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Modern migrant agricultural workers

“Agriculture is not about producing food it is about producing profit... food is a side effect”
-Ecologist Richard Levins (Angus, 2016, p.158)

Imagine you are a Mexican undocumented migrant trying to cross the Arizona desert in 122-degree heat. The hot sun blares on your back as you constantly scan your surroundings as you walk, trying to avoid snakes, dehydration, and guards holding guns. Your money is hidden, wrapped tightly around your body but you know you still risk being robbed. You have a long journey ahead of you: once you arrive in the United States, there is no guarantee how you will find your way to the farm where you will work, relying on the help of many, jeopardizing deportation at every step.

If you arrive, you will work long hours for minimum pay, in potentially hazardous conditions of pesticide exposure, lifting heavy equipment with few safety precautions, and housing crowded with hundreds of other workers. You will have little if any access to health care and no access to government assistance despite paying sales and even perhaps income taxes. You might move from farm to farm, as the seasons change to find new work, or you might return to your home, to see your family for a brief time and to prepare to do the process all over again. You are chancing everything, including your life, to do this. What structures drive this movement? This thesis seeks to understand the impact of industrial agriculture and policy on migrant labor by examining the social, economic, and political issues facing migrant workers in the United States agricultural industry. It also seeks to take the analysis one step further by exploring the role democracy can play in imagining a better future.

Introduction:

Modern Migrant Agricultural Labor

Modern migrant agricultural workers experience violence in a plethora of ways from the dangerous journey to America, unsafe workplace conditions, the many physical and psychological barriers to health, and even federal and state policies. These migrant workers, particularly from Mexico and Latin America are unwanted, discriminated against, abused, and necessary, performing some of the nation's most dangerous work. Simultaneously pulling in and pushing away, the capitalist system that creates the need for migrant labor is intertwined with a political system that makes the worker illegal. Using a critical political theory lens, this thesis explores the roots of this violence performed on bodies by examining the social, economic, and political causes and consequences of the issues migrant workers in the United States today face today. In addition to diagnosing why these problems occur, this thesis examines a few possible alternative arrangements to combat this structural violence.

The industrial food system in the United States is dependent upon the exploitation of migrant workers, whose bodies bear the cost of providing food to United States supermarkets. At the same time, the obstacles and inefficiencies of the United States immigration system effectively create the structures for continued exploitation by prohibiting migrant workers in the United States from obtaining legal work authorization and a path to citizenship. Without work permits or citizenship, agricultural workers' face increased health risks and lack of oversight or regulations in the workplace (Fitch et al, 2017, p.3). Examining migrant labor, then, reveals how this violence is embedded in the industrial food system as well as how macro structures perpetuate inequality and harm agricultural workers.

The advocacy organization “Farmworker Justice” estimates that approximately fifty to seventy-five percent of farm workers in America are undocumented workers, and approximately eighty percent of all farm works are immigrants (Fitch et. al, p. 2). The conditions under which migrants and undocumented workers live and work are among the most dangerous and unsafe spaces in the country. Largely from Mexico and other Central American counties, migrant farmworkers comprise much of America’s farm labor work force (Liebman and Augustave, 2010, p. 192).

Exposure to pesticides, unsafe work conditions and procedures in processing facilities, heavy machinery and equipment, lack of health care, inadequate housing, and extreme poverty all characterize the migrant worker in America today (Fitch et al, p.2). Factors such as poor or no training, language barriers, minimal pay, inability to gain documentation, and geographical and cultural isolation put migrant workers at an extremely high risk for workplace injuries and abuses. Despite the inherent dangers of farm work and these vulnerabilities, United States labor and health laws for agriculture provide less protection than any other industry due to a long history of agricultural exceptionalism under the law (Liebman and Augustave, 2010, p. 193).

Just as migrant workers struggle with physical health they also deal with psychological stressors as well. Working for low wages for many hours a day, without access to education or medical care, can contribute to high amounts of economic stress and pressure on migrant workers. Food insecurity among children of migrant workers is prevalent, which can contribute to depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, and a series of other psychological consequences. Separation from family is very common among migrant workers, further putting them at risk for depression (Fitch et. al, 2017, p.19). Migrant workers are also

extremely vulnerable to trafficking, and need protections set in place to make them more secure.

Migrant workers face a variety of challenges in representation, legal protections, and healthcare access. Because they are not citizens and therefore do not have the right to vote, they often do not have any kind of political representation (Fitch et. al, 2013, p.27). An additional psychological barrier they face is the issue of symbolic violence towards them, the naturalization of social asymmetries. As people experience the world through their mental schema and body compartments in a social world, they make the social order including hierarchies appear to be natural. Through this process of making sense of the world people will often misrecognize oppression as something that is natural because it fits their mental and bodily schemata as they perceive. This does not happen consciously, it is an unconscious process that happens through our perceptions (Holmes, 2013, p. 167). For migrant workers, this means that they often unknowingly consent to their own domination by participating in this “social game” in the first place. Both the dominant (American non-migrant citizens) and the dominated (the migrant workers) are victims of symbolic violence, however it affects them differently.

Labor migration is not exclusively North-South; it is truly a global phenomenon. While this paper focuses on struggles of migrant workers in the Americas traveling from the South to the North, much of labor migration occurs across the Global South, and in many places outside of the Americas. The scope of this thesis is intentionally narrow, confined to the Americas to show the impact of specific agricultural policy towards migrant workers leaving Mexico and Central American countries to work in the United States. The experience

of these workers in this part of the world is unique due to a specific colonialist historical past, neoliberal policies, and economic structure of capitalism.

This thesis begins by using critical political theory to examine issues migrant workers face working in the United States today. The first chapter focuses on the interconnected nature of exploitation between people and the land. The second chapter uses technological rationalization, false consciousness, and double movements to show how specific issues migrant workers face are tied to multiple facets and contradictions of capitalism. The third chapter then uses discourse analysis to define and characterize language commonly used to refer to migrant workers and its implications on policy. Much of the discourse associated with migrant workers is intentionally excluding, dividing and separating migrant farmworkers from the rest of society. The fourth chapter discusses alternative labor arrangements and their potential for improving the lives of workers. It looks specifically at cooperatives, the attempt to institute workplace democracy and empower workers through agency, and examples of this attempt in the United States today. This chapter also explores the possibility of other spaces to assist migrant workers in their struggle including labor unions, worker's organizations, and nonprofit organizations. Finally, the thesis explores the concept of using utopia to allow individuals the ability to imagine and create a more liberated society.

Chapter One:

The theoretical framing of industrial agriculture in capitalism

Critical political theory allows a unique examination of the economic underpinnings of migrant agricultural labor in the Americas. Drawing on the works on political theorists and the ideas described by Karl Marx in the third volume of *Capital*, this chapter examines how the process of exploitation of the land through capitalist agriculture causes environmental degradation. In industrial agriculture, the land is exploited through the labor process, revealing the inherent interconnection among the land and the people making this land productive.

It is impossible to separate the exploitation of the people from the exploitation of the land in capitalism; they are intricately connected. The second section of this chapter explores the domination of migrant workers' bodies through veiled violence. These concepts are important in framing the experience of migrant workers in the United States today. Building upon this frame, this thesis will explore common issues migrant workers face and illuminate the economic underpinnings of these issues, opening the space for an alternative through democracy.

Land, Labor, Capitalism and the Metabolic Rift

The exploitation of people and the exploitation of land are inherently interconnected. This is underscored by Karl Marx in the third volume of *Capital* as he develops a systematic critique of capitalist "exploitation" of the soil through large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture. Marx describes this as a "rift" in the "metabolic interaction between man and earth" or in the "social metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life" through the

removal from the soil of its constituent elements, requiring its “systematic restoration” (Foster, 1981, p. 73).

Labor is, first of first of all, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature... the labor process is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting capture-imposed condition of human existence”(Marx, 1976 , p. 283).

Through this “metabolic rift,” profit-seeking capitalism harms the environment as well as the workers who tend the land.

Labor is the process through which humans interact with and transform the land, indicating how the exploitation of each is interconnected. For Marx, labor is only a source of material wealth it is also the process by which humans leave their mark on the land “Labor is the father of material wealth and the Earth is its mother.” For industrial agricultural farms to succeed (most farms in the United States), they must rely on both natural resources of the land, and the labor of the migrant workers. Under capitalism, however, the whole system is based on value. Value is a function of the exchange-value dimension of the commodity. The magnitude of value is a function of labor time measured in quantitative terms. Wealth, a function of the use-value dimension of the commodity is measured in terms of the quantity and quality of products produced. This is contradictory, as value is dependent on the expenditure of labor time, and what is produced is based on an abstract value. Capitalism is dependent on nature, but at the same time destroys that which it requires. The “metabolic rift” is a result of simultaneous growth of large-scale industry and agriculture that have increased alienation, or the disconnection, between people and the land. The rift occurs because the rate at which capitalism extracts resources from the land is faster than the rate at

which the land can replenish itself. In capitalism, the land is a space to be exploited, rather than holding inherent value deserving protection.

This same process of capitalism that exploits the environment through labor also exploits the migrant worker, who in societies in the Global North are treated as if they are less than human facilitating this exploitation. It is labor that enables the process of metabolic rift to occur, and in the case of Migrant workers, there is a rift not only between capitalism and the land, but also capitalism and the migrant worker's body. These impacts of the metabolic rift are particular to the bodies of migrant workers. Capitalism degrades the land and the bodies of migrant workers through an unbalanced use of chemicals and fertilizers. In addition, large-scale capitalist agriculture prevents true "rational" application of the science of land and soil management. For example, the waste produced by society should be recycled back into production as part of a complete metabolic cycle to prevent environmental degradation (Foster, 1981, p.195).

Instead, industrial agriculture pours toxic wastes into the environment without proper abilities to maintain balanced systems, because doing so would hinder profits, and the environment, and migrant worker's bodies are both viewed as free resources for capitalism to exploit. The current capitalist system is incapable of the consistent rational action it would take to have sustainable social metabolic relationships because of the rate at which it must operate due to the constant need to increase profit and grow exponentially (Foster. 1981, p.77).

Pesticides are substances that are used to prevent or kill organisms (pests) that are harmful to crops. Herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides are all pesticides, with herbicides accounting for 76 % of pesticides applied by United States farmers in 2008 (Fitch et al, 2017,

p. 7). Exposure to pesticides has been linked to a variety of health hazards including skin conditions, respiratory problems, certain types of cancers, reproductive issues, as well as heart, liver, and kidney issues, and many more. Despite a reduction in recent years of pesticide use overall due to awareness, most farmers in the United States today still rely heavily on pesticides. One effect of this use is the increasing occurrences of pesticide related illnesses of migrant workers. The scale of this, though, is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons. First, pesticide poisoning is often underreported as crop workers do not seek healthcare because they often do not have access to healthcare. Second, as migrant workers are often poor, do not speak English, and are at the risk of being deported, they often do not report pesticide poisoning. In addition, it is difficult to measure pesticide exposure among migrants because they often cannot seek medical treatment. As a result, are not properly diagnosed or treated, and it can sometimes take many years to develop into a serious health issue (Fitch et al., 2017, p.7). The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 10,000-20,000 farmworkers are poisoned on the job due to pesticide exposure (The Migrant/Seasonal Farmworker, 2014).

This problem occurs under capitalism because the migrant worker's body does not hold value. Though tools are available to protect workers from pesticides, migrant workers remain unprotected because the focus of industrial agriculture is not human or environmental health, it is profit. Capital benefits from the use of cheap migrant labor because capitalism can lower the value of its labor power using migrant workers thereby increasing surplus value. The systematic pressure on capitalists to maximize profit leads to capitalists externalizing costs because this system only works if the reproduction costs can be held in check. This requires appropriation of massive amounts of unpaid work outside the

commodity system, the “free gifts of nature.” Historically these have included women’s work and slave labor, but in this context the exploitation is broadened to include the work of migrant workers. Capitalism, and even more so neoliberalism as we see capitalism today, has changed since Marx’s time. But the basic economic driver of profit seeking at the expense of human well-being remain today.

Domination and “Veiled Violence”

In addition to exploitation of people and the land, modern capitalist society is also characterized by domination and “veiled violence” towards migrant workers. This occurs because in capitalism, the two foremost offsprings of affluent society (such as the United States) are the escalation of commodity production and productive exploitation; both which permeate all aspects of private and public life (Marcuse, 1969, p.7). Today, nearly every aspect of modern society is geared towards selling as many commodities in as little time as possible. Wrapped up in this excessive commodification, the so-called consumer society and politics of consumer capitalism have created a “second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 5). In the one-dimensional society, false needs, driven by profit, are so integrated into a system of production and consumption that destruction and waste are no longer seen as irrational, and oppositional action and thinking are evacuated.

Migrant workers are not seen as humans within the neoliberal capitalist system, instead their bodies are commodified and abused through the system of capitalist agriculture. Profit maximization and competing for the lowest possible price drive global agricultural markets, and the entire system is dependent on workers being at the very bottom of the

hierarchy. Capitalist restructuring is the primary force behind migration in addition to influencing immigration and labor policy (Choudry and Hlatshwayo, 2016, p. 4).

The crisis of migrant workers in the industrialized food system cannot be separated from the economic and political systems that rely on this “veiled violence.” Through domination, neoliberal capitalism and the productive forces have created the technological veil that covers the brute presence and the operation of the class interest in the worker through a process of domination (Marcuse, 1969, p.12). Systems of migrant labor are characterized by domination through a separation of the process of reproduction of the labor force and the production of the labor force. For migrant workers, quality of life will not truly improve until their bodies are no longer commodified in this way and they are viewed as human beings.

Chapter Two:

Capitalism and migrant workers

Modern society today is characterized by the emergence and occurrence of technological rationality. Capitalism acts in a double movement: simultaneously pulling migrant workers in through availability of jobs while pushing them away and calling their bodies illegal. To support these claims, this thesis uses examples such as pesticide exposure and poor workplace conditions to connect the situation of migrant workers today to the economic system of neoliberal capitalism.

These themes show the connections between capitalism and violence towards migrant agricultural workers. However, this does not have to be the case. Democracy can play a role in improving workplace conditions if we allow ourselves to imagine an alternative possibility.

Poor working conditions and Technological Rationality

The structure of farm work today is intricately connected with the conditions of where migrant workers live and work. In this environment, capitalist society today is characterized by domination and technological rationality, the act of using principles of scientific management in the workforce (Marcuse 1964, p.147). Technological rationality is one form of scientific management that emphasizes that conditions in society can be improved through technological, rather than political, social, or economic, advances. For example, it is not perhaps ethically or socially acceptable to allow people to live and work in dangerous conditions and yet we do. Why we do so is linked to the technical rather than social nature of work in a capitalism society where people become appendages of the machine. Farm owners and managers are not immoral people, they are simply “doing their

job” and following the logic of capital. Scientific management is the management of a business through scientific principles to increase efficiency. It does this by viewing humans as numbers, and making decisions through cost-benefit analysis. Combined, technological rationality and scientific management characterize modern capitalist business practices, including industrial agriculture.

The struggle for existence is determined by technological rationality, as it has allowed capitalists to increase productivity and the economic, political, and cultural enterprises, while creating the appearance of a higher standard of living for some. The issue, however, is scientific management also rationalizes the most destructive and oppressive features of this system, including the inhumane treatment of migrant labor. Migrant workers are simply bodies capable of work in this system, rather than dynamic and valuable humans.

For example, capitalist agriculture requires manual labor, the use of dangerous machinery, and other hazards that place farm workers at risk for musculoskeletal damage. Agriculture holds the highest fatality rate of any sector. In 2013, there were 22.2 deaths per 100,000 employees in agriculture (Fitch et. al, 2017, p. 11). What contributes to this danger is often language barriers as well as hazardous workplace conditions. Workers can also suffer from extreme weather and environmental conditions. In addition, it is known that reporting of injuries in the agricultural sector is highly underestimated (Fitch et al., 2017, p. 11) so it is difficult to know the exact number of migrant workers who are injured or hurt because of hazardous workplace conditions.

Agricultural workers are often exposed to both natural and synthetic agents that are inhaled as particular matter, placing field workers at an extremely high risk for decreased respiratory function (Fitch et al., 2017, p.13). Migrant agricultural workers often do not have

access to health care due to financial, legal, and linguistic barriers. Lack of transportation or insurance, the high cost of care, care hours that conflict with work schedules are all reasons that contribute to migrant workers lacking proper healthcare (Fitch et. al, 2017, p. 26).

While farm managers might appear to have the agency to change workers' conditions, the corporatization of United States agriculture combined with the growth of international free markets makes it extremely difficult for farm managers to vastly improve the lives of the workers due to technological rationality. The farmers' job is to keep the business running at the lowest possible cost to continue turning a profit. The logic of capital does not support improving the lives of migrant workers by improving workplace conditions or giving them access to education or learning English. That is not their job. In fact, if they spend additional money to increase workers' pay or improve the conditions of labor camps they risk going out of business (Holmes, 2013, p. 52). They also risk losing their workers completely if the workers develop the skills and the ability to earn a higher wage somewhere else.

Technological rationality creates, facilitates, and maintains structural violence as it is enacted by market rule, and then channeled by racism, sexism, classism, and anti-immigrant bias. Farm executives can be extremely ethical, good people who do not want to impose harm on their workers, many want to treat their workers well, and participate in volunteer work and social activism (as with any occupation, there will be those who bring racial biases, but they do not personally aim to make workers lives more difficult). The point is technological rationality normalizes treating migrant laborers poorly as the farm owners are simply doing their jobs. They are responding to the system in which they live, and are left with the choice to play by the economic rules of the current system or risk losing their own

jobs. This example emphasizes how violence against migrant workers is a structural issue, not an individual issue.

One major way technological rationality is dangerous is through the normalization of violence. For many white people living in produce growing regions of the United States near migrant communities, the suffering of migrant workers is normalized (Holmes, 2013, p. 169). People justify the dangerous living conditions of migrant workers based on what is perceived as normal for them. Believing that the conditions must be better than their conditions at home in Mexico, (often without any firsthand knowledge of validity of that statement), structural violence toward migrant workers is normalized.

The Double Movement of migrant workers: Unwanted but needed

The neoliberal capitalist system simultaneously pulls migrant workers in through the availability of jobs while at the same time pushes them away, telling them that they are not wanted and labeling their bodies as illegal. Political theorist Karl Polanyi argues that capitalism has created “double movements” over the past two hundred years that bounce power back and forth between laissez-faire economic policies and the protection of social life from the destructive impact of market pressures (Polanyi, 1945, p. 33).

Migrant laborers survive on low wages contributing to economic production because the family, community, and state externalizes the cost of labor force renewal and benefits from the system of labor migration. Contradictory political and economic forces enforce the separation of these processes, simultaneously requiring cheap labor and banning migrants from entering the country. Neoliberal Free Trade policies such as NAFTA, The North American Free Trade Agreement, reinforce the availability of cheap migrant labor. The cheap cost of United States subsidized crops eliminating indigenous agricultural jobs in rural

Mexican communities, NAFTA is just one example of how neoliberal economic and political forces simultaneously perpetuate violence towards migrant workers.

Chapter Three:

Discourse in industrial agriculture: language and policy

Critical discourse analysis is the exploration and identification of specific words to examine underlying power relationships. This chapter begins by explaining why discourse is important and relevant in explaining the experience of migrant workers. It then examines specific language commonly used to refer to migrant workers.

These words include “migrant,” “Mexican” and “illegal.” The chapter concludes with an analysis of specific agricultural policies and the implications for migrant workers in order to show how these policies have led to the increasingly vulnerable position of migrant workers in agriculture today and argue for a democratic alternative.

Discourse Analysis: Power in Production and Reproduction

Discourse analysis is useful in analyzing how power is reproduced and how it changes over time. Power is a potential, defined as possibilities created within the social structures in which groups or individual agents act. Critical discourse analysis analyzes policy documents and texts to see how power has changed (Boreus and Bergstrom, 2017, p. 3).

Critical discourse analysis also aims to investigate social inequality expressed and legitimized by language use. Essentially, critical discourse analysis shows how words used to categorize people matter, as it often indicates a power dynamic. Using discourse analysis to understand the words used to refer to migrant workers and policy towards migrant workers can provide valuable insight to the power dynamics of migrant workers. Discourse analysis is

extremely useful in unpacking specific ideologies, worldviews, and frameworks contained in a text. The linguistic structure of specific words or phrases can often offer a detailed look into the intentions and cultural context of a specific word or words (Boreus and Bergstrom, 2017, p.5). Analyzing terms including “farmworker,” “migrant,” “Mexican”, and “illegal” reveal power structures associated with migrant workers and helps to articulate the complex and unique experiences of these workers in the United States.

What is a “farmworker”?

According to the Migrant Clinicians Network, the term migrant farmworker is used to describe people working temporarily or seasonally in farm fields and other agricultural occupations. These workers perform extremely difficult work for very little pay. Guest workers who live in the United States through the H2A program are also considered to be in this category (Epps and Furman, 2017, p.1)

Many of the words used to describe migrant agricultural labor are rooted in class and race-based connotations. The term “farmworker” does not apply to everyone who is employed by a farm. The managers, owners, administrative workers, supervisors, crew bosses, and field bosses are not called farm workers in practice, they are referred to as their specific job title. The term “farmworker” strictly refers to workers who are working directly in the fields, harvesting fruits and vegetables by their hands (Holmes, 2013, p.186).

in the web of life: Ecology “migrant”?

The word “migrant” linguistically refers to anyone who migrates for work, who moves from different locations as they work. But the word migrant is not commonly used to describe businesspeople who travel for work. Those are called “international businesspeople” or some other similar term. The word migrant has strong, lower-class ethnic connotations.

Commonly referred to as “unskilled,” in the United States, the word “migrant” is most commonly used to describe poor, Latin American workers (Holmes, 2013, p.187, Koser, 2013, p. 95). This concept of “skilled” versus “unskilled” is problematic because it is based on a comparison with a very specific type of professional labor associated with the Global North. But if a white wealthy lawyer unfamiliar with berry picking suddenly had to learn how to be a field worker, the migrant worker would be much more adept and “skilled” at picking than the white worker.

The word “migrant” also has a connotation that excludes “them” from the rest of “us.” This rhetorical tool is used to emphasize a separation between the “in group” and “the other.” The “in group” is often defined by what “the other” is not. “Othering” is constructed in discourse to show an imbalance of power. “Othering” can be understood as a social method of identifying individuals thought to be different from one’s self or culture, most specifically the majority culture, that creates or emphasizes dominance and subordination (Epps and Furman, 2017, p. 2).

The “migrant” discourse also leads to an assertion that migrant workers are out of their proper place and carries the assumptions that workers are moving between one “sending” community and another “receiving” community (Holmes, 2013, p. 158). In other words, this word is wrapped up in connotations that assume that migrant workers do not belong in the communities in which they work, they belong somewhere else. The phenomenon of “othering” has been a common and accepted practice when dealing with immigrant populations in the United States despite the fact that the nation’s entire heritage, besides those of Native American descent, derives from immigrants.

Discourse of country of origin: “Mexican” versus “American”

Often migrant workers will be referred to negatively as “Mexican” rather than “American.” This dichotomy is wrapped up in the assumption that the term “American” is only used when referring to people who are ethnically white (Holmes, 2013, p.159). This difference in language also indicates an underlying fear of the “other” and often the idea of someone staying true to their cultural heritage or “staying Mexican.” This term is also wrapped up in the idea of being “dependent on welfare”, referring to the untrue assumption migrants are somehow taking money from American citizens. The dichotomy between “Mexican” and “American” is even used to characterize United States citizen Latinos, regardless of origin. No matter where in Latin America the migrants are from, they will often be referred to as “Mexican.” This language also indicates that they are out of place, do not belong, and are unwanted.

One example of this rhetoric used is republican lawmaker from California Dana Rohrabacher, who admitted that “those millions of illegal immigrants that have come here, they may be fine people,” but what really counted was the fact that “they are consuming resources and benefits that are meant for the people of the United States of America” (United States Congress, House, September 25, 1996). This kind of rhetoric towards immigrants is not uncommon, and often is characterized by generalized language, grouping illegal immigrants, migrant workers, and Mexicans into one large, broad category (Gerken, 2013, p.114).

In one of the largest public schools in the Skagit Valley in Washington State, one of the largest fruit-growing regions in the country and home to many migrant workers, a teenager named Junior explains the difference in names he is referred to. He self-identifies and is identified by others as Latino. “Mexicans are the ones who are like gangsters; that is what

a Mexican is. When you say, someone is Hispanic, it is like saying you have respect for that person. But when you call them Mexican, it is like saying ‘You are a dirty Mexican’ (Holmes, 2013, p. 163). People who are Mexican are often also portrayed as “dirty”, as opposed to White who are “clean. “This embodied understanding of race is very relevant in the discussion of migrant workers from Mexico, just as poor and nonwhite people are often referred to as “dirty” (Holmes, 2013, p.156).

Illegal bodies, illegal “aliens”?

The “illegal” trafficking of people is a feature of globalization. The corruption in the immigration system by way of bribes and longer waiting periods for people who have applied for documents show that the “illegality” of migrants is promoted by the United States (Chourdy and Hlatshwayo, 2016, p.5). This also indicates a double movement, to label another person’s body as against the law, simply because of where they originate, and yet provide methods and channels to skirt around the law indicates the push and pull of migrant workers in the United States through the dominant economic system. The use of the word “illegal” rather than “undocumented” to refer to migrant workers can easily be viewed as an attempt to further marginalize and dehumanize those workers. In addition, the word “alien” is also used to refer to undocumented migrants and includes an additional meaning, that illegal migrants are something other than human (Gerken, 2013, p. 114).

This discourse can be dangerous because if a person is not referred to as human, or is thought of as less than human, then normalizing of violence them can occur much more easily. Because the “illegal” methods for crossing into the United States makes migrants themselves illegal, this further separates the “us versus them” dichotomy. The federally

proclaimed need to detain or imprison immigrant “criminals” legitimizes the perception and treatment as “others”, people who should not be trusted (Epps and Furman, 2017, p. 4).

“Farmworker,” “migrant,” “Mexican”, and “illegal” are all significant words that have a profound impact on the portrayal of migrant workers in the United States. By analyzing these words or phrases commonly used in reference towards migrant workers, a clear pattern of domination and power emerges. It is important to understand these power dynamics to fully understand the experience of the migrant worker in the United States today. These words, along with specific historical developments and agricultural policy, all play a valuable role in understanding the multi-dimensional power forces stacked against migrant workers.

Migrant vulnerabilities: Historic agricultural exceptionalism, policy, and NAFTA

Migrant workers are more vulnerable to exploitation than other groups for to a variety of reasons: historic agricultural exceptionalism, specific agricultural policies, and the illegality of migrant workers all contribute to the marginalization of migrant workers in the United States. Workplace reforms, while able to help workers in other sectors, have not improved workplace conditions for these workers. By examining the history of agricultural policy and specific policies towards migrant workers, additional discrimination towards these workers is evidenced.

Immigrant workers are marginalized in a variety of ways including lack of work authorization, which prevents them from seeking better conditions due to a constant fear of deportation. Fear is prevalent as job loss and retaliatory violence has increased. At the same time, undocumented work consists of the majority of particular types of agricultural positions: since 2001, undocumented workers have comprised 50% of the farm labor

workforce in the United States (Fitch et. al, 2017, p.26). One reason migrant workers are so vulnerable is because of a long history of agricultural exceptionalism under the law.

Agricultural work is exempted from overtime along with a host of other workplace safety measures (Holmes, 2013, p. 62) and United States safety regulations for workers in the agricultural sector are less stringent compared to workplace standards for other industries. (Liebman and Augustave 2010, p.3, Fitch et. al, 2017, P. 26).

Workplace reforms made during the Progressive Era through the New Deal period for example, The Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), dramatically changed industrial labor in the twentieth century but exempted agricultural labor. The Act does not require small farm employers to pay minimum wage, allows child labor in agriculture and exempts overtime for all agricultural employees. These reforms dramatically changed industrial labor in the twentieth century but the “agricultural exceptionalism” has kept many farm workers in poverty and forced them to work in hazardous conditions (Liebman and Augustave 2010, p.3).

Agricultural exceptionalism makes migrant workers more vulnerable to human trafficking, and creates the conditions for exploitation to develop. The prevalence of low wages, inflated food rates, and recruitment fees all contribute to situations of debt bondage. Threats of deportation, unfamiliar laws, and language barriers are all very common issues migrant workers face. In addition, undocumented migrant workers are not eligible for state or federal funding through assistance programs, despite paying taxes such as sales tax (Fitch et. al, 2017, p.26).

Agricultural exceptionalism is reinforced through the actions of United States federal agencies. OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration under the Department

of Labor, does not protect farmworkers the same way it does workers in other industries. It does not regulate many conditions of agricultural jobs, exempting agricultural industries from the same record-keeping requirements of workplace injuries (Fitch et. al, p. 26). Because migrant workers do not have the ability to collectively bargain, they have no means of organizing and requesting higher wages or more safe working conditions. This is a serious issue when examining how dangerous the work of agricultural jobs can be, and the fact that these workers are not protected is problematic because the United States industrial food system depends on the work of migrant laborers.

The United States government does provide some legal methods for migrant workers to obtain work authorization without citizenship. One example of this is the H-2A: Temporary Agricultural Visa (2014) a “guest worker program” which allows foreign workers to come to the United States if an employer offers a temporary job and is able to show that there are no current United States workers who are able to take the job. The policy was designed to fill labor shortages but several studies have found that the program as it has been implemented suppresses wages and is very problematic with human rights violations (Fitch et. al, 2017). Guest workers have faced many issues from wage theft to human trafficking, and it does not allow guest workers to change employers once they arrive, leading to many instances of workers forced to work in extremely dangerous situations.

NAFTA : The North American Free Trade Agreement

Free Trade agreements between countries can have major impacts on migrant workers because they affect how easily goods can be bought and sold between nations. For agriculture, one recent agreement has had a monumental impact on migrant workers. The North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) is a free-trade agreement between Canada, the

United States, and Mexico banning economic barriers between those countries such as tariffs (Holmes, 2013, p.25). Implemented initially in 1994, the result of the agreement has been the allowance of cheaper agricultural exports from the United States into Mexican agricultural markets, having a devastating impact on Mexican farmers (Caulfield, 2010, p.91). The Mexican government, because of this agreement, was forced to erase corn tariffs, the main crop produced by the indigenous in southern Mexico. Because NAFTA does not ban government subsidies, the United States's subsidized corn sold for a lower price than the indigenous corn, meaning many farmers could no longer sell their product in local markets due to the cheaper United States corn (Holmes, 2013, p.25).

Because the indigenous Mexican farmers could no longer work in their own country, they were forced to find work where the crops were cheapest, in the United States. The policy has forced at least eight million Mexican migrants to seek out agricultural work in the United States. NAFTA has also resulted in the privatization of many Mexican industries, eliminating thousands of jobs. At the same time, union density has declined and the power trade unions once held in the Mexican government has significantly decreased. This leaves workers defenseless against deteriorating working conditions and declining standards of living, propelling Mexican immigration to the United States (Caulfield, 2010, p.92). Migrant agricultural workers risk their lives to travel to the United States for work out of necessity for survival, not out of desire.

The imperialist history of exploitation and the undermining of cohesion and community in the Global South is an important aspect of understanding the struggle of migrant workers today. Colonialism paired with capitalist development created the structural issues of dispossession as well as poverty and inequality in the Global South that push

migrant workers towards the Global North to find work. The immediate effect in the United States of Mexican labor immigration is the growth of the immigrant workforce, but that is only one dimension of a broader transformation taking place in the world of work and labor markets. As seen in Mexico, union membership has declined sharply in the United States as labor strikes are less frequent, and the unions hold less political power than they once did. Less union membership means less protections for agricultural workers in their home states. Migrant workers do not travel to the United States because they want to risk their lives, and work in dangerous conditions, but because they are forced to due to neoliberal policies such as NAFTA.

The phrase “free trade” is used often by politicians, and was criticized repeatedly by both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election season. The basic idea of free trade is the removal of tariffs, quotas, or any other kind of tax on the movement of goods from one country to another. This liberalization of trade is a key tenet of neoliberal policy, the most recent form of capitalism that came into effect during the 1980s with the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (Chase, 2005, pp.181-186).

Free trade policies such as NAFTA are based on principles that can be traced back to the beginning of capitalism. Adam Smith, Scottish economist author of the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) who is cited as the “founding father” of capitalism, wrote:

It is the maxim of every prudent master of a family, never to attempt to make at home what it will cost him more to make than to buy.... If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage (p.264).

The quote by Smith indicates the neoliberal philosophy: follow the price wherever it is cheapest. However, this philosophy is solely focused on economic efficiency. It does not consider the human cost imposed on workers, in this case the migrant agricultural workers.

Improving migrant workers' conditions through policy: the neoliberal approach

The neoliberal approach to the migrant workers' crisis is through policy reforms. Because the stability of the food industry in the United States is tied to the stability of migrant agricultural workers, the American Farm Bureau Federation acknowledges that immigration reform is necessary to avoid a shortage of labor that could potentially harm the agricultural industry (Fitch et. al, 2017, p.31). The United States food system is entirely dependent on migrant workers, and a path to citizenship is necessary in the long run to ensure a stable workforce. Comprehensive immigration reform should extend work authorization to immigrants currently working in food production and provide a path for them to become legal. On the pathway to citizenship, one way to help migrant workers and their families improve quality of life is by extending eligibility for health insurance benefits to migrant workers and their families (Fitch et. al, 2017, p.31)

Under the Affordable Care Act undocumented migrant workers do not qualify for health insurance. One way to extend health care to these people who are living and working in the United States is to expand the Affordable Care Act (2010) to all United States agricultural workers. In addition, the exemptions for agricultural workers under the Fair Labor Standards Act (2009) should be removed. Migrant workers should be able to always qualify for at least minimum wage, and youth agricultural workers should be covered by the FSLA. Farms should also be required to pay overtime when the workers work more than 40 hours a week. Work authorization, also known as protection from the threat of loss of

employment or the threat of deportation is crucial towards enforcing the FLSA and extending it to migrant agricultural workers (Fitch et. all, 2017, p. 31).

Currently, farming operations are exempt from all OSHA regulatory activities, including inspections if the farm employs fewer than 10 non-family employees. OSHA should not exempt farms based on the number of employees in order to protect all workers from occupational hazards (Fitch et. al, 2017, p. 32). In addition, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act expired in 2000 and to-date has not been reauthorized by Congress. This act is the most comprehensive and effective anti-trafficking legislation the United States has ever passed, and the reauthorization of this act is crucial in order to enforce trafficking violations.

Chapter Four:

From theory to practice

Many scholars, activists, and public administrators working with immigrants advocate that comprehensive immigration reform is critical to worker protection. The security and resiliency of the United States' food system is based upon the exploitation of migrants, and they contend that a first step of including the agricultural industry in worker compensation at the state level would benefit workers (Liebman and Augustave, 2010, p.198). They argue that if migrant workers were elevated and no longer considered to be "illegal", this would be one way of improving workers' quality of life. This is true, working within the system to pass immigration reform laws that extend the rights of migrant workers has the potential to improve the work conditions for many migrant workers. Examples of these discussed in the last section include removing the exemptions for agricultural workers under the Fair Labor Standards Act and extending the Affordable Care Act to cover migrant workers.

These ideas are a step in the right direction, but they ultimately fail to combat the structural reasons why migrant workers exist here in the first place. To truly change the lives of migrant workers, systems of labor must change. In addition, policy proposals improving working conditions still do not allow migrant workers the opportunity to do anything but agricultural work. The following are attempts to create spaces to practice alternative arrangements.

Combatting structural violence through democracy

If the problems migrant workers face are systemic, then the issues they face will not be solved by politics-as-usual. Shortly before his assassination Reverend Martin Luther King

Jr. spoke a powerful statement, “We are dealing with issues that cannot be solved without the nation... undergoing a radical redistribution of economic power” (Alperovitz, 2013, p. 21). King understood the discrimination people of color faced was deeply ingrained in systemic challenges and that changing the system towards a truly democratic direction might be the only way to “get serious” about improving society.

“Democracy is a relative term” (Kaswan, 2015, p. 133). It comes in a variety of forms, from an unruly mob to inverted totalitarianism (133). Could democracy serve as a way to combat technological rationality? Marcuse maintains that Western democracies are not truly democratic, because people are quietly prevented from thinking critically, and induced into making choices which in any case remain within the systemic frame (1964). This is a product of quiet manipulation, built on a social order that is disguised as democratic but which is essentially authoritarian, meaning it does not ground any claims to systemic legitimacy.

To imagine a more democratic society without capitalism, where would one begin? One way to begin thinking about alternative arrangements is through the idea of democracy in the workplace. In the Global North, it is assumed that governments are democratic, but the same level of democracy is not expected in the workplace, where many United States citizens spend much of their time. For example, most workplaces are in the form of a hierarchical structure and decisions are made at the top. In a democratic workplace, decisions are made by the workers themselves.

In a study examining attitudes towards workplace democracy and blue-collar workers, researchers found, unsurprisingly, workers are more in favor of workplace democracy than managers (Zipp et. al, 1984, p. 410). The fact that blue-collar workers are the

occupational group most in favor of workplace democracy shows that there is a space and desire for practicing democracy through the workplace since they can take control of their work environment (Zipp et. al, 1984, p.411). By allowing workers more autonomy in their workplace environment and participating in direct democracy, there is a possibility for showing that a better form of democracy is not only possible, but it can be implemented outside the workplace.

Cooperatives: Democracy in the workplace

Cooperatives, a type of business structure characterized by shared ownership, play a major role in global economic institutions with more than 1 billion people participating in cooperatives worldwide (Grace 2014). Within the United States, more than 2 million people work for or with 29,000 cooperative workplaces (Deller et. al 2009). While there are many types of cooperatives, the main differentiation is among worker co-ops which are operated and run by the workers, and consumer co-ops which are owned by the customers who shop at the store. Worker cooperatives, businesses owned by the workers, are one way people are working to give workers more agency in the workplace.

Cooperatives can benefit democratic practice and systems of labor by serving as an opportunity to allow workers to come together to make decisions through workplace democracy, the shift in decision-making power from owners and managers to workers (Zipp et. al, 1984, p. 411). The struggle for control over the workplace is extremely political, between the workers and owners, altering the distribution of economic power. By enabling workers to take workplaces into their own hands, workplace democracy is an important aspect of support for democratic procedures, and challenges the existing distribution of power (Zipp et. al, 1984, p.412). Democracy through politics cannot happen in a country

where its citizens have little experience with democracy in their own lives (Alperovitz 2013, p.143).

There are many examples of people organizing workplaces democratically in United States, five of them are examined in this paper. At Arizmendi, a bakery cooperative with a location in San Francisco and six others in the Bay area, decisions are made based on modified-consensus with a simple majority. With regular meetings, worker-owners collectively make all enterprise decisions including how to use net revenue and who to hire. Mady, a worker/owner, describes how working in a cooperative, challenges the workers by necessitating constant open communication. She also describes accountability as a primary lesson of working at the cooperative: “You don’t have a boss in the traditional sense, so you have to work together and be accountable to one another for the business to succeed. Sometimes it feels like you have twenty bosses, and working with different personalities is a challenge. But I have learned more communication skills working at the coop than I have in any other job I have held (Mady, Personal Communication, 20 June 2017).

In the South, Cooperative Jackson is serving a space to practice direct democracy by building a solidarity economy in Mississippi. Through a network of cooperatives, they are reframing economic democracy by helping people start their own food production. They encourage independent electoral politics and are comprised of “people’s assemblies.” Cooperatives have a long history in Mississippi, particularly within the African-American community. Allowing workers the opportunity to come together and vote on initiatives, the cooperatives teach people voting is not just for politics. Voting and making decisions through workplace democracy can transform the economic sphere by democratizing wealth. The Jackson cooperative has emerged from deep rooted struggles for democratic rights, economic

justice, self-determination, and dignity for all workers, particularly for the Afrikan people in the Deep South. Investing in community-oriented cooperatives has immense potential for reclaiming capital and democratizing wealth. Cooperative Jackson is one space where workers are making this happen.

The Evergreen coop in Cleveland, Ohio, launched in 2009, is a network of worker-owned cooperatives modeled off the business structure of Mondragon in Spain. Currently employing 120 employees, Evergreen is referred to as the “Cleveland model” by many supporters, who claim that it can be applied in hard-hit industries and working class communities across America. But what may have enabled Evergreen’s success and complicate its applicability is the unique support it received from a wealthy community foundation and strong advocates within local government. This indicates that for co-ops to be successful in creating systemic change, they must be paired with movement building and policy pressure. Evergreen has served, more than anything, as a learning laboratory for implementing workplace democracy, unlocking imaginations and providing a pathway towards an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. By participating in one of three connected Evergreen co-ops, Evergreen energy solutions, Green City Growers, or Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, residents of Cleveland can earn ownership stake as they create thriving businesses while simultaneously playing a transformative role in building vibrant neighborhoods.

Partnering with anchor institutions, Evergreen is working to create green jobs and economic stability in low-wealth communities. Although questions remain about replicability in other parts of America, or even other parts of Cleveland, the implementation of employee ownership at Evergreen shows that through movement building, growing

cooperatives can ultimately result in transformation of capitalist enterprises into worker owned cooperatives, radically changing the workplace environments of many (Rowe et. al, 2010).

Agriculture is an area that cooperatives can make an extremely large difference in the lives of workers. CoFed, a cooperative food empowerment directive, brings tools and trainings to campus communities in order to develop cooperatively-run food businesses. The CoFed group stands strong for immigrant justice. In September 2017, the Trump administration announced the end of DACA (Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals), a program that protected 800,000 immigrant youth from deportation and allowed them to work in the US. The administration also challenged Congress "to address immigration reform in a iebman, Amy K. and Augustave, Wilson (2010) 'Agricultura" As a result of the statement, the group posted a statement of their own saying they are standing up for immigrants, both documented and undocumented. Cooperatives are spaces where migrant workers could make a fair living, if more cooperatives were started.

In Austin, Texas, three single mothers, who also happen to be undocumented Mexican immigrants, have started their own tamale co-op called "Cooperativa Posada". The women came here because they could not find a way to make a living in Mexico, and had to find a way to take care of their children. The women found that though the law prevented them from working most jobs or receiving government assistance, it did not technically prevent them from starting their own business. Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), employers face penalties for knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants or continuing to employ immigrants upon discovering their undocumented status. But the IRCA does not use any specific language to bar undocumented immigrants from

having a business. Essentially what this means is that they cannot be employees, but they can be employers. So they started a cooperative, in their homes, doing what they know how to do: make tamales. If undocumented workers form their businesses as limited liability corporations, each one of them can be an owner (Hill, 2016).

Undocumented migrant workers technically cannot be employees legally, but they can own businesses. There are currently approximately eight million undocumented immigrants in the United States labor force, with most of them working in restaurants or domestic work, earning low wages, experiencing abuse, and functioning in poor working conditions. Undocumented workers are disqualified from most social services, despite the fact that they pay taxes that go towards supporting those services. According to the Institution on taxation and economic policy, immigrants pay approximately \$11 billion each year in state and local taxes. These include sales and excise taxes (Hill 2016, p.2).

Cooperative Texas is an Austin-based “incubator” for cooperatives that provides education, training, and technical assistance for cooperative development. The nonprofit was started as a resource to help people of color create dignified jobs. So far, Cooperative Texas has helped to launch three cooperatives: a vegan bakery, a green housing cleaning cooperative (owned by four undocumented Latina workers), and the country’s first worker-owned cooperative brewing company. The women who own Dahlia Green Cleaning have left an industry famous for its low pay, poor working conditions, and abuse for their company, which has enabled them to earn \$15/hour and determine their own schedules (Hill, 2016).

This kind of framework, for single mothers, gives them the power to set their hours around their kids’ school schedules, which enables them to be home for their kids when they need to be. This is critical, especially when the cost of child care could be half of what they

earn, allowing them to spend with their children (Hill, 2016, p.3). For these women, and migrant workers as a whole, the options for work in the United States seem to be choosing between the industry that will exploit them less. But through cooperatives, there is the possibility of creating spaces where people can work for themselves, and work with dignity.

Cooperatives Continued

Cooperatives receive many responses from those who both support = capitalism. Some supporters of capitalism critique cooperatives and their ability to scale up, arguing that they can only exist in a limited size, that their democratic nature and principles inhibit their ability to compete with other businesses. Others see cooperatives as beneficial, denouncing any alternative system. These capitalists see cooperatives as an important ethical supplement to the market. This is important because it shows how very savvy capitalists see cooperatives as another way to do business within the current system. If employee ownership or workplace democracy make workers more productive, they see this as beneficial for business, and good for capitalism. This tension highlights the idea that cooperatives are not necessarily synonymous with systemic change of the social, economic, and political system, which is true. Co-ops should not be viewed as a solution, but rather spaces where democratic skills can be taught, explored, and practiced.

Migrant workers, Labor Unions, and Workers' Centers

Another space where migrant workers might be able to change their work environment is by influencing labor unions. There are many challenges of migrant labor organizing, including animosity towards migrant workers from labor union members themselves. But there have also been quite a few stories of (at least partial) victories of collective organizing and resistance. Migrant workers have immense potential for worker

dissatisfaction and protest due to their poor working conditions and low pay. Since the 1970s, Union membership worldwide has decreased due to the widespread adoption of neoliberal policies in much of the world (Chourdy and Hlatshwayo, 2016, p.10). Agriculture is a potential space for the future of unions.

In addition to cooperatives and labor unions, there are a few other forms of organizations that have the potential to assist migrant workers in the current system. Workers' centers, which have developed in a few places in North America, are an example. Workers' centers are primarily community-based and community-led. They are usually non-profit community-based mediating enterprises and they provide support to low-income migrant workers and immigrants. Some attempt to pull people together by fusing labor militancy, but most serve as spaces that provide resources necessary for survival (Chourdy and Hlatshwayo, 2016, p.11).

The Immigrant Workers Center Collaborative is a nonprofit organization that aims to be a movement building institution. Located in Southern New England, the purpose of the organization is to create a mass movement of immigrant workers (Who we are, 2017, p.1). A similar organization, the Pioneer Valley Workers' Center in Western Massachusetts aims to build power with low-income and migrant workers, simultaneously building community and changing the lives of working people. They use community organizing tactics to improve working conditions of migrant laborers and fighting for pro-worker legislation at the local, state and federal level (Pioneer Valley workers' center).

Non-governmental Organizations: dignity in the workplace

NGOs often lobby for political change as well as conduct educational and awareness messaging campaigns. They do not advocate for migrant labor organization typically, but

they often work in coalitions with other organizations, and are active on both the national level in many countries as well as the international level (Chourdy and Hlatshwayo, 2016, p.11). “We are proud to be farmworkers and proud to work. We are not looking for handouts. Work gives us dignity. At the same time, when policies and laws are decided, it is important that you please include us in that process. It is more dignifying that way.” This is a quote from former farm worker Wilson Augustave (Liebman and Augustave, 2010, p. 192). Advocating for dignity in the workplace is common among groups who are resisting the exploitation of the capitalist workplace. Dignity, the state of being worthy of honor or respect, is the opposite of how migrant workers feel coming to work in the United States. Understanding that the agricultural sector in the United States is a hierarchy of perceived ethnicity and citizenship is key to understanding agriculture and labor today.

Today, it is important that we keep this in mind and allow ourselves to imagine different ways of arranging ourselves. Workplace democracy can be a vital part of a better political, economic, and social system because in a new system work will not go away. We will continue to have to think about work and the role work plays in our lives. The space where people spend so much of their day, every day, must change if we wish to live in a truly liberated and democratic society.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Utopia and Liberation

Policies such as NAFTA have not been implemented without resistance from groups both outside of the United States and within. As the neoliberal market policies took hold of the economy, simultaneous counter social movements such as the Zapatista movement in Mexico sought to check these market forces. The entire capitalist system relies on this back and forth, “double movement” to avoid destructive and messy social, environmental, and economic consequences (Evans, 2008) The Zapatistas are the most well-known group in opposition to NAFTA. Originating in Chiapas, Mexico, the social movement illustrates a resistance to the neoliberal world order (Stahler-Sholk, 2010, p. 269). The Zapatista Army of National Liberation launched an armed uprising on January 1st, 1994, the date NAFTA went into effect. What is unusual about the Zapatista movement compared to other Latin America guerrilla groups is that the armed phase of the movement only lasted for twelve days. For fifteen years after the uprising, the group has acted as a social movement creating autonomous structures of government in the indigenous regions of Mexico and organizing networks of support. With an indigenously-rooted rebel support base, the Zapatista movement’s goal has been a global transformation of society, and the people involved consider their movement to be a rebellion, not a revolution. They did not seek to seize state power, but rather build a more participatory and just order moving from the community level upward (Stahler-Sholk, 2010, p. 270).

Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in social movements in Latin America resisting the social impact of neoliberal economic policies, as well as the failure of electoral democracy that failed to deliver promised change. The grassroots and indigenous Mexican

rebellion movements simultaneously reject the neoliberal capitalist framework of market globalization and attempt to construct new collective identities based on fair human rights, equitable resource allocation, and autonomy (Stahler-Sholk, 2010, p.271). Despite the appeals of the Zapatistas and other protest movements, migrant workers' conditions have worsened since the 1990s (Koser, 2013, p.95) indicating the systemic nature of these issues.

Organizing across California's Central Valley in the 1960s and 1970s, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta formed a resistance using place-based community organizing, self-help Mexican mutual aid organizations, community service unions, and international boycotts. They broke patterns of territorial governance of industrial agriculture by connecting local struggles beyond regional landscapes. The interconnected relationship between land, labor, capital, and social movements across the valley through fields of power is a complex web of domination and subordination, solidarity and cooperation (Kohl-Arenas, 2015, p.229).

Despite the relative success of the Farm Worker Movement in the 1960s, migrant poverty still exists today. The environmental and labor victories of the 1970s in many cases are unenforced, and the neoliberal trade policies put in place in the 1990s have exacerbated poor conditions for migrant workers (Kohl-Arenas, 2015, p.233). This thesis has attempted to articulate and explain many of the factors leading to violence towards migrant workers. By examining labor and industrial agricultural through a critical theory lens, it is evident that the struggles migrant workers face will continue to perpetuate if the systemic forces pulling them in and pushing them away do not change. Ecologist Richard Levins articulated the purpose of the agricultural industry when he wrote: "Agriculture is not about producing food it is about producing profit... food is a side effect" (Angus, 2016, p.158). To truly make an impact on the lives of migrant workers, we need to distinguish between the need for changing

intolerable conditions of existence and the need for changing society as a whole (Marcuse, 1967, p.82). Policy proposals can make substantial difference in the lives of migrant workers and improve workplace conditions (and this is important!) but to combat the drivers that force them to be there in the first place, we need to think bigger.

Individuals, despite claims otherwise, do have the power to create, sustain, and change our social environments. It is difficult, because institutions are resistant to change, but it is possible if we let ourselves imagine it. We need to consciously create spaces and structures with the imaginative potential for liberation. And these spaces might require utopian thinking to imagine the potential. Eduardo Galeano famously wrote “Utopia lies at the horizon. When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps. If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten steps ahead. No matter how far I go, I can never reach it. What, then, is the purpose of utopia? It is to cause us to advance” (Galeano, 2002, p.1). We shouldn’t be afraid to be utopian in our thinking, to imagine a world without the struggle for existence. As Marcuse wrote in an *Essay on Liberation*, what is utopian is no longer “no place” but what modern capitalist society blocks from existing.

Let’s let ourselves be free enough to imagine a world with work, but without labor. A place where people can have dignity in themselves and the work they do. Industrial agriculture is not about dignity, or about feeding the world. In fact, it is not about people at all. It is only about profit.

Peter Frase writes regardless of whether you work for a capitalist boss or a worker-owned cooperative... the space of work is still considered the realm of necessity and not the realm of freedom (Frase, 2016, p. 40). Though cooperatives still embody the realm of necessity, they can serve as a space for moving towards building a realm of freedom which is

not of the present. A society liberated from exploitation, the kind of liberation that must come before the construction of a new system (Marcuse, 1969, p.viii). “Capitalist progress not only reduces the environment of freedom, the ‘open space’ of the human existence, but also the ‘longing’, the need for such an environment” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 18). Capitalist logic is so embedded in daily life that many of us no longer have the desire for something different, something better. We no longer realize that something better is possible. This is incredibly dangerous, especially for migrant workers, who are forced to act within the system in an incredibly dangerous way.

We must break past this one-dimensional thinking and be brave enough to imagine a better world. These spaces cooperatives create are imperfect, sometimes difficult to work in, or dysfunctional. They struggle with institutional barriers of colonialism, racism, inequality, and injustice, but we must do something or else these problems will perpetuate and worsen. I believe this is a critical first step in reaching a more free and liberated society.

The problems migrant agricultural workers face in America today speak broadly about the society we live in. Policy proposals to improve the lives of migrant workers are incredibly important. But they do not seek to solve the issue of why migrants are here in the first place. This cannot be separated from the dominant economic, political, and social systems that dominate the world and especially the Global North. If we really want to solve the problem of violence towards migrant workers in agriculture today in the United States, we must think critically about the kind of world we want to live in. As long as this violence towards migrant workers and other oppressed groups continues, we are still far away from a more advanced society.

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