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Tropics of Reality Television: Introducing Metaphor and Coloniality through *Drones!*

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Overview

In *Sleep Dealer*, a sci-fi movie by Peruvian-American writer/director Alex Rivera, the fictional Memo Cruz witnesses a predator drone pilot murder his father during a broadcast of the in-film reality television series *Drones!* (Figure 1). As the host announces at the beginning of the fatal episode, *Drones!* takes viewers “to the frontlines where high-tech heroes use cutting edge technology to blow the hell out of the bad guys.” In Memo’s case, this reality television series takes viewers to rural Santa Ana del Rio, Oaxaca, where his father is among the “bad guys,” albeit not by his own volition. Memo has brought trouble for his father by eavesdropping on an American private water company, Del Rio Water, which surveils Santa Ana to block locals from accessing the nearby river. Under these circumstances, Memo watches as a drone pilot murders his father to eliminate a so-called “terrorist intercept.”



Figure 1. This white American narrator announces a rookie drone pilot will “eliminate a terrorist intercept.” Screenshot by the author.

Tropics of Reality Television uses *Drones!* to introduce the rhetorical power of metaphor, which is the master trope that Burke (1941) equates with “perspective” (421). This reality television series turns Americans into “high-tech heroes” and Mexicans into “bad guys,” among other subject positions constructed through metaphor (e.g., “evil-doers,” “aqua-terrorists,” etc.). By transforming Mexicans into “bad guys,” *Del Rio Water* strips them of their humanity and legitimizes their disposability on an internationally broadcasted reality television series (Figure 2). In effect, *Drones!* is an apt media text for explicating metaphor as a partisan, partial, and consequential rhetorical device across borders.



Figure 2. Memo's father looks into the camera as a drone pilot murders him, which viewers in the United States and Mexico witness from their television screens. Screenshot by the author.

This approach to introducing metaphor empowers instructors to accomplish three learning objectives. First, *Tropics of Reality Television* trains students to understand that metaphor is more than a literary device; it is also a rhetorical device through which humans come to know and shape the world around them. Second, this lesson plan helps students recognize metaphor as one of myriad discursive means through which western elites facilitate and justify acts of territorial, bodily, and epistemic dispossession. Third, this lesson plan prepares students to apprehend reality television's role in managing human perspectives on citizenship, borders, and natural security despite the genre's seemingly apolitical nature. *Tropics of Reality Television* therefore engages in the exigent task of teaching rhetorical theory while spurring students to consider how power interfaces with communication and composition through media.

Beyond enabling instructors to teach a staple rhetorical theory in a critical fashion, *Tropics of Reality Television* presents a timely opportunity to discuss reality television's role in propagating American Empire. For the first time in American political history, a former reality television host openly spreads the infamous “Latino Threat Narrative” from within the oval office (Chavez 2008/2013, 3). Since reality television has long been implicated in state-

sanctioned violence and surveillance measures (Baudrillard 1991/1995; DeRosia 2002; Fay 2016; Fishman 1999), this development raises new questions about how western elites might use reality television in their pursuits to procure capital. Given *The Apprentice* star's historic election, not to mention startling parallels between *Sleep Dealer's* high-tech border wall and President Trump's proposed border wall, students are likely to find *Sleep Dealer's* in-film reality television series ominously foreboding, provocative, and meaningful.

Rationale

Tropics of Reality Television was born in 2018 from a workshop on decolonizing rhetorical pedagogy. Led by J. David Cisneros, this workshop invited instructors to consider the "Eurocentric/Western bias in rhetorical theory courses" and "make space for diverse, transnational, and 'pluriversal' ideas of what rhetoric is, what rhetoric looks like, and what rhetoric does" (W.R.I.T.E. Lab 2018). Cisneros pushed participants to imagine decolonizing rhetorical pedagogy beyond simply expanding the proverbial canon. I responded by developing the lesson plan herein, which grounds the rhetorical power of metaphor in the European colonization of the Americas.

The rhetorical power of metaphor is well-documented (Burke 1941; Ellis and Wright 1998; Foley 2012; Ivie 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003; Schutten and Burford 2017). Whereas metaphor's epistemic function aids humans in knowing the world through communication and composition, its pragmatic function assists humans in shaping attitudes about people, places, and things. For instance, the American mainstream news media frequently portrays immigrants as "pollutants," which joins a host of other degrading metaphors that authorize the US federal government to undertake "national security measures," a metaphoric way of understanding state-sanctioned violence in terms of security (Cisneros 2008, 590).

The pervasiveness of metaphor affords instructors with an opportunity to teach how it surfaces in endless contexts. Given the ethical imperative to decolonize rhetorical pedagogy (Black, 2013; Ruiz and Sánchez 2016; Shome 1996; Wanzer 2012), *Tropics of Reality Television* introduces students to the rhetorical power of metaphor with a focus on colonial thought and practice, which necessarily entails a communicative dimension (de Onís 2018a; Kelly and Black 2018; Lozano 2019; Ono 2009; Rodriguez 2014; Stuckey and Murphy 2001; Wanzer-Serrano 2015).

In line with trends in Latin American decolonial theory, *Tropics of Reality Television* presumes continuity between the past, present, and future colonial activity by identifying colonialism as an enduring force rather than a historical event from a bygone era (Lugones 2008/2010; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Quijano 2007). Broadly speaking, colonialism refers to a pattern of exogenous domination in which one society takes control of another society by dispossessing them of their territories, bodies, and epistemics (Veracini 2011). While exogenous domination is a fundamental characteristic of the human experience, colonialism names a specific pattern of exogenous domination with recourse to October 12, 1492, when Christopher Columbus "discovered" the "New World."

Colonialism entails a heterogeneous set of logics and practices, so it is important to consider exogenous domination as it relates to specific times and places. The term coloniality draws attention to the persistence of colonialism in a seemingly post-colonial era, chiefly with “Latin America” in mind (Quijano 2007). As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) defines this term, coloniality “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (243).

Although fictional, *Sleep Dealer* provides insight into these long-standing patterns of power by demonstrating how racialized, colonial hierarchies might come to exist through a reality television series. *Drones!* joins actual security-based reality television series in structuring how white Americans come to exist in relation to law enforcement, the military, and non-white “criminals” or “terrorists” (Baudrillard 1991/1995; DeRosia 2002; Fay 2016; Fishman 1999). Importantly, this in-film reality television series does so in a futuristic register that pushes students to consider how American Empire will continue thriving in the future if left unchecked in the present. For this reason, *Drones!* pairs well with discussions of coloniality, enabling students to grapple with the sheer persistence of colonialism (Figure 3).

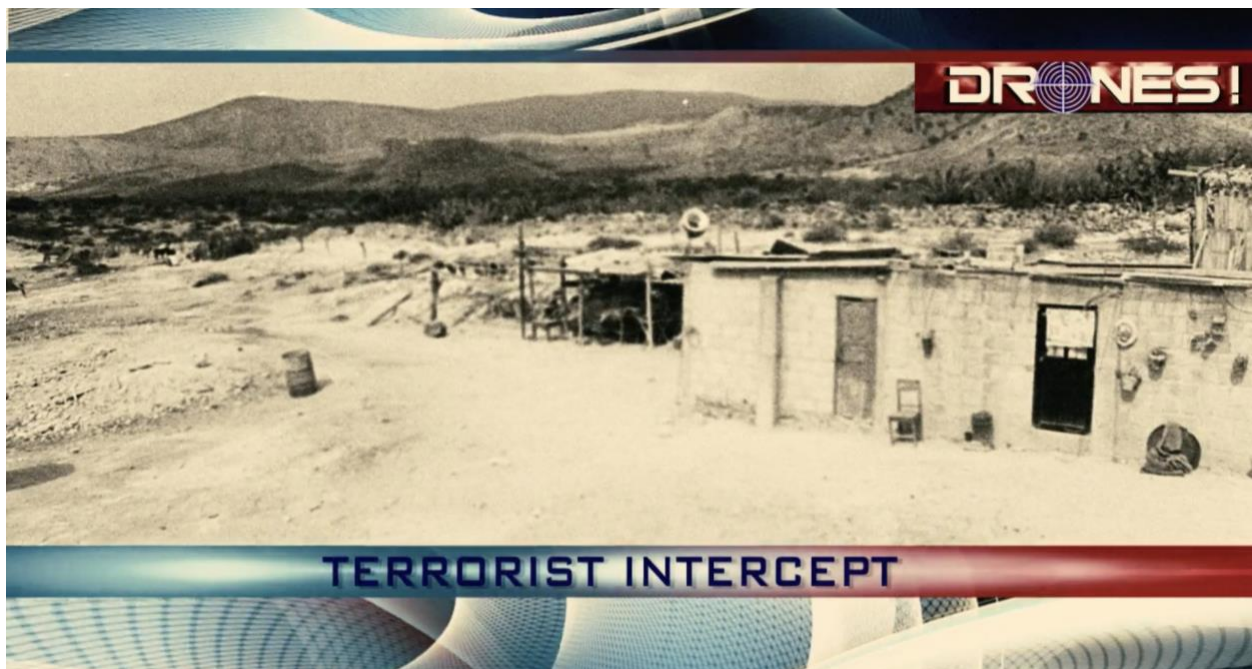


Figure 3. *Sleep Dealer* is a suitable rhetorical artifact to consider the interplay between metaphor and coloniality in that it draws on familiar discursive patterns like the idea that Mexicans are “terrorists.” Screenshot by the author.

With these concepts in mind, *Tropics of Reality Television* introduces students to metaphor in concert with colonialism and coloniality. This lesson plan stimulates a learning environment in which students encounter rhetorical theory alongside Latin American decolonial theory, showcasing how views from the underside of modernity enhance knowledge about what rhetoric is, what rhetoric looks like, and what rhetoric does. In this way, this lesson plan exhibits how teaching with reality television can *gesture* toward coloniality’s ongoing threat.

General Timeline

Tropics of Reality Television is recommended for small and mid-sized classes involving face-to-face instruction. This lesson plan requires approximately 150 minutes to complete and is suitable for lower-division courses in which students first learn about metaphor, colonialism, and coloniality, such as freshman composition, argumentation, public advocacy, introduction to media studies, intercultural communication, and contemporary rhetorical theory. It ultimately unfolds across four stages, including 1) a lecture on metaphor, colonialism, and coloniality; 2) an in-class, partial screening of *Sleep Dealer*; 3) a small group reflection on metaphor, coloniality, and *Drones!*; and 4) a class-wide discussion on metaphor, coloniality, and *Drones!*

Instructors on a Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule should facilitate the first stage on Monday; the second and third stages on Wednesday; and the fourth stage on Friday. Instructors on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule should facilitate the first two stages on Tuesday and the second two stages on Thursday. Instructors who teach once per week should facilitate all four stages during a single class.

I base the following walkthrough on a Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule.

Stage One: Lecture on Metaphor, Colonialism, and Coloniality

Prior to class, students should read the following texts:

- 1) “Four Master Tropes” by Kenneth Burke (1941, 421-423);
- 2) “Chapter 10: Colonialism, Metaphors, and Communication” and “Chapter 11: Criticisms of Metaphor” from *Communication: Colonization and the Making of a Discipline* by Amardo Rodriguez (2014, 73-86);
- 3) The *Wikipedia* entry for the “Coloniality of Power” (*Wikipedia* Contributors 2019).¹

Burke (1941) equates metaphor with perspective, defining this master trope as “a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else” (421). Next, Rodriguez (2014) provides an anti-colonial perspective on metaphor to demonstrate how metaphor is a partial, partisan, and consequential rhetorical device. Finally, *Wikipedia* contributors (2019) liken coloniality to “the living legacy of colonialism in contemporary societies” and historicize this concept’s development in the hands of Latin American decolonial theorists like Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Maria Lugones, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Together, these readings prepare students for a lecture on metaphor, colonialism, and coloniality.

¹ I value *Wikipedia* as a resource for introducing students to dense concepts like coloniality. Instructors should review the *Wikipedia* entry to ensure it reflects current research. Instructors who prefer academic publications may assign “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” by Aníbal Quijano (2007) or chapters five through seven from *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (2018, 105-152).

The first part of the lecture should emphasize the epistemic and pragmatic functions of metaphor. Burke (1941) argues this rhetorical device is integral to the “discovery and description of ‘the truth,’” a way of saying that metaphor is the condition of possibility for coming to know various phenomena through communication and composition (421). Meanwhile, Rodriguez (2014) shows metaphor’s epistemic function alongside its pragmatic function, using the infamous war metaphor (e.g., war on cancer, war on drugs, war on terrorism) to illustrate how metaphor informs human thought and policy on health, substances, and violence. As Rodriguez (2014) concludes, “In shaping how we perceive and relate to things and persons, metaphors are ideological creations—reinforcing and perpetuating what we value and believe. That different worldviews make for different metaphors means that metaphors are never morally and ideologically neutral” (84). Given these points, the first part of the lecture should lead students to understand metaphor as more than a literary device.

Frantz Fanon (1961/2004) provides a relevant example of metaphor’s pragmatic and epistemic functions, which instructors should share with students. Fanon writes about colonial thought and practice in Algeria and theorizes how the colonizer dehumanizes the colonized through animalizing metaphors. Instructors should inform students about the scope of this book within the greater world of anti-/de-/post-colonial theory while contextualizing Fanon’s relevance to Latin American decolonial theory, acknowledging that even though he did not conceptualize coloniality, he helped establish the intellectual conditions for scholars to do so in recent years. Instructors should also provide students with the following excerpt and questions, which they may display in digital or print form:

In plain talk, he [the colonized subject] is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. Allusion is made to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odors from the “native” quarters, to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavors at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary. (Fanon 1961/2004, 7)

- 1) You just learned metaphor is a device through which humans come to “know” the world around them. How does Fanon’s commentary on animalizing metaphors illustrate this rhetorical device’s epistemic function?
- 2) You just learned metaphor assists rhetors in motivating audiences to act in ways grounded in particular perspectives. How does Fanon’s commentary on animalizing metaphors illustrate this rhetorical device’s pragmatic function?
- 3) Animalizing metaphors pervade communication. Can you identify other instances of western elites using animalizing metaphors, whether implicitly or explicitly, to oppress various groups of humans?
- 4) In preparing for class, you read “Colonialism, Metaphors, and Communication” from *Communication: Colonization and the Making of a Discipline* by Amardo Rodriguez. Rodriguez (2014) argues, “The Western/European worldview begins on the belief (ontology) that the world is of a conflict between opposing (positive and negative) forces,” including good versus evil, mind versus body, life versus death, local versus

alien, order versus chaos, and so on and so forth (73). How does the Western/European worldview imbue animalizing metaphors with the power to establish and maintain hierarchies?

Successful answers will acknowledge the low social standing of “animals” in the Western/European worldview by arguing that animalizing metaphors make it easier for western elites to dispose of animalized humans. Students are also likely to reference historical and contemporary instances of animalizing metaphors when substantiating their claims. For instances, my students frequently draw attention to Nazis portraying Jews as “rats” and “cockroaches,” as well as to the US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement locking migrant children in cages.²

The second part of the lecture begins after instructors review the aforementioned questions with students and should emphasize colonialism and coloniality, addressing such questions as:

- 1) What is colonialism?
- 2) Why view colonialism as an enduring force rather than a historical event?
- 3) What is coloniality?
- 4) Why use coloniality as an analytic rather than colonialism?
- 5) What is the relationship between metaphor, colonialism, and coloniality?

I answer these questions in roughly the following manner:³

- 1) Broadly speaking, colonialism is a general pattern of exogenous domination with recourse to 1492, the year when “Columbus sailed the ocean blue,” as many of us heard in elementary school. I borrow this definition from settler colonial studies rather than Latin American decolonial theory, specifically from Lorenzo Veracini (2011) in the augural issue of the peer-reviewed academic journal, *Settler Colonial Studies*. This general definition of colonialism frames exogenous domination as a specific historical phenomenon. To put it differently, while human civilizations have met each other and “clashed” for millennia, colonialism refers to a specific iteration of exogenous domination over the past five hundred or so years.
- 2) Viewing colonialism as an enduring force rather than a historical event prepares us to consider the ongoing ramifications of colonial thought and practice. As Robert J. C. Young (2001) reminds us in his well-regarded book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, in many settler colonial societies like the US, it is customary to view colonialism as a discrete event from a bygone era. For instance, growing up, I learned about the “colonial era” and the “Thirteen original colonies” from which the US manifested. Educators and textbooks led me to presume colonialism *happened*

² I have found students are mostly aware of animalizing metaphors by the time they enter my classroom. Instructors may wish to provide additional examples of animalizing metaphors, which saturates scholarly literature in the humanities (Aldama 2001; Césaire 1955/2000; Deloria, Jr. 1969/1988; Memmi 1957/1991; Omi and Winant 1986/2015; Santa Ana 1999; Smith 1999/2012; Weheliye 2014).

³ These lecture notes are abridged. Instructors should adapt my content with their specific courses in mind.

and that the US was a post-colonial nation. Later, in college, I encountered educators and activists—many of whom affiliate with one of 500 distinct American Indian tribes—and they encouraged me conceive of the US as a settler colonial nation that bills itself as post-colonial. In doing so, I began to recognize how colonialism, settler or otherwise, structures every aspect of the contemporary moment, including, but not limited to, attitudes about race, gender, and sexuality; who belongs and on certain lands; and what knowledges count as the “right” knowledges. As a case in point, the words many of us use to name the “United States”—as well as the individual states and cities within the “United States”—are products of exogenous domination that survive today. Indeed, when European colonists “settled” the “United States,” they imposed names on places that reflect their own histories and relationships (Stuckey and Murphy 2001). To this day, those names continue to shape how many of us think about place, ergo *colonialism is an enduring force in the world rather than just another “historical event.”*

- 3) Coloniality refers to the ripples of colonialism in a world that is far from post-colonial. In the words of Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), a renowned figure in Latin American decolonial theory, coloniality “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (243). Catalina M. de Onís (2018b) has more recently defined coloniality for communication scholars as “a racialized system of modernity and capitalism that categorizes, capitalizes on, and controls based on dichotomous hierarchies that mark colonized peoples as subhuman and uncivilized” (537). These definitions cohere with Wikipedia’s definition of coloniality,⁴ which suggests this concept “identifies and describes the living legacies of colonialism in contemporary societies in the form of social discrimination that outlived formal colonialisms and became integrated in succeeding social order” (*Wikipedia* Contributors 2019). Since coloniality structures racial/gender/sexual hierarchies, knowledge production, and cultural systems, any attempt to understand the establishment and maintenance of social stratification, epistemologies, and ways of life must account for coloniality.
- 4) Colonialism and coloniality are related concepts to be sure, especially since both point toward exogenous domination with recourse to October 12, 1492; however, exogenous domination unfolds differently in each time and place, so colonial thought and practice is heterogenous. Insofar as *Sleep Dealer* is concerned, coloniality is a more fitting concept since the film imagines the future of US/Mexico relations from the perspective of a Mexican protagonist named Memo. In short, this rhetorical artifact leads us to use coloniality as analytic because it emerges from scholars who consider how colonial thought and practice has unfolded and continues to unfold in countries organized around the moniker “Latin America.”

⁴ I frequently use *Wikipedia* as a teaching resource. That said, I also inform my students that *Wikipedia* is a “starting place” rather than a foolproof source. In this case, I would encourage them to consult peer-reviewed, scholarly research if they were to engage with concepts like coloniality for future assignments.

- 5) Metaphor is an integral feature of colonial thought and practice since colonialism puts civilizations with different worldviews in contact with one another, which often brings about disaster for non-white people, places, and things, as our discussion of animalizing metaphors has revealed. The rhetorical power of metaphor affords western elites the opportunity to turn those they encounter into a form of disposable life. As Rodriguez (2014) observes, the stakes of metaphor are high, for “[w]ho controls what metaphors we use to describe and perceive things wields much influence in shaping what we conceive as real” (73). It is thus best to remember that metaphor is partial, partisan, and consequential.

Instructors should conclude their lecture by identifying how students will “test” these ideas about metaphor and coloniality. Since *Tropics of Reality Television* uses *Sleep Dealer’s* in-film reality television series to help students consider how these concepts interface with one another, instructors should inform students that they will analyze the epistemic and pragmatic functions of metaphor *vis-à-vis* a media text. This media text will comment on the enduring ramifications of the European colonization of the Americas, albeit in the fictional future as scripted by a Peruvian-American filmmaker. In particular, this media text will chart the rhetorical power of metaphor as theorized from the perspective of a young Mexican protagonist, subsequently inviting them to consider what rhetoric is, what rhetoric looks like, and what rhetoric does from the perspective of what the film’s writer/director characterizes as “one of our world’s true outsiders—a migrant worker” (Engler 2009).

Stage Two: Partial Screening of *Sleep Dealer*

Prior to class, students should watch *Sleep Dealer’s* trailer on the film’s *IMDb* (2008) profile and read the following text:

- 1) "The Home Front: Citizens Behind the Camera" by Isabel Fay (2016).

Fay (2016) explains how reality television empowers white Americans to reaffirm their status as citizens by surveilling Latino bodies, including Latino Customs and Border Patrol Agents, undocumented migrants, and drug smugglers. Fay’s assessment is part of a larger constellation of scholarship about reality television and neoliberal governing strategies that calls into question reality television’s role in managing the relationship between the state and society (Ouellette and Hay 2008). Whether it be *America’s Next Top Model*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *America’s Most Wanted*, or *Border Wars*, reality television is integral to the management of neoliberal citizenship as well as the adjudication of power (Hasinoff 2008; Sender 2006). Fay (2016) explicates this latter point in her article about *Border Wars*, effectively preparing students to analyze *Drones!* for how it exists in relationship to actual reality television viewing practices.

Students should also read the following two interviews:

- 1) “Science Fiction from Below: Alex Rivera, director of the new film *Sleep Dealer*, imagines the future of the Global South” by Mark Engler (2009);
- 2) “Director Alex Rivera on Third-World SF” by Steve Erickson (2009).

These interviews summarize *Sleep Dealer* and introduce Rivera, who speaks candidly about the political impetus for his film. As Rivera notes in the first interview, “*Sleep Dealer* is a science fiction thriller that takes a look at the future from a perspective that we’ve never seen before in science fiction. We’ve seen the future of Los Angeles, in *Blade Runner*. We’ve seen the future of Washington, D.C., in Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report*. We’ve seen London and Chicago. But we’ve never seen the places where the great majority of humanity actually lives. Those are in the global South. We’ve never seen Mexico; we’ve never seen Brazil; we’ve never seen India. We’ve never seen that future on film before” (Engler 2009). Moreover, these materials contextualize *Drones!* as a plot device and an omen. As Rivera observes in the second interview, “I think that *Sleep Dealer* makes many predictions about the future. One of them is that there will be a TV program where we follow drone pilots” (Erickson 2009). Collectively, these interviews prepare students to analyze *Drones!* and question how reality television might serve western elites in the future like it has in the past.

Instructors should screen the first 16 minutes and 50 seconds of *Sleep Dealer*, which is available for purchase on *Amazon* and *iTunes*. Instructors should ask students to focus on the relationship between *Drones!* and metaphor, informing them that they will discuss how this in-film reality television series enables Americans to control perspectives about Mexicans in a world scarred by a high-tech border wall. Doing so will enhance the quality of the discussions in stages three and four.

Stage Three: Small Group Discussion on Metaphor, Coloniality, and *Drones!*

After screening *Sleep Dealer*, students should form small groups of 3 to 4 students and discuss the following questions:

- 1) Exogenous domination is at the heart of *Sleep Dealer*. How does dispossession exist as a mundane structure of everyday life in Santa Ana? To put it differently, how do Americans—and more specifically Del Rio Water—impact people like Memo?
- 2) Describe *Drones!* in detail. What is the plot of this reality television series? What is the tone of this reality television series? Who produces this reality television series? What purpose/s does this reality television series serve?
- 3) In preparing for class, you read “The Home Front: Citizens Behind the Camera” by Isabel Fay. Fay (2016) argues that the reality television series *Border Wars* positions white American viewers as “deputized citizens” who surveil Latino CBP Agents, undocumented migrants, and drug smugglers, all of whom are constituted as more or less threatening depending on their proximity to the viewer (475). *Drones!* and *Border Wars* might be two different reality television series, but they arguably overlap. What parallels do you notice?

- 4) Regarding *Drones!*, what is the epistemic function of metaphor? In other words, Americans who watch this reality television series come to know themselves and Mexicans as what? Likewise, Mexicans who watch this reality television series come to know themselves and Americans as what? Draw attention to specific visual and textual elements to support your claims.
- 5) Regarding *Drones!*, what is the pragmatic function of metaphor? In other words, Americans use this reality television series and its metaphors to what ends? Draw attention to specific visual and textual elements to support your claims.
- 6) As you have learned, coloniality refers to the ripples of colonial thought and practice in a world that is far from post-colonial. How does the rhetorical power of metaphor in *Drones!* mirror past and/or present metaphors used by western elites (e.g., presidents, congressional leaders, business people, etc.) to describe Americans and Mexicans?

Instructors should provide a handout with these questions and encourage students to compose written responses for each prompt, which should also include the following excerpts from *Drones!* for easy reference:

Every night on *Drones!* we take you live to the frontlines where high-tech heroes use cutting edge technology and blow the hell out of the bad guys. (Rivera 2008)

This show contains depictions of graphic violence against evil-doers. If you have any young children at home, you won't want them to miss it. The southern sector water supply is in constant crisis, and dams all around the world are a security risk for the companies that built them. They often come under attack by legions of aqua-terrorists like the Mayan Army of Water Liberation, so the companies fight back. Tonight, we follow a rookie drone pilot who works protecting the assets of Del Rio Water. (Rivera 2008).

By displaying these excerpts, instructors will prime students to consult dialogue from the film, empowering them to be as specific as possible when answering each prompt. Instructors may also wish to include screenshots from the film alongside these excerpts, since the prompts call for students to draw on "specific visual or textual elements" to support their claims. I typically replay the clip without sound as students work in small groups.

Stage Four: Class-Wide Discussion on Metaphor, Coloniality, and *Drones!*

Finally, instructors should facilitate a class-wide discussion on metaphor and *Drones!* in response to the questions from the small group discussion. I prefer a more unstructured discussion in which the entire class sits in a circle and shares their answers. In cases where students are uncomfortable discussing their answers, instructors may consider asking each small group to nominate a "leader" to speak on behalf of the group.

Although responses can and should differ, successful answers to the discussion questions might take the following form:

- 1) Exogenous domination is at the heart of *Sleep Dealer*, because Del Rio Water, an American private water company, has invaded Santa Ana del Rio to export water to the US. In this case, dispossession functions as a mundane structure of everyday life since people like Memo *must* purchase water from Del Rio Water at an exorbitant price, which they do without protest. As the film notes, 35 liters of water costs 85 dollars and is outrageously priced given that water—a vital resource for human life—would otherwise be free. On that note, dispossession also puts people like Memo in close proximity to drones, machine guns, surveillance equipment, and militarized police, subjecting Mexican life to the cruelty of American operations. In short, exogenous domination and dispossession, which are two colonial themes, have negatively impacted life in the seemingly “underdeveloped” Santa Ana, demonstrating how—in the words of Rivera from one of the interviews assigned for homework—“underdevelopment is not an earlier stage of development, but rather the product of development” (Engler 2009).
- 2) *Drones!* is a fictional, in-film reality television series hosted by a white, cisgender man dressed in business attire. This host hyperbolically explains that *Drones!* takes viewers “live to the frontlines where high-tech heroes use cutting edge technology and blow the hell out of the bad guys.” *Drones!* is produced in the US by companies like Del Rio Water, each of which benefit from this reality television series since it helps them shape perspectives about Mexicans as “bad guys,” “evil-doers,” and “aqua-terrorists.” In effect, *Drones!* enables companies like Del Rio Water to manufacture “a security risk” in places like Santa Ana. Doing so helps them maintain control over their “assets,” a metaphorical rendering of water that benefits companies and harms Mexicans.
- 3) Like the context for *Border Wars*, *Drones!* exists in an iteration of American society that recognizes non-white bodies from Latin America as a threat to the nation-state, all of which is predicated on myths perpetuated through communication. This context creates a situation in which American viewers act as “deputized citizens” who surveil suspicious Latino bodies, as in the case of *Drones!*, inviting viewers to take part in the elimination of a “terrorist intercept” by way of immersive Flying-E cameras (Fay 475). Moreover, like the Latino CBP Agents in *Border Wars* who must act aggressively to curb the paranoia of white American viewers, the rookie drone pilot who murders Memo’s father is a Mexican-American soldier performing his allegiance to Del Rio Water, albeit hesitantly since he does not really want to kill Memo’s father as the movie goes on to note. All in all, *Drones!* shares strong parallels with *Border Wars* in rather overt ways.
- 4) The epistemic function of metaphor is pronounced in *Drones!* On the one hand, American viewers come to know American drone pilots as “high-tech heroes,” a perspective and worldview, to borrow verbiage from Burke (1941) and Rodriguez (2014), that coheres with a popular understanding of military activity as righteous. Furthermore, American viewers come to know Mexicans as “bad guys,” “evil-doers,” and “aqua-terrorists,” which they readily accept as true because their knowledge of Mexicans is filtered through a reality television series. This perspective and worldview is

only compounded by visual elements in *Drones!* that feature a digital “target” on top of Memo’s father, inviting viewers to see Memo’s father in terms of a target (Figure 4). On the other hand, Mexican viewers come to know so-called American “high-tech heroes” as the beneficiaries of propaganda, hence recognizing them as something akin to “high-tech warmongers.” Mexican viewers also come to know themselves as victims of this propaganda given that someone like Memo’s father is not a “terrorist” in any sense of the word. All in all, the epistemic function of metaphor is essential to *Drones!*, which shapes perspectives and worldviews about Americans and Mexicans who live above and below *Sleep Dealer*’s high-tech border wall.



Figure 4. *Drones!* turns Memo's father into a "target" through its imagery. Screenshot by the author.

- 5) As with the epistemic function, the pragmatic function of metaphor is pronounced in *Drones!* By turning Mexicans into “bad guys” through communication, Americans justify to themselves, for themselves, and by themselves why they can and should “eliminate” Mexicans. Americans come to see drone pilots as engaging in a war on “aqua-terrorists,” which informs US policy regarding how to respond to those humans who threaten its control of dispossessed “assets.” Visual elements, namely the fact that Americans only ever see Santa Ana through the lens of weapons known as “Flying-E cameras,” enhance this perspective and worldview by transforming the rural Santa Ana landscape into a site of criminal activity (Figure 5). Del Rio Water, which is just one of many American private water companies that benefit from *Drones!*, uses this reality television series to ease the consciousnesses of Americans as their nation dispossesses Mexican people of their lands and lives. In sum, Americans use *Drones!* and its metaphors to deadly ends as demonstrated by a predator drone pilot murdering Memo’s father: the alleged producer of a “terrorist intercept.”



Figure 5. American viewers of *Drones!* see Santa Ana through the lens of "Flying-E" cameras, which enable them to "see every angle of the action." Screenshot by the author.

- 6) As Rivera observes in one of the two interviews we read for homework, "*Sleep Dealer* makes many predictions about the future. One of them is that there will be a TV program where we follow drone pilots" (Erickson 2009). *Drones!* reminds me of the real reality television series *Homeland Security USA*, *Border Security: America's Front Line*, and *Border Live*, each of which comment on national boundaries and civic identity. Additionally, *Drones!* makes me think about the rhetoric of President Donald J. Trump (2017), who describes non-Americans as more inclined to commit acts of "terrorism" than Americans. President Trump (2017) also repeatedly refers to migrants as "bad dudes" (Figure 6). In these ways, President Trump uses his platform to promote a degrading perspective and worldview regarding non-white humans, many of whom are from Mexico like Memo and his father.



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump

Follow

If the ban were announced with a one week notice, the "bad" would rush into our country during that week. A lot of bad "dudes" out there!

5:31 AM - 30 Jan 2017

Figure 6. President Trump's "bad dude" metaphor is eerily similar to the "bad guys" metaphor from *Drones!* Screenshot by the author.

After discussing these questions, instructors should re-acknowledge the learning objectives for *Tropics of Reality Television*. They should remind students this lesson plan was meant to 1) train them to understand the rhetorical power of metaphor by drawing attention to its epistemic and pragmatic functions; 2) help them recognize metaphor as one of myriad discursive means through which western elites facilitate and justify acts of dispossession; 3) prepare them to apprehend reality television's role in managing human perspectives on citizenship, borders, and natural security. With these learning objectives accomplished, instructors should conclude this exercise by informing students that they are now equipped to consider the rhetorical power of metaphor as it relates to coloniality and advise them to continue thinking about these topics, especially as they relate to reality television.

In my experience, *Tropics of Reality Television* is an engaging and purposeful lesson plan. My students frequently report they find worth in "relating concepts to pop culture" and claim they have an "easier time understanding dry academic language and theories [by] applying course concepts to contemporary matters or entertainment." As an educator, I value this type of feedback, because it suggests that *Drones!* is an accessible and meaningful media text for discussing metaphor's rhetorical power and reality television's role in American Empire.

By way of conclusion, I want to echo the importance of decolonizing rhetorical pedagogy, which I take as the ongoing project of troubling coloniality and delinking from it in all its forms. Whereas Darrel Allan Wanzer (2012) once issued a call for rhetoricians to become decolonial rhetoricians, arguing that our research must consider how coloniality structures rhetoric, here I submit that all rhetorical pedagogues must seek to become decolonial rhetorical pedagogues. *Tropics of Reality Television* provides one such way decolonial rhetorical pedagogues may problematize coloniality and delink from it, even if this lesson plan will not magically decolonize rhetorical pedagogy all at once. Going forward, it is imperative that decolonial rhetorical pedagogues decipher other ways to educate students by remaining attuned to views from the underside of modernity.

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T. Jake Dionne (M.A., Syracuse University) is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research considers how western institutions communicate about the more-than-human world, often to disastrous ends. His dissertation, "The Synecdochal Bison in an Age of Territorial Dispossession: Rhetorical De/Animalization as an Argumentative Resource for U.S. Settler Colonial Institutions," traces how settlers rhetorically mediate the social standing of the American bison to facilitate and justify territorial dispossession. You may follow him on Twitter (@dionnephd). He wishes to thank Arturo J. Aldama, who introduced him to *Sleep Dealer*.

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