

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Argenis Hurtado Moreno for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on June 5, 2020

Title: She is Somebody: The Care and Labor of Undocu/DACAmented Mothers

Abstract Approved: _____

Emily Yates-Doerr

This thesis is an offering, request, testimonio, refusal, and compliance to the discipline of anthropology and higher education. In this thesis, I engage with different forms of storytelling to highlight the relationships of mixed-status families in the United States. To accomplish this, I draw on the experiences of my mother and sister. I offer my own reflections as a scholar-activist and ‘model immigrant,’ a label which I resist. By employing multimodal-multisensory ethnographic methods, I convey a different kind of anthropology – an accessible anthropology. As I push for this new method of engagement, I also argue against the narrative of high achieving undocumented/Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) scholars as the only undocumented immigrants deserving of dignity, respect, and acceptance. I ask allies and supporters of immigration reform to think expansively, about marginalized low wage-earning undocumented women silenced and left out of the discourse. I ask for immigration advocacy to consider women that produce so-called exemplary immigrant children. I explore the labor and care that my mother and sister demonstrate in order for me to advance and gain recognition, even when it comes at their own exclusion. By inserting myself in this project, I aim to make sense of my own thoughts and feelings of acceptance and rejection. It is through exploratory means that I am able to better understand the borders I encounter as a Mexican-born and “American-raised” racialized immigrant.

Through poetry, film, letters, and essays I gift a *new* “model” for anthropology, one that unsettles the established convention. By applying feminist methodologies and experimental ethnographic methods, I challenge the system that has recognized me, asking that it also recognize and care for my mother and sister.

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She is Somebody: The Care and Labor of Undocu/DACAmented Mothers

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Argenis Hurtado Moreno, Author

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DEDICATION

Para mi Mamá y Hermana

Outline

Under the current administration, two polarizing narratives dominate immigration discourse in the United States: perpetrators and ‘model’ citizens. This thesis serves multiple purposes. One, it brings the experiences of undocumented and DACAmented mothers to the forefront of the conversation in an attempt to challenge the conversation surrounding immigration in the United States of America by demonstrating that a person does not need to be exemplary to be deserving of recognition, dignity, and citizenship. Through observation, participation, and collaborative research, this study in Phoenix, Arizona examines the everyday negotiations immigrant mothers make regarding paid and unpaid labor or “motherwork,” time, agency, and their children. Secondly, it is a reflection on conducting anthropological fieldwork from the insider perspective of a DACAmented scholar-activist, examining the relationship between researcher, subject, and the academe. I use experimental ethnography to explore different modalities of knowledge (re)production¹. Overall, the project contributes to the understanding of narrative construction and the silencing of people’s voices and lived experiences through multimodal-multisensorial ethnographic methods.

This thesis is multimodal and multisensorial because it includes prose, videos, photographs, poetry, and letter-writing. It is broken into ten parts that offer a history, present discourse, and imagined future of immigration in the US. The sections do not follow a standard linear convention, instead they are ordered in a thematic sequence. Woven throughout these sections are various engagements with theories of motherwork, borders, legality, and experimental methods of ethnography. My hope for the reader is to consider who and what is left on the peripheries of socially constructed models of acceptability.

¹ I note the reproduction of knowledge to honor the original storytellers and theorists that shared their lived experiences with me as part of this thesis.

“General Introduction” gives context to the Dreamer Movement and history of immigration policy regarding the Development, Relief, and Education Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The DREAM Act would provide a pathway to citizenship to undocumented scholars in the United States. The DREAM Act was first introduced in the US congress in 2001 and many times after. It has been rejected and reintroduced. The failed effort led to the 2012 executive order by President Obama, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The election of Donald J. Trump put DACA in danger of termination and this heightened the contradictions and inequalities of such exclusive immigration policy.

In chapter one, I think through the question, “What knowledge is valuable?” as a means to understand how knowledge is constructed and guarded to uphold systems of power. More specifically, I investigate how “formal” education plays a role in mixed-status families. I provide a critique of the exclusionary practices of the anthropological field and reconcile these critiques of the discipline with a model of storytelling. I highlight Zora Neal Hurston, whose contributions to anthropology remain underrecognized. In particular, I draw attention to how she bent the boundaries of traditional anthropological methods through experimental ethnographic methods. *New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa and borderland theory is at the core of this work. While not an anthropologist, her feminist pedagogy is consistently in conversation with my research and advocacy. With her in mind, I examine the relationship between the researcher and the “subject” and what it means when these lines are blurry.

The second chapter is a short film on the border-crossing experiences of my mother and sister. In this video I play with the ideas of memory and storytelling and how two people who share experiences can have different retellings. It provides a glimpse of the themes, such as care and labor, that I explore in the succeeding chapters. I show the leaps mothers are willing to take for their

children, the family they leave behind, and the fear of losing what they have gained in their new homeland.

The third chapter concentrates on motherwork, networks of care, and medical re-crossings (border crossings in pursuit of medical care). To develop on the idea of motherwork, I focus on my mother's chronic illness, lupus, and how her motives for getting well center around her children. Combining motherhood and carework, I use the term motherwork to show that the labor and care undertaken by mothers are not separate from one another. I explore how care travels across borders and examine the reconfiguration of the family under US immigration policy. I touch on the concept of the global care chain and detail how kinship networks cross and re-cross through physical and abstract borders. I introduce the term medical re-crossing to illustrate the act of crossing the border back to Mexico and then re-crossing to the US for medical healing and family reunification. I continue to explore the construction of knowledge and how undocumented mothers and their children learn to navigate systems for survival and care.

Chapter four and five experiment with unconventional modalities of anthropological scholarship. Chapter four is an experimental short film on the care of hands and the work they do. This sensory ethnographic film begins with an eagle-eye view of my mother as she makes tortillas. I use this vantage point to capture her perspective. The second clip of this film is the dialysis machine that has become vital to my mother's health. The third and final scene illustrates the process of removing her from the machine. I use these representational forms and approaches to encapsulate the embodied lines of care. Chapter five is a series of *antropoesía* – or anthropological poems – that relate to the undocumented experience inspired by my reflections and fieldwork. Poetry offers an avenue to process ideas and emotions of the human condition in a textual form that is underused in the field of anthropology.

In the sixth chapter, I expand on the concept of undocumented labor and carework through the scope of noise. I explore the breakroom at my mother and sister's jobsite to bring attention to the function of hierarchies in the workplace. I mirror the idea of a mixed-status family with a mixed-status job site and how these differences in status illustrate power and control. People with precarious citizenship status participate in unofficial forms of policing and surveillance as a means to protect their uncertain careers. I argue that precarious livelihoods uphold the status quo by silencing people through these practices. This chapter symbolizes sound and questions the consequences of making noise while also asking, "who is allowed to make noise?"

Chapter 7, "El Virus," documents the networks of care that have existed in racialized groups and class-marginalized communities in the US. Social networks of care have been doubly important in light of the coronavirus pandemic. While I demonstrate different forms of care, I also argue that racism is a disease and show how Trump perpetuates a longstanding form of violence. Drawing from my fieldwork, I highlight the continuous manner in which immigration policies attempt to minimize the already scarce resources undocumented immigrants have. I call for unity and action to stop the spread of structural violence that targets anyone in the country that identifies or is coded as "other."

In the *Borders that Bind Us*, I offer my testimonio and give insight into the barriers that non-US scholars in the academy encounter. My offering is part of a larger work that includes contributions by Anand Pandian, Adam Fleischmann, Zoe Todd, Emily Yates-Doerr, Ben Orlove, Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan Goldsmiths, Eduardo Kohn, Hannah Knox, Jerome Whittington, Tyler Zoanni, Krista Billingsley, Taapsi Ramchandani, Mayanthi Fernando, and Andrea Muehlebach. This is a call to action to reimagine the annual meeting for the American Anthropological Association, and with this, the broader practice of anthropological scholarship. I envision an educational system and a nation with no borders.

The conclusion is in the form of a series of letters. The letters are addressed to the reader, my (white) mentors, Senator Reed from Rhode Island, mis Mamás, and future undocumented scholars. Each letter touches on one or more of the themes discussed through this thesis. Anthropological studies of immigrants often perpetuate stories of suffering and victimization and present this within the established models of anthropology. My intention is to break away from these paradigms and present stories of undocumented mothers, their agency and care, with experimental ethnographic methods.

General Introduction

¿Pa' dónde vamos y cómo?

This thesis interrogates contemporary migration issues in the United States with a focus on women with no US citizenship, and no foreseeable pathway to US citizenship. More specifically, it is the women in my life—my mother and sister—who offer their lived experiences for me to explore this topic through written, visual, and auditory modes. In the pages of this manuscript, you will notice that I have taken a nontraditional but certainly not new, manner of presenting academic research. Stories, poems, photography, and film are avenues that allow me to express my ideas but also make these ideas accessible to people who are not in academia. If, at times, this feels disorienting, please know it is not without deliberate intent. Perhaps it is personal hubris, but I want to disrupt you (the reader) and welcome you to challenge the domain of anthropology, much in the same way that navigating a country sin papeles is disorienting and challenging for many immigrants. I want to, as Auerbach (2020) suggests, to get you to care about people by converging thinking and feeling. Woven in are my own reflections and stories. After all, anthropology is storytelling.

Contextualizando la historia y el ahora

In the United States, the events that took place on September 11, 2001 have been labeled as an American tragedy. On the day marking the ten-year anniversary, President Barack Obama delivered a speech outside of the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., describing the attacks as a moment of tribulation:

Ten years ago, America confronted one of our darkest nights. Mighty towers crumbled. Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon. Airplane wreckage smoldered on a Pennsylvania field. Friends and neighbors, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters – they were taken from us with a heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty. And on September 12, 2001, we awoke to a world in which evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty clouded our future. In the decade since, much has changed for Americans. We've known war and recession, passionate debates and political divides. We can never get back the lives

that were lost on that day or the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars that followed (Obama, 2011).²

Sixty-three undocumented immigrants were reported by immigrant families as desaparecidos or “disappeareds” in conjunction with the events of 9/11 (Louie, 2001). But without official documentation to prove their existence or employability, they have been left out of the accounts commemorating this moment in US history (Solís and Rivera-Sánchez, 2004). The aftermath of that day has had a severe impact on US immigration policy and conversely, further perpetuated the silencing of undocumented people.

The fall of 2001, I was in the third grade and my family was living in a dingy townhouse in Phoenix, Arizona. My parents went to work that morning and my sister headed to school. What seemed to be inconsequential to us at that moment and for years to come, would late prove to be impactful, even though we were 2,500 miles away from the World Trade Center. That day I had on a red shirt, navy shorts, white tennis shoes with velcro straps, and an off-brand backpack from the swapmeet or Los Perros, as many Mexican Spanish speakers dubbed it because its location was a former greyhound racing compound. I walked to school alone like I did most mornings, and upon arrival, I, along with the other students were ushered into the campus cafeteria and then to our respective classrooms.

At the front of the classroom, centered above the line where the chalkboard and whiteboard met, hung a wooden box that doubled as a digital clock and speaker. The principal spoke through it, her voice grainy because of the bad audio quality, and I can only imagine now that perhaps it was also filled with hurt and uncertainty. She asked for us to stand, and like well-behaved children, my classmates and I obeyed. In accordance with our daily ritual, we recited the Pledge of Allegiance and

² Remarks by the President at a “A Concert for Hope” <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/2011/09/11/remarks-president-concert-hope>

held a moment of silence, except that that day we stood in silence a little longer than usual. C, my friend, and I caught each other with our eyes open. The principal broke the silence and informed us that time outside would be limited and suggested our classroom televisions remain turned on in case another incident occurred. She assured us that we would be safe and survive this because we were a nation of strong and courageous Americans. When the announcements ended, my teacher, Ms. V, walked over to the clunky TV, which dangled from one of the corners in the room and let us know that our lives would forever change. Before pressing the power button on the tv, she said something to like, “we will remember this day for the rest of our lives, and that from that day moving forward, everyone in the country would be united.” She was both right and wrong.

Five days before the terrorist attacks, Presidente Vicente Fox and President George W. Bush released a joint statement promising a resolution to address the root cause of Mexican nationals crossing to the US. Their statement assured “realistic approaches to migration to ensure it is safe, orderly, legal, and dignified (2001).” That of course would change. The events of 9/11 also meant that the initial Senate hearing for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would no longer take place on September 12, 2001 despite the labor and advocacy efforts made by social justice activists and policymakers. The version of the bill had gained support from both major political parties in the United States and would provide undocumented children a pathway to US citizenship. It seemed like a sure win but a positive outlook for immigration reform quickly dwindled as racist and nationalist ideologies ran rampant. The events of that September morning prompted the militarization of the US/Mexico border, the movement of people underwent more comprehensive surveillance, and new government initiatives deepened the exclusion of people without US citizenship. A year and five months after 9/11, the federal government established Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), whose history of community raids and deportation of non-US citizens has earned it a reputation as one of the country’s most hated and feared agencies

(Menjívar and Abrego, 2012). In 2010, republicans Russell Pearce and Kris Kobach conceived the Arizona Senate Bill 1070, infamously known as the “show me your papers” law that authorized local officials to require proof of US citizenship from individuals suspected of being undocumented immigrants. SB 1070 equated nationality to phenotypical appearance, encouraging racial profiling. This law made people leave the state and local Mexican immigrant economies, such as Los Perros, suffered (Sterling, 2010). That same year, Arizona elected officials introduced House Bill 2281, which prohibited public schools from including ethnic studies courses in their programs. Ethnic studies courses were said to:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States Government.
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people (white people).
3. Speak primarily to pupils of a particular ethnic group.
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.

These state legislations directly impacted my family, friends, and myself. Mimicking the East Los Angeles Walkouts of 1968, students throughout Arizona rallied together and left school campuses chanting, “walkout!” For undocumented youth, like myself at the time, these new laws cultivated fear of deportation and a need to justify their presence in the United States without penalty. With no formal anthropological training, I began observing claims made by undocumented friends that were in tune with popular political claims in support of undocumented children. Statements such as “these kids were brought here with no fault of their own” and “I shouldn’t have to be punished for my parents’ decision to bring me here, I was only a baby,” created a division between criminal and criminalized. Another popular argument, and one that I used extensively in my adolescence, was that my intellect and academic achievements made me deserving of US citizenship—an argument that I now criticize and is the basis of my thesis’s argument. But before I get there, more context is necessary.

Ms. V said the national catastrophe would unite us, but it only created more divisions. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my intellectual and academic aptitude, which I clung to to defend

my presence in this country, rooted back to a racist history of situating intellect as a form of membership. Between the late 1800s and the mid-1950s, the U.S. Public Health Service Department administered a series of tests on European immigrants arriving through Ellis Island. These proctored exams would determine whether someone was worthy of entering the US or whether someone lacked the physical, mental, medical, cultural, political, and or social qualities deemed **acceptable** by the governing party. Those that did not pass these tests entered the deportation process and were shipped back to Europe. People sent back to their home countries were labeled “defectives.” These labels based on merit, intelligence, and other racist measures made it easier for upholders of whiteness and elitism to distinguish between the desirables and the undesirables. Medical staff visually examined the performance of immigrants as they hauled their luggage upstairs, intently monitoring for shortness of breath, coughing, and limping. Chang (1999) suggests the nativist movements in the US are not against all foreigners, but target immigrants who can be racialized. Dolmage (2011) builds on these ideas by examining the port of Ellis Island, arguing these observations, informed as they were by eugenic logics of superiority and biological fitness, coded “undesirable bodies” to “attributions of disability,” including phenotypically white bodies which were “raced as nonwhite, or disqualified whites.” Physically capable immigrants had to undergo a set of age-appropriate intelligence-based exams, which, of course, had an element of subjectivity given the freedoms granted to each proctor. Administers of these exams noted whether someone could complete a puzzle, answer arbitrary questions, and follow orders. These tests were developed by Howard Knox, who publicly defended his work as a process of “sorting out of those immigrant who may, because of their mental makeup, become a burden to the State or who may produce offspring that will require care in prisons, asylums, or other institutions” (1915). Another supporter of these evaluations was eugenicist Henry Goddard, who published “Mental Tests and the Immigrant” (1917), in which he states:

Assuming that they are morons, we have two practical questions: first, is it hereditary defect or second, apparent defect due to deprivation? If the latter, as seems likely, little fear may be felt for the children. Even if the former, we may still question whether we cannot use moron laborers if we are wise enough to train them properly.

People influencing, enacting, and enforcing government policy had a particular vision for what the US would look like, and their systems of classification--xenophobic and racist attitudes cloaked under a rhetoric of building a prosperous nation--allowed them to reject those different from them and exploit their labor, while also constructing the image of moldable immigrant children.

Nearing the decennial of the 9/11 attacks, the DREAM Act once again made its way to Washington D.C., and with it the stories of accomplished Dreamers yearning for a pathway to citizenship. The 2011 document cited successes such as obtaining high grade point averages, dominating the English language, performing at Carnegie Hall, attending some of the top engineering schools in the country, earning high honors in military programs, being courted by Silicon Valley start-ups, and earning degrees from elite universities. Throughout the country, undocumented youth have connected with the Dreamer movement. But in policy conversations and legislative records, Dreamers are young, high achieving scholars, who in fact are not representative of the majority. In the same manner in which documents are a proof of citizenship, the DREAM Act proves that some undocumented people are more *deserving* than others. On June 28, 2011 in front of the United States Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security, and Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Dick Durbin stated:

There are many others here today who I would like to introduce, but I do not have the time to do it. Let me ask everyone here today who is a DREAM Act student to stand and be recognized. Thank you so much for being here, for the sacrifice you made to come. You can be seated.

When I look around this room, I see America's future--our doctors, our teachers, our nurses, our engineers, our scientists, our soldiers, our Congressmen, our Senators, and maybe our President.³

Senator Durbin, although arguably well-intentioned, simultaneously recognizes and dismisses the large group of unauthorized immigrants not categorized as exemplary by US-government standards. His statement echoes and is echoed by many others, compromising a discourse that became popular in 2011 and continues to be at the center of immigration discourse.

My mother, sister, aunt, father, brother-in-law, and the majority of my undocumented friends are not traditional academics, have no plans to run for office (because they cannot even if they wanted to), and work underpaid and undervalued jobs. The DREAM Act, while inclusive for people like myself, who are English proficient, “talented,” and scholarly, holds the same exclusionary measures established by the US government to distinguish between desirable and undesirable immigrants at Ellis Island. These labels of desirability are contingent on conformity and utility, because as stated by the DREAM Act, immigration is “an issue of economic prosperity...to sustain American’s economic prosperity.”

On the morning of June 15, 2012, Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, announced President Barack Obama’s executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Before serving on Obama’s administrative team, Napolitano served as the governor of Arizona. I mention this because my mother was working under the table at that time, and coincidentally, she was the person who would empty the waste baskets of Napolitano’s office in Phoenix. It was that summer day, in 2012, a year after I had graduated high school and over a decade since the initial introduction and failure of the DREAM Act, that US policy would recognize and grant protection from deportation to (some) undocumented people.

³ The Dream Act Senate hearing on June 28, 2011 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112shrg20267/html/CHRG-112shrg20267.htm>

Failed versions of the DREAM Act led to DACA, a watered-down version that only came to fruition through the executive action. The executive order came as a response to many people's pleas, including mine. I was tired of working under the table and feeling that a future in this country was not the future my mother envisioned for me when she crossed the border in 1996. Obama defended his action to help the young, studious, talented, utile, *Americanized* Dreamers⁴. He said, "Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you've done everything right your entire life -- studied hard, worked hard, maybe even graduated at the top of your class -- only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about, with a language that you may not even speak." He used my parents as scapegoats and criminalized them to justify my belonging:

"They were brought to this country by their parents..."

"That's what gave rise to the DREAM Act. It says that if your parents brought you here as a child, if you've been here for five years, and you're willing to go to college or serve in our military, you can one day earn your citizenship."

"...to expel these young people who want to staff our labs, or start new businesses, or defend our country simply because of the actions of their parents..."

President Obama repeatedly emphasized that his executive order was a moral decision, all the while pressing the economic utility of Dreamers.

"And as long as I'm President, I will not give up on this issue, not only because it's the right thing to do for our economy -- and CEOs agree with me -- not just because it's the right thing to do for our security, but because it's the right thing to do, period."⁵

⁴ Transcript of Obama's speech on immigration policy by the New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/us/transcript-of-obamas-speech-on-immigration-policy.html>

⁵ Remarks by the President in address to the US nation on immigration on June 15, 2012
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>

Obama holds the record for the most deportations processed under any presidency, and his protection of people like me while suggesting that my parents had acted wrongly furthered played into and complicated his stance on immigration. “Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who’s working hard to provide for her kids.”⁶ Perhaps his rhetoric was to convince right-wing politicians to not oppose DACA, but this strategy had more damaging effects. Two years after DACA, President Obama announced Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) to “establish a process similar to DACA” for undocumented parents of US citizens and lawful permanent residents. DAPA immediately came to a halt because of a Texas State lawsuit and would remain at a standstill beyond the Obama presidency. This meant that the future of undocumented parents with US-born children or lawful permanent residents would remain in limbo despite a presidential effort to grant them US citizenship.

As Obama’s second presidential term was coming to an end, I worried about Donald Trump being his successor, but I would try to convince myself and others he would not win. “El no ganará” I told family and friends who sought advice from me. I did know this in absolute, but I hoped I was right. I believed the media that discounted his chance taking the win. But his message for white supremacy spread throughout the country like a virus. In his presidential announcement speech, Trump used language to categorize immigrants as bad people—defective people.

“When Mexico (meaning the Mexican Government) sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you (pointing to the audience). They’re not sending you (pointing again). They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems to us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people! But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we’re getting. And it only makes common sense. They’re sending us not the right people. It’s coming from more than Mexico. It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming probably from the Middle East. But we don’t know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don’t know what’s happening. And it’s got to stop and it’s got to stop fast...Likewise, tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border. The

⁶ Remarks by the President in address to the US nation on immigration on November 11, 2014
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-president-address-nation-immigration>

United States has become a dumping ground for Mexico and, in fact, for many other parts of the world. On the other hand, many fabulous people come in from Mexico and our country is better for it. But these people are here legally, and are severely hurt by those coming in illegally...”⁷

In the same speech, Trump vowed to end DACA, I will immediately terminate President Obama’s illegal executive order on immigration, immediately.” Trump’s disparaging remarks continued throughout his campaign. He proposed banning all Muslims from the country, mocked people with disabilities, and stereotyped Black communities as poor, uneducated, and unemployed. He picked Mike Pence to be his running mate for vice president. Pence has a consistent history of undermining the rights of LGBTQIA+ communities and he has made derogatory comments about women. For many, including myself, their presidential win came as a soul-crushing shock.

One year into his presidency, Trump rescinded the DACA program, affecting the lives of 800,000 beneficiaries and their families. Too much of a coward to deliver the news himself, he had then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions deliver the message.⁸ The message, unlike Obama’s, did not refer to us as kids and children but as “mostly-adult illegal aliens” and criminalized us. Sessions said DACA “contributed to a surge of unaccompanied minors on the southern border” and “denied jobs to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same jobs to go to illegal aliens.” He said we would disrupt social order and bring disease and unhappiness to the country: “No greater good can be done for the overall health and wellbeing of our Republic.” Sessions continued to state the US was a nation of compassionate laws—a questionable opinion, and one that I disagree with. He continued to paint us as a threat to (white) communities and taxpayers. To permit us citizenship

⁷ Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech <https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

⁸ Attorney General Sessions delivers remarks on DACA <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-sessions-delivers-remarks-daca>

would “put our nation at risk of crime, violence, and even terrorism.” In contrast, Trump’s response to the white domestic terrorists and their violent protests in Charlottesville, Virginia was that white nationalists were “very fine people⁹.” The end of the DACA program did not come right away, but DAPA’s did.

Protests and lawsuits opposed Trump’s desire to rescind DACA. In late December of 2017 in Washington D.C., I was contacted by United We Dream, a national immigrant rights organization, to participate in a series of actions pressuring the Democratic party to support a pathway to citizenship and permanent protections for undocumented and temporarily authorized communities. The demonstrations eventually led to the government shutdown of 2018. However, the government reopened after two days, and our efforts seemed to have been in vain. On November 12, 2019, the Supreme Court heard a consolidated case consisting of the three main lawsuits over DACA: *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People v. McAlleenan*, *Vidal*, and *the Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California*. The Judges did not come to a conclusion but would have to declare a verdict no later than June 2020.

I have established a general overview of immigration that spans nearly two decades and connects back to the history of US policy and its efforts to exclude and categorize non-citizens. Throughout different points in time, organizations across the country have made extraordinary advances for immigrants in this country. Undocumented immigrants are still a group consistently in the limelight and in the shadows of the political debate. Recent advocacy and pressure from local and national organizations have given way to some changes in policy—even if selective. Without their efforts, I would have had access to DACA, scholarships and other funds, in-state tuition, and

⁹ Trump’s Statement on Virginia <https://www.politifact.com/article/2017/aug/14/context-president-donald-trumps-saturday-statement/>

many other privileges. At the same time, much of this work echoes a paradigm that champions intelligence and utility. This, in turn, shapes US policy by how members of congress advocate on behalf of undocumented people. They advocate for the young, educated, and upwardly mobile. It marks me as deserving of recognition more than it does other members of my communities—including my most intimate kin—who do not have access and resources to agents of care. In this thesis, I offer no answers to immigration debates but welcome a shift in thought, one that considers immigration with care. I am interested in presenting how care and human kindness are still actively present and practiced by undocumented immigrants and allies in a nation with a history of the displacement and enslavement of people.

This project emerged from a moment of distress and care, shared with my academic advisor, Emily Yates-Doerr. At the time (and to this day), I struggled with my position in the academy and how it made me feel different from my family. I also had concerns about not being able to take care of them financially and carried an enormous sense of guilt for being deemed by the structures of US immigration as “more worthy” than they were deemed to be.

“Write about it, make this your thesis,” Emily encouraged.

And I did. My mother and sister became the people I wrote about. I spent my time during my summer fieldwork “documenting” their lives. I gazed with an anthropological perspective upon what was ordinary in their/our day-to-day lives. I spent nights with them as a janitor, and also shared responsibility for caring for my sister’s young child. I became interested in sharing these stories. I did not want to write on the premise of hardship and resilience, and I also did not want to present another story about achieving the impossible dream of citizenship. I wanted to illustrate, with different modalities, how undocu/DACAmented immigrants women care and work within the confines of a country that actively seeks to oppress them and their children.

Chapter One: Introduction

(With thick Mexican accent...)

I speak Spanish therefore you hate me
 I speak in English therefore they hate me
 I speak Spanglish therefore she speaks *ingleñol*
 I speak in tongues therefore you desire me
 I speak to you therefore you kill me
 I speak therefore you change
 I speak in English therefore you listen
 I speak in English therefore I hate you
pero cuando hablo en español te adoro
 but when I speak Spanish I adore you
ahora, why *carajos* do I speak Spanish?
 political praxis *craneal*
 I mean...
 I mean...

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Border Brujo*

Writing this master's thesis I am filled with self-doubt. Inner monologues give way to questions about the authenticity of my voice and whether the work I produce is *real* anthropology. The whisper in my ear questions whether I am a writer at all. I wonder what it must be like to speak with authority. To say things, to know things that I know nothing of (or rather things that I think I know), and string along words with conviction.

"This is really great!" Emily, my academic advisor tells me as she reads the text on my laptop.

"Really? You think so? I feel like I am only telling stories," I reply, with an uncertainty stronger than the lingering scent of coffee emitting from the espresso machine a few feet away.

I watch as my colleagues write and discuss their own works among each other. My confidence is low, but her affirmation makes me believe in myself.

Without taking her eyes off the screen and a smile she adds, "Whoever told you anthropology isn't about storytelling?"

As a student of applied anthropology, the foundation of my training situates me in the role of an engaged observer, one that connects feminist advocacy, activism, and research with the hope

of enacting tangible outcomes within communities and political arenas (Mohanty, 2013; Sanford & Angel-Ajani, 2006; Lamphere, 2003). I think about the responsibility of this position and polemics historically associated with the methods the discipline of anthropology promotes. I pay close attention to the disconnect within anthropology--applied anthropology versus anthropology. What does it mean for me to be an engaged anthropologist? As a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals beneficiary conducting ethnographic research with undocumented/DACAmented women, my identity markers place me in a unique position. I experienced the majority of my life (ages three – twenty) in the United States without US citizenship or any sort of authorized status. My status changed in 2013 when my application for DACA was approved and for the past eight years I have lived in a limbo of “legality.” I recognize the intersections of identities between my mother, sister, and myself. I also recognize that as an *hijo y hermano*, I walk a different side of the borderlands, a path where my body and its presentation are coded differently than theirs. These intricacies allow me to question anthropology as a discipline, my position within the academy and outside of it, and the privilege that comes with liminal immigration status and being a model minority. These interrogations are at the root of this research.

Narratives about Dreamers/DACA recipients tend to focus on a narrow set of qualities: top of their class, ivy league bound, hard-working, and with a bright future. Our success stories dominate progressive immigration reform agendas. Rarely are our parents or parent figures exalted. Rarely, if ever, does the DACAmented minimum wage worker trying to get by and helping her siblings move ahead, receive the same kind of recognition as someone studying at an elite college. The labor endured by family members to propel their model children is not present in the argument for a pathway to US citizenship. The model child is excellent by her accord, and her parents take on the label of criminals.

In this thesis, I offer stories of my mother and my sister—two women that spent most of their time in this country with no US-citizenship or protection from deportation. I highlight their contributions to my successes to make the following arguments: Their care and labor propel me forward, and their actions deserve the same respect and recognition that my achievements (and that of others like me) receive. Most importantly, their existence alone should be enough to warrant protection and safety.

Whoever told you anthropology isn't about storytelling?

Anthropology is storytelling and about storytelling. This I believe is accepted. But who gets to tell and decide which stories are told, from whose voices, and in what manner? Examining the history of anthropology unveils a racist foundation, particularly the extractive processes of appropriating local knowledge (Simpson, 2005). The methods of the conventional ethnographer are as follows: he arrives to the field, immerses himself into the community, observes, surveys, and leaves. He translates the foreign language of the “other” into the language of scholars. For what is home to some is the “the field” to the ethnographer—a place to riddle with scientific methods and quantifications.

Communities have begun to resist this process. In “Extractivism, Refusals, and the Mining of Failure,” Teresa Velasquez asks, “Is knowledge construction a veil for narrative extraction, where knowledge is a commodity to be reassembled for productive gain?” (2016). Velasquez details the distrust Southern Ecuadorean Andean women demonstrated to her when she went back to conduct a workshop for her research among these women, who thought that their participation would involve giving a testimony that would be documented and taken away to the United States. Where Velasquez thought of the workshop as *devolución*, a form of reciprocity, the local women thought of it as a form of mining. The act of coming and taking is foundational to anthropology, as many

scholars in the discipline come to learn through the canonized literature of social theory. When the anthropologist returns from the field and publish his work, he does not credit the locals for the knowledge he has taken but presents as his discovery and his theory—how many papers have you read with the subheading, “findings?”

In her critique of anthropology, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “A conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’ is a conversation in which ‘them’ is silenced” (67). The others are faraway, unable to speak for themselves, so the anthropologist or ethnographer speaks about and for the subjects. Minh-ha refers to this practice as “scientific gossip” (67).

“Anthropology is finally better defined as ‘gossip’ (we speak together about others) than as ‘conversation’... Scientific gossip takes place under relatively intimate conditions and mostly without witnesses; hence the gossipers' need to act in solidarity, leaning on and referring to each other for more credibility. The confidence they (re)gain through the ritual of citing all their fellows’ (dead or living) names has allowed them to speak with the apathetic tone of the voice of knowledge (67).”

Feminist anthropologists have been critical about how citational practices further perpetuate the canonization of white males in the discipline and silence the works of scholars that are non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-cisgender, non-US-born, non-western/US-educated and in other respects, not part of the hegemonic group (Lutz 1990; Weiss, 2018; Calkins & Rottenburg, 2014; McElhinny, Hols, Holtzkeuer, Unger, & Hicks, 2003). Scientific gossip or citations leave people already on the margins of society on the periphery of the academy.

Efforts to decanonize anthropology attempt to break this paradigm by re(inserting) Zora Neal Hurston as a “foremother” of social theory, experimental ethnographic methods, and reflexive anthropology (McClaurin, 2002; McClaurin, 2012; Buell, Burns, Chen, Grabinsky, Hurtado Moreno et al. 2019). Hurston’s recent publication, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last ‘Black Cargo’* details the life of Oluale Kossola (Cudjoe Kazoola Lewis), a former slave brought to the United States illegally in 1860 along with an additional 100 enslaved people on the Clotilda. *Barracoon* remains loyal to Kossola’s voice, because rather than translate or alter his voice to make it conform to standard English,

Hurston kept his dialect minimally changed. Her unwillingness to modify his words is the reason why *Barracoon* took nearly 90 years to meet publication. Publishing companies interested in Hurston's manuscript demanded that she edit Kossola's language, but Hurston refused. In an interview Lynn Neary on National Public Radio, publisher, Tracy Sherrod, defended the choice to keep Kossala's authentic voice, saying:

“We’re talking about a language that he had to fashion for himself in order to negotiate this new terrain he found himself in...embedded in his language is everything of his history. To deny him his language is to deny his history, to deny his experience— which ultimately is to deny him, period. To deny what happened to him” (2018).

Language and race are emphatically connected, and as Rosa and Flores (2017) note, are informed within and between nation-state borders. They call the study of these processes *raciolinguistics*. Guillermo, a Spanish speaking participant in *Working the Boundaries* (De Genova, 2005) theorizes the production of language and questions whether la producción de lengua benefits the learner, the teacher, or the system at large. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes extensively about the sociocultural politics of language. She recalls her mother's words, “I want you to speak English. Pa'hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent.’”

Thinking about what stories and whose voice become accepted, I examine my own positionality. Like Hurston, I too am interested in engaging with the voices of my communities and the everyday life--the messy, the entangled, the simple, the nuance, the day to day negotiations. Channeling Hurston, I refuse to translate the Spanish included in this project. While I realize this may turn away some readers, my hope is that readers will *work* to find meaning the same way non-English speaking immigrants in the US construct pathways to understand and navigate a nation that primarily functions in the English language.

While critiquing conventions of anthropology, public discourse, and the US government, I am also critical about myself. I am keenly aware that my place in the academy is contingent on the

ever present but loose binaries or “soft borders” that restrict certain immigrants’ membership to social and cultural groups (Gonzales & Sigona, 2017). The borders I move through ask me for transcripts, resumes, and curriculum vita—though I should note that my crossing through these borders is also within the realm of the nation state. As a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) beneficiary, I am granted certain privileges, most notably work authorization. However, DACA is a membership that also requires certain sociocultural ‘ins.’ These ‘ins’ or signifiers of belonging are proofs that are not easily attainable without adopting the dominant culture’s language and norms. Among other rigid requirements, to qualify for DACA status, the applicant must have gone through the educational system successfully.

[Applicants] are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States.

My sister, [REDACTED], came to the US at the age of eight, and struggled to learn English.

In spaces where English speaking and comprehension is vital for participation, her membership is contested.

“Para mí, el inglés siempre fue difícil. No siento que lo hable bien. Pero así me navego. La escuela fue difícil. Recuerdo que ni siquiera sabía que lo que la gente hablaba era el inglés. No sabía y me llevó mucho tiempo para entenderlo. No terminé la escuela porque fue difícil para mí. Batalle para leer y escribir.

Cuando iniciaron el programa para trabajar [DACA], no lo necesitaba de inmediato porque mi pareja trabajaba. Pero luego nos separamos y necesitaba obtener un ingreso para mantener a mis hijos. Entonces, tuve que regresar a la escuela para poder calificar. Eso también fue una batalla. Pero tenía que ganar dinero.

Mi hermano me ayudó con mis tareas. Mi hermano si le sabe a todo eso de la escuela. Sabe como hablar, leer y escribir. Y yo creo que por eso para él es más fácil. Él a veces, escribía mis reportes por mí.

Regresar a la escuela cuando eres ya un adulto no es ideal, y menos cuando tienes hijos y responsabilidades. Pero en mi caso, tuve que hacerlo. Fue necesario.”

My thirty-two-year-old sister describes me as someone who has very little trouble understanding and maneuvering the school system. She explains that my ability to navigate academic institutions is because of my proficiency of the English language. What she does not mention is that the skills she boldly attributes to me are talents that I acquired from observing her and my mother. I migrated to this country at an age when I was developing my language skills. My mom and my sister came to this country at a stage in their lives when learning a new language is not a simple task. They established and sustained connections with people and parties that shared news and valuable information with them. Alerts of job openings came through this web of people. These connections helped them translate and fill out documents such as applications to said jobs, apartment leases, insurance forms, car registrations, and other forms of mundane but necessary resources. And all the while, I observed what they were doing, and learned from them.

For this reason, I consider both of them knowledge producers. They navigate the United States system, perhaps not in the same way I do, but in a way that informs the way in which I navigate it. Their voices and experiences are just as important, because they are alive and are human. Those two qualities are what makes someone deserving of recognition, respect, dignity, and acceptance. Papeles or a birth certificate of the United States should not be the requisite that grants a person their rights. In the US documents carry weight and authority. This is evident not only with birth certificates but with degrees. Undocumented people use their college degrees to strengthen their claims for recognition. I have a paid pathway to a doctoral degree to a prestigious institution and I am in conflict with thinking that this makes me any more remarkable or deserving than my mother and my sister who have a total of zero college degrees.

I secured a generous amount of funding for fieldwork this summer from the American Ethnological Society and Oregon State University. Funds for this research included a stipend for my

mother and sister which they refused to accept by telling me that it was more important for me to keep it to pay for expenses.

“No. Lo guardas. Comprate comida y paga tu vivienda allí ya que no podemos ayudarte mucho. Sabes que no te pido nada. Tenemos suficiente,” my mom told me.

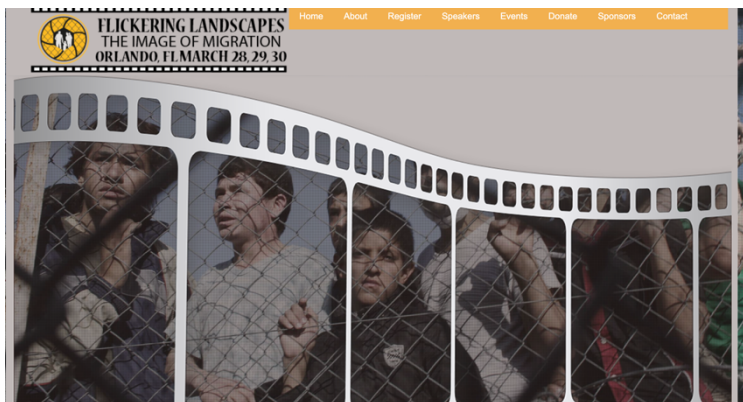
My sister joked about my coffee expenses being equivalent to my rent, “Paga tu renta. O guárdalo para el café.”

With a reluctance to engage with unethical research behavior and wanting to take care of them, I assured them the money was intended for them. I told them these two institutions had agreed to these payments. I negotiated with them that in order for this money not to be returned to the granters, I had to provide receipts for expenses and that I would be purchasing gift cards for groceries for them and pay them rent for staying with them over the summer break. Their hesitation to accept money from me and preference to offer it to me to make my life better, and their satisfaction with having “just enough” or lo suficiente, illustrate a key way in which they live their lives, which has made it possible for me to navigate the US with less financial stress.

Chapter Two: Memorias del Migrante

This link will take you to a film entitled, *Memorias del Migrante*, which I created and was featured at the University of Central Florida's Flickering Landscapes conference. My film was the only student film screened in a series of migrant themed movies directed and produced by filmmakers, scholars, and activists. The following description borrows from the original film description and provides new analysis.

Remnants of migrant crossings are scattered throughout the Sonoran



Screenshot taken from the Flickering Landscapes website.

Desert. Empty jugs on resting on their sides, a soleless pair of brand-name shoes, a tattered backpack, a pink baby bottle, and other keepsakes rest beneath the unforgiving sun. Among the remains are photographs. Neither a written record nor oral history accompany them. These prints leave their finders to speculate about the stories behind the smiles and somber expressions frozen on glossy paper.

Crossing the border sin papeles with my family meant leaving behind material possessions. Too many times I asked my Mamá what her life was like growing up in Mexico, and if she had any pictures stored away. She would tell me that pictures were not something she had on her mind to bring with her but that she wished she would have. Her stories led me to imagine what her experiences were like. My mother's memory started failing when we realized she was sick. Lupus fog is the term given to people with this chronic autoimmune disease. Her stories started changing and without photographs to verify or prove some of the details I accepted every story as true.

FLICKERING LANDSCAPES

The conference brings together scholars and filmmakers to address how moving images depict the relationship between human migration and place. Our definition of migration encompasses any movement of peoples, including migration within nations or across national boundaries. The variety of the spaces migrants move across demands that we define place in the broadest terms possible: land, and sea, and the built environment.

PRESENTED BY:

**The Center for Humanities and Digital Research,
The Nicholson School of Communications and Media,
and the Texts and Technology Doctoral Program
at the University of Central Florida**

SPONSORED BY:

The Office of Research, The College of Graduate Studies, CREATE (Center for Research and Education in Arts, Technology and Entertainment), The Department of English, The Department of History, The College of Arts and Humanities, FIEA (Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy), The Center for Humanities and Digital Research, The Nicholson School of Communications and Media, The Puerto Rico Research Hub, and The Texts and Technology Doctoral Program at the University of Central Florida

Information about the conference taken from the website.

In this film my mother and my sister recount their border crossing experiences. They both tell the same story to their recollection. They remember the same event differently, bringing about themes of hope, despair, care, gender politics, and living in the United States under Trump's rule. As their stories unfold the previously described photographs move across the screen. Coincidentally some of these pictures resemble elements of the stories being told.

This was done with symbolic purpose. In an effort to

reduce my presence in the film I offer minimal

context. The audience is invited to make these connections. I do not identify these women as my mother and sister because the video is publicly accessible. It reflects a personal decision, and my wavering between wanting to share and keep secret.

Chapter Three: Motherwork, Networks of Care, & Medical Re-crossings

My mom and I are lying in bed in what used to be my bedroom. The walls are painted chartreuse, a color she hates but one that she has been reluctant to paint over because it reminds her of me. She has two pictures on the wall that are both of me. One is my high school senior photograph and the second is from when I was either in kindergarten or first grade. Neither of us can remember. I am talking to her about her crossing the border, as I



Chartreuse Bedroom Photo by author

have many times before. Unlike those other time, I am conducting fieldwork—or “homework” as Visweswaran (1994) calls it: when ethnographers participate in anthropological inquiries with their families or communities. In Spanish, I ask my mom if she can tell me about why she came to the US. She begins by noting my dad’s struggle with alcohol and her role as a mother as the primary reasons she migrated north.

“Por muchos años yo le supliqué a él [redacted] que nos cruzáramos para el norte. Pero él antes era borracho, no se preocupaba por sus hijos. Y como mamá yo ya no podía depender más de él. La oportunidad se me presentó para cruzar. Con la ayuda de amigas crucé y tuve dónde llegar. Solo tenía 200 pesos y tres cambios de ropa pero eso era lo de menos. Al siguiente día tuve trabajo en una florería y con eso pude para salir adelante. [redacted] se cruzó para seguirme y aquí nos juntamos pero no dependí de él porque ya sabía lo que era esa vida.”

With the help of her women friends my mother was able to cross the border and have somewhere to stay. The day following her arrival, her friends helped her secure an under-the-table job as a florist. My father caught wind of my mother’s crossing, and without taking into consideration my sister and me, he migrated north to find her. Although they reunited and worked on their marriage, my mother never took on the dependent role again. My mother attributes her ability to provide to her spirituality and her work ethic. Although she doubts herself as the best mother, she feels content with her mothering.

“Yo me esforcé por mis hijos y para traérmelos. Gracias a Dios les he dado todo lo que he podido con mi esfuerzo. A lo mejor no soy la mejor mamá, pero yo siento que no fallé. Les di una casa. Han podido salir adelante. Bueno pues uno más porque le gusta la escuela. Mis hijas siguieron otro camino—se casaron y tuvieron hijos. Pero también les he dicho 'tienen que trabajar porque no puedes depender de los hombres y maridos.'"



Pequeño Argenis

As I listen to her talk about me to me, I realize that in that moment she is not talking to me as her son. Porque no me está tuteando (because she is not speaking informally), I can tell she is talking to el antropólogo. This is another example of how my mother considers me different when compared to my sisters because I pursued higher education and have “gotten ahead,” whereas my sisters have taken on the roles of wives and mothers. She lets me know she advises that they cannot depend on men or husbands. I can attest to this because I heard her say it to them many times. This intrigues me because I depend on women, specifically my mother and older sister, a lot, and I give them credit for my successes because their labor and care has allowed me to focus most of my energies on obtaining college degrees. I also want to tell her, “your love is enough. more than enough,” but instead I reach out for a hug.

Worthham, Mortimer, and Allard (2009) describe how characteristics of being hardworking and uncomplaining have been ascribed to Mexicans in the US as part of the new Latino diaspora. Hardworking and studious are also qualities highlighted by undocumented youth movements in the US to push for immigration rights (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). In this chapter, my focus is not on my achievements or being an undocumented Mexican model minority—a term I borrow from Peterson (1966,) who used it to refer to Japanese Americans in the US who were able to achieve imposed western notions of success. Asians in the US are stereotyped as high achieving and more successful than Blacks and Latinos, which problematically labels them as a

model for other racial minorities to follow (Wing, 2007). Moving away from this construction of young undocumented people like myself as high-achieving and therefore deserving “model” status and citizenship, in this chapter I draw attention to the invisibilized care and labor that goes into producing and maintaining *a family* in the US. This complicates the idea of individually earned merit that is often attributed to immigrant children that ‘make it,’ whether they are undocumented or documented. I highlight the entanglement of my undocumented mother’s declining health, acts of care, US immigration policies, and border (re)crossings, as components that factor in the reformulation of family structure.

Growing up, I did not see my mother much. Our time spent together was minimal but valuable, nonetheless. I remember a time when my mother began to look like a stranger. Her body was physically changing and dramatically so. Typically, when I would come home from school, the place would be empty, but the more the illness took over her body, the more she was around. Yet it did not feel like she was herself anymore. She even stopped sharing our cramped room with us and began to sleep in the living room, where there was more sunlight—a remedy of sorts that we would later find out was unintentionally causing her skin to flare-up. She did not look like my mother, but I was too young to understand what was going on. I was frightened and confused. All the *ganas* in her body were gone, or so it seemed to me, and soon her body began to shut down.

I remember the voice over the intercom, in my fourth-grade classroom calling my name. I gathered my things and met my dad at the front office, which was another rarity because he does not speak English and had never set foot on my school campus before. I do not remember much of that day except stopping at a gas station on our drive to the hospital. Once inside the emergency room, my dad directed me to ask the front desk clerk for my mom’s whereabouts. I had no idea back then that he had not been in the hospital before and that he had gone directly from his worksite to pull me from school. I am not even sure who called him or who brought my mom to the hospital that

day. Thinking back about this moment, I wonder how difficult it must have been for him to communicate with the school assistant to find my classroom. Asking questions, translating, and navigating foreign spaces is a necessary skill many undocumented children develop because we act as interlocutors in white spaces for our parents (Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003; Reynolds & Orellana, 2009). The rest of this is hazy to me and my mother as well. What she does recall is:

“No sé porque me pasó esto. Paso mucho tiempo pensando en esto. Tal vez hice algo malo hace mucho tiempo. Sólo Dios sabe. Recuerdo estar muy enferma. Me dijeron que tenía poco tiempo. Pero he aprendido que a los médicos les gusta decirte esto. Recuerdo que me sentí inútil. No pude hacer nada. No podía trabajar. Pensé ¿y mis hijos que se encargarán de ellos? Es lo que te motiva a mejorar. Mi madre estaba muy interesada en el curanderismo. Ella y una amiga me dijeron que fuera con un brujo y él me dijo que tendría que ir a México para mejorar. Una prima en México se enteró de mi salud y me rogó que volviera. Ella es doctora y me dijo que podía obtener un diagnóstico y luego volver a cruzar. Y así fue. Pero no todo fue así de repente, todo el proceso duro como un año o dos porque tenía que mejorar un poco y ver si nos alcanzaba el dinero y averiguar cómo dejarlos a ustedes en este país sin su madre por un tiempo.”

My mother's testimonio offers many insights about the complex and arduous task of obtaining a proper medical diagnosis as an undocumented migrant in the United States. Unauthorized immigrants encounter various forms of legal violence (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012), one being inaccessible healthcare (Castañeda & Melo, 2014; Hacker, Anies, Folb, & Zallman, 2015; López-Cevallos & Harvey 2016; Melo, 2017) which leads them to consider non-medical forms of healing. Favazza (2014) notes undocumented immigrants seek wellness through prayer and Curanderos as alternatives to western medicine because of financial limitations, cultural beliefs, and as a way to bypass the inaccessible US healthcare system. Horton (2016) suggests that chronic disease for undocumented immigrants is an embodiment of legal violence because US policies make it near impossible for unauthorized migrants to obtain medical assistance. Understanding immigration policy is important to contextualize how citizenship plays a role in the wellbeing of undocumented immigrants. It is through her recollection that I draw out three important aspects of

care: cross-border care, temporary family separation as a form of care, and the designation of motherwork.

Seeking Care

“No recuerdo mucho. Pero recuerdo que no duré mucho en el hospital. Pues sin aseguranca (seguro médico) solo te ponen atención si estas a punto de morir. No me diagnosticaron. ¿Y pues que hace uno cuándo está arrinconada? Yo quería trabajar para mis hijos pero ni eso podía hacer. Le pedía a Dios y a la Virgen que me ayudaran. Mi mamá me envió aceites y otros remedios caseros. Ella estaba muy interesada en eso, tú sabes. Pero pues, ella no sabia cómo escribir ni leer entonces no había manera de saber el uso de las cosas. Tuvimos que hablarle por teléfono varias veces para comprender el uso de cada cosa. Bueno, las velas de los santos y oraciones si supe usar sin instrucción.”

The hospital discharged my mother when she was no longer in a state of emergency but before we felt safe to leave, which is a common experience for the uninsured in the US. No medical insurance meant her symptoms and rapid physiological changes would go without further medical investigation. Kusakabe and Pearson (2010) report that the responsibility for wellbeing often rests solely on the shoulders of undocumented mothers, who must care for themselves in addition to caring for their families. My mother’s testimonio illustrates this idea, but in practice, the care my mother experienced was a multi-faceted and collective cross-border effort, or “transnational caregivng” (Baldassar, 2007).

Through care packages, my grandmother sustained my mother’s spiritual beliefs by supplying her with religious crafts. Additionally, she used traditional and herbal remedies to improve my mother’s health. My mother explained that during this time, she stopped sending remittances to my grandmother, and that she felt bad about receiving these items because she knew my grandmother did not have a lot of money. My grandmother was a well-respected figure in her village (now a town), and people with the ability to cross the border were kind in offering to move these packages across national walls.

Although she followed the instructions her mother gave her regarding the remedios, my mother's health was not progressing at a desirable rate. My grandmother made another plea to my mom to visit a brujo or a curandero.

“Y pues, ella me decía que buscara alguien que me ayudara como un brujo o curandero. Decía que quizás este país tenía diferentes hierbas. Y pues sí, si fui con un brujo a que me leería las cartas. Él me dijo que yo estaba enferma y que aquí no iba poder encontrar la respuesta. Me dijo que tenía que regresar a México.

Y lo más raro fue que no mucho después de hablar con el brujo, mi prima de Morelia, Michoacán. Una que es doctora me llamo, y me dijo que ella me podía ayudar. Que si fuera posible que me regresara yo y que ella me daba las recetas y me podía mandar los medicamentos.”

Davies, Borland, Blake, and West (2011) examine return migration patterns and report that migrants returning to their home countries are coming back less healthy than when they initially left and are most likely returning because they “need health care that does not exist or which they cannot afford” in their host country. Hagan (2008) renders spiritual beliefs as the principal basis for making the trip back home. My mother made the decision to return to her homeland because she believed the brujo and because her kinship network included her cousin, a licensed medical professional. My mother's decision tied both the spiritual and the practical. Most importantly, for my mother returning home meant being able to get healthy and then re-cross (from the Mexico to the US), work, and take care of her children.

“Pues me fui porque tenía que regresar (a los EE.UU) a trabajar y sacar a mis hijos adelante. Yo sabía que si no intentaba mejorarme, iba a morir. A veces si siento que hice mal en irme. Muchas cosas injustas les paso a mis hijos. A veces creo que no supe ser la mejor madre, pero mi deber siempre fue hacer todo lo posible para que no sufrieran y yo sé que de todas maneras sufrieron. Yo me pregunto por qué Dios me dio una vida tan difícil. Pero si me pusiera a llorar por todas las injusticias en mi vida nunca iba poder hacer nada.”

Perhaps less than a year passed between my mother's initial ER visit and her return to Mexico. I roughly remember the timeline because we had moved into a three-bedroom apartment with my aunt, uncle, and a family friend. By then, my older sister was contemplating dropping out of

high school and searching for a full-time job where she would not have to use a fake social. Without my mother working multiple jobs like before, my teenage sister felt internal pressure to make up for the loss of family income.

Both my parents and my youngest sister made the return to Michoacán. My mother left me under the shared care of my older sister, aunt, and uncle—though my main caretaker was my sister. I think back to how my sister had provided me care in years prior, but at that moment she was given the tremendous responsibility to parent a child as a child herself. The distribution of labor or household responsibilities is evident not only in undocumented families but also in working-class families across the spectrum of immigration status, race, and ethnicity (Valenzuela, 1999; Bettie, 2014; Himmelweit, Santos, Sevilla, & Sofer, 2013; Enriquez, 2017).

Talking to me, the anthropologist, my sister shares her thoughts on taking on additional work:

“Creo que ver a mi mamá sufrir fue lo suficiente para mí para ponerme las pilas. Yo al principio no sabía que al venir a este país iba a ser difícil y mucho trabajo. Pero se me hace que así es la vida para los que no tienen papeles. De niña lo entendí. Entendí que ser ilegal es sufrir y trabajar. Y que haces las cosas porque tienes que. Porque si no hay otras personas que sufren aún más por tus decisiones de no trabajar y ayudar. Y porque amas a esas personas se te hace como natural [hacer ese trabajo].”

Gonzales (2015), who has conducted extensive research among undocumented Latino populations, suggests that undocumented youth who exit the school system early -- early-exiters as he labels them -- “accepted that everyday routines of work and survival constituted their reality.” My sister dropped out of high school the same year my parents left for Mexico, and transitioned into adulthood because of her immigration status, financial stressors, and household responsibilities (Fuligni & Pederson 2002; Gonzales 2011). While Gonzales’s framework for understanding the differences between “early-exiters” and “college goers” is useful in understanding differential aspirations and struggles among undocumented youth, my experience tells me that this framework would be enhanced by highlighting the role played by love. By paying attention to love, we get a

richer understanding of not only the lives of undocumented youth and their family members, but also the care work and emotions that exist *between* family members. My sister indicates love as a driving force for action even when that action means to take on other's suffering. Love or as my sister says, "el querer" of family members means undocumented youth must negotiate between short term or long term relief – dropping out of school or staying in.

Time passed without our parents. My sister told me that our mom was not doing any better. A family friend had informed my mother that he would be returning to Mexico and asked if she needed anything from this side of the border. My mother took this opportunity to ask my sister and me if either or both of us wanted to return to her. My sister said no, and I said yes. I was in the fifth grade, and returned to Mexico during spring break and would have to enroll in school in Mexico.

When I arrived at my grandmother's home, my mother was not there. She was in the hospital. She had been for a few days now, again, as I later learned. As my sister was transitioning to adulthood, my mother wanted nothing more than to return to her role of mother and caretaker:

"Pensé que estaba mejorando. Alomejor fue el ambiente del hospital lo que engaña a tu mente para que pienses eso. Me puse muy mal. Mi prima, la doctora, hizo varios laboratorios. Tomó mucho tiempo obtener un diagnóstico. Pero finalmente me dijo que lo que tenía era lupus. Al principio, no entendí lo que era. Estaba muy asustada. Al principio pensé que era cáncer. Te dicen que no hay cura y tienes que comenzar un tratamiento intensivo y tu mente divaga. Piensas en muchas cosas, pero sobre todo piensas en quién cuidará a sus hijos."

Lupus is an autoimmune disease that is difficult to diagnose because its symptoms tend to imitate other diseases (Wollina & Hein, 2005). If not properly diagnosed and treated, it can lead to kidney failure and death. Harper (2016) quotes medical doctor, Melissa Anderson, "You see them one day and then you see them two months later, and they've aged and you can see the suffering... You know they might die before you see them again." Although not fluent in medical terminology, my mother's understanding of her chronic illness was simple. If she was not physically well or present, it meant she would not be able to care for her children.

Comencé el tratamiento con esteroides y varios otros medicamentos, y mi cuerpo comenzó a cambiar. Subí mucho peso, pero también me sentí mas viva. Creo que después de un mes de tratamiento le dije a mi prima que volvería a cruzar la frontera. Ella quería que me quedara hasta que me sintiera mas mejor, pero entendió mi decisión. Ella dijo que me enviaría medicamentos cada vez que alguien cruzara la frontera.”

US policy limits access to healthcare for undocumented immigrants in addition to making healthcare inaccessible for its own citizens. The healthcare system in the US has led to medical tourism; however, this practice requires one to be able to leave and enter the US freely. US medical tourists visit countries such as Mexico for medical procedures that are far too expensive in their home country as well as to access medications that can be found cheaply over the counter that otherwise would be prescribed and costly in the US. Getting care in Mexico, one can expect cultural competency and/or humility that is often lacking in US settings. The US federal government enacts policies that puts people in precarious situations, especially people who live as non-citizens in the country. It means people like my mom who experience complications with their health have to tap into their kinship networks for support across national borders and support in *crossing* national borders (Menjívar 2002; Wallace, Mendez-Luck, & Castañeda, 2010). While her experience is similar to that of a medical tourist, what I call medical re-crossing seems to be a more appropriate term to describe her movement back and forth between her home country and then again to the US despite her undocumented status. Medical re-crossing makes apparent the inequitable US healthcare system, and how undocumented immigrants are willing to take serious risks to return to their birth country to access medical care and then cross the border once again to reunite with their families.

My dad wanted to stay in Mexico, but my mother did not. She had a daughter in the US waiting for and needing her, who, we had found out, was expecting a child of her own. My mother said to my father there was no future for her kids and grandkids in Mexico. She had gotten the diagnoses she had sought, and now she would be re-crossing the border again with or without him.

“Le dije ‘te dejé atrás una vez y lo volveré a hacer. Tengo una hija estadounidense, una embarazada en los Estados Unidos, y este (refiriéndose a mí) tendrá una vida mejor allá.”

He stayed back. His absence and lack of support was a common factor behind the kinds of carework and networking women like my mother and older sister practice.

My mother’s decision to cross the US/Mexico border was dependent on economic factors, though, for her, it was not the primary reason. She explained that coming back to the US meant fulfilling her obligations as a mother and grandmother.

“Yo tengo una responsabilidad y eso es ser mamá. Al saber que mi hija estaba embarazada, pues entonces tenía que estar ahí para ayudarla. Dar a luz es difícil, y andar en los hospitales también. ¿Cómo iba a dejar a mi hija tener una criatura sin estar yo ahí? También necesitaba regresar y seguir criando a mis hijos en los Estados Unidos. Ellos fueron criados aquí y ni modo de moverlos otra vez y sabiendo que pues en México, ser pobre es más difícil que ser pobre aquí, yo pienso. La vida aquí sí es dura, pero cuando sabes que es mejor para el buen estar de tus hijos pues como mamá tienes que seguir adelante y hacer lo necesario.”

My mother’s understanding of motherhood points to the complexity of mothering. She negotiated the family to seek care by assigning my older sister as my primary caregiver. Enriquez (2017) makes it very clear that family negotiations of responsibility are gendered. After receiving initial care and then finding out about my sister’s pregnancy, my mother placed urgency in migrating back to the US to (grand)mother. Similar to when my grandmother practiced transnational parenting, my mother would assist my sister over the phone with recommendations on how to manage morning sickness and alleviate nausea with house remedies. Bastia (2009) reminds us that grandmothers play an important role in transnational parenting and builds on Hochschild’s (2001) definition of “global care chains,” which refers to transnational links of care work. Yarris (2011) deems the idea of grandmother caregivers as “mothering again,” a common extension of their role as mothers across generations. By drawing on their motherwork and my family’s experience, I am able to complicate the chain of care even further—the chain crosses and re-crosses for medical, economic, and kinship reasons. By drawing on these concepts and my family’s experience I am able

to demonstrate just entangled networks of care can become. Illustrating these networks and actors involved undoes the notion of self-sufficiency that US society desperately holds on to as a quality of being an “American.”

My mom, US-born sister, and I crossed through the desert together. The coyote had assured my mother the crossing would be easy and fast. And it was. We rode a bus from our hometown to the border towns. We spent the night at a motel. The walls were blue, and the air conditioner was at the lowest possible temperature, making the room cold. It was the three of us and two other people who were also going to cross. We shared the bed with the other woman, and the man slept on the floor.

The exact color of the vehicle escapes me, brown or tan, but I remember we were sitting pretty close to each other because it was a five-person car with six of us in there. The person picked us up early in the morning, and while she was driving, she was also giving us instructions detailing what to expect. When there was a moment of silence in the car, my mom took out a small prayer card with an illustration of Baby Jesus. She said to me something along the lines of “no matter what happens to me, you must keep going and make sure your sister makes it too. Do not stop if you see me fall behind. Listen to whatever the coyotes tell you to do.”

Within visible distance was an immigration inspection checkpoint, and the conductor of the vehicle reassured us everything would be okay. She turned into a rest area and told us once again “todo está bien.” She directed us out of the car and led us under a metal ramada. Two more groups joined us. In total, it was between twelve or thirteen people that would be making the journey across the border. Once they did a quick attendance check, we were told we would be walking for about ten minutes together toward the metal fence.

My mother’s recollection of the day is straightforward, when compared to mine. She says, “camino y pues de ahí cruzamos. Esa vez creo que fue la mas fácil.” When we made it to the metal

fence, the coyote lifted up a portion of it like one would lift a curtain. A second coyote ducked his head and crossed. The coyotes were white and US citizens. The one holding up the metal divide motioned us to walk north and to follow the first guide. He then closed the fence, and the one that was on the north side with us told us to run and follow him. I held to my sister's hand and looked back to my mom who gestured to keep running. We made it to a dry ravine, and just ahead was another rest area on the US side. As we crossed the ravine, I lost sight of my mom. Another person crossed the ravine and said, “sigue, sigue tu mamá te alcanzará.”

The leading coyote motioned us into the bathrooms. Not knowing where my mom was, my sister and I followed the woman we had shared a bed with the previous night into the women's restroom. My sister was visibly upset because my mom was nowhere in sight. I patted my front pocket to make sure I still had the prayer card. Two white women came into the restroom, and behind them was my mom. My mom was pointing me out to them. They asked if I understood English, and I sheepishly replied, “yes, I do.”

I often think about what Coyotes think of their roles in moving people across borders, and whether they sustain any connections with their clients. My mom informed me she did not give much thought to the challenges of migrating to the US because she expected life to be no harder than in Mexico. She knew it would be difficult but worth it to give her children a better shot at life.

“No tuve tiempo de pensar. Yo sabía que iba ser duro pero iba ser mejor que en Mexico. Lo hice por ustedes. Todo lo que hace una mamá es por sus hijos, siempre es por ustedes.”

The coyote gave me instructions to relay to the group of women and then sent me to the men's restroom to share the message with the men. Two SUVs would arrive, and people would load in and hide. My sister and I were privileged to sit in the backseat with a cooler filled with drinks and snacks. When the vehicles arrived, we piled in and traveled for no more than three hours, although it felt eternal.

Rows of unassuming tan homes lined the suburban neighborhood where we were being taken to. The car pulled into a driveway with a windowless garage entry. The garage door opened, swallowed the car whole, and hid us inside. When the garage door closed the women ushered us into the house and slowly the house began to fill with people. The women offered the rest of the group snacks and drinks from the red cooler that my sister and I had accessed inside the car. The inside of the house matched the muted tone of the outside—tan carpet, tan walls, and brown cabinets. The doorbell rang and man carrying boxes of pizza walked in—he was complicit to the act. He was there to bring us food. My sister and I ate a slice a pizza. I remember one of the blonde women was holding up her phone and mouthing the word, “llamar.” She was signaling that the pickup process would begin.

My mother made two quick phone calls. Unlike the present where she can hardly remember details, that day she had memorized my older sister’s cell phone number and her friend’s house phone number. When she made the first phone call to my sister she said, “ya estamos de éste lado,” and held her tears. The second telephone conversation with her friend, neither my mom nor I can remember the exact words, but it was to let her know where she could pick us up. My mother did not know the address of where we were so handed the phone to the woman and had me explain to her that her friend needed directions to find us.

In the years since her medical re-crossing, my mother’s chronic illness became a central aspect of her daily life, and again the family negotiated roles of care, most notably between her and my sister. My older sister became the second mother of our household while my mother took on the responsibilities that typically have been normalized and assigned to fathers such as being the economic provider. My mom worked multiple jobs

despite her body becoming weaker as the years went by. My sister gained a literacy for navigating medical systems and other institutions such as state medical programs, the department of motor vehicles, the IRS, etc., all of which play a role in aiding my mom's wellbeing.

These recollections and conversations with my mother and sister offer a view into the impact of the nation-state's border policies on the lives of undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families. My mother's chronic illness, in conjunction with her desires to care for her children, led her to seek ways to move in and out of the United States without a US passport, even if it meant temporary separation from her family. Crossing and re-crossing also brought upon bending the borders of gender assigned roles, while at other times reinforcing the walls or expectations of motherhood. My mom became the breadwinner but relies on my sister to maintain the order of the house. My sister's role in the family shifted between mother and daughter, both in the biological sense and in the symbolic. While my sister claims to not be proficient in the English language, she has gained literacy in communicating between doctors, lawyers, service clerks, and other figures in US systems. Both women assert different ideas that drive their abilities to endure the difficult positions in which their non-citizen status places them. *Para mi Mamá*, motherhood is her motivation and for my sister, it is love. Both of their understandings maintain aspects of labor and care. They take on work and additional responsibilities so others will not have to. Their stories also demonstrate the reliance on shared networks of care across physical and abstract borders.

In the social sciences, migration is a response to a larger sociocultural system of ideologies, practices, and enforcements. For my mother, her original crossing and her medical re-crossing are acts of mothering. Migrating to the US signified to her a better opportunity for her children. When she fell ill, returning to Mexico was for the purpose of getting better to be able to fulfill her responsibility as a mother in the US. For my sister, dropping out high school was an act of mothering and love. Undocumented rhetoric tends to focus on the achievements of immigrant

scholars, when it should also include narratives that reflect the experiences of women that cannot pursue education because of their other equally important pursuits.

Chapter Four: Manos a la Obra / La Obra de las Manos

This link will take you to a short film entitled, *Manos a la Obra/ La Obra de Las Manos*. Sensory ethnographic films employ little to no dialogue and demonstrate similar qualities of early observational-anthropological films (Pink, 2015; Pink, 2011; Nakamura, 2013). In this short experimental film, I observe my mother's hands, arms, and artificial kidney. Multisensory anthropologist Taylor (1996) suggests images of human conditions and non-textual forms of anthropology can present what words cannot. Therefore, in this film I offer no voice-over to explain what is happening and the moment is present as is. Minh-ha, filmmaker and critic of anthropology, warns against losing authenticity for the sake of style. To practice authentic modes of visual storytelling, I incorporate minimal manipulations to the video. The only manipulations are the position of the camera, the subject, the order in which the scenes are presented, and a title card.

Three short clips make up this eleven-minute film. The first is an eagle-eye view of my mother's hands as she makes tortillas. Her hands are vital to generating an income to support her family. The next is a direct view of her artificial kidney - the hemodialysis machine she is hooked up to three times a week for four hours each time. The work of staying healthy to keep supporting me and my family is crucial to her. The last video short captures the male nurse as he disconnects my mom's arm from the machine. Dialogue can be heard here as the nurse explains the process. As the nurse performs this operation, he verbally explains the procedure, but the dialogue is not the central focus. I kept the audio as is to remain faithful to the original video. Through this work I depict different systems of care and the complexity of ability and disability.

Chapter Five: Antropoesía

Madre Mojada

From a tin roof home
In the tropics of Michoacán
To the dry desert heats in Phoenix

A broken ankle to remember the journey
Made for her two children and one to come

Freckled faced and tired eyes
She speaks,
“Soy Mojada”

Though she never crossed Rio Grande

Wetback and loving mother
Not one without the other

And then hers is gone.
A shriek pierces through the halls
¡Mi Mamá—no puede ser!

Mother, sister, and father.
Three deaths in two years
Decades without seeing them

Mi corazón me duele, she says
Breathe rubbing alcohol to cure pain
Is what my abuela would have suggested

My mom kneels to a porcelain bowl
She limps throughout the nightshift
And continues to work

Si me pusiera a llorar para cada injusticia no trabajaría

Two jobs, three jobs and a fourth
Motherwork
No citizenship or application required.



Billboard Outside of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

Photo by author

On Our Way to Work

Driving through twisted highways
She begins to dispel the certainty
She once held to

“Yo tenia tantos sueños.
¿Y ahora qué?”

She crossed the border in ‘96
At the age of 8
Now 32 and mother of three

“No quiero ser ciudadana,
solo quiero estar con mis hijos.”

She belongs here
With them

“¿Qué sucede si los jueces deciden cancelarlo?”

I don’t know,
I answer in full honesty

She breathes and maneuvers
From the furthest lane on to the on-ramp
Traffic flows in and out
People move in and out

Always moving.
“Bueno pues, a trabajar.”

Childcare & Tamales

“Cuida a mi hijo”

The daughter spoke on her way out

The (grand)mother brings her kind hands
Forward and separates the green husk
from the ghostly white body
The golden silk is next to go

Her grandchild approaches
Brown curls and plump cheeks
He stands beside her

She guides his pale little fingers
Down the kernels and he smiles

She returns to the process of making
Comida del otro lado
Rhythmic and coordinated
A learned system

Teachings from her mother’s mother,
To her mother, to her
To her daughters and son,
and now to her grandchild

Cultural teaching cloaked
By childcare
Como las hojas cubren la masa

He snatches a whole piece
And tears the husk away

He is learning a piece
Of the Mexican way



My Mamá teaching my youngest nephew how to peel the husk off the corn. Photo by the Author

Tired Eyes

Tired eyes
Puffy bags, one and one
Oh, sweet honey-colored eyes

One hand lifts the other holds,
One hand pours the other holds,
One hand pulls the other steers.

Tired eyes
Graveyard shift
\$11 dollars an hour
One graveyard shift
For one little jar
Of Estee lauder night cream
To fix those tired eyes

One hand will hold
The other will rub
The un-miraculous cream
That won't fix those
Tired eyes

Mother, Birthmarks, and Anthropology

1,267.6 miles away and I can see her freckled face
Through the static phone call
She assures me, like She always does
“Para eso tienes madre, yo siempre te rescataré.”

At 27, She *left* me to cross the US/Mexico border.
At 27, I *left* Her to scale the walls of the academy.

Her voice sounds coarse
Woven between nothing and everything
The words that leave Her and enter me
Are the salt that I need

I write about Our experiences
Because those are the only things I know
“The field” is home
And home becomes work

A different kind of work,
The kind that doesn’t require papeles
And neither mop nor broom.
Except when it does.

“¿De verdad nos estudias?”
“Sí”
“Pero cuenta la verdad” She demands

Her life becomes a marker of the human experience
Much like the birthmark on the crease of my arm
A mark, like the wall, we share

Or the way in which the fall from la frontera
Marked Her walk with a permanent limp
A reminder.

Un Día Normal

¿Me cuidas al niño?
Regáñalo - dile que no.

¿Qué dice esto? Tradúcelo.

Vamos al mandado y te compro un estarboks.
Ándale, vamos.

Haber ponme la novela en el yu-tu-be.
Creo que le moví, vuelve a ponerla.

Hijo, pasa por tu papá y ponle gas al caro.

Ten, le llevas esto a mi Mamá.
Prendes la lavadora, porfas.

¿Ya comiste?
¿Ya hiciste lo que te dije?

Love Like a Woman

You threw the words
 “You love like a woman”
 With an intention to hurt.

But it didn’t.

Because loving like a woman is
 loving like my Mamá y hermana.

This love is bodily experience.

It tastes like café con leche in the morning
 And sounds like the sizzle of a witty joke
 It feels like the words knotting in your throat when saying adiós
 It smells like Imari and Far Away perfume from the Avon catalog
 And looks like a pastel pink house in the hood

Loving like mi Mamá is believing:
Dios reconoce tu dolor y te va a dar algo mejor.

Loving like my sister is taking on responsibilities
 You have no business taking,
 because it’s culturally ingrained and unique to *our* language:

“Pues si veo que es algo que puedo hacer, me **acomedio**.”

Loving like this is putting dreams away under the mattress
 Alongside important documents.
 Love like this means withholding truth
 To keep your mom alive.

Love like this has traveled from her
 to her
 and then to me.

I’ll keep loving like this.

El Otro

Standing at the periphery
Where the sea marries land and sky
It stands, divorcing the three
Dividing the two
Cutting us all

A wave veiled with excitement
But composed of anxiety, sadness
Frustration and disgust
Hits me with the weight of two decades

Peeking through the mighty pillars
are the hands of mi gente
Attempting to separate the bars
And fit their faces through

Their stares melt me
Into the glistening granules below my feet
To them I have made it
El sueño

They capture me
In photograph and video
I am a spectacle
El otro

No longer Mexican
But never quite from here



A landscape photograph of (un) natural elements: ocean, sky, land, and border.

Photo by author

Border Protection

¿Madre, a dónde vamos?

WARNING

Un pie en el mar

KEEP OUT

y uno en la orilla

RESTRICTED AREA

La sombra proyectada por los pilares,
me marca la cara y el cuerpo entero con rayas de prisión.

AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

Un extraño entre los míos

Y un extranjero

U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

en esta tierra que una vez fue Mexicana

e indígena siempre

¿Mamá, a dónde voy?

STOP

Pero, tu respuesta no llega

Nos han separado



A sign with multiple warnings in front of the US/Mexico divide at Friendship Park in California.

Photo by Author

Chapter Six: Noise & Silencing: Making Sense of Power & Citizenship

“Si quieres vé toma un descanso” my sister, [REDACTED], tells me as she pulls the large grey mobile trash bin from my plump tan hands. “Ya sabes dónde está” she says to me with affirmation. I take my time strolling through the second floor of the building, as I make my way to the elevator that will take me to the breakroom on the ground floor. Steady paced, I take notice of the multiple office spaces. Some have leather chairs paired with cherry wood desks that home large sleek, up-to-date computers. They are backdropped by large windows showcasing stunning panoramic views of the Phoenix mountain preserves and the last of the Sonoran sunset glow.

Adorning these offices are photographs of each occupants’ family and friends (mostly phenotypically white) along with collegial relics such as diplomas with gold emblems, team jerseys, coffee mugs, and other miscellaneous objects adorn these offices. Each space seemingly perfect and customized to suit the individual preferences of each salaried tenant.

Upon exiting the elevator, I notice a sign which reads, “Elevator for [REDACTED] employees only.” [REDACTED] is one of the nation’s multibillion-dollar construction companies and holds contracts with universities, school districts, and popular retail stores. I wonder if I was not supposed to take the elevator and imagine my sister carrying and pivoting the loaded trash bin down the flight of stairs. Neither of the custodial women nor myself are [REDACTED] employees. We are outsourced labor from [REDACTED], a well-established North American company that specializes in security personnel, security technology, and janitorial services across all three countries. Although none of us pay any mind to the sign’s declaration, it sharply illustrates the hierarchy of valued labor and those who perform it.

Tucked below the staircase is an electrical room that functions as a custodial closet and breakroom. Behind the heavy pale birch doors, the room is cramped with circuit breakers and other electrical equipment that read, “DANGER.” Mop buckets, toilet paper rolls, various toiletries, and a

small number of personal belongings of the janitorial staff decorate this room. But the most noticeable element of this room is the electrical unit that is emitting a piercing whirring sound.

I sit quietly because the aerial reverberations are more than enough sound. I begin to wonder how someone is meant to relax in this environment. Never mind the multiple hazardous violations such as mop water by electric circuit boards and lack of fresh air. The sound makes the room uninhabitable. It is ever-present and difficult to ignore. At least for me, this is true.



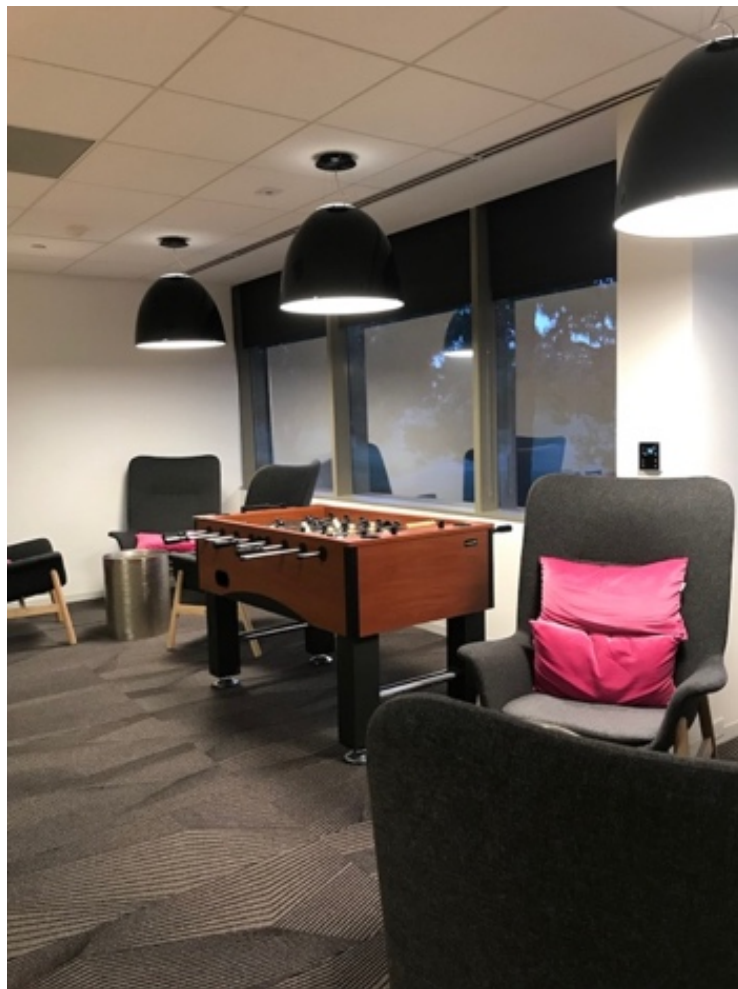
To experience the sound of the breakroom go to this link:
<https://youtu.be/jGMITRzWJJQ>

As I sit there, I soon notice the chrome handle on the door begins to turn. Before I can suspect who it could be, I hear a familiar sigh of exhaustion. My sister tells me, “Ahorita voy y saco la basura” as she wheels in the still full trash bin and bends her body to sit on the wooden pallet of napkin packets rather than the other black chair in the room. “Siéntate ahí,” I suggest to her as I point to the available seat as if she was unaware of it. She bends her body again, this time forward, and extends her legs towards me. As she takes out her phone, she tells me, “No, ése es el asiento de [REDACTED], la supervisora.” Her words quickly register, and I realize I have taken the seat she and our Mamá share interchangeably. I stand up and volunteer to take the trash out to the dumpster. She argues against it, but I am already going. My act is not completely selfless—disposing of the trash means exiting the room and getting away from the buzzing sound that somehow, she has grown accustomed to.

On my way out, la supervisora, a short middle-aged Latina dressed in matching grey t-shirt and sweatpants, and a navy-blue apron, walks in. Her copper hair, similar to my sister’s, is in a messy ponytail. La supervisora is too focused on the conversation she is having through her Bluetooth earpiece to offer any help with the trash bin or the door. My sister stands to hold the door open for me. La supervisora proceeds to her chair, sits and interrupts her conversation to draw my sister’s attention to close the door. As it closes, they begin to talk. Unlike me, they can withstand the high-pitched frequency. The breakroom is their place of rest. It offers short relief from vacuuming, scrubbing toilet bowls, mopping, and wiping windows, a place to scroll through their social media feeds, check up on their children, message friends, and peers working the night shift at other sites, a place to gossip, complain, and laugh.

When I return, they are no longer in the breakroom. I find my sister dusting off some millennial-esque ‘think rooms’ the company has designated for its employees. One of these ‘think rooms’ has a treadmill desk and my sister makes fun of it. Others have board games, comfortable

seating areas, and windows that look out to the country club outside. As we move on to clean a single-occupant bathroom, I ask if she and la supervisora left the breakroom because of the noise. She momentarily looks up, turns her head to both sides as if to search for someone else, but it is just the two of us. She returns her gaze to the pink-almond scented soap and fills the dispenser as she quietly responds “no, es que mientras menos nos desaparecemos menos preguntan en dónde estamos.” By making themselves visible, they make themselves invisible...I try to process this. Her words stay with me like the permanent dried water stains on the mirror above the sink. And we continue working.



“Think Room” Photo by Author

Mi Mamá, [REDACTED], has cleaned bathrooms for the majority of her lifetime, juggling two to three jobs at once, fulltime and part-time. She has cleaned the offices of important political figures, like Janet Napolitano, who made the DACA announcement in 2012. She has also emptied the wastebaskets of the classrooms at Arizona State University, where I have been privileged to occupy space as a student and discuss borderland theory and gendered violence. My sister, a DACA beneficiary, works alongside my mom as a custodian. They like many other immigrants in this



*My sister preparing a mop bucket. To view visit
https://youtu.be/qGWm4_q1dCM*

country, live, work and play. Immigrants in this country are highly politicized, but the stories of women like mi Mamá and sister hardly garner any media attention. My Mamá is monolingual and my sister speaks Spanish and basic English. My mother finished the sixth grade, and my sister dropped out

of high school. At 29, in order to meet the education requirement for DACA, my sister returned to an alternative school program geared toward non-traditional students that awarded high school diplomas for those under 32. She graduated in 2017 at age 30, the same day our younger U.S.-born sister graduated high school. Both my mother and my older sister requested the day off and were denied it. They ignored their supervisor's response and missed work to attend the ceremony. The following day they were reprimanded.

Bureaucratic Games & Loopholes

In this chapter, I draw on the experiences of my family to examine the precarity of foreign-born non-U.S. citizens in the United States and how policies are set in place to hinder the upward social mobility of this community. I pay close attention to the negotiations my mom and sister make in order to survive. I highlight the interactions of these women in the workplace and observe how

non-citizenship status and motherhood inform how they speak up or stay silent about forms of domination.

Legal status has a profound effect on people and their social mobility.



My mom is authorized, by virtue of a key, to replace the napkins in the paper towel dispenser. Photo by author

Undocumented immigrants in the United States encounter countless obstacles navigating a country that places saliency on citizenship and utility. Even though the U.S. government renders the legitimacy of people through documentation, it also quietly depends upon the production value of undocumented labor. Since the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) during the Reagan era, policies continue to monitor employment eligibility in the United States. At the same time, the U.S. government requires those people who they call

“nonresident aliens” to pay income taxes to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) via an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN). The loudly touted argument that unauthorized immigrants benefit from the U.S. welfare system is a misdirection of the truth.

To survive, undocumented immigrants find creative ways to maneuver this discriminatory system of laws. For example, some undocumented immigrants falsify, borrow, rent, or ‘buy’ social security numbers and identification cards from U.S. citizens. This is commonly known as obtaining papeles chuecos. Growing up, I regularly overheard conversations between my parents and their friends about someone willing to partake in this exchange, like an underground social network between migrants, allies, and U.S. citizens not wanting/having to work. One of these organizers, Panchito, would pull up in his blue car with his camera to take headshots and would return a few

days later with identification cards. When I was 12, he joked about taking my picture and making me una mica chueca, In most cases, each party benefits from this exchange. Immigrants are able to bypass the proper documentation requirement and make an income. And the lender/lessor/seller often claims the low earnings on their taxes to receive a tax refund. People that lease their social security numbers tend to be people that do not work for one reason or another. They benefit from lending their social security numbers because under social restrictions, the borrowing immigrants often take on low-paying jobs.

One night as we sat at the kitchen table, her glasses sliding down her freckled face and her eyes peering just above the frames, mi Mamá tells me.

“El gobierno nos chinga y lo saben. Y ahí queda el record para si un día nos dan papeles no puedan decir que no ayudamos con los impuestos.”

As she notes, the US economy secures a sum of dollars in tax revenue from unauthorized immigrant labor. She makes three significant claims: 1) The government has set up a method to solicit funds from unauthorized migrants despite their ineligibility for lawful employment. 2) Federal U.S. agencies have documentation of undocumented people that partake in this collection. 3) Unauthorized immigrants place trust and hope in the government to someday recognize them because of their economic contributions. Employers are not innocent in their participation. They ignore immigration policies, not out of kindness, but because they can consciously exploit labor from people who live precarity.

“Pues uno como mamá va ser lo que tenga que hacer por sus hijos. Sin o con papeles...si tengo que limpiar los inodoros manchados con caca de estos gringos... pues es lo que hecho por muchos años. Por ti.”

Some undocumented mothers place their children as top priority and take on jobs that in the United States are stigmatized and viewed as less than desirable. This business knowingly employs unauthorized workers or at the very least is aware that potential employees use papeles chuecos at the time of applying.

The workplace is an entanglement of various stakeholders. The undocu/DACAmented are the group with the least to gain (economically), and the most lose. Undocumented immigrants or immigrants with “false” papers who disrupt the workplace order are at risk of deportations. Employers know this and use it as a tactic for abuse. When immigrants get hurt on the job, they forfeit seeking medical attention or calling HR. Those that do take this route put the entire workplace at risk of an inspection which would lead to the possible



Mi Mamá limpiando. Photo by author

deportation of coworkers. In some instances, white coworkers call immigration or pretend to call them to inflict fear (Meek, 2011).

Still sitting in the kitchen, my mom brings our conversation to a close with one important anecdote. “Pero al final, he podido darles todo. Y es por eso que trabajo.” Her words ring true; her work ethic has given her kids everything. It has given me the liberty to pursue an education. It has given our family a home and transportation. Her work has put food on the table. Her work has gifted academia with her lived experiences.

Mixed Status & Unofficial Forms of Policing

Our house slowly becomes alive before the morning sunlight can pour in through the east facing windows. Mi Mamá and Papá are the first to wake. The soft sizzle of the pan and the smell of chorizo and huevos wake me. My mom is making my dad breakfast and will pack the leftovers for his lunch. Hazily, I tune in to their hushed discussion about work and working harder, payments to be made, and groceries to be bought. They shuffle outside so as to not wake me. I hear the car start.

Mi Mamá has many responsibilities in our house. As far back as I can remember she has always been the decision maker and breadwinner of our family, at least since coming to the United States. House responsibilities fall on the eldest child. Gender normative roles are bent in our house. My mom's ability to have a driver's license means she drives my dad every morning to and from work.

██████████, my six-year old nephew comes to lay next to me on the air mattress. He turns on the television and starts tapping at my face with his tiny hands. "I hope Mami (my mom) has to put gas in the car so she can get me a donut" he says to me. "What flavor?" I inquire. "Mmm, chocolate or maybe pink with sprinkles" he responds indecisively. "Me vas a dar de tu dona?" I question him. He smiles. His silent response is enough for me to realize sharing his hypothetical treat is not part of his wishful thinking.

Our house is home to three generations interwoven through four nuclear families, totaling thirteen individuals. My mother and brother-in-law (my older sister's partner) both are non-permanent residents, in the US on a yearly work authorization renewal program. Their permits came from a court negotiation after each was separately detained. Mi Papá is the only one sin papeles. My older sister and I share DACA status. My younger sister, her partner, and four children are U.S. born citizens. My mother's sister and her baby are asylum seekers. Our different statuses shape our interactions and how we negotiate and reconcile with our everyday decisions, both at home and at work.

"Ya ve cámbiate y ve y levanta a tu hermana" my mother orders me. "Tenemos que pasar temprano porque hay mucho que hacer" she continues. "Siempre," I reply and go do as I am told. The drive to the ██████████ office in the Tempe, Arizona takes us about twenty-minutes, thirty if I am the one driving, and nearly two hours if traveling on the public transit system. My sister likes to drive, even without a license. She is a slow reader and fears failing the written exam, but she is probably the best driver out of all us. When she was fifteen, she would sometimes drive me to

school. When we get to our destination, our mom stays in the car, and my sister accompanies me in. We are greeted by the clerk at the front desk. She hands my sister the application even though I asked for it. We sit next to each other.

I look like I just slept on an air mattress, mostly because that is the truth. I am in shorts and a t-shirt; I did not consider that a custodial job would require me to ‘dress up.’ Another man dressed in a neatly pressed maroon shirt tucked into his pants is seated in the waiting room, also filling out a job application. I notice his look of dejection as he tries to make sense of the clipboard full of papers, all worded in English. He gets up and, in Spanish, politely asks the secretary for assistance. I review the packet before I begin to fill it out. Reading it carefully, I take both mental notes and digital ones on my cellphone. “Excellent fieldwork material,” I think to myself. In the moment, I fail to realize the privilege of my ability to meticulously scrutinize the stack of papers before me. My sister had previously shared with me that an undocumented friend of hers did not complete the application because it was too much information that she felt she did not have. The tedious application is one added barrier to the livelihood of people.

The packet has many parts to it, lettered A-U, but there are more than twenty-one pages, for non-English speakers to agonize over. At the end of the packet there is a description that reads, “I know that many of these forms can be overwhelming. Although, we will review all of them in orientation, if you have any questions later, please call me so we can set up a time to answer all of your questions. Human Resource Representative.” I ask my sister what orientation is like and if there is safety training to use the different chemicals. She looks at me as if I just asked the most ridiculous question. She informs me no training is provided and also says, “Esta será la única vez que vienes aquí. Con HR ni se habla.”

New Hire Packet

Dear New Employee,

I would like to welcome you as a new member of the Allied Universal team! I look forward to working with you as your Human Resource contact. I will be responsible for ensuring that all of your new hire and benefit information is processed.

Your New Hire Packet contains a lot of information to help orient you to the Company. Some of the documents must be reviewed, signed and returned to me and will become part of your employment record. Other items are enclosed for your reference and information only.

Below is a checklist of the specific items that need to be reviewed, signed and returned to me on your start date to ensure proper processing.

<input type="checkbox"/> A. This Welcome Letter (sign below)	<input type="checkbox"/> K. Hazard Communication Training Acknowledgement
<input type="checkbox"/> B. Employment Application and (EEO) Information	<input type="checkbox"/> L. Union Dues Authorization / Membership Application
<input type="checkbox"/> C. Personnel Action Notice (PAN - complete section I only)	<input type="checkbox"/> M. Background / Reference Authorization forms
<input type="checkbox"/> D. W-4 Federal Withholding Tax Form	<input type="checkbox"/> N. Restitution Agreement
<input type="checkbox"/> E. EDD - CA State Withholding Tax Form (optional)	<input type="checkbox"/> O. Payroll Information Enrollment form and Direct Deposit Authorization form
<input type="checkbox"/> F. I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification Form <u>Must provide supporting documentation</u> <i>(Note: this document must be completed within 3 days of hire or we will be unable to continue your employment)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> P. Worker's Compensation Pamphlet and Acknowledgement form
<input type="checkbox"/> G. Confidential Medical History Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Q. Cellular Telephone Training Acknowledgement
<input type="checkbox"/> H. Emergency Contact Form	<input type="checkbox"/> R. Attendance Policy Acknowledgement
<input type="checkbox"/> I. Drug-Free Workplace Acknowledgement	<input type="checkbox"/> S. Meal / Rest Period Acknowledgement
<input type="checkbox"/> J. Consent for Post Offer / Pre-Employment Drug Testing	<input type="checkbox"/> T. Harassment and Discrimination Acknowledgement form
	<input type="checkbox"/> U. Handbook / Work Rules Acknowledgement form

In Addition to the forms listed above that need to be returned to me, you are receiving the following documents that are for you to keep for reference only, and are not required to be returned:

<input type="checkbox"/> Employee Handbook / Work Rules	<input type="checkbox"/> Workers' Compensation Brochure and Policy
<input type="checkbox"/> Attendance / Absence Reporting Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> EDD State Disability Brochure
<input type="checkbox"/> Harassment & Discrimination Brochure and Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> ADR Information

Please sign here acknowledging that these items have been given to you during your new hire orientation:

_____ New Employee Signature	_____ Today's Date
---------------------------------	-----------------------

I know that many of these forms can be overwhelming. Although we will review all of them in orientation, if you have any questions later, please call me so we can set up time to answer all of your questions.

Human Resources Representative

A - Welcome Letter

rev. 11/10

Picture one of the job application. Photo by author

I continue through the application and begin to realize that I am not the traditional

Second photograph of the job application. Photo by author

candidate for this job. I am a graduate student and my references, the people who can ‘evaluate my capabilities’ and who are also not my relatives, include

associate and assistant professors. Can my classroom skills translate to janitorial labor? I begin to feel underqualified for the position. I jot down my academic advisors’ information and that of a colleague. Next to me, the other applicant calls a friend to ask if he knows “alguien que le haga el paro.” This work is an entanglement of different goals, values, and stakeholders that includes people of different statuses such as undocu/DACAmented workers.

“Pues yo no digo nada porque siento que no es mi lugar. Y si digo algo pues luego se molesta la supervisora y ya vez todo es un desmadre. Hay cosas que uno ve pero pues para no causar problemas mejor se queda callada y haci no te pueden decir nada tampoco y puedes seguir trabajando” my sister tells me.

She says the potential loss of employment—as well as the differences in power between employees—are what keeps people quiet about unfair labor practices as well as the differences in power between employees. As she mentioned earlier, the employees at [REDACTED] avoid contact with the department of human resources. “Todos te dicen que el HR no sirve que nomas dicen mentiras que te quieren ayudar pero que causan mas problemas.” “What about days off? Don’t you call HR for that?” I ask in English. To which she replies, “No. Le dices a la supervisora y entonces ella ve si alguien te puede cubrir. Pero luego dicen que no pagan los dias asi que nadie quiere cubrirte el turno.” “Who says days are not paid?” I ask her with curiosity. “Pues todos” she says without contention. In a later conversation she reveals a suspicion about why she thinks la supervisora does not like it when employees contact HR:

“Una vez estaba hablando con uno de los nuevos gerentes de otro edificio sobre la reubicación y por más horas y me preguntó quién era mi supervisor. Entonces le dije que era

██████████, y dijo que cuando revisó la lista ninguna ██████████ estaba incluida como supervisora, sino otro nombre.”

Many businesses and corporations around the country depend on unauthorized workers because these groups are less likely to unionize, ask for better working conditions, and demand higher wages. Like families, workplaces have people of varying citizenship statuses. Employees, such as ██████████, who are possibly using papeles chuecos, participate in the use of fear to dissuade coworkers from contacting higher-ups. This lessens interactions that can lead to someone potentially asking questions about work eligibility. Living in precarity means women like la supervisora take extra precautions and enact their own forms of regulation. DACAmented workers, like my sister, can feel powerless. Her limited English-speaking skills and formal education leave her with limited work options, which also adds to the pressure to be silent. The fear of losing their jobs and not being able to provide for their children means people with insecure documentation are less likely to question authority.

Hesitant to interrupt the front clerk and the other applicant, I work up the courage to hand her my completed application. Admittedly, I did not read through the whole application but rather skimmed through sections that required me to input information and signature. I ask for a copy of my application and the clerk hands me a blank one instead.

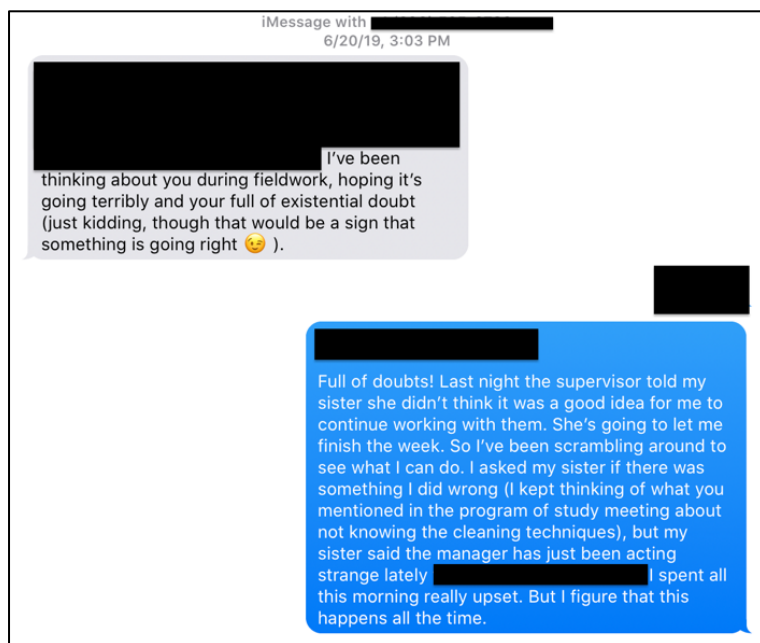
No call was placed to notify me I got the position. I also did not receive an invitation to an orientation. So far, my sister's assertions about the job held. The only advice I felt I needed was on how to conduct proper fieldwork. But as I knew from listening mi Mamá talk about her work, janitorial work is not unskilled labor. It is arduous and often lonesome. Rhythmic and repetitive. Often with odd processes, such as locking and unlocking the hand-towel dispenser. “¿Habrá alguien realmente que quiere robar las napkins?” I ask my mom in Spanglish as she reloads the metal container. She does not answer the query, not because she cannot understand my mixed language,

but because she is concentrating. Her next words to me are instructions to wipe the mirror so we can move along to the next restroom.

During our night shifts, I find myself doing the least amount of work out of all of us. I think of all the times mi Papá has joked about my delicate hands and how they do not know how to hold a shovel. Mi Mamá would tell him that my hands are best suited for pencils and keyboards. Mi Mamá and my sister demonstrate their care when they tell me I should do the things that require less detail, “porque ya sabemos cómo es la supervisora,” and if the supervisor complains, she will quickly have me dismissed.

I had previously spent countless hours helping my family as a volunteer when time allowed me. School vacations and holidays, I worked alongside them to alleviate some of their workload and simply because it was a chance to spend time with them. The supervisor, whom I had met before, had agreed to my fieldwork and to be a part of the collaborative research I had envisioned. But my constant questions, note-taking, filming, and photographs set off an alarm that must have sounded louder than the noise of the breakroom. After four days of work, she text messaged my sister that I was neither employed nor allowed back as a volunteer.

I refrained from calling the supervisor or human resources because I did not feel it necessary for me to get closure, and by proxy, jeopardize the livelihoods of the custodial staff. If indeed my anthropological fieldwork brought feelings of insecurity, I did not want to further insert myself in that particular workspace.



An exchange between my academic advisor (grey) and me (blue) about being let go from the job.

On Making Noise

As a non-U.S. citizen and academic, I am caught at the convergence of everyday life and theory, an invisible border as wicked as the U.S.-Mexican frontera, and every other unnatural, national wall or fence. In anthropology, I am both the studied and the surveyor. At home, I am el favorito, as my sisters

will surely attest. To mi Mamá and Papá, I am el sabe-lo-todo y el sueño – the one who knows it all and has made it. The result of this aching transition, as Gloria Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, demands an active role within these new realities and imaginaries:

“Every step of consciousness, every step forward is a travesía, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And ‘knowing,’ I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. Knowing is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before.” (p. 70)

In crossing over, I am unable to re-cross, therefore, in ‘making it,’ I have a responsibility to my communities and family to make noise, to shake the rattlesnake’s tail because the lids of my eyes have been lifted (p.71). I have to speak. To speak, not for us, but about us, with each other, and to you, in hope that our (los indocumentados) stories of everyday life will disrupt the reductive rhetoric that strongholds us (los migrantes) in silos marked as un/worthy.

As expressed in *The Vulnerable Observer* by Ruth Behar, I too write/show/make noise from a place of vulnerability, with a constant “[worry] that a smoke alarm will blare our ears when the ethnography grows perilously hot and ‘too personal’”(p.7). I engage my research with the women

closest to me--mi Mamá, sister, and friends--even when the fear of legal repercussions is closer to real sirens of la migra and their unsolicited knock on the door, than to hypothetical ones.

The experiences I describe illustrate the relationship between structures of power and humans with (non-)citizenship status through the scope of noise. I examine noise as a framework of authority that manifests in the relationships and spaces undocu/DACAmented immigrants foster and occupy, respectively. The depictions of noise--whether literal or symbolic, rambunctious or discreet, lighthearted or sinister, avoided or desired--hint towards different forms of domination and resistance. This essay adds to the cacophony of immigration dialogue in the United States. Hopefully, it sounds louder and more powerful than the chirp of a Twitter notification. Noise is alerting. It demands attention and often, action. Scholar-activists, hijos y hijas, myself included, who are products of mothers and their infinite care, are raising their voices demanding the same pathway to citizenship for the women that have allowed them to access their education. At DACA and Dreamer rallies, we chant:

“I am somebody,
And I deserve full equality,
Right here, right now!
My mom is somebody,
And she deserves full equality,
Right here, right now!
My sister is somebody,
And she deserves full equality,
Right here, right now!”

Long nights of studying keep me on campus during the same time the cleaning crew begins the late shift. Their janitorial closet is across my office door, and I can hear the songs playing on their radio and their inaudible chatter. I think of mi Mamá, and the many women like her who came to this country wanting more. I think of how I could be helping her clean bathroom stalls or take the trash out, to lessen the tasks of my sister. I hear the sound of the yellow mop bucket roll away and how the only sound that remains is the tapping of my crooked fingers on my computer's keyboard. I

think of them and hope that in doing this work, I can show them the same care they show me. I also hope this research makes noise beyond the walls of the university because dignity and respect should be for all, not just for those with a degree.



My sister and mother deserving of full equality. Photo by author

Chapter Seven: El Virus

This chapter is now homed on Somatosphere.net as part of the series, “Dispatches from the Pandemic.” To view and read this essay with translations, photographs, and working links visit the following website: <http://somatosphere.net/2020/el-virus-a-contagion-of-racism-how-networks-of-care-can-stop-it.html/>

My mother FaceTimed me a month ago and asked if I needed her to ship me hand sanitizer from Phoenix to Oregon. I thought it a silly question, but in hindsight, I should have known better than to doubt my mother. During our chat she informed me that a relative called earlier in the day to check in on her, concerned my mom might catch ‘el virus.’ My mother is on hemodialysis as a result of a longstanding relationship with lupus— making her more susceptible to a severe case of coronavirus, or ‘el virus’ as she calls it.

I coughed a couple of times as I listened to her.

She paused, and asked: ¿Sigues tosiendo? ¿Ya fuiste al doctor?

I had recently returned from a ten day trip to the east coast where coronavirus had begun to spread. I assured my mother the college town in which I live had no reported cases, and that despite a stubborn sinus infection, I was fine.

Before we ended our chat, my mom once again asked: ¿Seguro que no ocupas nada? Te podemos mandar lo que ocupes por correo.

From the perspective of a DACAmended researcher working with undocumented and mixed-status families, I investigate how forms of care travel between and across political, cultural, and physical borders. My collaborations with undocu/DACAmended mothers provide me insight into the everyday negotiations immigrant women make between their bodies and the neoliberal nation-state to advance their children’s social mobility.

Like many others, I find myself fervently refreshing my news and social media feeds about coronavirus. I search for stories about the protections for immigrants, and what I find is troublesome. The tweets, blogs, and popular news articles I read invoke a deep sadness in me because many migrants cannot work remotely, their options to voluntarily take time off from work are limited, they do not have health insurance, and they live paycheck to paycheck. They keep working because they have to, often at the expense of their bodies.

Doris Reina-Landaverde, a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holder and custodian at Harvard University, who cleaned dormitories after the university evacuated students, began to show symptoms of coronavirus but has been unable to get tested. Migrant farmworkers in the Central Coast of California, now deemed ‘essential workers,’ bend their bodies swiftly and methodically to the rhythm of heavy machinery to bring food to our tables. Despite their highly skilled labor, the US government has a history of passing laws that mark farmworkers as disposable bodies, and in turn, agricultural laborers “expend exceptional effort to maintain their jobs” (Horton, 2016).

Coronavirus has not deterred Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents from raiding communities and placing unauthorized migrants in cramped cages. Two physicians that work with the DHS shared a letter warning that detention centers are at risk of a “tinderbox scenario” or disease cluster. The doctors also suggested that “releasing all immigration detainees who do not pose a security risk should be seriously considered in the national effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus.” ICE published a website with updates on people in custody and employees with confirmed cases of coronavirus, but I am unsure how much I can trust this source.

Women at an ICE detention center used a video visitation program to express their fears about a fellow detainee that demonstrated symptoms of the virus. Dressed in orange jumpsuits, the women displayed signs to communicate that the woman they suspected of being sick worked in the

kitchen, potentially putting all of them at risk. One of the messages read, “is very crowded here,” followed by, “we are 72 women living in the same dorm, one above the other.” “We have very much fear” is the last display before the guards arrived to break up the group of women huddled in front of the camera. The video ends in disruption and my heart breaks.

Equally important are the protections of the DACA program whose future rests on the Supreme Court decision expected between now and June. In keeping with public health precautions, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced it would suspend in-person services— an impact felt by DACA recipients, asylum seekers, TPS grantees, and many non-US citizens seeking to maintain or adjust their immigration status. In an update, the DHS said it would process applications with previously submitted biometrics, which reveals the redundancy of subsequent biometric appointments that they have required of DACA recipients every two years. How the DHS will address cases in which applicants encounter a lapse in immigration status due to delays and rapid policy changes is still unknown.

What I do know is DACA recipients are experiencing layoffs, do not qualify for unemployment benefits in 46 states, are ineligible for federal benefits (Medicaid and food stamps), and in addition to these worries, have to pay \$495 to renew their immigration status. This fee is already a financial barrier for many DACA recipients with limited capital, and recently the US government proposed to increase it to \$765. The pandemic has curtailed operations for many immigrant rights groups across the country. My sister’s permit is up for renewal, but our joint efforts to find financial assistance have come up short because of an increase in DACA folks looking to renew their status before the Court decision, and healthcare precautions complicate community outreach. These challenges are a testament to US politicians’ flippant disregard for non-citizens despite the fact that immigrants contribute tremendously to the everyday operation of this nation.

The United States maintains a longstanding narrative of a country built by immigrants, and at the same time, it underplays this myth through its displacement of people. Additionally, this common belief silences the presence of Indigenous communities already living on and with this land who were forcibly and violently removed, killed, and disempowered by European settlers. A nation built by immigrants ignores slavery and the dehumanization of Black lives, and the legal undoing of their personhood. And popularized history overlooks the Chinese immigrants who built the transcontinental railroad. By no means is it a coincidence that racialized groups and class-marginalized communities will suffer the most throughout the pandemic.

My older sister text-messed me last week. Worried about me, she asked if I had enough food supplies. She wanted to send a care package that included hand sanitizer, dry goods, and Mexican treats our younger sister bought for me. I replied that I appreciated their thoughts, but that it would not be necessary.

I am fortunate to have constructed a family since my move to Corvallis, Oregon. I live with two of my professors, their boisterous children, and a shaggy loveable dog. When DACA went to the Supreme Court, they offered me housing as a way of financial and emotional support. At the beginning of each month, per my insistence, I write them a check for a small amount. They do not always cash it. My housing arrangement allows me to allocate a portion of my finances to supplement my family's low earnings. We share a mutual love and appreciation for each other, and undoubtedly their care for me crosses over to my family.

I am mindful that my kinship networks provide me access to resources not available to most low-income non-citizens. I also recognize that my mother and sister's labor has given me the privilege to dedicate my time to my pursuits of undergraduate and graduate degrees in applied and activist anthropology. In a group-chat with DACAmended folks and allies from Oregon State University, we discuss the barriers our peers are encountering. Our school administrators have yet to

communicate how they intend to support class-marginalized students throughout this time. Instead, their bombardment of emails focuses on the transition to remote classroom instruction.

At the moment, one invaluable resource for mutual aid is the COVID-19 Support Network established by the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) at Oregon State University, which is available to all students and community members regardless of their citizenship status. Guided by an ethos of community building and resilience, CGE provides food assistance, grocery delivery, rideshares, childcare, and various other services. Under-housed and food-insecure students can count on the support of the Human Services Resource Center, a campus-based food pantry offering food boxes and emergency shelter. I worry about the sustainability of such welfare programs under neoliberal educational restructuring.

As policymakers debate what, whom, and where to allocate funds, coronavirus is spreading, and people are dying. Undocumented immigrants remain one of the groups most afflicted, and my inclination is that many will not survive. When asked during a recent press conference about aiding undocumented people during the pandemic, Donald Trump responded:

“Well, you know, you’re saying undocumented, meaning they came in illegally. A lot of people would say we have a lot of citizens right now that won’t be working. So, what [do] you do? It’s a tough thing. It’s a very terrible—it’s a very sad question, I must be honest with you. But they came in illegally. And we have a lot of people that are citizens of our country that won’t be able to have jobs.”

In his vitriolic 2016 campaign, Trump demonstrated his penchant for fear-mongering, anti-immigrant rhetoric: “Tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border,” he said. His continuous callous invectives about “the Chinese virus” reinforce the racism and xenophobia that his supporters expect and further propagate. Cherrie Moraga (1981) tells us, “what the oppressor often succeeds in doing is simply externalizing his fears, projecting them into the bodies of women, Asians, gays, disabled folks, whoever seems most ‘other.’” Like many before him, Trump uses language as a tool to inflict fear, harness power, and protect the white nation. Perales (2013)

emphasizes how eugenics in the US has made the exclusion and discrimination of (Mexican) immigrants permissible over the past century:

“Historically, mexicanas’ bodies represented multiple threats: women were individuals even likelier to become public charges and more susceptible to vice and corruption; they were potential prostitutes that destroyed the moral character of the nation, carriers of disease and contagion, and, particularly in later generations, they became ‘hyper-fertile baby machines’ whose children would illegitimately draw from social services.”

“Está muy mal ese señor,” my mom tells me when we discuss Trump.

I agree with her. Racism is a disease, an abnormal condition that originates from the contact of Western men and power, and Trump is a complicit carrier. This virus causes a desire for domination, and it has spread into every crevice of the United States government. Symptoms of this disease include chronic disparities in health, education, wealth and income. Coronavirus has uncovered oppression that has for years “brewed in our beds, tables, and streets” (Morruga & Anzaldúa, 2015). Trump and his administration’s inefficient and pitiful response to the pandemic reflects the lack of care their system of governance has for the overworked and underpaid poor and the undocumented.

This morning I sat on the staircase and I called my mom. It has been about a month since she asked if I needed some hand sanitizer. And although we have not been able to purchase any in weeks, this is not the reason I’ve called. I wanted to say hello. I wanted to hug her and kiss her chubby, freckled cheeks. I missed her terribly. And I secretly mourned the loss of her planned visit to Oregon this June.

She greeted me and then inquired: Hola. ¿Cómo te sientes?

I moved my knees closer to my chest and replied: Sigo tosiendo un poco pero igual ya no. Como te había dicho, el doctor dijo que porque no tuve fiebre no cree que sea el virus. Tengo que regresar en dos semanas.

What she said next took me by surprise: Tu papá quiere que le pidamos un favor a una amiga para que vaya por ti en carro. Y que le podemos pagar. Pero le dije que no. Es mejor que te quedes con tus profesores. Acuérdate de darles las gracias.

For many undocu/DACAmented people, living in precarity is not a new experience. Uncertainty and fear are the conditions in which we work, play, love, and care — even if with limited mobility. We acknowledge that access to our families is a great privilege, and that separation, even if momentarily, is an aspect we must endure. When systems fail to care for us, we rely on the care of our networks. But I worry that these social networks will not endure under the increasingly corrupt and sickly rule of Trump and the GOP.

Coronavirus spreads through physical contact. We are advised to wash our hands often and to remain indoors. Yet, moments of great tragedy and collective suffering are when solidarity, unity, and mobilization are needed the most. Anzaldúa expresses the saliency of touch in bringing communities together for political revolution:

“Touching is an act of making love, and if political touching is not made with love no connections, no linkages happen. We each are our sisters’ and brothers’ keepers; no one is an island or has ever been...We are each responsible for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea. And those of us who have more of anything—more brains, more physical strength, more political power, more money, or more spiritual energies—must give or exchange with those who don’t have these energies but may have other things to give. It is the responsibility of some of us to tap the vast source of spiritual/political energies to heal others, to put down a drawbridge; at the same time, we must depend more and more on our sources of survival” (2015).

At the moment, the risk of contagion keeps us physically distant. However, this does not permit us, the minoritized and vulnerable, to remain detached from one another. We would be wise to heed Anzaldúa’s advice; otherwise, we risk further spread of ‘el virus’ – the infectious disease of racism that preys and immobilizes the ‘other.’ If left untreated, it will fester within white-identifying communities and continue to wreak havoc.

Chapter Eight: The Borders that Bind Us

To watch this video, *The Borders that Bind Us*, please [click here](#). I offered my testimonio as part of a collective effort at the 2019 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association to reimagine the annual conference meeting. To learn more about Reimagining the Annual Meeting for Radical Climate Change, please visit Culanth.org. A movement towards public and accessible scholarship gives way to engagement beyond the classroom or academic gatherings. Knowledge should be accessible without having to prove membership to a country, university, or academic society.

Mi testimonio

By the time you see this video, it will have been approximately a week after Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has had its initial Supreme Court hearing [in] November [2019]. By then, I imagine the sores and blisters will have started to heal on the feet of 200 and something DACA beneficiaries, Temporary Protection Status (TPS) holders, supporters, and allies who are walking from New York to DC. They are marching as part of the “Home is Here” campaign, asking the highest court in the nation to protect the status of 700,000 DACA recipients and congress to extend protections for 300,000 TPS holders. The Supreme Court has until the end of June 2020 to make its decision.

This year the American Anthropological Association calls for academics across disciplines to come together to discuss and reimagine the changing climate specifically through the lens of struggle, collaboration, and justice. Similarly, “Home is Here” activists rallied together at the Statue of Liberty and commenced a 230-mile walk to the Supreme Court steps, to immediately address the political climate surrounding the future of nearly 1 million people. Their overall mission is to reimagine a broken immigration system that selectively, if at all, grants protections with uncertainty while also taking into account the total number of the undocumented population in the US.

Mi nombre es Argenis Hurtado Moreno, and I am a DACA beneficiary. I was born in Michoacán, Mexico and came to the US at the age of three. Up until 2012, when the Obama administration introduced DACA, I was undocumented. DACA, while very much imperfect, allowed me the opportunity to work and obtain an undergraduate degree in social and behavioral sciences from Arizona State University, which had previously felt beyond reach. My newly granted status allowed me the privilege to move in and out of state borders, when financially possible.

With my newfound mobility, I was able to attend the Society for Applied Anthropology annual meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2017. Along with collaborators, I presented an exhibit, Visualizing Immigrant Phoenix, a multi-modal ethnographic project to celebrate the contributions of our migrant communities. This space not only awarded me the opportunity to present my contributions to the field but allowed me to partake in the social networking ritual. I met tenured anthropologists that would help open doors I never even knew existed, such as graduate school. Because I was able to attend this conference, I met Dr. Kenneth Maes, the anthropology graduate program coordinator at Oregon State University. He encouraged me to apply to OSU's applied anthropology program. I did, I was accepted and now work with Dr. Emily Yates-Doerr.

This is my final year at OSU and with doctoral program deadlines approaching, this conference would have been a prime opportunity to sample a portion of my master's thesis and meet potential Ph.D. advisors. My research employs multimodal-multisensory ethnographic methods in an attempt to shift immigration reform discourse beyond the DREAMer/DACA narrative and highlight the lives of the migrant women that produce such model citizens. My fieldwork this past summer allowed me to collaborate with three women of different statuses: a non-permanent resident, a DACA beneficiary, and an asylum seeker. Their stories speak to the nexus of gender, status, and mobility.

Their border-crossings and outcomes elucidate experiences of breaking and dislocating ankles while jumping across the border wall, wearing ankle bracelets during house arrest, driving and navigating working restrictions, and documenting continuous presence in the country. Because of Trump's order to rescind the DACA program, benefits like advanced parole, which allowed DACAmented folks to travel across international borders, no longer exist. This prohibits me to attend "the triple As" and share the research I have done with these women.

Mi testimonio offers a glimpse of how borders, immigration policies, and the academe work in tandem to make social mobility nearly impossible if one exists sin papeles. But these limitations are not unique to undocu/DACAmented academics. My international colleagues face limitations. Two of them will be barred from the US for two years because of their visa agreement. Another wrestles with the rigamarole of crossing international borders as a Brazilian citizen. As we put our minds to collectively reimagine anthropology conferences to make them more accessible, let us consider the voices that are silenced by border walls and restrictive immigration policies. I also challenge faculty members taking on foreign-born graduate students to consider the additional barriers their students will encounter in an already precarious field.

I have benefited beyond measure from my mother's decision to cross the border 23 years ago. I have benefited from restrictive immigration initiatives. I have benefited greatly from having advisors that demonstrate compassion and love beyond the walls of the university. But I wonder whether current and future students in similar or worse positions have or will have the same opportunities. I wonder whether my cousins and their children will be met with open arms at the border if living conditions continue to worsen in our home state. But of course, I am doubtful. How does a country decide to momentarily welcome people during a time of crisis and then denounce them before the crisis is over? I wonder about the challenges that my aunt and her baby will face depending on the result of their asylum case next month. I nervously await the Supreme Court's

decision on DACA and whether it will pave the way for comprehensive immigration reform based on humanity alone and not college degrees, or whether I will have to again participate at next year's AAA meeting remotely, this time from Mexico.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

“It is not easy writing this letter. It began as a poem, a long poem. I tried to turn it into an essay but the result was wooden, cold. I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing.

How to begin again. How to approximate the intimacy and immediacy I want. What form? A letter, of course.”

Gloria Anzaldúa,
Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers

Dear Reader,

I was thinking of apologizing for the lack of coherency in this “thesis.” I fear that perhaps I haven’t made much sense at all. But I’m tired. I’m tired of helping people make sense of the way things are. And before you say, “that’s your job, you’re an academic. You signed up for this!” I want to remind you, this is not my job. This is a consequence of unjust racist bullshit. And hopefully, because you’re reading this, you already agree.

I am tired of arguing and defending because I feel like I’ve done that for so much of my life. Perhaps this is why I enjoy experimental forms of storytelling. There seems to be more humanity in stories, poetry, pictures, and film than in numbers. I want to feel human, and not be reduced to some statistic people reference in favor of or against migrants. I want to be part of something, a movement, a new form of thinking that centralizes care.

Being of Mexican nationality and growing up in “the states,” I have always had to defend myself. To prove that I was/am Mexican enough, and *American* enough -- whatever that means. Well, I guess I do know what that means. It means speaking English with no accent. It means having to perform in front of white peers, in front of white teachers, and in front of white people in general. It means being ashamed of having to wear clothes bought from yard sales every year and then feeling more ashamed when your mom spends fifty dollars at Mervyn’s and JCPenny for your

freshman year of high school, knowing she spent money she didn't have. It means feeling rejected by the people you went to high school with because their lives are so different now. They didn't get the privilege of continuing school or being "talented" and "gifted" even though they had papeles. I just wrote that sentence and I felt icky. School shouldn't be the answer to everything, and yet for me, it's one of the few places where I feel accepted even when my presence is contested.

It also means anthropologizing the ordinary to make it scientific, to make it valid. I can empathize with Trinh T. Minh-ha's disdain for this discipline. Writing, Anzaldúa says, feels unnatural. I will often stare at my screen and pray that my mind will think of something new or interesting. I work better with direction. Give me a box and I will color outside of it. I just need the box to be there. My advisor always tells me to write. To write about not writing and to write about writing. She once wrote to me, "For some, intellectualizing it all might be a form of violence. For others, a way to survive the trauma."

I don't know that my writing is any good, despite what my mentors tell me. But I wrote this letter and this thesis as both a refusal and a compliance. By writing a conclusion in such an unorthodox fashion, I aim to further breakaway from the established paradigms of anthropology and the academy. In writing this, I subject myself to the institution and its demands of me and others like me. Or those like me and yet unlike me. Perhaps this will inspire future students of anthropology to create something even better than what I've presented.

At the same time, I write for that little undocumented reader who isn't allowed to go outside because their parents fear la migra. To you, my fellow undocumented reader that wants to know more about the world and all that it has, this may be for you.

Always,

Argenis

Dear (White) Mentors,

Thank you for your care, kindness, and consideration. I thought perhaps you'd fear to mentor someone like me. That you'd feel out of touch or perhaps unable to relate to the stress and pressures I experience as a DACAmented scholar. I thank you for sharing time and space with me for two years and not pushing me away to faculty of color...adding to their already long list of demands. No, this is not to minimize your own undertakings, because you do a lot. More than I think I could ever do. And yet, you have still found and made time for me. And those are the aspects I am most grateful for, because even if you couldn't understand what I was saying you were there, and you listened. Though I should note, that we do relate on many levels because sometimes our experiences did intersect. Like growing up poor. Being insecure. And questioning your place in academia. You let me be and you see for me.

I was thinking of listing the things I felt you've done right, but I think that's unnecessary and unbecoming of me since by now you know my feelings towards metrics. But I do hope that you realize that you have done plenty and that you continue to offer the same affection to your current and future students. Because it really has made all the difference for me. The walks, the jokes, the bike rides, shared meals, hugs, and everything else.

Before I end this letter, I do want to say that without your encouragement and support, I wouldn't have explored the different modalities of knowledge (re)production. If it weren't for your eagerness to welcome silenced scholars into our *academic* conversations, my work would probably look much different, and perhaps less me. I hope that I've made you proud. And one day, I'm going to cheer on my students and gift them the same care you've gifted me and my family. You're my acompañates, my friends, my allies, and my othermothers.

Always,

Argenis

Dear Senator Reed,

Hello, my name is Argenis Hurtado Moreno, and I will be one of your constituents in September when I commence my Doctorate in Anthropology at Brown University. I will be the University's only DACAmented Ph.D. student, and while this may sound astounding at first, it isn't entirely surprising. Only about 4% of 700,000 DACA beneficiaries hold a bachelor's degree and less pursue post-graduate education.

Of course, by now, you must know the future of DACA is in danger of ending because of Trump's xenophobia. Next month, the Supreme Court Justices will decide over my future and others like me. But this letter is not about me. You're probably familiar with stories similar to mine- young, smart, hardworking immigrant that's ivy league bound. These qualities describe me, but these are not the qualities that I think should be necessary to advocate for immigration reform. Missing from these stories of success are the women whose invisibilized care and work produce "model immigrants." These women's experiences are rarely, if ever, at the center of policymakers' conversations. This letter is about women like them.

Because I am writing this letter without their knowledge, I will refrain from using their names. To refer to them, I will use the first letter of each of their names.

R hates cooking, but you wouldn't think this you tasted her meals because they are phenomenal. When she was young, her mother would tease her because R didn't know how to cook an egg. Her mother would tell her often that no man would ever want to marry R because men don't like women that aren't useful. R did marry, but only because her now-husband kidnapped her. I guess that's how it was back in the day. Or so she tells me. It happened in Mexico sometime in the 80s. At first, I didn't believe her because it sounded outlandish. And because I know R to be strong-willed and

independent. R told me her mom was a conservative and traditional Mexican mom. "My mom didn't care about the circumstance, and if any of her daughters didn't come home for the night, it meant she was up to no good with some man." You see, R's mother was one of the few well-respected women in her village, and she cared deeply about her and her family's reputation. R cared about her mother's opinion, but that changed. "Having children of my own made me place their wellbeing above what anyone else had to say or think. My priorities and way of parenting were different than my mom's. But I also think that her stubbornness stuck on me."

R was unsatisfied with her life in Mexico. She was not in a happy marriage, and she wanted more for her two kids. She decided to cross the border in 1996. Her mom didn't approve but understood there was no changing her daughter's mind. R's mother and sister would take care of her children while she looked for a job in the US. With her first paycheck, R paid a Coyote to bring her children across the border to Phoenix, Arizona, where R still lives to this day.

In the early 2000s, R's health began to decline. Undocumented immigrants have limited access to proper healthcare, so, with the encouragement of her mother and some friends, R decided to return to Mexico. She left her two Mexican-born children in Phoenix. The diagnoses came in the form of lupus, an autoimmune disease that has severe effects on the body and mind. R recrossed to the US to reunite with her children and grandchildren. She came back and worked under-the-table and poorly paid jobs to take care of her family.

One day, R let a friend borrow her car, and the friend, unfortunately, was in an automotive accident. When R was unable to provide "proper" documentation to the police, she was detained and entered the deportation process. Thankfully, through a network of friends, she was able to get in contact with the now-late and former Arizona and Latino community leader, Ben Miranda. With his help and that of others', and a reasonable judge order, R's deportation came to a halt. R also became eligible for a work permit per the judge's order.

Every year R has to pay approximately a thousand dollars in legal fees to renew her work authorization. This liminal "legal" status grants her access to the dialysis center, where she undergoes hemodialysis. Despite her declining health and failing memory or "lupus fog" as medical specialists call it, R maintains that her will to live and work are her children.

R has one US-born daughter, who recently turned twenty-one. R's daughter could petition for an adjustment in status for R, but R has lost hope. She worries she'll her case will be denied, and she'll be considered a public charge. She worries about spending thousands of dollars she doesn't have and potentially be told she'll have to return to Mexico. Returning to Mexico would mean fewer resources healthcare and fears dying in a country away from her children. R is somebody. And she deserves full equality.

The second person I will tell you about is R's eldest daughter, Y-- a kind and endearing person. She is the type of person that lends herself to help no matter the receiving party or situation. I envy this about her. Y is also a DACA beneficiary, but she is not the DACAdocumented person that headlines news stories.

Y struggles to speak English, and reading is a difficult task for her. Y didn't do well in school and dropped out when R's health became a concern. She started working and contributing to her family's growing financial needs. At 29 and with three children of her own, Y returned to school to satisfy the DACA requirements. She works as a custodian with R.

One time on our way to work Y said to me, "Arge (that's my nickname), I have a lot of dreams. I want my kids to be someone. To know that I did everything I could for them and to have the things I didn't have growing up." When she shared this with me, all I could muster was not. Not of approval, but to convey my empathy and understanding. I don't have children of my own, but I've been on the receiving end of an undocumented mother's love. I've been fortunate to have an older sister that looks after me too.

Y's story makes me sad. It makes me sad that her efforts are shadowed by the success stories of so-called exemplary undocu/DACAmented scholars, like me. Y may not feel confident in her language skills, but I think otherwise. I have witnessed her interactions with physicians, health workers, administrators, attorneys, and other institutional representatives. Y assists her mom with her medical visits, communicates with them, and translates to her mom. Y is an expert application reader and filler. She understands the language regarding "acceptable" documentation and what institutions participate in loopholes that put moral ethics over bureaucratic gatekeeping. She navigates this country well, and perhaps better than I do. I'm nearing 28 years of life, 25 of those spent here in the US, and I feel that I don't know how to navigate this country.

As an anthropologist, I document the stories of the undocumented/DACAmented experience, primarily from the perspective of women--women with little to no formal education, women without extensive CVs, or well-paid jobs. Women like R and Y, are the kind of people that get left out of the conversation. Women, that you and your colleagues tend to ignore. And I ask you, please, don't do that.

Senator Reed, you've held your position since 1996- that's the same year R and Y migrated to the US. I can only infer that you've got a grasp on how the dialogue surrounding the topic of immigration has changed throughout the years, specifically post 9/11. In 2006, regarding the Immigration Reform Bill, you stated:

“People wishing to become citizens must play by the rules, hold a steady job, pay fines, and learn to speak English...At the same time, the bill recognizes a group of hardworking people who are here seeking a better life for their families, paying their taxes, and making positive contributions to society. They came to America for the same reasons that many of our ancestors did.”

First and foremost, the colonists that came to this country didn't play by the rules. They stole this land. What's now known as Rhode Island, belongs to Narragansett, Niantic Eastern, Nipmuc,

Pequot, and Wampanoag peoples. This country is built on the displacement and enslavement of people. Furthermore, this country makes it impossible to play by the rules when it consistently makes it hard for people to survive. How do you expect a working mother of three to learn English when she has to maintain multiple low-paying jobs?

You consider yourself a staunch supporter of the DREAM Act, but the DREAM Act isn't enough. You describe it as legislation that gives "bright, law-abiding, hardworking immigrant students who serve in the military or attend college an opportunity to earn legal status." The DREAM Act is unfair and leaves out people like R and Y, who aren't college students and have no intention of joining the military. They are hardworking, yes, but even that is a characteristic that leaves out immigrants unable to work. The definition of labor in this legislation further perpetuates the invisibilization of work undertaken by mothers - housework, childcare, etc. "Hard work" or utility should not equate to deservingness. Someone's welcoming into this country should not depend on their economic value. R and Y are human beings worthy of respect, dignity, and recognition. That alone should be enough.

In the coming days, nine people will decide the fate of 700,000 people and their families. Across the country, nearly 17 million people have at least one unauthorized immigrant family member living with them. As much as I worry about my future, I worry more about R and Y. If I were to get deported, I could perhaps rely on my prestigious and privileged academic networks to apply for a student visa. But for people like R and Y, these networks are nonexistent.

I care about R and Y. And you should too because immigrants like them are why this country is still able to function amid the coronavirus pandemic. Undocumented labor, now deemed "essential," is sustaining the US. Again, I don't think this should be the argument for their protection, but it is part of it. The pandemic has highlighted many of the injustices in this country, one of the most impacted groups being undocumented people.

As you continue to advocate for immigrant rights, please remember the US does not lend itself to "playing by the rules." My point is not to reproduce rhetoric that criminalizes undocumented immigrants but rather to emphasize the faults in the US immigration system, which you've stated as broken. I want you to think more expansively, and to consider the people that the language you participate in leaves many undocumented people on the peripheries.

I would be more than happy to make myself available to discuss this in further detail if it is of interest to you. You can reach me at [REDACTED] and by email at argenis@brown.edu.

With thanks,

Argenis Hurtado Moreno

Para mis Mamás,

He pensado en lo te quiero decir. Pero creo que todo lo que pienso tú lo sabes muy bien. Te quiero mucho, y eso creo que es lo más importante. Quizás, algo que no comparto mucho porque pienso que no tiene sentido es lo orgulloso que me haces sentir. No puedo imaginar lo que es tener hijos y dejarlos en cuidado de alguien más para cruzar la frontera. No sé que haría si yo tuviera que brincar el muro con mi hija y quebrarnos los pies juntos. No sé que siente ese dolor físico y emocional. Y tampoco sé de los pensamientos que te pasan por haber puesto a tu hija en esa situación. De eso no hablas conmigo ni con otras personas. Ese dolor tú lo llevas por dentro.

Tampoco sé lo que es ser responsable de un niño a los dieciséis años y lo que es mantener un hogar mientras tu mamá siente que está muriéndose. Me acuerdo que una vez fingiste tener dieciocho años para acompañar a mi clase de quinto grado al zoológico. Eres muy fuerte. Lo aprendiste de mi mamá. Cuando la arrestaron y estaba en proceso de deportación, tú tomaste mucha

más responsabilidad. Yo me siento como un fracaso muchas veces porque siento que a veces el mundo se está cayendo sobre mí, y no tengo la fuerza para superarlo.

Tú me has dicho que esta vida es para sufrir. Y eso me hace muy triste. La vida es para ser feliz, puede ser que tú sufres por mí y es por eso que yo no sé sufrir igual.

Tú me has dicho que yo debo hacer todo para todos sin esperar algo en retorno. Pero toda por la gran mayoría de mi vida siento que te debo algo por todo lo que has hecho por mí y mis hermanas. Cruzaste la frontera para darnos una vida mejor pero esto a veces es difícil de creer. No por tu culpa si no porque la vida en este país es difícil. Y está llena de sufrimiento. No sé, no creo que en México la vida sea mejor, pero la presión de ser más que bueno tal vez no fuera tan alta.

Cuando llegué a Oregon, y estaba armando mi cama, las lágrimas se me salieron porque estaba frustrado que no podía hacer este pequeño trabajo. Sentado en el suelo me puse a llorar como niño pequeño. Y me acorde de ti - de como navegaste este país sin saber la lengua, sin dinero, y sin muchos recursos. Y es lo que me da esperanza y motivación. No porque es un pequeño logro. Al contrario, tú me enseñaste a seguir adelante.

Tú sabes que he batallado con una gran tristeza. Y quiero que sepas que esto no es tu culpa. Quiero que sepas que yo viviera toda otra vez en magnífica tristeza por ser tu hijo y para tenerte a ti. Y también te quiero pedir perdón por no ser el hijo que tú imaginaste. Soy triste y solitario, y pienso demasiado. Me gusta pasar el tiempo estudiando y eso, aunque tú apoyas mis estudios, es lo que nos distancia. Sé que esto te hace feliz y triste. A mí también. Te he visto llorar y quedarte sin poder decirme las cosas me quieres decir. Las palabras se te hacen nudo en la garganta. Y lo siento. Pero también te lo agradezco.

En muchas formas, la escuela me alejó de ti. Y también me hizo entenderte más. Es por eso que en el centro de mis estudios se encuentra tu cariño, cuidado, el amor y amabilidad. Por eso es

que los temas que más me interesan son para entender el amor laborioso de madres como tú.

Gracias.

Tu hijo,

Argenis

Dear Dreamer and Argenis,

When I began to write this letter, I began writing it with a future undocumented student in mind. The more I wrote the more it began to sound like I was writing to myself—my past self. So, I decided to make this out to the two of us. Here it goes.

If you're reading this, I want you to know that I've deeply contemplated what I should write to you. What makes this task difficult for me is that I am unsure what the immigration policies will be when these words appear on your screen. It could be that by then, nothing of what I say will hold any relevance. But maybe that's a lousy excuse since I've never had a grasp of the future

You've graduated high school, and you will be the first person in your family to go to college. You'll identify as a first-generation student, and this will bring forward some opportunities. If your school holds a series of orientations, it most likely will include one aimed at students like you. Maybe not undocumented but first-generation, though you should keep your eyes out for undocumented student organizations. It's weird that I'm saying this, like undocumented students are out and about waiving their status proudly, but you'd be surprised. These people will be your allies. Perhaps you'll find that your views don't completely align—a challenging experience. You're going to have to decide if they are with you or against you. They most likely share your vision of justice, but it's just a different method of getting there.

You will also meet people that will seem like your adversaries. They will intimidate you and make you feel as if you walked into the wrong building on the first day of class and don't belong. When these emotions and doubts start to creep up, rest assured that you are definitely in the right wrong space. You and I should not be here. But we are. Be okay with that. You have to be if you're going to make it through this journey. This experience is a total mind warp. It's good if you have acompañantes or mentors to help you get through it.

How to find a good mentor is an excellent question but I am afraid that I don't have a complete answer. I think in many respects, for me, it sort-of just happened. Bad answer. I know. I think you'll know a good mentor by the way they write to you. Maybe they'll talk to you about trees and the ocean. Maybe they'll have a direct quote on their email signature signaling to you that they want to help you. Once they're in your life, they'll be calling, texting, tweeting, emailing, Facetiming, Facebooking, WhatsApping, Instagramming, Canvassing, Zooming, and using whatever other platforms exist to communicate with you –even when you should both be sleeping or not thinking about work! I guess what I'm trying to say is that a good acompañante is also your friend. They are friends that you will drink coffee with (make it for you too!), walk with their dog, go on bike rides, make silly videos, drink margaritas, invite you to play with their children, send you articles/blogs/podcasts for your enjoyment and research, make your try new things, lie for you, mourn your losses, celebrate your accomplishments, laugh when you fall in the creek, make and share dinner with you. They'll be some of your loudest cheerleaders. They won't be perfect of course; they might eat tamales rojos with sour cream!

These bonds may develop ill-feelings from your peers. They'll call you a "white savior project" or a quota filler. It's not their fault, yours, or your professors'. The US school system is as broken as its immigration system. Make friends with kind students - the ones that will stay up late with you, challenge your ideas (but in a good way), cook with you, lend you their favorite books, and

keep your secrets. Make the sort of friends you can laugh with until your ribs feel like they're about to tear from your sides. Make sure to take long walks and ride your bikes together. Hold each other accountable for your studies. Remind them they are smart and capable of producing fascinating scholarship. Celebrate their successes! Help them when they need your help and ask them for help when you need theirs. Be there for each other and cherish these friends as much or even more than they do you.

I mentioned before you're going to experience doubts about your place in the university. You're going to become your worst critic. You're going to think that your work is not as good as your peers'. But it is just as good. You have to believe it. You have to believe that your work is just as worthy as anyone else's. You've got a paid way to master's and doctoral degree. The work you're doing is important because it's informed and made possible by the women that raised you. The women that worked long hours and extra shifts to get you this place. You're making them proud, and as such you should be proud too. For what it's worth, I'm proud of you.

I am sure there's so much I've left out, but I want to remind you of one last thing. When you're out in the world or deep in your studies, make sure to call your mom and your sister. Listen to their voices to remind yourself of what and who is important.

Always,

Argenis

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