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A Decolonizing Discourse of Migration on the Web

Abstract: The discourse regarding migration, taken from the United Nations Migration Agency's online platform "I am a migrant" (IAAM) can be considered a major resource to support the promotion of human rights. It emerges as a site of cosmo-political encounters, connectivity, and conviviality, where subjectivities are recognized, respected and re-humanized. Specifically, this study investigates the discursive and multimodal narratives of migrants in English, and the photos of themselves provided to IAAM, considering whether this type of discourse may be viewed as an act of the decolonial linguistic knocking-down of the walls of inclusion/exclusion that regulate and govern today's migration. Within this discourse, it also detects an attitude of existence of / resistance against the hegemonic discourse of Western politics and media, and an ability to put forward a new definition of humanity on the basis of the practices of the migrant, in order to finally satisfy everybody's understandable and legitimate freedom of movement.

Keywords: *decolonization and human rights*, *corpus-assisted discourse studies*, *multimodal discourse analysis*, *biographies*, *pictures*

1. Introduction

The present study aims to address language issues related to migration in a decolonial interpretative key. The debate on decoloniality is well established in other disciplines (e.g., ethnic, gender and area studies), yet it has not fully taken root in language studies, other than teaching English as a lingua franca. For this reason, the study also aims to explore a wide range of possibilities for relating decolonial thinking to discourse studies in order for both to benefit from this relation: discourse studies can take advantage of the decolonial perspective; conversely, decoloniality itself can acquire a new conceptual vigor by examining research on discourse analysis.

Due to the focus of this study, which revolves around the discourse of migration, literature in the field of decolonization and human rights is examined;[1] migrants are approached as people who have survived coloniality, and who still deserve recognition of their natural human rights and civil liberties. Extensive press coverage of the present-day local/global political arena on migration misinterprets and misrepresents migrants, e.g., their right to a better life and their freedom of movement. For instance, the hegemonic political discourse in the news originating from countries that, while most priding themselves on their commitment to equality, human rights, and democracy (e.g. Western countries), are the very ones that adopt a closed-door policy for migrants (i.e. refusal of entry, detention, and return) in order to prevent them from accessing equality, human rights, and democracy.[2] This is a recurring theme in

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[1] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* [1956], trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], trans. by Richard Wilcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. by Richard Wilcox (New York: Grove Press 2008), Walter Mignolo, "Who Speaks for the 'Human' in Human Rights?", *Human Rights in Latin American and Iberian Cultures*, 5.1 (2009), 7-24, Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke U.P., 2011), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Righting Wrongs", in Aakash Singh Rathore and Alex Cistelecan, eds., *Wronging Rights? Philosophical Challenges for Human Rights* (New Dehli/London: Routledge, 2011), 78-103, and Nelson Madonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Human Rights", *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 114 (2017), 117-136.

[2] Luigi Cazzato, "Shades of Feeling: Human Rights, decoloniality and Palestine", *From the European South*, 2 (2017), 55-70.

Western modernity, which when successful in hiding its historical "colonial matrix of power"[3] (CMP), is unable to hide its constitutive contradictions, which still thrive in today's society.

Conversely, in line with the objective stated by Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo,[4] this study chooses to focus on the emerging theme of relationality. According to these scholars, relationality embodies various concepts and practices of decoloniality which, coming from different local histories, geopolitical locations, and from those who have undergone – and continue to undergo – colonial differences, "contest the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity".[5] With this in mind, this work enters into relation with migration issues, with the subjectivities, struggles, and worldviews of migrants, and provides an example of the practice of decolonial resistance to Western thought, and as a form of "re-existence" aimed at "redefining and re-signifying [migrants'] life in conditions of dignity".[6] Precisely, through their own faces and words, it makes migrants' subjectivities much more visible thanks to the multimodal analysis of their photographs and stories, collected from all over the world and made available online at *iamamigrant.com* (IAAM).[7]

These micro-narratives by/on migrants together with their pictures appear to use what Maldonado-Torres[8] defines as a "counter" discourse that seeks to dismantle coloniality in order to shed light on the creative energy of migrants' events and processes and foster a more just and equal society.[9] In addition, these first-person narratives and self-portraits of/by migrants from all over the globe may be considered part of the project of pluri- and interversal decoloniality[10] because they do not purport to provide a definitive answer to the acknowledgement of their free movement around the globe. However, they are practices of decoloniality which, by entering into conversation with one another, build understandings that interrupt, that crack "the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal matrices of power",[11] and that at the same time, heal the colonial wounds that have been inflicted upon each of them. In so doing, the conceptualizations and actionings of decoloniality become "multiple, contextual, and relational",[12] more broadly, encompassing all of us who – even though we have not experienced and suffered decolonial difference – "struggle from and within modernity/coloniality's borders and cracks, to build a radically distinct world".[13]

Making migrants' subjectivities visible through the multimodal analysis of their voices/thoughts and gazes/faces, this study thus partakes in this communal project of building another world, contributing not only to undoing, disobeying and delinking from the CMP but also to constructing a praxis toward an alternative approach to the migration issue. In order to do so, the study is organized as follows: the following sections provide a review of the literature, focusing on: (1) decolonization and human rights, (2) corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS), and (3) multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). In the following sections there is a description of the data, which includes a corpus of 732 texts written on/by migrants and 732 pictures of migrants, collected from the IAAM online platform. With the hypothesis in mind, a selection of texts and images occurring with the highest frequency values are discussed in order to uncover the various ways in which migrants speak of / describe themselves and give their own

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[3] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality", *Cultural Studies*, 21.2-3 (2007), 168-178.

[4] Catherine E. Walsh and Walter Mignolo, "Introduction", in Catherine E. Walsh and Walter Mignolo, eds., *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke U.P., 2018), 1-12.

[5] Ibid., 1.

[6] Ibid., 3.

[7] United Nations Migration Agency's Online Platform (date of launch: July 21, 2015). I *Am a Migrant*, <http://iamamigrant.org/>, 1 May 2019.

[8] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality* (Paris: Frantz Fanon Foundation, 2016).

[9] Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 2000).

[10] Walsh and Mignolo, *Introduction*, 3.

[11] Ibid., 10.

[12] Ibid., 4.

[13] Ibid., 5.

side of the story on the issue of migration. The enquiry on the decolonializing discourse of migration comes to a conclusion by providing a general account of the benefit of relating decolonial thinking to discourse studies, for only thanks to a mutual flow and exchange of conceptual and methodological tools, ways of theorizing and studying phenomena (e.g. societal, cultural, and linguistic) can we at long last build a radically distinct world and foster the much-needed change for the acknowledgement of human rights without discrimination.

2. Pluriversal Perspectives on Migrants and Their Human Rights: The Contribution of Decolonialization, CADS and MDA

Drawing from a new perspective on humanity was essential for this study, and recent literature in the study of decolonization and human rights has contributed significantly to putting a whole new perspective on the analysis of the discourse of migration as addressed through the interpretative lens of CADS and MDA. Particularly, the decolonial turn[14] proved essential to challenging the hegemonic Western concept of the human, which thinks of "humanity in terms of degrees – that one can be more or less human",[15] and then to advance "a new definition of humanity on the basis of the practices of the colonized"[16] who here becomes the migrant. For example, Western countries use real and metaphorical barbed wires to distinguish humans (the good) from the non-human (the evil or the *damnés*[17]), and accordingly, to guarantee the former the right to mobility and to shut the latter inside detention centers.

Damnation itself is the starting point where Fanon discerns the possibility for a new concept of the human. In fact, Fanon, together with Césaire, are considered by Maldonado-Torres[18] as key leaders in introducing a decolonial turn which, unlike the perspective of the CMP, affirms the humanity of the colonized, who emerge, thanks to this turn, as questioners and agents of their own destiny. Fanon and Césaire's words of great encouragement for "a new start", a "new way of thinking" and the concept of a "new man"[19] and new woman prove to be still valid today: "Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man [and a woman] in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving",[20] and "So we need to have the patience to take up the task anew; the strength to redo that which has been undone; the strength to invent instead of following; the strength to 'invent' our path and to clear it of ready-made forms, those petrified forms that obstruct it".[21]

Césaire and Fanon's call for concrete forms of engagement for the decolonization of the concept of the human also emerges in the recent works by Mignolo and Spivak. Their common concern focuses on the question: "who speaks for the human in human rights?".[22] In response to this question, Spivak calls

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[14] See Luciana Ballestrin, "América Latina e o giro decolonial", *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política*, 11 (2013), 89-117, Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, *El giro decolonial: reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá, Col.: Universidad Javveriana y Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn", *Radical Philosophy Review*, 9.2 (2006), 111-137; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "La descolonización y el giro des-colonial", *Comentario internacional: Revista del centro Andino de estudios internacionales*, 7 (2006-2007), 66-78, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique - An Introduction", *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.2 (2011), 1-15 and Maldonado-Torres, "The Decolonial Turn", in Juan Poblete, ed., *New Approaches to Latin American Studies:* Nelson *Culture and Power* (London: Routledge, 2017), 111-127.
[15] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Transdisciplinariedad y decolonialidad", *Quaderna*, 3 (2015).
[16] Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Human Rights", 118.
[17] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth.*
[18] Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Human Rights", 118.
[19] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 239
[20] Ibid., 236
[21] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*,104.
[22] Mignolo, "Who Speaks for the 'Human' in Human Rights?".

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for good education courses for children to be delivered in poor rural areas in the Global South,[23] so that children themselves can learn and engage in defining and affirming their humanity and their rights. What is more, Mignolo calls for "de-colonial thinking" that far from longing to have "the last word about what human is," does not feel any need "for someone specific to talk about the human, because human is what we are talking about".[24] Echoing Césaire and Fanon's words, Spivak and Mignolo assert that human rights need more than philosophical debates to formulate a concept of the human on which the human rights of the damned may be based. Furthermore, what they ask those who have suffered – or still suffer from – the colonial difference is to be/become key representatives of this de-colonial thinking and formulate their own view of the human.

The difference between Spivak and Mignolo, on the one hand, and Césaire and Fanon, on the other, lies in the fertile ground where decolonization should germinate, for the former, in the creation of a new educational framework, and for the latter, across and outside universities (e.g., in social, artistic, and intellectual movements). A line of continuity between these two ideas can be envisaged in how Boaventura de Sousa[25] sees decolonial thinking as acting at large beyond disciplinary divisions and the strictures of method. Contributing to this disciplinary openness and methodological germination is critical for the advancement of decolonization and for the emergence of a human rights discourse produced by those who experience colonization, and based on their struggles in affirming their humanity.

This study fits well into this conceptual framework since it uses the testimonies of migrants taken from the online platform IAAM and explores them through pluriversal perspectives and instruments. Specifically, the IAAM corpus formed by the migrants' narratives and by photos of themselves, is investigated through a CADS approach,[26] as far as the textual component is concerned, and through an MDA approach[27] with regard to the visual component, so that "the analysis and interpretation of language use is contextualized in conjunction with other semiotic resources, which are simultaneously used for the construction of meaning".[28]

The CADS approach has already been used to investigate the discourse of migration. The literature encompasses mainly studies which analyse migrants' representation in the British and Italian press.[29]

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[23] Spivak, "Righting Wrongs", 82.

[24] Mignolo "Who Speaks for the 'Human' in Human Rights?", 3.

[25] Also see Santos Boaventura de Sousa, "The University in the Twenty First Century: Towards a Democratic and Emancipatory University Reform", *Eurozine* (July 2010), https://www.eurozine.com/the-university-in-the-twenty-first-century/, accessed 25 November 2020.

[26] Alan Partington, "Corpora and Discourse, A Most Congruous Beast", in Alan Partington, John Morley and Louann Haarman, eds., *Corpora and Discourse* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 11-20; Alan Partington, "The Armchair and the Machine: Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies", in Carol Taylor Torsello, Katherine Ackerley and Erik Castello, eds., *Corpora for University Language Teachers* (Bern: Peter Lang, 189-213; and Alan Partington, Alison Duguid and Charlotte Taylor, *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins).

[27] David Machin and Andrea Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012) and Per Ledin and David Machin, *Doing Visual Analysis: From Theory to Practice* (Los Angeles: Publications, 2018).

[28] Kay L. O'Halloran, ed., *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* (London: Continuum, 2004).

[29] Paul Baker, *Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press*, 1996-2006: Full Research Report, ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-22-1381 (Swindon: ESRC, 2007); Paul Baker et al., "A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press", *Discourse and Society*, 19.3 (2008), 273-306; Paul Baker, Costas Gabrielatos and Tony McEnery, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of Islam in the British Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2013); John Morley and Charlotte Taylor, "Us and Them: How Immigrants are Constructed in British and Italian Newspapers", in Paul Bayley and Geoffrey Williams, eds., *European Identity: What the Media Say* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2012), 190-223; Sebastian M. Rasinger, "'Lithuanian Migrants Send Crime Rocketing': Representations of 'New' Migrants in Regional Print Media", *Media, Culture & Society*, 32.6 (2010), 1021-1030; Charlotte Taylor, "The Representation of Immigrants in the Italian Press", *CirCap Occasional Papers 21* (Siena: University of Siena, 2009); Charlotte Taylor, "Investigating the Representation of Migrants in the UK and Italian Press", *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 19.3 (2014), 368-400; and Paolo Orrù, *Un discorso sulle migrazioni nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).

What emerges from these works is that the hegemonic discourse of the media attaches labels to migrants of their being violent, desperate, and illiterate. In reaction to this emerging migrant-phobic discourse, Maglie[30] launched a new line of research that opens up towards the potential decolonization of language/thought hierarchies originating from migrants themselves. She compiled corpora made up of alternative discourses found in glossaries, charters and blogs available on the web, and, using a CADS approach, detected a prejudice-free terminology contributing to the respect, protection, and fulfilment of migrants' human rights.[31] For instance, when analysing migrants' representation in the corpora, Maglie identified the category of self-representation, i.e. a category which provides opportunities for migrants to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories in public.[32]

This line of research emerges again in Maglie and Orrù[33], a cross-linguistic CADS and MDA study which addresses both migrants' narratives in English and Italian, and their pictures made available on the IAAM platform. Moving beyond the hegemonic power of the press as well as the unimodality of texts, their study brings together texts, images, and graphic elements to claim that migrants can have their own space of knowledge production, a *new* space where they take the forefront, speak for themselves, choose how to frame their story in its own unique way, and actively contribute with their own individual stories and a picture of themselves as positive, strong, productive, and proactive individuals, with their projects, values, feelings, and willingness to be part of the host society.

The present study draws on the abovementioned paper but focuses only on migrants' biographies written in English and on their pictures taken from the IAAM website. CADS and MDA approaches are used in combination to study both the textual as well as the visual choices made by the migrants, in order to facilitate an understanding of how and why those communicative choices were made over others and of "what possible ideological goals they might serve".[34] The repeated sequences of language and visual features detected and analyzed through MDA and CADS are interpreted here as ideological pointers to decolonial thinking, contributing to the construction of migrants as individuals and active members of collective social groups. Both biographies and pictures thus become a new social practice designed to call into question the Eurocentric-related dominant paradigm and its hegemony on institutional and public discourse about migration.

3. The IAAM Corpus: From Words to Images

The IAAM corpus is made up of 732 texts written on/by migrants (247,973 running words) and 732 pictures of migrants. It is divided into six sub-corpora, each of them corresponding more or less to a continent: Asia and the Middle East [305 texts (90,599 running words) and 305 pictures]; Africa [194 texts (77,957 running words) and 194 pictures]; Europe [96 texts (28,986 running words) and 96 pictures]; Balkans and Eastern Europe [72 texts (26,935 running words) and 72 pictures]; the Americas [59 texts (21,873 running words) and 59 pictures]; and Australia [six texts (1,623 running words) and six pictures]. The hypothesized common reason for migration justifies such a corpus division. Due to word limit constraints, the analysis focuses on the larger sub-corpora. Thus, the sub-corpora from Australia and the Americas are not included in the investigation reported in this study.

[30] Rosita B. Maglie, "Speaking of Migrants: Glimpses of a New Discourse on the Web", in Luigi Cazzato and Filippo Silvestri, eds., *S/Murare il Mediterraneo. Un/walling the Mediterranean: Pensieri critici e artivismo al tempo delle migrazioni* (Lecce-Brescia: Pensa Multimedia, 2016), 105-126.
[31] Ibid., 105.
[32] Ibid.,123.
[33] Rosita B. Maglie and Paolo Orrù, "The New Migration Discourse: How Migrants Are Depicted on the Web", *I-Land Journal: Identity, Language and Diversity*, 2 (2019), 77-93.
[34] Machin and Mayr, *A Multimodal Introduction*, 5.

Each of the remaining four sub-corpora are firstly approached by looking at their wordlist sorted according to frequency, because the analysis addresses specific words with the highest frequency values. Next, the concordance strings containing the most frequent words allow for the detection of statistically significant collocations, clusters, and patterns, which are instrumental here for uncovering the various ways in which migrants from four different areas of the world speak of themselves and give their own side of the story on the migration issue. Personal pronouns referring to migrants who write in the first-person appear to be in the nominative (*I*) and in the oblique forms (*me*), and together with possessive adjectives (*my*) are the most recurrent words in the four sub-corpora. These stories also revolve around other human beings and places. In fact, *people* and *family, home* and *country* are the next most frequently used words present in the four sub-corpora. The results on how *home/country*, *people*, and *I* behave in context are reported and discussed in the following section.

In addition, for each text, the four sub-corpora include a photograph of the migrant who is both/either the main character, and/or the author of the text. The visual analysis of the photos focuses on understanding how migrants visually describe themselves, and what kind of messages they would like to communicate and impart to modern society.[35] With this in mind, each subcorpus is addressed by looking at its image listed according to frequency, because this investigation concentrates on the photographs which contain elements that occur with the highest frequency values. Close-ups of faces – half-length and full-length portraits – are the most frequent communicative choices exercised by migrants throughout the four sub-corpora. Subsequently, they are shown to be looking directly at the viewer/reader, and they are smiling in the majority of cases. Other recurrent elements (e.g. actions, people, settings) frame each visual text present in the four sub-corpora. In fact, when together with other *people*, they would much prefer to be photographed together with their family and friends, and in settings that show their new/old *home* and *country*.

The fact that the same words and the same visual features occur with similar frequency throughout the four sub-corpora suggests the following research hypothesis: if words and images closely cooperate with each other to put migrants' subjectivity on a pedestal, the decolonizing discourse of migration, which ensues from them, will possess the decolonial features of relationality and of re-existence. In other words, it will connect and bring together – as both pluri- and interversals – different subjectivities, narratives, voices, thoughts, and faces to re-define and re-signify the migrants' lives in a condition of dignity and respect.

3. *I* Am a Migrant *through Words and Images*

Space does not permit a detailed language discussion of all the strings of words related to *I, me,* and *my* identified by the Wordsmith corpus software[36], occurring with statistically significant frequency in the four sub-corpora. Thus, in the case of *I,* the focus is on groups of three-word clusters, which are then examined in their discourse contexts through concordance listings, to determine the discourse functions associated with each of the groups in the IAAM corpus. The fact that *I want(ed) to* ranks either first or second in three of the four sub-corpora, except for the Africa sub-corpus, and that *I don't/didn't* is placed first, second and/or third in four of the sub-corpora, except for the Europe sub-corpus, explains the reason why this study analyzes only these four groups of clusters.

I (N=3,629 in the Asia and Middle East sub-corpus) is investigated when followed by *want(ed)* and *don't* and *didn't*. With reference to *I want(ed) to*, the strong wish to do and have something collocates the migration experience of Asian and Middle-Eastern people in two temporal slots: before and after the

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[35] Due to page restrictions, the author postpones in-depth discussion of the visual data of the IAAM corpus in a future dedicated paper.
[36] Mike Scott, *Wordmith Tools* (Stroud: Lexical Analysis Software, 2018).

journey. When they speak of themselves in the past tense, what *they wanted* is not only *to secure a future for* [themselves] *and their children* (*I decided to leave because I wanted to save my life and my family*) but also be useful contributors to building a just society:

(1) *I wanted to work, have a successful career and be an active member of society.*
(2) *We have a whole cultural structure to differentiate us but I wanted to find what can bring us together.*
(3) *I wanted to help but not by carrying weapons or killing people.*
(4) *I wanted to show them that I am exactly like them.*

Old dreams continue to be the same when they arrive in the host country (*All I want is to protect my children, this is why we left*; *I want to be independent; I want to be/become a(n) interpreter/doctor/musician/carpenter; I want to learn everything/many languages/maths*). In addition, they write that *they want to share this* [practical/professional] *knowledge with everybody* (*I want to share our [Syrian] food and our culture with the [German] people; I want to grow and empower myself to be able to empower others;* and *I want to feel useful for the society I live in*). They demonstrate a firm commitment to human rights (*I want to use human rights as my avenue; I can finally be in Senegal again, I want to actively engage in helping the poorest people of my community; I want to continue to be that bridge where migrants contribute to the development of their host and home countries*).

The clusters *I didn't/don't* within past and present negative statements are aimed at giving further details about their condition before and after the migration journeys. Before their leave, they *didn't have* either *a job* or *much money, they didn't have* either *a visa* or a proper ID. Leaving home was not in their plans (e.g. *I didn't plan to come to Hungary*), but they did so in order to avoid circumstances beyond their control (*I didn't want to kill anybody from any side; I came from a corrupted country where I didn't enjoy too much freedom*). Now that they are abroad, they seem lost (they *don't know which country* they *would call home;* they *don't speak the language;* they *don't know how to integrate into Emirati Society*); what they *don't want* is either *to beg anyone* or *to depend on others to support [their] family*. Their struggles for respect and dignity appear both in sentences like the following: *I don't want to be seen only as a refugee or a migrant; I don't want to sit around doing nothing;* and in their comment on Western hegemonic thinking: *I don't make distinctions, for me these are all human beings; I don't understand, we were not criminals!*

I (N=3,563 in the Africa sub-corpus) starts to be analyzed in negative sentences set in the past. In addition to that detected previously in the Asia and Middle East sub-corpus, *I didn't* concerns here their psychological distress felt during their journey and once they arrived in the host country: *I didn't know who I was anymore; I didn't know where I was going or if I would be welcomed.* Now that they are in a new country, they are able to recover quickly from the unpleasant past events and state as follows*: I don't have much time to think and stress about all the things I miss; I don't see it [leaving] as a failure, but as a stepping stone.*

When *I want(ed)* is analyzed looking at its context, migrants continue to talk about their dreams, which here becomes a request for recognition of their human and social dignity: *I had dreams – I wanted to become "someone"; the first thing I wanted to do was to reclaim my name and get my ID.* What they *want readers to learn from* their *stories* and dreams is, as already stated for Asian and Middle-Eastern migrants, their fight for equality*: Instead of saying, "we are refugees," I want us to say, "we are the same as the others."*

I (N=1,332) in the Europe sub-corpus tells unsurprisingly another story. They *wanted* their dreams about living/studying/working abroad to be fulfilled and they moved easily (*when I decided that I wanted to move here, it was pretty easy*). However, when in the host country, they *want to* do their best as the African, Asian and Middle-Eastern migrants want to; *I want to work in the migration sector, and fight for the rights of the LGBTQ community,* and *I want to specialize in North-American literature.* Frankly,

in comparison with the migrants analyzed above, their condition is – as one of them defines – "luxurious", *because I <u>didn't</u> feel that I was left out of anything and I wasn't fleeing war or conflict.* However, when in the host country, they face and feel something that could more or less resemble African, and Asian and Middle-Eastern migrants. They encounter intolerance (*I <u>don't</u> like that people are scared of differences; I <u>don't</u> think it means people in the host nation can criticize my country of origin*). They cherish their tradition and compatriots (*I <u>don't</u> forget my roots; I <u>don't</u> miss places, I miss people*). In addition, they want to return home (*I really like it here, but I <u>don't</u> think I'll stay forever*).

The first personal pronoun (*I* N= *1,239)* in the Balkans and East Europe sub-corpus does not highlight notable changes compared to what was seen before. Indeed, even if they <u>*didn't*</u> *know what to expect,* they leave the country in order to improve their living condition (<u>I *wanted*</u> *to learn in order to find a different job*). In the new country, they <u>*don't*</u> *consider themselves a victim* and what they really *want for* their *family* is *to do well, feel safe and cared*.

The ways migrants choose to be portrayed visually in the IAAM platform is not neutral. They choose a certain set of representational strategies[37] to participate in the "social world"[38] so that the common viewer can see the other side of the coin: no longer migrants as being all the same[39] as often happens in the press, but as *I*-ndividuals. Four women from the four sub-corpora smile and keep their gaze fixed on the viewer. They act the same, but they are different in their somatic features as well as in their traditional attire. Their difference enters into relationality with one another and with the viewer as a form of re-existence.

Fig 1-4 Migrants from Africa, Asia and Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and Europe subcorpora respectively (source: https://iamamigrant.org/).

3.1 I Am a Migrant *Together with People in Words and Images*

In the Asia and Middle East sub-corpus, *people* (N=421) refers either to migrants' compatriots left behind in the country of origin or to new individuals met in the host country. For the former they feel longing (*To be honest, I do miss the <u>people</u> back home*) and to the latter they are grateful (*I like Budapest. The <u>people</u> are nice;* […] *in Greece, the <u>people</u> are nice and friendly; In Croatia* […] *the <u>people</u> are very friendly and gentle*). Talking about their compatriots provides them with the opportunity to describe their harsh living conditions (*I worry about what is going on there* [Afghanistan] *still. People are killed every day*).

When talking about people in general terms, other than those they have really met, migrants refer to the binary vision of humanity, typical of the hegemonic modern Western thought, and place it in doubt with a question: *why is it good for people from Europe to move within Europe, but bad when people from Middle East or Asia look for jobs in Europe?* They answer firstly by explaining what migration is (*it consists of normal people, some are good and some are bad* […] *they are bad not because they are*

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[37] Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 145.
[38] Machin and Mayr, *A Multimodal Introduction*, 77.
[39] Ibid.,100.

from a specific place). Then, they state their commitment to changing people's mentality: *I hope to make a difference in people's lives and help them understand that human rights are not a luxury, but vital to being human*.

When the word *people* is preceded by numbers (*13* to *4,000*), they describe their own experience of crossing the sea by boat (*We were suddenly 45 people boarding the boat*) and their idea of dying at sea and of saving others (*And if I die and those 20 people are still alive, that's great; I felt that I cannot let the other 20 people drown and just save my own life*).

In the Africa sub-corpus *people* (N=410) is also used with numbers (*10* to *200,000*) and continues to relate to Africans' travel either by boat (*It was 4 am on the day the smugglers loaded 300 people onto the boat*) or by car (*We were 40 people from all over the region crammed in one car*).

What differs here from the abovementioned occurrences of *people* found in the Asia and Middle East sub-corpus is a greater focus on diversity. On the one hand, in derogatory remarks, it can promote a bad attitude towards people who are different (*comparing black people to monkeys; The fear of the unknown and ignorance of people not wanting to know is what leads to racism*). On the other hand, African people encourage cultural diversity, not division and opposition (*My hope for the world is that different people with different experiences can move around and meet one another; We should be happy to meet people from diverse backgrounds; and seize the opportunity to develop, learn and get new perspectives*).

They think *the movement of people is a fact of life,* they consider migration a way to give *people the freedom to go to places where their lives can be improved,* and *believe in the idea of global citizenship where people are allowed to live beyond their borders*. In reality, they live and tell another sad story about *people* who, during the journey, *fell off the car; others broke their arms or legs, others died, but the driver never stopped for them.* Their condition in their countries is even more dramatic: *people being killed, and people having to eat leaves,* and *people in prison in Libya that can't get out because they have no money.*

The Europe sub-corpus contains a vision of *people* (N=213) which decolonizes the Eurocentric tendency of much of today's society. Indeed, *people with a migrational background* are seen as those *who have a lot to give to society, the state and the economy.* Therefore, they deserve full European hospitality: *it is important that when new people arrive, they open their heart and feel welcome by the locals.*

Speaking of *people* (N=156), the Balkans and Eastern Europe sub-corpus follows the same reasoning. For the integration to work, on one hand, *people of the host society have to tolerate you* [the migrants] *and have the desire to help you integrate.* On the other, *people* [migrants] *need to feel welcome or to be seen as having the rights to be there, without this bargaining – "you learn our language, you dance our dances, then you are welcome."*

The way migrants choose to speak in photos when they are with other people revolves around the topics of education (Fig. 5-6) and multiculturalism (Fig. 7-8). The first two images portray a smiling mom with her kids. Both stay one step behind (fig. 5) or to the side (fig. 6) of their kids meaning that their kids are the most important thing in their life. Going to school represented here by the girl who is doing her homework and by the boy who is proudly showing his backpack is an important investment for their future. The other two pictures exemplify the theme of relationality: two couples made up of people coming from different parts of the world are together and love each other.

Fig 5-8 Migrants from Africa, Asia and Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and Europe subcorpora respectively (source: https://iamamigrant.org/).

3.2 I Am a Migrant *between Home and Country in Words and Images*

The words indicating a place (i.e., *home* and *country*) are the last instances that this study investigates due to their high occurrence both in the textual, and the visual part of the four sub-corpora. Due to the fact that their order of appearance in the word lists of each sub-corpora does not coincide, even though both words are near the top of the frequency list, the study opts to analyze only the most frequent word of the two. Thus, *home* is investigated in the Asia and the Middle East and in the Africa sub-corpora, and *country* in the Europe and the Balkans and Eastern Europe sub-corpora.

African people use the word *home* (N=299) more than *country* (N=266) in their travel stories. They define it (*home to me* (N=7), and *home is where* (N=6), placing possessive adjectives before it: *my* (N=35), *our* (N=6), and *your* (N=6) as well as verbs mainly indicating a forward —*left* (N=10) – and a backward – *go back* (N=11) – movement. The definition of home mirrors their existence divided into two worlds: on the one hand, the home where they were born and, on the other, the home where they live (*Home to me is Tunisia and Malta as well*). This duality emerges in another sentence: *I faced two options – stay home* [Sierra Leone] *where a dire future awaited me, or move thousands of miles away* [the US]. However, the number of homes tends to rise: *I consider Egypt, the UK and South Africa to be my home*, as proof that they are citizens of the world, longing for their home country nevertheless. In fact, most of the occurrences of *my home* center around the topic of homesickness: *Looking back on life in my home country, I miss everything.* The personal adjectives *our* and *your* + *home* touch on the subject of leaving together with their own family (*my family and I left our home country Egypt to move to Tirana*) or, speaking in general, on what causes leaving your country: *Leaving your home country is a struggle for most people*. Indeed, their great dream is one day to go back home:

(5) *When I go back home, I want to continue painting.*
(6) *I would like to go back home and open a large sewing shop.*
(7) *I'd love to go back home one day and help my community.*

Home (N=251 occurring more frequently than *country* N=237) for Asiatic and Middle-Eastern people is naturally their *home country* (N=17) but also the host country where they *feel* at *home* (N=7). In addition to this, when the word is used in the context, what emerges is that they see their stay abroad transient since their objective is to *go [back] home* (N=45). The stories about their home countries are a mixture of love and excitement (*I love my home country and I am extremely excited to share its traditions and history with the world*), as well as hindrance (*Leaving your home country is a very hard decision*) and despair (*Without a home country, you truly feel like you are nothing*).

The host country evokes conflicting emotions that can be defined as peace (*I feel at home, especially in Brussels*) and despair (*Sometimes I don't feel at home here. There are racist views*). Integration sometimes does not work (*neither Belgium nor Turkey is really home for me. I feel that in Belgium*

people consider me a foreigner and in Turkey, they tend to see me as a tourist). After they have been forced to leave their home and have made them believed to be ineligible to have one, migrants' strength and resilience overwhelmingly manifests themselves in this more comprehensive definition of home:

(8)   <u>Home</u> *for me is where I can be who I am and pursue the plans and the goals I have without fearing for my life. A place where I can feel secure mentally, physically, and economically. A place where I can go back to whenever I want without anyone questioning why I should be able to go back there.* <u>Home</u> *is where I can pursue my mission.*

As one might easily imagine, the context of occurrences of *country* (N=112 occurring more frequently than *home* N=97) in the Europe sub-corpus appears different from that reported above in the previous sub-corpora. Even though both the reasons for their departure (e.g. study, work, and business) and the feelings when living abroad (e.g. nostalgia, appreciation, and love for their *<u>home</u> <u>country</u>*) may be similar to those detected previously, being abroad for European migrants is *by choice*, i.e. they are never forced to leave their home, they do it easily and *moving to a new country is never* felt to be s*tressful.*

Occurrences of great value for the sake of this study are those where *country* describes what migration is and means for them (9-10), and advises both migrants on what they should do in order to *benefit from living in a different <u>country</u>* (11-12) and those living in the host countries on how they should welcome migrants (13-14).

(9)   *Migration cannot mean to move to another <u>country</u> to just become exactly like the people who are already there.*
(10) *It [migration] can give new energy and a new rhythm to a <u>country</u>.*
(11) *My advice to those who choose to migrate is to learn the language of your destination <u>country</u> first.*
(12) *My advice to everyone moving to a new <u>country</u>: observe what is going on, be open-minded, ask questions, be curious ...*
(13) *My advice to someone living in a <u>country</u> that hosts migrants is to put yourself in their shoes.*
(14) *My advice to people in the UK is to keep an open mind and identify with the migrants in our <u>country</u>, with a view to maintaining a culturally rich society.*

Country (N=91 occurring more frequently than *home* N=71) in the Balkans and Eastern Europe sub-corpus refers both to the home and the host country. Towards both of them they experience the same feelings of love (about the new country they write: *I love the <u>country</u> and respect its people*; *I fell in love with the <u>country</u>,* and about their country of origin they write: *I love my home <u>country</u>*; *Romania is and will remain my <u>country</u>*).

When they concentrate on their place of origin, they exhibit conflicting emotions: misunderstanding, when they think of their choice to leave (*they feel that you do not love your <u>country</u> as much as you should anymore*); homesickness, when they miss their home (*I missed my <u>country</u> of the Czech Republic terribly),* and pride, when thinking their place of birth is a very *underrated <u>country</u>,* and then they mention its history *("the suburbs of the Albanian cities grew dramatically in the '90s*), and its aesthetic beauty (*"I love the sea in Estonia"*).

When they talk about the host country, they exhibit other conflicting emotions: fear, when they are afraid that *one day there might not be a <u>country</u>* they can call theirs; guilt, when they feel they did something wrong by *entering the <u>country</u>*; difficulty, when they refer to the local language (*I found being in a new <u>country</u> without the language really difficult*), on the one hand, and relaxation when stating that being in *a free <u>country</u>* calms them down, and gratitude when talking about the support they have received (*the German citizens gave me so much for my <u>country</u>, my people and children*), on the other.

However, in their travel stories, they more often than not feel the need to explain the reasons behind their decision to leave (*I was forced to leave home and I choose a <u>country</u> where I could live a good life*

and study; he left his <u>country</u> *in order to find a safer place to pursue his career and settle down; the* <u>country</u> *that I left because of the conflict*).

In addition to this, they show they have a political vision in terms of their contribution to the new country (*and since so many people are leaving* <u>the country</u>, *you [Western country] need immigrants to keep the economy going*); in terms of their actionings (*being a good and a loyal citizen of the* <u>country</u> *one chooses to reside in; we need to leave a positive mark on the* <u>country</u> *that hosts us; learning the local language [...] the first step that all migrants should undertake in their new* <u>country</u>), and in terms of reception and integration policies (*I find that when people are accepted as they are it encourages them to embrace the culture of the host* <u>country</u>; *Those in the host* <u>country</u> *should try not to put migrants into a box, because they are all different people*). The new meaning they give to the word *country* (*My first* <u>country</u> *is my kids*) and to the expression *leaving a country* (*The decision to leave the geographical borders of my* <u>country</u> *did not cost me much, when your home is the world, you never actually "leave"*) may be considered an incredible life lesson.

The background of the photos projects a prevailing set of cultural values which entails the centrality of the family as well as the defense of indigenous culture (fig. 9) and religious faith (fig. 10), on the one hand, and the awareness of oneself as an autonomous individual within modern civilization, on the other (fig 11-12).

Fig 9-12 Migrants from Africa, Asia and Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and Europe subcorpora respectively (source: https://iamamigrant.org/).

4. Concluding Remarks

The relation between decolonial thinking and discourse studies has proved not only possible but also highly beneficial. On one hand, the use of CADS and MDA, which pay attention directly and exclusively to real instances of language related to modern issues, has offered major potential for innovative conceptualization to decolonization itself. On the other, CADS and MDA approaches have gained better insights into language issues by using the decolonial interpretative key. Both discourse analysis and decolonialization are essential in order to produce knowledge, and their relationship is particularly relevant to this study because they work hand in hand to overcome the coloniality of Eurocentric and modern knowledge, which is responsible for dividing the world into two zones separated by the barbed wire of damnation: the former, a zone of salvation,[40] exclusive privilege of the civilized, and the latter, populated by the damned, the migrants, whose existence is seen as problematic and dangerous. The analysis of the discourse of migration from a decolonial perspective has challenged this hegemonic Western knowledge and has offered new knowledge which comes from migrants themselves who, through their stories and pictures, have redefined and re-signified their lives in a condition of dignity. Far from providing a definite solution to the free movement of people, migrants' counter discourse in observance of the principles of relationality[41] becomes part of the project of pluri- and interversal

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[40] Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Human Rights", 123.
[41] Walsh and Mignolo, *Introduction*, 1.

decoloniality.[42] Their stories and images – ideological pointers to decolonial thinking – interrupt "the modern/colonial/capitalistic/heteropatriarchal matrices of power"[43] with alternative practices and forms of engagement. Since they are "multiple, contextual, and relational,"[44] they enter into conversation with one another, build understandings, and heal the colonial wounds in favor of a praxis moving towards an alternative manner of addressing the migration issue, a pre-requisite to fostering a much-needed change for the recognition of human rights, thus building a radically distinct world without walls of separation. In conclusion, the added value of decolonial thinking that emerges from this study is extremely important in order to re-think and re-define humanity on the basis of the practices of migrants, of their life choice – be it free or obliged – to live abroad, and of their contribution to the growth of the host country.

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[42] Ibid., 2.
[43] Ibid., 10.
[44] Ibid., 4.