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2012

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Art Became My Window:
California Youth Art Activism in the Undocumented Rights Movement

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Virginia Elizabeth Bartz

Committee in Charge:

Professor Rosaura Sanchez, Chair
Professor Amanda Datnow
Professor Natalia Molina
Professor Wayne Yang

2012

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2012

DEDICATION

i dedicate this
the(sis)
to:
the **memories** of

J○shua Bartz,
J○aquin Luna,
Und○cumented Y○uth Everywhere,

& to:
anyone else

wh○ has struggled
[including y○u]

to find their
strength
among the ashes,

to find that there is too much][beauty][to quit

and to tell their
truths regardless.

EPIGRAPH

“These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden: they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman’s place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep... For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives” (Audre Lorde 1984, 37).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Epigraph.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Illustrations.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	x
Abstract of the Thesis.....	xi
::Introduction::	1
El Capitulo Numero Uno ::Art Activism in the Undocumented Rights Movement:: the Power of Grassroots Creativity.....	5
::El Capitulo Numero Dos:: Art for the Soul: The Importance of Art Activism on Individual Empowerment within the Undocumented Community.....	30
:: El Capitulo Numero Tres:: Testimonios y Suenos: Struggles de Education y Mas	64
::El Capitulo Numero Cuatro:: Undocu-Queer Art: Inclusions? Of Queer Narrative i Movements for Undocumented Rights.....	87
::El Capitulo Numero Cinco:: Art Became My [:Window:] Conclusion & Creative Reflection.....	112
Appendix.....	141
References.....	145

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1.1: Drawing by CA art activist, Our Stories Will Not be Banned.....	5
Illustration 2.1: Mural by Youth Activist Group, No Human Being is Illegal y Cada Uno Tiene Un Sueno.....	30
Illustration 2.2: Painting by Esperanza, Wired Fence Heart.....	43
Illustration 2.3: Undocu-Meme, Then I Said... I'm Not Separating Families.....	49
Illustration 3.1: A Youth Video-Recording Another Youth During an Encuentro.....	64
Illustration 3.2A: Scene of Graduating Student Transfixed by 'Dream' Girl.....	67
Illustration 3.2B: Scene of Undocumented Artist Drawing/ Erasing Background Between Scenes.....	68
Illustration 3.2C: Left: Scene of Undocumented Artist Drawing. Right: Scene of Student Holding Platter while 'working' and 'studying'.....	68
Illustration 3.2D: Scene of Youth Working While Seeing 'Dream' Girl	69
Illustration 3.2E: Left: Artist Drawing Between Scenes. Right: Scene of Youth Protesting.....	69
Illustration 3.2F: Left: Scene of Youth With Dream Girl. Right: Scene of Youth Heart Broken and Alone (note graduation cap on heart).....	70
Illustration 3.2G: Left: Scene of Youth Drawing Background. Right: Scene of Youth Graduating College With Dream Girl Clapping.....	70
Illustration 3.2H: Youth in Cap and Gown, Cap Says 'Pass the DREAM Act.....	71
Illustration 3.3A: Left: Youth in Front of a Mural. Right: Shot of Media of Valedictorian Undocumented Youth.....	74
Illustration 3.3B: Left: Four Youth in Stair Case. Right: Nine Youth in Stair Case...	74
Illustration 3.3C: Shot of Empty Stair Case.....	74
Illustration 3.3D: Youth in Encuentro Meeting.....	75
Illustration 3.3E: Shot of Young Latino Encuentro Video Excerpt.....	75
Illustration 3.3F: Left: Shot of 'Day Labor Zone' Sign. Right: Shot of Day Laborers Waiting for Work.....	75
Illustration 3.3G: Shot of Encuentro with Day Laborer Youth.....	76
Illustration 3.3H: Youth Standing in Front of Different Murals Chanting That They Have a Dream.....	76
Illustration 3.4: Image of Two Graduate Students as They Answer Questions From the Community.....	79
Illustration 4.1: Drawing of Youth Protesting in a 'Coming Out' Ceremony.....	87
Illustration 4.2: Poster Made by Undocu-Queer Youth, Let's Make it Better. Homophobia is Killing Out Youth.....	94
Illustration 4.3: <i>Dia de Los Muertos</i> (Day of the Dead) alter	94
Illustration 4.4: Collage of Select Flyers for Queer People of Color Events.....	96

Illustration 4.5: Artists at Art Event in San Francisco Bay Area, I'm a Queer Undocumented Artist Unapologetic and Unafraid.....	98
Illustration 4.6: Event Flyer for National Coming Out Day 2011.....	100
Illustration 4.7: Youth Marching in Coming Out Ceremony.....	100
Illustration 4.8: I am Undocu-Queer Portrait and Quote Series. Bottom Right: Five Tips For Queer Boys Series.....	102
Illustration 4.9: Posters made to support a Undocu-Queer March.....	102
Illustration 4.10: Five Tips for Queer Boys, Tip #1.....	103
Illustration 4.11: Midnight, Painting by Andrea.....	108
Illustration 4.12: Roxanne, Painting by Andrea.....	109
Illustration 5.1A: Art Became my Window, by Virginia Bartz.....	115
Illustration 5.1B: Art Became my Window, by Virginia Bartz.....	116
Illustration 5.2A: You're Welcome, by Virginia Bartz.....	118
Illustration 5.2b: You're Welcome, by Virginia Bartz.....	118
Illustration 5.3: Privilege by Virginia Bartz.....	119
Illustration 5.4: Anger Into Power by Virginia Bartz	121
Illustration 5.5: Womyn Are Warriors by Virginia Bartz	121
Illustration 5.6A: Art for Justicia Workshop Sign.....	123
Illustration 5.6B: Art for Justicia Workshop in Progress.....	123
Illustration 5.6C: Donation Box and Collages as They Dry.....	123
Illustration 5.6D: Art Work from Art for Justicia Workshop: “where the world's most _____ come to be invisible”- looking at border spaces of visibility.....	124
Illustration 5.6E: Art Work from Art for Justicia Workshop: “Constraints”- thinking about ways that people and nature are constrained through borders.....	124
Illustration 5.6F: Art Work from Art for Justicia Workshop: “Age and technology”- thinking about the ways in which borders of age and 'knowing' lead to specific types of losses.....	125
Illustration 5.6G: Art Work from Art for Justicia Workshop: “Who am I?”- looking at the border of gender and race/ethnicity and questions of mixed identity.....	125
Illustration 5.6H: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Our borders define us but don't let those borders be your boundaries”- looking at positivism/ the belief in science and the boundaries that are created through ‘definition’	126
Illustration 5.6I: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Go” maps of San Diego/ Mexico border with hand drawn characters and elements cut out of brochures from Tijuana estuary bird map guides. Thinking about movement and space as border.....	126
Illustration 5.6J: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Feelings”- thinking about feelings as borders and ways in which violence is aimed at impacting our happiness and other positive feelings.....	127
Illustration 5.6K: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop: map of Tijuana/ San Diego border in Spanish, with flower grown along the border attached- thinking about	

the borders of our visions.....	128
Illustration 5.7: Water, Photo of My Brother, Josh Bartz, and personal Writing.....	129
Illustration 5.8: Academia is a Lonely Place by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz.....	131
Illustration 5.9: Say Gay by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz.....	134
Illustration 5.10: Navajo Country by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz.....	136
Illustration 5.11A: ‘Stolen Land’ Succulent Garden.....	137
Illustration 5.11B: ‘Stolen Land’ Succulent Garden- with plants and found objects from the San Diego/ Tijuana Border.....	137
Illustration 5.11C: ‘Stolen Land’ Succulent Garden- At Auction Table in Northern California Art Fundraiser.....	138

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family, first. To my grandmother, who loved completely and as if it were forever with what little she could. To my mother, who always gave me motivation in shadows. To my father, who taught me to be eccentric and wise and to spend a little time each day stretching my eyes to look at the horizon. To Tirzah and little J for being true sisters everyday. To those close to me that are family, who have held me up through so much and let me hold them too, sometimes: Cassy, Azin, Erin, Whitney, Frankie, Yesenia, Erik, Josh, April. To my extended family in Arizona, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Oakland, San Diego, Escondido, and Los Angeles, who I think of often and know are also always a part of me. To my many communities that I am lucky to somehow attach to.

I also would like to shout out all the amazing Youth, artists, activists, Undocumented community members, students, advisors, organizations and leaders who have not only helped me in this project but have dedicated their lives to standing up for those who are feeling the violences of colonization and globalization. Thanks to all who allowed me to use their images, songs, videos, poems, and experiences in this project. Especially to those who let me get close to them, their words and their amazing art, but also to those I only briefly met. To every person who has lost a family member due to forced deportation or policed borders.

Thanks to my UCSD community. Damien Veraga, who in reality mentored me while acting as my undergraduate research assistant in this project. Damien's devotion to truths and depth of analytical thought are a treasure I was able to cherish dearly. I look forward to the day when Damien looks back to these days from the peaks of graduate school, himself. Special thanks to my thesis committee: Rosaura Sanchez, Natalia Molina, Amanda Datnow, and Wayne Yang, for showing me what it means to be devoted to academia and positive social change inside and outside of the classroom. You have defiantly challenged me at times, but it is through these challenges that I have grown as a thinker, knower, and learner.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge that I wrote this thesis mostly late at night at home cuddled in bed on a laptop computer that was given to me when I transferred from community college to University by its' previous owner, my brother, Josh Bartz. Acknowledging kindness and its lasting effects on those who receive it.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Art Became My Window:

California Youth Art Activism in the Undocumented Rights Movement

by

Virginia Elizabeth Bartz

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Rosaura Sanchez, Chair

Recent work in the field of Undocumented Studies has tended to consider Undocumented Youth as either victims or as resilient leaders in movements for Social Justice for migrants. However, the ways in which narratives are experienced and expressed within this population of young people has received little attention. This thesis looks to address this gap, by considering grassroots art activism that demonstrates complex and varied experiences of Undocumented Youth in California. Placing creative expression as a form of response to structural oppression within a history of artistic activism throughout the Americas, and situating current experiences of Undocumented Youth within the specific conditions of contemporary eras, this thesis uses in depth-qualitative research to consider experiences of Undocumented Youth in California. Starting with the impacts that art has on individual empowerment through interviews with young Undocumented art activists, then moving towards a focus on the art itself as a text to understand and complicate narratives related to education and Queer issues, this project explores Undocu-Youth led movements for justice during a period of intense state-led violence towards Undocumented Youth and their communities. This thesis finds art to be a powerful method of healing, connecting, learning, and sharing narratives, as well as space in which counter narratives and movements can be included in struggles for social justice.

::Introduction::

This introduction summarizes the main points and findings of each chapter within this thesis. To start with, chapter one places the importance of studying Undocumented¹ Youth based art activism within California today. There are a total of three body chapters, which use the data obtained during this project to open up the discussion related to the power of art activism within movements for rights in contemporary times. Following these, I include a conclusion that uses creative response to this thesis project. The following parts of this introduction explain these chapters in more detail.

Chapter one will begin with a brief overview of some of the many moments in which grassroots art activism has been used by oppressed groups throughout the Americas. Since the main population that was included in this study was Latin@ Youth, this will place this project within h8storical² contexts related to Latin American, Latin@, Chican@/Xican@, and Indigenous movements for community empowerment and social justice. While the importance of art in these movements has often been ignored by popular media and academia, this section explores examples of multiple struggles that have been navigated through artistic expression from the *favelas* of Brazil to the streets of Oakland, Ca via the following grassroots medias: writings, music, quilting, images and paint, political posters, performance, and even fashion. Next, this chapter places movements for social justice by Undocumented Youth within a specific time of violence towards certain bodies in the United States. This includes an overview of recent federal as well as state policies and some of the ways in which these state-led violence's are impacting the larger Latin American community. Linking Xenophobia and discrimination towards immigrant Youth of color, this conversation touches on the impacts of these policies on the educational inequities experiences by Latin@ youth in California. Responding to this injustice, this chapter outlines some of the ways in which Youth-led

¹ Δ (footnotes using the Δ symbol are my direct responses to the reflection of this thesis by my research assistant, Damian Vergara, which can be seen in the appendix to this thesis.) Throughout this paper, I often will use the words Undocumented Youth to refer to Undocumented Latin@ Youth. While Youth from other ethnic groups exist and were present within the Undocumented community in this project, my focus on Latin@ Youth relates both to the subjectivity of this project as a thesis in the field of Latin American Studies, as well as the unique and specific experiences that Undocumented Youth from Latin American communities may have in California.

² “H8stories” will be used through this thesis instead of the word “history”. This denotes the importance of recognizing that what has been called H1Story has been a construction of Aglo- male stories. However, as this essay shows through art activism by Undocumented youth, the past is patterned with all types of stories that do not fit neatly into fixed hetero-patriarchal categories. Thus, the use of a sideways infinity sign reclaims h8story to be a dynamic and complex telling of various narratives throughout time.

organizing for justice has shown resiliency among this population through their tremendous struggles. However, noting that the path to this resiliency has not been a place of focus by those in the field of Undocumented Youth Studies, this chapter moves towards a discussion of the methodologies that were used in this qualitative research project to understand how creative expression might lead to empowerment. Linking art to indigenous forms of knowledge, this section introduces qualitative methods as important for looking at the experiences of Undocumented Youth. This qualitative study included attending 32 events and conducting 68 informal interviews and 20 formal interviews with youth art activists and members of the Undocumented communities in San Diego, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco bay area. Chapter one ends with a brief forecast of the ways in which this research will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter two, “Art for the Soul: The Importance of Art Activism on Individual Empowerment within the Undocumented Community”, begins with a personal narrative from a young Xicana who has seen her father and brother deported within the last couple of years. The struggles that she describes present an introduction to the myriad of emotional struggles and difficulties that Undocumented Youth today face in their daily lives. The next section shows some of the struggles that accompany the migration experience, discrimination and economic struggles and how these may emotionally impact Undocumented Youth in the U.S. To better understand the ability of art to empower Undocumented Youth, a brief literature review related to the use of art therapy and creative expression within oppressed communities is presented. Then, interviews related to art in some of the Undocumented communities in California are introduced through a brief methods section. Next, trends found in these interviews are described in detail. These trends include concepts such as: the ability of art to be a space for expression of emotions (especially when no other spaces are open to these expressions), the tendency of there to be a period of fear about making art related to the Undocumented experience, the ability of art to heal individuals from their own traumas (including the importance of a variety of ways in which Youth creatively express their experiences), the ability of art to connect people to themselves and others (often producing feelings of pride and empowerment in the process), and the ability of art to impact both teaching and learning in communal ways. This story of art leading to empowerment is followed by a discussion of times in which art was not a magic ingredient and did not work to overcome specific problems within the communities I worked with during this project.

Next, I analyze the ways in which gender and sexuality were found to be important places of focus within this community. While this chapter shows the importance of art in the process of Youth empowerment, it also complicates creative expression within this community, showing the art process to be a complex and dynamic way of navigating the oppressions that Undocumented Youth and their communities are facing during contemporary periods.

Following chapter two, chapter three uses videos made by three different groups of Undocumented Youth in California in an attempt to listen to their voices related to the struggles of Undocumented Youth, specifically as they relate to systems of education. These videos present narratives of youth in San Diego, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area, and are from Undocumented Youth along a variety of life circumstances. These videos tell the stories of high achieving Undocumented students, as well as those who struggle within contemporary systems of education. While different in many ways, these three videos demonstrate some of the complexities that accompany the Undocumented identity as well as the ways in which social justice issues often thought to be experienced ‘outside’ of school greatly impact education and learning in systems of education for this population. These videos also show the agency in which Undocumented Youth use to navigate their lives within structures of exploitation. Concluding this section, I introduce a number of suggestions for those in systems of education to better serve the Undocumented community.

Chapter four also uses some of the art created within the Undocumented community to explore the inclusion of Queer people of color within this movement. This chapter brings in content from the interviews I have done with Undocumented Youth, artists and activists around Queer issues within this community. In this chapter, I show that Queer people of color have been excluded from mainstream LGBT activism in the United States in contemporary movements such as organizing around gay marriage and ending the military policy of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. However, I use content analysis and ethnographic data from this project to show that there have been a number of ways in which the movement for migrant rights, specifically in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, has intentionally included Queer people of color narratives. I also discuss the phenomenon of ‘coming out’ within this community, linking ‘coming out’ ceremonies to an increased amount of Queer related public art projects made to support Undocu-Queer

youth and their families. However, I also look at the space of San Diego, where I find that the inclusion of Queer people of color narratives does not commonly exist within the formal activism for migrant rights and within the Undocumented community. Instead, I argue that Undocu-Queer youth who struggle in their daily lives to survive the violent social and political landscapes of San Diego county offer a critical understanding of the ties between movements for citizenship within the nation and movements for transnational social justice regardless of intersectional identification.

The conclusion to this thesis includes a short analysis in summary of overall trends found within this research project as well as a personal creative reflection. These trends include the fact that art can empower individuals through personal healing as well as creating space for connecting to others. Also, looking at the artwork made by Undocumented Youth can be a place to understand Queer narratives as well as experiences in education. The creative reflections section uses art to outline some of these trends. It also includes a number of art projects that were created in response to this thesis project, especially as it related to action research. Concluding this chapter, I explore my own spiritual journey of working on this thesis project within the space and time that I have been a Masters Student in Latin American Studies at CILAS (Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies) at UC San Diego. Here, I consider Undocumented struggles in relation to the ideologies that support the modern nation state and settler colonial oppressions.



Illustration 1.1: Drawing by CA art activist, Our Stories Will Not be Banned.

El Capítulo Número Uno ::Art Activism in the Undocumented Rights Movement:: the P○wer of Grassroots Creativity

“But in my dark retreat/ I bear poetry/ Like a secret disease/ A hidden/ Illicit fruit”

(Alaide Foppa¹ in Partnoy 1988, 185-86)

Introduction

What is activist art and why is it important today? One may think of grassroots art as an individual or a group creative expression that is meant to as a reaction and disruption to oppressive power. But how is a painting, a *cancion* (a song), or a play different from the performance of survival through daily life under a dictator or through poverty? What is it about a mural that brings people together? How is it possible for a five-line poem to stand up to a million dollar corporation or hundred-year-old constructions of womyn as weak? How can a child who is failing in school find his or her voice through rhythms and beats? How does activist art re-create the artists who are making it, and how do they then remake the world that they are part

¹ Women living in exile in Guatemala until she ‘disappeared’ in 1980 (Partnoy 1988).

of? These are some of the questions that this thesis project will explore through an in-depth study of California Youth art activism within the undocumented community.

This chapter will introduce the relevance of activist art through a review of some of the forms of creative expression that have been utilized in social justice movements throughout the Americas. These movements show art to be a fundamental and important element of organizing and mobilizing for social change, which inspires emotional responses often through personal expression that is anonymous or collective in nature. While briefly noting some of the social justice movements that these artistic expressions belong to, this section will focus on some of the various mediums of art that have been shown to be particularly useful to Latin American activists dealing with the interrelated issues of oppression, violence, poverty, revolution, neo-colonialism, and health. It will not, however, dive into the complex global and local conditions that have created said social issues in Latin America and the U.S. After introducing previous art in social movements, this chapter will show some of the current struggles for transnational migrant rights, particularly as they relate to undocumented Latin@ Youth art activists in California. Next, this chapter will present the methodology for this project, exploring the ways in which participant observation, content analysis and interviews are helpful techniques in considering contemporary movements for social justice through art.

Social Justice Art History 101: Mediums of Social Change

Like the diversity that is present across Latin@ experiences, art activism throughout the Americas has been present in a myriad of struggles, places, times and h8stories². While it may be thought that modern grassroots art activism is a development of increased accessibility of new age technologies, Firat and Kuryel explain that “the practice of subverting dominant messages transmitted by hegemonic powers is... hardly new. It is inspired from and indebted to previous political movements of the past” (Firat and Kurvel 2010, 10). Indeed, Gloria Anzaldua (1987) notes that “before the conquest, poets gathered to play music, dance, sing and read poetry in open-air places around Xochicuauhtl, el Arbol Florido, (tree of life)... the

² See footnote 1 in introduction for justification of the use of the spelling ‘h8stories’ instead of ‘histories’.

ability of story (prose or poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic” (Anzaldua 1987, 88). Creative expression and the narration of experience during the violence of colonization is an indigenous methodology that has survived from within the shadows, continuing to be a relevant form of empowerment under neocolonial, authoritarian and postmodern forms of violence in recent eras. This is especially true within the Latin American and Latin@ community, which has had a strong cultural history of intermingling art with movements for social justice (Caragol 2005). Speaking about art made by Chican@ and Nuyoricans (New York Puerto Ricans) in the 60’s and 70’s, Caragol explains that “participants believed in the power of art as a social tool and chose to develop their expression through printmaking and mural painting, media that had been vehicles for propaganda and protest in Latin America for decades” (Caragol 2005, 3).

However, the art that comes from grassroots social justice movements, in the past as well as the present, has often been squelched by the denial of its existence or relevance by popular media and the academy (Monestel and Boyle 1987, Adams 2000, Osborne 2004, Wells 2007). As Wells argues, activist art forms, such as political posters, “rarely receive attention from the art or academic community. Although frequently the only surviving records of diverse political struggles, these artworks are often taken for granted... it’s time their stories are told” (Wells in Inkworks Press 2007, 7). This exclusion may be linked to other forms of exclusion that the Latin@ community has experienced in spaces of knowledge production. Caragol (2005) comments on this, while showing the beginning of a shift in the practice of studying activist art. She explains that “the push for greater documentation of Latino artistic production has also come about as a result of the still small but increasing number of Latinos in the academy and on the staffs of cultural institutions... they recognize the role Latinos played in developing the nations contemporary culture and creating community-based art. These contributions have often gone unacknowledged” (Caragol 2005, 2)³. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) shows that a focus solely on high and elite art maintains systems of inequality under capitalism. He explains, “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social

³ One such book, which might be especially useful for those who are interested in this project in relation to historical movements for social justice in Latin America is *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlan*, by my past advisor Edward J. McCaughan (2012).

differences” (Bourdieu 1984, 7). In fact, there is nothing inherently good about upper class art culture. However, because those in power embody elite-classical culture by attending prestigious gallery openings or purchasing expensive art from dealers, the elite reify these forms of artistic expression as valuable. Other cultural forms of art, such as grassroots, activist and informal art are not considered by the elite to be of highly stimulating educational value, especially as these ‘street art movements’ may critique the companies, ideologies and privileges of those in power. While lower class Latino art forms are not always valued by the academy or popular medias, these creations are, nevertheless, beautiful, meaningful, captivating, expressive, creative, bold and impacting towards individuals and social movements.

As the following section will show, there have been many methods that have been used to reflect as well as shape the histories of the Americas. While creative expression has taken many forms- including everything from small groups of mothers telling their narratives through stitches in quilts, to multi-national musical performers playing sold out concerts for peace, grassroots expressions through art “are important for the light they shed on dark areas of injustice and poverty in Spanish America today” (Marting 1990, 124). Academics in the past have, unfortunately, chosen to categorize the fields of Latin American and American art as separate, ignoring themes of colonization and leaving “artists who work on the verge of both cultures” (Caragol 2005, 3) out of the picture. By including Latin American and Latin@ art, this introduction will use a transnational lens to understand the history of art in social movements and grassroots artistic empowerment between communities across the Americas. Although this is only a small review of the many places and times in which art activism has been and continues to be apparent, it is enough to show a significant presence and importance of creative expression in social justice movements, especially within the Latin American community.

Literatura

Not surprisingly, literature is a form of creativity that has been used for empowerment of grassroots Latin American authors. Poems, short stories, written testimonials and narratives have allowed people to share the memories and personal experiences of their struggles through written words (Moya-Raggio 1984, Marting 1990). For example, Marting explores *You Can’t Drown the Fire: Latin American*

Women in Exile (Partnoy 1988), which highlights writings of womyn living in exile from their Latin American countries of origin during the wars of the 1980's. Marting explains that these simple but direct writings show that it does not take a highly educated person to use this medium to say profound things about their own experiences. In fact, Marting notes, the "strength of this collection is the variety of its testimony by women who are not professional writers" (Marting 1990, 123). In addition to testimonial literature, womyn writers living in exile as well as internal organizers throughout Latin America have also used their artistic writings to spread news about continued struggles under oppressive regimes externally and with each other (Osborn 2004, Adams 2000, Adams 2002, Moya-Raggio 1984). As Marting explains, these works diverge between "the political and the personal, the factual and the artistic... all coalescing easily and naturally into 'writings' " (Marting 1990 126). Others have been able to share their individual experiences of life in poverty through diaries and memoirs. One excellent example of this comes from the Afro-Brazilian favela writer Carolina Maria de Jesus, who kept a diary where she was able to talk about her struggles with poverty, race, sexuality, domestic violence, hunger, and religion in Brazil in the 1950's. When this diary was published in 1960 by traveling journalist Audalio Dantas, who had found out about the diaries on a research visit to the favelas, it helped to spread awareness about the impacts of government policies on womyn and was one of the first works to discuss the oppressive conditions of slum dwellers in Latin America from the inside (Maria de Jesus 1964). While Latin American literature, including famous and popular artists such as Eduardo Galeano and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, has a strong history of using creative imaginaries to explore experiences of inequality, other grassroots narrative poems and writings of poor womyn across the Americas show that literatura is one form of art that can be used for social justice and personal empowerment regardless of access to higher education or expensive resources such as printing presses and publishing companies.

Musica

Another method of creativity that has been used for social justice in Latin America is music. A good example of this is found in the 1986 event World Peace Begins in Central America, which brought together social justice oriented musicians such as Mercedes Sosa, Quilapayun, Amparo Ocha and Luis Enrique Mujia Godoy and was one of the most successful music events of the decade in Costa Rica.

Monestel and Boyle (1987) explain that “the possibility of bringing together so many international artists in Costa Rica provided a rare opportunity for appreciating the musical work of national and visiting artists on the same stage, with rhythms, instruments and musical projects that form the voice of a continent in the face of war” (Monestel and Boyle 1987, 231). Adams (2002) also finds music to be an important form of activism through art, noting that a successful concert for change can reach larger audiences who can experience the content together in a community (Adams 2002, 52). In fact, the concert for peace in Central America in Costa Rica was a success in that it sold out, had overwhelming energy from the crowd, and “the songs [were] sung collectively by singer and audience” (Monestel and Boyle 1987, 231), which helped to build hope and strength for the Central American community during a period of extreme violence and struggle in the region. Another aspect of music that was important at the concert was the fact that the actual lyrics, similar to literature, included words of expression about the personal experiences and feelings of the artists under dictatorship and violence, allowing the audience to communally express and confront their own experiences with each other instead of in isolation. This form of activism has continued, through more modern Latin American social justice oriented musicians in traditional as well as contemporary genres (hip hop, rock, metal, reggae etc), who also often use their lyrics to speak out against social inequality in the Americas.

Arpillas en Chile

In addition to words and music, artistic expression through visual mediums has been used to give testimony and create change. One unique way this has occurred is through the Arpilla (quilt making) movement in Chile. In this movement, collective workshops, geared towards domestic womyn under the authoritarian regime, allowed womyn to narrate their experiences with oppression anonymously and through the traditional womyns medium of needle working. These quilts were then sold to supporters outside the country, allowing the quilt makers to be compensated for their artistic expression at a time when unemployment and poverty was a rampant problem in the country. Speaking about the development of the Arpilla movement in relation to these economic circumstances, Adams (2002) notes that “poverty had an impact on the form and content of the arpilleras. Because they lacked money, the women had to use sackings, old cloth and their own hair as raw materials” (Adams 2002, 47). This shows that even with very

limited resources, grassroots art activism is still a possibility. Similar to writings, a key activist oriented element of this movement included the sharing of womyns personal and private experiences in a public arena. Adams explains, “the arpilleras portrayed the situation in Chile in a symbolic as well as a literal way” (Adams 2002, 36), using symbolism and representations to share their stories. However, the anonymous and collaborative workshops where these quilts were made were medium that also allowed for a collective growth and education among formerly home-bound womyn in Chile. Moya-Raggio (1984) explains that these Arpillas were “not only a source [of] work, but also of women’s self-realization” (Moya-Raggio 1984, 281). In other words, as these womyn shared their experiences together during quilting workshops and by looking at quilts made by other womyn, they began to see the issues they faced at home to be larger social problems related to the hegemonic structures in Chile during the period. (Adams 2000, 630). As their consciousness grew, Arpillistas in Chile began to involve themselves in other forms of activism for social change and spread education related to social inequality to other poor womyn and families (Maya-Raggio 1984). However, it has been argued that it was the emotions shared through their artwork that had the greatest impact in the movement against oppression in Chile. Adams (2002) explains, “emotions, aroused partly through art, are more important for movements than is usually assumed” (Adams 2002, 49). In the case of Arpillas in Chile, the emotional content of the hand made quilts worked to maintain strong bonds between Arpillista womyn and also motivated those who were physically removed from the situation to get or stay involved as well as donate their resources to the cause.

Imágenes y Pintura

The power of images to inflict emotional reactions has also been seen in a few other image based art activist movements. Talking about the grassroots womyn’s movement against femicide in Juarez, Osborne (2004) notes that, to spread awareness about deaths as well as the disappearance of loved ones, activists go out in large groups and paint posts throughout the city. Osborne explains, “many activists are the mothers and family members of the victims, who have covered the city of Juarez with hundreds of

black crosses that they paint for every murdered woman” (Osborne 2004, 26)⁴. By keeping these disappeared womyn present in the daily lives of people in Juarez through these visual representations, people build emotional connections to those who have suffered due to the horrific violence against womyn that is a result of impacts of NAFTA and similar treaties. A more complex form of painting, community murals have also been a means of Latin@ art activism in the Americas, especially in California. Speaking about the muraling movement in Los Angeles, Rangel (1998) explains that artists, such as Judith F. Baca, painted murals with the help of Latin@ Youth in the community as part of the struggle for empowerment during the Chicano rights movement. Rangel notes that “as her work with youth progressed, Baca honed her sense of imaginary and real power into an artistic and activist career of unmistakable political force” (Rangel in Austen and Willard, 1998, 224). Other projects, such as Communic Arte⁵, have used community muraling workshops as a way to understand the impacts of past revolutions and current free trade agreements on small agricultural communities in Central America. Similar workshops, done by Chican@s and Latin American migrants in California, have also resulted in empowering murals that use images to tell about displacement through neocolonial economic policies, violence and oppression, as well as focus on indigeneity and Latin American cultures. As noted in the mission statement for Precita Eyes, a San Francisco Mission District based community muraling project, these muraling projects seek to “enrich and beautify urban environments and educate communities locally and internationally... to bring art into the daily lives of people through a process which enables them to reflect their particular concerns, joys and triumphs” (Precita Eyes, 2012). Although large-scale murals require collaboration and resources, murals and painted posts across the Americas allow communities with little power and resources to beautify their surroundings and educate each other through creative processes that reflect ideas of survival and hope through oppressive struggles.

Political Posters

⁴ Through my work in Central America, I have also seen painted posts that say things like “*Detener la violencia contra las Mujeres* (end violence against women)”, or “*En Suchitoto, Las Mujeres son Libres de vivir su vida sin violencia* (in this town women are free to live their lives without violence)”.

⁵ Thanks to Amanda Eicher, Christopher Nagler and Cassandra Clark I had the pleasure of helping with some of these workshops and mural painting in the Pueblo of Colima, El Salvador (2009).

In addition to Murals, political posters have been used for many activist purposes in the Americas. Like other media, posters allow for anonymity of their makers as well as collective understandings of the issues to which they point. Goldman points out that these posters have also been made through anonymous and collective collaborative workshops, citing posters made in the San Francisco Bay Area during the movement for the Third World Liberation Front. These posters embraced indigenous collectivity, opposing capitalistic individualism and elite art while working to push issues protesting educational inequality in conjunction with the Chicano rights movement in the U.S. (Goldman 1984, 52). While Goldman argues that grassroots activism in California uniquely led to the development of the professional political poster during the Civil Rights Movement, the colorful and creative political poster exhibit “So There Will Be No Forgetting: Images from the Spanish Civil War”⁶, shows that transnational images have been used to communicate, critique and empower throughout Spain and Latin America, well outside of the ‘liberal’ region of San Francisco and the period known as the Chicano Rights Movement. Cushing builds on this, noting “there is a long tradition of printing in the service of peace and social justice. Examples of the productive union between the printing trade and political activism include abolitionist tracts distributed before the Civil War” (Cushing 2007, 3). Wells (2007) also demonstrates this, showing that collectively owned poster presses in the San Francisco Bay Area have been accessed and used by groups who have designed and distributed political posters for activist causes throughout the world, including but not limited to: movements for peace in Central America, activism against deportation of Latin American Refugees, Latin American, Indigenous and Black Womyns rights, environmentalism in Haiti, family health in Latin America, critiques of state led anti-immigrant laws, and movements for educational equity in the U.S. Wells argues that “Political posters have been one of the most important forms of dissent since the nineteenth century, and they have played an increasingly important role in public art... they continue to represent struggles for social change today” (Wells in Inkworks Press 2007, 5). Like Arpillars, a political poster taps into the power of an image to insight emotional responses from those who view them. However, political posters have traditionally been produced in large scale, which requires access to some sort of technology and printing resources. While collective presses have existed, allowing activist groups to access

⁶ This is a recent exhibit shown at the UCSD library from the Southworth Spanish Civil War Collection (March, 2012)

them, Hoover and Simons (2007) explain that the same neo-liberal policies that have increased the demands for these presses have also forced many independently owned shops to shut down in the last few decades (Hoover and Simons 2007). However, with the increased possibilities of online image production as well as the increased access to programs like Adobe Photoshop, online political posters continue to be a prevalent form of art activism. Political posters, thus, help to demonstrate the power of images to speak out against injustice, mobilize for specific events, and spread concepts of empowerment throughout local as well as transnational communities across the Americas.

Otras Formas

In addition to the above media, other forms of creativity have shown an ability to impact social movements as well as empower individuals through whatever “little space[s]” (Moya-Raggio 1984, 276) activists have been able to find. This includes traditional as well as non-traditional artistic spaces. For example, plays made about the Arpilla movement in Chile helped to spread the empowerment of women in communities beyond the nations borders (Moya-Raggio 1984, 281). While rarely written about in the academy, activist groups may wear their slogans on T-shirts, allowing individual members to become easily distinguishable at protests or political rallies and embody the political organization’s message in their daily lives⁷. Looking at the possibilities of fashion, Miller (2005) notes, “clothing has political significance because it affects the relationships among [citizens]. Clothing is not simply a private or personal matter; it implies the existence of an inter-subjective social world in which one presents oneself and is seen by other... Fashion can provoke dialogue about social and political matters” (Miller 2005, 3). In fact, almost anything can ‘provoke’ such countering dialogue if it is created in a unique and emotionally significant way. Flags, Jewelry, speech, dance, children’s drawings, chalk paintings, photographs, movies, cartoons, comic books, folktales, and even children’s books are only a few already established forms in which art

⁷ While this thesis, unfortunately, did not have room for this discussion, there is a great deal of creative use of fashion within the Undocumented activist community. This includes incredible grassroots t-shirt making, as well as the re-appropriation of the cap and gown in new settings, such as marches and within activist pro-immigrant images. Interviews done for this project did relate to this trend at times; however, there was not enough space to fully analyze the importance of fashion within the Undocumented community. Further research could look into this area of creativity.

activism could, and most likely already has or does, occur. Speaking to underground street art in Chile, Adams argues, “art... can be the locus of an oppositional voice... Art can indicate... that there is an active opposition movement, and this can be a way for a movement to threaten the regime; as such, the artwork breaks the complicity of silence” (Adams 2002, 29). This section has outlined the way in which Latin American art has been used to break silence from within. Through literature, music, quilts, paintings, murals, political posters and more, art activism has flourished in Brazil, Chile, Central America, Mexico, California and the United States during periods of violence, poverty and oppression and subsequent movements for positive social change.

Contemporary Contexts for Undocumented Activism in 2012

Looking back to the past is important, but where are we now? If art activists in the undocumented community of California are using similar artistic mediums today as those outlined in the previous section, what are the social conditions to which their artistic expressions respond? The following segment of this introduction will look at contemporary contexts for Undocumented and migrant rights activism in California. This discussion will explore the status of contemporary immigration politics in the United States by looking at recent federal and state political policies, as well as policies for education of immigrant youth, which heavily impact the undocumented community and youth-led art activism today. While these national and local policies are significant factors related to contemporary realities, it is important to note that legal reforms, policing, and political perspectives often are set in place to support and strengthen: the nation-state instead of a transnational reality, Western male-centered thinking instead of interdependent Indigenous or Womyn focused ways of knowing, and European settler colonial understandings of land ownership and migration patterns. This being said, positivism and neo-colonial political ideas of citizenship continue to hold incredible power in the region known as the United States, and thus popular politics do impact the lives of those who exist outside of the nation-state, such as Undocumented Youth and their families.

2012 Presidential Politics and Federal Deportation Policies

During recent years, immigration has become an increasingly hot topic in the United States. From the first President of Color, a democrat who embraced the Latin@ community and has since supported increased federal deportation policies, to the everyday conservative ‘minutemen’, who voluntarily ‘protect’ the U.S./ Mexico border from ‘possible terrorists’, the man-centered world of politics has been focused on the policing of ‘criminal’ migrants with little regard to the actual impacts of this trend on global communities. Asking for Latin@s to vote for him in the 2012 presidential race, Barack Obama recently declared “I’ve got five years to revamp immigration” while he argued that his Republican rivals “would veto even the Dream Act, much less [promote] comprehensive immigration reform” (Jackson, USA Today, 2012). Unfortunately, it is true that the 2012 Republican candidates have made dramatic statements targeting the undocumented population. For example, preliminary candidate Mitt Romney, himself a member of an elite transnational Mexican-American family, has argued for ‘self-deportation’, or voluntary deportation of immigrants after local laws work to make it too difficult for those without papers to find jobs and safety in their home communities (Ewing 2012).

While Obama has critiqued the Republican candidates for their anti-immigrant ideologies, others have looked at Obama as problematic for the actual policies that he has implemented so far. In fact, since 2009, forceful deportations under the Obama administration have increased to around 400,000, a number that is about double the yearly average of deportations during George W. Bush’s first term (Lopez et. al 2011, 11). These deportations neglect both “push” and “pull” factors that have been encouraging migration of low wage laborers from Latin America to the United States for decades. The ‘irony’ to this is that many of the factors that promote dependence on migration are actually based on federal U.S. policies, labor programs and free trade agreements (such as NAFTA, DR-CAFTA, the Bracero Program and maximal limits on visas for countries like Mexico and El Salvador). While undocumented immigrants come to the United States from all over the world⁸, a disproportional number of these deportations (97%) have happened to people from Latin American countries (Lopez et al 2011, 12). Thus, the Latin@ community in the United States has been hit particularly hard with Obama’s immigration policies. It is estimated that

⁸ 11% of unauthorized immigrant are from Asia, 4% are from Europe and Canada, and 3 %are from other countries (Lopez et al 2011, 12).

about one-quarter (24%) of all Latin@s in the U.S. today “know someone who has been deported or detained by the federal government in the past year” (Lopez et al 2011, 10). Although President Obama was originally elected with the support of the Latin@ community, with Spanish campaign slogans like “Si Se Puede”, many Latin@s now question his leadership specifically because of his policies on deportations (Lopez et al 2011, 16). Either way, it is clear that regardless of who becomes president in 2012, recent federal immigration politics will most likely continue to side with anti-immigrant rhetoric instead of addressing the lived realities of the estimated 11-12 million undocumented men, womyn and children who reside within the borders of the United States and would benefit from comprehensive immigration reform.

Anti-Immigrant Regulations at the State Level

Federal deportation policies are not the only space in which anti-immigration regulations and ideologies have grown in recent years. Newly passed anti-immigrant state laws, such as Prop 187 in California, Arizona Senate Bill 1070, Georgia’s H.B. 87 and H.B. 56 in Alabama, allow for racial profiling and deny public services based on citizenship status within the state. As Muse-Orlinoff (2012) explains, in response to the broken federal immigration system “states have taken it upon themselves to enforce their way to a solution... by passing laws designed to criminalize virtually all activity engaged in by undocumented immigrants... to create a climate of fear and make life so difficult for immigrants that they will self-deport” (Muse-Orlinoff 2012, 1). However, since most undocumented immigrants are tied to permanent living situations in the U.S. (most have been here for more than 10 years and the majority are part of family units with children) and because economic conditions in their birth countries have not drastically improved, these anti-immigrant laws do not push Undocumented people out of the U.S., but instead into increased isolation and fear of the government (Muse-Orlinoff 2012).

While these state laws are based on theoretical instead of accurate understandings of migration patterns, they continue to be passed regardless of their actual costs. Looking at their impact on local economies, laws banning immigrants from working and surviving have greatly impacted the larger communities of the states that have passed them. For example, Arizona’s S.B. 1070 has cost the state at least \$141 million in lost conference revenue, while Georgia’s H.B. 87 is projected to cost \$300 million-\$1

billion and Alabama's law has effectively cost \$10.8 billion, or 6.2% of the states GDP in lost agricultural revenue (Muse-Orlinoff 2012, 3). These expensive state laws hurt local economies and promote, instead of disrupt, Xenophobia towards Latin@s, as they encourage a structure in which Latin@ communities that fear law enforcement are left with little protection from racial gender and sexuality based hate crimes. As Perez (2012) explains, aggressive state laws, along with "anti-immigrant politicians, talk show hosts, and vigilante groups fan the flames of growing Nativist⁹ hysteria" (Perez 2012 4). This hysteria is based on fear of Latin American immigrants coming to the United States to 'steal' social services, such as education and health care (Perez 2012, 4). However, research from the Mexican Migration Field Research Project has shown that less than 1% of surveyed immigrants move to the U.S. to benefit from social programs (Masey, Durand, & Malone 2002). In fact, due to fear and lack of information, many immigrants who could benefit from federal and state services do not actually obtain them (Perez 2012, 4). Although anti-immigrant ideologies tend to blame immigrants for the loss of jobs and decreased state funding, Xenophobic laws themselves damage local economies and increase poverty and fear within the state. Oppositional theorists, such as Muse-Orlinoff (2012) argue that, "instead of unsuccessfully trying to drive unauthorized immigrants out of the country, we should work to integrate them, which will keep families together, improve community safety, and better the economy all at the same time (Muse-Orlinoff 2012, 4). However, instead of focusing on the economic or social impacts of anti-immigrant laws on Latin@ families, as well as the broader community, many local governments and politicians have continued to blame and deport 'illegal aliens' for social problems in the U.S.

Impacts of U.S. policies on Latin American communities

The increased anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S. during recent times has dramatically impacted those in the broader Latin American community. Speaking to the ways in which anti-immigrant policies in Arizona have disrupted life for mixed status families, O'Leary and Sanchez (2011) note that federal and state policies may be believed to impact only those who are undocumented, but in reality they have "far-

⁹ The term Nativist here is used to describe the reified Western colonial persons as 'Native' to the region of the United States. However, the Native American community uses the term Native to refer, more accurately, to the Native peoples who have and still do live in the Americas, including Native Latin Americans (Indigenous), First Nation Peoples and Alaskan Natives.

reaching implications for the broader Latino population... in part due to the ubiquitous mixed immigration status household, whose development is closely allied with history and economic ties to Mexico” (O’ Leary and Sanchez 2001, 128). In other words, it is not only people residing in the country without papers who are being impacted by these Xenophobic reforms, their families (in the U.S. or in Latin America) are being heavily affected as well. A major way that life has been disrupted in the Latin American community is through separation of the family, which has created tremendous emotional as well as economic stress for individuals and kin networks. Speaking to the impact of deportation on transnational families, Hagan et. al explains that, under current U.S. policies,

deportees and their families face a double-edged sword... If deportees have a spouse and/or child in the United States... they could find themselves... separated temporarily or permanently from loved ones who, more often than not, depended on the deported family member's earnings for survival. On the other hand, if deportees left a spouse and/or child in their home country... reunification may not be necessarily welcomed, since the deportee may no longer be able to remit earnings from the United States... are stigmatized upon their return or unable to find work in their home communities, which was their reason for emigrating in the first place (Hagan et. Al 2008).

Looking at U.S. policies from this larger transnational perspective, it seems as if the anti-immigrant sentiments, which have been increasing through current periods of global economic crisis, are not based on considerations of the protection of the Latin@ family or empowerment of the Latin American community. On the contrary, these policies go beyond targeting Undocumented ‘criminals’, and continue to develop ‘under-development’, poverty, and overall social inequality for Latin American families across the Americas.

Anti-Immigrant Policies through Education for Immigrant Youth

The policing of education for Latin@ Youth through anti-immigrant based policies has also been a political means of disempowering the Latin@ community. Lopez and Lopez (2010) explain that immigrant children today are “trapped at the intersection of two systems in crisis: the public education system and the immigration law system... [and are] caught in the crossfire of the harsh law, policy, and rhetoric that currently pervade these two systems” (Lopez and Lopez 2010, viii). While the 1982 supreme court case of

Plyer v. Doe ruled that “undocumented students must be provided access to a free public education because citizens and/ or potential citizens cannot achieve any meaningful degree of individual equality without it” (Perez 2012, 6), Latin@ youth are forced to navigate informal barriers and formal barriers to access a quality K-12 education. In addition, even the small proportion of high achieving Undocumented students who do well in high school face incredible obstacles to obtaining a college degree. These educational barriers work in conjunction with anti-immigrant political hysteria to justify the exploitation and oppression of undocumented youth and their families. This section will explore these barriers to situate the movement for educational rights that has led grassroots youth activists in the undocumented community of California to organize and mobilize for change.

While contemporary education studies researchers have argued that embracing multicultural education and bilingualism are valid methods to promote student growth and close achievement gaps, well trained teachers often find this immigrant friendly pedagogy difficult to implement in the class room due to federal and state regulations. For example, K-12 classes in Arizona have recently banned lessons that discuss race, ethnicity and oppression and from using books that embrace cultures other than White American, including the histories and lived experiences of Native American as well as immigrant groups. While Arizona’s anti-Ethnic Studies education law is perhaps the most dramatic and blatant anti-immigrant educational policy so far, informal and formal forms of exclusion exist throughout American schools, leaving many Latin@ youth struggling to find a path out of poverty. For the 2007-2008 school year, for example, the drop out rate for Latin@ students in California was 25.5% (California Department of Education 2009). The majority of Latin@s who do graduate high school often come out with “lower achievement levels” (Lopez and Lopez 2010, 5) than their non-Latin@ peers, especially in math, science and literacy. This heavily impacts the lives of the 3.4 million undocumented young adults (18-29 yrs old) to whom “higher education is an elusive dream... with only 10% of undocumented males and 16% of undocumented females age 18-24 enrolled in college” (Perez 2009, xix).

Even if they make it through substandard K-12 schools and find a way to gain access to college, Latin@ youth who are undocumented are not able to receive federal funding, or get loans to support their

academic goals in higher educations. Perez explains, “having spent their lives... being told that if they work hard enough, a college education and career opportunities will follow, undocumented college students are forced to face a harsh reality when they start college and realize that this is not the case” (Perez 2012, 25). In fact, those who stay in school often are required to work low-wage jobs under the table with little time to study, do not have the resources they need to thrive in the university (such as computers or transportation) and experience persistent stress due to their grim situation (Dozier 2001, Oliverez, 2006). Unfortunately, many high achieving undocumented students find they are unable to handle these barriers on their own and drop out of college (Perez 2012, 25). Even with a college education, undocumented youth continue to experience economic and social barriers, live their lives without access to public services and experience constant fear that they or their families will be deported forcefully and without notice. While undocumented youth currently have no legal path to citizenship or a documented status due to federal immigration policies, the path towards ‘pulling themselves up by their bootstraps’ through school is also blocked, leaving young Latin@s and their families struggling in the lowest paid jobs and unable to achieve the ‘American Dream’ that U.S. ideologies of capitalism so strongly preach.

Undocumented Youth in the United States and Dream Activism

These federal and state anti-immigrant laws have impacted the larger Latin American community, but they have especially impacted Undocumented Youth. The Undocumented Youth population makes up about 25% of the total Undocumented population, with approximately 3.2 million youth under the age of 24 residing in the U.S. *sin papeles* (without papers) (Perez 2012, 5). The numbers of Undocumented students in the U.S. do vary by state, and California does have around 40% of the total undocumented student population in the U.S (ibid). As Perez explains, these children “were brought by their parents when they were very young, often before schooling age” (ibid). Thus, Undocumented Youth often grow up significantly identifying as Americans and immigrants, without even knowing about their status until they apply for college or try to get their first job.

Those who do learn about their Undocumented status experience a number of significant emotional issues related to their identity. Perez explains, “Undocumented status is a common source of

stress among first-generation Latino youth. Compared with documented adolescents, Undocumented adolescents are at greater risk of anxiety, and children of mixed status families... are at greater risk of both anxiety and depressive symptoms” (Perez 2012, 9). These identity struggles, combined with the extreme stresses one experiences when migrating to a new country, living in poor neighborhoods where violence is a part of life, and being part of interdependent family structures where Youth hold real financial and social familial responsibilities, make it difficult for some Undocumented students to find hope for change in their situation. Perez explains that even high achievers can “experience a dramatic drop in their academic performance, and may completely disengage from school and discontinue their extracurricular activities... they often fear the same fate as their older siblings who excelled in school but ended up in undesirable jobs with few options due to their documentation status... many become disillusioned and lower their life aspirations” (Perez 2012, 10). Indeed, Youth who fear the reality of deportation, especially when seeing their friends and family go through the violent and traumatic experience, can easily find themselves giving up. Also, Youth who have family members deported without notice experience extra pains of separation, especially as they are unable to travel outside of the country to see these family members.

This identity can be particularly difficult for Undocumented youth who find themselves growing into Queer sexualities as well as their Undocumented identity. This experience may be difficult, in part, due to exclusions of Queer communities of color from mainstream white-LGBT culture, as well as histories of homophobia from within the cultures of many immigrant communities. Openly Undocu-Queer activists Perna Lal (2012) speaks to the exclusions that Undocumented LGBTQIA Youth experience, noting “we’ve been told to leave spaces because we are queer. We’ve been left out of conversations... told to suppress or hide one part of ourselves in favor of another... We’ve been told that our lives and truths need to be filtered and watered down for the comfort of our more privileged allies” (Lal 2012, 2). Deportation holds another element of fear for Queer youth, as homosexuality is either legally or socially punishable by death in many areas of the world. This fear of deportation is a major reality, as Perez (2012) explains, “Undocumented students fear of deportation is so central to their daily existence that it influences almost every aspect of their lives” (Perez 2012 10), including not wanting to go to hospitals when they are sick, hesitation to change jobs when they are being exploited and difficulties developing strong emotional bonds

with those around them. Undocumented youth who are Queer experience many challenging situations in their daily lives that can lead to feelings of isolation and depression.

Regardless of their potential fears, Youth leaders in the Undocumented community, including those who identify as Queer, have shown a tremendous strength and resilience through their struggles, which is evident in their activism and in their participation in movements for social justice. Perez (2012) explains, “undocumented students often report that their parent’s hard work and sacrifices motivate them to pursue higher education... and often remain positive about their future outlook by reframing their negative experiences in positive terms” (Perez 2012, 11). A major way in which they have done this is through activism for educational reforms, such as the state and federal DREAM Act. The federal DREAM Act (the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act), which was first introduced in 2001 but has yet to pass, would provide a pathway for citizenship to Undocumented Youth who can meet specific requirements, including spending either 2 years in higher education or the U.S. military (Perez 2012, 12). The California DREAM Act, along with other state-led DREAM efforts, does not provide a pathway to citizenship, but instead gives a financial pathway into higher education for AB540 students (students who may not have documentation but can meet other specific requirements, including graduating from a California high school). The California DREAM Act was passed and signed into law in Fall, 2011. Both of these DREAM Acts were created through the grassroots organizing and mobilization of Undocumented Youth in the United States. However, the DREAM Act is only one area in which Undocumented Youth have been inspired to mobilize for social change. Other Youth, especially those who disagree strongly with the assimilationist and militaristic concepts written into the federal DREAM Act, have organized into art based activist groups and mentorships that work for social change in the K-12 educational sphere, immigrant and transnational rights movements, anti military and prison industrial complex efforts as well as Queer People of Color movements. However, the DREAM Act movements have been the most successful and well-known forms of activism by this community. Perez reports that, through this activist work, Undocumented Youth who may otherwise have a difficult time finding hope in their situation “report feeling a sense of empowerment as a result of their activism” (Perez 2012, 12). Lal adds that Undocumented youth who are Queer have been “active and at the forefront of securing more rights for

immigrant communities while not leaving our queer allegiances behind. If and when the DREAM Act is passed, it would be in large part due to the unrelenting efforts of queer youth and women” (Lal 2012, 1).

California Youth Art Activism as ‘Research’

Process & the Importance of Art Activism in the Undocumented Community

The foundational base of this thesis project came from a colorlines.com article from November 30, 2010 entitled “Art and Activism Come Together to make DREAM a Reality” (Lee 2010). This two paragraph-long article, supplemented by five political posters made by Youth activist artists, talks briefly about the possible use of art within the movement for immigrant rights through the DREAM Act. Lee explains “through [summer] campaigns... artists were able to engage creatively in fighting the unlawful treatment of immigrant... recently, we see artists coming out to support the DREAM Act” (Lee 2010, 1). While this is just a brief article, a day of online exploration pointed me quickly to a large community of grassroots art activism from within the Undocumented movement. Since California has a disproportionately large number of Undocumented Youth compared to other states (Perez 2012) and California has a strong history of art social justice movements, specifically through muraling and political poster production (Inkworks Press 2007, Goldman 1984), I soon began to realize that many of these Undocumented art activist leaders come from California. Soon, I began to find grassroots California Youth art activism in many spaces for Undocumented issues, especially noting the inclusion of trans-linguistic communities, Queer People of Color, and discussions of educational inequity.

In fact, art is an especially valuable tool for Undocumented youth activists. For one thing, the creativity and skills needed to produce art activism can be learned or used either independently or in collective format and can create great emotional reactions from those who view it. In addition, art is a place of power that youth can easily access, both collectively and anonymously, unlike adult and individual centered sites like courtrooms or mainstream media. The ability of art to be anonymous is especially important for Undocumented youth, as fears of traumatic deportation are realities for people in this community. Speaking of art as activism, Deborah Barndt points out that “whether the modes are verbal or

non-verbal, art-making that ignites people's creativity recovers repressed histories, builds community and strengthens social movements is in itself a holistic form of action" (Barndt 2006, 18). But what were these posters, murals, drawings, plays, poems, online video shorts, and personal narratives saying? Why did they speak to me (and others) so strongly? How is it that this group, thought to 'live in the shadows', conceptualized by popular media as less educated, immature and even delinquent, has been able to find the strength to share its' stories, Queerness, and critiques with such a loud and dynamic voice through art activism? I found few answers to these questions within academia. Although there is a growing body of literature on Undocumented Youth as well as the importance of images and art in the writing of Chican@, Latin@, Latin American and transnational histories (Perez 2012, Perez 2009, Schmidt Camacho 2008, Caragol 2005, Firat and Kurvel 2010, Adams 2002), there is hardly any mention of art in movements for social justice during contemporary times. I began to see that I needed to go to the sources of these works themselves- the Youth Activists- to understand what is happening in art activism of the Undocumented community. Thus, this research project uses a combination of qualitative methods to explore the art itself, as well as the experiences of those who have created and been impacted by it.

[UN]documentation Through Art: Methodology

The methodologies for this project borrow from a number of previous thinkers who have used qualitative methods to explore and document images as important. The use of art and images is an indigenous forms of knowing, which Native scholars have used for quite some time. King explains, "in fact, pictographic systems (petroglyphs, pictographs, and hieroglyphics) were used by a great many tribes to commemorate events and to record stories, while in the valley of Mexico, the Aztecs maintained a large library of written works that may well have been the rival of the Royal library at Alexandria. Written and oral, side by side" (King 2008, 16). Unlike Western forms of knowledge, which separate the world into emotional and intellectual spaces, using positivism and rationality to keep the public and private spheres from influencing each other (Eisner 2008), indigenous forms of knowing are interdisciplinary in nature. Here, the emotional is just as important as the statistical, the oral and communal as necessary to note as the material. As Cole and Knowles explain, "arts-informed research is a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion,

responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry. This redefinition reflects an explicit challenge to logical positivism and technical rationality as the only acceptable guides to explaining human behavior and understanding” (Knowles and Cole 2008, 59). This project thus shifts explanations of immigrant rights struggles away from trying to find solutions or statistics, focusing on artistic expressions of lived experience instead.

The main methods used in this project are content analysis, interviews and personal reflection through field notes and art. The content analysis section borrows from Schmidt Camacho, who uses textual analysis of multiple mediums of historical art created by transfronteriza Latin American migrants to understand representations that “create new imaginative worlds out of the trajectories of loss and displacement” (Schmidt Camacho 2008, 6). In addition, the project also builds on Sandra Weber’s (2008) more contemporary “use of existing (found) artistic images as data or springboards for theorizing” (Weber 2008, 48), in which family and school photos or other images already belonging to those who are part of a qualitative research project were used to better understand the experiences of participants. However, this project will expand beyond theoretical analysis of art works, borrowing again from Weber through her use of images as part of the interview process. Explaining the possibilities of asking individuals to talk about their own photos, she explains “giving people an image or object to talk about sparks multiple reactions, leading often to outpouring of all kinds of information, feelings, thoughts, and situation details” (ibid), many of which might be too painful to talk about without the concrete “materiality of photographs, artwork and objects... asking people to talk about visual images already in their possession is thus a very promising research method” (ibid). In addition to analysis of artistic expression from Youth in the Undocumented community and material based interviews with those who have created or been impacted by these works, this thesis will also include my own art as representation of the process and findings that come from this project. Weber defends this new form of the use of images in research, noting “as the norms and expectations for communicating research results in change, a growing number of scholars are turning to image-based modes of representation, creating art to express their findings and theories” (Weber 2008, 49). In other words, in addition to analysis of the art produced by Undocumented art activists in California, specifically around issues of education and Queer rights and interviews about experiences creating the art, I

will be including my own experience and art to explore my own subjectivity and understandings of this project.

The Field

To some academics, Art as the 'field site' might be considered to be a somewhat exotic concept. Indeed, it is exciting to work with people who use creativity to tell their stories, interact with their hopes and dreams, and build positive social change together around such 'hidden' identities as Undocumented and Queer. However, to me this field site is home. In some ways I am an insider within this community. I have family members and very close friends who were and are Undocumented, Queer, Migrants, People of Color and grassroots Artists or activists. I have been drawn to art as a form of healing and empowerment due to my own confrontations with the poverty, pain, violence, depression, and isolation that people around me and me, myself, have experienced due to oppressions based on these identities. People within this community are my family and a main source of emotional and social support. 'The field', thus, exists to me the way Gupta and Ferguson (1997) suggest, as location or a state of mind instead of as a specific place or time. This community will be part of me well beyond this project. Thus, my research for this study has been designed using methodological tools of ethnography that allow me to look at art activism within the undocumented community through in-depth, qualitative analysis that allows for understanding of the complexities present in the undocumented art- activist communities and social movements present in California.

The Cold, Hard 'facts'

To explore the use of art in activism for the Undocumented community, I have attended events, interviewed artists and activists, and followed Internet web sites to obtain my data. My focus was on the three areas of California with the largest populations (San Diego, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area). From the summer of 2011- March 2012, I personally attended 32 events that were focused on art or activism of Undocumented Youth in some way. These events have included group planning meetings, poetry slams, open mics, fundraisers, hikes, art shows, muraling or painting workshops, marches, meetings with occupy events, reclaimed Latin@ cultural events, and presentations to raise awareness in the general

community. At these events, I made contacts, whom I reached out to for personal interviews relating to their experiences with creative expression. I also began to follow their web pages, blogs, and social networking sites for information on other events, artworks, and experiences with making art. With the help of an undergraduate research assistant, who also has a vast knowledge of the San Francisco and San Diego Immigrant and Queer communities, I conducted 68 informal interviews, which were built on with a total of 20 in-depth interviews later on. People were asked to do in-depth interviews based on their accessibility and presence in the community as artists or activists. About 35% of those interviewed in depth were womyn and the majority (95%) were Latin@. My formal interviews were done at the convenience of the artists at their studios, homes, cafes, cultural centers, murals, and/or online via email or video chats. There were also published news articles and videos about some of these and other artists in the community, which supplement my data and interviews. From these artists, events, and Internet sources, I collected around 400 visual artistic representations, poetry, video clips, and mixed media projects that were used for positive social change in some way within the community. Using coding of the field notes, interviews and images, I found empowerment, queer narratives and educational justice to be trends in this data. After noting these trends, I conducted interviews with queer artists and activists as well as people who were making art for educational justice. Thus, this project explored the process of making art as well as how Undocumented images impacted the artists who make them as well as their communities. My main research questions were: in what ways did the experience of making art impact the individual and the community, what has this grassroots movement said about education and learning, and how has undocumented youth activism included or excluded Queer narratives and experiences? Some examples of questions I asked participants include: How has creating art made you feel? What was it like to see that other people were able to see your art? How has your family influenced your art? What is it that you want your art to show?

Brief Forecast

This chapter showed the existence of art in social movements throughout the Americas, the contemporary structural realities Undocumented Youth are facing, and the methodological backing of this research project. The following chapters will use qualitative techniques to explore what art activism is

doing in the Undocumented movement. This thesis is not linear; it will most likely provide readers with more questions than answers. However, as the art pieces themselves create emotional reactions in those who view them, this project hopes to connect those in academia to the challenges and methods of empowerment that people who live outside the nation state continue to navigate in the struggle for rights.



Illustration 2.1: Mural by Youth Activist Group, No Human Being is Illegal y Cada Uno Tiene Un Sueno

::El Capítulo Número Dos::

Art for the sOul: The Importance of Art Activism on Individual Empowerment within the Undocumented Community

The figures of two girls stand tall in a High School Hallway. Eerie music plays in the background as they walk forward in the shadows. Subtitles note: In the last 2 years Gloria's father and brother were deported, leaving Gloria's mother as the family's sole provider]. Cut to close up of young Latina girls mouth, saying:*

A couple years ago, on my moms birthday, every year me and my sister and brother, we go buy flowers to my mom... we were a few blocks away from the house and we seen a cop. Somebody wasn't wearing their seat belt in the back, and they took my brother... the hours passed and my mom was just crying... We were scared for him... my mom was like 'oh my God, he doesn't have any money, he doesn't know anybody over there, what if something happens to him?'... I feel like [my mom] kind of went crazy. She wouldn't cook, all she would do is like cry. She got very very depressed... she would just up to work and then come home and start crying... It's hard to get money, you know... She stresses a lot over the bills, like 'oh how am I gonna pay this, or how am I gonna pay that'. You kind of even get more scared like even going out. You're just like 'oh I don't want to go out because I don't want this to happen to me, what if this happened to my mom... You don't want those things to happen because, you know, they are the people who support your family. So, if they're gone, whose going to support you?... Everything gets twice as hard... where my families from, we always grew up poor... we don't have the same resources and benefits like others do... a lot of people come over here to help their families over there, on the other side in Mexico, financially... You never feel that it's gonna happen to you because you're like 'I'm not doing anything wrong', you always think that your families doing something good and you see them struggle so much and it's like 'how can they think we're doing something wrong when we are the ones suffering?'

* Pseudonyms are used for all names throughout this project maintain anonymity of participants.

[Film shifts to same girl painting a mural with other Youth, laughing and smiling with bright colors around]

Ok, so we did a mural... and the statement is “No Human Being is Illegal, y *Cada Uno Tiene un Sueno*” and that means no human being deserves to be deported because no one is illegal and no one should be deported or put in a box and be called illegal... *Y Cada Uno Tiene un Sueno* means that everyone has a dream, like I have a dream that I can travel, I can go to college... There’s many others that have different kind of dreams or the same kind of dream as me but, that everyone has a dream so nobody should be put down for who they are or where they come from. There’s a piece of the mural that looks like me, holding a mega-phone. And basically coming out of the megaphone is indigenous language coming out from where I’m talking and like that’s cool and I made a connection to that, I feel that kind of connecting me to my roots, I really love my culture, just learning the history about that and I feel like that’s something very powerful and it made me feel good because it made a statement of We’re here. It’s big and a lot of people are seeing it. Its very easy for people to ignore us because we are not in their faces so just looking at the mural and just looking at the statement just puts out a statement that we are here too and that we are not going to stay quiet anymore. It kind of made me feel like that, *like I was very powerful*, ‘oh like yeah I did that and yeah, I’m saying that’... it felt good that people got the message. Maybe some people didn’t like it, maybe some people did. But the point is that they got the message and some people start talking about it, start realizing things¹

Introduction

In the above narrative, told by a Xicana² Youth to her peers in a video-recorded interview, some of the real life emotional, financial, and social side effects of life as an Undocumented Youth within an Undocumented family are laid out. With both her brother and father experiencing deportation, Gloria tells of the struggles that she has had to deal with while trying to make it through high school and achieve her dreams of going to college. She speaks not only of the ideological issues she faces (“how can they think we are doing something wrong when we are the ones suffering”), Gloria also talks about the felt manifestations of being Undocumented: fear, pain, financial struggle, depression, transnational responsibility, family separation and anxiety for the future. However, in the second half of her narrative, where Gloria explains the mural she has helped to create, she points to the power that she has experienced when sharing her identity through art (“it made me feel good because it made a statement of We’re here... It kind of made

¹ Gloria, Personal Narrative through film, accessed online March 15, 2012.

² I originally had written Latina here, but upon review of this chapter by the group she is part of I was asked to refer to her as Xicana due to her close ties and personal identification as indigenous from Mexico instead of identifying as Latina.

me feel like that, *like I was very powerful*, ‘oh like yeah I did that and yeah, I’m saying that’ ... it felt good that people got the message”). It is apparent that Gloria feels the negative effects of being Undocumented, but in the moments of this narrative she is somehow able to use her painful experience to speak out in an empowered way, regardless of her continued fear.

This chapter focuses on this moment- not just for Gloria, but for the many Undocumented Activists across California who have used their own creativity to speak out against the violence and injustice that they have faced as members of the Undocumented community. It is important to note here that, while I refer to art and creative expression many times throughout this chapter, I am not looking at one individual form of art or creative expression. Instead, art and creative expression represent many different forms of creativity that Undocumented Youth are using within the movement for emotional empowerment and social justice. To begin this chapter, I will briefly explore some of the traumas and struggles that Undocumented Youth, such as Gloria, may face in their daily lives. Although these experiences are indeed painful and difficult, this essay will avoid a model of victimization by focusing instead on Youth empowerment and possible ways in which individuals in the Undocumented community have used their own agency to find personal strength through coping techniques revolved around creative expression. The questions this chapter explores include the following: Are Undocumented Youth empowered through the process of making art about their struggles? What might this empowerment look like and how is it felt? How might personal empowerment impact the ability of Youth to organize and mobilize for social justice within the Immigrants rights movement?

Emotional Struggles and Coping Techniques of Undocumented Youth

Struggles

The Undocumented identity is clearly emotionally difficult for Immigrant Youth in many ways. To begin with, many Undocumented Youth have come into the country through a criminalized and dangerous path, which is often a very difficult journey. Perez talks about this, explaining that during migration to the United States, 24% of first generation Latino students have “experienced a stressful migration event” as part of the journey (Perez 2012, 9). Crossing the desert by foot with little water, in the

trunks of cars, or on boats in which they have to swim to shore, is a dangerous trip in which people, including children, die on everyday. In addition to a stressful journey, many young migrants experience family separation and loneliness during important developmental times in their lives. Potochnik and Perreira (2010) find that 75% of Immigrant Latino Youth had been apart from their primary caregiver for an average of 3 years prior to their migration to the U.S. In addition, while they are in the United States, many Undocumented Youth have left behind close family members, who they know they may never get to see again.

Besides family separation and traumatic experiences at the border, the experience of moving to a new county as a Latin@ Youth is not easy. Perez explains that migration itself “is one of the most radical transformations and life changes that an individual or family can endure... With respect to Latino Immigrant Youth, research suggests a host of socio-cultural experiences related to the acculturation process that are extremely stressful” (Perez 2012, 9). Some of these migratory stressors include: difficulties with adapting to a new language, changes in family dynamics, experiencing discrimination in the new country (by other children or adults), life in poverty and violent neighborhoods, living in cramped urban spaces and educational pressures without adequate support (Perez 2012, 9-11). Latin@ Youth also understand that they are not welcomed with open arms by Xenophobic and racist people and policies around them. At times, many Undocumented Youth experience anger and resentment at their parents for bringing them to the United States and these very difficult and stressful conditions.

Noting the lack of research on emotional experiences of this population, Perez continues to explain that the identity that develops as an Undocumented person ages is a complicated and difficult one, which includes anxiety and fear related to deportation and physical safety (Perez 2012, 10). In the transition from childhood to being young adults, the lives as Undocumented persons become increasingly difficult. Perez notes that “buying a cell phone, obtaining a library card, or even renting a movie all involve difficulty and possible embarrassment... at every turn they risk deportation... many of these young adults are constantly off guard, worried about the possibility of getting caught... the emerging contrasts between their lives and the lives of their peers, friends, classmates, and family members is all the more difficult”

(Perez, 2012 25). Frances Contreras (2011) also talks about the reality of fear and embarrassment among Undocumented Students, noting that most Undocumented students she interviewed in Washington State “continued to live in the shadows, fearful that others would discover their undocumented status” (Contreras 2011, 109). Contreras also argues that even Undocumented Youth who make it into higher-education experience isolation and financial difficulties that make it difficult to survive.

Sadly, during this research project the struggles outlined here were too difficult for at least one Undocumented Youth to overcome. In November, 2011, the Undocumented community in California was hit hard by the news that Joaquin Luna, an 18 year old Undocumented student at Juarez Lincoln High School in Texas, decided to end his life. Reporter Daisy Martinez (2011) explains that the Luna family “said he was frustrated the Dream Act never passed... he didn’t (see) any other way or no other option to achieve his goals” (Martinez 2011, 1). In his suicide letters, Joaquin explained that because of his immigration status, he feared being unable to fulfill his dreams or take care of his family. Speaking to this on her blog, California Undocumented and Queer activist Perna Lal comments that “this post hits close to home on so many levels... Joaquin isn’t the first undocumented student to take his own life, there have been others. I feel terrible, even tho[ugh] I’m undocumented as well and I know what struggles come with having no SSN, I cannot begin to understand what he was going through” (Perna 2011). This tragic event is a reminder that the Undocumented identity may have serious consequences on young people’s emotional well being. Unfortunately, this case points to the fact that it is possible to feel absolutely alone and without hope when one is Undocumented instead of feeling excited about the future or supported in your dreams.

These emotional struggles are realities in the daily lives of Undocumented Youth Art Activists in California as well. While doing this project, I saw the Youth around me struggling financially, discuss difficult stories related to crossing the border and experiences with deportation, deal with isolation in academia, and miss out on numerous opportunities because of the legitimate fear of being deported that they had. In addition, those around me in this study throughout California shared one strong characteristic: financial struggle. Whether this took the form of needing to work while they were children (even in the U.S.) to support their families, struggling to figure out how to afford tuition or the time needed for studying

at community college, State Universities, or UC's, figuring out how to use their degree for something other than a janitor or nanny, or how to continually support those close to them in their communities, all Undocumented Youth I worked with had some type of serious financial difficulty during the time of this project. As a person with a family history that includes Undocumented persons, I see that the trauma, anxiety and emotional issues that this population experiences because of their identity may not necessarily end with their gaining access to citizenship, and may continue on to impact generations beyond those that are currently living in the shadows as Undocumented. It is important to note too that members of this community have had their fears become realities during the period of this study. One Youth, who had been deported and wrote about her experience online in September, 2011, explains that being deported to Mexico meant giving up "the life I had designed after graduating college and deciding to stay... my life as an artist" (Maria field notes, 2011). While this essay is written, Undocumented Youth continue to experience fear, pain, and struggle around their identity. Although Obama has said he will not deport Dreamer students, Youth continue to have their families ripped apart, struggle because of anti-immigrant federal and state policies, and even get deported themselves. However, Undocumented Youth are ready to move beyond being victims of this violence; many are using their agency to make changes and overcome- starting at the most intimate level of understanding and empowering themselves through art.

Coping Techniques: Resiliency over Struggle- How?

Although Undocumented Youth do experience incredible difficulties in their daily lives, most develop coping strategies to help them survive into adulthood and keep living their lives with family members in the United States. In fact, Undocumented youth have been shown by scholars to have an incredible ability to show resiliency when overcoming many of these obstacles in their daily lives, using their personal agency to enact coping strategies such as humor, minimizing their own fears related to their aspirations, defining themselves as being "no different from anybody" (Perez 2012, 33), finding confidence through reclaiming identities (such as identifying as AB540 or Undocumented instead of 'illegal'), ignoring the issue of illegality, taking pride in proving others wrong, and showing overall extreme determination to succeed (Perez 2012, Contreras 2011, Abrego 2008). Some of these experiences and strategies were shared in a closed-door workshop I attended on emotional health in the Undocumented community in December,

2011. For example, students went around the room and talked about their experiences and feelings, at times joking and at other times noting the different experiences based on intersectional identities, such as being Queer, a person with a disability, or a high school drop out. However, through all these struggles the workshop ended on a positive note, with one young Latino Community College student even saying “It has been a very hard thing, but today I’m glad I’m Undocumented because I don’t think I would have had so many opportunities to grow, think about school and organize with other people if I was just a kid from my neighborhood” (field notes, December 2011). Speaking of agency in their daily lives, Perez notes that, although the Undocumented students he interviewed did “recognize that the experience of undocumented immigrants in society involved discrimination and persecution, they did not want to allow these circumstances to control their lives, even if it still threatens their sense of safety and their aspirations” (Perez 2012, 33).

While many scholars have noted the importance of agency and resiliency in the lives of Undocumented Youth, very little has been done to show the ways in which this resiliency has actually been achieved. For example, humor is noted to be an important coping mechanism. However, this humor does not happen in a vacuum and, in fact, requires an incredible amount of creativity, performance, style and practice to pull off in an empowering way. For example, the big hit online video series “Undocumented and Awkward” uses the humor felt in an awkward moment to show some of the complex ideological anomies and struggles that Youth in this community experience. These ‘jokes’ told in short video episodes that end with the words “awkward”! comment on tensions related to daily struggles such as: dating without a California or U.S. legal ID to get into clubs, taking the bus to work as an adult because you are not legally able to drive, and talking about Queer issues and being LGBTQIA within a Latino family and community. These funny videos do use humor to cope with these struggles, but they also require a great deal of personal reflection, artistic process based on representation and meaning, physical production, and the ability to deal with the way in which others respond (hopefully by laughing) at the difficult experiences Undocumented Youth embody daily. While humor is used throughout the community, even by those who do not have the means or time to produce successful video shorts based on their jokes, the *art* of telling a joke based on the

Undocumented experience is not an innate trait that all people *sin papeles*³ possess; it is a creative way of experiencing and reflecting upon the world that requires dedication, community participation and feedback. In fact, creativity is an important element of most coping techniques. Being able to image the future as bright, reconstructing for oneself what it means to be ‘illegal’ and reframing the world in a more positive light are not ideas handed out to Undocumented Youth by mainstream American media or even their families. Instead, Undocumented Youth themselves find the strength and courage through creative processes to rethink the world that they live in. Thus, the importance of art and creative expression in coping with emotional struggles that Undocumented Youth face is a neglected, but necessary element in understanding agency and empowerment within this community.

Creative Expression as a Therapeutic Experience: The Ability of Art to TRaNs F o R nn

(A Brief Literature Review)

While art has often been left out in discussions around agency within the Undocumented Community, personal empowerment through creative expression has been noted within the field of therapeutic healing for quite some time. Expressive Arts therapist Cathy Malchiodi (2005) explains that “the arts have consistently been part of life as well as healing throughout the history of mankind” (Malchiodi 2005, 4), going on to cite the Egyptians and the Greeks as early expressive arts healers. Karen Estrella (2011) explains that expressive arts practitioners have been working since the 1960’s “to break through conventional boundaries of self-expression and artistic expression and to bring an interdisciplinary arts experience into therapy, community, and education in a new way” (Estrella 2011, 43). She argues that using art as therapy comes from the underlying understanding that “ ‘expression is itself transformative’ ... creativity is a human birthright... [and] the creative process is inherently linked with the movement towards growth, health, and life ” (Estrella 2011, 43). The embrace of creative expression within parts of the psychological community has especially impacted social justice based mental health organizations, who often use art as a form of therapy “at times under the title of ‘therapy’ and at other times under the title of ‘art’” (Estrella 2011, 46). Doing so, some argue, can allow individuals to heal at a quicker pace while also

³ Without papers, meaning Undocumented

letting people in the community see themselves differently, especially through imagination and self-expression (Mc Niff 1992, Gladding 1992). Overall, Malchiodi explains,

creativity in therapy has the potential to impact clients in memorable ways that traditional interventions do not. When therapists choose to use expressive therapies, they give their clients the opportunity to become active participants in their own treatment and empower them... Whether through art, play music, movement, enactment, or creative writing, expressive therapies stimulate the senses, thereby 'sensitizing' individuals to untapped aspects of themselves (Malchiodi 2005, 14).

Although not often done through therapists (which most would be unable to afford), the expressive art that Undocumented Youth make may access this very form of therapeutic healing. Queer academics have also discussed the importance of creativity and form in personal empowerment. Rivera-Servera does this well by talking about his own experiences as a Queer Latino who found the ability to creatively understand himself through dancing. He explains, "dance became the entry point to other forms of queer connection: friendship, sex, employment. But it also was a means for me to begin choreographing my own movements through the world as an openly gay man" (Rivera-Servera 2011, 291). Speaking about the importance of dancing for LGBT communities, Rivera-Servera notes that dancing was just as important, and often happened alongside, before, after and during, political marches and social justice organizing. In other words, without the ability to creatively experience the world and express themselves through dance, Rivera-Servera would argue that the gay rights movement in the United States would not have had the impact that it has on so many Queer individuals. He continues, arguing that "dance does not simply forecast a possible world; it puts into motion the material bodies of queers in public spaces that were created out of political and psychological necessity. Dance signaled not the promise of gay liberation but its practice" (Rivera-Servera 2011, 292). While not all Undocumented Youth have the ability or desire to participate in marches or other political organizing events, they may find similar liberation through art based collective experiences, such as being part of a mural collaboration or working to think through a video short.

Although little work has been done to look at the use of art as a survival tool in the Undocumented community, there are a few places in which the power of art to transform has been noted. One way in which art empowers Undocumented Youth through their personal emotional struggles is through narratives

included in works by writers and scholars who are part of the Undocumented community themselves. In his recent MA thesis, *Visual Rhetoric: Struggles of Dreamers in Higher Education*, social activist, artist and academic Raymundo Hernandez discusses how art helped him through his own struggles in identity while growing up in California. Hernandez explains, “in grade school, I continued to create art to release my emotions and release stress... eventually becoming conscious that I enjoyed creating art because it was a way to step away from the real world and as a way to unwind. Most of the art I created in high school and in college was only done to express my personal emotions, and many times I did not share my creations with others because I was not confident enough” (Hernandez 2011, 19). Speaking later of his choice to include art in this thesis, Hernandez points out that “the intention to reflect these personal hardships as visual content is to apply art as a weapon to empower unauthorized students and their communities” (Hernandez 2011, 33). Jose Antonio Burciaga, in his book of poetry entitled *Undocumented Love: Amor Indocumentado* (1992), also discusses the importance of art and process, noting “el arte que yo produzco es un reflejo de mis sentimientos al captar lo que vuela con el viento de estos tiempos. El proceso de producir una obra de arte es lo mas importante” [*the art that I produce is a reflection of the sentiments I capture from what blows in the winds of these times. The process of producing a work of art is of most importance*] (Burciaga 1992, iv). While not as clearly linking his emotional experience of being an Undocumented Youth in his introduction as Hernandez gives in his thesis, it is still seen clearly in the poetry of Burciaga. For example, his poem “Green Nightmares” reads: “I vomit versus/ in green trousers/ when la migra/ asks where I was born/ being the color of the earth. I vomit versus/ when thinking/ one day they will knock to tell me/ my life here is terminated... and I vomit versus/ in green trousers/ contemplating skulls/ from the human hunters, / *la Guardia Civil/ el Gestapo/ and la Migra*” (Burciaga 1992, 104-105). This poem shows some of the emotional struggles that Burciaga experienced while living in fear of being deported due to his Undocumented status.

While both the recorded narratives of Burciaga and Hernandez justify the argument that art and creative expression can be useful tools that Undocumented Youth use to cope with and share their difficult situations and emotions, these works focus on artists who have successfully created well known works of poetry and art. Thus, these narratives do little to point to the ability of creative expression to impact the

lived experiences of Undocumented Youth in the broader community, through work that may only go as far as their own diaries or walls. Also, Hernandez and Burcaiga do not go into detail about the ways in which the process of creative expression actually helped them to overcome or deal positively with some of the negative emotions that they faced. As Hernandez puts it, art can be used as a weapon; but how does it feel to pick up that weapon and shoot it? What are some of the ways in which other identities, such as sexuality, gender, and class, impact that experience? What are some of the visuals that are expressed around traumatic experiences, and what do these works of art mean to those who have made them? What challenges occur during the process of expressing oneself about the struggles of being Undocumented? The remainder of this chapter seeks to answer these questions through the inclusion of interview data, field-notes, and online sources in which Undocumented Youth in the activist community of California have used art for individual empowerment.

Methods to Learning the Power of Art

To better understand the complex dynamics and experiences around creative expression within the Undocumented community of Youth Art Activists in California during this project, I used standard ethnographical techniques to obtain and analyze qualitative data. In order to protect participants in this study, I did not ask about documentation status. The means that I interviewed people based on their production of art within circles that Undocumented Youth tended to inhabit, based on the content of their art being related to Undocumented border experiences, or used for mobilizing around Undocumented issues. I also opened up the definition of Youth to people who defined themselves as Youth in some way through their art, even if they might be seen by others as young adults. In addition to these interviews, I collected information through personal experiences that were documented in field notes and through online blog posts within this community. Questions I asked included the following: Can you tell me how it felt to create some of your earliest works? What was the process of making art-work about your own personal struggles like for you? In what ways has creating art about your experience impacted your life? How has your family impacted your creative expression through art? And what was it like for you to share these or similar works with others? From the data obtained in this project, I was able to find some trends and themes related to the experience of personal empowerment through creative expression within the young

Undocumented community. The next section will list these findings; however, it is important to note that these are findings that I found to be significant across individuals, regions, ages, artistic mediums and forms of data collection. However, like all ‘results’, this is a subjective analysis of the experience related to making art as an Undocumented person and these ‘findings’ may not relate to all people within the Undocumented community. However, the significant amount of fieldwork, interviews, and multi-medium data collection, as well as clear examples from the data, should show that these trends are one way in which art within the Undocumented community can be understood.

‘Findings’: Art as Emotional Empowerment?

Art Became My Window

Through speaking with Youth within the Undocumented community in California, one of the clearest trends found relates to the ability of individuals to express their feelings around complex intersectional experiences and struggles through art. Put simply, Rolberto (an Undocumented Youth who uses music to express himself), says “writing [music and songs] has helped me all my life to express all my feelings. Break-ups, romances, injustice, frustration, dreams” (Interview, December 2011). Esperanza, an Undocumented Latina who paints, writes poetry and does spoken word in Southern California, explains that painting provides her with “a safe outlet to express an idea, thoughts, feelings. [It is] great for experimenting with different mediums to express one self” (Interview January 2012). Speaking about writing poetry, she comments that the positives of using poetry are that “whenever I am feeling a certain emotion, I feel the need to simply write it down” (Interview January 2012). Speaking to the ways in which this has impacted her life, she notes that writing poetry and letters to God has become

a safe outlet to express myself, allowing myself to simply ‘let it out’. I write letters to God, which is another way of feeling spiritually connected and letting my prayers be derived in writing. I struggle with depression, having been living with it for a few years now, so I write about my experience with that, but don’t share these writing with others, fearful it can be perceived as ‘too negative, painful, draining’, and don’t want loved ones to feel overwhelmed with my own pain. I also write about feelings relating to something personal going on in the present moment, from the past, or concerns about loved ones or political climate it. It feels as though once I put my thoughts and feelings into paper, it helps me to put thing into perspective and be at ease with myself (Interview January 2012).

Esperanza's comment that she does not want those she loves to be overwhelmed with her own emotions and experience may relate in part to a traditional element of Latin@ culture, in which it can be considered inappropriate to discuss one's individual struggles with close friends and family members. Some participants specifically mentioned the fact that the culture of their traditional Latin@ families did not give them space to talk about their unique stresses and tensions as Undocumented Youth. In response to this, making sketches, paintings, music, or poetry on their own, art became a safe place for many Undocumented Latin@ Youth to engage their own feelings without threatening the values of their family, even as they may have questioned specific elements of traditional Latin@ culture in the content of their art pieces. Andrea, a Latina artist who is part of the Undocumented community Southern California explains how this impacted her need to express herself through art, saying:

My family and the way I grew up had a lot to do with my interest in art as a way of expressing myself. I grew up repressing many feelings, naturally, because I grew up in a very typical *machista* household where we weren't taught how to express our emotions, the idea of talking to your parents or siblings about the way your heart felt was non existence, it was even ridiculous! By the time I was a teenager I had a lot of issues I needed so solve, lots of accumulated emotions, but I didn't know how to express them verbally, I was dying inside and needed a window to ventilate the putrid-ness inside. Art became my window, my guiding hand who walked me out of the darkness (Interview April, 2012).

The fact that Andrea found it difficult to express her emotions to her Latin@ family made her search for another way to deal with them. As she explains, art became a window where she was able to express her experiences without challenging those who were close to her by talking about her experience. This silence within the family, specifically around discussing experiences related to being Undocumented, was mentioned in many other interviews. Participants who were unable to discuss their experiences with those closest to them often found art to be an important way of dealing with their struggles. However, not all participants experienced this pressure to be silent from their Latin@ families. For example, when asked about the role that his family played in his life as Undocumented and Queer, J.S. (an Undocumented and Queer Latino artist) explains, "every person is different. In my case, they played a huge role. My mother especially, she always pushed me to speak my mind and love myself" (Interview November 2011). While not everyone expressed themselves through art because they felt pushed to keep their struggles to themselves within their family, every person interviewed mentioned that they were able to express their

feelings in some way through their art. Moreover, art was often talked about as a place in which the complex identity intersections were able to be presented through simple and tangible representations of their own experiences. Andrea talks about the way in which these creative expressions are not just about one aspect of her identity but are related to many complex aspects of her structural positionality. She explains,

what inspires me to make art is the world itself, the realities we live in, whether personal or social, or even global, it is our human experience and how we relate to the world we live in, how it shapes us, how it hurts us, how it heals us, how it guides us, how it protects us but above all how it makes us FEEL. It's the world I live in which with everything it has to offer, good and bad, pushes me to paint when I can't explain with words how it makes me FEEL (Andrea, Interview April, 2012).

Looking at the possibilities of art to show complex intersectional identities with a detailed example can show how this trend plays out for individuals and their artistic creations. Esperanza explains this in the following response to the question: Can you tell me what the heart and barbed wire in your painting (below) represent and why you chose to include these?



Illustration 2.2: Painting by Esperanza, Wired Fence Heart

The heart represents my childhood pain and what I was feeling at that time, literally heart broken. There is nail puncturing the heart, which represents that childhood wound. The wired fence, is a representation of defense mechanism for boys not to come close to it, I guessed closing itself, fearful of getting heart again. But the wire also represents the pain created by “border walls” and how my current immigration status creates pain as well. In the center of the heart there is yellow light connected it with the yellow light that provides sort of a shell for the heart, which represents the healing energy of some form of

higher power that is there with me, helping my heart heal, protecting me and allowing my heart to giving and receiving love. The Yellow color represents hope and spiritual connectedness (Esperanza Interview, January 2012).

In her answer to this question, Esperanza shows that through representation, this art piece allows her to express herself on a number of personal experiences and struggles. She explains how her unique experience as a person at the intersection of being a womyn, Undocumented, a migrant, a member of a transnational family, and a spiritual being can be at times be painful. Yet, she finds the ability to sourround her traumatic and difficult experiences with healing and hope. This powerful piece is just one of the many works that Undocumented Youth are creating to express their feelings and struggles through art. But the process of putting their feelings down was not a simple one- Youth did not magically find empowerment through the brilliant colors and sounds that came out of their creativity. The process involved in making art about the Undocumented experience is complex and, often, a struggle in itself.

Art: A Struggle in itself

While the artwork was often talked about in a positive light, many participants reported an initial period of fear related to showing others their work. Some participants talked about this lasting for years, others talked about it in terms of a specific time in their life. During this time, respondents seem to have felt awkward or noticed internal tensions while they navigated through their feelings by making art. The following are a few excepts in which individuals talked about how it felt to start the process of putting their feelings into paintings, poems, videos, or other creative mediums:

I felt nervous (as I always do when sharing my story) (Jaime Interview, January 2012).

For me, even though I've had an interest in being a writer and reflecting on this experience for a long time, it was very hard to put things down on paper (Anon Interview, April 2012).

I felt terrified of making myself vulnerable, especially during open mic's when I didn't know many of the people attending. Once I shared myself with others (at small poetry workshop or gathering), I was able to connect with them at a deeper level, but still feel fearful of making myself too vulnerable (Esperanza Interview, January 2012).

As seen above, beginning the period of producing an artistic expression or showing art to other people for the first time was often a period in which participants felt vulnerable and afraid. This trend is also apparent

from Undocumented Youth who blogged about their experiences making art. Some people related this experience to a process of overcoming shyness, explaining that making art has helped them to share their struggles in a way they would have been uncomfortable doing otherwise. It is important to note here that hardly anyone reported that the reason they make art is because it is enjoyable or easy. In fact, only one participant mentioned that they find this art fun and only one participant said that they started doing art for activism in the Undocumented community because they were good at it. This is not to say that making art is not fun or that these artists are not fantastic creators (most are); instead, this shows some of the emotional complexities that Undocumented Youth face when trying to tell their stories or share their feelings about being Undocumented with others.

The shyness and fear many Undocumented Youth in this community experienced may be related to negative stereotypes about Undocumented people and their experiences. At times, this stereotyping leads to personal experiences with others (outside the Undocumented community) who criminalize the community and talk about ‘illegals’ in cruel ways. It is likely that these interactions, as well as larger movements of Xenophobia, and pressure to pass as documented to avoid deportation gave participants legitimate fear about the consequences of expressing their struggles through art. It is also important to recognize that, since many Undocumented Youth begin the processes of making art about their intimate experiences on their own, they may have had very little feedback related to the quality of their art. This lack of feedback may make it difficult to gain confidence about the audio-visual quality of their art. Also, as many people injected their experiences of pain and traumas from being Undocumented in their work, it is likely that these initial fears relate to thinking that other people might not agree with or understand their very personal art-narratives.

When asked for advice to other Undocumented Youth who are trying to express themselves through art, many participants addressed the difficulty of getting through these fears. These participants also encouraged others to be open to multiple mediums of expression and see what felt right to them while using their creativity to confront stereotypes and make art about their struggles regardless of what others

think about what they produce. The following are a few examples of advice that addresses this moment of fear that others may be working through:

No one knows your story better than you, so why not tell it like it is and not let it get distorted by those who think they know what you're going through (Jaime interview January 2012).

My advise to people who want to share their struggle through art is: at the beginning don't worry.. es mas, don't ever worry about how your art, whether it be music, poetry, graffiti, or visual art is going to be perceived by the people around you. Finding 'the right' way to express our struggles is a struggle on its on, so don't add an extra load on your shoulders by worrying about what your mom is going to think or what your girlfriend is going to say, none of that matters, just express what you *feel* inside. Todo eso que no puedes decir con palabras⁴, just say it, somehow, whatever way works for you, embrace it and let that way be your guiding hand out of the dark (Andrea, Interview April 2012).

To simply allow themselves the opportunity to experiment with different art forms and find one that feels right for them. Once they find what they like, to simply allow themselves to do it, and not think too much about the rules, what others would think of what they create, but simply allow the creative to flow (Esperanza, Interview January 2012).

As artists, I guess sometimes we're very afraid of how others will receive what we make. I myself am very bad with criticism. But you know what? You just have to see past that and put your work out there. There's really no secret, it's just a matter of getting to work (J.S., Interview November 2011).

These reflections show that an important process for participants to move from doing art in isolation to using it for social justice related movements or showing it to others was overcoming the fear that other people would not appreciate or understand the experiences and artistic representations that have been created. The comment that others should be open to various forms and mediums reflects that being open to new different forms of communication is one way to overcome this period of fear. As Esperanza mentions, there is no one path that will bring people through this tension, but instead it is necessary for people to find the right form to fit their own struggles through experimentation with their own feelings. Speaking about this period of fear, especially for Undocumented artists who do not identify as artists, D (an Undocumented Queer Latina in Southern California), explained "from my perspective, I don't think that they ever thought of themselves as such [artists]. I think they were just looking for an outlet to convey their emotions without being criminalized. It's the only way that one can resist" (field-notes, April 2012). In this initial stage, the

⁴ All of the things you can not say with words

point of doing art was usually not about becoming artists. Instead, participants faced their struggles by writing, painting, dancing about them. While emotionally difficult, many participants seemed to have at least partially overcome this initial period of tension and fear related to the production of art, often finding incredible strength and personal empowerment on the other side⁵.

Impacts of Expression on the Individual- From fear to empowerment

Creative expression about their emotions helped Undocumented Youth who were part of this project to find empowerment in a number of ways. Making and showing art about their experiences helped participants to heal from their traumas, connect to others, understand and reclaim their identity, and feel powerful. Some participants were further along in this process than others at the time of the interview. In fact, some had gone through incredible development from the time in which they began making art about their struggles and felt very confident about their narratives and art. Other participants, however, apologized to me for their art or were surprised that I was interested in interviewing them as artists. This section will overview how making art impacted individuals in these ways, often leading to feelings of empowerment and strength.

Art as Healing

Many of the participants who were interviewed discussed the ways in which art became a therapeutic way of dealing with their struggles⁶. These feelings came up when I asked the questions “can you tell me about how the process of making art feels to you?” and “how does it feel to show your art to others? Some people talked about this process in conjunction with other elements in their lives that they found to be therapeutic. For example, Sofia, a student and activist in Southern California explains that

⁵ Δ (Response to research assistant): How are the feelings of being vulnerable because of documentation status negotiated versus these feelings of vulnerability in making art? Are they being negotiated together? How does this negotiation with one impact the negotiations with the other? Might both be happening at the same time?

⁶ Δ (Response to research assistant) Key questions to consider in further research around this might be: How does art, even done as a momentary doodle, serve as an outlet to this community? Is this technique specifically helpful in moments of ‘heightened vulnerability’?

“laughing, friends, and familia are my healing medicine and dancing makes things so much better. I express myself better in writing and poetry and enjoy art in all shapes and forms” (Sofia, field notes September 2011). Here, Sofia linked dancing, writing poetry and using multiple mediums of expression to be important elements of overcoming her struggles, while also placing importance on friends, family and laughter.

The importance of humor through art as an artistic therapy came up in other places as well. For example, Anon commented, “I think I found the art, almost out of necessity... I think humor is very therapeutic and the drawings, lends itself a little more to humor than the writing” (Anon Interview April 2012). In April 2012, a trend developed where Undocumented Youth art activists started sharing Undocu-memes (public photos explained humorously through one or more short sentences of computer text related to issues in the community). Speaking about these in an interview from colorlines.com, one Youth explained “Humor helps you escape all of the seriousness. That’s what humor is for, to express this crazy reality. It’s funny how you find humor about your own situation. We are politically aware about our reality and we make fun of it” (L.S. in Novoa 2012). Bringing up this particular quote through their blogs and social media sites, participants said that they also found humor and comedy to be a very important part of reshaping the way immigrant issues are talked about in public spaces. Undocu-memes, online videos, and comedy nights are some ways in which the Undocumented community is able to laugh at its struggles. It is important to note, however, that making these issues into jokes does not replace their personal feelings about being Undocumented. Speaking about Undocu-memes, one student explained “this all speaks to how we’re human. We’re just people. We laugh about our status, but just because it’s funny, that doesn’t mean we’re not angry and frustrated. These memes stimulate conversation and express very clear ideas about what we’re feeling and our politics, but also that there is internal satisfaction being able to say what we think” (T.U. in Novoa 2012). Instead of replacing feelings of anger, art that uses humor allows Undocumented Youth to laugh- often together- at the struggles that they face. This in some ways shows the complexities that exist within the experience of being Undocumented.



Illustration 2.3: Undocu-Meme, Then I Said... I'm Not Separating Families

While humor was an important element for some participants, others focused more on reflection and self-healing in relation to their artistic process. Unlike humor, this was a personal form of healing that often happened in more private spaces, even when it was inspired by more public events or workshops. For example, Esperanza explained that before making one of her paintings, she went to a art/ therapy workshop. From this experience, she found that she was able to go home and extend this workshop's impact on her life on her own. She explains,

Painting is a form of self-healing for me... I created this piece when I was home alone. I didn't plan on how it would look like. In the fall of 2011, I attended an art therapy workshop. I could say the experience from this workshop and experimenting with the creative process as a form of therapeutic healing encouraged me to paint, simply express how I felt, without having anything in mind or planning how this painting would look like at the end (Esperanza discussing a specific painting Interview January 2012).

Here, Esperanza shows that through trying out new ways of expressing herself, she was able to express how she felt without an intended audience or outcome. Through this process, she was able to use painting as a form of therapy to work through her many and complex personal traumas. Other participants had done this form of art therapy as well; however, many of these pieces ended up being deeply personal and were rarely brought into public spaces for art shows or fundraiser events. While often kept in personal and private spaces, these pieces are important elements, both in the healing process and in the path towards stronger

activism in the public sphere, as participants gained confidence and strength when reflecting on this art or when showing it to others. When asked who has seen the art work she discussed in the above statement, Esperanza explained “I did share the piece with my sister and she gave me feedback. She loved the art work. I shared with her what encouraged me to paint it. She is the only one that knows and perhaps one other person” (Interview January 2012). While few people saw this piece, Esperanza was able to get support from those closest to her, allowing her to share her struggles with those she loves and experience positive reinforcement about her artistic abilities and emotions.

In addition to therapeutic spaces of humor and self-healing, art also allowed participants to overcome oppressions felt because of their intersecting identities. A major way in which this was seen was around the Undocu-Queer experience. One Undocumented and Queer artist explained it well, saying “I understand that some of my art might not speak to everyone, but we can all be healers, instead of waiting for others in the straight world to accept our identities, we can put artwork out there that rebuilds our Queerdoms. *Somos fuertes [we are strong]* and our dualities are *medicina [medicine]* (Y: fieldnotes Decmeber 2011). Here, Y not only shows that art has been a form of healing for him; he opens up that healing to those around him who also experience violence and pain due to being outsiders in a predominately heterosexual and documented world. He also points to the ability of artwork to rebuild this world, mentioning the strength one accrues through their struggles and reconstructing dualities experienced by the Undocu-Queer community as medicine. While Y does not define what he means by medicine, J.S., another Undocumented and Queer Latino artist, talks about the fact that his complex identity gave him the ability to be creative and make change. He explains,

for a while, I was very angry at the fact that I was gay. I was angry that I was undocumented. I was being blinded by the anger and not seeing the fact that because I was different, I had an advantage over people who were ‘normal’. My identities gave me the creativity that many dream of. I used my challenges to create change within myself and I tried to show this on my writing and art (Interview, November 2012).

As J.S. mentions, working through issues related to identity helped him to see that his struggles have made him special and that his artistic voice is thus unique and that his perspective can be a powerful critique.

Through this process, J.S. moved from feeling only anger to also feeling a sense of empowerment related to his ability to express first hand some of the struggles of Undocumented Youth.

While creative expression is used in different ways and for different purposes within the Undocumented community, it is clear that throughout these spaces art can be a form of therapeutic healing related to complex traumas experienced by Undocumented Youth. As seen in the beginning of this chapter, through a review of ways in which Undocumented Youth continue to experience trauma, sadness and oppression, it is clear that Undocumented Youth still do experience very difficult situations in their daily and emotional lives. The participants in this project continued to have incredibly difficult and complex lives which included emotional highs and lows during different periods of the year. However, the ability of art to be a personal healing force that helped many participants to navigate their difficult struggles is evident across the data. Participants in this project showed that this healing may be experienced through the art of telling or hearing a good joke about Undocumented issues in a public space, through personal and private reflection on one's own experience, or by reclaiming complex and oppressed experiences as powerful identities. The open spaces that art creates around issues often silenced in mainstream areas can give people a site in which change can happen from within. It is important to mention that the ability of art to heal is not something that happens overnight or at one specific time in the lives of Undocumented Youth. As this community continues to experience and face Xenophobic hate and discrimination, Undocumented Youth continue to create new and fascinating ways to voice their experiences and heal from their struggles through ever expanding art methods⁷. However, emotional empowerment is not the only way in which art impacted the lives of participants.

Art as a Connection to Others

⁷ Δ: To use assistant's words "migrant youth have contested their position... through cultural production, in this case art", showing the importance of the migrant imaginary when the narratives of these Youth are erased. Further discussions on this might look at the ways in which Undocumented Youth understand and navigate their vulnerable position and identity through these migrant imaginaries.

In addition to healing, art in the Undocumented community allowed people to connect in important and meaningful ways. To begin with, the art process itself helped participants to connect to those making art with them. One way in which this was seen was in community art projects, such as mural making, media for social change group workshops, poetry writing workshops, and group poster painting for events. For example, while speaking about the experience of conceptualizing and then painting a large immigrant friendly mural, Juan (an Undocumented Latino in Northern California) explained that the process made him feel very close to the other Youths that were also part of the mural. In addition to planning out what the mural would be about through collaboration with other Undocumented Youth who were involved, Juan explained that sometimes people would walk by the group and heckle the young Latinas while they were painting the mural. While wanting to protect them from the insults, he said that this made him realize and think about some of the struggles that Latina Youth face. He also talked about the way in which these insults made the group feel the need to band together and support each other like a family. Here, Juan shows that he was able to recognize and connect to struggles that other Undocumented Youth experience, such as the unique struggles the Latinas in the group experienced making the mural. Juan was able to do this at the same time as he formed strong emotional bonds with those he connected to while painting (Juan Interview, November 2011). Other participants also mentioned that they were able to connect emotionally to other Undocumented Youth through these communal art based experiences. For example, Esperanza explains “once I shared myself with others (at small poetry workshop or gathering), I was able to connect with them at a deeper level... The blessing of doing this was that I was able to connect with others and see their humanity and accept my own humanness” (Interview January 2012). The experience that Juan and Esperanza are commenting on was evident in most art -workshops that I attended. The art that was done in a communal fashion allowed people from different backgrounds and experiences to come together for a shared goal or shared experience, in which they were able to use representation to present their complex identities and struggles in a clear manner. Participants still reported feeling fear in the early stages of this process, but the support from those around them often allowed them to find a sense of safety and love in these spaces.

In addition to connecting to others through collaborative art projects, the content of the art made by Undocumented Youth allowed them to connect to their friends and family members in new and important ways. For one thing, the stories told within the art work of participants often included family experiences or family members, although through the eyes of the participants. One example of this is evident in Gloria's video narrative (provided at the beginning of this chapter), where Gloria talks about her mothers' experience trying to survive the deportation of Glorias father and brother. Speaking up about their own traumas and struggles through art, Undocumented Youth are able to express their unique position through a family trauma. Gloria does this by speaking about her own feelings of fear and responsibility as well as the way her life changed because of the changes in those around her because of the deportations. The content of her video thus explained her experience to the broader community, but also to her own family and friends that watched her video. This form of connection may hold some tension, especially as speaking out about family experiences might be seen as inappropriate to some family members. Speaking to the challenges that he felt when depicting family members in his visual Diary, Anon explains

There have been areas where family members who have said don't do that or don't go there, sometimes explicitly sometimes implicitly, and I definitely wanted to respect that as much as possible. But sometimes I do question it of why is it you don't want me to go there, and I have this view of that experience and how does it compare to yours. I think its just they haven't come to terms with being undocumented in the same way I have (Interview April 2012).

As Anon explains here, the navigations around the presentation of private family experiences may be tensional experiences themselves. In fact, participants reported having a strong commitment to preserving their families' integrity in their artistic expressions even when doing so meant leaving certain aspects out or showing them only through abstract methods. However, the process of discussing these events and feelings with their family members was one way in which Undocumented Youth artists connected to their friends and family members, whether or not the content ended up including the family related narratives. Also, participants were able to think through some of the experiences of their family members while making art related to their family, at times understanding the struggles of those close to them in new ways. This means of connecting to others is important because it allows Undocumented Youth artists to dialogue with those closest to them about the discrimination that they face due to their

documentation status. It also, however, allows them to show that they know being Undocumented is not only their struggle but a difficult experience which impacts others in their family as well.

In addition to connecting to others through the process of making art, Undocumented Youth were able to connect to the broader community in important ways. At times, the art that was created in private spaces or through collaborative workshops was used to help raise money or awareness around Undocumented Issues. This often occurred through community art shows, which happened multiple times in San Diego, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area during this study. At these art shows, art and personal narratives were often displayed anonymously to protect the Undocumented Youth and their families from being deported. One such event, which happened in Southern California in the Spring of 2011, included photographs of shadows of Undocumented Youth who were not out with their status. Accompanying these were narratives about their experiences and struggles. Speaking about this event a year later, Jennifer, an Undocumented Korean Youth, explained

When I shared my story at the art show it felt really good, I was able to come and see people who liked it and it just felt really good to be like that, in a group of people who were happy I'm here (in College). It was cool to share my story but it was also good to see other people and what they thought of it, it made me feel strong inside (Jennifer, December 2012).

Here, Jennifer shows that the art show not only impacted others through her artistic narrative, it impacted her because she got to see other people supporting her even though she was not out to them as one of the artists in the show. Other participants echoed similar sentiments related to the ways in which showing their creative expression to others helped them to connect to the community and feel empowered through the process. Some examples of this trend are found in the following interviews selections:

It feels encouraging and inspiring knowing that one's art work can impact someone else's life or touch them in a special way. Once I get off stage, I feel accomplished and feel this way of challenging myself is a way to build my self esteem and confidence (Esperanza January 2012- about sharing her struggles publicly through spoken word events).

It feels nice to be able to share my story with a different community. A community that is also oppressed (Jaime January 2012- Interview about sharing his narrative with others through an online video in which he uses only sign language)

Since these drawings are small I have only shown them to the people I'm currently staying with and they also like how they are coming out so far, and that makes me feel good, I like to see their smiles when they see something that they can relate to (Andrea April 2012- about her watercolor paintings conceptualized with the help of collaboration but made by her in private).

It felt good because for a while we didn't think we were going to be able to get it done, there was times when things weren't working right and we had to figure stuff out but in the end it felt powerful to say these things that the mural says and to see myself up there where other people have to recognize that I exist (Juan November 2011- on completing a mural in Northern California).

Esperanza, Jaime, Andrea and Juan all talked about good feelings that emerged when they were able to share their work with others. Unlike revealing their art to family members, showing their work at events or to people outside of their families allowed participants to connect to broader communities and share their struggles while witnessing people, who did not know them intimately, respond positively to their narratives. Sharing their experiences as Undocumented Youth through artistic expression, participants found that others were able to listen, learn and even relate to segments of their struggles. Showing a completed work to the broader community also allowed participants to feel like they accomplished something that they could be proud of. The lack of attack from those outside the Undocumented community was a surprise to some participants, especially those who had felt fear related to sharing their struggles with people who might discriminate against them because of negative stereotypes. Anon describes how this trend manifested in his life when he responds to the question "how does it feel to put completed art pieces out to the community". He explains,

I've been surprised... by the positive ways things have been received then by confusion around the message... The essays I've written about being undocumented took a lot to get out, psychologically and because few people embrace that identity in that way. For me, that was important to do those, they have been an important part of my academic work. And these pieces [sketches] are tied to that... Because I did it through facebook, I knew that it was a safe community and they were my friends I was sharing it with primarily, so I think I took some risks knowing that they were my friends... I just print them [sketches] out and put them up... And it surprised me that it grew some feet. My goal was, some of the students who were my friends on facebook who were AB540 students... And they weren't the ones to respond right away, it was other people who had no interest in this area before and they were really positive. The only time I ever received negative comments were when [a popular online magazine] put some drawings up by me and the trolls (you know, anti immigrant readers) began commenting on it. But they weren't commenting on the art, they were commenting on me as a person and what that represented... the art has been effective... The [negative] impact that I thought I was going to face, I haven't. (Anon April 2012).

As Anon describes, art is a form that can be utilized to share experiences with others in a way that academic work is often unable to do. However, as Anon's description shows, the intended audience of AB540 students or the Undocumented community was not the only group that benefited from the sharing of knowledge about the Undocumented experience. In fact, as Anon's sketches show, Undocu-art, when shown online, in galleries, at community events, or even in more private spaces, has increased the visibility of Undocumented issues to broader communities, often creating allies. This is not inherently an element of art; not all art brings people together or helps them to connect to broader communities. Art within the Undocumented community, however, holds potential to dispel stereotypes of 'illegal aliens', at times confronting them head on. Through this process, those outside of the Undocumented community are able to reshape their understandings of migration politics. This is not to say that all those exposed to this art will or do become allies or activists for migrant rights; however, those who are able to connect emotionally to these struggles through art may have a hard time turning their heads away from injustices related to Undocumented experiences. In other words, by sharing their stories (anonymously or not) to the outside communities through art, these personal connections may push others to question their own understandings of migrant struggles.

Learning and Art

Along with connecting to others and healing, making art allowed some Undocumented Youth to learn about themselves. In addition to working through their personal emotions and healing from traumas, some participants reported learning about powerful counter h8stories⁸ that impacted the way in which they understood themselves and their struggles. This can be seen clearly in Glorias narrative, as she explains,

There's a piece of the mural that looks like me, holding a mega-phone. And basically coming out of the megaphone is indigenous language coming out from where I'm talking and like that's cool and I made a connection to that, I feel that kind of connecting me to

⁸ As stated in more detail in the introduction 1, footnote 1, "h8stories" is used here instead of "history"; the sideways infinity sign reclaims h8story to be a dynamic and complex telling of various narratives throughout time.

my roots, I really love my culture, just learning the history about that and I feel like that's something very powerful.

As Gloria explains, she learned about indigenous concepts and ideas during the collaborative process to make the mural. She claimed these as parts of her own and her families roots, explaining that she loves her culture and finds power in understanding her own indigenous heritage. The mural, which focused on struggles of Undocumented Youth in education, militarization, *la frontera*, and in poor Latin American contexts, thus utilized concepts of indigeneity in relation to decolonial struggles. While not related to school or formal education, this mural project helped Gloria to learn about historic pasts that are often erased by mainstream movements. Gloria learned about this history through a model of communal education, which art is highly applicable for. The ability of creative expression to inspire learning, however, also occurred when art was done individually. For example, Riccardo, an Undocumented Youth in Northern California, comments on his blog that learning about the art and overall achievements of people whom he identifies with was a powerful experience. He also says that it was helpful for him to learn about his Mexican culture and history in the process of making art, which he noted helped him to hold onto aspirations about a specific career (field-notes, January 2012). Not all artists mentioned this aspect of the art process. However, those that did linked it to feelings of personal and community empowerment.

Empowerment as the Outcome- Summary & Places Art fell apart.

This section has worked to understand some of the ways in which art has been an important element to emotional empowerment of Undocumented Youth in California. While many respondents had reported feelings of fear and anxiety related to making art at certain times of their lives, it was clear that overcoming this fear and actively making art lead to feelings of accomplishment and self-healing from traumatic migrant experiences. Working through complex and intersecting identities, as well as finding ways to laugh at the tensions around Undocumented issues were also key ways that art allowed participants to find therapeutic means of dealing with their experiences. Also, connecting to other Undocumented artists, family and friends, or the broader community enabled participants to find a sense of support regardless of their decision to present the art anonymously or through being named. In addition, Undocumented Youth were at times empowered through the art process because they learned counter-

narrative related histories, which helped them to better understand their struggles in relation to anti-colonial struggles.

It is clear from this data that art is an important component when trying to understand how Undocumented Youth become 'resilient' in the face of their many oppressions. While many Youth do achieve emotional empowerment through this process, it is not something that happens easily or on its own. In fact, Undocumented Youth have often done the hard work of moving through their traumas, creating new imaginary worlds, resolving internal tensions, reaching out to connect to others, and being open minded enough to learn from themselves and their peers in the process. This section has mentioned places where the labor of art has been useful in helping Undocumented Youth find strength and feelings of empowerment through their struggles. However, there are times during this study in which art did not lead to empowerment.

One way in which art has not always led to empowerment is through tensions within groups who were creating communal art projects. For example, while trying to create a painted banner discussing the DREAM act, one group I was working with had a fight about what the banner should say. Some people wanted to talk about the importance of the DREAM Act for Undocumented Youth by showing the ways it could help them reach citizenship. However, some group members were uncomfortable doing this because it meant promoting the military component of the DREAM Act, which some group members felt was problematic. Giving citizenship for military service, they argued, was a problem because it meant that Undocumented Youth who were not valedictorians might have to give up their lives in colonial wars. In the interviews with Undocumented art activists, I saw that this was a large site of tension across communities. This tension led to a fight that kept the group who had been painting the poster from completing their task. The outcome of this was that this group did not end up even attending the event that they were planning to make the banner for. Here, larger ideological tensions kept the group from finding the healing, connecting or learning that might have been possible if they had worked through these ideas. However, the fact that youth on both sides stood up for their beliefs and did not give in to making a DREAM Act poster that they did not agree with shows that Undocumented Youth art activists use their agency to create art that they feel

represents their struggles and ideologies. This may be one reason why intersectional struggles, such as being Undocu-Queer, have gained support within the Undocu-artist scene. While the art project here was unsuccessful in supporting this particular event and poster, it is important to remember that the conversations that opened up during this moment may still be important in organizing for Undocumented rights, especially if they gave Undocumented Youth a space to confront their structural oppressions and learn from the experiences of others.

In addition to idea-based tensions which halted the art process, some participants reported that they had difficulty at times finding empowerment through certain mediums. For example, Esperanza explains that spoken word was at times a difficult form for her to share her experience. She comments, “I found it personally draining, when creating pieces where I looked into expressing deep/painful uncomfortable feelings. I also found it a bit difficult when it came to detaching emotionally; when hearing other poets share traumatic/painful experiences through poetry. I have an easy time empathizing and I am very compassionate, but have not learned how to separate other’s pain from my pain” (Interview, January 2012). While writing poetry allowed Esperanza to overcome some of her own trauma, sharing this intimacy in a public space was not only a scary thing; it opened Esperanza up to taking on the emotional struggles of others through their poetry. While speaking about her experience publicly may have led to some healing, she reports that it is difficult for Undocumented Youth to hear the traumatic stories of others, possibly as it may mirror so closely their own. Esperanza still did find this space important enough that she continues to participate in Spoken word events in Southern California. However, her painting and poetry provide her with a space to handle these emotional performances. Some participants interviewed were at various places within the sphere of academia themselves. While many of these persons used academia as a place to find structural power, they commented that their work within academia is often not respected, accessible or relevant to making change for their communities. Specifically academic writing, such as essays and journals, did not bring up strong feelings of emotional empowerment for Undocumented Youth in academia. However, while their academic work was still very important to them, many participants in this category resorted to grassroots art activism, even within academia, to meet these needs. For example, Anon explained that he started drawing political cartoons during his lunch breaks at the University. Others

organized Undocu-art based events, panels, speakers, clubs and off campus organizations to work for Undocumented rights. These involvements did not seem to be appreciated by the broader academic community in the same way that other extra-curricular or supplementary activities may be. While writing in academia is not often looked at as an art form, creating journal articles and books that are interesting, captivating, or that say something important about the world is a form of creative expression. However, those who were in academia reported finding their non-academic artwork to be more useful for empowerment of themselves and their communities.

Analysis- Gender, Sexuality and Empowerment

While all participants reported feelings of empowerment through the art process, the ways in which they commented on this varied at times by gender and sexuality. When asked about what it felt like to make art, womyn and Queer men tended to talk about this process in more complex ways. These participants often discussed multiple emotions they felt at different times, often going in depth into their discussion without prompting. On the other hand, straight Latino male participants mentioned feelings, but did not tend to talk at length about these feelings without being prompted. Also, both Queer and straight men tended to talk more about humor and the ability to find strength through laughter, whereas few womyn talked about humor during their interviews. Instead, womyn tended to discuss self-reflection and healing. Latino men also mentioned self-reflection and healing through art, but again did not tend to go into depth about this process without being prompted⁹.

⁹ Δ: As Damien notes in his reflection, open conversations around these issues may be held in male- based spaces that I do not have access to because of my gender. Also, as Damien notes, because I am not only seen as a womyn but as a white womyn, the participants in this research project most likely saw me as an outsider to their communities in a number of ways. Damien also mentions the conflicting powers that may have been in tension during my interviews, specifically with Latino males. As a white womyn graduate student, I do indeed have access to power in a way that young activist Latino artists do not. This may have been a point of tension, in which Latino participants may not have felt comfortable expressing deep personal feelings around. Although I did develop close relationships with a number of participants, these relationships were mostly with Queer and Latina participants.

In addition to the ways in which participants answered questions, gender and sexuality also played a big role in status and achievement of Undocumented Youth. One way in which this was clear was the fact that throughout California, the organizations tended to have male leader figures. At times these were official leaders; at others they were informal leaders. Either way, getting the trust and support of these male leaders was an important part of being able to complete this research. However, many of the Womyn I talked to worked more in the informal zone or else their main activist work focused on Womyn centered spaces, such as domestic labor issues or putting themselves through college. While noting that leaders tended to be male in this community, these male leaders showed a serious dedication to confronting gender roles and recognizing their own power as males. In fact, many of these men cited influential womyn in their lives as being important role models. Others actually commented on internal tensions related to Latino masculinity while reflecting on their experiences making art. These male leaders also were actively working to try and take the womyn in their groups and community seriously, treating them as intelligent and powerful artists and organizers. Regardless of their dedication to womyn, these men were not able to control the way the public sphere treated and saw Womyn in the Undocumented community. Through this study, a number of young Latino males who were artists gained some prestige and upward mobility through their art. However, the Latinas who participated on this project tended to continue to struggle to get by, many of them working full time as nannies or housekeepers even while going to school or taking care of their family. Queer Latinas tended to have the most difficult struggles. This is not to say that all young men were recognized for their art. Especially for youngest Latino male youth who were part of this study, getting by was also a constant struggle. Latino males who were more poor tended to have a harder time succeeding in school, whereas Latinas in this study often did well in school. The structural locations of individuals in this study had very little to do with the quality of their art. In other words, Queer Latinas, Latinas and poor young Latinos in this study made fantastic and incredibly powerful art, although their inability to come out in the same ways that other participants could made it difficult for them to support themselves or be recognized formally in larger communities for their art.

While gender and sexuality impacted participants experience finding empowerment through art, even those who were not well recognized for their work reported that they did find healing which led to

feelings of strength regardless of their documentation status. Also, when asked about the role their families played in their art or activism, all participants talked about their family being very important to them. This was also seen in their responses to other questions, where they often discussed individual family members as being important sources of support for them as artists and activists. The support of family and friends was one way in which participants were able to overcome times of personal struggle. Thus, while this chapter has looked more at individual and collective processes of creative expression for personal empowerment, it is important to remember that these individuals are working within families that are also impacted by and impacting struggles for migrant rights.

Conclusion

Summary

This chapter focuses on the ways in which art can be a coping technique that leads to empowerment for Youth within the Undocumented community. First, I explained some of the struggles and traumas that Undocumented Youth have often experienced or faced in their daily lives. Next, this chapter outlined other academic works that have shown Undocumented Youth to be particularly resilient at times in the face of these struggles. However, as these texts do not address the process in which Youth become resilient, this chapter outlined literature that shows some ways in which creative expression has been shown to be a means of empowerment within oppressed communities, especially through art therapy and individual narratives of Undocumented figures who have pointed to their own survival through art. Through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter used transcripts and field notes to explore ways in which participants found empowerment through creative processes.

The main findings of these interviews showed that art is one way in which Undocumented Youth may become resilient through their struggles. However, the data shows that this process is a complex one, which includes periods of fear, personal reflection, healing, sharing, connecting, re-reflecting, re-creating, learning and teaching. The ways in which individuals experienced empowerment through the art process was impacted by their intersectional identities as well as the support of their friends and families. While

some participants reported difficulties expressing themselves through specific artistic mediums, all participants were able to find ways to use their personal agency to create vivid and complex art-based work that empowered them in some way.

It is not a fantastic leap to say that art is an empowering force in the lives of many Undocumented Youth. Art has been shown by therapists, Latin American historians and Undocumented academics to be an important space of growth and organizing for social justice. However, this chapter re-examined the art process to show the unique ways in which this process impacts and heals Undocumented Youth in California. But are these findings relevant? What is the significance of individual and communal healing? This chapter showed ways in which art impacts individuals, often by healing them and allowing them to connect to others. But, what else does creative expression do within this community? The following chapters will attempt to answer this question. First, I will use the grassroots art made by Undocumented Youth in California to briefly explore movements for educational justice across California. Next, I will look at the use of this art in organizing and mobilization for Queer rights within the Undocumented community. Finally, I will include a self-reflection using my own art to reflect on this project and its findings before concluding this thesis.



Illustration 3.1: A Youth Video-Recording Another Youth During an Encuentro Sharing

::El Capítulo Número Tres::

TestimoniOs y Sueños: Struggles de Education y Mas

Esperanza, an Undocumented Youth who uses painting, writing and spoken words to talk about her struggles, pointed out that art is “a great way to communicate a message, a statement” (Interview January 2012). Supporting this statement, art activists scholars have argued that, while social justice grassroots art works “tend to be creative, colorful, joyful, carnivalesque, and humorous” (Firat and Kuryel 2010, 12), they should not be seen as fluffy expressions that simply add excitement to events and movements. Instead, “these are ‘ludic’ instances through which the people confront economic and political oppression” (Firat and Kuryel 2010, 12). Historian and art activist Caroline Wells (2007) adds that artistic texts, used for activists projects, “are ephemera that rarely receive attention from the art or academic communities. Although frequently the only surviving records of diverse political struggles, these artworks are often taken for granted by their intended publics... It’s time their stories are told” (Wells in INKWORKS PRESS 2007, 7).

The previous chapters have touched on the fact that Undocumented stories are already being told. Regardless of the real life dangers, personal fears, and lack of time and resources, Undocumented Youth in California are giving voice to their experiences through a myriad of artistic mediums. As an academic who is documented, regardless of my 'outsider-within' status, political beliefs and good intentions, it would be impossible for me to 'give voice' to any of the struggles I have had the honor to witness. The critical feminist ethnographer, Kamala Visweswaran, argues, instead, for a "suspension of the feminist faith that *we* can ever wholly understand and identify with other women (displacing again the colonial model of 'speaking for' and the dialogical hope of 'speaking with')" (Visweswaran 1994, 100).

This chapter is framed by the perspective that 'giving voice' is not a possibility or even a desire; instead, it will attempt to listen, through academia, to what is already being said (in art) about experiences of Undocumented Youth in California. Education scholars Bernal and Elenes (2011) point to similar methodological models in which scholars have accessed experiences of Latin@ and Chican@ Youth. The use of the *Testimonios* (Elenes 2000), [personal narratives that interacts with collective group struggles], Bernal and Elenes argue, shifts the power of academic research from the researcher to those being interviewed. They explain, "it is the intention of the *testimonialista* [a women who tells her testimony] to use the recorder/researcher/journalist to bring attention to her and her communities situation" (Bernal and Elenes in Valencia 2011, 110). Bernal and Elenes argue that the *Testimonio* in itself breaks subalternity of marginalized groups in education. In this chapter I am not attempting to 'break subalternity' by presenting narratives through art. Instead, I am noting that Undocumented Youth art activists are already speaking about their experiences. This segment of my thesis will present excerpts of transcripts of three such narrative pieces that have been made by young activists within the Undocumented community in California. These three videos were chosen for their educational-justice related narrative content, as well as their location within the Undocumented community of California. While these videos present complex and dynamic interpretations of educational justice, it is not the goal of this chapter to interpret these art works or even fully understand and identify with them. Instead, this chapter aims to let these narratives speak for themselves.

Los Testimonios y Sueños

The videos that will be presented in this chapter represent narratives of struggle for educational justice across different theoretical and physical spaces in California. All three of these videos were obtained from websites in which multiple mediums of grassroots Youth led art were presented to the public for Undocumented social justice movements. Some examples of other art mediums that are used on these web sites include poetry, murals, photography, fashion, drawings, short stories, short essays, and other audio-visual content. The majority of works on all of these sites are done by Undocumented Youth in California. Across all three of these sites, some of the Youth artists behind this art remain in the shadows through anonymity, while others step out of the shadows through their creative works or other organizing efforts. All three of these sites were related to a formal group with the main purpose of organizing and mobilizing for Undocumented Youth issues (although each group did so in very different ways). Each of these groups are from a different area in California, (one each from: San Diego, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area). These groups were also different because of the location of the Undocumented Youth within educational spheres. Group A, for example, included high school age Undocumented Youth (most but not all students in high school), while group B included high school age Youth as well as community college, undergraduate and graduate students. Group A and B also included people who were not in any formal education identity at the time of this thesis writing. Group C, on the other hand, only included graduate students, who were graduate students the entirety of this project. While two of these groups included mixed gender Youth, (and the other including only Latinas), the majority of the Youth involved in these sites were Latin@. Only one of these groups included members who were openly Queer in their online media. All three of these groups, however, organized not only for educational justice, but also for rights of those outside the academic sphere. For example, members of group C did a lot of organizing around issues for Domestic workers, while group A worked to help support day laborers, including Youth who were not enrolled in American schools. While A, B, and C were not the only groups I worked with to understand the power of grassroots creativity in the Undocumented community across California, members of each of these groups were participants in this thesis project. Also, I got permission from these three groups to use specific parts of their websites for this thesis project, including these video segments. While groups A, B

and C are very different in many ways, their similarities in the use of their websites as a main point of organizing and voicing experiences of Undocumented Youth through narrative form make them good comparative texts to focus on educational experiences across some of the different populations of Undocumented Youth in California.

Video 1: La Mujer de Los Sueños

Summary

Video 1, from group B, is an artistic narrative of life as an Undocumented student over the past 10 years, from the perspective of a Young Latino male. Throughout this narrative, the main character speaks about life from high school graduation to getting a college degree, struggling along the way. Throughout his struggles, the character is constantly chasing, or trying to catch, a Young Latina who represents the ability to achieve his dreams through the federal DREAM act. In this way, the narrative actually follows both the story of this Latino male and the history of the DREAM act. The video is shot using creativity as representation; performance and sketching are used in addition to writing, editing and producing the story. Also, creativity within the Undocumented rights community is seen through the fashion (t-shirt designs) and political posters that are used in this film. While the dialogue and representations are about the narratives of this Dreamer student and the history of the DREAM act, the plot line is actually of this young Latino male pursuing the 'Dreamer girl' as if were in love with her. Using the pursuit of a young lover as a metaphor, this video shows the emotional as well as economic and educational impacts of political battles that Undocumented Youth activists and students have faced in recent years.

Excerpt



Illustration 3.2A: Scene of Graduating Student Transfixed by 'Dream' Girl

Young Latino Male: May 2001 was the first time that I saw her. I saw her at my graduation... I knew that she was going to be the one to change everything... I spotted her when I was on stage, diploma in my hand. I saw her stand up and head for the exit. Amid that crowded auditorium, I saw my parents waving at me... all that I could focus on was her leaving; she never turned around. I was 17 going on 18 and in my young naive mind I thought I had it all figured out. I was graduating from high school, a couple of college situations in which I was on the fence about. It was an exciting time.

(cuts to reversed video of other Latino drawing graduation scene. Reversal makes it appear that he is erasing it instead of drawing it.)

But then I got the bad news, all this work and blood and sweat and tears, all that high school awkwardness all those extra curricular activities, all that went to hell when I got that letter in the mail, asking for proper documentation... I didn't have anything to show them. I knew I wasn't born in the United States, but I thought my paperwork was straight. I was graduating from high school with my whole life ahead of me. But this transition into College life got put off. Life went on, I watched all of my friends move on. I stayed behind.



Illustration 3.2B: Left and Right: Scene of Undocumented Artist Drawing/ Erasing Background Between Scenes

(reverse drawing ends with a blank page. Other Latino begins drawing restaurant scene on blank paper. Latino, wearing dress clothes and carrying a serving platter while reading)



Illustration 3.2C: Left: Scene of Undocumented Artist Drawing. Right: Scene of Student Holding Platter while 'working' and 'studying'.

I got a job, started bussing tables. AB540 had just passed in California, so by the time fall semester started that year, I was able to afford being a full time student. I led a triple life.

During the day, I was a student. An undocumented student... at night I was a service sector slave. Between my classes and my night shifts, after my night shifts, that's when my work got completed. I never forgot her, kept looking forward to seeing her once more, I imagined that the next time I saw her, things would be different... Before I knew it, two years had gone by. I was still working at the same place, and I saw her again it was at the end of July in 2003... We locked eyes, she had the face of a dream. She winked but it was not yet to be and as quickly as she wizzed into the restaurant where I was working, she was gone... She defiantly had some sort of way of keeping that hope alive inside of me.



Illustration 3.2D: Scene of Youth Working While Seeing 'Dream' Girl

Life went on... Before I knew it, another two years had gone by... I had transferred to a University... Things were escalating to be more and more difficult, but I never forgot her. I knew that sooner or later we'd meet again... And I was right.

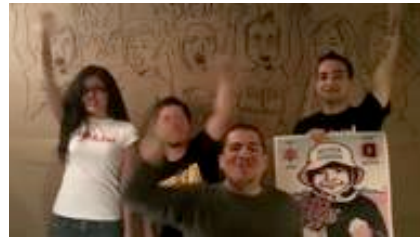
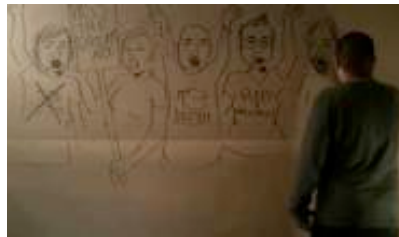


Illustration 3.2E: Left: Artist Drawing Between Scenes. Right: Scene of Youth Protesting

Hurricane Katrina had just devastated the Southern portion of the United States. And I saw her again, right before thanksgiving. I felt like I had nothing to be thankful for, but there she was... She seemed more refined, more open and willing to connect. And I had a feeling that she knew what I wanted. It wasn't love, it was hope. She was a movement to herself, undefined and uncategorized. She was there to make a statement. She wasn't there for herself, she was there for us.



Illustration 3.2F: Left: Scene of Youth With Dream Girl. Right: Scene of Youth Heart Broken and Alone (note graduation cap on heart).

But then suddenly, she was gone. And for the first time, since I first saw her, I felt heart broken. Like hoping was not enough. I had to chase her down. I had to make her understand what she meant to me... I felt that if we were in the same movement, moving towards the same outcome, with the same goal in mind, we could accomplish great things together. And since then, we've become closer, Consistently pushing forward. When I fall behind she picks up the slack, and when she goes mute for a while, I remind her of the importance of the voices that she represents. My heart, lacerated by the many times that she's walked away, continues to pound at the site of her. And again, it's not love, it's hope. Hope for something grander; that, indeed, we can come together. It's been 5 years of courtship. 5 years of struggling. 5 years of bickering. 5 years of back and forth. Many people would say that it's a dysfunctional relationship. But without me, without the faith that I have in her, without the hope that I have for us, she's nothing. Nothing but a pretty face, an ideal circumstance, utopia, a dream, she is my dream.

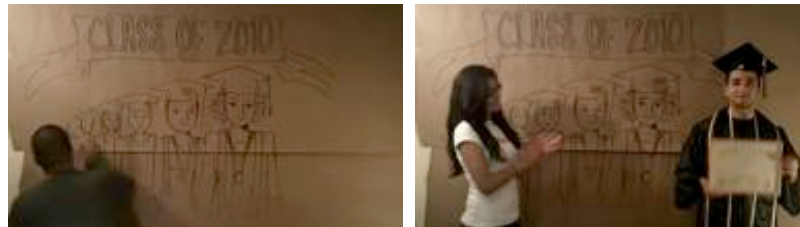


Illustration 3.2G: Left: Scene of Youth Drawing Background. Right: Scene of Youth Graduating College With Dream Girl Clapping

2010, its been 9 years since I've obtained my high school diploma, I finally have my college diploma. She's still there, applauding this time. Pulling forth, pulling for me, pulling for everyone like me. Please don't break my heart. (Lifts cap to show words: Pass the DREAM Act).

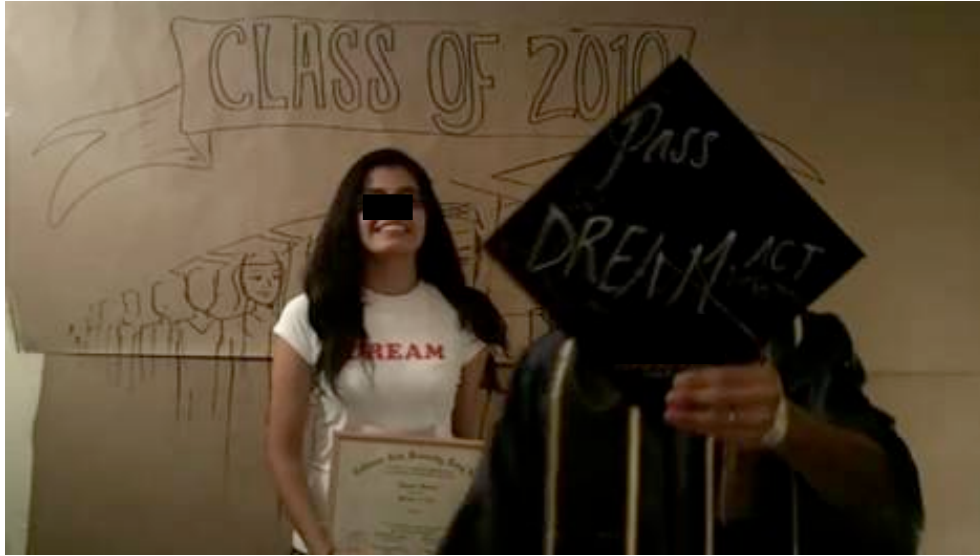


Illustration 3.2H: Youth in Cap and Gown, Cap Says 'Pass the DREAM Act

Considerations

This is a narrative that, while based on real life experiences of some Undocumented Youth, tells the story of a Dreamer student and the DREAM act itself through representation. In this representation, the Dream girl is said to represent hope to the Latino male. Through the visuals as well as the facts given, the history of the DREAM act organizing as well as responses to this organizing are recorded in a meaningful, individualized way. The main character continues to struggle and have his hopes crushed as the DREAM act continues to be unsuccessful. However, the main character experiences ups and downs, especially as he has high hopes for his future and is able to go to college because of the passing of AB540, which gave Undocumented students who met particular requirements a level of access to public Universities in California. The main characters' struggles, such as not being able to go to college right after high school even though he was well qualified and having to work low wage jobs under the table to support himself while in school, are in dialogue with the struggles of DREAM act organizers to find and maintain support through the years of the act not being passed.

While this narrative is unique in its creative presentation, the story that is told through these representations gives little hint at some of the complexities that I saw within the Undocumented movement. The main character in this video has done well in school, so much so that even by graduation he would be

set to go to college if he were only able to have access to financial aid and other things that most documented college students take for granted. Throughout the narrative, he struggles to find hope because the DREAM act does not pass. He does not, however, talk about struggles related to deportation, educational inequities in many poor Latin@ school districts and communities, or transnational responsibilities or struggles. This is not to say that these are not issues the writers of this film have had to deal with. In fact, whether or not these Youth are impacted by these issues is not shown to be relevant here. Instead, this video shows the importance of the DREAM act for students like the main character, looking at the DREAM act as a possibility of hope for a community that may easily lose hope in its future, regardless of students' individual educational attainment. In other words, this video shows that even those who work hard and conform to sexual and gender norms of the U.S. are limited in experiencing success in their formal education, careers, and upward mobility because of discrimination against certain bodies.

This film does some very important things for the DREAM act movement. For one thing, this video personalizes the long-term battle that Undocumented Youth have been fighting to gain equal access to higher education. This is something that statistical data and education scholars are often unable to do. It also shows the hard work and dedication that those who are Undocumented within academia have had to endure, with little appreciation in formal spheres. Also, this narrative simplifies the years of complex legal terminology and changes, organizing efforts, and navigations through education by Undocumented students. In just over 5 minutes, the filmmakers are able to convey some strong messages about the dedication and hard work, as well as emotional and physical struggles that Undocumented students and Youth in the United States have had to endure because of legal discrimination against them in higher education. By simplifying this narrative, many struggles may be left out of this video. However, by using representation and simplification, the video does not attempt to tell these stories head on.

In fact, there are additional stories present in this narrative, where one might find some of these complexities. For example, in the drawn scene of organizers for the DREAM act, an organizer that is drawn is wearing a shirt that says "Queer and Undocumented", pointing to the fact that those involved in this movement are not all living their lives through heterosexual based dreams but may have instead have

complex hopes related to their unique and different struggles. Also, the way that gender plays out in this film shows that there may be complex navigations around gender experienced by Undocumented Youth. In addition, the references to the family of the main character in the high school graduation scene show that, while the main narrative focuses on his limited access to higher education and subsequent personal experience, the main character is actually a member of a family who may also be Undocumented or may be impacted by his immigration status and educational limitations. The complications to this narrative are not easily seen or read into the plot line. However, I note these elements to show that the characters and representations shown, while limited to a specific high achieving Undocumented experience (which represents a minority and not a majority of Undocumented Youth), are in reality situated within more complex transnational global politics that impact individuals in varied and diverse ways, many of which might not correspond to the presentation of Undocumented Youth depicted in this video.

Video 2: Encuentros y Los 67 Sueños

Summary

Unlike the previous video, this video does not tell a specific individual story. Instead, Group A uses video clips, narration from multiple Youth, community murals, media excerpts and excerpts from their own oral history projects (encuentros) to talk about experiences of Undocumented Youth as well as their communities, both in the United States and globally, through film. Representation is also used in this film (an empty staircase, for example, to show the lack of representation towards non-‘criminal’/‘valedictorian’ Youth in popular media). However, these representations go beyond the struggles of Undocumented Youth in education to teach about and critique the complex social structures that limit educational justice for Undocumented Youth in the U.S. These videos do discuss, head on, the impacts of the legitimate fear of deportation that many Youth and their families experience, as well as the global economic and social struggles in places like Guatemala that push Undocumented Youth and their families to migrate to California. However, the focus of these videos is not to push for a specific legislation. Instead, this video shows the creativity, strength, motivation, and power that Undocumented Youth possess in taking charge of

their experience. Instead of asking mainstream news institutions to document these stories, students from Group A uses their own agency and skills to do it themselves.

Excerpt

(shots of Youth in front of murals to back ground music, cuts to shots of media to follow narrative). In the media, we are always criminals or straight A students, *illegals* or valedictorians (cuts to video of Youth sitting on stairs) but 67% of Undocumented Youth are not on the path to college; but we're not criminals either. So where's our voice, where are our stories?



Illustration 3.3A: Left: Youth in Front of A Mural. Right: Shot of Media of Valedictorian Undocumented Youth

(cuts to video of empty staircase, fills frame by frame with Youth then is empty again)

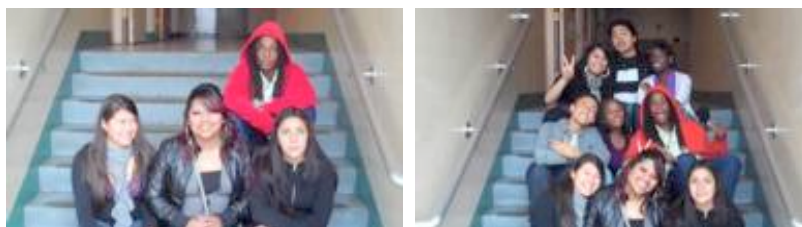


Illustration 3.3B: Left: Four Youth in Stair Case. Right: Nine Youth in Stair Case

It seems like 67% of Undocumented Youth don't exist. We're invisible and in the shadows and unheard.



Illustration 3.3C: Shot of Empty Stair Case

In **** (city), migrant students are having encuentros, also known as gatherings, to show the importance of lifting our voices and telling our stories.



Illustration 3.3D: Youth in Encuentro Workshop

(Shot of Youth meeting in a community center type room, talking to each other, working together). Our project... will collect... stories of young people who are not criminals or valedictorians. We're just like you, and we will be heard. (cut to video excerpt from an Encuentro- Young Latino male narrates)



Illustration 3.3E: Shot of Young Latino Encuentro Video Excerpt

(cut to Interview from first Encuentro) 'My mom told me to stay inside [instead of going to school], and we stayed inside for the whole day. I was hella scared, even now I feel chills, I get chills when I talk about it because I know that all they need to know is that I'm Undocumented and they will take me and I would be separated from my family and that's something I don't want to face. I've seen people face it and I know its hella hard, to know that you're not going to be with your dad, or that you and your brothers are going to be separated. I dream of a day where I could travel, basically wherever we want like Jamaica or, that's where I wanna go, like Africa'

(cut to black screen with words: Who else are we? Then cuts to an image of Youth in stairwell, smiling and giving peace signs) Not all of us have the privilege of staying in school. Many of our... stories are... of young people who can no longer study, and have to work as day laborers. (Cuts to shots of day laborers in **** city).

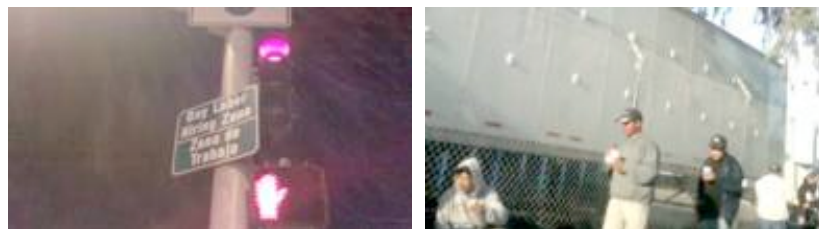


Illustration 3.3F: Left: Shot of 'Day Labor Zone' Sign. Right: Shot of Day Laborers Waiting for Work

Waiting on corners as the world passes us, hoping someone will underpay us for very hard work so that we can at least eat and feed our families.

(Jornaleros: cuts to excerpt of Interview with Young Day Laborer, in broken Spanish)
 'Donde yo vivo es vivo en un Pueblo de Guatemala y mala Todos Santos. En este pueblo todos están, están necesitados y estos son pobres, no tienen dinero no tienen trabajo, y por eso piensan de llegar aquí. Para sé... mas fuertes con el dinero para que así tengan con que... por eso vinieron aquí' *(Where I am from is a small rural town in Guatemala, Todos Santos. In the town people are in need and poor. They have no money or work. For this reason we come here, to have some money, this is why we are here).*



Illustration 3.3G: Shot of Encuentro with Day Laborer Youth

(cut to shots of individual youth in front of different murals) I have a dream, yo tengo un sueno, I have a sueno, tenemos un dream, I have a dream, yo tengo un sueno, yo tengo dream, yo tengo un sueno, I have a dream, yo tengo un sueno, I have a dream!

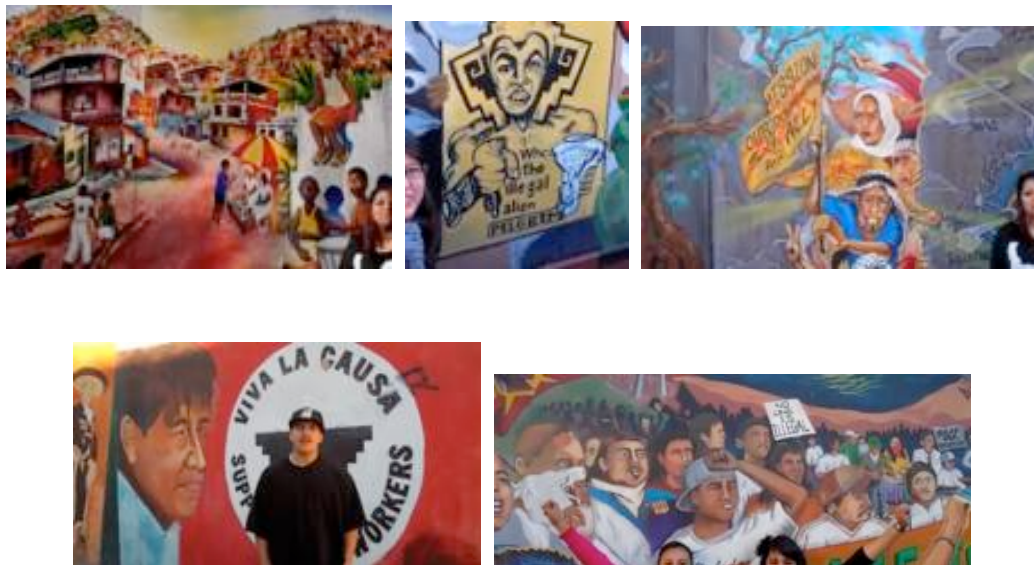


Illustration 3.3H: Top Left, Top Center, Top Right, Bottom Left, Bottom Right: Youth Standing in Front of Different Murals Chanting That They Have a Dream

Considerations

This video critiques the idea that higher educational policy changes, which leave out many other experiences, are the answer to oppressions experienced by Undocumented Youth and their communities. In fact, the beginning of this film critiques the very notion that ‘valedictorian’ high achieving Undocumented experiences are relatable to the 67% of Youth in this community who would not benefit from policies like the federal DREAM act, or who do not qualify as AB540 because they could not make it through high school or were not in a California high school for long enough. By using the settings of a public school staircase, community murals and day laborer zones, this video links struggles of non-valedictorian Youth to their communities. The day laborer interview, where a young male Latino talks about needing money to support his community in Guatemala, shows that there are young people in the United States who do not have the luxury of using their time for learning and going to school. Instead, some must work because they need to support their families, either in the United States or else where. Also, as one youth talks about staying home from school in fear of deportation, the viewer becomes aware of the fact that educational justice cannot be separated from issues like deportation and immigration related traumatic experiences. However, while these formal structures continue to limit educational possibilities, this video actually shows that the Youth are themselves capable and knowledgeable persons who navigate complex and difficult barriers to gain knowledge about their histories and global settings. For example, while many of these Youth do not feel safe coming out with their Undocumented identity, Group A used filming techniques and creative strategies to allow them to share their stories anyway (anonymously). Video 2 links the struggles of Undocumented Youth to larger structural issues, but shows the agency in which Latin@ Youth deal with these struggles in creative and empowering ways.

However, there are narratives that are also not represented in this project. While this group does a great job of looking at lower working class and poor migrant experiences, their intentions do not seem to be related to intersectional identities like being Undocumented and Queer or Undocumented with disabilities. It is possible that these stories are part of the encuentro video interviews that Group A is doing. However, these narratives do not come out in the videos that are seen in this site. While this critique is true, it is important to mention some of the possible reasons why other narratives are not being represented here. For one thing, this is a grassroots group that has taken it upon itself to share stories that they feel were excluded

from dreamer narratives. It is possible that, since the DREAM act movement has in many ways opened up visibility of Undocumented and Queer Youth, Group A did not find it incredibly important to focus on these stories. Also, as Group A focuses on poor and lower working class migrants, there might be a greater difficulty for narratives about deviant sexualities to emerge. In other words, the privilege of adopting and embracing a political LGBTQIA identity might be more difficult for someone who is having to worry about how to feed himself or herself and his or her family on a constant basis. Also, if these Youth themselves have strong ties to heteronormative cultures, they might find it more difficult to openly discuss Queer narratives. In addition, this critique may be found to be limited because the people being interviewed, while not shown as LGBTQIA, are in fact being depicted as Queer to the Dreamer movement. These Youth are not asking for permission for entry into the binary identities of Dreamer high achievers or *illegal* criminal Youth. Instead, Group A is Queering what it means to be Undocumented, by embracing those who exist along a spectrum of Undocumented identities.

Video 3: Los Sueños de los Estudiantes Graduados

Summary

This video is not done as artistically or creatively as the other two videos. This text is from Group C, which is an online community page for a group of Undocumented graduate students pursuing their dreams through academia. While this page is used for a number of creative expressions (such as fashion, jewelry, cooking, photography, short motivational sayings, etc), this video itself is very dry. In it, two group members address the question ‘why choose grad’ school, giving their own personal answers related to why they are dedicated to their specific programs. The reasons that they give relate to the desire to give back to their communities while also making a difference in the structures and experiences of other Undocumented students. After giving these explanations, they reach out for other questions to be sent in for future videos, opening up the content to undergraduate experiences as well as experiences outside of school as Undocumented young people. The video is shot in one take and is done on a university campus. The feeling of this video is very personal and intimate.

Excerpt

(Still camera throughout video, no cuts or edits, done in one take and shot of two Young womyn talking straight into the camera).

Hi everyone... We're doing something special today for all of you who have liked our [***] page... Today we wanted to do something different and share more about ourselves through this video so that you all can get to know us better, and also so we can be a resource for all of you who are thinking about graduate school, or even if you have questions about undergraduate experience.

So, my name is (A) and I am in my 2nd year here at a graduate program here at [***] University. And My name is (B) and I am in my first year as a graduate student here at [***] University. So one of the questions that we have... is 'why choose grad school'? So we will be talking about why we chose grad school and how you should all pursue your passion and how it relates to how we are pursuing our passion.



Illustration 3.4:Image of Two Graduate Students as They Answer Questions From the Community

B: So (A) want to tell us a little bit about why you chose grad school?

A: ... when I came out of undergrad I really wasn't sure. I knew I wanted to further my education, and I was thinking I wanted to be a lawyer... But then, as I did community organizing and through thinking about my own personal experiences, I started to realize that, in terms of mental health, there's not that much support for us in our community. That is what I'm in now, I'm in my second year of a marriage and family therapy program. I realize that there's so much that, as Immigrants, working class, people of color, we go through so many obstacles and struggles in life and there's sometimes very few resources for us... Those struggles effect us in more ways than not just having enough to eat or even financially, they effect us on an emotional/ psychological level that many times we don't have the resources to access some sort of help for that, some sort of support. Or we don't have the tools within community organizing, or within our community to be able to elevate people to a level that they're able to function at their highest potential. So for me it's that I'm here because I want to extend mental health, and

I want to make sure that the issues that we're facing are also brought up, are also taken care of. That our children and people in our community are able to be healthy in every way possible, including emotionally, including psychologically and for me that's one of the biggest reason that I'm here... Because I think that our needs are being ignored [by] the majority and I want to be here to plant a seed and say 'wait a second we matter too', and there's a lot that's happening that's not being addressed. So that's why I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere...

B: Similar for me, I felt that our issues and our challenges needed to be addressed and a way for me to contribute to that was to pursue higher education. So going into a graduate program and my field is sociology. So the way I got into that is that in undergrad, I realized that a lot of the personal issues that we face are also social issues so how they relate to different structures... the educational system, the political economic, you name it, they have an effect on what we are going through and its not only our fault as individuals if we can't succeed economically or emotional, like (A) was saying. So, for me it was a way for me to bring up those issues and unique challenges that we face as immigrants and as undocumented immigrants, and as an undocumented immigrant, too, in grad school I feel that a lot of what I've learned, a lot of what I've gone through, I can relate it to my own process in grad school and so that helps me out a little but too in knowing that us dreamers can also pursue our passions and our dreams and not be held back by what we're told...

A: The only thing that I do want to add is that... If there's anything on your mind that you are curious about us, about this process grad school (B: even if you're an undergrad)

A: ... or even just the process of being a dreamer in life, because we go through so much we're not just students. Feel free to email us; for the shy ones, or for the not so shy ones, feel free to post it on our page and we'll do our best to answer it...

B: Stay tuned, we are going to have more videos... We are gonna continue to have more fundraising events, more raising awareness more, scholarships too, hopefully, and we just hope that you stick around and share our page and get your friends to like it too, because the more people that know about this issue the bigger difference it can make, not only on one individual but as a community.

A: And the more support we can gain for all of us thinking about graduate school or in graduate school right now. Thank you so much, have an awesome day...

Considerations

There are some interesting things that Video 3 shows through the narratives of these two Undocumented graduate students. One important fact to note about this video is that the amount of Undocumented students who make it to grad school is very small. Thus, this group is a minority in the Undocumented community. Still, these narratives are important, and relate to both video 1 and video 2. Like video 1, these students show that even the high achieving Undocumented Youth experience a number of struggles, including both financial and emotional difficulties. Also, due to her age and self-identification as a Dreamer in other texts, the organizing and community work that A talks about in her past was very

likely related in some way to the Dreamer movement. While not specifically telling the history of the Dreamer movement (like video 1 does), A tells her history in relation to the organizing that went on in as part of this movement. Also an organizer for domestic workers, A links what she learned outside of the classroom about structural problems, such as the Undocumented community not having adequate resources to deal with emotional traumas, to her purpose in the classroom as a graduate student. B does this as well, explaining that what she has learned in the process of facing her unique challenges as an Undocumented student has led her to a grad school program where she can discuss structural inequalities in education, politics and economics. Like video 2, both A and B are actually linking their struggles, and the struggles of other Undocumented Youth, to complex forms of structural inequities. For example, as A explains that “as immigrants, working class, people of color we go through so much struggle in life” (Video 3, 2012), she points to intersectional ways in which inequality and discrimination is experienced by Undocumented Latinas like herself. Also, the fact that both A and B talk about their reasons for being grad school being related to their dedication to help make a difference for members of their communities relates to the way in which Undocumented Youth in Video 2 use their own agency to make a difference in their own representation by holding encuentros. Also, like video 2, Group C mentions the lack of representation that Undocumented stories have had. B explains, “I think that our needs are being ignored for the majority and I want to be here to plant a seed and say ‘wait a second we matter too’, and there’s a lot that’s happening that’s not being addressed” (Video 3, 2012). Here, B shows that it is not only the mainstream media that has ignored realities of Undocumented Youth; academia and formal knowledge producers have ignored these narratives and experiences as well. However, a critique of this video might be that these graduate students are in some ways participating in academic structures in ways that might promote assimilation instead of empowerment. However, by mentioning that people can ask them questions about their lives outside of graduate school or school in general, as well as the accessible medium that is used, A and B are stepping out of their formal grad school roles in this video. As A and B give their personal testimony about how they have navigated their choices in academia, Group C demonstrates that agency and creativity can be used (even within schools) to disrupt systems of exploitation and oppression. These may be important

messages for the many Undocumented Youth who find academia to be a limiting place of empowerment and a place where their struggles are often left silenced.

Las Tres Películas de Los Sueños

This chapter has used three examples of art made by Undocumented Youth to tell their narratives around their life experiences, including their navigations with formal education. Through video 1, Group B used representation to tell the story of a high achieving Undocumented Latino male who struggled to gain access to formal education because of laws that limit Undocumented Youth from attending higher education as well as working to support themselves. This video also gave a history of the DREAM act and explored the ways in which the movement was related to the hopes and dreams of many Undocumented Youth. Video 2, by Group A, critiqued this movement, however, while also questioning the valedictorian/criminal binary and representation of Undocumented Youth in the media. Taking representation into their own hands, the video showed how Youth are holding encuentros to collect data and build community among Undocumented Youth whose stories were not previously being recognized. Through excerpts of these oral histories, it becomes clear that U.S. immigration policy, criminalization and deportation, economic struggles in Latin America, dedication to transnational families, and issues of poverty and fear are some elements that impact formal education for Undocumented Youth. In Video 3, group C talked about some of these very issues, citing them for reasons why A and B decided to go to graduate school themselves. Group C also talks about the lack of representation they have felt in their lives, explaining that this is a key reason why they are pursuing their dreams through higher education.

While each video can be hailed or critiqued due to the specific narratives that are chosen to feature, these three videos combined show experiences in education of Undocumented Youth across ages, gender, time, placement within academia/school, and physical location to be heavily impacted by their lives ‘outside school’ as members of the Undocumented community of California. In other words, although each of these videos included a very different population of Undocumented Youth, they show that the ways in which Youth experience in K-12 schools, colleges and universities is heavily impacted by the difficulties

they face in their daily lives. For example, one of the young Latinos interviewed in Video 2 talked about his experience having to hide out from *la Migra*, who were said to be around his school. Even as he talks about the event he says that he feels scared. Thus, this trauma impacted him not only because he could not go to school that day and most likely got behind his peers in his classes, but this trauma clearly continues to cause him stress and anxiety when he is reminded of the incident. In Video 1, the main character is shown negotiating the difficult financial, social and emotional side effects of being an Undocumented Youth trying to achieve through higher education. Also, Group C talks about the fact that Undocumented immigrants may suffer from emotional traumas that they are often unable to overcome given the lack of access to professional help. Comparing these films to each other, it is clear that these students have faced difficulty in the class room because of their experiences within the Undocumented community.

Although these videos are made mostly by students, the issues discussed in them reflect a crisis in education to which these youth are deeply connected. While the short films did show Undocumented students in high school, college, and even graduate school, the majority of the 3.2 million Undocumented Youth of college age who live in the United States do not have access to higher education (Perez 2012, 5). In fact, only a very small number (10% of males and 16% of females) of Undocumented Youth who are ages 18-24 actually enroll in college (Perez 2009/ xix). In addition, even the highest achieving Undocumented students often find themselves unable to handle the financial and social barriers they experience, and many do drop out of college (Perez 2012, 25). Also, it is estimated that about one-fifth to one-sixth of Undocumented students drop out of high school each year (Passel 2003). It is clear from this data that there is a crisis in education for Undocumented Youth. These numbers may shift in coming years, as the California DREAM act will allow access to state funding for school. However, this is the current reality that many Undocumented Youth face. As these videos show, even though Undocumented Youth in higher education are a minority, they are still deeply connected to the experiences and issues of the Undocumented community. In an online news article about their organization, a spokesperson from Group A explains,

I have young people working with me who have recently had a father deported, or whose mother just recently lost their job because programs like e-verify have gotten rid of all the

undocumented people at a certain place, even if they've been working there 10 years and have set up their life based on that salary... our young folks don't want to be separated from their parents, they feel like the struggle is the same, the family goes through it together. Our young folks don't want to be separated from their one cousin who did get a 4.0, the struggle is the same struggle and one deportation in that family affects the entire family. So these are hardcore things that destroy families; they impact the ability to pay rent, the ability to just *be*. But then there's the small stories... the little things that break your heart too. There's the first time that you're in a classroom and the teacher uses the word *illegal* and doesn't realize that this is deeply painful to one of these young folks; and because they live in the shadows they can't even stand up for themselves in that moment, they can't say 'I'm not illegal, I'm a human being'! Because now I've out-ed myself, now I've told everybody in the class, and that's dangerous (fieldnotes, Sept 2011).

As the previous statement implies, students within the Undocumented community share the struggles of their families and loved ones. Recent increases in the deportation and criminalization of the Undocumented community will have serious impacts on the educational outcomes of Undocumented students. It is imperative that those working for educational justice within this community address the serious traumas that Undocumented Youth are experiencing.

Suggestions

There are a few suggestions that this research points to. For one thing, it is important to note that some Youth are finding ways outside of formal therapy and higher education to deal with these issues. As these videos showed, small groups of Undocumented Youth are using their personal agency to make a change in the way in which their stories are being represented. Groups like this should be supported and listened to by those looking to work for educational justice. For example, in response to the problems in representation of these students, schools could adopt policies that ban words like '*illegal*' in their educational frameworks as part of an effort to formally decriminalize Undocumented Youth and their families. Also, safe spaces could be provided on campuses for students to come and get the support they need. While schools can make some changes to the ways in which Undocumented Youth experience educational environments, it is also important to expand movements for educational justice outside of the classroom. As seen in these videos, trauma and high levels of stress at an early age are a reality for many Undocumented students. As previous chapters of this thesis have argued, the process of making art itself can become a way of healing and connecting to others that may help Youth to deal with these difficult

experiences, find personal healing and empowerment. This empowerment could apply to formal educational arenas. For example, high schools with large populations of Undocumented Youth might invest in programs of art therapy that could be made available to Undocumented Youth and their families free of charge. Also, the arts should be well funded in low-income schools where Undocumented immigrants and their families often attend. Since increased deportations have also led to increased Undocumented Youth trauma that impacts student learning, schools and educational institutions should become leaders in the movements for migrant rights. High schools should have special counselors that specialize in understanding the complex struggles Undocumented students face and Universities should create scholarships and internships for Undocumented students to help them work in fields related to their studies. Also, advocates for educational justice should open their horizons to dealing with issues of oppression that impact Undocumented and poor communities in the U.S. as well as their transnational families elsewhere.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to listen to the voice of Undocumented Youth art activists, especially in relation to their educational struggles, through presentation of three art works from Undocumented Youth across California. Listening to what Youth activists are already saying is something others within the field of education should do as well. However, the suggestions given in this chapter are mentioned with the unfortunate understanding that they will most likely not be implemented. With struggling K-12 and public university budgets and continued anti-immigrant state and federal policies of criminalization and deportation, it is understood that this chapter addresses a political topic that many educational institutions would rather avoid than face. However, with the implementation of the CA Dream Act, beginning in 2012, this is an essential moment in time to make a difference for these Youth as well as the changing population of California in general. As California AB540 students who previously could not afford college begin to graduate from high school and apply to higher education programs, they will need services to help them deal with the complex stressors which they will face in the classroom. Moreover, the California Dream act does not address many of the issues in their lives (such as increased deportation of the Undocumented community) that Youth have been struggling to navigate on their own. Further research might implement one of the suggestions given in this chapter and, through longitudinal study, seek to understand the ways in

which art, art therapy, or specialized counseling can positively impact the experiences of Undocumented Youth in K-12, community college, and University settings.

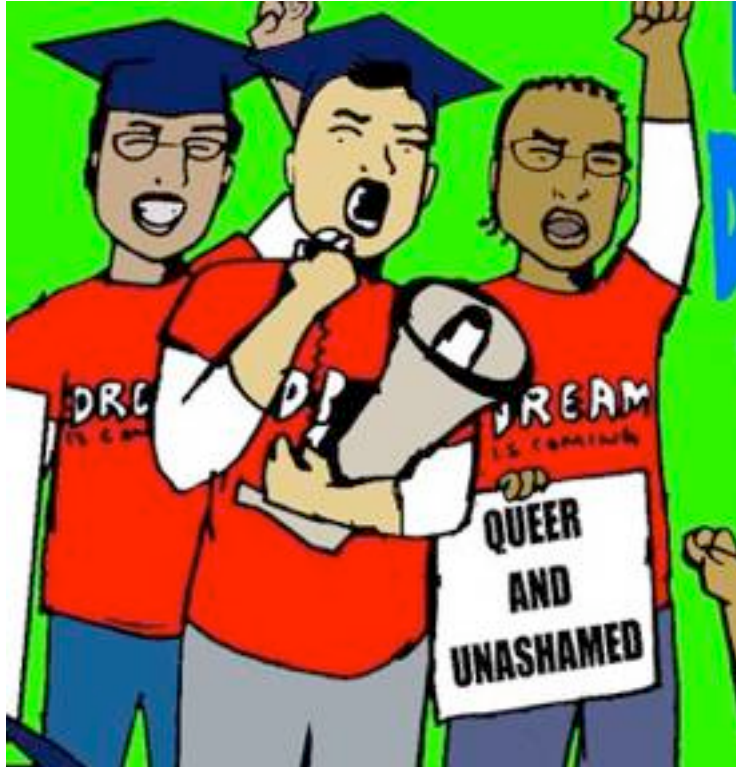


Illustration 4.1: Drawing of Youth Protesting in a 'Coming Out' Ceremony

::El Capítulo Número Cuatro::

Undocu-Queer* Art: Inclusions? Of Queer Narratives in Movements for Undocumented Rights

It's dark outside and the few blocks of art shops and small cafes that make the downtown of a small Southern Californian town are bustling. The warm air combines with the laughter of a group of young Latino boys, who walk in and out of the store fronts and past a group of young Latinas who are chatting with each other by a small flowing fountain on this last summer weekend evening. The scene is also moving with young boys holding their dolled up girlfriends close while traditional looking Latino families walk by them with strollers, young bright children and stoic looking fathers who tower above. As I enter the libreria where the art fundraiser for undocumented students from

* It is important to note that I did not come up with the term Undocu-Queer, it is a term used by the Undocumented community to refer to people who identify as both Undocumented and Queer. The fact that this term exists is a reflection of strong the presence of Queer inclusion on some level.

this community is taking place, I notice two police cars parked in the dark corners of the downtown streets. After a while, English and Spanish conversations come to a break as a young Latino male steps up at the front of the store. As he presents the art exhibit to the community of mostly Latin@ attendees, he introduces the event, saying while it is focused on raising funds for undocumented students who live their lives in the shadows, the event also recognizes that there are many people who live their lives in fear based on their sexuality as well. He explains boldly, 'No matter how people identify, we want to create a welcoming space, an equality for all of us. Yes, we are in one of the most conservative counties of the nation but there's a basic work happening here to create that space for all of us in our communities' (*Field Notes, September 2011*)

Introduction

The Undocumented Youth art show described in the above statement was an instance from this study in which I saw individual empowerment occur through both personal and social justice oriented art. However, as the statement to the crowd at the beginning of the art show suggests, this event embraced not only Undocumented students and Youth; there was also a clear openness to the Undocumented and Queer community as well. As this chapter will show, this embrasure of Queer narratives and experiences is also present in the art work and mobilization techniques that Undocumented Youth artists and activists have been utilizing in recent years. This space for Undocumented Queer people of color activism is happening at the same time that mainstream LGBT communities continue to exclude many Queer people of color. This chapter does not aim to fully understand contemporary Undocu-Queer experiences. Instead, it uses art as a basis for pointing to both the inclusion and exclusion of Queer people of color narratives within the contemporary Undocumented rights movement in California. After reviewing the methodology to be used, this chapter will place Undocu-Queer activism among mainstream LGBT activist movements. Next, it will outline spaces in which intentional Queer inclusion was found to be a main theme. This inclusion, however, will be complicated through an analysis of Undocumented and Queer experiences from the border city of San Diego. This complication does not negate the importance of Undocu-Queer activism; instead it points to necessities of transnational based frameworks for considering Queer people of color and migrant experiences.

Methodology: Documenting Undocu-Queer Perspectives

This chapter uses qualitative methodology to try and understand some things that have been happening within the Undocumented and immigrant rights movements around Queer Youth issues. It will include some of the visual art works and posters that have been created to promote Undocumented and Queer events in San Diego, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. These posters and flyers were obtained through attending over 30 events in the Undocumented community across California during the period of this study. In addition, a number of flyers were obtained through announcements and invitations sent over the Internet. Also, this chapter will use specific art works with Queer content that California artists in this study made to raise visibility and empower Undocumented and Queer Youth. These art works were also obtained either at events I attended or through the Internet. In addition, interviews with Undocumented and Queer artists and activists will be used to explore some experiences around Undocu-Queer empowerment. This data will also be supplemented by news articles and online blog posts that have featured participants. While it is important to note that there are Queer people of Color and Undocu-Queer people from many different migrant communities, this chapter does focus on Latin@ artists and activists within the Undocumented and Queer community. The main question for this chapter is: in what ways does undocumented youth activism include and exclude Queer narratives and experiences? To answer this, this chapter will explore how events and art from the Undocumented community throughout California has interacted with Queer activism.

Space for Queers? Contemporary Exclusions of Queer People of Color by Mainstream LGBT Movements for Empowerment

If intentional inclusion of Queer people of color is present in Youth led Undocumented rights movements, is this trend important or unique during contemporary times? While some may place Queer people of color as part of mainstream LGBT rights movements, such as those supporting marriage ‘equality’ and ending ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’, this section will explore critiques of these movements to demonstrate some of the ways in which Queer people of color have continued to be excluded due to their intersectional identities. It will begin by looking at some of the physical spaces of exclusion though a brief discussion of gentrification and gay-meccas. Then, popular movements for marriage and military ‘equality’ will be complicated in relation to Queer people of color and Undocumented experiences. Especially due to

their intersectional identity, this section will show that mainstream LGBT movements in many ways have not included Queer people of color, demonstrating the significance of the inclusion that may be present in the contemporary Undocumented and immigrants art and activist movements in California.

Gay meccas have developed in many major cities since LGBT political identities began to emerge in the 20th century. These mecca areas of a city are places in which LGBT ‘friendly’ businesses predominate. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily a friendly or safe space for many Queer people of Color. Manalansan explains that, in fact, “the rise of a vibrant exclusive real estate, gay commodified business, and other signs of... [gentrification] are based on the very process of eradication and disappearance of the unsightly, the vagrant, the alien, the colored, and the queer” (Manalansan 2005, 152). In other words, gay meccas have resulted in the commodification of a certain type of queerness that excludes Queer people of Color and Queer Immigrants. As wealthier LGBT focused businesses ‘develop’ neighborhoods in order to create an ‘empowered’ commodified space for wealthy LGBT publics, Queer people of Color (who may themselves be living or using these mecca-neighborhoods prior to gentrification) are often kicked out of these spaces to make way for the mainstream (white) LGBT communities. The cities of San Diego, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area, California, all have neighborhoods which have been developed into these ‘gay meccas’ as well. However, gay mecca spaces in California have also been critiqued as excluding poor Queer Youth of Color in particular (Reck, 2009). Although the freedom to be ‘out and proud’, which these mecca spaces are supposed to allow, is considered by some to be a success for LGBT rights, Queer people of color in fact often experience violence, criminalization/policing and overall exclusion in these LGBT gay mecca spaces (Manalansan 2005, Reck 2009). Especially for Undocu-Queer Youth, who can easily be targeted by law enforcement officers, gay-meccas do not give Queer Youth of Color the same feelings of safety and ‘proudness’ that upper class LGBTQIA persons may experience.

This exclusion is also found in the movement to overturn the ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy in the U.S. military. Gay rights activists argued that the historical exclusion of queer people in the military kept them from achieving equality with heterosexuals. Some considered access to the military as a final frontier of gay rights activism in the U.S. (Herek 1996, 6), a hurdle which has now been overcome since the policy

was officially ended in Sept, 2011. While this movement focused on the ability of queer people to experience freedom in their military service, it did not take into consideration the way the U.S. military is experienced by people of color. In contemporary eras, Latin@ youth are encouraged more than any other demographic to join the military, and are “over-represented in positions directly related to combat” (Mariscal 2009), making them more likely to die at war. For other immigrant communities, such as those from Middle Eastern countries, joining the military and embracing the ‘war on terror’ means turning against their own communities in the support of U.S. imperialism. In response, an anti-military movement has erupted within the immigrant community in the U.S. (Mariscal 2009). In particular, activism within the Undocumented community has had to deal with this issue due to in-fighting related to the inclusion of the military component in the proposed federal DREAM Act, which would allow some undocumented youth to have access to citizenship if they serve in the military for 2 years. While a focus on inclusion in the military has been at the forefront of gay activism in the U.S. in the past years, many Queer People of Color and Latin@s do not see access to the military as a means of empowerment but instead as continued oppression.

Another space in which mainstream LGBT activism in the United States has excluded Queer People of Color is in the push for legalized gay marriage in the United States. Mainstream LGBT activists have argued that laws against marriage of same sex partners exclude Gays and Lesbians from access to the benefits and resources that heterosexual couples have (Strasser 1997). However, this movement for gay marriage also excludes Queer people of Color and Immigrants. For one thing, traditional ideologies of many Communities of Color in the U.S. have remained conservative in their conceptualization of marriage as an institution. In addition, many Queer activists of Color have seen marriage as an idea which focuses on the ‘traditional’ white-middle class family structure and privileges *the have’s* instead of *the have-not’s*. One can see this clearly by breaking down traditional pro-same-sex marriage arguments. Extended family child care and rearing as well as transnational and extended family living situations, which are realities within many communities of color, also experience exclusion from the benefits of health care, tax, and inheritance regulations from medical institutions and the federal government. In addition, a focus on increased protection of LGBT family ownership is based on capitalistic instead of communal ways of knowing and being that define many Queer and Transnational families. Also, the focus on ownership and access to a

partners benefits is based on an ideal situation in which the LGBT family *is* economically successful in the first place. However, many families of Color continue to experience educational inequity and discrimination in employment based on racial and ethnic Xenophobia in the U.S. The fact that gay marriage allows for definitions of marriage and rights through governmental reforms also excludes those whose identities exist outside of state regulation, such as undocumented persons residing in the U.S. or their families and loved ones abroad. Thus, as mainstream gay activists have focused on inclusion of LGBT persons within same-sex marriage as well as the military, they have excluded Queer People of Color and Undocumented individuals in these contemporary movements.

In addition to exclusion from mainstream LGBT movements, Queer people of Color also have to deal with struggles like racism and xenophobia that have historically plagued their ethnic communities as well as internal struggles with cultures that may also be homophobic. For example, Queer Latin@s face ethnic based oppression and xenophobia towards people of color and immigrants from the mainstream American public *and* they also face exclusion from within their own Latin@ community through the traditional culture of *machismo*, in which gender and sexual norms are strictly enforced and regulated (Garcia 2006, Armitage and Dugan 2006, Veliz, 2009). Based on these traditional exclusions of queer people of color from mainstream society as well as within their ethnic or immigrant communities, Queer people of color narratives and struggles have not historically had a strong presence in ethnic or sexuality based based rights movements. Audre Lorde comments on the impact of this intersectional discrimination, noting “Black lesbians in the Bagatelle faced a world only slightly less hostile than the outer world which we had to deal with every day on the outside- that world which defines us as double nothing because we were Black and because we were Woman” (Audre Lorde in *Zami*, 225). Here, Lorde shows that Queer experiences for womyn of color have been and are felt differently then queer issues for people that exist along different intersections of power. Speaking of survival in this landscape, Lorde argues the importance of having a space. She continues,

you had to have a place... in times of need and great instability, the place sometimes became more a definition than the substance of why you needed it to begin with... for some of us there was no one particular place, and we grabbed whatever we could from

wherever we found space, comfort, quiet, a smile, non-judgment (Lorde in Zami, 225-226).

Due to exclusion from mainstream LGBT movements as well as oppression from within their own communities, Queer people of Color and Queer immigrants have struggled to find an inclusive space. These contexts are important to note when thinking about the significance of a possible non-judgmental space within the Undocumented movement in which Queer activism has possibly emerged within contemporary periods.

Inclusion? Queer in the Undocumented and Immigrants Rights Movement

Inclusion: Queer People of Color & Immigrant Focused Events

There are many examples of the inclusion of Queer experiences and narratives in the Undocumented community that can be found in the data for this project. While more traditional American LGBT representations were seen, such as gay flags, rainbows, and terminologies, it is important to note that most of these were used in conjunction with, instead of apart from, traditional ethnic related cultural representations. This section provides a few examples from the data of this trend.

At one event, which honored queer and undocumented youth in the Latin@ community, youth created an altar for the Latin American holiday *Día de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) and dedicated it to young Latin@s who have died because of homophobic physical and emotional violence. This altar included sugar skulls, photographs, religious candles, flowers and bright colors that accompany the traditional altar and celebration. However, these flowers were made in rainbow patterns and there were also words like “Queer” and “Homophobia” used, which represent mainstream and English LGBT ideologies. The poster, which reads “Let’s make it better. Homophobia is killing our youth” depicts a caricature of a youth of color with wings and a t-shirt that reads “A victim of hate” as he stands in front of a number of darkened figures. These two scenes show not only that Queer Youth exist and experience violent oppressions, they



Illustration 4.2: Poster Made by Undocu-Queer Youth, Let's Make it Better. Homophobia is Killing Out Youth



Illustration 4.3: *Dia de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) alter

place these Queer Youth as being part of and not outside of the Latino community (saying they are ‘Our’ Youth and are honorable in our culture). This also pushes the Latino community to be responsible for the homophobic realities that exist within traditional ideas of machismo. Other events based around Queer experiences and narratives also focused on intersectional identities even within the Queer immigrant community. These events tended to be created as fundraisers or places to allow intersectional identities to be explored and inter-community dialogues to be discussed openly and freely in a safe and even fun space.

The following page includes illustrations that are a sample of event flyers for events that occurred in California during this project. At these events, which were often fundraisers, spaces were opened up to the broader community to enjoy themselves in an intentionally inclusive Queer friendly space. Not all of these events were put on by groups that focused mainly on Undocumented Youth issues, although some of them were. Other events, such as comedy nights, poetry readings, and special Undocu-Queer panels, also created intentionally open spaces. The art-work that is seen in these flyers is done with the intention of reaching out to people and getting them to come to the event. This art work was used to promote these events online, often through blogs and social networking sites.



Illustration 4.4: Collage of Select Flyers for Queer People of Color Events

As seen in the above flyers, there were numerous events for LGBTQIA people of color that were held during the period of this study. Some of these events included Queer cumbias, Drag, and game nights. The depictions of people in these flyers were often of people of color and tended to play with gender and constructions of queer identities. For example, one flyer for a drag show used an image of the Mexican

artist Frida Kahlo, emphasizing her mustache so that it is hard to tell where she would belong on the gender binary (one cannot tell if the Frida representation is a man dressed as a womyn or a womyn dressed as a man). Like the *Dia de Los Muertos* event, these events and flyers also situate these Queer spaces as belonging to communities of color instead of mainstream LGBT spaces. These events were often art focused in some way- whether they were created around dancing, performance, or even games- and are themselves a good demonstration of the importance of creativity in relation to intentional inclusion of Queer narratives and experiences.

While there were multiple events which similarly were built around Queer identities for People of Color, there were also events from the Undocumented community which were not specifically based around Queer identities but were also in some way inclusive. For example, many of the youth art shows included art by Undocumented youth which embraced LGBTQI experiences and narratives. For example, although a painting being auctioned off at an art show to raise money for Undocumented Youth in Southern California focused on a pair of hands and did not show the gender of either hand holder, the placard explaining the painting identified the young Latina artist as “a sex-positive multi-media artist queer rights activist and film maker” (*Field Notes, Southern California, September 2011*). A placard at an art show held in the house of a SF Bay Area artist and her intergenerational Latino family, including not only traditional Latino religious altars and cultural representations, but notions of sex-positivity as well, explaining “this piece is a statement about unleashing your sexuality and encouraging a positive, not negative discussion about what sex means for all of us- the term ‘sex-positive’ embraces social and philosophical attitudes promoting open sexuality without limits” (*field Notes, SF Bay Area, December 2011*).



Illustration 4.5: Artists at Art Event in San Francisco Bay Area, I'm a Queer Undocumented Artist Unapologetic and Unafraid

At this same event, which was not mainly focused on Queer art, a small Mexican flag with a metal rainbow flag attached to it, was proudly displayed in the front room of the house. Another placard was titled “I am a Queer Undocumented Artist”. This accompanied an art series which told the stories of three Undocumented Youth through written text narratives which narrated some of their experiences with being undocumented, including watching close family members being forcefully deported in front of them. Queer narratives were also explored among the Undocumented community in closed door workshops for Undocumented Students. Here, young individuals commented on their appreciation of Queer politicians of Color who they saw as allies in the undocumented and immigrants rights movement and also showed respect towards those who came out as Queer in these spaces by listening to them and embracing them or including them in some other way.

Inclusion: Identity Spaces & “Coming Out” as Undocu-Queer

Undocumented and queer youth have been at the forefront of both the queer and immigrant rights movements. We are often told to reflect on our identity based on the messaging of the space in which we are present. We are told that Immigrant Rights and LGBTQIA¹ rights are separate issues but, it is here, at the intersection of our lives, where our Undocu-Queer identity brings a new perspective. Being Undocu-Queer we live under laws that treat us as less human, we are scapegoats to society’s problems, are

¹ LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual identities.

misrepresented, and feel unsafe or vulnerable due to policies, institutions, and attitudes that keep us on the margins. Our every day lives are a reflection of these intersections and we will not accept the message that our movements do not intersect. We are queer undocumented youth. We cannot afford to be in either the queer or undocumented closet. We cannot and will not hide; we cannot and will not let those who haven't been in our shoes decide and tell us how to act, how to feel and that this isn't our home. We have the right to be whoever we want to be and love whoever we want to love. It is a shame that the only path we have to legalization is to lead a heterosexual lifestyle. We shouldn't and won't conform to such ideas. We have a right to live and love to the full extent of our capacity. We urge you to come out! Now is the time to come and proclaim that you're UndocuQueer, Unafraid and Unashamed! (field-notes, purpose statement of Youth Immigrants rights group web site, March 2012).

Alongside the openness to Queer narratives and experiences in events focused on art, fundraising and socializing, Queer inclusion was also found in conceptual spaces through broad acceptance of various identities in the Undocumented movement. Like LGBTQIA persons, the identity of being undocumented is one that is not visible to the naked eye. Because of this, it is at times easy for individuals to 'pass' as a documented person, even to their close friends. Juliana, an Undocumented Latin@ in Southern California explained this experience, noting "when my best friends wanted to go on a trip to Mexico, I pretended I didn't want to go because they don't know about my situation and I didn't want to tell them" (*field notes, November 2011*).

At events, in art and online, there were many times where this intersectional identity was discussed. In fact, not only was space opened up to Undocu-Queer narratives, 'coming out' as Undocumented and Queer was often encouraged as a form of empowerment. The push to 'come out' as Undocu-Queer, or simply as Undocumented, occurred in some of the art content as well as through specific mobilizations throughout the year. The concept of "coming out" of the closet, one of the foundations of the mainstream LGBT movement from the 1970's, is an attempt to humanize the identity of Queer people by showing their communities that they do, indeed, exist. 'Coming Out' as Queer was an idea that was often supported from the Undocumented community at events, in online media and through art that was made by Undocu-Queer art activists. Undocumented Youth (Queer or not) were urged at times to participate in marches and other events that were part of mainstream LGBT activism, including national "coming out" day.

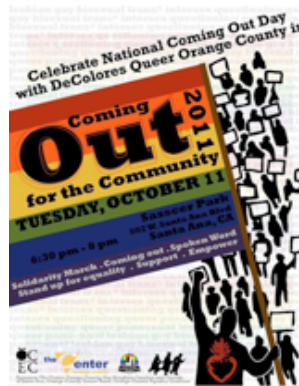


Illustration 4.6: Event Flyer for National Coming Out Day 2011



Illustration 4.7: Youth Marching in Coming Out Ceremony

Also, as part of the movement to push the federal DREAM Act and to mobilize against deportation and educational inequity of Undocumented students, organizers embraced Youth coming out to their communities as undocumented, even through public coming out ceremonies and marches. These typically got media coverage and were heavily policed. These marches included Queer undocumented Youth activists as well as traditional mainstream LGBT imagery, such as gay flags. A common occurrence in these marches when the Youth would ‘come out’ would be that they would march into the street and sit on dreamer banners so that traffic would be blocked and the Youth would have to be arrested. When this happened, the Undocumented Youth who were coming out would be detained and then put into deportation proceedings. In other words, these Youth put their lives in the United States at risk to ‘come out’ as

Undocumented. When arrested, prerecorded videos telling the personal narratives of the Youth who were arrested would be released through blogs and social networking sites online. Always ending with the words “if you’re watching this, I have been deported”, these videos served as an important tool to not only come out to their friends and family, but to tell their own unique experience as Undocumented. Thus, Youth had the ability to come out with their intersectional identities if they wanted to. These videos were also used by activists who worked to try and get these arrested youth out of deportation proceedings.

These ‘coming out’ ceremonies had a real impact on the artistic and activist community of Undocumented Youth, whether or not they were part of them. Speaking about the reasons for his inspiration to make art pieces for the movement, one queer art activist noted that people coming out as undocumented impacted him significantly. He explained that he was inspired after

seeing how younger undocumented college students were so brave to come out and say, ‘I’m undocumented and unafraid!’ When I was in college, the advise was always to stay quiet about our status. Even when organizing in our communities, we were told by allies... to not say our real names and be careful who we told. But these younger folks were so courageous in just coming out and even getting arrested. This inspired me and others to come out and not be ashamed. How could I not illustrate this in my drawings? (Interview, December 2011).

As these mobilization spaces were intentionally inclusive towards Queer experiences, using art in their flyers, posters, and actual demonstrations, they introduced Undocu-Queer experiences into the public sphere. Through this process, other Undocu-Queer Youth, who may or may not have participated in these specific events, saw their narratives represented in a public way, impacting the art that they made on their own or for other activist purposes.

Undocumented Youth in California have also decided to “come out” with their intersectional identities through their artistic mediums. For example, a number of Undocumented Youth participated in an online event in which they were asked to take a picture of themselves with a hand made sign that outed themselves to the community (*field notes, January 2012*). These pictures were posted online and also used for the basis of other art pieces. Also, through the collaboration of Queer Undocumented artists, a series of drawings and quotes were made in early 2012 which embraced the Undocu-Queer identity and were based

on real life narratives and quotes that youth were encouraged to send in. These includes lines such as “Undocumented, taking control of my own identity, I exist”, “I am undocuQueer: and inspiring hue of identities. Embracing my struggle, empowering la joteria, anamoring my passions: Out of the closet(s) out of the shadows”, and “coming out of the shadowy closet: undocumented and Queer, join me”.



Illustration 4.8: I am Undocu-Queer Portrait and Quote Series. Bottom Right: Five Tips For Queer Boys Series

Other Youth made art in support of mobilizations, which they posted in virtual and actual spaces. This art supported Undocu-Queers who were taking part in coming out ceremonies or marches for justice.



Illustration 4.9: Posters made to support a Undocu-Queer March

While “coming out” as queer or undocumented can have serious reproductions for those who embrace these identities, the push to do so has aided in the development of the Undocumented identity as well as personal empowerment. Speaking to those who continue to pass as straight or documented, one participant explained “I would tell them to take their time. There is no rush. You don't owe anybody to come out but yourself. But once you do, the freedom that comes with it is beautiful and empowering. Just know that once you come out, someone will hear that story and will then empower themselves to come out and so on, which will [be] creating an empowering domino effect” (*interview, young male Latino Artist, January 2012*). This ‘coming out’ with intersectional identities has also allowed for Queer People of Color in this movement to ‘come out’ with advice that they have learned through their experiences.



Illustration 4.10: Five Tips for Queer Boys, Tip #1.

For example, the online series “Five Tips for Queer Boys”, a five part series of words of wisdom to young gay boys of color, talks about the realities of exclusion on multiple levels, saying things like “shit is bigger than sex and sexuality. You will be forced to examine life through a multidimensional consciousness and come to an understanding that you are an intersection of thins, a complex being that embodies many struggles beyond borders and gay marriage” (*field notes, January 2012*), or “know that you have been conditioned to hate every fiber of your being through a history that has demonized your spirit, but before

times like these you were celebrated and honored. Your spirit was seen as something beautiful created by a higher power” (*field notes, January 2012*). Although forceful deportation and discrimination toward undocumented persons has been occurring since immigration laws were developed in the U.S., the adoption of ‘coming out’ ideologies has allowed a number of leaders to emerge from within this community who have shared their Undocu-Queer struggles in public spaces. Also, some Undocu-Queer artists found inspiration in the strength of youth who were claiming their intersectional identities in public spaces. This inspiration led to an increased amount of intentionally inclusive Queer art activism within the Undocumented community.

Exclusions: San Diego Narratives & Critiques

Although this research showed that there has been inclusion of Queer narratives, experiences and ideas from within the Undocumented community, there were also exceptions to this finding. A central exception pertains to the fact that Queer inclusion was rarely seen at formal organizing events, protests, marches, group meetings, or workshops that were held in the San Diego area. Some of the events I attended in the San Diego area included non- Undocumented focused art shows (that included art from Undocumented Youth I knew), meetings with individuals from Undocumented Youth and immigrants rights based non profit groups, quarterly hikes with Undocumented Youth throughout San Diego, legal workshops for Undocumented students, and workshops for high school and college students related to the California Dream act. In these spaces, Queer narratives were never openly discussed or represented. There were times in which I probed questions with individuals about Queer experiences, but workshop leaders and participants often told me that they did not know very much about Queer issues related to being Undocumented.

There are many things that may explain the absence of formal Undocu-Queer activism in San Diego. For one, the organizing events in the San Diego area tended to be smaller in nature and more segregated from each other due to the lack of good public transportation. Because driving a car without a license can lead to deportation if one is caught, many undocumented Youth in San Diego relied solely on their friends or family to take them places or else tended to stay isolated in their own communities. In

addition to a transportation system that does not measure up to that of the Bay Area or LA, the suburban sprawl and large canyon systems of San Diego also cut people off from building community across neighborhoods. Sam, a Queer activist in San Diego, talked about this phenomenon, noting

when I think about the struggle of being able to get activistyness going here, or even about community building here, I always think about how this city is fragmented and huge, so that the possibility of community and working together is there but the city almost undoes it by making it difficult for people to unite. Because the gigantic sprawlness of it waters the concentration of these people and all the canyons and freeways slice this city up. Which, I guess if folks are getting around by car, the freeways supposedly only make things more accessible. But as one who bikes and busses... I feel like it's difficult to get to people who don't live in my neighborhood (Field notes, May 2012).

Through this narrative, it is clear that a combination of structural factors play into a strong lack of activism in the San Diego area. This lack of activism is not only in the area of Undocumented issues; even events like occupy and other immigrants rights protests held throughout the year have experienced many of these barriers to organizing. From my experience living in San Diego as a high school student, I see that these separations have been reified as 'normal' in mainstream white culture of the San Diego area. Also, much of the organizing that did occur for immigrants rights in San Diego during this study tended to be related to religious based groups. This may be due to San Diego's more conservative atmosphere, which both makes it more difficult for people to be out as LGBTQIA and might encourage more segregated networking among members of the same religious community. Regardless of a group's actual politics, meeting in churches and other religious facilities that are known to discriminate against non-heterosexual identified individuals might shape who comes and participates in organizing events. Other important factors that may play into this reality include the fact that the San Diego border is the most heavily policed border in the world and it is a major center for the U.S. military.

In other words, due to infrastructural and social conditions in the San Diego area, there may be a serious risk to health and safety for individuals who choose to seek empowerment through coming out as Undocumented or Queer, a situation which has impacted the ability of this community to formally be inclusive of Queer narratives and experiences. This is not to say that coming out as Undocumented or Queer in the LA or SF areas is not a serious risk to Queer People of Color within these communities;

instead, it may speak to the fact that persons in San Diego have more first hand experience with the violence of oppression and Xenophobia that exist in the United States due to coming of age in a openly conservative anti gay and anti immigrant region. One Queer Undocumented youth, who had personally experienced the violence of his own and his families deportation, explained “when you’re in that moment, it doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done, to them you’re nothing. They treat you like cattle, you are their business transaction” (*interview, Latino male, February 2012*). Another Queer San Diego youth commented on the movement to come out publicly, saying

I don’t like [art work] that uses undocumented and queer on the same level because it’s making them seem to be the same, and in reality if you’re undocumented, you don’t have the same privileges as people in the queer movement. Being queer is a privilege, being undocumented gets you thrown in jail and then you get deported, being queer doesn’t. That’s why the whole ‘coming out’ thing, I don’t like it (*interview, Young Latina, January 2012*).

While the suburban landscape and structures of San Diego are in many ways problematic for organizing and may limit Undocu-Queer activism in particular, they could also be seen as successful elements of the colonial model. As San Diego is not only a border town, touching the very tip of Latin America through its’ sister city (Tijuana), San Diego also has the highest number of Native American reservations within its limits, as well as large immigrant groups and neighborhoods of many immigrant groups from places other than Latin America. Keeping these groups separate allows San Diego to maintain its’ elite border city status instead of being conceptualized as a Native, immigrant, or a people of color city. Also, San Diego has a history of colonization through religion, as Mission San Diego was founded as part of the colonial mission of Spain and missionization was one of the foundational violence’s that pushed indigenous people in the region into many forms of erasure. Also, the huge investment of San Diego in the military industrial complex maintains the participation in colonial movements, both in San Diego and across the world.

Shadow Spaces and Guardian Angels

While the structural elements of San Diego limit activism and organizing for Undocu-Queer Youth, they also encourage informal forms of networking and organizing. Informal forms of organizing relate to people working together, often outside of a non-profit or formally recognized rights group. These

are shadow spaces, in which many Undocumented Queer youth use their agency to survive. In informal and formal interviews, these youth discussed the dangers of coming out as Undocumented and did not feel that they would experience any empowerment from doing so. The art that these Youth made tended to use abstract representation to talk about their struggles as Undocumented and Queer (in addition to other identities that they embodied).

While Undocumented and Queer voices in San Diego have critiqued the coming out movement and could be seen as being ‘un-supportive’ of migrants rights campaigns, complicating their critique might show that these counter Undocu-Queer narratives are some of the strongest voices for migrant and transnational Queer Youth rights. While San Diego Undocu-Queer may not publicly ‘come out’ as undocumented or queer in the same way that youth in LA and SF bay areas have, their insertion of narratives that show them continuing to live in fear under the state links them to the experiences and realities of Undocumented people who may not have the privileges other Undocumented Youth possess. Instead, San Diego based Undocu-Queer Youth tended to link their struggle to critiques of borders and reified transnational inequality. This trend came out in the art work that was based in San Diego, which tended to discuss painful border experiences and personal traumas related to being Undocumented more often than the art work that was present in LA or Northern California. The following are two examples of this trend, done by Andrea who is part of the San Diego art and activist community but is currently living in Mexico. These two pieces demonstrate some of the traumas that Youth experience along the borders that they must navigate and are followed by excerpts from interviews with Andrea.



Illustration 4.11: Midnight, Painting by Andrea.

This piece reflects our reality... constantly migrating north, getting lost at midnight in the desert, risking their lives in hopes that they'll make it, cross the U.S/Mexico border, find a job and start sending money to their families back in Mexico. And there they go, leaving everything, risking everything, dragging their heart, a heart that wants to stay, stay close to family and friends, no one, no heart wants to leave their country but they are pushed to migrate, and often yes, to get lost at midnight endlessly walking with no hope and company but their guardian angel which in this case is that beam of light that shines our way in the darkness, that last hopeful breath that pushes us to go on. And why is he sad you asked? How would you feel if you knew that you have left everything you love for hopes of a better future but now there is no better future, only the vast wastelands covered by the grey ness of the night?(Andrea, Interview April 2012).



Illustration 4.12: Roxanne, Painting by Andrea.

Inspired by a car ride close to downtown in Mexico D.F where I saw trannies prostitutes in plain daylight I painted 'Roxanne' thinking in that one song: 'Roxanne, you don't have to put on the red..' reflecting on what it is like to do that kind of work and if that Roxanne in particular didn't want to do that kind of job what were her options? and how sad her guardian angel must feel (Andrea, Interview April 2012).

Although Andrea's art work shows pain and struggle, she is also able to point to hope in these places. The guardian angels that she draws with these characters (who are both based on real life people she knows personally), are all that holds them through their pain. Unlike art work done to support 'coming out' ceremonies and movements for access to citizenship, this artwork locates oppression towards people, based on their intersectional identities, as a phenomenon that is a result of structures of nation, gender and sexuality. In this way, the guardian angel does not represent citizenship or inclusion in contemporary

structures; instead these angels represent something that remains unseen but strong through the structures of colonization.

I will not attempt to name the guardian angel, the light that holds true even in the darkest times of oppression. What this guardian angel is may change from person to person. This angel may be art or creativity to some; it may be learning or exchanging knowledge to others. To some, the angel that gets them through could be a real person, through a Queer relationship regardless of the embrasure of ‘coming out’ as Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Transsexual or navigating shadowed spaces while knowing that you are different. Others may find this strength in communication with higher power or by looking to the future with faith regardless of circumstance. Whatever it is, these voices from the San Diego art activist community show that guardian angels do exist and that there is hope and love even among isolation, militarization, criminalization, deportation, heteronormativity, and structures of colonial oppression. This is not to say that these struggles are not real and painful (they are), but it is through a transnational Queer decolonial creative lens that these obstacles might be shattered.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at Queer inclusion or exclusion within struggles for rights across California. I have found that Queer people of color narratives have been left out from much of the mainstream LGBT social justice movements and empowering spaces. My data for this project has also shown that space has been made for Undocu-Queer Youth through organizing and mobilizing in LA and the San Francisco Bay Area. In fact, ‘coming out’ as Undocu-Queer not only impacted the movement for migrant rights, it also affected individual artists who became inspired to talk about their intersectional identities in their public art work. However, the data also showed that Queer Youth in San Diego critiqued the idea of ‘coming out’, either as Undocumented or Queer, as a good solution to the oppressions they experience. While this may be due in part to the structural make up of this city, shadowed Queer narratives still found ways to come through in informal spaces to those who were listening for them. Further research might focus on exploring this in greater detail. While Undocu-Queer organizing and mobilizing for change through ‘coming out’ in public spaces is an important way that Queer immigrant people of color can find inclusion in movements

for social justice, it is also important to think about the power that an individual can experience when one finds light among the shadows.

::El Capítulo Número Cinco::

Art Became My | :WindOw: | Conclusion & Creative Reflection

“Art became my window, my guiding hand who walked me out of the darkness”

(Andrea, Interview April, 2012).

This research project attempted to look at the use of art activism within the community of Undocumented Youth in California. My research has demonstrated that that art is an important aspect of organizing and mobilizing within this community. This project has also shown that art can help to empower those who experience discrimination and oppression in their daily lives within a variety of communities and places. The ability of art to enact emotional empowerment, whether done on an individual basis or in a group, can allow individuals to experience healing. The process of creating art can be a way in which Youth use their agency to give voice to their own struggles, build community, experience knowledge communally, and break down stereotypes cast onto them by mainstream society. When shown to others, art can convey a message, teach, and connect people to each other in special and important ways. Art also has the ability to become a space for the inclusion of new ideas and communities. Undocumented Youth activism is not the first area in which art has been an important tool in grassroots organizing. There is, in fact, a long history of artistic activism throughout Latin America, as well as within communities of color in the United States. By situating contemporary Undocumented Youth art activism among other activist movements across the Americas, one becomes aware that the texts and interviews included in this thesis share many features of other movements concerned with survival in a time of extreme violence towards specific bodies. In the specific case of art by Undocumented Youth, art activism and the stories of the youth challenge white heteronormativity under the modern nation-state. These narratives have few places to emerge within contemporary hegemonic structures. However, by focusing on the art that exists within this

community, it becomes possible to peek into the lived reality of the Undocumented identity. As political leaders continue to endorse anti-immigrant state and federal policies of discrimination for the purposes of exploitation and as educational institutions continue to discriminate against individuals from certain communities, Youth led creative movements for social justice will continue to respond. In fact, at this very moment there are young people across the state of California, the United States, Latin America, and globally who are using art to navigate and struggle against the violence they are witnessing in their own lives. These artistic activists use their agency to transform themselves and others, demonstrating in the process that Undocumented Youth are not victims but rather survivors. Surviving and finding within themselves the power to heal and build community, Undocumented Youth art activists challenge the idea that we must exist within a model of the nation state; they confront the anomies and stereotypes that reify constructions of borders; they Queer the idea of Queer; and they open up dialogues that have long been erased from popular discourse. Within these artistic spaces, creativity and the ability to play with imagination become ways in which Undocumented Youth manage their daily lives and rethink their worlds. However, it is not enough to smile upon the creativity of Undocumented Youth; this is work that requires a response. This is work that requires a re-understanding of our own contributions to the oppressions of global exploitation. Thus, this conclusion breaks from the typical ending to a thesis project. Instead of simply summarizing my finding, I will present my own art as a reflection of the statements and experiences that impacted me most from this thesis and the process of this thesis project.

Creative Reflections

Art Became My Window: & Other Powerful Quotes

One of the findings that I proved to be most powerful in this thesis project is linked to the ways in which young artists worked through their struggles by making art on their own or in community settings. *Art Became My Window: & Other Powerful Quotes* is an art piece that I did in response to writing “Art for the Soul”, chapter 2 of this thesis project. After coding the interviews, working through the findings, checking in with the participants, and then summarizing the ways in which art can heal the individual, I found a quote from Andrea’s interview to be especially relevant and inspirational. Talking about her

experience and suggestions for others who are trying to express themselves through creative means, she explains “art became my window, my guiding hand who walked me out of the darkness... Todo eso que no puedes decir con palabras, (*all of this that cannot be said with words*) just say it, somehow, whatever way works for you, embrace it and let that way be your guiding hand out of the dark” (Andrea, Interview April 2012). After sitting with these words, I decided to manifest the idea of art as a window by painting my own window. I chose to paint a huge hand that took up the entire space of my large bedroom window. The hand represented the image constructed by Andrea that art became her guiding hand out of the darkness.

Including five other empowering quotes from these interviews, one for each finger, I wanted to interact with this quote in a space where natural light and darkness moved freely. Allowing my window to also become art, I wanted to allow these powerful quotes to sing out in the immigrant neighborhood in Southern San Diego where I live (Northern city heights). As seen in the visuals below of this art piece, the perspective and colors of this piece change depending on the time of day as well as the viewers own perspective. This reflects the ways in which art for empowerment is not a static process but one which requires constant reflection on the world to which it is speaking.



Illustration 5.1A: Art Became my Window, by Virginia Bartz

The following quotes are used in this art piece to make up the finger portions of the hand:

we can all be healers, instead of waiting for others in the straight world to accept our identities, we can put artwork out there that rebuilds our Queerdoms (Y: field-notes December 2011).

My identities gave me the creativity that many dream of (J.S., Interview, November 2012).

Once I shared myself with others, I was able to connect with them at a deeper level... The blessing of doing this was that I was able to connect with others and see their humanity and accept my own humanness (Interview January 2012).

It feels nice to be able to share my story with a different community. A community that is also oppressed (Anonymous, Interview 2012).

Painting is a form of self-healing for me (Esperanza, Interview January 2012)



Illustration 5.1B: Art Became my Window, by Virginia Bartz

These quotes were chosen because they demonstrate, simply, some of the trends found in chapter 2 of this thesis. These trends included finding an emotional outlet and healing through art, as well as the ability to connect to others, present a message, and learn about themselves and others. These quotes do not address the periods of tension that many youth experienced as they began to share their struggles through art as well as the times in which art did not work to empower individuals or groups who were part of this project. However, the quotes that were chosen to be included show the importance and power of creativity in surviving the struggles that Undocumented Youth face.

You're Welcome

“You’re Welcome” is another piece that uses symbolism to interact with some of the concepts I experienced through this project. Much of the organizing that was taking place in the Undocumented

community was around ideas of access to education through the federal and state Dream acts. While the art work done in the Undocumented Youth community varied in perspective around this issue (some of the work looked at discrimination in higher education while other works looked at issues of K-12 education for low-income immigrant youth as well as the struggles of their families and communities) much of the art created was around issues of educational inequity and justice. At the same time that I was doing this project, I worked for the Graduate Student Association as the VP Diversity. In this process, I was able to see first hand some of the ways in which university administrations continue to systematically exclude specific categories of Youth (including but not limited to Undocumented students), even as they paint themselves as opening their doors to these communities. The following piece critiques these structures through simple child like imagery. While the educational system (the box= schools) seems to be open and welcoming (even with colorful balloons and flags and welcome signs), the top of the box is limiting; only those who can fit into the tiny entrance can get in. Thus, regardless of the signs welcoming all colors, shapes and sizes, the only ones who are able to get in are the ones who look exactly alike. There are a number of shapes in the background that are protesting this fact with signs that read things like 'let us in'. These are the activist shapes who are using their creativity to try and fight for a change in the structure. However, these activist shapes also are in danger of becoming disconnected to the shape communities that they represent.



Illustration 5.2A: You're Welcome, by Virginia Bartz



Illustration 5.2b: You're Welcome, by Virginia Bartz

Privilege

“Privilege” is also a critique of structures. However, this work is a direct quote from an interview with a Queer Latina in San Diego who critiques the Queer movement and ‘coming out’ as a privilege. She explains, “in reality, if you are undocumented you don’t have the same privileges as people in the Queer movement. Being undocumented gets you thrown in jail, and then you get deported. Being queer doesn’t” (Interview, young Latina January 2012). She goes on to say in this interview that it is this difference that makes her not care for the idea that she should ‘come out’ in order to help build change for her community. Instead, she talks about the dangers and difficulties that exist for Undocumented Queer Latinas who are out with their status or sexuality. I found this quote especially interesting because it recognizes and stands up to the complexities that may exist in the Undocu-Queer movement. While theoretical links can be made between the Queer community and the Undocumented community, this statement shows that the lived experience of being Queer and Undocumented is different from just being Queer or part of the Queer rights movement.



Illustration 5.3: Privilege by Virginia Bartz

Anger into Power, Womyn are Warriors

One way in which this project impacted me personally was through my decisions as an artist outside of this project. Including my own artwork here follows the ways in which the art activists in chapter three address their realities as students as not being separate from their realities as immigrant Youth outside of school. Before this project, I tended to make art about my own experiences and struggles. However, seeing the Youth around me use their passions for art-work that responded to the injustices in their lives has inspired me to use my own creativity to express myself in a different way. The following two pieces are related to injustices and violence's towards womyn of color in my community that happened during the time I was working on this project. "Anger into Power" uses an Audre Lorde saying and a hand painted portrait to respond to the violent murder of Shaima Alawadi, an Iraqi immigrant Womyn and mother in San Diego whose death has been labeled a hate crime. Working with activists in LA and the San Francisco bay area, I saw that people in other places were organizing and mobilizing to this event with greater power than people in San Diego were. In addition, the piece "womyn are warriors" responds to a violent incident in Los Angeles that happened to a close friend of mine (also a young immigrant womyn) during this project. Although these two pieces are not about Undocumented Youth, they point to the systems of hate and discrimination, as well as violence and oppression, that many of the artists in this study also experience in their daily lives based on their intersectional identities.

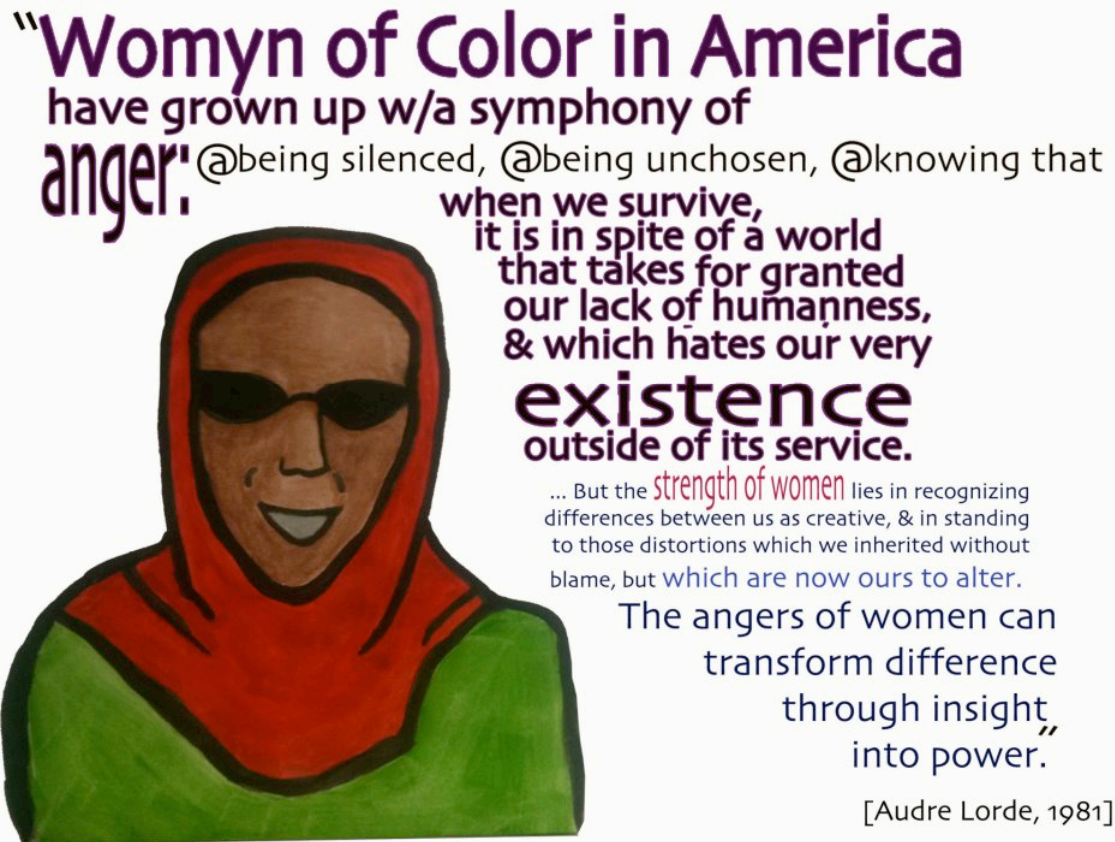


Illustration 5.4: Anger Into Power by Virginia Bartz



**WOMYN
 ARE WARRIORS**

Illustration 5.5: Womyn Are Warriors by Virginia Bartz

Art for Justicia

In addition to producing a high quality academic text, this project was built through an action-oriented framework. In other words, in an attempt to share the power that is related to this thesis I tried to give back to the community that participated in this study. One way in which I did this was to provide an undergraduate student familiar with issues related to the Undocumented community the opportunity to get research experience first hand in this project. This brought depth to this content of this research, but also allowed me to make the project into a mentoring relationship in which I shared practical knowledge about the process of doing a qualitative project. Also, due to the financial difficulties I noticed in Undocumented students around me, I used this project to help start and support fundraising for college scholarships. In April, 2012, I held a collaging workshop at UCSD that over 60 students and community members attended. The workshop, called *Art for Justicia* did many things. While the goal of the workshop was to create border related collages, which were later sent to the San Francisco Bay Area to an art show that raised money for scholarships and a new community mural, the workshop also used some of the ‘findings’ of this project in an attempt to empower the San Diego community through art. Participants were encouraged to make art about their own lives, specifically the intersectional border spaces which they inhabit (such as the border between gender as well as race). By making collages about their own borders, this workshop became a space where individuals in the community could come together and connect to others while also finding a space of healing from emotional traumas they may have had related to these borders. This was a success, and through informal conversations I found people were conscious of the fact that they were finding peace and healing through through the collages. Also, this workshop was a fundraiser for a scholarship that I created this year for Queer Latina Undocumented Youth who are from the San Diego area. At the workshop, I also shared a number of videos from groups who were part of this research project and opened up space to discuss my ‘findings’ with members of the San Diego activist community. Also, the materials for the workshop included a number of items that I had collected myself through a walk along the border space between the U.S. and Mexico. The following are images of collages that were made at this workshop along with a brief description of each.



Illustration 5.6A: Art for Justicia Workshop sign



Illustration 5.6B: Art for Justicia workshop in progress



Illustration 5.6C: Donation box and collages as they dry



Illustration 5.6D: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “where the world’s most _____ come to be invisible”- looking at border spaces of visibility.



Illustration 5.6E: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Constraints”- thinking about ways that people and nature are constrained through borders.



Illustration 5.6F:Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Age and technology”- thinking about the ways in which borders of age and ‘knowing’ lead to specific types of losses.



Illustration 5.6G:Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Who am I?”- looking at the border of gender and race/ ethnicity and questions of mixed identity.



Illustration 5.6H: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Our borders define us but don’t let those borders be your boundaries”- looking at positivism/ the belief in science and the boundaries that are created through ‘definition’.



Illustration 5.6I: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Go” maps of San Diego/ Mexico border with hand drawn characters and elements cut out of brochures from Tijuana estuary bird map guides. Thinking about movement and space as borders.



Illustration 5.6J: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop. “Feelings”- thinking about feelings as borders and ways in which violence is aimed at impacting our happiness and other positive feelings.



Illustration 5.6K: Art work from Art for Justicia Workshop: map of Tijuana/ San Diego border in Spanish, with flower grown along the border attached- thinking about the borders of our visions.

(popsicle sticks in above image read: “borders police us wherever we are, we must live beyond those boundaries and imagine another universe possible. ‘Our visions begin with our desires’ (Audre Lorde)”.

The Spiritual Journey of This Thesis Project

Graduate students of color have employed various coping strategies and methods to preserve and persist while attempting to obtain advanced degrees. One such coping strategy is to be connected consistently and constantly with a spiritual awareness or belief that provides the internal or cognitive dialogue needed to counteract the negative or self-debilitating actions that may occur inside and outside the classroom environment... Overwhelming discriminatory practices such as sexism, racism, and classism require underrepresented groups to shape and determine their own world from a higher moral and spiritual plane, one that is not repressive but respectful and accepting (Howard-Hamilton et. al 2009, 169).

During the process of working with Undocumented Youth who are surviving their own traumas and discrimination, I also had to survive a few things. While I recognize that this survival is a privileged survival- being in graduate school allows for incredible access to power and is not ‘dangerous’ to my life-

this period in my life was still a struggle in many ways. This section explores some of my own personal spiritual journey through grad school at UCSD as a Native American identified graduate student connected to this research project in very intimate ways. This section includes a number of writings and visual art that I have made in the process of creating this thesis. These works were not originally made with the intention of sharing them here. However, as I began to see links between my challenges as a Native student in the field of Latin American Studies and those faced by Undocumented Youth, I found that these personal dialogues and responses bring depth to the conclusion of this thesis. Also, as this thesis argues for the use of art to empower, this section demonstrates the use of this lesson in my own life and serves as a guide to other underrepresented students who may be struggling to survive their graduate experience as well.

Water



Traveled the campus I will start school at in less than a month. Found a bench near where my office/Institute is at that looks out to the sea. The ocean is where I have found closeness to my brother, and I am glad that I will be able to visit him at almost anytime that I need a break at school. Water is humbling to me lately.

Illustration 5.7: Water, Photo of My Brother, Josh Bartz, and personal Writing

Water: This is something I wrote a month before beginning school at UCSD. As I have mentioned, coming to UCSD in many ways was coming home to me. However, coming home to San Diego happened for me during a period of trauma. My brother, whom I had left high school early to work two jobs and raise, had not been able to survive the many demons that are part of the struggles of poverty, including overcoming

his own personal traumas of loss and displacement. His spirit is what has gotten me through grad school, if not symbolically, at a minimum from knowing that life can be over quickly and should be taken advantage of when given the opportunity. This is a picture of my brother, Josh, at the beach in San Diego with me when he was in high school. I knew that UCSD was the right place for me to go because I wanted to be close to his memories (he passed away on the night of New Years eve, 2009 after jumping off the San Diego Coronado bridge). I was not prepared, however, for the violence that would accompany my grad school experience at UCSD as a Native American identified student.

Indian soil

Like the ants, who stumbled on my grandmothers grave, all you people walk around this soil like there are no spirits underneath. Yet you are not creatures of nature and you are not Black. you are the intellectuals and you think that makes it ok. My grandmother is buried in a wall in Arizona. We couldn't buy the land that she was Native to. With 6 mouths to feed and no work to be found, we were unable to afford it, among other things. An orphan for violent reasons, she was denied a proper death ceremony to accompany everything else she was denied. And I was the only one with my mother to perform our grief. Unable to clump the earth in our hands, we stood in the hallway and cut our hair.

And what is it that you cannot afford? To look at me in the eye and tell me why my history is invisible here?

My Brother The Native plays on the radio in the loft, and I remember sitting on the floor when we were sweaty and all we cared about were the sounds that we could make. Now, you play in the background as professional and academics talk in spaces you have never seen. I go from here to a video night where we eat popcorn from kernels that were made en el otro lado, pero we don't recognize our own contributions to the enemy as we watch a film about struggles of Latin American indigeneity.

I have lived many lives and so have those before me, and my ancestors are calling me to be who I am meant to be. If only I knew what that means, except I do. But the road to leadership is more lonely than I ever could have imagined it would be. Everything that we do is on Indian soil, some claims have merely been more destructive than others. (April 5, 2012).

Indian soil: This writing was a response to the anger that I felt in a few places where I experienced erasure and pain from the treatment of Native issues at this campus. Through my job as VP Diversity for the GSA, I came across the administrative decisions regarding Native issues on numerous occasions. I do not feel

safe describing these individually here, but the fact that the local indigenous groups are currently in the process of suing this campus might reflect the violent landscape which I often found myself navigating alone. I did not come to UCSD to study indigeneity, but as these violences happened around me, I realized that part of the spiritual journey that brought me to this space was to see these issues first hand. In this place, I began to see issues of Undocumented students and the idea of citizenship as supporting the capitalist colonial nation-state.

Academia is a Lonely Place

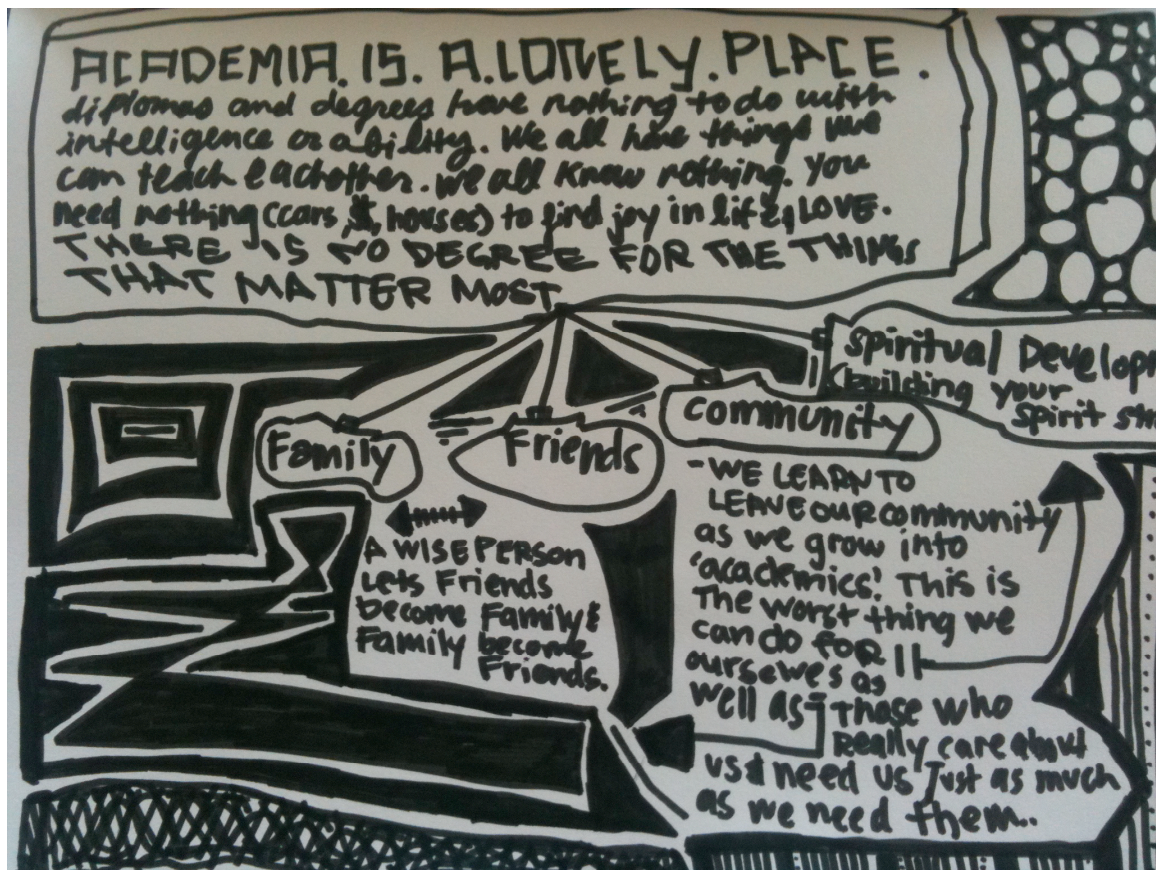


Illustration 5.8: Academia is a Lonely Place by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz

Academia is a Lonely Place: This sketch is one I made when feeling isolated and alone at UCSD. The main text reads: “Diplomas and degrees have nothing to do with intelligence or ability. We all have things we can teach each other. We all know nothing. You need nothing (cars, \$, houses) to find joy in life, love. There is no degree for the things that matter most: Family/Friends- a wise person lets friends become family and family become friends. Community- We learn to leave our community as we grow into ‘academics’. This is the worst thing we can do for ourselves as well as those who really care about us and need us just as much as we need them. Spiritual Development- building your spirit strong”. This reflects some of the ways in which elite academia is built on the idea that degrees and institutions are the best ways in which knowledge is obtained. However, as elite academia is inaccessible to many populations, students who do make it often end up feeling very separate from their communities. Doing a thesis project that let me break this down somewhat was an important element in the process of trying to break from this oppressive model.

Extrarruptions

This thesis is writing itself.

It’s storming outside and my fingers are typing frantically. I leave windows in all sides of the house open and the wind rushes through my home like the coffee rushes through my veins. It’s as if my ancestors have picked up their spirits from below the earth on a journey to visit me here and they are screaming keep going, keep going! Don’t let anything stop you! Make more tea so we can scream at you, go go go! You have all the pieces we’ve been preparing you for years!

I’m in my pajamas and missing out on big city adventures on this Friday night. I’m having my own, and the cool San Diego rain storms are working to keep me excited. Por k la lluvia. In Colima you can only play stupid for so long not knowing what to call the rain. Por K la lluvia! Por k el sol y la tierra! Por k los Pueblos y sus Padres y los Padres de sus Padres! Por k los viajes dificiles, por K los inmigrantes k tienen muerte en el desierto. Por k tu Espanol malo porque no puedes escucharlo! My ancestors don’t speak Spanish as far as I know, but they speak other languages that come through in Broken Central American español. Lenguas de los indigenous, captured in the refusals to complete things asked of them, including sentences. I got lost with the rain and the bridges, puente o lluvia/ lluvia o puente. Por k both belong to water and movement around it from above.

Maybe I won’t finish this thesis like people en Colima no completan sentences. Here is my shittiest Espanol, and I’m glad to recognize that I am faulty in it. My respect for the language comes from my respect of mi amiga k moved from San Diego to San Antonio

when we were teens, who did coke lines off the bathroom sink and called me to tell me about life as a stripper. And now she's studying to be a therapist and I know since she was my first of many things, including my first healer, she will make a difference and already has. I respect the language because I respect Sunday afternoons spent in bed, smoking weed and listening to Raggaton y East LA based hip hop groups I will never be cool enough to list out casually, while having conversations through deep dark skin that holds uncaptureable strength within. I love the language because I can't help but do so for you, although no one will speak it with me the way you can, your words broken in different ways due to your father's change of address a few times.

Pero k mas? people call me on the telephone so this thought is interrupted. But this thought was already an interruption. Time to get back to extrarupting. Time flies when you don't pay attention to it. Or stands still, whatever you need it to. (May 26, 2012)

Extraruptions: This writing reflects some of the reasons that I have been drawn to working in the field of Latin American Studies as well as some of my issues with it. Having lived and done work in Central America in a small Pueblo (where I learned to speak and understand 'bad' Spanish) as well as having grown up in poor immigrant Californian neighborhoods after migrating from rural Arizona, my relationships with 'Latin America' are mostly through poor womyn of color in these spaces. However, studying in academia, I have seen that the money and interest is not usually focused on poor Latinas or their struggles. This writing also reflects my own thought process in writing this thesis, finding strength in my memories of the strong womyn from within my community to get me through the challenge.

Say Gay



Illustration 5.9: Say Gay by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz

Say Gay: In March, 2012, I was privileged to present chapter four of this thesis at a conference on Queer activism along the Pacific Coast at the University of British Columbia in Canada. One of the reasons I was excited about traveling to this conference is because my relatives who came to the U.S. without papers came from Canada. The ‘push factors’ that inspired them to leave were domestic violence in the family and poverty. This migration disconnected my family from our Meti relatives in Canada. Afraid of being deported to Mexico, my mother’s grandmother changed her name and embraced silence about her past. Going through the borders and customs in Canada was the first time that anyone in my family had ‘gone back to the country of origin’. This was a privileged experience, especially as those involved in my academic work are unable to travel to another country without extreme difficulty. Fittingly, the Canada customs agent almost didn’t let me into the country. She began asking me questions about my research, asking me things like ‘are you planning to take down the government’ and ‘are you part of the occupy

movement' when she found out my research was related to activism. Part of this was my own ignorance, assuming that being at UBC would be a good enough cover for me. This denial was avoided, however, as my friend urged me to explain that I study 'gay' activism. Once I made this distinction, I was happily welcomed into the country. This is a commentary on borders and colonization, as well as the trend of mainstream 'gay' activism excluding certain narratives and supporting the state instead of challenging it.

Navajo Country

Navajo Country: This piece is a remake of a sketch done of a Navajo womyn on her horse on the Navajo reservation from the 1950's. The original sketch has the womyn in traditional dress, riding her horse under the typed words "wherever you find the Navajo is part of Navajo country". I remade this image with elements of the original sketch, but instead of showing her hair put up in the traditional Navajo way, I made her hair into a black cloud that covers her face and other parts of the scene. I did this because I wanted to play with the traditional representation of 'Indians' while also showing the confusion about my own identity that I have experienced as part of a family that migrated away from this region of Arizona. I include this piece here because of the way in which this image represents the complex ties between identity, movement, settler colonialism, land ownership and the nation-state. Thinking about anywhere the Navajo is as Navajo land reshapes the way in which one might understand Undocumented experiences as well. While both identities are very different, and are situated along a unique and complex axis of intersectionality, both exist as identities that challenge the construction of the modern American as white, non migratory, non indigenous, non poor, non Queer, and non feminine. Further research in the field of Undocumented studies could explore this connection and complicate it, looking at neocolonial struggles through Native and Undocumented movements for social justice.



Illustration 5.10: Navajo Country by Virginia Elizabeth Bartz

G[art]ens- 'Stolen Land'



Illustration 5.11A: 'Stolen Land' Succulent Garden

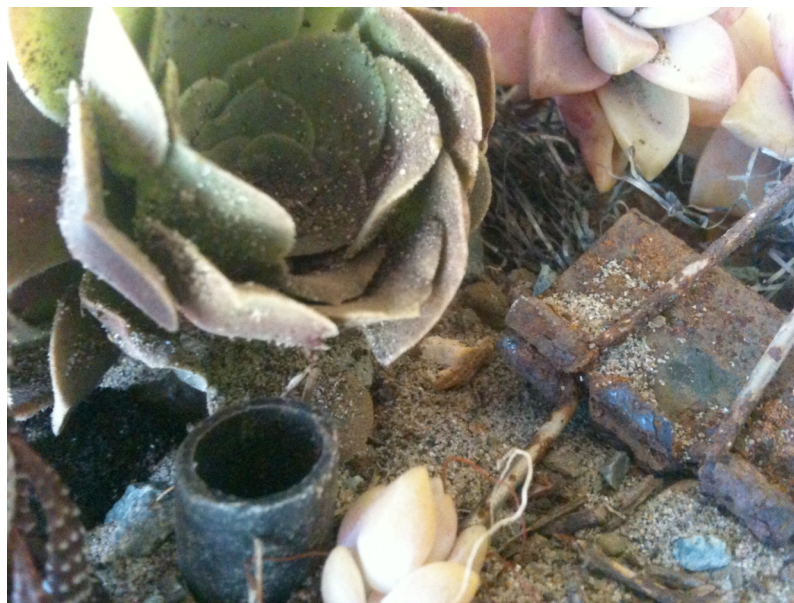


Illustration 5.11B: 'Stolen Land' Succulent Garden- with plants and found objects from the San Diego/ Tijuana Border



Illustration 5.11C: ‘Stolen Land’ Succulent Garden- At Auction Table in Northern California Art Fundraiser

‘Stolen Land’ is an art piece I made to donate to a fundraiser for a group working for rights of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the San Francisco Bay Area. I made this garden out of soil and items that I found along the U.S./ Mexico border on border hikes. The following considerations are part of the commentary that I included in a hand written booklet I included with this garden:

- This land has been ‘stolen’ a few times- first by Spanish colonialists who claimed the area of San Diego from the local indigenous groups (who still exist in the region to this day), using the mission system to profit from the forced enslavement and displacement of Native people; then later the land was ‘re-stolen’ by the U.S. government who claimed and developed this land as ‘America’ through ‘manifest destiny’ in 1848.
- This is a critique of the idea that people and governments *can* own/police/separate land and natural resources between individuals.
- My own privilege to be able to travel the border region (as well as other travel I have done throughout this ethnographic journey) without fear to my person health and safety reminds me that I am part of a system that allows some bodies to experience certain freedoms that others can not.
- The decomposing found objects that are part of this garden are a reminder that people have been crossing this region for decades to be able to provide for themselves and their families. On this journey, there are many people (including Youth) that do not make it to the other side or who experience serious traumas because of the policing of this region. As these found objects litter the border landscape, they help to represent those who have lost their lives due to the violence’s that exist here. This succulent garden is thus dedicated to the memories of those whose lives were lost along the border.
- The succulents that are in this garden are a very strong plant. Even with very little water and nutrients, they are able to survive and blossom into beautiful flowers. To me, these represent the Undocumented Youth that I have gotten to work with through this project. Although their struggles are many, the strength of participants in this study has touched me in very deep and personal ways. These youth have taught me to find and create beauty, to stand up for what I believe in, and to have confidence in the power of narrative.

The fundraiser that this garden was auctioned off at made a total of \$4,100 towards muraling internships for Undocumented Youth. The mural project that this money will be used for is going to be focused on the experiences and struggles of Undocumented Latinas. This is only one of the many art projects within the Undocumented community of California that continues on past this thesis project that I hope to be part of. While the paintings, videos, murals, performances, poetry, writings, songs, and testimonies may seem like small artifacts of a population surviving through violence, it may be through these very expressions that new possibilities and strategies emerge which allow for a shattering of the colonial structures that have created the contemporary world. These ‘new possibilities’ emerge from the creativity that exists in the shadowed spaces of rememberings, healings, and constructings that oppressed communities have held onto through historical as well as contemporary movements for social justice. This thesis has shown some of the powers that art holds for individuals as well as communities. A final suggestion to those interested in this project is to apply these concepts; make art, even when you are afraid

to; make art that tells your story, especially if you are not supposed to; allow yourself to heal from the violence's that you have experienced, and when you are ready, share that art with others.

APPENDIX

I. A short List of Some of the Groups I worked with in San Diego, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area for this project.

Group (a): This is a group in San Diego. It is an organization that works to support undocumented immigrant students in San Diego with scholarships as well as events. This is a small organization and it has been around for just a few years. The members currently are students and activists in San Diego who, for different reasons, feel connected to the undocumented community of students. Some of these members are from the LA areas and have connections to art and activist communities there. While most of the group members and activists are related to one particular school, the activities and events they do also include attendance and participation with other groups from San Diego and Southern California. I have been attending the weekly meetings and getting to know individuals one on one as well as conducting interviews with individual group members and attending events done by the group in and out of San Diego.

Informal network (b): This is a group of students who use art and organize around undocumented student and undocumented issues in San Diego, including the South, Inland Eastern and Coastal counties. This group is not a formal group, although many of the members network and participate in formal groups, such as poetry/spoken word groups, dreamer networks, and other formal groups as well as informal groups such as grassroots film networks, tshirt designers, and social organizers. I have been attending formal and informal events with this group as well as doing one on one interviews.

Informal network (c): This is a small group of Queer/ LGBTQIA individuals who network with each other for support within the undocumented and immigrant community. This group also uses services from group (a) and networks with group (b), although they at times feel disconnected or left out from the other groups. The main services that they provide for each other include friendship, emotional support, small financial support and other non-formal forms of support. This group has little political activism, although they use art for personal expression and empowerment among themselves. Members of this group have been in deportation proceedings in the past. I have been inhabiting informal spaces and becoming friends with members of this group, discussing issues and getting feedback on trends I have noticed from this project.

Formal network (d): This is a group in the San Francisco bay area that has a large presence in the immigrant activist community of Northern California. Formal network (d) does murals, videos and social justice actions to call attention to the experiences of undocumented immigrants, show exploitation of transnational corporations, and support of government agencies in rights related issues for immigrants.

Members of this group have had family members deported and seem to consider this group itself to be like a family. This group thus interacts in both formal and informal ways, which I have been able to experience by attending meetings, field trips, and muraling work with this group. I have also done interviews with members of the group.

Informal network (e): Informal Network (e) is an artist community in the San Francisco bay area made up of well known/popular artists who do work on social justice issues, including immigrant and educational rights as well as DREAM act art. Some members of this community network with each other formally through art collectives, while others are formally solo artists, although they do collaborative work with others as well. I have some level of access to this community in their formal spaces (web sites, facebook, books, public events) and informal spaces (house parties, emails, friends) due to my connections in the activist community in the Bay Area. I have been on contact with some of these artists and have done formal interviews as well as ed get togethers with this group during this project.

Formal network (f): This is a formal network of undocumented students in California. This group works on issues of undocumented students across the state through networking and events done in collaboration with smaller formal networks such as group (a). I have been to workshops and events done by this group in both the Southern California and Northern California regions. This group seems to use art to raise money and awareness, with the groups main focus to be around support and awareness for Undocumented students, especially those who are (or aspire to be) high achievers in higher education.

Formal network (g): This is a group of artists doing work around the DREAM act in the LA area through political posters, comic strips, videos, humor skits, drawings, poetry, hip hop, and more. While this group has a core group with a heavy online presence, they also do call outs for art from undocumented students and allies within the movement to post as well. This group is well known for their art across the nation and many of their posters have been seen in activism done by others in CA as well as across the country. I have been following this group in their formal public appearances and news sites and have formally interview a few members, as well as attended events they promoted.

Formal network (h): This group is a Queer people of color group centered out of the Los Angeles area. Although they have Undocumented members, they are focused on issues of larger migrant struggles. This group sponsors many events that are Queer friendly for Undocu-Queer Youth. I was unable to get a formal interview with members of this group but did have contact with them during this project.

II. Reflection of Project Research Assistant on Chapter 2, Art Became My Window

As part of his job as a research assistant for this project, I asked Damian Vergara to respond to some of the key ideas and complications that are part of this thesis. Below is his full written reflection on Chapter 2. My response to these notes has been included through footnotes in Chapter 2, noted with the use of a Δ symbol included with the footnote. It is my intention that checking in with Damian about these findings will add validity to this project, connect the ‘findings’ to the community (I also had community groups overview it), and provide a space of mentorship for undergraduate underrepresented students who are interested in doing similar work within academia.

Reflection, Chapter 2 by Damian Vergara

Fascinating chapter. I think you did an excellent job of addressing how and why it’s important for undocumented youth to have art as vehicle to cope with their experiences of disempowerment. It might be useful to think about how art, not just the kind that takes you more than one seating to finish, but even the momentary doodle can serve as an outlet for the youth. Particularly when encountering a moment that heightens their vulnerability. What I wonder, is how the emotion of feeling vulnerable over legal status, is negotiated through art? Because you talk about how for some, sharing their artwork is extremely vulnerable, how much then is that a result of the very personal art process experience versus their status? I would venture to guess it’s a bit of both but it be worth exploring.

Throughout the text, there was the shift between ‘undocumented youth’, and then ‘latin@ undocumented youth’ but I didn’t see mention of other migrant youth. To avoid the conflation between undocumented youth and latin@ youth, you may want to side note somehow that it was simply as a result of the youth you had access too that happened to be latin@ and that the study recognizes that there are other youth migrants from different backgrounds who also engage in art or other cultural practices.

Also, I don't know if you may have written this in another section, but I remember we had an amazing discussion about migrant imaginaries. I think that is a great way to strengthen your argument by illustrating how art practices are a form of migrant imaginaries. In which given the vulnerable invisible position they are rendered in by the state as a result of the way they embody the undesirable, the way migrant youth have contested their position has been through cultural production, in this case art. This will allow you to engage discussions about how the youth project their understandings of their condition, and how they reject, accept or negotiate it.

The last thing I can think of, is our conversation about the way cisgender males fall short of expressing emotions. While I can't speak for cisgender males, from my experience with them in male dominated spaces like the barbershop, or my job for example, I have noticed that there is a lot more discussion in these spaces about how they feel. My best guess thus is that its due largely to the absence of womyn and so I think this played a substantial role in their interaction with you. Although I'm not sure how you went about your interviews, I'm venturing to guess they were aware that it was for your academic work, which is already something that most people, especially most males may not connect feelings to. Secondly, while I know you are a womyn of color, unless you were outing yourself, they may have perceived you as white, which also creates a different relationship to a male of color. This creates a different relationship between you and all undocumented youth of color period, but differently for the males of color. Not only because you may have been passing as a white womyn, (unwittingly of course) but your talking to them about personal vulnerable things when they are already in a vulnerable position and are probably fighting tooth and nail to regain some sort of power. So while you do address in the paper how males of color negotiated their male privilege and position to the others artists, how do you think this may have impacted your interaction with them seemingly coming from the position of a white passing womyn researcher? Was the kinship that you formed with your participants enough that race, gender, and sexuality were not an issue in your interaction? Just something to think about, I hope this all helps somehow. I apologize in advance if it doesn't. I'll keep reading, and keep sending me your chapters I'm enjoying reading this. It truly is fascinating and politically important work. Great job!

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