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INTA 201 Honors

Dead but not Deceased:

An Analysis of Identity and Deportation within ‘Planet of Exiles’

This concept of expulsion is as complex as it is archaic, deriving from the human necessity to divide and conquer for a sense of superiority at the expense of belittling minority groups. By forcefully deporting those within the lower labor force, governments forcefully remove someone from society at the expense of their livelihood, depriving them of social acceptance and belonging, in hope of making themselves more ‘at home’ and ‘safe’. As such, deportation becomes less of an act of economic action and more of a politically driven motive, as those deemed unfit for society are forcefully removed. In other words, they become ‘dirt out of place’, as those in power attempt to maintain the purity of society to the extent they deem fit.

However, ironically, to maintain this ‘pure homogeneity’, that ‘out of place’ matter is recycled, shifting our society to accommodate those casted away. For example, the bilingual Mexican workers, deported back to ‘where they came from’—even if they never did live in Mexico—and given work at call centers created specifically for their demographic. Poor working conditions, no hopes of mobility: a perfect opportunity for capitalistic ‘reform’. As such, Lancaster argues politicians continue to leave labor “in an exposed and precarious condition”, as our system recycles for the sole purpose of exploitation, leaving minorities with a loss of identity. Lancaster connects this identity loss to Julia Kristeva’s theories, who discusses how this idea of ‘tidying up’ actually leads to a sense of belonging *in* the matter out of place, as what was once outcasted instead fosters community. As she explains: “a perpetual sense of identity”.

In many ways, capitalist systems place people at rock bottom before allowing them to dimly shine to the extent it supports the needs of those in power. As Weber puts it, “made tallow out of cattle and money out of men”. This concept of reutilization through the thievery of identity makes neoliberal global capitalism nothing more than a series of opportunistic actions; taking advantage of minority groups who are already stripped and devoid of identity, as they comply to rules they only half understand. Lancaster argues that nations such as the United States, who pride themselves on making the right decisions, actually end up creating the problems, as they fund civil wars in countries, only to then turn away the people — the displaced — in their time of need. A country built on deportees of other nations, hell bent on deporting those that make America’s engine run.

Simply put, our capitalist structure is “a proper regime of accumulation”, where instead of breaking men to build them back up, we destroy them with the hope of labor market exploitation. As Marx explains, the only thing capital is good for is to make more capital, human suffering notwithstanding. It is argued that these “predatory economic practices”, where those deported and discharged from society are forced into a sense of perpetual loneliness, are necessary to allow our societies to run. However, to what extent can we continue to deprive minority groups of their identities, before our overreliance on such creates social fragmentation? As summarized by Baudrillard, “capital...is a monstrous unprincipled undertaking, nothing more”: an unfit system fit into our society to benefit the few that cannot sustain itself.

Although these systems may have evolved to be more technologically savvy, their purpose of recycling without social movement remains the same. We continue to purify our society, forcing those we deem unfit—whether that be race, sexuality, etc.—into smaller sections, perfect to serve everyday needs. However, at the same time, our society continues to rely on

those we deport to keep our nation's running: an ironic undertaking that, as Wallerstine argues, cannot continue forever.

Our system depends on labor-power, yet by continuing to degrade it, we force the system to go without the very fuel it needs. Our system tries to purge those deemed unfit, allowing labor power to exist, while at the same time attempting to uphold human rights. People and profit cannot both exist as a priority at the highest level: one must be sacrificed—or should we say, deported—to allow the other to thrive. Wallerstine, and by extension Lanchester, argue that as opposed to trying to find a utopian solution, we must instead make peace with the fact both cannot exist, and find alternatives as best-case, second-hand solutions.

This thievery of identity in support of neoliberal global capitalism creates the idea of being dead without being deceased, as immigrants and others deemed unnecessary in society are stripped of their rights, and thus die socially, without actually being deceased physically. As such, they are left in a limbo, perfect for economic exploitation and forcing them to serve the very society that deemed them outcasts: they are not welcome, but they are needed, leading to a sense of deportation without full expulsion. In many ways, they become the dirt beneath our feet: there but ignored; used but not celebrated; necessary, but never fully accepted.