

Under the Shadow of Trump: Portrayals of Undocumented Youth in Young Adult fiction from 2016-2017

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Abstract

The current president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, has consistently disparaged immigrants entering the U.S. but he has saved his most vitriolic language to describe undocumented immigrants who come from countries south of the U.S. border. He has called this Latinx population criminals, rapist, drug dealers, and animals among other derogatory terms (Davis, 2018). In referring to undocumented immigrants Trump maintains a constant barrage of dehumanizing language that permeates print, digital and social media. He has fomented an atmosphere of hate, intolerance and xenophobia. It is under this verbal avalanche of denigration and vilification of undocumented immigrants that emanates from the Trump administration that I sought to explore how undocumented Latinx immigrant youth were portrayed in young adult literature written near the end of the Trump presidential campaign and into his first term (2016-2017). Content analysis and a critical multicultural analysis (CMA) framework were used to provide a lens on how language and power intersect and are used to (Botelho & Rudman, 2009) give or deny characters voice and agency (Moore and Cunningham, 2006). CMA provides young adult (and all) readers a lens to not just read stories but to compare and critique the elements of truth revealed in them. Realistic portrayals of undocumented youth in young adult literature can serve as a counter narrative for adolescents against ill-informed and racist rhetoric.

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. They're sending us not the right people.

It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably--probably--from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast. [2015 announcement speeches of 2016 presidential hopefuls](#) , (Time, 2015)

Introduction

During President Trump's 2015 – 2016 presidential campaign and into his first year in office he has made his position about undocumented immigrants and immigrants from Mexico and Latin American countries clear. In a closed door meeting held in the Oval office on January 11, 2018 Senator Dick Durbin related that the President said, “things which were hate-filled, vile and racist” (Sullivan, 2018) as he spoke about immigrants from African nations and others under

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Temporary Protective Status (TPS) such as those from Haiti and El Salvador. While the word choice in that specific meeting was being parsed in the media the president's rhetoric on undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Latin America has been clearly detailed in his campaign speeches and presidential rallies calling them criminals, rapists, drug dealers, murders, and using the term illegal aliens which in itself connotes a sense of danger and otherness. His hate-filled speech is used to foment a psychological uprising against and to create an environment of fear about those "illegal aliens" who enter our country and our homes to rape and murder us. Yet, the data do not support his abhorrent rants. Nowrasteh (2015) reviewed the research on immigrant criminality and concluded:

Both the Census-data driven studies and macro-level studies find that immigrants are less crime-prone than natives with some small potential exceptions. There are numerous reasons why immigrant criminality is lower than native criminality. One explanation is that immigrants who commit crimes can be deported and thus are punished more for criminal behavior, making them less likely to break the law (Nowrasteh, 2015).

Ignoring the research data the president has stepped up measures to arrest and deport undocumented immigrants no matter of their perceived "criminal" status. According to a Washington Times article (Miller, 2017) border crossings are at their lowest in 45 years, while interior arrests, such as the recent raids on 7-eleven convenience stores nationwide have increase as well as overall arrests of undocumented immigrants.

It is under this constant barrage of denigration and vilification of undocumented immigrants that pours forth almost daily from the Trump administration and assails the very air around us that I sought to explore how undocumented immigrant youth were portrayed in young adult (YA) books published during his presidential campaign and into his first year in office. It is important for young adults to read, understand and learn from books that have substantial elements of truth in them no matter if the person who holds the highest office in the nation is perpetuating stories that contradict those truths.

Researcher Lens

I must position myself as a researcher and discuss my interest in books that depict undocumented immigrants. I am a Mexican American. I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Both my parents were born in Mexico. My father came into this country as a seven-year old undocumented youth. He and his family fled the Mexican Revolution and sought a life of peace in the United States. My father and his family came into this country when the borders were considered open and before the term "illegal alien" was used. His family established residency as Californians, worked on the railroad, in furniture manufacturing and as gardeners. My father attended Los Angeles public school through eighth grade, began working and did not become a naturalized citizen until after he had enlisted in the army during World War II, spent four years fighting in the European campaign as an infantryman and was twice wounded in battle. As a U.S. citizen he returned to Mexico, married my mother and brought her to the U.S. legally. My father rarely spoke of his journey from Zacatecas, Mexico to California perhaps because he was a young boy and his recollection was not clear. He did tell one story but it focused on fleeing Mexico not the journey north. He told us how they fled with his aunt and cousins and that his aunt was pregnant at the time. A Mexican soldier thinking she was hiding something of value under her dress took the butt of a rifle and jammed it violently into his aunt's midsection to make sure she was indeed

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pregnant. Perhaps the long arduous journey north paled in comparison to fleeing the horrors of the revolution and war. While my father did not talk much about his journey north the elementary students I taught often shared their harrowing stories of border crossing with me. They would tell me bits and pieces of their story before, during or after school until I had a thorough picture of what they went through or they felt they had shared enough. I have friends who were or currently are undocumented and they too have described the arduous and dangerous journey north as well as their reasons for leaving their home country. I brought all of these stories and information on “undocumentedness” to the reading of the young adult texts focused in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA) as defined by Botelho & Rudman (2009) uses a critical stance to examine text within a cultural, historical and linguistic context and a multicultural lens to view the multiple world views and histories embedded in texts and brought forward by the reader. CMA was used as a conceptual frame to closely analyze and interrogate the selected works of fiction. CMA according to Johnson and Gasiewicz (2017) “is an important tool for text analysis that compels readers to examine representations of power, authenticity, accuracy, and the sociopolitical and historical context present in the narrative” (p. 29). Furthermore, CMA provides an analytical lens that demands close scrutiny of whose story is told, how it’s told and the power relations that are established, how identity develops, language is used and issues of social justice are situated within and beyond the literature (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). CMA can highlight how power is introduced and used in young adult literature dissecting how characters are situated, and portrayed through language and descriptive interactions. Botelho and Rudman 2009 argue that CMA “requires examination of the historical, sociopolitical, and discursive forces that have constructed these texts” (p. 120). In order to do this an examination of how dominant ideologies and political and social discourses are interwoven overtly and subliminally in texts is required. To begin this process a discussion of the terms illegal alien/illegal immigrant versus undocumented immigrant/youth is needed.

Illegal Alien vs Undocumented Immigrant

Throughout this paper, unless quoting Trump, the federal immigration laws (who still use the term illegal alien) or the selected text, I chose to use the word undocumented immigrant or undocumented youth. According to Chomsky (2014),

The 1924 law, in addition to establishing the quota system, created the concept of illegality by making entry without inspection illegal, and making deportability permanent by eliminating the statute of limitations. Before 1924, what made a person deportable was his or her membership in an excluded class; furthermore, after the person had been in the country for a period of time, his or her presence became legal despite prior excludability. Now, a person who entered without inspection could be, technically, “illegal” (pp 45).

Chomsky also notes that the term “illegal” immigrant did not apply to Mexicans who were not considered immigrants but migrants who could cross the border easily until 1965 when equal quotas were imposed on all countries and the terms illegal alien and illegal immigrants became part of the legal and social lexicon. There have been efforts dating back to the 1990s to eliminate the use of the terms illegal alien and illegal immigrant. In 2009 Supreme Court Justice Sonya

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Sotomayor chose not to use the legal term illegal immigrant but undocumented immigrant in a written opinion, in 2013 the Associated Press discontinued the use of the term illegal alien/immigrant, in 2015 the state of California deleted the term “alien” from the state’s labor code and since 2016 the Library of Congress no longer uses “illegal alien” as a subject heading (Hawkins, 2017). I, too, have chosen to use the term undocumented immigrant to describe anyone who has entered the United States without the necessary documentation or one who has entered using the proper channels but have allowed their visas or entry paperwork to expire.

Agreeing with Botelho and Rudman (2009), I also see young adult literature “as social transcripts” that provide an anthropological frame in which to examine historical, cultural and the sociopolitical machinations of the past and present. To select the texts for analysis I relied on my knowledge of young adult multicultural literature to search online on multiple sites for texts published between 2016 and 2017 that focused on undocumented youth who had come from Mexico or certain Central American countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras. I specifically focused on these areas due to my research interests and expertise and because immigrants from these geographic locations were under constant attack by Trump. I selected the years 2016 to 2017 to better capture the text that may have been influenced by his presidential campaign that began in 2015 and continued through the 2016 election and into his 2017 presidency. I purposefully selected contemporary realistic fiction texts that felt timely and read as if they highlighted the news stories streaming from the media today. In all I found three texts that fit the criteria.

CRITERIA	
Year Published	Between 2016-2017
Geographic Location	Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras
Character Focus	Undocumented youth/immigrant – Unaccompanied Minor – asylum seeker
Genre	Young Adult Literature - Contemporary Realistic Fiction

The three books selected were written by American authors, one who is fluent in Spanish and has parents who were Cuban Immigrants (Alexandra Diaz), one who has lived and studied the border environment for many years (Steve Schafer) and finally one who is involved in a nonprofit that serves detained immigrants (Marie Marquardt). All three books were published in the United States between 2016 and 2017. Each book had characters who were between the ages of twelve to nineteen, were fleeing their home country located in Mexico or Central America unaccompanied by a parent and their journey ultimately led them north to enter the United States as undocumented immigrants or asylum seekers. It is important to note that minors under the age of eighteen traveling without a parent and who cross into the United States are considered unaccompanied minors (UAC). Unaccompanied minors have a different status and there are laws that provide them with due process. Under the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPA) an unaccompanied minor who is caught crossing into the US without documentation is detained and processed as a potential victim of human trafficking. These minors are provided temporary Continued Presence status (some may eventually be issued T- or U-visas).

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They are under the jurisdiction of Health and Human Services (HHS) who provide them with shelter, health care, and education until they can present their case to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This process can take months or up to several years. If an unaccompanied minor is from either of the two contiguous countries Canada or Mexico, they are usually screened by Customs Border Protection (CBP) for trafficking and if no apparent signs of trafficking or other dangers due to persecution are apparent they are usually quickly returned to their country of origin. Under the Trump Administration most have been quickly sent back to Mexico.

BOOKS SELECTED				
Title	Year Published	Geographic Location	Genre	Character Focus
<i>The Only Road</i>	2016	Guatemala	Contemporary Realistic Fiction	Undocumented youth/immigrant Unaccompanied Minor
<i>The Radius of Us</i>	2016	El Salvador	Contemporary Realistic Fiction	Asylum Seeker Unaccompanied Minor
<i>The Border</i>	2017	Mexico	Contemporary Realistic Fiction	Undocumented youth/immigrant Unaccompanied Minor

The following questions guided my examination of the three narratives:

- 1) In what ways are undocumented youth or unaccompanied minors from south of the U.S. border represented in text published from 2016 to 2017 compared to how they are portrayed in the media?
- 2) How do these texts portray authentic and current issues that impact the lives of the characters?

All three texts were analyzed through critical content analysis and using a (CMA). Brief summaries of the three text selected for further analysis are provided:

- *The Only Road* (Diaz, 2016). This story focuses on 15 year old Angela and her 12 year old cousin, Jaime. Angela's brother is killed by the local gang for not accepting their "invitation" to join them, now Angela and Jaime are receiving similar threatening requests. Fearing for their lives their families borrow and cobble together enough money to send them to the U.S. to join Jaime's older brother, Tomas. Readers join the two cousins as they begin the arduous and dangerous journey from Guatemala, across the rugged and perilous Mexican landscape, to the border town of Ciudad Juarez and finally into the U.S.

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- *The Border* (Schafer, 2017). What begins as a joyful quinceañera celebration ends brutally when the guests in attendance are gunned down by drug narcos. All are executed except four teenagers, 16 year old cousins Arbo and Pato and siblings, 19 year old Marcos and 15 year old Gladys who are in the desert smoking during the killings. Hearing the gunshots they return to the party and witness the final scenes of the massacre. Marcos locates a gun and kills one of the narcos and now they must flee for their lives. Hunted by the killers they leave their hometown in Mexico and flee to the U.S. crossing into the arid, hot terrain of dangerous gangs and traffickers. This story chronicles their perilous journey across the Sonoran desert into the U.S.
- *The Radius of Us* (Marquardt, 2016). Two brothers, 18 year old Phoenix and 12 year old Ari must flee their home in Ilopango, El Salvador when gang members begin to heavily recruit and harass Ari to join the gang. Reaching the U.S. border the brothers turn themselves in as asylum seekers. Phoenix is immediately taken to a detention center and processed as an undocumented adult. Ari is processed as an unaccompanied minor (UAM) and placed in a youth detention facility in Texas. Phoenix is issued an ankle bracelet and released to church workers who have hired an immigration attorney to help him with his asylum case. The story uses flashbacks to describe the brothers' journey from El Salvador to the U.S.

Critical Content analysis

The books were initially read to capture the essence of the characters' stories and gain an understanding of their journey (Rosenblatt, 2005). As I read each book the first time, many of the stories my students and friends had recounted emerged from the pages and I made personal connections to the texts. I read the texts a second time using a critical multicultural analysis to look at language use, image portrayal and authentic representation of events and settings. Prior to reading the text a third time, I read several nonfiction texts on undocumented immigrants crossing into the United States from the southern border. Texts such as Jason De Leon's (2015) *The Land of Open Graves*, John Moore's (2018) *Undocumented*, Sonia Nazario's (2013) *Enrique's Journey* and Luis Alberto Urrea's (2004) *The Devil's Highway*. These informational texts, as well as others, informed my understanding of the severely hazardous journey taken by undocumented immigrants and helped me situate the information from the three narrative texts in a real world context. In addition, I spent ten days exploring the Sonoran desert and areas close to the Nogales, Mexico and Nogales, Arizona border in August 2018 to visualize the terrain and experience the climate in the heat of the summer. I also relied on my memory of exploring the border cities of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas. Finally, I thought of the sensations and emotions I felt in southern Arizona each time I crossed a border patrol checkpoint or drove next to a Border Patrol vehicle wondering if my dark hair and tanned skin would be cause for closer inspection and detention.

I read the stories a third time to gain a better understanding and frame the figured worlds that surfaced and coalesced from the characters' words and stories. As I read each book, I also compared it to media stories that circulated around Trump's comments or tweets about

undocumented immigrants. Through figured worlds, I made linkages between the worlds formed by the characters and the world formed by Trump's specious words. The concept of figured worlds is defined by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52).

I charted the main characters across each text to see how the figured worlds emerged, were navigated and how protagonists were positioned or positioned themselves in these worlds. I found two major foci that seemed integral to the construction of the figured worlds: 1) figured worlds from the inside out and, 2) figured worlds from the outside in.

Figured Worlds from the Inside Out

Figured worlds from the inside out focuses on the worlds created by the characters, as they inhabit multiple worlds. The world of their home country, the world they find themselves in on their journey, and the world in the U.S. The discussion that follows focuses on examples from the three texts that highlight the themes of figured worlds from the inside out.

Leaving home from the Inside Out

Contrary to how the current President of the United States may portray undocumented immigrants who come to the U.S. as gang members, many of them are young adults and unaccompanied minors who do not want to leave their home country. Leaving home is a difficult decision and they leave because they feel there is no other choice, they leave because risking their life on the dangerous journey is better than sure death at the hands of the local gangs or drug cartel. All three texts reveal the theme of the necessity of leaving home. All of the characters realize that they must leave to survive. In *The Border*, the characters are fleeing sure death by a local drug cartel and Marcos clearly states the decision to leave:

"Which leaves us one option." He points north. "We cross the border."
"Aren't they building a wall?" Arbo asks. "Who knows. And even if there is one, then we climb it. Or we go underneath it. I don't know how people get to the U.S., but they do it. Every day. And once we get there, we're free. We leave this *chingado* country and the gangs behind." (p. 49)

We are all defenders of our home. We might make disparaging comments about the weather, and yes, even the gangs and crime but home is personal and a place we always fiercely defend. Diaz's (2016) book, the *Only Road* takes place in an unnamed village in Guatemala. The reader gets a sense that geographically their village is not too far from the border with Mexico since once the cousins Angela and Jaime have to flee their village it takes hours, not days, to get to the border of Mexico. Even though there are gangs in the village who threaten them and eventually kill a family member neither want to leave the warmth, security and love of their family and friends. Once Jaime's cousin and Angela's brother, Miguel, is killed by the gang, family members talk about what to do to protect Jaime and Angela from the same fate. Both are receiving "invitations" to join the gang and threats if they do not. Angela talks about running away. Jaime begins to fantasize what running away would be like and he imagines them running away into the rainforest of

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Guatemala not north to the border. If he and Angela must leave the world of family and friends then, “Jaime imagined himself living in the rainforest, swinging through the trees like Tarzan, a pet jaguar as his watchdog, surviving off bananas and insects. For a moment he got lost in that world—the hundreds of shades of green, the wildlife camouflaged within those greens—it’d be fun. For a day” (p. 20). While danger lurks in their village through gang violence Angela and Jaime see Guatemala as home, a home they love and do not want to abandon. Once on the road injured and deep into their struggle to journey north Angela again has the desire to go home. She tells her cousin Jaime she wants to return “Back home. To Guatemala.” (p. 225).

Angela hugged the knee of her good leg to her chest. “I’m tired of being scared all the time. I miss my parents and Abuela. I want to hang out with *mis amigas*. I want a bath and regular meals. I want things to go back to how they were.” (p. 225)

For Angela her connection to her home and her world is vital for her wellbeing. Her attachment to her family and friends helps form her identity and creates her world. While neither cousin wants to leave their village the family knows that it is in their best interest and for their safety if they flee the country and go far enough away from the reach of the local gang and so the cousins reluctantly begin their journey north. Similar in *The Radius of Us* by Marquarot (2016) we meet characters who have deep ties to their home country and do not take fleeing north lightly.

In *The Radius of Us* we meet eighteen year old Phoenix who has left the gang life back in his village of Ilopango, El Salvador and has traveled to San Salvador on a full scholarship to attend the university. He has left his younger brother, Ari, back home with friends and Sister Mary Margaret to watch over him. Phoenix sees this opportunity as a way to create a world of success and to permanently leave the gangs and forge a new life for himself and his younger brother. Phoenix sees his life heading in a successful trajectory until he gets news that twelve-year old Ari, is being forced to run with the same gang that Phoenix left. Phoenix is well aware of the brutality, maliciousness and evilness of the gang life and abandons not only his dreams of an education but of staying in his home country of El Salvador to save Ari from a terrible life and the very real possibility of death. Phoenix and Ari flee El Salvador and begin their journey north. While both brothers understand why they must leave for their own safety neither one truly wants to leave their home. Ari attempts to resist leaving home but Phoenix forces him on the journey.

Stupid Ari thought he was going to fight back. He thought he was going to be a hero. I knew what would come next, and I was not going to let that happen. So I went back there, and I got him. Kidnapped him, basically—my own brother—we headed north. Ari fought me the whole way, telling me I should live my own stupid life, telling me that the *federales* were all over the neighborhood these days—that they would protect him. But I knew too much about the so—called protection offered by the federal police, and I wasn’t gonna live with that on my conscience. So I dragged his scrawny ass all the way through Mexico. Ari punched me in the gut, like, twice a day the entire time I was hauling him toward the border. (p. 49)

Similar to Angela and Jaime, Phoenix feels that leaving home is the only option available to keep them safe. It is not a choice they want to make it is a choice they feel they must take. In Schafer’s

(2017) *The Border* we meet characters who are enjoying life and celebrating a quinceañera, a young girl's fifteenth birthday and introduction to society. The farthest thing from their mind is fleeing their home country.

For the characters in all three books, the figured world of home was a place they created and imagined as a sense of family bound by love, commitment and friendship. Within this space they felt secure and empowered to withstand the negative discourse from the outside which was symbolized by the constant threats to their safety by gang or criminal drug cartel members. Due to the integrity of the family unit they held an imagined position of power to arm themselves against the outside social forces that were attempting to erode their unity. Once the sense of family is disrupted the power position shifts and the characters find themselves imagining and mediating a new sense of self on the journey north.

Their World on the Road from the Inside Out

It has been well documented that the journey north from Central America through Mexico and to the United States is arduous, treacherous, dangerous and most often deadly (De Leon, 2015, Moore, 2018, Nazario, 2007; Urrea, 2004). The young characters in *The Border* whose families have been killed by the drug cartel have very little support and money as they prepare to flee their home in Mexico. They learn bits and pieces from other travelers as they begin their journey. Pato hears first-hand about the dangers of the journey from a fellow traveler who had three previous crossings:

“But do you know what can really kill you out there?” “No” “Everything. The sun. The heat.

Bad water. Snakes. Scorpions. Spiders. Wolves. Cougars. Bears. *Chupacabras*. And that's only the desert stuff. Then there's the human element. If you get caught and you're lucky, you'll meet the U.S. *migra*. Their border patrol is a one-way ticket back. All it costs you is a beating. Not much. A black eye, a broken arm. Most people live through it. They're the nice ones.” (p. 98)

Chased by the drug cartel Pato, Arbo, Marcos and Gladys have no choice but to plunge forward into the Sonoran desert. Their journey is not easy; it is filled with severe dehydration, multiple injuries and tragedy. It is at his most vulnerable when Pato seizes power from the drug cartel and outsmarts them to get his group to safety. Unfortunately, only three of the four get away safely.

For travelers from Central America they have the added trek of first getting to the Mexican border. Angela and Jaime (*The Only Road*) begin their journey as they leave their village in the early morning hours to evade notice by gang members. Pancho, a friend and neighbor who conducts business in Mexico, offers to smuggle them into the country. He picks them up early in the morning and puts them in the bed of his pickup truck buried under bags of used clothing he will use to bribe the Mexican border guards and some to sell once in Mexico. Angela and Jaime carry a bag of food, a few thousand dollars sewn in their clothing that took days to collect and will be used to pay the coyotes or guias (guides) to take them from Mexico into the US, and the memories of their family

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and village. Angela and Jaime as well as Phoenix and Ari begin to form a new figured world as they leave the border of their home country and journey north. Once in Mexico Angela and Jaime need to develop a strategy for their journey. Angela begins to position herself to take charge as she tells Jaime, “There’s a lot we will need to sort out along the way. Our parents spent more time borrowing money than ironing out the details.” (p. 47). Their journey is difficult and is filled with desperation, fear, injuries, hunger, and tragedy. Both Angela and Jaime learn to make decisions, care for each other and others they meet on the road and ultimately, survive to make it to the U.S.

Their world in the United States from the Inside Out

The only book that provides the reader with a glimpse of what life is like for undocumented youth who manage to cross the border into the U.S. is *The Radius of Us*. Unlike the other two books, the characters, Phoenix and Ari go to the border and turn themselves over to immigration as asylum seekers. Ari, as a minor traveling without a parent and is considered an Unaccompanied Minor and is placed in a youth facility located in Texas until his case is adjudicated. Phoenix is released from his detention center to live with two relatively wealthy women from a religious organization who took legal action to have him live under their care until his asylum case is decided. The story focuses on Phoenix who follows all the rules and regulations placed upon by the court while trying to live a somewhat normal young adult life that includes volunteering in a community garden, meeting a young girl, falling in love and making sure his brother Ari remains in the U.S. This story does paint a very positive portrayal of life in the U.S. for Phoenix. His story is singular – perhaps there are others like him in the U.S. but the majority of asylum seekers are not as fortunate. Life for many undocumented immigrants or asylum seekers, especially under the Trump administration is not easy nor luxurious. While Phoenix has several setbacks in regard to his asylum case, there is evidence that he can claim religious persecution as a reason for fleeing El Salvador. Claiming religious persecution will make his asylum case much stronger and give him a much better chance of staying in the United States. The book ends without resolving this issue. The surviving characters of the other two books (*The Only Road* and *The Border*) make it into the U.S. and the story ends soon after. The reader is left to imagine what life could be like for Jaime, Angela, Pato, Arbo and Marcos in this new world. Jaime provides a brief look into his thoughts when he states at the end of the *The Only Road*, “What was it going to be like to live here, where there was no one? Would he ever be able to speak English properly? What if he never stopped missing his family back home? What if, after everything, they still got deported?” (p. 276). *The Border* ends with Pato promising “to never take this for granted. To always remember what that walk was like, and what it cost us to get here. I don’t know what we’ll do in Denver, or wherever we end up. Truth is, I don’t know how I will face tomorrow. Each breath is still hard. But I’ve been through enough to know that we have an opportunity. And we owe it to ourselves and to all the others to make the most of it.” (p. 342).

At the end of all three novels there is the possibility that all will work out well for the characters. In reality, under Trump’s shadow the United States is not a safe place for undocumented youth nor for asylum seekers.

Figured Worlds from the Outside In – Under Trump’s Shadow

Figured worlds from the outside in are the narratives about undocumented immigrants that president Trump has created at his rallies, in his speeches, and his Tweets during his presidential campaign and into his term in office. What follows are just a few of the malicious messages and racist stereotypes he has perpetuated. There have been many pejorative comments but the ones listed below help create the narrative that the characters in the young adult books discussed in this paper face as they cross the border fleeing one violent life to enter another filled with verbal microaggressions and insults.

From Trump’s world view immigrants south of the U.S. Border are less than human:

“We have people coming into the country or trying to come in, we’re stopping a lot of them, but we’re taking people out of the country. You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are, Trump said. “These aren’t people. These are animals.” (Davis, 2018)

According to Trump’s perspective, they are not just “animals” but creatures that infest:

Democrats are the problem. They don’t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like MS-13. They can’t win on their terrible policies, so they view them as potential voters! (Twitter 6:52 AM - 19 Jun 2018 @realDonaldTrump)

It is not enough to berate certain populations Trump also demeans entire countries calling Haiti, El Salvador and parts of Africa “Shithole Countries” (Beckwith, 2018).

Finally, In Trump’s view he sees undocumented immigrants, who journey thousands of miles and across the hot, arid desert, many who are in terrible shape as they cross the border, as “invaders.”

We cannot allow all of these people to invade our Country. When somebody comes in, we must immediately, with no Judges or Court Cases, bring them back from where they came. Our system is a mockery to good immigration policy and Law and Order. Most children come without parents. (Twitter 8:02 AM - Jun 24, 2018@realDonaldTrump)

The president not only unleashes a verbal assault of his own but his words as racist and twisted as they are seem to hold cache with certain populations. He has spread his venom against the Latinx people wide and far. One example is of a Mexican American gardener, Esteban Guzman and his mother who were approached by a woman yelling at them to “Go back to Mexico.” “Why do you hate us?” Guzman ask. “Because you’re Mexicans. Rapist, animals and drug dealers.” The woman was parroting Trump’s words (May, 2018). Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident the President of the United States has poisoned the well and many Americans have taken a drink.

Conclusion

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The school population in many U.S. cities has changed dramatically. There are many undocumented youth sitting in classrooms today some who came across as unaccompanied minors and are awaiting adjudication, some who came across as infants or young children with their parents and many more American born students who have an undocumented parent (or parents) at home (Passell & Cohn, 2016). Having texts in their classrooms that provides an honest and realistic narrative for the reasons why many undocumented youth are willing to flee their home country and risk their life to enter into the U.S. is an important tool to counter the specious rhetoric emanating from the White House. Adolescents should not only see themselves honestly represented in texts but should also be able to learn about their peers through realistic portrayals.

All three texts discussed in this paper attempt to provide a clear description of what it is like for Mexican and Central American tweens, teens and young adults to have to make the difficult and possibly fatal decision to undertake the perilous journey to the United States. Diaz's (2016) *The Only Road* and Schafer's (2017) *The Border* provide readers with a realistic look at the dangers of crossing into the U.S. Neither book glamorizes the arduous trek nor shies away from the reality of death on the road. Marquardt's (2016) *The Radius of Us* mentions a further danger of crossing the desert through Mexico, abduction by drug cartels to work as child laborers in their drug operation as well as the terror that awaits them should they return home. This book also provides just one version of life in the U.S. – a life that is not enjoyed by many asylum seekers and undocumented youth. Each of these books should be presented as just one possible “figured world” and representation of the life and journey of an undocumented youth willing to risk their life for the possibility of a better and more secure one. More texts that share multiple perspectives and tell honest straightforward stories about border crossing into the U.S. are needed.

Trump's verbal shadow casts a dark presence over the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. There is a need for more young adult novels and texts that counters this narrative. Books that inspire a critical approach to the issues immigration presents in this country.

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