grant EVD status to all of the untenable. Historically, the United States has been very generous in granting immigrant Visas (Paul Schott Stevens, 11 Nov. 1988)

In Sister Mary Canavan's letter, she lists the large number of refugees migrating to the US as a reason for not granting Central American migrants EVD status. More importantly, Sister Canavan's letter denotes how hegemonic discourse was opposed and resisted by members of the Sanctuary Movement. Dominant narratives surrounding Central American migrants were contested and solidarity movements were created as a direct response to the hegemonic discourse spread by the elites. At the same time, however, the Reagan administration pushed back against the Sanctuary Movement's definition of NTC refugees and disputed the Movement's explanation of refugee's rationale for coming to the U.S.

Part Two: Newspaper Analysis

The second part of the analysis looks for intersections between government discourse and media discourse on NTC migrants. Once the final articles were chosen, each document was reviewed once again but this time common themes or repeating messages were noted by highlighting relevant quotes or phrases. Since the number of articles being analyzed in this stage was significantly less (11) than the number of documents identified in the first round (53), Taguette, a free qualitative research tool, was used to create a codebook. Using Taguette's web server, 11 documents were uploaded and highlighted portions were assigned tags based on phrases or themes that consistently came up. Throughout the process of reviewing each document the tags "illegal aliens", "economic migrants", "refugees", "left-wing", "Reagan",

"criminals", "danger" "political migrants", "fear", "church", "labor", and "sanctuary movements" were created. Each time a document used those terms or mentioned that topic the text was highlighted and a tag was assigned to it. Since several of the tags were similar to one another, the tags listed above were used as markers to facilitate the analysis process. The articles were then discussed and placed under their corresponding domains: Economic Concerns and/or Discrimination and Counter Discourse. The articles were then reviewed a third and a fourth time to ensure that the correct tags were assigned to each highlighted portion.

While older CDA studies primarily look at text with the purpose of analyzing its grammar and syntax, this thesis draws heavily from the work of Fairclough to conduct an intertextual analysis to look at the time, place, and context in which discourse is constructed. Creation of each individual tag and theme were done with the intention of organizing data within a sociolinguistics context to determine whether mass media acts as "agents of hegemony" (Sheyholislami, 2007: 96). This section of the thesis introduces the emerging themes that were identified throughout the analysis of the 11 articles from the NYT, WSJ, and Washington post published between 1980 to 1990. The three domains in which the tags are labeled under present the data such that the portrayal of Central American migrants is organized by economic, social, and political perspectives. The data is organized in this manner because all the tags can be grouped into either of those three categories when analyzing discourse about Central American migrants.

Economic Concerns

After looking at the articles in depth, one of the topics of discussion that arose in the text was about the perceived threat of economic competition. Of the 11 articles analyzed (including news analyses, editorials, and op-eds), more than half of the articles brought forth the idea that

Central American migrants were viewed as competition for the U.S. labor market. Throughout these articles Central American migrants are presented not as victims of exploitation but as competition for "legitimate" U.S. workers. In an editorial piece published for the *Wall Street Journal*, David Rogers provides an overview of the debate surrounding the issue of immigration, specifically about the proposed amnesty provisions that would grant legalization to those who could establish residence in the US prior to January 1, 1982. Due to Texas' proximity to the US-Mexico border, Rogers indicates that it serves as a popular destination for Mexican and Central American migrants which explains why discussions about amnesty provisions is such a sensitive topic for Texans. In the article, Rogers presents the two opposing sides in the Texas Delegation – one side shows their support for the proposed amnesty provisions and the other side condemns it. Statements made by Texas Representatives are also included in text and offer a good representation for what each side values and fears in terms of immigration reform. While El Paso's Rep. Ron Coleman seems to be against immigration reform:

> In Houston, poor blacks and Hispanics in Rep. Mickey Leland's Democratic district watch anxiously as a new wave of Salvadorans compete for low-paying jobs. Far to the west, along the Mexican border, El Paso is fearful of the illegal migration, yet the city's isolation in Texas fosters a certain kinship with its Mexican neighbor, Juarez. "We're out there in the desert together," says Rep. Ron Coleman, a first-term Democrat from El Paso. "We have to rely on one another." These crosscurrents make Texas a major battleground as the House begins voting today on legislation to tighten immigration controls. The contrasting views, reflecting ethnic, economic and geographic differences, are crucial in the debate. (*Wall Street Journal*, Roger, 11 June 1984)

> Texas Congressman Charles Wilson expresses a much different perspective. Wilson even goes so far as to say that:
>
> If they [illegal aliens] weren't there, then poor blacks and poor whites would make more than $3.30 an hour. (*Wall Street Journal,* Roger, 11 June 1984)

The quote above reflects an attempt at stigmatizing migrant workers by instilling the idea that low wages are caused by the influx of migrants in the US labor force. In the excerpt, Congressman Wilson implies that employers are swayed by the cheap labor offered by migrant workers. By making this statement he puts forth the idea that migrants are directly responsible for the wages of other minorities, which is a strategy to pit minorities against one another. Although Rogers does not express his agreement with any of the sides presented, the context in which amnesty provisions are discussed indicate that the topic of amnesty is thought about from an economic standpoint as opposed to a humanitarian one. Nowhere in the article are the conditions of migrants addressed or does the author provide any context for the influx of immigrants.

Even though Latin American migrants are subject to exploitation and exist as commodities in the American labor force (Sherman-Stokes, 2018: 588), the vulnerable space they occupy in the US economy is hardly acknowledged, if at all. Instead, migrant workers are put up against American citizens and residents which creates tensions among both groups. Additionally, in the same article, Roger indicated that when Hispanic voters were asked how they felt about migrant workers, even they indicated that that these workers were responsible for taking their jobs:

> More important, perhaps, is the perception of illegal workers [illegal aliens]. Most respondents couldn't name a specific case, but a majority of the Hispanic voters surveyed

> in Texas' Hidalgo County on the Mexican border said aliens took jobs from citizens. (*Wall Street Journal*, Roger, 11 June 1984)

This viewpoint is in line with other depictions of Central Americans as economic migrants coming to the US for economic reasons rather than political persecution. This portrayal is problematic because it downplays the severity of their situation and reduces it to a matter of personal economic motivation.

Another article for a different publication – *The Washington Post* – also places emphasis on Central American migrants' contributions to the economy, except this time it focuses on what migrant workers bring back to their country of origin's economy instead of the US labor force. Doris M. Meissner, former acting commissions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, wrote in a *Washington Post* Op-Ed that:

> Close to 1 million Salvadorans, i.e., about 20 percent of El Salvador's population, reside in the United States. According to data developed by the Hemispheric Migration Project at Georgetown University, more than one third of Salvadoran families have one or more relatives in the United States. These relatives' earnings supply more than 60 percent of the income for their families at home. Cumulatively, migrant remittances bring more than $1 billion annually into El Salvador, constituting the third largest source of earnings for the country after U.S. aid and coffee exports. (*Washington Post,* Meissner, 29 Dec. 1988)

Once again, this text is consistent with discourse about Central American migrants that frames the issue of migration from an economic perspective. Rather than making the argument that legal remedies for Central American migrants should be employed because of their vulnerability and susceptibility to violence, Meissner argues that migrant remittances constitute a substantial source of income for the migrants' country of origin. Perhaps Meisner's previous role as the

acting commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, explains the use of revenue figures and economic statistics to assess Central American migrants' situation. Despite Central American migrants varying reasons for migrating, government officials over-emphasize their economic motivations which contributes to the legal violence they experience and ultimately results in creating "liminal legal statuses" (Coutin, 2011: 574) that do not address the root of the issue. Even officials like Meissner, who argue that the Salvadorans should not be deported, focus on economic rationales in the country of origin.

The use of the term "economic migrants" was also noted as an emerging concept in the discourse. All of the articles from WSJ, the Washington Post, and at least half of the articles from the NYT use the term "economic migrants" which is particularly interesting for this thesis because it showcases how the issue of Central American migration is oftentimes framed as one about economic hardships as opposed to political violence. The use of the terms "economic migrants" to describe Central Americans is intentional and has long been debated because of the weight it holds in legal spaces. Labels are important political signifiers of the legal status each group occupies because each term has its own set of connotations and meanings associated with it. Hence, use of the term "economic migrants" is particularly significant because it offers valuable insight into a person's attitude on the issue of immigration. The excerpt below comes from an editorial piece published for the New York Times and serves as a good example of how labels can serve as indicators of immigration policy preferences (Rucker, Murphy, Quintanilla 2019: 1151).

> Like the church movement, the cities are acting in the belief that Federal authorities have improperly refused to classify Central American immigrants as refugees. But the Federal Government adheres to the United Nations definition, which reserves the pitiable status

> of refugee for people with a well-founded fear of political persecution. Such migrants are different from people who enter this country seeking opportunity. Economic migrants should take their place in line with all other applicants around the world (*New York Times*, 27 Dec. 1985)

Looking at the tone used in the text, there is a change in the attitude expressed when referring to refugees and economic migrants. In this piece, the author not only makes a clear distinction between refugees and migrants using the definition provided by the United Nations, but also suggests that the cities should adhere to these guidelines. Moreover, while it is true that the situation of refugees and economic migrants differs, the definition provided by the United Nations is contested because it leaves room for differences in interpretation that render exclusion practices (Charles, 2006: 202). In other words, classification of Central American migrants as refugees or economic migrants is based on the political agenda of those in power (Charles, 2006: 190). Furthermore, the last sentence in the paragraph reveals an ideological slant in the author's perspective. The way in which the author expresses themselves about economic migrants, suggests that the refugee label used by the church movement and by the city is misguided, hence implying that Central American migrants should receive the same treatment as other economic migrants. However, the issue with using “economic migrants” in discussions about Central American migration is that it paints the narrative that Northern Triangle migrants flee their country solely for the economic opportunities available in the US which is not entirely accurate. In fact, scholars have suggested that the Central American migration crisis can be attributed to both economic and political reasons (Hamilton, Chinchilla 1991: 76). In spite of this, however, the Reagan administration continuously pushed the narrative that Central American migrants are “economic migrants”.

> The Reagan Administration, however, has insisted that the Salvadorans are "economic migrants," here illegally and not entitled to stay. Over the years, the Government has sent more than 50,000 of them back home. The new immigration bill has made things even harder, for about half of the Salvadorans in the United States arrived after Jan. 1, 1982, and therefore do not qualify for the general amnesty. (*New York Times,* Crittenden, 3 Oct. 1988)

The above excerpt comes from a New York Times article written by Ann Crittenden – two years before the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 – juxtaposing the rhetoric used by the church and the Reagan administration. Beyond presenting the two sides that emerged as a result of IRCA 1986, the statement also unveils an attempt by the media to expose the government's strategy to deport large numbers of Northern Triangle migrants by classifying them as “economic migrants”.

> As is the case with illegal Haitian immigrants, the Government says the vast majority of Salvadorans seeking asylum are not "political refugees," who would face persecution if they were deported to their war-torn country, but rather "economic migrants" fleeing poverty. Refugees' lawyers and leaders of assistance organizations concede that it is all but impossible to disprove that assertion. But some say the Administration's policy toward the refugees is colored by foreign policy considerations. (*New York Times*, Lindsey, 4 July 1983)

Reinhold and Lindesy’s statement makes a connection between IRCA 1986 and Northern Triangle migrants’ legal status, by highlighting the role of the administration in establishing discriminatory provisions that target specific groups or communities. To put it differently, the articles draw attention to the Reagan administration's contribution to the legal violence

experienced by Central American migrants caused by the framing of their situation as one about economic motivation.

Discrimination and Counter Discourses

> Here's someone who has broken the law, and you're saying it's OK," [criminals] says Rep. Martin Leath of the proposed amnesty - (*Wall Street Journal*, Rogers, 11 June 1984)

In the above excerpt, Rep. Martin Health voices his distrust over Guatemalan migrants by insinuating that they are criminals. While Congressman Health's statement may seem extreme, findings show that depictions of Central American migrants as criminals is a common trope in the media (Reynolds, 2015). Moreover, this criminalization of migrants, specifically Central American migrants, is dangerous because mass media has the ability to shape public perception. Regardless of whether or not these portrayals are accurate, media representations matter because societal attitudes about immigration can be more or less favorable depending on how a particular issue or group is framed (Kalfeli, Frangonikolopoulos, Gardikiotis, 2022: 1790). Stereotypical portrayals of Central American migrants in the media reinforce dominant threat frames that evoke a sense of distrust in the public. In essence, representations of Central American migrants as criminals due to their legal status contributes to the dehumanizing discourse that functions to justify "their oppression and/or marginalization as a response to perceiving the migrants as threats in all spheres" (Reid 2021: 88). Subsequently, Central American migrants experience discrimination at the institutional and individual level.

However, several of the articles have shown effort to expose the discriminatory practices employed by the US government. In particular, the articles shed light on the exclusionary provisions established by the Refugee Act of 1980 that prevent Central American migrants from receiving refugee status. In fact, Arthur Helton wrote an Op-ed for the New York Times where

he brought attention to the low number of Northern Triangle applicants that were granted asylum:

> Still further ideological discrimination confronts those asylum seekers who manage to enter the country. In 1984, only three of 761 Guatemalan applicants (1 percent) were granted asylum; only 328 of 13,373 Salvadorans (3 percent) were. This contrasts sharply with the rates for Bulgarians (52 percent), Hungarians (28 percent) and Russians (51 percent). (*New York Times,* Helton, 2 April 1985)

Based on the figures provided by Helton it is evident that there is a stark difference between the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status from European countries versus NTCs. As Helton explains, the US shows strong favoritism to those fleeing from communist countries:

> The United States has traditionally proclaimed a generous and compassionate approach to refugee problems. The rhetoric has not, however, always been matched by actual accomplishments, and in practice people fleeing Communist-dominated regimes have been favored over those fleeing merely authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. (*New York Times,* Helton, 2 April 1985)

Furthermore, in order to fully understand these numbers, it is necessary to provide context for the origin of the term "refugee". As defined by the United Nations during the Geneva Convention in 1951, a refugee is someone who is escaping political persecution (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14). With the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the US adopted the UN's definition of a refugee and changed the eligibility criteria for asylum seekers. In a New York Times article, Paul Lewis explains:

> The present international machinery for dealing with refugees, essentially comprising the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and a convention defining the rights of

> refugees, dates from the 1950's when international concern was focused on the plight of Europeans left homeless by the World War II and the spread of Communism in Eastern Europe. The 1951 Convention, for example, defines refugees in essentially cold-war terms, saying they must have fled to another country to escape "a well-founded fear of persecution." (*New York Times,* Lewis, 29 May 1989)

Lewis' observation brings up an important point of discussion. Even as the composition of asylum-seekers changed, the US government continued to use the definition for a refugee that was created during a time in which those fleeing their country came from communist-dominated regimes (Anker, 1983: 161). The definition for refugees fails to account for changes in the international realm that have led to an increased number of asylum seekers from Latin American countries. Consequently, many Northern Triangle migrants are not eligible for asylum despite being victims of tremendous violence. As Lewis puts it:

> Today, most refugees are in the developing world and are victims of violence and natural disasters, not ideological persecution. (*New York Times*, Lewis, 29 May 1989).

The Washington Post also did not shy away from calling out the US for showing favoritism towards certain groups:

> Asylum is often denied in the United States and Canada for reasons that have less to do with the legitimacy of refugee claims than with the governments' immigration enforcement concerns, and, in the case of the United States, with ideological biases and favoritism toward certain nationalities and against others. (*The Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 1988)

Treatment of refugees is greatly influenced by the government's foreign policy interests and

objectives, ergo, categorizations are often created with ulterior ideological and economic motives in mind (Charles, 2006:193). Similarly, the New York Times denotes that:

> Too often, however, foreign policy considerations distort the decision-making process. Officials have been reluctant to recognize political persecution under the U.S.-supported regime in El Salvador; they granted asylum to only 3 percent of Salvadoran applicants last year. (*New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1989)

Likewise, in a New York Times article Robert Lindsey provided his insight on the refugee crisis and emphasized the significance of foreign policy objectives when attaching meanings to labels:

> As is the case with illegal Haitian immigrants, the Government says the vast majority of Salvadorans seeking asylum are not "political refugees," who would face persecution if they were deported to their war-torn country, but rather "economic migrants" fleeing poverty. Refugees' lawyers and leaders of assistance organizations concede that it is all but impossible to disprove that assertion. But some say the Administration's policy toward the refugees is colored by foreign policy considerations. "If we gave the refugees asylum, it would be an admission that the Government in El Salvador, which we support, violates human rights," said Peter Schey of the National Center for Immigrants' Rights here. (*New York Times,* Lindsey, 4 July 1983)

All in all, the New York Times were determined to bring attention to the political violence experienced by Central American migrants and the Reagan administrations complicit role:

> "We've already seen more than 40,000 deaths there," she told the judge, referring to El Salvador, "mostly all civilians killed by Government forces. The Reagan Administration continues to support that Government, the Government that creates the refugees." (*New York Times*, Reinhold, 28 June 1984)

CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to analyze the combined role of the government and media in the construction of Central American migrant narratives. With the research question "How did the legacy of Ronald Reagan's presidency help set the precedent for the modern rhetoric surrounding migrants from the Northern Triangle region?" in mind, a critical discourse analysis framework was used to examine 11 articles from the NYT, WSJ, and Washington Post alongside documents from the Reagan archives. Intertextual analysis of the data revealed that lexical variation amongst each publication source framed the issue of Central American migration as an economic or humanitarian crisis depending on their own political ideologies. Documents created during the Reagan Administration had a tendency to use the term "illegal aliens" and was more in line with the work put out by WSJ. The WSJ, notorious for being on the conservative side, had a tendency to use the term "illegal aliens", while the NYT used "refugees" more, and the Washington Post used a mix of both. Lexical variation is especially important in the media, because each term has its own connotation and is associated with certain attitudes and ideologies. Patterns in the data point to conflicting framings of Central American migration that portray the issue as an economic one or humanitarian crisis depending upon publication source. As seen throughout the text, rhetoric is employed as a tool by the elite to create discourse that reinforces the status quo. Archival analysis of the Reagan Administration documents reveal that there were obvious attempts by the Reagan Administration to push a anti-immigration reform agenda, but it was not entirely successful in the media. Findings show that the narratives created by the elite are contested in both academic spaces and in non-elite spaces. As is evident through the examination of Sister Mary Canavan's letter addressed to Reagan's administration and in some of the articles analyzed from major publication sources, dominant portrayals are resisted. In

particular, articles published by the New York Times show strong resistance to the narratives advanced by the Reagan administration through the construction of counter discourses. At the same time, however, the fact that newspapers such as the NYT still had to present the administration rationale as legitimate interpretation of NTC migration, demonstrates how official discourse sets the tone for media coverage.

In sum, mass media functions as a source of information for the masses and has the ability to manipulate the discourse surrounding Central American migrants to best fit their ideologiesThrough overt or subtle framing strategies of social issues. This is problematic because public perception is easily influenced by the media and publication sources that employ hegemonic rhetoric can create a sense of "othering" that frames migrants from NTCs as outsiders (Reynolds 2015: 28) . For instance, using the terms "illegal aliens" or "economic migrants" dismisses their lived experiences and associates their legal status with criminal activity and labor competition. Such portrayals contribute to the dehumanization of Central American migrants and is a form of legal violence. Additionally, painting migrants as undesirable hinders conversations about ways to improve their situation. It provides insight as to why Central American migrants occupy a liminal space in the legal spectrum. On the other hand, findings also revealed that media publications have agency and do not necessarily occupy the role as "agents of hegemony". In fact, findings point to a movement of resistance via the construction of counter discourses.

Research on this topic is significant because social construction of Northern Triangle migrants as undesirable reinforces harmful narratives and gives rise to dehumanizing discourse. This issue is of relevance to the political field because exclusionary provisions are a form of legal violence and are partly responsible for the liminal space Central American migrants occupy.

Although a CDA was identified as an appropriate methodology for this project, there are some limitations to this approach. For one, there may be differences in the interpretation of the text analyzed between the reader and the researcher (Sheyholislami). It is important to recognize and acknowledge that the researcher's identity may inadvertently influence the interpretation and selection of the documents analyzed. However, such differences are possible in any type of methodology (Lynch 2013). Additionally, there were funding and timing constraints that limited the analysis of the Reagan archives, as well as media sources. A more critical analysis requires the examination of administration rationales for supporting NTC militaries to assess how political violence in Central America is explained and justified. It is also imperative to examine a wider range of media sources, including papers across the U.S. and from different time periods, to see whether papers in more conservative parts of the country and from more recent times were/are more accepting of Reagan administration discourse. While this study does not analyze contemporary discourse, future research could focus on examining how the criminalization of Central American migrants has expanded from an economic realm to encompass all aspects of their lives.

Finally, individuals doing research on this topic should consider analyzing the discourse surrounding Central American migrants in Mexican-based newspapers. Being that Mexico is a Spanish speaking country it would be interesting and beneficial to compare Mexican-based newspapers with American-based ones. Due to differences in ideologies, cultural values, societal norms, language, and nationalities, it would also be beneficial to juxtapose the metatexts of Mexico with the US between the 1980s to now.

REFERENCES

Bacchi, C. (2012). Introducing the ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’approach. *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic interventions and exchanges*, 21-24.

Cable, V. (1969). The 'Football War And the Central American Common Market. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, *45*(4), 658-671.

Campbell, K. M. (2016). Operation sojourner: The government infiltration of the sanctuary movement in the 1980s and its legacy on the modern central American refugee crisis. U. St. Thomas LJ, 13, 474.

Carling, J. (2017). Refugee advocacy and the meaning of ‘migrants’. *PRIO Policy Brief*, *2*, 2017.

Charles, C. (2006). Political refugees or economic immigrants?: A New" Old Debate" within the Haitian immigrant communities but with contestations and division. Journal of American Ethnic History, 25(2/3), 190-208.

Chomsky, A. (2021). Central America's Forgotten History: Revolution, Violence, and the Roots of Migration. United States: Beacon Press.

Cities Can't Make Immigration Law: [EDITORIAL]. (1985, Dec 27). *New York Times*

Coutin, S. B. (2011). Falling outside: Excavating the history of Central American asylum seekers. *Law & Social Inquiry, 36(3), 569-596.*

Crittenden, A. (1988, Oct 03). El Salvador, U.S.A.: [Op-Ed]. *New York Times*

Douglas, P., Cetron, M., & Spiegel, P. (2019). Definitions matter: migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. *Journal of travel medicine,* 26(2), taz005.

Draft Reply Paul Schott Stevens (on behalf of the President) to Sister Mary Canavan. Central America – Public Mail to the President (1), RAC Box Act 3, Latin American Affairs Direcotrate. NSC: Records. *Ronald Reagan*

Library.

Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, *5*(11), 121-138.

Ferreira, R. G. (2008). The CIA and Jacobo Arbenz: History of a disinformation campaign. *Journal of Third World Studies*, *25*(2), 59-81.

Finch Jr, W. A. (1990). The immigration reform and control act of 1986: A preliminary assessment. *Social Service Review*, *64*(2), 244-260.

Friedman, M. P. (2003). There Goes the Neighborhood: Blacklisting Germans in Latin America and the Evanescence of the Good Neighbor Policy. Diplomatic History, 27(4), 569-597.

Gleijeses, P. (1989). The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *21*(3), 453-480.

Hamilton, N., & Chinchilla, N. S. (1991). Central American migration: A framework for analysis. Latin American Research Review, 26(1), 75-110.

Helton, A. C. (1985, Apr 02). SECOND-CLASS REFUGEES: [OP-ED]. New York Times

Houston, S. D., & Morse, C. (2017). The ordinary and extraordinary: Producing migrant inclusion and exclusion in US sanctuary movements. Studies in Social Justice, 11(1), 27-47.

Kalfeli, N., Frangonikolopoulos, C., & Gardikiotis, A. (2022). Expanding peace journalism: A new model for analyzing media representations of immigration. *Journalism*, *23*(8), 1789-1806.

Kosho, J. (2016). Media influence on public opinion attitudes toward the migration crisis. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, *5*(5), 86-91.

Lewis, P. (1989, May 29). New Aid Strategy for Latin Refugees. *New York Times*

Lindsey, R. (1983, Jul 04). A FLOOD OF REFUGEES FROM SALVADOR TRIES TO GET LEGAL STATUS. New York Times

Lungren, D. E. (1987). Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, The. San Diego L. Rev., 24, 277.

Lynch, C. (2013). Interpreting International Politics. United States: Taylor & Francis.

Lynch, E. A. (2011). *The Cold War's Last Battlefield: Reagan, the Soviets, and Central America*. Global Academic Publishing.

Macekura, S. (2011). "For Fear of Persecution": Displaced Salvadorans and US Refugee Policy in the 1980s. Journal of Policy History, 23(3), 357-380.

Martin, D. A. (1982). Refugee Act of 1980: Its Past and Future. *Mich. YBI Legal Stud.*, *3*, 91.

Memo, Edwin Meese to Strum Thurmond, Sept. 11, 1985, folder: Immigration (re: Immigration Reform Act of 1985), RAC Box 4, Latin American NSC: Records. *Ronald Reagan Library.*

Memo, Edwin Meese to National Security Council, Sept. 4, 1985, folder: Immigration (re: Immigration Reform Act of 1985), RAC Box 4, Latin American NSC: Records. *Ronald Reagan Library.*

Molinari, L. (2013). Counterinsurgency and Union Movement in El Salvador (1967-1968). *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, *8*(1), 7.

Parsons, K. H. (1978). Key policy issues for the reconstruction and development of Honduran agriculture through agrarian reform.

Plascencia, L. F. (2009). The" Undocumented" Mexican Migrant Question: Re-Examining the Framing of Law and Illegalization in the United States. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, 375-434.

Reid, L. T. (2021). The Portrayal of Central American Migrants in North American Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis.

Reinhold, R. (1984, Jun 28). CHURCHES AND U.S. CLASH ON ALIEN SANCTUARY. *New York Times*

Reynolds, C. (2015). " Illegal Children": Metaphors and Terminology Used In Newspaper Coverage of Central American Minors During Summer 2014.

Rogers, D. (1984, Jun 11). The latino tide: Curbs on illegal aliens, due for a house vote, split texas delegation --- amnesty for those in U.S. before 1982 is hot issue in areas of job scarcity --- should bosses pay penalties? *Wall Street Journal.*

Rosenblum, M. R., & Brick, K. (2011). US immigration policy and Mexican/Central American migration flows. *Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute*.

Rubio, A. (2011). Undocumented, not illegal: Beyond the rhetoric of immigration coverage. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, *44*(6), 50-52.

Rucker, J. M., Murphy, M. C., & Quintanilla, V. D. (2019). The immigrant labeling effect: The role of immigrant group labels in prejudice against noncitizens. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *22*(8), 1139-1160.

Ryan, D. (1999). Colonialism and hegemony in Latin America: An introduction. *The International History Review*, *21*(2), 287-296.

Schlesinger, A. (1967). Origins of the cold war. Foreign Affairs, 46(1), 22-52.

Sherman-Stokes, S. (2018). Reparations for Central American Refugees. *DENv. L. REv.*, *96*, 585.

Sister Mary Canavan Letter to President Reagam. Central America – Public Mail to the President (1), RAC Box Act 3, Latin American Affairs Direcotrate. NSC: Records. *Ronald Reagan Library.*

Slater, J. (1987). Dominos in Central America: Will they fall? Does it matter?. International Security, 12(2), 105-134.

Stanley, W. D. (1987). Economic migrants or refugees from violence?: A time-series analysis of Salvadoran migration to the United States. *Latin American Research Review*, *22*(1), 132-154.

Statement of Alan Nelson. Sept. 9, 1985, folder: Immigration (re: Immigration Reform Act of 1985), RAC Box 4, Latin American NSC: Records. *Ronald Reagan Library.*

Streeter, S. M. (2000). Interpreting the 1954 US Intervention in Guatemala: Realist, Revisionist, and Postrevisionist Perspectives. The History Teacher, 34(1), 61-74.

The Shout From Central America; Here: Migrants and the Need for Safe Haven: [Editorial]. (1989, Feb 26). *New York Times.*

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). (2010) . Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Geneva: United Nations.

Villarruel, K. L. (1986). The Underground Railroad and the Sanctuary Movement: A Comparison of History, Litigation, and Values. *S. Cal. L. Rev.*, *60*, 1429.

White, M. J., Bean, F. D., & Espenshade, T. J. (1990). The US 1986 immigration reform and control act and undocumented migration to the United States. *Population Research and Policy Review*, *9*, 93-116.

Wood, E. J. (2019). Poets and Prophets of the Resistance: Intellectuals and the Origins of El Salvador's Civil War, by Joaquín Chávez. *The English Historical Review*, *134*(567), 515-517.