

**Invisible, Hunted, and Creating a Living:
Undocumented Parenthood in Philadelphia**

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Introduction

The specific place of Philadelphia, a purported “sanctuary city,” at this specific time in the first half of the Trump administration, has constructed a context-based experience of Mexican “illegality.” The distinct psychological, social, economic, and legal conditions the undocumented population in Philadelphia contends with are a reflection of this moment and the long history of Mexican migration to the United States.

I came into this project hoping to understand the mechanisms through which undocumented Mexican parents negotiate these conditions. This project is not an ethnography¹, but a preliminary study that uses ethnographical tools to examine how being undocumented in this time and place affects families and their negotiations with power structures.

I recruited Mexican undocumented parents of US citizen children, between the age of 30 and 40 who had been in the US for at least 10 years (the maximum number of years any of my participants had been here was 17 years), which is the standard demographic—78 percent of undocumented Mexican migrants have lived in the United States for 10 years or more (Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad 2017).

Many immigration restrictions have been put in place during the last decade, and significantly with the election of President Trump widespread xenophobic rhetoric and increasingly aggressive deportation tactics have become more acceptable (Burnett 2018; Chishti and Botler 2017; Sontag and Russakoff 2018a; Valverde 2018). Because all of my participants have lived in Philadelphia for all or for the majority of their time in the US and have experienced the entirety of the Obama presidency and the beginning of the Trump administration, I was interested in capturing this moment that no doubt is changing what it means to be an

¹ Nor is this research: a proposal of the project I submitted to the Swarthmore Institutional Review Board was

undocumented migrant in the United States. Further, my participants are associated with an immigrant rights organization in Philadelphia, which likely has a particular effect on their experience and worldview.

Though I explicitly looked for participants who were undocumented parents, I did not want to pigeonhole the interview questions solely in parenthood because I was interested in how my participants conceive of themselves overall. Despite this, the interviews absolutely were centered on parenthood, because being a parent is an enormous part of all of my participants' identities. Aside from parenthood, however, I found that my participants have identities surrounding nationality, citizenship, and belonging, a sense of self as connected to work ethic—all of which allow them to survive and navigate the complications of being undocumented.

My analysis centers on belonging, work ethic, and parenthood as points of departure from which to observe the ways in which my participants resist power structures and dominant ideologies, and also the ways in which they subscribe to them. Observing interactions of power is complicated—a single act can be both resistance and subscription, difficult to neatly categorize. This study does not aim to provide neatness, but attempts to provide a framework through which to think about how individual stories and experiences are in conversation with histories of oppression and power

Literature Review

Terminology and Approach

My analytical approach is heavily informed by Nicholas P. De Genova's (2002) article "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life." In this work, De Genova provides a critical review of the social science literature on undocumented migration up to that point. For the purposes of this analysis I have adopted the terms "*illegality*" and *migrant* based on the arguments laid out in this article.

Following De Genova's critiques of social science scholarship, the notion of "illegality" became a widespread framework through which to view studies on undocumentedness (Abrego 2016; Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Cardoso et al. 2018; Dreby 2015; Gonzales and Raphael 2017; Menjivar and Kanstroom 2013). The term "illegality" is defined as the historical process nation-states used produce undocumented subjects through immigration policy. The term serves several purposes: first of all, at a visual level, to undermine the validity of the word "illegal" by consistently putting it in quotes². Beyond deconstructing word choice, however, the idea of "illegality" denaturalizes the idea that undocumented migrants are inevitable byproducts of ineffective immigration law; rather, instead of taking the word of law and state at face value, the notion of "illegality" pushes us to understand exactly how undocumented migrants came to be, and to recognize the role the law had in intentionally creating this population to provide a vulnerable, easily exploitable labor force.

Further, De Genova discusses how the then-current qualitative and ethnographic literature on the subject fell prey to the tendency to use migrants *themselves* as the form of study, thereby reinstating "illegality" by performing surveillance and subjectification of the undocumented population in the same way the nation-state does, as opposed to studying "illegality" itself.

Also following De Genova, I will use the word migrant in almost all cases, the most salient exceptions being when it is used in reference to immigration law or where my own participants use the word, so as not to bastardize or change their choice of vocabulary beyond what has already been done in the process of translation and analysis.

De Genova's uses migrant as opposed to "immigrant" in order to

² I will do the same for "criminal," for similar reasons, after Jodi B. Cardoso (2018) and Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013).

“problematize the way that U.S. nationalism, in particular, interpellates historically specific migrations in its production of ‘immigration’ and ‘immigrant’ as an essentialized, generic, and singular object, subordinated to that same teleology by which migrants inexorably become permanent settlers and the U.S. nation-state assumes the form of a ‘promised land—a self-anointed refuge of liberty and opportunity.” (De Genova 2002:421)

Especially due to the history of Mexican migration to the United States, which has been orchestrated according to United States need for labor, and the millions of people who are separated from their families because of limited mobility after restrictive immigration law, upholding the United States as the preferred long-term commitment for these migrants ignores how many people are forced to stay in the United States who could otherwise move freely between countries.

Background

National Context: How “Illegality” Came to be Racialized, Classed, and Gendered

Two trends I want you to take away from this brief history are 1) every time some undocumented migrants gain access to citizenship or authorization, the result is that the remaining undocumented population becomes more destabilized and at risk, and access to rights of citizenship become more difficult to obtain, and 2) the influx of migrants and Mexican migrants in particular and the amount of deportations are dictated by the labor needs of the United States.

Starting at the very beginning of the constitutional United States, whiteness and US citizenship were linked way back in the Naturalization Act of 1790, when “the first United States Congress mandated [...] that a person who was to become a naturalized citizen of the United States must be ‘white.’” (De Genova 2005:216). When people of color became naturalized, it was because of situations like the peace treaty, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that in 1848 resulted in the annexation of Texas, California, and much of the Southwest into the United

States. This established early on the “treacherous triangulation of whiteness, citizenship, and empire” (De Genova 2005: 220) between the United States and Mexico.

The US was unable to remove all Mexican peoples from that soil, and thus through the peace treaty some Mexicans were granted a disenfranchised version of citizenship, still subject to racial terror and differential treatment. Despite this lower status, Mexicans were some of the few people of color that were able to access US citizenship at all due to that stipulation made in 1790 that non-white migrants could not naturalize to US citizenship. It was not until 1952 with the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act that any migrants of color were able to naturalize.

Thus, the first addition of Mexicans to the United States was a result of manifest destiny and colonialism. The next big wave of Mexican influx to the US happened from 1910-1930, “directly orchestrated by labor demand in new industries and agriculture in the United States” (De Genova 2005:222). By 1930, there were so many Mexicans in the US that “Mexican” was its own racial category on the US Census (Goldberg in De Genova 2005), and Border Patrol began in 1924 as a branch of the Department of Labor to manage the influx. Just as they were ushered in when they were wanted, when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, nearly half a million Mexicans were deported—regardless of whether or not they were US citizens—because the government wanted to reserve its scarce resources for the white populace.

When the Great Depression passed and labor was needed again, the Bracero Program was initiated in 1942 to bring back the work force that had been deported the previous decade, to work in agriculture and railroad construction. This ebb and flow tells us the story of the formation of “illegality.” There was no difference between the Mexicans being forcibly extracted during the Great Depression and the ones incentivized to enter through the Bracero Program other than

formalized policy that deemed whether or not they were “supposed” to be there. Looking at immigration policy in this light allows us to see how immigration law creates the class of undocumented migrant not because the law is inherently “right” or “good,” or because certain people should be “illegal,” but in accordance to the nation-state’s convenience and based on of what kind of labor force it requires moment to moment.

The Bracero Program enabled both documented and undocumented migrants to come in from Mexico—at this point there was little retribution for being undocumented and even some incentives, so during this time it is estimated that there were four undocumented laborers to every Bracero. Employers came to prefer undocumented workers because they were a cheaper source of labor and not beholden to any contractual obligations or protections. Even then, we can see how the differentiating practice of the Bracero workers and the undocumented workers made the undocumented workers more easily exploitable. During the time when the Bracero Program was in place, there were multiple avenues for undocumented people to become documented, but also intermittent expulsion: “the Bracero years were distinguished not only by expanded “legal” contract-labor migration, but also the federal facilitation of undocumented migration and the provision of ample opportunities for legalization, simultaneously coupled with considerable repression and mass deportations” (De Genova 2005:225). Furthermore, the acceleration of the “revolving door” marked the start of demonizing undocumented border crossers as a danger to society.

The next ebb to this dizzying tide of pushing out and pulling in Mexican migrants was in 1965 with the Hart-Cellar Act, which occurred in conjunction with the end of the Bracero Program. Though the end of the Bracero Program was pushed for by workers rights movements in an attempt to guarantee fair treatment of migrant laborers, the unfortunate effect of the

program's demise was a tightening of the US-Mexico border and a limiting quota system.

Though other migrant groups had enforced quotas throughout US history, Mexican migration had been exempt from that until this act. The Hart-Cellar act was touted as “an egalitarian overhaul of US immigration law” (De Genova 2005:230)—and for many countries that had been subject to severe restrictions on migration, this was indeed a ground-breaking occasion.

For Mexico, however, the quota of only 120,000 permitted migrants from the entire Western Hemisphere meant that Mexico was automatically over the quota. Because the migrant population disproportionately consisted of Mexicans, the “deportable” population also consisted mostly of Mexicans, many of whom were people who had been there before the quota was put into place—in 1973, Mexicans comprised 99 percent of apprehended “aliens” (Cárdenas 1975; De Genova 2005:231). Because of this disproportion—produced by decades of immigration policy that encouraged undocumented migration from Mexico—Mexican migrant and “illegal” became synonymous.

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was a landmark naturalization program that targeted undocumented Mexican migrants. Though IRCA resulted in the “legalization” of many undocumented Mexicans, it also “foreclosed almost all options of legalization for those who did not qualify, and for all who would arrive thereafter” (De Genova 2005:235), the consequences of which we see today.

From 1986 to now, this cycle of increased restrictions and deportations has only grown in scale. There was an increase in restrictions as a consequence of 9/11, and we saw mass deportations during the Great Recession in 2008. Since 2009 there has been a decline in unauthorized Mexican migrants (Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad 2017) and since 2015 there have been more Mexican migrants leaving the US than coming in (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015), and

it looks like a steady trend—65 percent of Mexicans have a negative view of the United States, and Mexicans “express less of a willingness to live and work in the U.S. without authorization” (Vice and Chwe 2017). Furthermore, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)³ has become more aggressive in internal deportations whereas before it focused on the border (American Immigration Council 2011; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. n.d. A; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. n.d. B), making it more and more risky to live undocumented. A study on the effect of punitive immigration measures on recently deported or returned migrants showed that “punitive measures ‘partially lessen deportees’ desire to return to the United States in the near future” (Amuedo-Dorantes, Puttitanun, and Martinez-Donate 2013).

Based on the decreased migration from Mexico and the Mexicans who are deterred from coming or returning in an unauthorized manner, it might be tempting to draw the conclusion that increasingly punitive immigration laws are “working” because they discourage new migration to the United States. But because we have learned that the goal of immigration laws is “tactically supplying and refining the parameters of labor discipline and coercion” (De Genova 2005:227), we must reflect on why it might be beneficial to the nation-state to deter Mexican migration.

While migration from Mexico is slowing, migration from other countries has picked up (Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad 2017)—it could be that because the development of globalization provides a new market for labor, Mexico is more useful as a scapegoat than as a labor force. Further, we notice that it is mostly men who are being deported (Golash-Boza 2013), but the number of women and children crossing the border has increased (Dreby 2015). It could be, then, that the kind of labor Latino and Black Caribbean working class men, can provide is no longer needed—“A labor market that increasingly relies on service jobs and offers diminishing

³ Also referred to as “immigration” throughout this piece, i.e. “immigration came and picked him up.”

numbers of construction and manufacturing jobs deems these men disposable and redundant” (Golash-Boza 2013:273) while depending more and more on women to fulfill those service roles (such as taking care of the aging population baby boomers).

Thus, Mexican “illegality” is constantly shifting as new demands and policies arise, but is based in this long-standing history that situates Mexican-ness as perpetually “foreign” and “illegal.” This history, and its interaction with the current context of Mexican migration, is necessary backdrop to any analysis of “illegality” and power relations.

Local Context

Philadelphia was a center of migration in the days of industrialization, but its migrant population in the 20th century remained fairly small despite the influx of migration in other parts of the country. In the 1990s, however, immigration picked up again. As of 2016 migrants comprised 13.1% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2016), though this cannot be fully attributed to immigration: Philadelphia has experienced overall population loss due to decreased employment opportunities and relocation to the suburbs. This said, the migrant population continues to grow at a rapid pace and change the landscape of the historically predominantly black and white city (Takenaka and Osirim 2010), accounting for 75% of Philadelphia’s labor force growth between 2000 and 2008 (Singer et al. 2008).

It is estimated that 50,000 migrants or nearly 1 in 4 foreign-born residents Philadelphia are undocumented. Indeed, undocumented migrants have comprised around 25% of Philadelphia’s foreign-born migrant population since at least 2005 (Eichel and Ginsberg 2017). Migrants coming to Philadelphia are mostly Asian, Caribbean, and Latinx; further, Philadelphia has attracted a disproportionate amount of refugees as compared to the rest of the country, perhaps because of its affordable housing.

The Mexican population is the second-largest Latinx immigrant population after the Puerto Rican population (Takenaka and Osirim 2010), with the Mexican migrant population estimated to make up 3% of the city's foreign born, or about 6,200 people (Singer et al. 2008). Mexican migrants are heavily located in South Philadelphia and Norristown, and have enclaves in North and Northeast Philadelphia as well.

Early migration of Mexicans to this area occurred before and during World War II, when “many Mexicans were contracted by the U.S. government to work on the railroads in Philadelphia” as well as in agriculture (Atlas 2010:180). But after the mass deportations in the Great Depression, the Mexican migrant population was virtually nonexistent until the late 1990s. Because of the dearth of literature on migration to Philadelphia (Takenaka and Osirim 2010), it is unclear as to why Mexicans have arrived in such unprecedented numbers. Some hypotheses, as outlined in Jennifer Atlas's work on Mexican migrants in South Philadelphia, are 1) affordable housing and cost of living as compared to other big cities (referenced to by multiple migrant populations as a contributing factor in their decision to live in Philadelphia); 2) two recessions in Mexico during the late 1980s and mid 90s that put pressure on Mexicans to move to the United States for economic opportunity; 3) the expansion of the restaurant, hospitality, and hotel industries in the late 1990s; and 4) reconnecting with family and friends who already lived in Philadelphia (Atlas 2010:180). Because the Mexican population has grown at such an accelerated pace, infrastructure to support this community--such as healthcare and Spanish language resources--is insufficient.

These insufficiencies--in combination with both the normal stresses of migration and further complications of “illegality”--set the scene for the undocumented Mexican community in Philadelphia. Another important factor to consider, however, is Philadelphia's “sanctuary city”

status. There is no clear legal definition of what it means to be a “sanctuary city” (Cardoso et al. 2018; Waters 2018), but it essentially means that local law enforcement will not help federal immigration officers apprehend, detain, or deport undocumented migrants beyond what is absolutely required by federal law. Though Philadelphia is popularly known as a “sanctuary city” (Rao 2016; Nolen 2018), the city itself does not define itself as such: the City of Philadelphia website says “We do not use that term [“sanctuary city”]. We are a “Welcoming City.” We do not allow our City employees, including police officers, to ask about the documentation status of people they encounter” (Waters 2018). Regardless of the pedantics of terminology, it would seem that Philadelphia citizens, immigrant rights groups, and politicians have over the past two decades made it so that local authority collaboration with immigration officers is against city standards--at least nominally. In practice, however, because there is no legal backing to “sanctuary city” or “Welcoming City” status, it is at the discretion of individual officers and authorities as to whether they will abide by these protective rules. It is therefore ambiguous what level of collaboration local authorities have with ICE, if any.

What is known is that the Philadelphia ICE office is the most aggressive in the country, with more than 64% of the arrests it made in 2017 made on migrants without any prior “criminal conviction,” compared to the national levels of 38% (as cited in Sontag and Russakoff 2018a). The office was able to garner this reputation through the “three large, multiday enforcement operations” (Sontag and Russakoff 2018a) it conducted in the winter, spring, and fall of 2017, in addition to its daily apprehensions and sweeps. This aggression cannot be solely attributed to the expanded freedoms ICE officers have under the Trump administration, but there are tellingly 62% more immigration cases pending in Pennsylvania’s immigration courts than there were at the end of the fiscal year 2016 when Trump first took office (as cited in Sontag and Russakoff

2018a). Though not all of these arrests were made in the city itself and so do not speak to the exact statistics migrants in Philadelphia might have experienced, it is clear that the label of “sanctuary” or “Welcoming” is not enough to protect undocumented migrants or make them feel safe in the face of an increasingly emboldened and punitive deportation regime.

Theoretical Framework

Because my project is interested in what agency and resistance look like in the face of “illegality”, and how this is even possible under the current deportation regime, using power as a framework is generative because it enables me analyze the stories, experiences, and behaviors of my participants and organize them into a schema of quiescence and subversion. As we will see, the two are not necessarily dichotomous or opposing processes. In constructing this model, I draw from three scholars whose bodies of work have been formative in theorizing power: Michel Foucault, Steven Lukes, and James C. Scott.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault tracks the historical formation of contemporary punitive systems, starting with guillotines as a public spectacle of punishment. The idea was that the state used guillotines as a way to make an example of someone who had committed a crime; they used torture to elicit a confession of guilt to further justify their actions, and then a beheading to warn other citizens of the consequences of disobedience. Foucault describes, however, how beheadings elicited too much sympathy from onlookers, and so over time punishments became more privately conducted but also more widely enforced through societal internalization of ideology regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Though guillotines are still frowned upon, the practice of taking out violent anger on society outsiders as a channel for fear and scapegoating has not ended: the blade is now a deportation order; the torture is now systemic violence against undocumented populations. The

warning still rings true, but it is not for citizens—indeed, deportations are framed as a protective measure for the greater good, a vindication on behalf of citizens of the state. The warning is instead for other undocumented migrants, to let them know: you’d better be careful, or you might be next.

Thus, though Foucault argued that punishment has become less publically dramatic, migration social scholars have noticed the opposite happening with undocumented migrants: Renato Rosaldo (1997) notes the increasing militarization of the border and labels border technology as “cultural theater,” while De Genova (2002; 2005) calls the national panic and fixation on “securing the border” a spectacle that “socially inscribes the spatial difference between the United States onto Mexican migrants” (De Genova 2005:245).

This phenomenon, too, of making borders between people—haves and have-nots, Americans and Mexicans, citizen and noncitizen—is of interest to Foucault. In a piece on subject formation and power, he describes the various mechanisms through which subjects are made. Through study (justifying De Genova’s claims that social science studies of undocumented people themselves as opposed to the “illegality” they experience subjectifies them), through differentiating practices (the phenomenon just described of making distinctions between people so there is an ingroup and an outgroup in which individuals find themselves belonging), and through self-subjectification (the meanings and classifications people use to subjectify themselves).

Subject formation is crucial to power because it is how individuals impose their perceptions onto themselves and others and make sense of the world; power is what decides which perceptions and narratives take precedence and ultimately become the validated norm.

As it stands, “illegality” has been shifting within the last two decades so that the responsibility to monitor and differentiate between citizens and non-citizens has spread beyond the jurisdiction of only federal officers. What with the increase in laws requiring employers to more closely regulate the citizenship of their workers (Fialkowski 2012) and asking local authorities to cooperate with ICE and Border Patrol (American Immigration Council 2011; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement n.d. A; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement n.d. B), it has become obligatory to enforce legal citizenship in places beyond the border. Reflected in the increase of internal deportations throughout the last decade (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2017), it seems that the spectacle of the border has become the spectacle of workplaces and neighborhoods as well.

This trend has been described by scholars as an extension of border controls, conceptualizing the border as not merely a physical space, but an internalized categorization that we place ourselves and other residents on one side or the other of (Menjívar, 2014). This kind of wide-reaching regulatory gaze is exactly Foucault’s idea of the panopticon, or the state of feeling that you are always seen. The gaze here is unequal--whoever is on the other side of it is being made into a subject and in a position of disempowerment. This kind of surveillance seeps into public spaces and is part of what makes undocumented migrants feel ill at ease in their everyday lives.

Power is nebulous and difficult to define, but resistance can be a bit more tangible. Resisting deportation, resisting fear, resisting subjectification, resisting the unequal gaze: examining these processes is a way of “using...resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations” (Foucault 1982:780).

Lukes also conceptualizes power as complex and at times difficult to observe: “indeed, power is at its most effective when it is least observable” (Lukes 2005:ix). In his work *Power: A Radical View*, Lukes asks the question: how is willing compliance to domination secured? He answers by critiquing and expanding on previous scholars’ work on power, coming to a theory that outlining his conception of power.

Essentially, he defines power as when entity A effects B in a way that works towards entity A’s interests, regardless of the effect on entity B. The most simple form of this control is coercion--forcing entity B to do something they do not want to do, such as when immigration officers deporting undocumented migrants. Incentives, too, are a good way to bend others to your will.

The mechanisms get much more complex, however. Power extends beyond mere action or inaction--it rests in the *potential* for exercising power, even if that power is never exercised. For example: an employer having the capability of calling ICE to pick up suspected undocumented employees but never doing so, or easily being able to not warn employees of an upcoming raid but informing them all the same. Further, as Foucault discusses as well, the ability to shape discourse and knowledge can be extremely powerful in disseminating ideology and forming common sense--like a presidential candidate using his platform to disparage Mexican migrants, thereby making those kinds of comments more widely acceptable. Most insidious are the ideological messages that convince those with less power that acting in a certain way is good for them even if it does violence against them--such as migrant parents who decide not to teach their children their own language and culture because they believe it will make their children less successful.

This is not to say that every exercise of power works against the interests of entity B-- federal compulsory education laws arguably benefit both the children receiving education and the state, which receives an educated populace--but the interests of entity A will always come before and at times at the expense of entity B's.

When thinking about resistance to this power, Luke turns to the theorist Charles Tilly, who asks: "if ordinary domination so consistently hurts the well-defined interests of subordinate groups, why do subordinates comply?" and provides possible answers himself:

1. The premise is incorrect: subordinates are actually rebelling continuously, but in covert ways.
2. Subordinates actually get something in return for their subordination, something that is sufficient to make them acquiesce most of the time.
3. Through the pursuit of other valued ends such as esteem or identity, subordinates become implicated in systems that exploit or oppress them. (In some versions, no. 3 becomes identical to no. 2.)
4. As a result of mystification, repression, or the sheer unavailability of alternative ideological frames, subordinates remain unaware of their true interests.
5. Force and inertia hold subordinates in place.
6. Resistance and rebellion are costly; most subordinates lack the necessary means.
7. All of the above. (Tilly as cited in Lukes 2005)

This comprehensive list covers resistance and barriers to resistance in the face of different relationships and contexts between subordinates and dominants that constrain the amount and type of resistance subordinates are able to orchestrate. In response to the first possibility, however, the one suggesting that "subordinates are actually rebelling continuously," Scott has a well-formed theory of what everyday covert resistances can look like.

Scott (1990) theorizes about what he calls the public transcript and the hidden transcript. The public transcript is the dynamic shared between the subordinate and dominant group--a performance that both do for the sake of the other but that is constructed in a way that makes the dominant group look good, therefore putting more strain on the subordinate group to uphold appearances. The hidden transcript is thus a shared space where both parties can express

whatever they are not able to in the public transcript--the dominant and subordinate group each have hidden transcripts, spaces where they can drop the performance. The public and hidden transcript exist in tandem, with the hidden transcript sometimes slipping through and disrupting the dance of the public one.

When a dominant group fears the existence of a subordinate hidden transcript that undermines the flattering public one, it implements top down surveillance to curtail the development of a subversive hidden transcript. This said, however, the dominant hidden transcript conceals whatever it is the dominant group wants to keep from the public gaze, which is usually something unflattering. In the case of homeland security, for example, ICE is portrayed as an organization that “secures communities” and targets terrorists, all in the name of expunging law breakers and threats to society. Because of this presented public image, it would be a priority for ICE to hide any instances of law breaking they might have done in order to deport someone (Sontag and Russakoff 2018) and to minimize the trauma and harm they put many families through. On the other hand, the widespread surveillance on undocumented migrants, performed by increasingly more actors, makes it more and more difficult for undocumented migrants to move through the world and perhaps might prevent them from developing robust and radical hidden transcripts that would disrupt this subjectification.

All of these theorists touch on the ways in which those with more power ideologically indoctrinate less powerful populations with hegemonic ideals. This is in an attempt to make members of the subordinate group subjectify themselves and others by the standards of the dominant group and thus develop a values that will make them underprioritize their real interests and subscribe to those laid out to them by the dominant group--in the case of undocumented migration, the U.S. nation state and its classist neocolonial white supremacist structures.

Methods

This project uses a lens of narrative inquiry, a sociological approach to collecting and analyzing personal narrative. The way in which the researcher or writer chooses to present narrative and construct their participants as narrators is an intentional process “revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase 2005:208). In the case of this project, the narratives rendered are taken from interviews with six individuals living in Philadelphia, and their experiences being undocumented Mexican migrant parents in the United States in the early 21st century. As Michel Foucault (1982) theorizes, we can understand power by looking at resistance, so the intention of this project is to uplift “explicitly political narrative that describes and resists oppression” (Chase 2005:209) in order to understand how my participants and people in similar situations to my participants subscribe to and resist systems and discourses of power. While all of their narratives are unique and varied, they are subject to similar and overlapping systems of oppression; by looking at the individual I hope to gain a more nuanced understanding of the whole.

My interest in the undocumented migrant community began in in the summer of 2016 when I volunteered with a non-profit organization, Coraje⁴, which supports undocumented migrants. After the announcement of policy change removing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in early September 2017, I sat in on a few community meetings to check in with the community and understand how the organization was rhetorically navigating the situation. I was surprised by the way the organizers were framing it: while recognizing the detrimental effects the policy change would have on individual community members, they spun it as not a loss, but an opportunity. DACA was too limited anyhow—it was not a pathway to

⁴ Pseudonym. This organization is not connected to this project, and is merely the site through which I met my interviewees.

citizenship, and it excluded the parents of DACA recipients, who Coraje deemed as just as important to advocate for. The loss of DACA is just one of many in the long road of struggle we have had, they said. This is our chance to express that we do not need DACA because our demands are much greater than what it provided us; we do not have to accept any less.

The formation of my project question came out of these meetings, as I thought of those undocumented migrants DACA left behind. I came to the question: How do undocumented Mexican parents living in Philadelphia situate themselves, both through actions and ideologically, in a society in which they are legally and socially marginalized?

When I started my inquiry process, I reached out by phone to potential interviewees. I chose participants I felt I already had established connections with. Though this limited my sample to my social network, this method guaranteed greater intimacy, which as an outsider to the community was crucial in establishing enough trust to conduct these interviews in the first place.

I already had most interviewees phone numbers from the time I worked with the organization, and was able to access those I did not have by asking around. I was familiar with every interviewee prior to the interview process, but was closer to some than others. All participants were familiar with the organization I had worked with, but had varying levels of engagement with it.

I conducted interviews with three couples—mother and father pairs—over the course of 2 weeks. They are all undocumented Mexican migrants, all of whom live in Philadelphia and have spent the majority if not all of their time in the United States living in Philadelphia. In coming to the United States, they all crossed the US/Mexico border using “illegal” pathways. They are all

in their 30s and came to the United States more than 10 years ago⁵. All of the children who live with them are U.S. citizens.

Because of their common connection to a social justice organization and their roles as undocumented parents of US citizens, there were similarities across the interviews. It is unclear how much and in what ways their experience might be different from the experience of undocumented migrants not affiliated with such an organization. Despite a shared identity and community the story each family has to tell is unique: their motivations for leaving Mexico, their relationship to their children, to their spouses, and their experience in this country all vary on an individual basis—and yet are connected by shared and overlapping oppressions.

While I am the daughter of a Mexican migrant, my experience is very distinct from the experiences of my participants on many levels. I am a citizen, college-educated, middle-class, and white passing. Any one of those factors would differentiate me from my participants, and in combination they create a certain distance between myself and my interviewees that forces me to think about how power and positionality dynamics inevitably came into play both during the interviews and in my analysis.

This dynamic for me was most palatable at Lucía and Santiago's house right before the interview, when I sat down at the family dinner table and found myself feeling as if I was intruding on a regular family routine. The dynamic was also present in some of the questions and comments my participants made: some asked point blank if I was conducting these interviews for my own benefit, and if working with Coraje had benefited me. These questions were not out of malice, but of curiosity, and I tried to be as honest as possible. I told them how the interviews helped with my thesis, and that the previous internship helped with my resume and potentially

⁵ The age of my participants and their children, as well as the exact number of years my participants have been here, have been obscured for confidentiality purposes and extra precaution given the vulnerability of the population studied

with job opportunities. Every one of my participants expressed their hope that what they shared would be useful to me, and some of them thanked me for keeping them in mind and putting forth the effort of hearing their stories.

Thus, while some expressed relief in being able to share their experiences, I do not think they participated for their own benefit. I believe they participated because they like and trust me and wanted to be of service to me in my studies. Their awareness of the situation makes me wonder about the possible reactive effects, how my presence and position might have consciously or unconsciously shaped their responses, perhaps because they wanted to present as “useful” a response as possible, or perhaps because they felt compelled to promote a certain image of themselves or of undocumented people in the face of my whiteness and citizenship. For example, when I asked Iván a difficult question I noticed he would acknowledge the negatives, but then reroute the topic into something positive. I was unsure how much of this positivity was an immutable character trait of his or if it was inflated due to my identity or the interview setting.

Further, I wondered how Santiago’s previous interviews informed how he answered my questions. I am unsure as to what other reporters have asked him before, but I know that he has been interviewed dozens of times as publicity to garner support for his cause when he was in sanctuary. It is likely then that his experience in other interview settings was reflected in his answers: perhaps in that he was more used to speaking on this subject than others, or that his answers were pre-formulated for publicity purposes, or in the way he related to me as an extension of how he had learned to respond to other reporters/interviewers.

In my analysis I therefore have to be aware of how the interviews, my results, and the analysis process itself might be colored not only by my own lenses, but also by how my interviewees might have modified their behavior to accommodate for my presence.

Before the interviews, I orally informed my interviewees of these facts: 1) the nature of my project, letting them ask as many clarifying questions as needed, 2) the final product would keep their identities anonymous to the greatest extent of my abilities by changing their names and obfuscating identifying details, 3) I would not be sharing the audio files of the interviews with anyone other than myself in case of identification through voice recognition, 4) they could stop the interview at any point, skip a question they did not want to answer, or afterwards retract anything they said during the interview if they so chose.

I obtained verbal consent to these stipulations, verbal consent to begin recording, and verbal consent to begin the interview. In this way, I did my best to ensure that my participants felt a measure of control over the interview and felt secure in sharing with me. I did not provide written consent forms due to the danger of being in possession of a sheet of paper with their signature on it outlining a project to do with being undocumented, in the case of immigration enforcement apprehending either of us in possession of these papers.

I performed my data collection using semi-structured interviews. I prepared a list of questions I asked every participant but would let the interviewee lead the flow of conversation and ask questions regarding emerging topics. The core questions I found myself interested in asking can be broken down into four categories: parenting, deportation, everyday existence, and role in society. I tried to strike a balance between giving participants the floor to expand upon their answers in any direction they chose and then recentering the discussion on the focal questions I was interested in. In this way, I was able to gather answers I initially set out to find, but also answers to questions I did not think to ask or could not have known to ask prior to the interview.

This methodology and indeed my list of focal questions developed as the interviews went on; my first interview, for example, was much more structured than the other ones. I used this first interview as the baseline to develop my approach to the other interviews. I noticed that it made my first interviewee uncomfortable when I referred to my list of questions or write down notes, in a way that took her out of the interview, so I decided to go into my interviews without taking notes. These interviews all occurred in casual settings, in the kitchens and dining rooms of the participants'; introducing myself into their space and then performing the formalities of an interview felt antithetical to the environments I was in and the conversations I was having. I decided at a certain point in that first interview to deviate from my question and allowed the interviews to wander away from my questions, and I immediately noticed a difference in the tone of conversation. When the microphone turned off, my participants kept talking and would often become a bit more vulnerable than they had been when the recording was on, reaffirming my impression that the formal interview structure was not an effective method to elicit candid narrative. The following is a list of the questions I kept in mind during my interviews. The questions for family background were adopted from the interview guide developed by Joana Dreby for her book *Everyday Illegal* (2015).

Interview Guide

Family Background

- Can you tell me a bit about your family and who you live with?
 - Include information on age of parents, their marital status, how old they were when their children were born, where they were born
- If married, ask about how they met their partner.
- How long have you lived in Philadelphia? Where did you live before this?
- Can you tell me about why you decided to come to the United States?
 - Age of migration, reasons for migration, goals for migration

Immigration/undocumented

- How do you think being undocumented affects your daily life? Your life overall?
- Have you talked with your child about being undocumented?

- How did you approach the subject?
- How often does it come up?
- Have you talked with them about the possibility of you being deported?
- How do you think you being undocumented affects your child?
- Do you think about the possibility of your own deportation?
 - What would you do if you were deported? Do you have a plan in place? Would you try to come back?
- Do you think about the possibility of deportation for your partner? What would you do in that case?
- What do you think is other people's perception of you?
- Is there something about being undocumented you would like other people to understand?
- What do you think is the government's perspective of you?
- What do you think about the state of the US government?
- What do you view as your place in this society?
- What are your hopes for your future?
- What do you hope for the future of your children?
- What in your life are you most proud of?

Not all of these questions were phrased this way during the interviews (both because I conducted the interviews in Spanish and because the way I phrased the question was subject to change within the context of the discussion), or asked in this order, but I was consistent in asking the same questions throughout my interviews, inserting them in places I felt made sense in the moment.

As I said, the interviews occurred in participants' houses and personal spaces. The moment I stepped foot inside my participants offered me something to eat, without fail—though it was the female participants who offered me food each time. I in turn brought pastries and breads for each family when I visited. Though I understood this as a cultural practice, I was nevertheless grateful for the willingness of these people to invite me into their homes and be so generous with me.

In doing analysis, I translated directly from audio in Spanish to English transcription, not only to accelerate the process, but also because I was able to better capture the meaning of the

original interview from the audio than I would have been able to from transcribed text in Spanish. In this way I attempted to retain the integrity of the meaning the interviewee intended.

As I delved into analysis, I uncovered questions of narrative, of power, and of the ethics of using these stories for academic purposes. I have already discussed narrative and power; in terms of ethics, I believe situational constraints and my own failures did not allow me to engage with this research in the collaborative way that, in hindsight, would have been more appropriate. I spent a lot of time focusing my energies towards institutional requirements and research formalities, instead of what I needed to invest in intentionally constructing my project design with my participants. Conducting this research in an ethical manner is especially important to me because of my close and ongoing relationships with participants, whom I do not wish to further implicate in a colonialist cycle⁶.

I do not wish this to be a condemnation of the work as a whole, but rather something to learn from and reflect upon, not only for myself but for my readers and other scholars as well. As Alicia Rujosa (2017) argues, “‘there is no pure de-linking (Campano in Rujosa 2017)’ from coloniality. Therefore, even as a methodology that can resist coloniality, a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith and Lytle in Rujosa 2017) always involves other’s practices and experiences, and not ‘speaking for’ others perhaps is not even possible” (Rujosa 2017:241).

Thinking back on my narrative inquiry approach, I wonder how much space for authentic voice I can provide my participants; even as I use their quotes, they are translated, transcribed, and embedded within analysis, inevitably shaping how readers perceive them.

What we have to think about as academics studying this topic is how research can directly contribute to these populations, especially in the face of the tightening controls and

⁶ see Rujosa (2017) for a more in-depth analysis of what it means to conduct research in a collaborative way that is intentional about minimizing colonialist objectification of certain populations and individuals

increased xenophobia under the Trump administration. We conduct well-intentioned research that asks participants to relive their trauma for the sake of outsiders, who use this work to understand a struggle that is not their own, perhaps enhancing their capacity for empathy but ultimately contributing nothing back to the communities they are taking knowledge from.

As we grapple with the uncertainty of scholarship (Rujosa 2017), it is debilitating to think that no matter what measures we take we are going to in some ways reify existing power dynamics. But if we move away from dichotomous thinking, it is possible to envision how contradictions can exist in tandem—how we can simultaneously disrupt and sustain dominant structures. This concurrent holding of contradictions, incidentally, is also what my analysis asks us to imagine. I close with a final quote from Alicia Rujosa: “This study feels mine and not mine, communal and individual, accurate and inaccurate, coloniality exerting and coloniality resisting” (Rujosa 2017:241).

Participant Profiles

Before moving on, it is necessary to construct an image of the people whose stories you are about to read so you can move forward with an idea of how I see them as individuals before they are patch-worked together through quotes and analysis.

Elena & Ernesto Ramirez

One child: girl under 10 (Sofia)

These are the first two participants I interviewed, on different days. They invited me to their restaurant, a welcoming and spacious space that the family had painted a bright turquoise, and wooden furniture adding to the warmth of the space.

When I came to interview Elena, her daughter Sofia was there, playing with her stuffed unicorn and her dog Nena. Elena went to the kitchen and brought out sweet coffee (café de olla)

and bread with jam and butter, sending Sofia to sit off behind the front counter watching cartoons with Nena. Elena told me about how another dog had attacked Nena during one of their walks a few months ago, and that now even though Nena had healed physically she still resisted going on leaving the house.

The immediate first impression Elena gives off is that she is very sweet, soft-spoken with medium-length dark hair that she often wears slicked back into a ponytail; her face is round and her teeth a bit crooked in a way that gives her smile an endearing quality. Though her mannerisms and appearance give her an air of meekness, as you get to know her you understand very quickly that she is firm in her beliefs and cuttngly perceptive. Above all she is committed to her faith, to the love of her daughter, and to her belief that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Elena has been with her husband, Ernesto, for 10 years. I met with him a few days after my interview with Elena. He has restless energy--he likes to keep busy and seems to always preparing for the future. During our interview, his eyes were on the ceiling or shifting about more frequently than they met my own; in the latter half he removed a phone charger from the wall behind him, flipping the metal bits of the charger up and down as we spoke.

He is businessman through and through. In another life he could have been a car salesman, or an auctioneer, or a politician. He's a quick-talker with a sharp voice that instills a sense of purpose and hope in listeners; I have seen it when he rallies other community members for a cause. Even better, he truly believes in his message of progress and rallying for change. He is driven by a firm belief in bettering the world and, as he says, "adding your grain of sand."

Though they did not meet until they moved to the US, their stories have similarities: Elena was studying to be a nurse and Ernesto was studying to become an engineer. When the

stress of working full time on top of schoolwork became unsustainable, they dropped and decided to move to the US for better financial opportunities.

They met when Elena first came to the US and started working under Ernesto at the first restaurant he owned. They did not start seeing each other until a few years after that, and then went on to open a second restaurant when the first one failed.

Maite Hernandez & Iván Torres

Two children: girl under 10 (Destiny), boy under 18 (Angel)

I did my interviews with Maite and Iván the same night. Like with all my other interviewees, I had to call to be let in—although they were expecting me they would not open a knock at the door without an accompanying phone call confirming who was outside.

The staircase up to their apartment was narrow and lined with carpeting, leading to the small space shared by the family of four. As soon as you walk in you tumble directly into their living area: an entry room that leads directly into a bedroom, a bathroom, and the kitchen. Just beyond the kitchen is another room, where Destiny was watching TV during the duration of my interview with Maite—at least when she wasn't running in and out of the room asking Maite questions and showing her artwork. Angel was there as well, in his room doing homework or playing a video game.

Maite gave me Jumex when I came in and we spilt one of the pastries I had brought, settling down at the kitchen table. She was in the middle of cooking dinner and would occasionally stand during our interview to check on the rice. Maite is easy to laugh, easy to smile, with a demeanor full of joy and warmth. She is loud and unreserved, and when her laugh does slip out of her it overtakes her entire frame and the whole room along with it. She has a passion for artwork, always learning and engaging in new forms, and showed me a painting of

hers hung up on the wall. I remember in previous experiences with her that she would volunteer with *En La Lucha* at any turn she could but most especially when they were creating posters or banners for actions.

When Iván came home later in the night, his hands were greasy from doing work on a broken-down car; when I went to shake his hand he apologized gingerly wiped his hands on his pants before reaching for my own. In contrast to Maite, Iván is mild mannered, but like her is also very kind. He spoke in circular ways, repeating a few phrases over the course of the interview but expanding upon his meaning with each repetition. His voice is soft and soothing, and his presence steady. He is averse to negativity and would consistently reroute our conversation to the beauty and joy of life instead of focusing on the hardships.

The two of them met when Maite moved to the US and ended up living in the same house where Iván was staying. They became more permanently attached after Angel was born. Iván now works in construction and Maite works in housecleaning to sustain their two children. Destiny is precocious and takes after her mother—opinionated and eager to change things she does not like; Angel is quiet like his father, but is also social justice oriented like his mother.

Lucía & Santiago Herrera

Three children: boy under 5 (Fernando), boy under 10 (Enrique), girl under 18 (Silvana)

The Herrera's live in a spacious two-story house with wooden floorboards and white walls. When I arrived, I noticed the security camera set up on top of the front door—I later learned footage from this camera is how the family found out about Santiago's first deportation. The whole family was home when I walked in, though Silvana was upstairs. The rest of the family, plus Santiago's brother and a family friend, were gathered around the dining room table as Lucía served them. Lucía invited me to sit and gave me a plate of chicken and beans and rice, which was much appreciated as I had forgotten to eat before I came. I struggled to engage with

the three men sitting around the table, feeling like I was intruding on an intimate family dinner until Silvana came in to say hi.

I interviewed Santiago after dinner in the dining room. Like Iván, remnants of work clung to him: some twigs caught in his shirtsleeves from his job cutting trees. His work sweatshirt bore the logo promoting the nascent company he was trying to start—“Herrera Tree Company” with a silhouette of a tree and his older son; Lucía was wearing the same sweatshirt.

Santiago is a bit withdrawn, but straightforward; gentle but I think still in pain from having been separated from his family. Over a four-year period starting in 2013, he was deported three times, put in detention for 16 months, then in sanctuary for 11 months. Because of the publicity he got during his time in sanctuary, he was used to interviews and met my gaze the entire time--except when I was asking about detention and sanctuary, when he looked down at the placemat and played with a folded up a bottle cap, using the sharp corner to etch away at the plastic placemat in front of him. He preferred to talk instead about his family and work, and even when he was talking about deportation and confinement his story revolved around his need to get out of his situation in order to return to working and providing for his family.

Lucía loves to talk, and spent a couple hours during my first visit showing me memes from her Facebook page after Santiago and I finished his interview. We talked for so long it became too late to do her interview, so we decided I should come back another day. My interview with her was the longest, lasting almost three hours. A lot of that time was spent with her telling me stories about her childhood and her friends, and tending to her two boys who were running around the house playing.

She is a hard woman with sharp cheekbones: a proud and independent woman who is also fiercely loyal and loving. She made me nervous when I first met her, back when her

husband was in detention proceedings. She is not someone to back away from a fight--Santiago told me that it was her steadfast support that allowed him to survive his battle with immigration, insisting on finding a good lawyer and holding the family together despite the economic and emotional hardships.

Lucía works in the house and taking care of the children now that Santiago is back, but they both used to work long hours when they were first here, in a variety of jobs. Lucía came with her then-husband and knew Santiago as a friend who would drive her to and from work. Even after she was single, Lucía resisted being romantically committed to anyone because of her bad experience with her first husband, enjoying the freedom of being unattached and on her own for the first time. After a few years, however, Santiago won her over by proving that he would be a good father to Silvana (whose biological father was Lucía's first husband), and they moved into their current house after having Enrique.

Analysis

We have seen that migrants to the U.S. have been historically racialized, classed, and gendered: narratives that have been presented and reproduced through national dialogue and legal policies. We can understand these narratives as the language of power; through forming and enforcing a public transcript that describes the nation-state as rational and morally pure, thus positioning undocumented migrants as violations of this purity and a danger to society, the government is able to shape individual ideology and justify its surveillance of migrant families.

The following examines the ways in which my participants ideologically and behaviorally subscribe to and push against these dominant discourses/policies and social contexts they produce. Through noting instances of self-subjectification and the subjectification of others,

I have broken down the self-construction of my participants into these categories: nationality, belonging, and citizenship; work ethic; and parenthood. The way my participants construct these notions of self both subscribe to and push against the dominant ideologies that render undocumented migrants as unwanted invaders, as well as the power structures that limit resources, knowledge, and opportunity to make them feel unwell and unsafe.

Construction of Self:

The Racialized Undocumented Subject and Nationality

Throughout my interviews participants used the words “Latino” or “Hispanic” and “immigrant” interchangeably with “undocumented,” in ways that made it clear they were talking about citizenship status:

Maite: Now, because we are Latinos, they are always attacking us. That they’re going to detain us, that they’re going to deport us, that they don’t want us here. So, if they knock on the door-- not just me, but the kids too--[*pretending she is scolding her kids*] if they knock on the door, don’t open for anyone, because immigration can come. They can detain us just for being immigrants.

And another example:

Me: How do you think being undocumented affects your daily life?

Santiago: Well, that’s the problem of every immigrant...you have to go out to sustain your family. Because if you don’t go out, who is going to pay the rent, who is going to bring food home? You have to risk yourself.

It’s not a matter of misunderstanding the distinctions between the terms, as represented in the way they used the same words differently later on in the interviews. Rather, this conflation demonstrates an understanding of how their homeland, language, and appearance interact with common narratives of what kind of body and which populations have access to citizenship and authorized residency.

My participants calling Mexico “my country” is another intriguing word choice. This phrasing suggests that even after a decade and in some cases almost two decades of living in the United States, they still feel more comfortable claiming their homeland than the place where they invested time and energy building a life. It is unclear if this is due to a continued attachment to Mexico or to the ongoing exclusion from citizenship and society that makes an American identity unclaimable or undesirable.

I suspect it is a combination of both. The ones who say they have a place in the US but do not claim it--Santiago and Iván--have factors that either tie them to Mexico or push them from the US., but ultimately feel like they belong. It is no surprise that Santiago, who experienced three deportations, over a year of detention, and another year of sanctuary, feels deep anger at the people who do not want him there. He says, “After so much time working for this country, I don’t feel a part of...of them, but I also feel like part of this country.” Thus, he situates his nationality by the deep ties he feels to the US because of his family and work, offset by this country’s dramatic rejection of him.

Iván does not feel this same rejection, mentioning how working in the US has actually granted him many opportunities and experiences. He cannot fully devote himself to the US, however, because of the family he left behind. Choosing between his children and his parents is quite painful for them, especially as his parents get older:

Iván: Sometimes you want to be with your parents. But...what can we do? [...] It’s sad when you don’t see them. Or you only talk [on the phone] and hear their voices, and how much you would like to hug them, and tell them you love them. This distance...it’s impossible.”

He therefore cannot feel fully settled in the US because of his conflicted allegiances, but overall feels accepted by his social circle and the people he interacts with.

While Iván feels he has a place in both countries, Maite expresses she does not feel she has a place anywhere: “I am not secure in saying, this is my country, the place where I am going to be. No. I think I have that fear [of deportation] every day.” And when asked whether she feels safer in Mexico: “That neither. Now I feel like I’m not from Mexico or from here.” She feels the US is unsafe for her children; it does not matter that they are citizens because “simply by looking at them, they are attacked [...] just for being Latino.” She told me about an incident a few months back when one of Angel’s classmates was harrassed on the street when he was walking to school, and was recently killed by the same person.

At one point she was planning to leave the US and move back to Mexico with her family, but changed her mind when a medical visit revealed that her daughter Destiny has a benign tumor in her brain. The nurse told Maite it would be a mistake to move back to Mexico because she would be better off in the care of American doctors in the case that Destiny’s tumor becomes malignant. Caught in a limbo of needing the benefits the US can provide her children but also feeling deeply anxious that being in the US could tear her family apart at any moment, Maite is at an impasse.

The contrast between Maite and Iván as a couple is particularly striking, because of all my participants she is the one who is most scared of the possibility of deportation and most desires to leave the US, while he is relatively unworried about deportation and has the most positive things to say about the US.

It is telling, though, that he cites a broad social network due to work relationships as a salient value-adding aspect of life in the US; Santiago also situates himself by his work. This feeling of belonging might therefore be gendered on the basis of men being more likely to have client- and project-oriented jobs--like construction and tree cutting--that allow them to connect

with a variety of people. Though all of the fathers mentioned their children as a grounding factor, they also talked much more at length about their careers than did the women. Elena and Ernesto both work together in their restaurant, but it seems to be a truly central part of the way Ernesto conceptualizes his identity and contribution to society. He, unlike the previous two men, says he does not have a place here: “I don’t think I have a place, but I think I could have it. We have to work. We have to work to achieve that place we want.”

Thus, his barrier to belonging is not from feeling unwanted here or from missing Mexico, but from believing there is more work to do before place claiming occur. The personal security owning and running a business grants is not enough for him--he believes real belonging will only come when other undocumented migrants build businesses, accumulate financial capital, and organize to use their capital to pressure the government. It is an optimistic, forward-thinking, and inclusive conception of belonging rooted in the belief that if migrants work hard enough to accumulate capital they will be able to pressure the nation-state into giving them citizenship rights.

In contrast with her husband, Elena does have a sense of place:

Elena: With all the years I’ve been here, I feel like I’m part of this country. Yes, really yes. And if I had to return to my country I would feel a little bit...oof, like an outsider. Because now no one knows me, the people and the family that I had, well lots of them aren’t there anymore.

Elena, therefore, belongs in the US not only because of the financial stability of owning a business, but also because she simply does not belong in Mexico. She has no family ties--her mother died when she was 10 years old and she stayed in a group boarding home until she was 18, mostly losing contact with the rest of her family. Lucia similarly does not have any claim to Mexico whatsoever; she has wiped her hands of the parents who mistreated her when she was growing up. Her relationship to Mexico is parallel to the one she has with her mother: she gives

it credit for raising her but otherwise keeps her distance. She is the only participant to directly claim the US, saying, “I feel like here [the United States] is my country, my house. Bueno, it *is* ours, right? I feel safer *here*, and I want to be *here* [original emphasis].”

At the same time, however, she does not erase her connection with Mexico. She also said referring to herself in the second person, “In your country you don’t have everything you want, like here.” And, “It’s very sad. When you don’t have protection in your country, the women are violated, trapped, killed.” And cannot completely ignore her citizenship status: “It [the United States] is not our country, we don’t have permission to be here.”

Based on the experiences of my participants, the salient factors of attachment to Mexico and the US are determined by a combination of:

1. Fear of deportation
2. Trauma from deportation or other negative exclusionary experiences
3. Economic, legal, or social stability
4. Labor and business
5. Family ties in Mexico

The factors listed have to do with power--the way my participants see themselves fitting into dominant ideologies and normative structures and how that overlaps with access and subjectification. The way these factors interact is not neat: as Pnina Werbner notes in “Exoticizing Citizenship,” “citizenship as a discourse is necessarily replete with unmarked inconsistencies and contradictions, precisely because it is embedded in everyday power relations and particularist ideologies” (Werber 1998:4), which is how my participants are able to claim both the US and Mexico and simultaneously reject them both.

Though the notion that my participants are in some way claiming “citizenship” when they claim belonging follows Rosaldo’s (1997) way of thinking--that people can gain access to citizenship by prescribing to certain models of what a citizen should look like or by reshaping

those models of citizenship--it also takes into account Ong's (1996) pushback to the notion that citizenship is actually attainable through these efforts. The contradictions of nation-claiming my participants are able to hold model how some might feel more of a claim to "citizenship" and belonging than others depending on how much they subscribe to narratives about undocumented migrants and how acutely they feel the effects of "illegality." As we see with Lucía, however, even if all factors align to maximize sense of place in the US, this cannot erase citizenship status nor give them any real access to citizenship.

Es Bien Trabajadora: Work Ethic and Identity

Another way participants subjectify themselves is as the working or productive subject; being hardworking is something they identified with both as individuals and as migrants. Every participant cites work opportunity as a primary reason for their migration to the United States, and indeed their first months and even years here were marked by the grueling work hours necessary for them to survive: Lucía worked from 7am to 2am for her first 5 months here until she paid off the \$6,000 debt incurred from crossing the border, then got a job working from 9am to 7pm six days a week; when Elena first arrived she was only sleeping three to four hours nightly; Ernesto worked 14-15 hours a day Monday through Sunday for ten years.

But work is not merely a way to gain income—strong work ethic is for them a point of pride. After our interview was over Santiago showed me a video of his older son Enrique, who is under 10 years old, running back and forth carrying bricks from a wheelbarrow to stack them up against a shed, clearly proud of his son's stamina and eagerness to work.

Ernesto: For those of us who were born somewhere else and came to this country, we came here to work [...] So those people who talk badly of us, who think that we're...like the president says, criminals, rapists, murderers. That's ignorance. [...] Of course there are bad people, like in all societies there are good and bad people. But in our immigrant community the majority of us are hard workers.

He labels citizens as “ignorant” and calls them blessed for being born in the US. Implicit in that description of citizens as blessed is that they have it easier, a common sentiment amongst my participants. While in some cases they see this as a good thing, as when discussing the future of their own children, in other instances it allows them to access a certain plane of experience that citizens do not have access to—you are a citizen, so you could not possibly understand. You haven’t gone through what we’ve gone through. There is an exclusivity to it that positions them as distinct from citizens in a self-affirming way, in a way that recognizes their shared struggle and honors their ability to endure it.

Other interviewees also highly valued diligence in work contexts. Elena said this of a receptionist at her daughter’s school who had an attitude about serving Spanish-speaking parents:

Elena: She’s not here for free. Everyone here is getting a wage, and if she doesn’t like her job, then she should leave because there is always someone else who is going to like your job.

Because we know that work ethic is a strong part of Elena’s identity, the act of devaluing this woman’s job performance and indeed her right to hold that position enables Elena to differentiate herself from her and condemn her discriminatory practices. In discussing work ethic, Elena and Lucía also expand upon the sentiment in Ernesto’s previous statement that implied citizens do not have to work as hard as undocumented migrants.

Elena: The US was really built by immigrants [...] *no one* is going to do the work that immigrants do. Because the immigrant came to do the dirty work that none of the American citizens want to do. And I’ve seen it—if you set someone, an American citizen, to washing dishes, picking crops [...] it’s honestly embarrassing to see how they do it. Because it doesn’t matter to us if we get sunburned, we want to work.

Lucía: There are people who say “oh, they came to steal our jobs”—that’s a lie [...] There are many people who don’t want to go clean bathrooms. I know many people who say, “Who, me? Wash bathrooms? No, I don’t like doing that.” Even if they pay them [...] Here nobody takes work from anybody, here everybody works. Whoever wants to work works and those who don’t work it’s because they don’t want to.

The primary reason Elena and Lucía work is so they can pay bills and provide for their families. They are fully invested in any work they do have--regardless of whether or not it is enjoyable--because given how uncertain their financial futures can be they are grateful for any employment opportunity. Though neither of these women work as many hours as they did when they first arrived--Elena works 7 hours a day Monday through Friday and 12 hours on Saturday, and Lucía is busy raising her toddler and upkeeping the house--they still consider themselves as people who do not shy from difficult tasks. This is not a trait singular to them, but is tied into their immigrant identity. In this way, they insulate themselves from the negative connotations of immigrant (i.e. "job stealer") and construct their own meaning of what it means to be an undocumented worker.

Spinning working long hours as a desirable character trait also buffers against how difficult it actually is, turning hard work into an identity. Being proud of the work they do and proud of other immigrants for sharing that identity is part of the hidden transcript my participants had to resist dominant ideologies. They describe citizen work ethic as inferior, which presents undocumented workers as desirable and valuable in the face of the dominant discourse is that undocumented migrants are unwanted intruders.

As we know, however, undocumented migrant presence in the US is predicated on their work power, so by so highly valuing their work ethic my participants are in some ways playing the idea that their only value comes from their labor. By creating a mental schema that allows them to work long hours, it could be argued that they are subscribing to their purpose in the US, positioning themselves to accept exploitative positions to thereby preserve this status of hard worker.

This said, however, though all of my participants went through that rite of passage, they have been able to leave the intense labor conditions they were in when they first arrived. Indeed, though they still value work and work ethic, they recognize the toxicity of working so much:

Ernesto: That's one of the things a lot of our people don't understand--quality of life. We have a mentality of work. The immigrant always has that mentality. To work, and work, and work, and work. When we arrived here, we dedicated ourselves to that. [...] And we didn't realize that that's not life. I know a lot of people who spent all their time working here, and life passed them by. [...] And I don't want that for myself [...] We work less now--and it's not that we work less, it's just that now we're more organized. More organized, and we work fewer hours.

Though you can see Ernesto's is hesitant to distance himself hard work by the way he backtracked in saying that he and Elena work less, he suggests that work on its own is not enough to make a sufficient life. After those first ten years of fourteen hour days with no vacation, he has a foundation now to operate at less intense levels. As a long term businessman, he is in a position to push against the norm of unstable exploitative working conditions for migrants. He has an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), which allows him to own a business without having a social security number. Santiago, too, is planning to open a tree-cutting business when his visa comes, adding to the growing number of migrant businesses supporting the Philadelphia economy.

But just as it is ambiguous whether being proud of working in exploitative conditions is resistance or submission or both, we cannot simply categorize Ernesto and Santiago's businesses as acts of pure resistance. It is certainly a personal victory that they worked hard for, but they also reflect an assimilation into "attaining success through self-reliant struggle, [which] while not inherently limited to any cultural group, is a process of self-development that in Western democracies becomes inseparable from the process of 'whitening'" (Ong 1996:739). The neoliberal mentality of getting out of poverty through work or offsetting the instability of being undocumented through building a business distances them from people who are still

struggling and makes it seem as though all others should be able to easily attain a status similar to theirs and settle into “the normative standards of good citizenship” (Ong 1996:739).

Thus, my participants are able to push back against dominant ideologies by creating a hidden transcript that undermines citizens and uplifts migrants and by disrupting the norm of most migrants being exploitative subjects--but no matter if someone is an easily replaceable productive subject in exploitative conditions or in the relatively stable position of business owner, they are still serving a function to the state. This observation is not to say that resistance cannot be possible or effective, but to point out the ways in which systems of power manage to limit the agency of its subjects. As Foucault says--“power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault 1982:790)--meaning that any spaces of resistance undocumented migrants make for themselves are subject to infiltration and rearticulation.

Hoy Por Hoy Por Mis Hijos: Parenthood and Family

My participants are susceptible to the “dominant strategies of spatialization” (De Genova 2002) that dictate through both physical and ideological borders that they do not belong in the US. Even as they build a life and a family here, they are projected back to their rightful place in Mexico, rendered flesh-and-blood phantoms in their day-to-day lives as the law and dominant discourse try to erase them. Because of this, as we have seen, their relationship to space is complex. In these instances, children can serve as mooring points for undocumented parents amidst the turmoil of “illegality.”

Even as the nation-state primarily values my participants for their production potential, my participants also find their value in other places, such as parenthood. We already have seen instances of parental sacrifice—Maite choosing to stay in a country where she is deeply uncomfortable for the sake of her daughter receiving medical care and her husband Iván

choosing his children over his parents—both of which exemplify the way in which parenthood determines locality.

Maite reported feeling extremely lonely when she first got here, separated from her family in Mexico and unable to communicate regularly with them. So when she discovered she was pregnant, it was comforting to think of having a central someone to her life. But she was lost—no one she knew could tell her anything about prenatal care and she was unable to find a clinic that would help her with the pregnancy.

The difficulties did not stop when Angel was born; it was very difficult for her to take care of him and work at the same time. He was a quiet child, and because it took longer than average for him to start walking and talking, the undocumented Latinas Maite recruited to watch over him quickly left. She decided that ultimately the cost of leaving him alone would be greater than the cost of lost income and decided to leave her job. Iván worked during the week and Maite worked weekends, and they were able to scrape by.

Maite struggled with lack of knowledge about resources for childrearing and found out about pre-school with only a year remaining. She enrolled Angel in preschool but became worried about the impacts of racism on him after she heard the other children making comments like, “you speak Spanish, we speak English here,” and “I don’t want your color to rub off on me.” Horrified that kids so young were using that language, Maite started volunteering at the school to act as a buffer for her son.

When Angel changed schools at the end of the year, Maite went with him. At first the principal at the new school would not allow her to volunteer because she did not have a social security number (SSN), but the teacher of Angel’s class advocated for her to come in. She volunteered every school day for 3 years, which helped Angel transition to English-speaking and

to school in general. Her and Angel would stay up every night, sometimes until 10 or 11pm working on the homework.

Over time Maite became a trusted resource for the teachers: they updated her on daily lesson plans and depended on her as a translator. But there were some who did not appreciate her school involvement. A group of three parents approached her one day after school and told her, “I don’t want you near me or my kids. You’re not on our level.” It is unclear what these parents meant by “level,” but from then on out Maite avoided their children.

We see the implications of power weaved throughout Maite’s experience raising Angel. Even beginning with the pregnancy, lack of access to healthcare for Mexican migrants in the Philadelphia area (Atlas 2010) in combination with her undocumented status meant that she had no support network, making it difficult to advocate for herself and obtain necessary resources.

This is power functioning through a lack of information, a mechanism we saw repeated in the fact that Maite was not even aware of pre-school until her son was four years old. This meant that he was at an automatic disadvantage, exacerbated by the language barrier and racist comments that affected him when he did finally make it to pre-school. These set up a differentiating practice between her son and the other students, situating him as an “unprepared” student and as “foreign” to the other children’s “native” status. Not only this, but Maite herself was implicated discrimination at school—not only by the differentiating practices of the parents who deemed her portrayed as not worthy of interacting with the children of citizen parents, but also by the principal who decided she was a unreliable subject because of her lack of SSN.

Maite had to devote more of her time, energy, and resources to childrearing just to ensure her child could get into school and understand the homework—effort citizen parents do not need to exert as much of because resources and information are pre-built into their social and cultural

capital. But by utilizing this situation to become literate not only in English but in racism and the expectations of the school system, Maite and Angel armed themselves against to be better equipped to deal with similar situations in the future. In this case, they received incentive for their participation in the dominant structure (the public school system), obtaining language skills and capital that would help with future success. At the same time, however, their acts of learning were rebellious because the explicit purpose of Maite first coming into the classroom was to push against the other students who were using the dominant discourse to “other” her son. Additionally, this allowed Maite to orient herself in a country where she had previously felt lonely and lost. Though Maite still feels uncomfortable with this country, this discomfort comes from the things she has seen and experienced here as opposed to a lack of knowledge.

Her son provided her not only company, hard skills, and practical knowledge, but a location to align herself with. Although she does not feel as though she belongs in either the US or Mexico, she is certain that her place is with her children. Thus, in the absence of a nation to attach herself to, she has formulated her sense of belonging around wherever her family is—a moving location, but a location nonetheless.

Me: If that [deportation] happened, would you try to come back?

Maite: If my kids are here, yes. If not, no. If in whatever way I return to my country, deported or not deported, I wouldn't return. If I was with my kids I wouldn't return, because for me this isn't life.

To Maite, one of the most painful parts of deportation is the fact that so many families are torn apart coming to the US only to have the families they built here again destroyed. The fear of separation from family was a common sentiment my participants brought up when they were talking about deportation:

Ernesto: I don't know. I hope it never happens. I hope that never happens because it's something very ugly, it's a separation of family. I think that's one of the ugliest things that could happen to us, to be separated from our families, our loved ones. But I also think we should prepare ourselves for that.

Iván: I have seen lots of people who have been separated from their families, and yes, it's very sad. You practically break them, completely. You end them, you end them completely, they don't know what to do.

Deportation is gendered in a way that makes it more likely for fathers to be separated from their children in this way. My participants' experiences reflect the literature pointing out that men, specifically Latinx and Caribbean men, are the targets of the deportation regime (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013) and that while men are more at risk for deportation, women tend to more at risk of becoming "suddenly single mothers" (Dreby 2015). When I pushed them to think about their own deportations, Iván and Ernesto implied that they likely would not come back to the US unless they could figure out how to do it legally, mentioning that they would like their spouses and children to stay in the US because of the greater opportunities here. And when I brought up the possibility of the women in the relationship being deported, Lucía and Ernesto both thought it was a little far-fetched:

Ernesto: If that [deportation] were to happen to me tomorrow, I would hope that tomorrow my wife and daughter could continue moving forward—

Me: Would they stay here, or would you want them to go to Mexico?

Ernesto: Ay. Híjole, esa... I don't know, honestly it's very difficult. I don't think the situation is better than here. My daughter, well, she was born here, she grew up here. I think at this point she has more possibilities and a better future here than in Mexico, so I think they would be better off here. [...] My wife, well, will always be attending to her, to Sofía [...]

Me: And what if it's Elena who's deported?

Ernesto: Híjola, esa... No, I don't know, the truth is, no, I don't know what would happen...Sofía is very attached to her. I think that we're talking about very very extreme cases. I hope it never happens. [...] I don't know. Maybe we would all go to Mexico.

Thus, when talking about his own deportation, Ernesto thought of separation as a sacrifice he would be willing to endure so that Sofía might remain in the US, valuing her

education and future opportunities over his ability to see her. But when it came to the possibility of Elena being deported, he valued the support she gives Sofia over the opportunities available in the US.

In contrast with the dubious tone of Lucía and their husbands—and pushing back against the literature—Maite and Elena both intimated that they are often anxious about being deported themselves and had been thinking about the possibility of their deportations in a profound manner. A similarity between Elena and Ernesto, however, is that they both agree that Sofia would likely go with her Elena if she were deported.

Elena: We [Sofía and I] would hope that he [Ernesto] would send us some money [if I were deported]. But, well, as a mother I can tell you, we couldn't be waiting on that either. So in some ways it would be...well, yeah, a complete separation. Because nothing guarantees us that he'll send us [money], and nothing guarantees that he'll go. So we would start over again, my daughter and I, if that happened to us—what I've always thought, what I've always...what am I saying—well, if that happens to me, all I'd want is for them to let me take my daughter, Sofía. I think that's the only thing. [...] I wouldn't ask for anything else other than for them to let me take her.

A difference between the two projections, however, is that Elena assumed Ernesto would not want to move to Mexico, hoping but not expecting that at a bare minimum he would send money. Without a doubt, “providing” for the family is an important and gendered aspect of parenthood. Part of being a good parent, and a good father in particular, is being able to work and bring enough money home to ensure that your children are able to thrive. In the context of undocumented migrants, the combination of the worker migrant narrative and the gendered nature of deportation makes it further ingrained into undocumented fatherhood that their primary role is in providing financial support; they must always keep in mind that their physical presence in their children's lives may be ruptured at any moment and thus prepare themselves for that possibility.

But while traditional gender roles and gendered deportation practices certainly might influence the way my participants experience and practice parenting, the fathers in my study all talked about their children in very tender, caring ways that disrupt the notion that they are only there to financially provide. Ernesto, for example, talked about how important it is for him to give attention to his daughter for a full 5 minutes of his 50-minute interview. “Give them attention, attention is the most important thing,” he told me, over and over. And Iván, when asked what he is most proud of in life, responded: “I feel proud that at least I know me and my children are together right now.”

Producing this counter-narrative of fatherhood is resistance to the forces that make it more likely for fathers to be separated from their children than mothers. Though there is buy-in from both the mothers and fathers in my interviews to the notion that 1) fathers are providers and 2) fathers are more likely to be deported/more likely to completely separate from their family, this buy-in exists in conjunction with their interrogation of this expected trajectory of undocumented fatherhood. Santiago and Lucía are the embodiment of a couple who pushed against the narrative of disposable migrant father, reuniting father and family because they utterly rejected the idea of the two living apart.

Santiago: And you get used to that.

Me: To what?

Santiago: The daily life. That you leave, and you don't know what's going to happen. Just with the car, if they stop you on the highway. And if the police comes to ask for your license, well if I don't have a license [...] That's daily life, but. And like I told you, I think you can accustom to it. But what you don't get used to is to be away from home, not seeing your kids, not being able to work to give them what you have to give them, that's...

Me: The time you weren't here?

Santiago: The time I wasn't here with them, when I didn't see them play, or fight, or cry, or smile. All of that was very stressful.

We see several themes reoccur here: the sentiment that separation from family is the most painful part of deportation; the role of father as provider; the need for fathers to be in close proximity with their children. Further, Santiago's relation to space, and specifically to the house where he lives with his family, is centered around his children in a similar way to Maite: after the third time he was deported, Santiago made it back home, now considered a felon and a high priority deportation case due to his multiple unauthorized reentries. The smart move would have been to go into hiding; to change houses; to make it as difficult as possible for ICE to find them. Even Lucía wanted them to move.

But he could not bear to leave the house where his first son had grown up—where he had given him baths in the kitchen sink as a baby, the backyard where he had first learned to play. So they stayed at the same address, and a year later immigration picked up Santiago a final time and left him in detention. Santiago stayed understanding that he was unsafe in that house, but valued his son's childhood memories and long-term stability over the risk of deportation. Though Santiago's story is the exception to the norm, the act of refusing to upturn his life and his children's lives was an act of rebellion—a costly one that resulted in two years of separation from his family, but that miraculously resulted in him being able to stay in the US with a U visa⁷.

Family is highly important to my participants either because they never had a supportive family in Mexico, or because they did and became separated from them; their families hold on tightly to themselves because they recognize how tenuous their position is. But because family is a social construction, and also a center of social reproduction (Bourdieu 1998), family units

⁷ U nonimmigrant status visa: “set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity” (U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, 2017). Santiago was violently stabbed in 2007 and cooperated with the police following the incident, which opened a pathway to this visa. At the time of our interview, over four months after his release from sanctuary, Santiago had still not received his visa so did not have a work or driver's license, but was guaranteed protection from deportation.

interact differently with the state than an individual might. When a family is acted upon as a collective subject, it sometimes has privileges that individuals within the family might not. When the state must act upon an undocumented family with documented children, it faces a dilemma—it behooves the state to endorse the family as a legitimate organizational structure, and “being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, [the family] receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist” (Bourdieu 1998:73). On the other hand, the state also has incentives to continue with deportation and destabilization of undocumented lives.

What this conflict provides is an opportunity: though likely unintentionally, Santiago was able to access family privilege by being so stalwartly devoted to his family, and vice versa, leveraging the state’s promotion of family cohesion in order to challenge his deportation⁸. Undocumented fathers as individuals are disposable, but family is not quite so easily dismissed.

Despite the fact that Santiago did get a U visa, however, I want to caution against the false impression that proving familial devotion is a practicable method to overcome problems with immigration enforcement. As we saw in the historical formation of “illegality,” when one group of undocumented migrants gains access to authorized rights, it makes it that much more difficult for others to gain legitimization. As it stands, Santiago was only eligible for a visa because he was stabbed, left for dead, and then accommodated the police in their investigation. While allowing excitement for his personal victory, we should be apprehensive that the bar to be worthy of a pathway to authorized residence has been raised to physical abuse and near-death experiences.

⁸ Indeed, I would argue the foundation of much immigrant rights work is based upon this notion of keeping the family together.

Conclusion

By looking at the stories of six undocumented parents, we can get a sense of the way they interact with, resist, and attend to existing power dynamics. Resistance and submission are not clean-cut—there is not an either or that my interviewees participated in, nor were the ways they contended with these systems always fully conscious or unconscious.

In subjectifying themselves they used the words “immigrant” and “Latinx” in conjunction with “undocumented,” expressing how they implicitly understood the history of Mexican “illegality” in the US and subscribed to it. Their understanding of themselves as Mexican—a highly politicized and racialized identity in today’s context—and the way they view themselves in terms of nationality and belonging depends on how effectively they nation-state and actors of the nation-state performing surveillance make them feel unwelcome and unsafe.

Feelings of belonging are dependent on family ties to Mexico, and well as their perception of their place in the US. Belonging might be gendered and classed—men, for example, might feel more comfortable in the US because they engage in jobs that require them to build broad social networks, allowing them to feeling more at ease around people they do not know. Further, it might be classed in that people who are able to find stability in starting a business might have a head start on those who are unable to.

I bring this up in relation to Maite, who was the most scared of deportation out of all of them, and also had a comparatively disadvantaged upbringing as compared to some other participants. The only reason Santiago is getting ready to start a business is because of the privilege of his visa—he and Lucía automatically have much more stability than Maite and Iván because Santiago is no longer at risk for deportation. Elena and Ernesto who have a business,

however, both lived in cities and were able to make it through some of college before they moved to the US. Maite, on the other hand, grew up in a rural area and only went to school up until 6th grade, while Iván made it to the end of middle school but then could not afford high school.

My participants also subjectified themselves as “workers,” thus in some ways prescribing to the nation-state’s role for them—they would not be here without the need for their labor. This pride in being able to work to the bone opens them up to exploitation, but also allows the construction of a hidden transcript that undermines the sanctity of citizenship.

Further, they do not see themselves primarily for their labor power, as the state does, but also as parents. Because of the biopolitical spatialization that makes it difficult to pin down the place they belong, my participants center themselves around their children, leaning into their hegemonic structure of family as protection against deportation practices and narratives.

Some of their personal victories are also victories for the very systems they are trying to change—like how Santiago getting a visa means it will be that much harder for other undocumented migrants to get near to. There are some resistances that are unintentional, like when Santiago used his family as a bargaining chip against the nation-state—though I’m sure from his point of view he was merely expressing genuine grief at not being able to see them.

This study has the same limitations in existing research in that it is based on interview data, which cannot tell us the same information an observational or ethnographic study might. An expansion upon this study would include more families and hopefully be able to capture the experiences of the children as well. Further, a comparison of coping mechanisms and negotiations of power between families like the ones in this study versus ones not connected to a

social justice organization might give us a different view into how Philadelphian migrant Mexican families contend with “illegality.”

Based on the literature, more work needs to be done in literature on undocumented experiences that are homosexual and queer, on gender experiences, and on family dynamics. I would also argue that looking at religion as a subversive/survival tool is an untapped area of research, as well as what it means to be someone who is not a citizen raising a child to be a citizen.

My conclusions overall are that resistance and reification occur in simultaneous and overlapping ways, and that the way my participants subjectified themselves fed into or pushed against systems of power, at varying levels of intentionality.

Fundamentally, what this work leaves us with is the stories of people who live under a nation-state that desires the convenience of their labor without the inconvenience of their personhood—and therefore minimizes this personhood by any means possible—and how they maintain and construct personhood relation to these attempts of erasure.

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