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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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The Latino Undocumented 1.5-generation: Navigating Belonging in New and Old Destinations

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Edelina Muñoz Burciaga

Dissertation Committee:
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2016

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DEDICATION

To my father, Paul Burciaga

and

To my mother, Ruth Muñoz

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Latino Undocumented 1.5-generation: Navigating Belonging in New and Old Destinations

By

Edelina Muñoz Burciaga

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Associate Professor Cynthia Feliciano, Chair

11 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States. Of these, about 2 million are members of the undocumented 1.5-generation, meaning they came to the United States as children and remain here without a pathway to citizenship. This dissertation fills a gap in the immigration literature by comparing the incorporation experiences of undocumented young adults living in welcoming and hostile contexts. I specifically examine if and how state laws and policies shape the incorporation pathways of this group. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 70 Latino undocumented young adults, ages 18-30, in Los Angeles, California and Atlanta, Georgia, I find that Latino undocumented young adults negotiate multiple social and legal contexts as they navigate the transition to adulthood. I argue that Latino undocumented young adults' connection to their families intersects with state laws and policies *and* an uncertain federal policy landscape to shape their everyday lived experience as well as their aspirations for their futures. To explain how these social and legal contexts intersect, I introduce the concept of nested socio-legal contexts. In three empirical chapters, I examine how nested socio-legal contexts shape Latino undocumented young adults in key areas of their lives including identity development, education, and political participation. Despite growing up and living in very

different contexts, I find that Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia describe surprisingly similar feelings of uncertainty about their present lives and their futures. The federal political climate is a significant force that influences Latino undocumented young adults' ideas about "Americanness" and citizenship, which in turn shapes their ethnic identity. State laws and policies, especially in the realm of higher educational access, create structural barriers at different points for Latino young adults in California and Georgia, impacting their opportunities for social mobility and sense of belonging. In both states, Latino undocumented young adults are deeply motivated by their parents' migration sacrifices. This shapes nearly every facet of their lives including their educational aspirations and political participation. Ultimately, I argue that Latino undocumented young adults' experiences of "illegality" and belonging are informed by nested socio-legal contexts that creates both inclusion and exclusion.

CHAPTER 1

The Latino Undocumented 1.5-generation: Navigating Belonging in New and Old Destinations

Yeah it's interesting because I'm the undocumented and he (his brother) just got to America now, but he doesn't know any English, so it feels like he is undocumented. (Jovan, 20-years-old, unDACAmented)

I interviewed Jovan, a 21-year-old self-described Dreamer, at a large conference table in the brightly-painted offices of the Georgia Immigrant Rights Network¹. Surrounded by paper mâché swallows, birds known for their migratory flight pattern between Mexico and United States, Jovan relayed his own journey to the United States from San Luis Potosí, Mexico, when he was 8 years old. During our interview, he fondly recalled helping his grandfather with *las vacas* on their family's *rancho*, but he also remembered, “on some sad nights I looked up at the sky and I would wonder where is my mom?” After being away from his mother for 7 years, he was awakened early in the morning. He and his four-year-old brother were leaving for the United States to be reunited with his mother. During our interview, he shared,

I was 8 when I crossed the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. And, so we held hands with my little brother, *una tia* and then *los dos coyotes*. We held hands in like a chain, and we crossed the Rio Bravo, I remember, I crossed and I was like is this it? Am I going to see my mom?

Jovan and his younger brother, a United States citizen, were eventually reunited with his older brother, also a U.S. citizen, and his mother in Atlanta, Georgia. Jovan, who is the only undocumented child in his family, described the pain and irony of his status during our ninety-minute interview. His younger brother, who eventually returned to Mexico to care for their grandmother, had just migrated to Atlanta in 2015. He described how, at 19 years old with U.S. citizenship, his younger brother was struggling to learn English and find a job. Jovan explained

¹ All participant and organization names have been changed to pseudonyms.

that while he struggled with certain barriers, including not being able to attend college because of his undocumented status, his citizen brother felt more disenfranchised because he didn't speak English and did not graduate from an American high school. The contrast between Jovan's and his brother's experiences highlights the paradox of growing up undocumented in the United States. While Jovan has the language and cultural capital skills to navigate life in American, key skills his brother is lacking, Jovan's legal status prevents him from fully realizing his hopes and desires for his future.

Undocumented immigrant youth like Jovan are referred to in the sociological literature as members of the 1.5 generation, signaling their place between the first generation, who migrated as adults, and the second generation, who are similarly children of immigrants but were born in the United States (Gonzales 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). What distinguishes Jovan and other undocumented young adults, though, is that they have developed values, identities, and aspirations that are influenced by growing up American and are also impacted by the practical reality of living "illegally" in the United States. Of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States, approximately 1.7 million are like Jovan, meaning they are under the age of 30 and arrived before the age of 16, spending the better part of their lives in United States (Passel and Lopez 2012).

In the past ten years, the experiences of the undocumented 1.5 generation have captured the scholarly imagination. Focusing primarily on the personal and academic challenges faced by college-bound and college-enrolled undocumented youth, this literature expands sociological understandings of the immigrant experience by highlighting the profound impact of legal status on the incorporation and mobility prospects of the undocumented 1.5 generation (Abrego 2006; Cebulko 2013; Enriquez 2015; Gonzales 2016; Gonzales 2011). However, much of what

sociologists know about the undocumented 1.5-generation is based on research focused on immigrants living in California (for exceptions, *see* Silver 2012; Cebulko 2014). While California is arguably an ideal place to study this group because of the long history of immigrant flows to the state and the large size of the immigrant population (Gonzales 2016; Rumbaut 2012; Ellis and Almgren 2009; Rumbaut 2008), in recent years, unauthorized immigrants have dispersed to new destinations, including the Midwest and the South (Marrow 2011; Massey 2008; Waters and Jimenez 2005; Singer 2004). This shift in immigrant geography has prompted interest in how state contexts of reception shape Latino immigrant integration (Morando 2013; Jones 2012; Marrow 2011; Ellis and Almgren 2009; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2009; Massey 2008). Context of reception captures of a host of factors that impact the way immigrants are received in their host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). The emerging literature about the impact of local context of reception on immigrant incorporation adds greatly to our knowledge about how place matters for adult immigrants and their children (Morando 2013; Jones 2012; Marrow 2011; Odem and Lacey 2009; Massey 2008). As immigration policy continues to be negotiated and enforced at the state and local level (Varsanyi 2010), and this generation comes of age in both traditional immigrant gateway states and new immigrant destinations, it is imperative that sociologists capture the experiences of the undocumented 1.5-generation beyond the “Golden State.”

Employing a direct comparative research design focusing on Los Angeles, California (a relatively² welcoming immigrant state and a traditional Latino immigrant gateway) and Atlanta, Georgia (a less welcoming state and an emerging Latino immigrant gateway), this dissertation fills a substantive gap in the literature by teasing out whether and how state and local policies

² I acknowledge the long and complicated history California, and the Southwest, has with Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans. However, in the current historical moment, California has enacted a series of policies that are considered immigrant-friendly.

impact the incorporation processes of the undocumented 1.5 generation. I draw primarily from 70 in-depth interviews with Latino undocumented young adults, ages 18-30, in Los Angeles, CA and Atlanta, GA, to demonstrate how state contexts of reception shape the lived experiences of Latino undocumented young adults. Context of reception, as a conceptual tool, facilitates an analysis of a host of factors that impact the mobility pathways of the undocumented 1.5 generation, beyond their own individual characteristics or motivations. I supplemented these interviews with ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2015 and March 2016 in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia and ongoing fieldwork since September 2009 in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Based on these interviews and fieldwork, I examine how Latino undocumented young adults in two distinct contexts of reception experience structural and social inclusion and exclusion.

I find that despite living in very different contexts of reception, Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta express *similar* feelings of exclusion. State laws and policies, especially in the realm of higher educational access, create structural barriers at different points in the life course for Latino young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta. Yet I was surprised to find that Latino undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia described very similar uncertainties, expectations, and hopes for their lives. I argue that federal laws and policies continue to be a significant force in shaping sense of belonging, but that state laws and policies may matter most for social mobility. Therefore, for Latino undocumented young adults, I argue that their experiences of “illegality” and belonging are informed by nested social and legal contexts that creates a sense of co-existing inclusion and exclusion. In the empirical chapters that follow, I examine how nested social and legal contexts impact Latino undocumented young adults as they develop a sense of ethnic/racial identity; negotiate the

transition out of high school; and participate (*or not*) in activism. I start by discussing what we know about the incorporation experiences of immigrants more generally, and how this experience differs for undocumented immigrant youth who have spent most of their lives in the United States, yet remain in here without formal legal permission or a pathway to citizenship.

Immigrant Incorporation in the 21st Century

How do immigrants become a part of America? This question, and the immigrant experience, have been foundational topics of study in American sociology for the past two centuries. Continuous immigration flows over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries have provided an exciting source for understanding the social processes that shape how immigrants become of a part of and redefine the American experience. Classic assimilation theory, based largely on the experiences of European immigrants, suggests that each subsequent immigrant generation will leave behind their immigrant culture and join the American mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964). Segmented assimilation theory emerged in contrast to the classic assimilation model, and described a more complex and nuanced immigrant experience, that of “post-1965” immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Segmented assimilation theory proposed that unlike their European counterparts, immigrants who migrated as a result of the 1965 Immigration Act and who were primarily from Latin America and Asia faced different conditions that constrained their potential ability to experience smooth integration into the American mainstream, or a straight-line assimilation process. First, because of their skin color, many of these new immigrant groups had to negotiate their place in the U.S. racial hierarchy. Secondly, these immigrants faced a deindustrialized economic structure that widened the gap between menial jobs and professional jobs, making

economic mobility and social mobility more varied (Portes, Fernandez-Kelley and Haller 2005; Zhou, 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Focusing primarily on the experiences of the second generation, segmented assimilation theorists argue that the context of reception, or how immigrants are received, is a significant determinant of varying incorporation outcomes. Context of reception facilitates identification of the impact of broader structural and cultural forces on the immigrant experience (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). It is the complex combination of the social, governmental, and communal environments that welcome immigrants and their children when they arrive in the host country and as they negotiate their day-to-day experiences living in their new country. While segmented assimilation theory has been critiqued for being too pessimistic in its prediction of divergent incorporation experiences of immigrants (Lee and Bean 2010; Waters and Jimenez 2005; Alba and Nee 2003), its theoretical power is derived from the recognition of various dimensions of context that impact immigrant incorporation. Portes et al. (2005) argue that downward assimilation is not a deliberate path chosen by the children of immigrants but is instead a reflection “a web of constraints, bad luck, and limited opportunities” (1031). My dissertation extends this work, by showing how the federal context interacts with state contexts to create divergent incorporation pathways, although not always in ways that we might expect. I suggest that legal and political contexts are mediated by familial and individual experiences, and that it is ultimately the interaction of these social and legal contexts that shape Latino undocumented young adults’ lives and futures. Through interviews with members of the undocumented 1.5 generation across two state contexts, this dissertation extends previous research about the role of context of reception for immigrant incorporation by comparing these experiences in a hostile and a welcoming context. Thus, this dissertation proposes a more

nanced understanding of how this “web of constraints” functions in the lives of Latino undocumented immigrant youth.

Latino Undocumented Immigrant Youth

For more than a decade, scholars have made incredible strides in gathering systematic, empirical research about the constraints facing undocumented immigrant youth. This research captures both the challenges that immigrant youth face growing up undocumented in the United States, and also how they are responding to these challenges (Gonzales 2016; Seif, Ullman and Nuñez-Mchiri 2014; Cebulko 2013; Enriquez 2012; Abrego 2011). The social, political and educational integration of undocumented immigrant youth has been profoundly shaped by the 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe*, granting undocumented immigrant children access to a public education through twelfth grade. The Supreme Court argued that denying undocumented immigrant children a public education based on their legal status would create an educational underclass, and that this was not in the best interest of undocumented children and of society (Motomura 2014). This decision highlighted the key role that schools play in socializing children and in shaping their social and educational opportunities. Perhaps more importantly, the Supreme Court’s decision was also an implicit acknowledgement of the settled lives that unauthorized immigrant children and their families were living in the United States. In fact, just four years later, in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed granting citizenship to nearly 3 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States.

In the years since the *Plyler v. Doe* decision and the passage of IRCA, the undocumented immigrant population has grown dramatically. During the 1990’s the undocumented immigrant population increased by 3.5 million, and between 2000 and 2013, it increased by 4 million (Rosenblum and Ruiz Soto 2015). Unfortunately, IRCA was the last major comprehensive

immigration reform to offer a pathway to citizenship, and the law ushered in an era of increased immigration enforcement. As a result, undocumented immigrant families have settled into everyday life, which includes living, working and attending schools in their local communities. In many ways, undocumented immigrants have become a part of the fabric of American life. Nevertheless, they struggle with full social incorporation precisely because of their legal status. This paradox is most acutely experienced by undocumented immigrant children, many of whom have spent most of their lives in the United States.

Sense of Belonging and Identity

Just as there are segmented paths to educational and occupational outcomes for immigrant children and children of immigrants, there are also divergent paths to identity formation and sense of belonging (Tovar and Feliciano 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994). An enduring weakness of the explanatory power of classic assimilation theory is that fully assimilating, or becoming American, is associated with being white (Tovar and Feliciano 2009). Given the U.S. racial hierarchy, developing a sense of belonging and ethnic identity formation is a much more complex and nuanced process for racialized immigrants than it was for white ethnic immigrants (Rumbaut 1994). Context of reception plays a fundamental role in shaping the identity formation pathways of immigrants. Previous studies find that discrimination in the form of a hostile political context and anti-immigrant public discourse results in stronger ties to one's ethnic identity or foreign-born national identity (Tovar and Feliciano 2009, Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994). In a hostile context of reception, immigrant children and children of immigrants are more likely to form a reactive ethnicity, characterized as a thickening of ethnic identity and connection to their own or their parents' home countries (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Previous studies also find that generation does

matter when it comes to developing an ethnic identity or sense of belonging. While a hostile context of reception and experiencing discrimination seems to result in stronger ties to a national-origin identity regardless of generational status, the 1.5 generation consistently identify more with their home country than their second-generation peers (Tovar and Feliciano 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994). However, sociologists do not have a clear picture about how variations in state contexts of reception impact the formation of an ethnic identity or sense of belonging in the undocumented 1.5 generation.

Browne and Odem (2012) suggest that the racialization of Latino immigrants occurs along two axes—race and legal status. They argue that the experiences of “legal-Latinos” versus “illegal-Latinos” are profoundly different and merit closer attention. Yet the impact of legal status on the nature of belonging and expressions of citizenships within the undocumented 1.5 generation is under-theorized, regardless of the state context. Instead, the undocumented 1.5 generation has been painted as “American by heart” or American in practice but not status (Perez 2011; Perez 2009). In this dissertation, I tease out how undocumented young adults articulate and experience “the social processes by which citizenship and its boundaries are formed” (Nakano Glenn 2011:1)

While the law treats individuals as citizens or non-citizens, in practice, undocumented immigrants are members of their communities; this includes the places where they work, go to school, and live. Nakano Glenn (2011) refers to the social processes through which immigrants become members of their community as substantive citizenship, in contrast to citizenship as a fixed legal status. Using a substantive citizenship framework—that is, focusing on the spaces and practices that function independent of the citizen/non-citizen dichotomy—sheds analytical light on the multiple and complex dimensions of what it means to be a citizen of a community, a

state, or a nation-state (Nakano Glenn 2011; Motomura 2006). In Chapter 3, *Ambivalent Americans*, I explore how Latino undocumented young adults integrate their experiences of “Americanness” with their legal exclusion and how this is tied to their ethnic identity development. I suggest that Latino undocumented young adults are ambivalent about being American precisely because of their own, and their families’, legal exclusion. This highlights the interaction of social and legal contexts for identity formation processes, and extends previous research about ethnic identity development among Latino undocumented youth.

Education and Labor Market Participation

Previous research about the undocumented 1.5-generation has focused primarily on educational outcomes and workforce participation as two related outcomes, and finds that for the undocumented 1.5 generation, legal status not only impacts their day-to-day lives but also influences their long-term prospects for incorporation in fundamental ways (Gonzales 2016; Huber 2015; Martinez 2014; Perez 2009). This research reveals a pattern of defining moments that shapes their integration. Gonzales (2011) theorizes a three-stage process whereby undocumented young adults negotiate their transition to illegality. During the discovery stage (ages 16-18) undocumented young adults learn the full impact of their status on their day-to-day lives. While some undocumented young people learn about their status through adolescent rites of passage such as applying for a job or a driver’s license, my own previous research suggests that many Latino undocumented young people grow up aware of their status. Regardless of whether an undocumented young person grows up aware of their status or learns about it when applying for a job or a driver’s license, as they age, they begin to personally feel the effects of living without “papers” (Perez 2009; Abrego 2006). During the second stage, “learning to be illegal” (ages 18-24), undocumented young adults negotiate their legal status outside of the

legally protected space of the K-12 school system. After high school graduation and well into early adulthood, Gonzales (2016) finds that the trajectories of “Early Exiters” and “College Goers” eventually converge in the underground economy because of their shared undocumented status. However, during Gonzales’ longitudinal study, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was introduced, shifting the transition to illegality for Latino undocumented young adults. While DACA has improved the prospects of some Latino undocumented young adults, I find that in states like Georgia, that have restrictive educational policies, the educational prospects for Latino undocumented youth have not improved.

By engaging in a direct comparison of different contexts of reception, bridging a gap in the current conceptualization of segmented assimilation theory and the incorporation processes of undocumented young adults, this dissertation introduces nuance into the theorizing about the incorporation processes of the undocumented 1.5 generation. It is well-established that context of reception, defined primarily by government policy, matters for the integration of the undocumented 1.5 generation (Gonzales 2011; Abrego 2008; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994; Portes and Zhou 1993). However, what is less apparent is *how* it matters and what this means for the incorporation pathways of undocumented young adults in different state contexts, facing different immigration policy landscapes. In this dissertation, I contend that despite divergent policy landscapes that shape their opportunity for social mobility through education, Latino undocumented young adults described surprisingly similar feelings of educational exclusion, but at different points in the educational pipeline. In Chapter 4, I introduce the concept of educational belonging to demonstrate how state laws and policies shape the educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta.

Activism

While formal legal status is a fundamental shaping force in the lives of undocumented young adults, the emergence of a strong and active undocumented student rights movement suggests that some undocumented young adults are not constrained by the absence of formal legal recognition. However, much of what we know about activism amongst the undocumented 1.5 generation is theorized based on the experiences of undocumented student activists living in California (Gonzales 2008; Abrego 2008; Seif 2004). Abrego (2011) argues that there are key distinctions that are integral to explaining the recent emergence of undocumented student activism. She suggests that a sense of fear permeates the legal consciousness of undocumented immigrants who migrated as adults, because they have been socialized primarily through exploitative work environments (Abrego 2011). In contrast, the undocumented 1.5-generation who migrated as children, and whose primary socializing institution was school, feel stigmatized yet also empowered to engage in activism. I expected to find a similar dynamic between California and Georgia, with Latino undocumented youth in Georgia expressing more fear about participating in activism than those in California. Instead, I found that because of the hostile context in Georgia, particularly in the form of restrictive education policies, there was a vibrant undocumented youth movement in the state. Those who were most active, however, were directly involved in Underground University, a community-based educational organization that was created in the wake of the educational ban.

Similar to previous research about the key role of campus-based undocumented student organizations in building the undocumented student movement in California (Nicholls 2013; Abrego 2008), I found that undocumented youth in Georgia were mobilizing by employing similar strategies--in their case, relying on a pseudo-campus-based model, as Underground

University is not accredited. This also highlights the integral role of building communities of support (Nepstad 2004) as an integral part of the process of becoming an undocumented student activist and developing an activist identity. In California, I found that undocumented youth were primarily mobilizing around the goal of securing better resources and opportunities for undocumented students on college campuses in the state. In addition, I found that respondents were focused on making the most of their education while they were in college. In both California and Georgia, activists and non-activists were similarly motivated by seeking access to, or making the most of their educational experiences. This motivation is rooted in a desire to improve their futures as a way to honor their parents' migration sacrifices, or keeping up their end of the "immigrant bargain" (Dreby and Stutz 2012; Louie 2012; Smith 2006). I also find that undocumented young adults in both states are constrained by other obligations to their families, including offering financial support. This narrative that was more prominent in Georgia, highlighting the vulnerability of the undocumented immigrant population not only in the state, but specifically in the Atlanta area (Foley 2016). These young people also believed that they were fulfilling the immigrant bargain. Thus, in Chapter 5, I focus on how Latino undocumented young adults, activists and non-activists, navigate nested socio-legal contexts in relation to activist participation or non-participation.

Methodology

I strategically chose the metropolitan Los Angeles and Atlanta areas because these sites share important characteristics, but they also differed in several key ways that were central to my analysis. As described in depth in Chapter 2, these metropolitan areas are situated in states that have taken very different legal stances on unauthorized migrants, including undocumented immigrant youth. The Southern California region is considered a traditional Latino immigrant

gateway, and as a result, it has a relatively strong infrastructure of support for undocumented immigrants, including businesses catering to immigrants, native-language media, and an array of community-based organizations. While the Latino undocumented immigrant population in the Atlanta area is more recent, there has been enough of a presence to give rise to a similar, albeit smaller, network of businesses, media, and community-based organizations. Methodologically, it was crucial that the regions shared a similar community-based organizational infrastructure, primarily to facilitate initial recruitment of participants, especially in the Atlanta area—a site that was completely new to me.

In October, 2014, I moved with my family to Atlanta, GA to begin fieldwork in the area. Prior to moving to the city, I had made contact with Underground University, an unaccredited non-profit educational organization that met weekly and offered college-level courses and college prep to undocumented students in the region. While I shared that I was a former attorney and a current doctoral student conducting dissertation research, the organization's most urgent need was for volunteer drivers to get students to and from class. During these weekly trips, I learned about the day-to-day impacts of the hostile laws in the state. As a volunteer driver, I was invited to stay for classes and to attend events. This initial data collection process mirrored my experience five years earlier in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, when I was starting my fieldwork in the area.

In addition to being a volunteer driver with Underground University, I also volunteered during the week with Georgia Immigrant Rights Network. GIRN works primarily with undocumented immigrants who migrated as adults. In addition, GIRN works with undocumented immigrants across the state, and as a result of my time spent with GIRN, I learned about the broader political and social climate for Latino undocumented immigrants in Georgia. GIRN's

executive director is an immigrant rights leader at the state and national level, and her support of my research increased my credibility and also facilitated the interview recruitment process. Drawing from these organizational networks in Atlanta, I initiated snowball sampling with participants from both Underground University and GIRN. Given the extensive network I had built through five years of previous research in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, initiating the interview recruitment process went much more quickly and efficiently. To increase representativeness, I offered two incentives--\$30 for participation in an interview and an \$10 for referring other participants. This technique worked well, especially for the purpose of eventually reaching undocumented young adults in both regions who were not connected to a community-based organization or the undocumented student movement; lack of such participants had been a limitation in my previous research project.

Interviews in both sites lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, and were directed by a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions about five broad topics: migration, family history, and growing up undocumented; identifying as undocumented and activism; their experiences with immigration law and policy; intergroup relations; and belonging and identity. During interviews, themes often overlapped. The primary challenge was to help participants to recall *specific* instances where they thought immigration law and policy affected their day-to-day lives—the central focus of this dissertation. To unpack this, I asked detailed questions about their understanding of their status when growing up, if and how this shifted over their life course, how their status impacted their educational experiences, how their experiences compared to those of their parents and/or citizen siblings, family or friends, and their views on citizenship. I also asked detailed questions about their understandings of how undocumented immigrants are viewed and treated in their local region, in the state, and

nationally. Finally, I asked questions about their overall feelings of belonging, their plans for the future, and the importance of adjusting their legal status. All interviews were conducted in English, with occasional Spanish peppered in. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and were hand-coded in Microsoft Word using open coding techniques. I then created data files that included transcript excerpts related to that code in one document. Data files were created initially by state and then merged across the two states to detect patterns within and across Los Angeles, California and Atlanta, Georgia.

Chapter Outline

In the chapters that follow, I analyze and compare how Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia experience structural and emotional incorporation *and* exclusion in three key dimensions of their lives: racial/ethnic identity development, educational participation, and (non)/participation in activism. While I expected to find the experiences of undocumented young adults in California to be much more positive than those of the subjects living in Georgia, I was surprised to learn that in certain aspects of their experiences, they expressed very similar feelings of belonging and, conversely, exclusion. I demonstrate that while state laws and policies can facilitate or constrain participation in social institutions such as college or driving, the uncertainty of their legal status creates a sense of emotional exclusion that permeates their institutional participation, and more importantly, the whole of their lived experience. Building on previous work that highlights the emotional dimension of immigrant incorporation (Enriquez 2014) I argue that there are two key components of full participation in the social world for Latino undocumented young adults: structural and emotional.

In Chapter 2, I provide a historical and legal analysis of the implications of nested socio-legal contexts for the everyday lives of Latino undocumented young adults. In Chapter 3, the

first empirical chapter, I show how Latino undocumented young adults express and experience citizenship, how contextual factors in their home states shape their relationship to ideas of being American, and their social incorporation. I find that undocumented youth in both states are ambivalent about being American, an ambivalence shaped by their experiences with formal law, which excludes them, and their everyday lived experience of growing up in the United States. In Chapter 4, I show how state laws and policies mediate access to educational institutions, but I argue that despite very different policy contexts, Latino undocumented young adults in both regions experience similar feelings of educational exclusion, at different points in the academic pipeline. In Chapter 5, I find that in California, college-enrolled undocumented youth are less likely to participate in activism because of the supportive educational climate and the possibility of reaching their goals, especially with DACA. In contrast, I find that the restrictive educational climate in Georgia has given rise to a vibrant undocumented youth movement engaged in direct acts of civil disobedience. This runs counter to commonsense notions of political power among youth and undocumented immigrants. In the concluding chapter, I highlight the fact that immigration laws and policies, at both the federal and state level, may not be producing their intended consequences. I underscore the uncertainty created by the absence of a comprehensive solution at the federal level, and I offer thoughts about how to create more humane and effective policy solutions.

CHAPTER 2

Nested Socio-legal Contexts and the Shifting Legal Landscape for Latino Undocumented Young Adults

The influence of law is powerful not only in its presence, but also in its absence. The last major comprehensive immigration reform regularizing the status of unauthorized immigrants was in 1986, with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA regularized the status of nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants, but also ushered in an era of harsher border enforcement and a sanctions regime (Motomura 2014; Rodriguez, Chishti, and Norman 2010). In the time since the passage of IRCA, the undocumented immigrant population has grown to nearly 11 million, the result of a confluence of the United States' need for workers, increased border enforcement, and limited if nonexistent, pathways for legal migration (Motomura 2014). In addition, undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States are subject to various policies at the state and local level that have created distinct political contexts, ranging from welcoming to hostile (Motomura 2014; Varsanyi 2010; Rodriguez 2008).

The increase in state and local immigration policies in the early-to-mid 2000's reflected a break from the long-held legal doctrine that "the power to regulate immigration is unquestionably a federal immigration power." (*De Canas v. Bica*, 1976, 354 as quoted in Rodriguez et al. 2010). These laws tended to proliferate in communities wrestling with rapid demographic shifts in their immigrant populations, and were focused primarily, although not exclusively on deterring undocumented immigrants from settling in these localities (Rodriguez et al. 2010). However, many policies during this time were also focused on integrating immigrants by expanding rights and benefits (Varsanyi 2010). The proliferation of restrictive laws and policies not only signaled a devolution of immigration enforcement to states and localities, but also reflected a "grassroots response to the presence (or potential presence) of undocumented

immigrants.” (Walker and Leitner 2011:156). In order to situate the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia, in this chapter, I examine some of the major developments in immigration law and policy, both at the federal and state levels. I introduce the concept of nested socio-legal contexts to frame how Latino undocumented young adults articulated multiple socio-legal influences during our interviews; these included federal laws, state laws and contexts, familial experiences of illegality, and individual experiences of illegality. Thinking about each of these as nested provides a nuanced understanding of the socio-legal experience of Latino undocumented young adults. Rather than approaching the transition to adulthood as a straight-line transition to illegality and legal exclusion (Gonzales 2011, 2016), in this dissertation, I show how nested socio-legal contexts shape both inclusion and exclusion for Latino undocumented young adults in different key dimensions of their lives, including in their sense of ethnic identity, educational experiences, and activism.

I start first by comparing the immigration histories of metropolitan Los Angeles, a traditional immigrant gateway, and Atlanta, a new immigrant destination. While the labels traditional immigrant gateway and new destination are useful for measuring *recent* unauthorized Latino migration to each region, these characterizations also obscure the complicated history of Latino communities in each of these cities and states. In this chapter, I discuss how the unique racial history of each region informs their current policy approaches to undocumented immigrants. I then discuss how following the passage of IRCA, the federal immigration landscape has shifted toward an enforcement and sanctions regime (Rodriguez, Chishti, and Norman 2010). In the current historical moment, this turn toward punitive immigration laws has created a particularly hostile national context. This is the backdrop in which state laws and

policies are made, and as I examine in this dissertation, these political and legal contexts intersect in unique ways for Latino undocumented young adults.

In this era of increased criminalization of the undocumented immigrant population (Chacón 2012), undocumented children and youth are the only group in recent history to receive federal immigration relief through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. It should be noted, however, that this program is *not* a legislative initiative but is instead administrative relief, and is subject to presidential renewal and support. While DACA has provided short-term benefits, the potential long-term benefits of DACA depend in part on state laws and policies, which I detail in an analysis of relevant laws and policies in California and Georgia. I examine four key types of policies that serve as a gauge of the openness or hostility of a state toward undocumented immigrants. Finally, I discuss how conceptualizing the relationship between immigration laws and policies as nested provides insight about the shifting socio-legal experiences of Latino undocumented young adults.

Traditional Immigrant Gateways and New Destinations

Beyond their divergent immigration law and policy contexts, California and Georgia also differ in their histories of Latino immigration. California is considered a traditional immigrant gateway, or a symbolic destination for immigrants, especially for Latino undocumented immigrants (Gonzales 2016; Rumbaut 2012; Singer 2004). Of the 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States, approximately 2.67 million live in California (PPIC 2015). About 1.3 million, or approximately 50 percent of the undocumented immigrant population, live in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, which includes the County of Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside County, and the County of San Bernardino (PPIC 2015). Georgia, on the other hand, is a new immigrant destination with current estimates suggesting that

about 400,000 of the 9.7 million state residents are unauthorized immigrants, primarily from Mexico (Pew Hispanic Center 2014). While the characterization of metropolitan Los Angeles as a traditional immigrant gateway and metropolitan Atlanta as a new immigrant destination is useful for understanding recent trends in undocumented Latino immigration to each region, these characterizations obscure the long and often complicated history of Latino communities in each state. For example, as recently as the 1990's, unauthorized immigration to California was a politically divisive issue in the state (HoSang 2010). In addition, because of its agricultural landscape, Latino migration to the U.S. South, and specifically to Georgia, has been happening as far back as 1910 (Weise 2015). These complex regional racial formations, or smaller-scale racial orders (Cheng 2013), are also situated within the broader historical legacies of California, as a former territory of Mexico, and Georgia, as a slave-holding state.

The Latino History of Metropolitan Los Angeles

California emerged as an immigrant gateway after the World War II era when the Los Angeles metropolitan area became a hub for immigration (Singer 2004). Prior to World War II, however, California had a long and complicated history with Latinos, and with Mexicans in particular. California was annexed from Mexico in 1848 under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ushering in a period of confusion about the social, cultural, and economic place of Mexicans in the state (Acuna 1996; Gutierrez 1995). This legacy is most relevant for understanding how the proximity of California and Mexico, both geographically and politically, has shaped race relations in the state as well as the experiences Latino undocumented immigrants.

Latinos have been a constant presence in California, and continued immigration flows have continued to replenish this population (Jimenez 2008). Starting as early as the 1920's, Mexican migrants became a core part of the agricultural, packing, and canning labor forces in the

Los Angeles region (Valadez Torres 2005). In addition to working in these industries, Mexican migrants were also a key part of construction-related industries, and the domestic work force (Valadez Torres 2005). However, with the 1929 crash and the depression that followed, Mexican migrants, specifically in the Los Angeles area were a target for deportation. Under the guise of “repatriation,” between 1929-1939 nearly 100,000 Mexican migrants were forced to return to Mexico. By the 1950’s, however, and due in large part to the Bracero program, Mexican migration, both documented and undocumented had grown and an economic boom in California increased demand for Mexican labor (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). California remained a destination for undocumented Latino migration through the 1980’s. In fact, following the passage of IRCA in 1986, estimates suggest that about 55% percent of undocumented immigrants legalized through the program lived in California, of these nearly 40% lived in Southern California (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). During the 1990’s a severe economic recession plagued California and anti-undocumented immigrant sentiment rose, culminating in the passage of Proposition 187 (HoSang 2010; Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000).

Proposition 187, or the Save Our State initiative, passed by a two-to-one margin amongst California voters in 1999 (HoSang 2010; Schrag 2010). Proposition 187 wanted to prevent undocumented immigrants from accessing a variety of social services including healthcare and education, both K-12 and college (Varsanyi 2010). While the U.S. District Court invalidated the proposition (HoSang 2010; Varsanyi 2010), arguing that it violated the plenary power of the federal government over immigration enforcement, the furor surrounding the proposition had lasting effects on California’s undocumented immigrant community. During interviews I conducted in 2010, Latino undocumented youth activists cited the Proposition 187 campaign as a formative experience that influenced their awareness of their legal status, as well as their

perceptions of undocumented immigrants in the state. Javier, who was ten years old when he migrated to the United States with his mother in the early 1990's, discussed

E: When you came, were you aware of your status, or did your family talk about it at all?

J: Yes. Because I remember, I think the whole Prop 187, that whole campaign was about-. We came at the end of that. But I remember there was a lot of ads that were very anti-immigrant, that I remember.

Because of the Proposition 187 campaign, the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults who came of age in the 1990's in California were very similar to the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults who came of age in the 2000's in Georgia. Despite this recent and hostile historical moment, California is currently considered a welcoming state. The Los Angeles metropolitan area in particular has been at the forefront of integrationist initiatives including being among the first cities to offer identification in the form of a city ID to unauthorized immigrants. In addition, when Arizona passed SB1070, its infamous anti-immigrant law, the Los Angeles City Council voted to cutoff business ties with the state.

Nevertheless, the difficult circumstances in California including a depressed labor market, stricter controls at the San Diego border, and an increasingly hostile anti-immigrant climate, resulted in a rapid shift of Mexican immigrants away from California during the 1990's and through the 2000's (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). By the 2000's when many of the respondents for this particular study were coming of age, California and the metropolitan Los Angeles region were firmly established as a Latino-centric locales. This has and continues to have important material and symbolic implications for unauthorized Latino immigrants in the state, as citizen Latino co-ethnics are a social, economic, and political presence in California. The same is not true for Latino unauthorized immigrants living in Georgia, as I discuss in the next section.

The Latino History of Metropolitan Atlanta

Georgia emerged as “new immigrant destination” during the 1990’s and 2000s’, when the population in the metropolitan area grew from less than 10% to more than 25% in just 20 years (Singer 2004). The influx of Latino immigrants during this period resulted from a number of factors including the passage of IRCA, which led to strain on the labor market in traditional immigrant gateways like Los Angeles (Odem and Lacy 2009; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2009). In addition, during the 1990’s labor economies in the South including manufacturing, poultry processing, and the service sector provided new and abundant opportunities for unauthorized immigrants (Lippard and Gallagher 2011; Weeks and Weeks 2011; Odem and Lacy 2009). Economic booms in two distinct Southeast regions--Charlotte, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia--led to an influx of immigrants (Lippard and Gallagher 2011; Weeks and Weeks 2011). The 1996 Olympic Games brought thousands of Mexican construction workers to the Atlanta area, and this migration continued for over two decades (Odem and Lacy 2009). Although between 2009 and 2014, the unauthorized population in Georgia decreased, the state currently has the 7th largest undocumented immigrant population in the country (Passel and Cohn 2014). Current estimates suggest that about 400,000 of the 10 million state residents are unauthorized immigrants, primarily from Mexico and Guatemala (Migration Policy Institute 2014; Pew Hispanic Center 2014).

While this relatively recent influx of Latino unauthorized migrants has garnered attention and hostility in the state, historian Julie Weise argues that the public and scholarly characterization of Georgia as a new immigrant destination is inaccurate. Instead, she shows that Mexican migration to the state, although *not* to Atlanta, began in the late 1950’s with a group of about 1,300 Braceros who picked cotton alongside African-Americans in the southern part of the

state. From the 1960's through the 1980's, Georgia's Vidalia sweet onions and peaches brought Mexican migrant farmworkers to the state, and some were able to settle and make a living working other fruit and vegetable crops in the region (Weise 2015). Many of these agricultural workers adjusted their status under the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) provisions of IRCA. Yet, overwhelmed labor markets in California and Texas (described briefly above) led to a continuous flow of unauthorized migrants to Southern Georgia. By 1989, the agricultural labor market in the state had almost completely turned over to Latino immigrant labor (Weise 2015).

In the northern part of Georgia, predominantly White industrial towns including Gainesville, Cedartown and Dalton recruited Mexican workers to work in carpet mills. Although their treatment was more considerably more hostile than in Southern Georgia. One exception to this harsh treatment was the city of Dalton, where carpet mill owners were able to calm anti-immigrant sentiment and encourage integration initiatives (Weise 2015; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2009). The experiences of Latino immigrants to the southern and northern parts of the state, highlight the complexity of Latino migration not only to Georgia, but also to the new "Viejo" South (Weise 2015). While both the Southern and Northern parts of Georgia have had a longer history of Latino immigration, Latino undocumented immigration to the Atlanta area began in earnest in the early 1990's in advance of the 1996 Olympic Games.

The migration patterns of immigrants to the Atlanta area followed earlier Mexican migration patterns, including migration first by single working class males—some from traditional immigrant destinations. Followed during the 1990's by increasing numbers of female migrants and children (Odem and Lacy 2009). My own interviews with Latino undocumented young adults in the Atlanta area confirmed this, as many of the participants' fathers continue to work in the construction industry, the industry that first brought them and their families to the

region. As with other new immigrant destinations, a polarizing debate has emerged in South. Previous studies find that that in the late 1990's and early 2000's some Southerners viewed immigrants as breathing new life into dying towns (Jones 2012; Marrow 2011; Odem and Lacy 2009). Immigrants, even if unauthorized, brought not only economic labor but also commerce to struggling main streets across the South. On the other hand, these studies also suggest that others view them as simply "illegals" that take jobs and burden taxpayers (Odem and Lacy 2009); a sentiment that has persisted even as Latino undocumented immigrants continue to remain in the state and make their homes and lives in these regions.

Odem and Lacy (2009) find that prior to 2000, before a significant influx of unauthorized immigrants to the Atlanta area, attitudes toward immigrants were either neutral or generally positive. Marrow (2011) comes to a similar conclusion in her in-depth study of immigration to rural North Carolina. However, the turn of the 21st century brought deteriorating economic conditions and a rapid growth in the Latino immigrant population, spurring public discourse that emphasized the social and economic costs of immigration (Odem and Lacy 2009). Georgia was one of the first and most aggressive states in the South to seek to limit the rights of unauthorized immigrants to transportation, housing, health care, and higher education. Research about the transformation of the South have captured the demographic shifts in the immigrant population. Yet, studies about the incorporation processes of this group, especially about Latino undocumented young adults is relatively sparse. In a telling conclusion, Marrow (2011) suggests that while native-born populations seem to be open to immigrant populations, legal status or rather "illegal" status, significantly alters the experiences of unauthorized immigrants.

Despite a hostile context, previous research demonstrates that Latino unauthorized migrants are making their lives in the "New South." They are (re)claiming spaces in the form of

churches, storefronts, and neighborhoods. This has proven integral for reproducing a social life and creating integration opportunities for immigrants, undocumented and documented alike (Odem and Lacy 2009; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2009). The remnants of this demographic shift was visible when I was in Atlanta conducting fieldwork. Driving along highways in the Atlanta area, I was attuned to spatial evidence of the presence of Latinos. The billboard below, for example, caught my eye as I was driving back from an interview in Norcross, a heavily populated Latino immigrant community in the Atlanta area.

Figure 2.1 Photo, Norcross, GA



The juxtaposition of the billboard being in Spanish with the cartoonish and stereotypical image of a “Mexican” signaled the ongoing and precarious position of Latinos in the area and in the state. During fieldwork I learned that the space, both physically and symbolically, that Latino undocumented immigrants have claimed in the area was the result of concerted community-based advocacy efforts, and that this has been an ongoing struggle. This parallels previous research that shows that in the Atlanta area physical spaces such as streets, parks, and other

public locales have become places of conflict (Odem and Lacy 2009). This coupled with workplace raids; raids at apartment complexes, and regular patrol of immigrant neighborhoods have stifled the social integration of undocumented immigrants in the Atlanta area.

Although Mayor Kasim Reed declared Atlanta a “welcoming city” in 2015, all undocumented but especially Latino undocumented immigrants living in Atlanta and the surrounding area continue to face significant legal barriers and challenges to inclusion. For example, when President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Parental Arrivals (DAPA) program, two different state legislators proposed bills that would bar DAPA recipients from being eligible for driver’s licenses. In the wake of the announcement of the DAPA and DACA+ programs, similar bills were proposed seeking to revoke DACA recipients’ driver’s licenses. In February 2016, state Senator Josh McKoon proposed that the term “illegal alien” be added next to driver’s licenses issued to undocumented immigrants in the state (Foley 2016). Georgia was also one of the 26 states that joined the legal challenge to DAPA and DACA+, asserting that implementation of these programs would create a significant burden to the state. As a result of a series of punitive policies and ongoing onslaught of proposed legislation seeking to limit rights of undocumented immigrants and DACA recipients in the state, the everyday lives of Latino undocumented immigrants in Georgia continue to be difficult. In the next two sections, I examine how the interaction of federal and state laws and policies shape the lived experiences of Latino undocumented immigrants in both Los Angeles, California and Atlanta, Georgia.

The legacy of *Plyler v. Doe*: The Federal Immigration Landscape

In 1982, the Supreme Court of the United States held in *Plyler v. Doe*, that undocumented immigrant children had a right to a public education through high school graduation. The case challenged the State of Texas’ implementation of a fee charged only to undocumented immigrant

children, effectively excluding them from public education (Motomura 2014). Justice Powell, who wrote the Court's opinion, argued that denying undocumented immigrant children access to a public education would create a "lifetime hardship on a discrete class of children not accountable for their disabling status" (*Plyler v. Doe* in Pabon Lopez 2005: 17). The opinion reflected a tacit acknowledgement of the importance of education for creating a pathway to upward social mobility, or in the case of undocumented children, at the least very avoiding a state sanctioned downward trajectory. The *Plyler* precedent has endured for over 30 years (Motomura 2014; Olivas 2011). While *Plyler* is generally considered a historic legal victory for Latinos, one of *Plyler's* most influential legacies has been to open the door to an uncertain future as undocumented young people leave the K-12 system (Gonzales, Heredia and Negron-Gonzales 2015; Olivas 2011).

To ameliorate some of this uncertainty, undocumented youth have tirelessly advocated for over ten years for the passage of the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Initially introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act would have provided a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrant youth who meet certain requirements. Initially the DREAM act was focused on educational attainment and community service. It has been introduced four times, in 2007, 2009, 2010 and again in 2011, and over time received bipartisan support. Although some speculate that this came at a cost. With each introduction the language of the DREAM Act became more restrictive and focused primarily on rewarding "deserving" undocumented young people. By 2010, the language included military service and a "high moral character" standard. Yet, with each iteration the undocumented youth movement also grew in strength and influence. By 2010, passing the DREAM Act eclipsed Comprehensive Immigration Reform, as the central fight of the national immigrant rights movement, although considerable

tension between passing the DREAM Act and pushing for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (Nicholls 2013). While the DREAM act, came closest to passing in 2010, the Act has never passed, signaling a larger social ambivalence about providing a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants, even the most palatable—English speaking, high-achieving “innocent” children.

A short two years after the DREAM Act’s failure in 2010, President Barack Obama announced the DACA program, in the Rose Garden of the White House Lawn, and in sharing his rationale for using his presidential his power to provide immigration relief, he remarked:

These are young people who study in our schools, they play in our neighborhoods, they’re friends with our kids, they pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper...Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you’ve done everything right your entire life -- studied hard, worked hard, maybe even graduated at the top of your class -- only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about, with a language that you may not even speak... Effective immediately, the Department of Homeland Security is taking steps to lift the shadow of deportation from these young people...Now, let's be clear -- this is not amnesty, this is not immunity. This is not a path to citizenship. It's not a permanent fix. This is a temporary stopgap measure that lets us focus our resources wisely while giving a degree of relief and hope to talented, driven, patriotic young people.

President Obama’s announcement echoed the discourse that was strategically employed by the undocumented student movement to advocate for passage of the DREAM Act. DACA ushered in a key legal shift for undocumented immigrant youth, because it grants a two-year temporary stay of deportation for eligible undocumented young adults who came to the United States before the age of 16.³ Symbolically DACA represented the first major federal commitment since IRCA that acknowledges, albeit with temporary relief, the continued presence of undocumented immigrants

³ Other requirements include: (1) continuous presence in the U.S. from 2007, (2) under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012, (3) physical presence on June 15, 2012, (4) entered the U.S. without inspection before June 15, 2012, (5) currently enrolled in school, high school graduate, GED, or honorable discharge from armed forces for Coast Guard and (6) no felony or serious misdemeanor convictions and do not pose a serious threat to national security.

in the United States. In addition to deportation relief, DACA recipients do not continue to accrue a period of unlawful presence, and they are eligible to apply for work authorization. In addition, DACA has opened the door to other key benefits for undocumented young adults including driver's licenses. As of December 2015, nearly three years into the program's existence, approximately 850,000 potentially eligible undocumented immigrant youth applied (USCIS 2016). As of December 2015, another 550,000 DACA recipients had applied for renewal (USCIS 2016).

Research about the impact of DACA for recipients has been generally positive. 89% of DACA recipients reported that they got a driver's license, significantly reducing the risk of driving-related infractions (Wong et. al., 2015). In addition, 69% reported getting a job with better pay and 92% of those enrolled in school have pursued educational opportunities that they wouldn't have pursued otherwise (Wong et. al. 2015). While these results are positive, they obscure key issues that I explore in this dissertation, which is that much of this success varies by state. As President Obama noted in his announcement, DACA is a *temporary* relief program with no pathway to citizenship. Underscoring the political vulnerability of DACA, is the President's announcement in November 2014 of the Deferred Action for Parental Arrivals (DAPA) program and the expansion of DACA to a broader group of individuals, referred to as DACA-plus. Both programs were under a temporary injunction restricting implementation. The Supreme Court heard the case in April 2016, and a ruling in June 2016 left both programs in limbo as an evenly divided 4-4 court let the injunction stand. A few undocumented youths expressed apprehension about the legal challenges to DAPA and DACA plus, and wondered if DACA would also be threatened. In addition, undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia, expressed concern about the 2016 Presidential election. Several Republican nominees not only threatened

DACA but have also proposed mass deportations, and further fortification of the U.S./Mexico border. Given this rhetoric Latino undocumented young expressed uncertainty about the continued viability of DACA.

State Legal Contexts: Comparing California and Georgia

While immigration law and policy falls under the purview of the federal government, immigrants ultimately settle in states and localities. How undocumented immigrants are welcome (or not) in these states and localities has a profound impact on their day-to-day lives (Marrow 2011). The absence of comprehensive immigration reform coupled with the movement of undocumented immigrant populations away from traditional gateways, has created varying contexts of reception within in the United States. As a result, states and localities, have responded differently to the influx of undocumented immigrants; with most states responding by restricting rights and benefits. The prime example of this is Arizona's SB1070, which was signed by Governor Jan Brewer in 2010. Following Arizona, several other states including Georgia passed similarly restrictive bills. In 2011, Georgia passed HB87, which included many of the provisions outlined in SB1070 including making it a misdemeanor to be an undocumented immigrant, imposed penalties on any individual assisting an undocumented immigrant, and required local law enforcement officers to determine an individual's immigration status. While conducting fieldwork in Georgia, I learned that this rapid shift significantly impacted the day-to-day lives of Latino undocumented young adults including a significant increase of fear and anxiety for themselves and their parents. To gauge the relative openness and hostility of a state, researchers look to a few types of laws that impact undocumented immigrants. These include (1) an omnibus punitive immigration law; (2) laws mandating an employment verification system (E-verify); (3) laws requiring applicants for public benefits prove their citizenship or

immigration status; (4) laws addressing immigrant access to higher education; and (5) laws granting driver’s licenses. In these areas, California and Georgia have taken very different stances. The following table summarizes the different policy landscapes of each state in key areas that impact undocumented immigrants.

Table 2.1: Comparison of state laws and policies aimed at unauthorized immigrants		
Law or Policy	California	Georgia
Restrictive Statewide Immigration Law	No statewide policy	HB 87: Signed May 2011 --Law enforcement officers can check the immigration status of any individual who cannot produce identification. Blocked by Supreme Court: Provision making it a felony to “transport, harbor, or conceal an illegal immigrant”
E-verify	State and localities prohibited from mandating E-verify	Strict E-verify: All employers must check employee’s eligibility against the Social Security and Department of Homeland Security database.
Higher Education Access	Undocumented immigrants can attend any college or university in the state	<u>BOR policy 4.1.6</u> : Undocumented immigrants barred from attending the 5 most prestigious public colleges and universities.
Higher Ed: In-state residency tuition	AB540: Signed 2001 --Eligible undocumented immigrants can pay in-state residency tuition.	<u>BOR policy 4.3.4</u> : Prohibits undocumented immigrants from paying in-state tuition.
Higher Ed: State Financial Aid	AB130 and AB131: Signed 2011 --AB130: undocumented immigrants eligible for private financial aid --AB131: undocumented immigrants eligible for state financial aid	No statewide policy
State ID and Driver’s Licenses	<u>AB60</u> : Driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants	--Driver’s licenses only for DACA recipients

(Sources: The National Immigration Law Center, The National Center for State Legislators)

For the undocumented 1.5-generation the current legal landscape is problematic precisely because of the unintended consequences of contradictory federal and state immigration laws and policies that leave many undocumented young adults in a state of limbo, especially as they transition out of high school (Gonzales 2016). In 18 states, including California, undocumented immigrant students who meet certain requirements can attend college and pay in-state resident

tuition (ISRT). Just three of these states, including California, also offer state and institutional financial to undocumented students. Access to state and institutional aid considerably eases the financial burden of paying for college, especially given the rising costs of a receiving a college degree. On the other end of the spectrum, three states including Georgia require undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition at public colleges. Out-of-state tuition can range from two to four times the in-state tuition rate.

In 2011, the Georgia Board of Regents, the governing body of the University System of Georgia, restricted undocumented immigrants from attending the five most competitive colleges in the state, under policy 4.1.6. This includes the state's flagship public institution, the University of Georgia located in Athens, GA. It also includes Georgia State University and the Georgia Institute of Technology both located Atlanta. During interviews, I learned that these three universities were often the top college choices of undocumented students in the state. Yet, they couldn't attend. In addition, undocumented immigrants are required to pay out-of-state tuition at *any* public college or university, including less prestigious state campuses and two-year colleges and universities. During interviews, respondents from Georgia shared that the average cost of attending college, even a two-year college, was three times the amount that an in-state resident would pay, and thus it was policy 4.3.4 that created the greatest barrier to college attendance.

Restrictive policies, like those in Georgia, are a relatively new phenomenon, with most of these laws and policies emerging after 2010. Previous research about the impact of in-state residency tuition policies for college enrollment is mixed. Some studies find that ISRT policies increase college enrollment amongst Latino undocumented immigrants (Kaushal 2008; Flores 2010). While more recent research suggests that ISRT policies do not increase college enrollment, but restrictive policies like those in Georgia have a negative impact on college

enrollment (Bozick et. al 2015). These studies highlight an empirical quandary—what are the consequences of welcoming or restrictive higher education policies for the educational access and experiences of Latino undocumented young adults? In Chapter 4, I specifically examine the ramifications of these higher educational policies for Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia. While higher education policies have the most direct impact on the lives Latino undocumented young adults, *especially* for the participants in this study; the lives of undocumented immigrants are shaped by patchwork of laws that influence their day-to-day lives.

In 2012 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down some of the harshest provisions of omnibus restrictive laws like SB1070 and HB87 in *Arizona v. United States*. Nevertheless, these restrictive policies have had the intended effect of increased scrutiny of the undocumented immigrant community and has created a hostile context of reception for unauthorized immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005). Despite the proliferation of restrictive policies in various states, including those in the New South, the introduction of these types of laws have slowed down considerably. In the empirical chapters that follow I explore the consequences of shifting, and at times contradictory, political and legal landscapes for Latino undocumented young adults' ideas about citizenship and ethnic identity, educational pathways, and (non)/participation in activism.

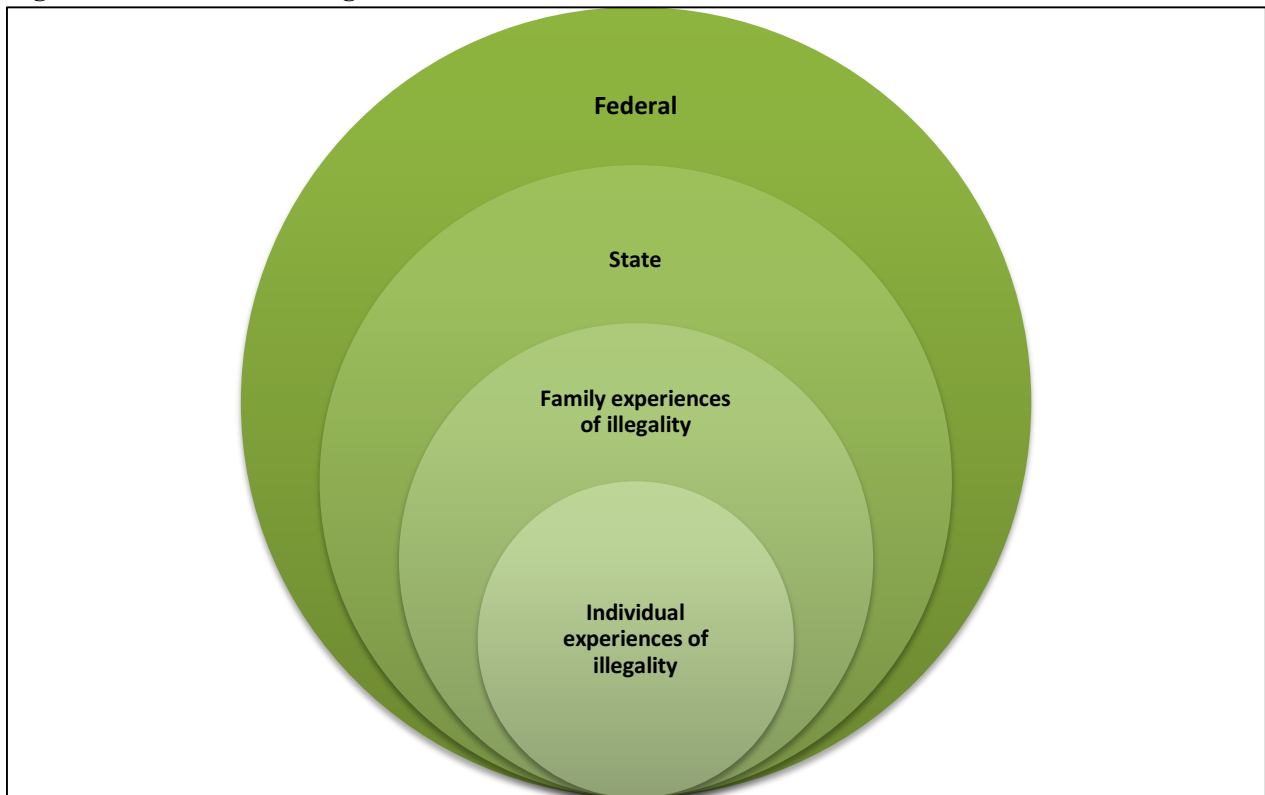
Latino undocumented young adults in nested socio-legal contexts

In this chapter, I have discussed the multiple legal contexts that Latino undocumented young adults inhabit. Starting first with the federal immigration policy landscape, I suggest that the absence of comprehensive immigration reform has led to a fractured legal landscape at the state level, particularly in states that have experienced an influx of undocumented immigrants. I discussed some of the major areas of law, both immigration related and general, that signal

whether a state is welcoming or hostile. Rather than focus exclusively on higher education laws and policies, I also examined key areas of laws that shape the lives of Latino undocumented young adults *and* their families in California and Georgia. As I discussed in the introduction, Latino undocumented young adults lives and experiences of illegality are fundamentally shaped by those of their families; creating another nested layer of legal contextual experience This narrative thread is woven throughout the experiences of participants in *both* California and Georgia and plays a fundamental role in shaping their perceptions of hostility and welcoming, as well as shapes their aspirations and expectation.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia within a nested legal context framework. I provide a diagram of the below:

Figure 2.2 Nested Socio-Legal Contexts



In each chapter, I find that Latino undocumented young adults envision their lives in relation to multiple contexts including their families, state laws and policies, and the overarching federal context. This nested legal context creates a series of experiences that are in many ways similar across the states and provides interesting insight, though, about state contexts and family experiences of illegality shape Latino undocumented young adults lives in two very different contexts of reception, the primary focus of the remainder of this dissertation

CHAPTER 3

Ambivalent Americans: Citizenship, Belonging and Identity in New and Old Destinations

On June 25, 2012, TIME Magazine featured journalist Jose Antonio Vargas on its cover. Vargas, who had recently “come out” as an undocumented immigrant, was flanked by a sea of other undocumented immigrant young adults. In bold red letters across the top of the magazine cover was the statement “We are Americans...just not legally.” The magazine cover captured a narrative that has become prominent in the public discourse and scholarship about undocumented immigrant young adults; that they are American *but for* their legal status. The discourse of “Americanness” emerged in part as a strategy employed by the undocumented youth movement to appeal to the moveable middle; however, it is also rooted in the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth who have lived most of their lives in the United States (Dingeman-Cerda, Burciaga, and Martinez 2016). In addition, in an increasingly hostile and threatening political climate, undocumented youths’ claims to an American identity directly challenge attempts to frame undocumented immigrants in dehumanizing and othering terms. One consequence of this framing, though, is that it has profoundly shaped the identity development of undocumented immigrant youth.

In this chapter, I examine how this American narrative, along with other key factors including state laws and policies, experiences of discrimination, and the presence or absence of other Latinos, shaped participants’ perceptions of whether or not they belong. I find that while these converging factors shape undocumented young adults’ sense of belonging, they also influence the ways undocumented young adults assert belonging, by claiming but also rejecting facets of this “American” narrative. As I examine this complex negotiation, the experiences of

the undocumented young adults I interviewed reveal a more nuanced relationship to notions of citizenship, belonging, and ethnic identity—one that is more complex than the simple characterization of them as Americans by heart (Perez 2009; Perez 2012). Drawing from intersectionality theory (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991), I employ an approach that acknowledges the relationship between legal status and racialization, a relationship that frames participants’ understandings of belonging and ethnic identity. As previous research suggests, I find that undocumented young adults’ progressive exclusion from social institutions and social life as they age significantly shapes their personal experiences of illegality (Gonzales 2016). I also find that their understandings of illegality developed long before they transitioned out of the legally protected space of schools. Undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia describe peripheral experiences of discrimination experienced by their parents and family members that, in conjunction with their own social exclusion, shaped their ambivalence about being “American.” I suggest that undocumented young adults develop an ambivalent American identity akin to reactive ethnicity, an ethnic identity that develops in response to particularly hostile political contexts (Rumbaut 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Unlike reactive ethnicity, however, I suggest that this identity develops in response to the concurrent inclusion and exclusion that Latino undocumented young adults experience as a result of living in nested socio-legal contexts. I argue that their ambivalence reflects a dissonance between their acknowledgement of the concrete benefits of formal legal citizenship, or officially becoming American, and their personal and peripheral experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Citizenship, Belonging and Ethnic Identity

According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), “identities are narratives, or stories that people tell about who they are (and who they are not)” (202). For undocumented immigrant youth, their

narrative, or identity, is informed by an experience of membership that is at once exclusive and inclusive (Glenn 2011; Gonzales 2016). Inherent in this paradox is the tension between formal citizenship and substantive citizenship. While undocumented immigrant youth and undocumented members of their family are denied legal recognition by the nation-state, membership is not defined *only* by law. Formal citizenship, in the form of legal permission to be in the United States, is often at odds with the inclusion of undocumented immigrant youth in at least one key social institution: public schools. Research about the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth is situated at this (dis)juncture, and reveals the paradox of this experience (Abrego 2008; Cebulko 2013; Gleeson and Gonzales 2012; Gonzales 2016). These studies document the acute personal sense of exclusion that undocumented immigrant youth experience as they transition out of high school and into more uncertain futures. Undocumented immigrant youth also make this transition during a key stage in their lives, and therefore, in the ethnic identity development process (Phinney 1993). In this chapter, I examine how undocumented immigrant young adults' ethnic identity develops in relation to their experience of citizenship and belonging.

Previous research about the incorporation experiences of immigrant children specifically examines ethnic identity development as a sign of how immigrant youth are assimilating, or not assimilating, into the United States (Feliciano 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Identificational assimilation (Gordon 1964) is the culmination of the assimilation process marked by a self-identification as only American. However, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001) note, identificational assimilation is not available to racialized immigrants who experience prejudice and discrimination in the United States. Instead they suggest that four patterns of ethnic self-identification emerge, "American" being only one option; (1) national origin identity, (2)

hyphenated identity, (3) American identity and (4) a pan-ethnic identity (Rumbaut 1994). For Latino undocumented young adults, however, in addition to being racialized immigrants, they also experience legal exclusion, which may impact their ethnic identity development process differently than their U.S.-born, second-generation counterparts. I examine how legal status interacts with racialization to shape the processes of ethnic self-identification among Latino undocumented immigrant youth in Los Angeles and Atlanta.

Scholars find that patterns of ethnic identity develop in response to contexts and experiences over the life course (Feliciano 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Phinney 1993). As previous research suggests, the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is key in the ethnic identity development process (Phinney 1993). For many Latino undocumented young adults this period coincides with their transition out of the legally protected space of the K-12 school system, and into a period of “learning to be illegal” (Gonzales 2016). These direct experiences of legal exclusion, including difficulty navigating milestones in the transition to adulthood, may influence Latino undocumented young adults’ sense of belonging but also their ethnic identity. As undocumented youth begin to feel the direct effects of their undocumented status, the potential for experiences of discrimination may also increase; as previous research suggests, direct experiences of discrimination can thicken ethnic identity (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

In addition to personal experiences of discrimination, hostile political contexts can also thicken ethnic identity and lead individuals to develop a reactive ethnicity. Reactive ethnicities can emerge in response to “perceived threats, discrimination, persecution, and exclusion” (Rumbaut 2008:110). Tovar and Feliciano (2009) find for example that the Sensenbrenner Bill, an especially punitive anti-immigrant bill proposed in 2006, heightened Latino college students’

self-identification as Mexican. In the past thirty years, the national climate has become particularly hostile toward Latino undocumented immigrants, with some scholars describing current conditions as a form of legal violence (DeGenova 2002; Abrego and Menjivar 2012). As I discussed in the previous chapter, Latino undocumented youth live in nested socio-legal contexts that I argue creates concurrent inclusion and exclusion. While DACA shields eligible undocumented immigrant youth from deportation, they remain exposed to a broader narrative that paints Latino undocumented immigrants as a threat (Chavez 2008). The prevalence of the Latino threat narrative also varies by state, and is currently prominent in the Nuevo South (Browne and Odem 2012; Marrow 2011).

In this chapter, I explore the intersections between nested socio-legal contexts, race, and legal status to highlight how Latino undocumented young adults experience and articulate what it means to them to be American. I examine how Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta navigate and negotiate their ethnic identity within a broader context of racialized immigration policies and social movement narratives that paint them as “Americans.” I start by discussing how Latino undocumented young adults in the metropolitan Los Angeles and Atlanta areas described their experiences growing up in two different legal and political landscapes. As expected, respondents who grew up in Los Angeles described a less overtly hostile climate than respondents in the Atlanta area. I then turn to an examination of respondents’ description of experiences of discrimination within these different contexts—discrimination being, again, a key factor in shaping ethnic identity. Finally, I discuss how Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta identify.

Growing up Undocumented in Old and New Destinations

“It was comforting”: Context of reception in metropolitan Los Angeles

Jennifer migrated to Highland Park, a predominantly Latino neighborhood in central city Los Angeles in 2005, at the age of ten. After she, her three-year-old sister, and six-year-old brother, landed in Tijuana from Mexico City, they parted ways with her mother, so they could cross with another family. Jennifer distinctly remembers that as the oldest, she was told, “Okay, if anything happens, you have to be strong. You have to take care of them. You're responsible because you're the oldest.” Through tears, Jennifer recalled that she and her brother and sister were caught and held at the border because they were using someone else’s papers. Because it was the weekend, they were held in the detention center until their mother could come pick them up on Monday morning. In addition, because of their age difference, Jennifer was separated from her younger siblings and was distraught because she could not take care of them as she had promised her mother. After this harrowing experience, Jennifer, her siblings and her mother eventually made their way to the Los Angeles area to reunite with her father, who had migrated to the United States when she was just three years old.

During our interview, Jennifer explained that the trauma of this early experience was mitigated in part by moving to the predominantly Latino community of Highland Park. Although she did not refer to Los Angeles as a “traditional Latino immigrant gateway,” Jennifer and respondents who migrated to Los Angeles described their transition as less shocking than they anticipated. Jennifer, who is now 19 years old, reflected on her first impressions of Highland Park, where her family continues to live:

I would like to say one hundred percent Latino. I mean when we got there I was like, “Why is everyone speaking Spanish?” I was surprised because I was like, “Okay.” It was comforting to go to a city where at least other people knew the language that I spoke. I didn't feel too out of place.

Like Jennifer, Yesenia migrated to Rialto when she was six years old. Rialto is a predominantly Latino community located about an hour outside of Los Angeles in San Bernardino County. She

described it as “a small boring place. There’s predominantly Hispanic people, so I never really felt out of place.” Jennifer’s description of her neighborhood as comforting, because of the presence of other Latinos who spoke Spanish, echoes the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults who migrated to the Los Angeles area. Both Yesenia and Jennifer believed that the fact that other Hispanics were not only physically present, but actually made up the majority of the community, helped them not to “feel out of place,” as they both described. However, not feeling out of place was the result of both the presence of other Latinos and also the tacit knowledge that many of their family members, neighbors, and friends might also be undocumented.

In contrast to the experiences of undocumented young adults in Atlanta, which I describe later in this chapter, respondents in the Los Angeles area described life in communities where they shared not only an ethnic background, but also a presumed legal status with others living there. Eduardo, who migrated to South El Monte, a community on the outskirts of the City of Los Angeles, pointed out that “Most of the people there (*in South El Monte*) are Hispanic. There’s a lot of undocumented. The undocumented community is big.” Alondra, who migrated when she was 11 years old, stated during our interview:

I obviously knew I was undocumented, the second I crossed the border...it was just in my head that I didn’t have papers...but throughout the whole school years it wasn’t a problem, no one really cares. Especially in LA, because a lot of people are undocumented, so I guess it’s common and you don’t really talk about it. My school is preK-12, and it’s like 99% Latino. So I grew up with pure Hispanic people, so there was no questioning about it (*her undocumented status*).

Rather than creating a stigma in their local communities, the equation of being Latino and undocumented paradoxically seemed to provide respondents with a sense of protection. While I am not suggesting that undocumented young adults and their family’s felt *no* fear or stigma because of their status, my findings suggest that Los Angeles’ designation as a traditional

immigrant gateway mitigated some of the hostility that respondents described in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, the move in the state toward more accommodating laws and policies played a significant role in creating the perception of a welcoming political context, a stark contrast to how Latino undocumented young adults described the political context in Atlanta.

“Life is hard here”: Context of Reception in metropolitan Atlanta

For Latino undocumented young adults in Atlanta, as expected, their experiences of growing up were shaped in part by Georgia’s status as a “new immigrant destination” and the proliferation of restrictive laws in the state. Unlike respondents who migrated to Los Angeles, undocumented young adults who migrated to the metropolitan Atlanta area, especially those who migrated before 2000, prior to the rapid increase in the Latino unauthorized population, described being the first family, or one of very few Hispanic families in their communities. Lydia, who came to the United States in 1991 at two months old with her mother and sisters, stated that her parents were the first Hispanic family in their community—a rural community about an hour outside of Atlanta. By third grade, in 2001, the demographics of her community were changing and Lydia and her sisters became translators for others. During our interview, she explained,

I was mainly translating for her [*a recently arrived Hispanic student*] because she came at that age, 3rd grade, and so I was working with her on everything. And it was really interesting because my second eldest sister was also doing that she must have been in 7th or 8th grade. I mean there was such there was no Hispanic adult to be able to do any translating or interpreting for the kids.

By the time Lydia graduated from high school in 2009, there were at least 20 Hispanic students in her graduating class and many more Hispanic students in the grades below. This shift in the racial demographics of the metropolitan Atlanta area had two distinct but related outcomes that shaped how respondents perceived the political and community context. The increase in the

Latino population during the early 2000s, coupled with a declining economy and fears following the September 11 attacks, increased xenophobia in the state (Brown and Odem 2012). On the other hand, as Latino communities increased in size, Latino enclaves began to form in various parts of the metropolitan Atlanta area, including in the areas of Chamblee, Doraville, Roswell, and Lawrenceville. While the proliferation of Latino stores, Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers, and organizations serving the Latinos created a sense of community for Latino undocumented immigrants, there was also a backlash which resulted in respondents describing a shift in their everyday experience of hostility.

During our interview, Arturo described how the political climate shifted around 2008, and he tied the backlash to the recession. The shift in political context coincided with his transition from middle school to high school, a period he described as quite difficult.

I do remember being on the, on the bus one day and it was, it was a white friend of mine like he was like are you illegal and it's just like that...In high school, freshmen year towards the end that's when it started really hitting me, it affected me really negatively because HB87 was proposed. Well I should backtrack. I do remember the raids. They were doing poultry raids under the Bush administration and so they would come into factory and my dad lost his job because of that.

Although Arturo was relatively young when the political climate shifted, he was aware of the change from what might be considered a laissez-faire attitude toward undocumented immigrants to a hostile climate. Ines, who grew up in Doraville, a Latino enclave of Atlanta, echoed his sense of a shift in the political climate.

When we first got here in Georgia, it wasn't as bad...I think there's a reason why we've stayed here, because we fell in love with here, you adapt. It's also very hard to live in a place when they don't help you in any way.

In stark contrast to the experiences of respondents in the Los Angeles area, the growth of the Latino unauthorized community in the metropolitan Atlanta area created a more hostile climate for Latino undocumented young adults and their families. While this backlash may be very

similar to the anti-immigrant climate in California during the 1990s, the current trajectory of immigration laws and policies in the state suggest that there will be little to no reprieve for undocumented immigrants in Georgia in the near future.

The divergent contexts of reception described above highlight how Latino undocumented young adults experienced inclusion or exclusion in their home states and cities. As expected, Latino undocumented young adults in the metropolitan Los Angeles area described the presence of co-ethnics, e.g. other Latinos, as integral to creating a sense of place. However, in Atlanta, the emergence of a sizable Latino undocumented immigrant community created a backlash in the general population that impacted their sense of place, or belonging. In both areas, Latino undocumented young adults had to confront their legal status, but paradoxically, in Los Angeles, the large presence of Latino undocumented immigrants made this identity less salient in the day-to-day lives of respondents. In contrast in Atlanta, the equation of being Latino and undocumented resulted in a sense of being scrutinized. In the next section, I examine how these different contexts also gave rise to differing experiences of perceived discrimination.

Comparative Experiences of Discrimination in California and Georgia

When I set out on this project, I wanted to understand *how* the divergent political contexts described above impacted Latino undocumented young adults in their everyday experiences. The relatively accommodating social context of Los Angeles and, conversely, the hostile context of Atlanta, tell one story about how laws and policies impact Latino undocumented young adults. In this next section, I examine variations in the social contexts described above and the way they translated to different everyday experiences of discrimination for Latino undocumented young adults. In line with previous research about Latino undocumented young adults, I find that respondents in Los Angeles and Atlanta articulate acute feelings of discrimination as they

transition out of high school and face more barriers and challenges, especially related to educational access—I explore this in depth in the next chapter. While Latino undocumented young adults described personal experiences of discrimination primarily within the context of education, I found that witnessing their parents’ experiences of discrimination also had a profound impact on their understandings of discrimination toward Latino undocumented immigrants.

Mateo, migrated to Atlanta in 1998 at the age of 10, noted that his undocumented status “...didn’t kick in, nor did it matter because after 9/11, that’s when really I guess being an immigrant or undocumented really was more highlighted than before.” While Mateo connected 9/11 to an increase in hostility toward undocumented immigrants, his status did not really matter to him until he turned 16:

Well I didn’t really have a sense of what it was being undocumented or anything, and then at 16, everybody was getting their driver’s license. At that point, that’s when I started to understand that I didn’t have that privilege. So I guess most immigrants, undocumented students or people start to realize that there is a difference you know, but I think that around 16 is when I started to understand.

Mateo’s story is not that different from the common narrative of the undocumented youth experience that has been well-documented (Gonzales 2016; Abrego 2008; Enriquez 2015). Nevertheless, later in our interview, Mateo stated that as living in Georgia became more difficult, he wrestled with feelings of shame about being Mexican, because of the messages he was receiving from media and the larger society, “I always felt proud of my father, proud of my mother. But with society, it was getting harder and harder to retain that pride. And there were times when I would feel guilty, and feel embarrassed.” Like Mateo, undocumented young adults growing up in the Atlanta area experienced the proliferation of restrictive laws in the 2000’s

primarily through the experiences of their parents; resulting at times in feelings of shame or embarrassment.

Marco, who migrated to South Atlanta in 2007 at the age of 7 with his mother, explained that growing up he “knew he was different,” but it wasn’t until middle school that he put “one and one together and realized that I was undocumented, and what came with that term.” As Marco elaborated during our interview, his early experiences about what it meant to be undocumented were informed by his parents’ experiences working in a factory and the way they were treated.

My mom always said that she encountered a lot of racism, a lot of people discriminated against her based on her status, and the fact that she couldn’t speak English too well. My dad he was very quiet, he kept to himself but he never expressed that, but he pointed out many injustices in our community, in the way we were treated... So, I was able to put 1 and 1 and was able to say I’m undocumented and undocumented people are treated a certain way, just from my mom’s and dad’s experience.

While Marco later learned that his undocumented status would make it difficult for him to attend college in-state, an experience he connected to a larger context of discrimination, his earliest experiences were shaped by his parents’ experiences. During separate interviews, Araceli and Diana, who were sisters and migrated to Norcross, a Latino suburb of Atlanta, in 2003, both relayed the same story to me. Responding to a question about whether they believed Georgia was a welcoming place for immigrants and about their own experiences of discrimination because of their status, Araceli said:

This is probably the weirdest story you will ever hear. I remember one time my dad had ordered a GPS I think. It was from Walmart. To pick it up, he needed an ID. I went with him. He showed them his passport from Mexico and not from here. He doesn’t have any type of ID here.... They made the biggest deal about it. I remember sitting there. I was about I want to say fourteen. They were so rude to him... I remember I just turned around. I wanted to cry because it hurts when it’s your dad and you’re seeing that happen to your dad.

While relaying this story, Araceli became very emotional and started to cry. Diana had a similar reaction, as her most vivid memory of the experience was seeing her father as vulnerable for the first time in her life. Like most undocumented immigrant children, Diana and Araceli were protected from anti-immigrant sentiment, in part because they were children, but also because their parents worked very hard to create a “normal childhood” for them and to shield them from the hostility that was growing in the state. Diana stated during our interview:

I remember my dad had just like hanging low and just feeling so vulnerable at the moment. That someone, he, it wasn't outright spoken that he was undocumented but by not having that Georgia state license it was just assumed...And to see him in that vulnerable moment. They always protected me from the discrimination. Sorry I'm just getting teary eyed now thinking about it, because he was just in a very vulnerable, weak spot and I know he was, in a sense, ashamed really.

During interviews, respondents recounted different variations on these painful experiences as they watched their parents endure exploitation, mistreatment, and rudeness. For Jasmin, it was a visit to the doctor, who told her mother that after 16 years in the United States, she should know how to speak English. Jasmin deplored that “even going to the bank, people [were] rude to [her] parents.” While undocumented young adults in Georgia may not be able to fully appreciate the impact of their status until they graduate from high school and plan to go to college, their parents' experiences of discrimination shape their conception of what it means to be American.

In contrast, Latino undocumented young adults who grew up in California described a policy climate that provided them with an increased sense of security about their own and the parents' safety. For undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta, driving posed the greatest risk. While I was conducting interviews and doing fieldwork in California, there was an important legislative reform that signaled to respondents that California was indeed a welcoming state. In January 2015, AB60 granted driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. While many respondents already had driver's licenses because they were DACA recipients,

Latino undocumented young adults discussed this law as providing protection for their parents and eliciting a greater sense of safety and comfort. Joshua, who was one of the few respondents in both California and Georgia to not yet have DACA, commented:

I just got my license two weeks ago through AB60. That is a big stress reliever...So there is a lot of things that are going through your mind while you're driving and you just want to get home. You just want to get from Point A to Point B and just be safe. And you never know in the middle of your travel, you'll get stopped.

The announcement of the AB60 created a huge sense of relief for respondents in California because of the danger of driving while undocumented. Like Joshua, who felt great personal relief because he could now legally drive, other respondents in California shared a similar sense of relief, but for their parents. Yosimar stated that “My mom and my dad are trying to get their license with AB60.” Aurora reflected during our interview on the emotional weight that is lifted by being able to get a driver’s license:

I thought about this 2 weeks ago and I started crying because my mom and my dad don't have the DACA thing. They haven't done the AB60, because they haven't had the time to go...because they're busy with work. For me, just thinking about the fact that my mom drives from where we live here to pick me up on Fridays or for anything, I'm like, “She's putting herself at risk,” and not a small risk... this could lead to really bad things.

For Aurora, the prospect of her parents’ eventually getting their driver’s license made her feel better about them going about their everyday lives and created a sense of safety for the Latino undocumented young adults living in the state. Again, this policy change, in conjunction with the lack of stigma in their local communities associated with being Latino and undocumented, reduced the respondents’ experiences of personal or peripheral discrimination. Although AB60 was a recent legislative reform, respondents from Los Angeles did convey a stronger sense of belonging as a result of the presence of other Latinos, and shifts in the state toward more

accommodating policies. Unlike the respondents in Georgia, where there is a trend toward further exclusion, respondents in California sensed a trend toward inclusion.

Ambivalent Americans: Undocumented Young Adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta

Despite very different political contexts and differing experiences of discrimination, I found that rather than a strong pattern of ethnic identification emerging *between* state contexts, a pattern of ethnic identification *across* state contexts emerged. While political context and experiences of discrimination were salient in shaping Latino undocumented young adults' ethnic identification later in life, undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta described a complex relationship to "Americanness" and their own ethnic identity. This finding is surprising, but not entirely unexpected; it speaks to the enduring power of the uncertainty created by federal law in shaping how Latino undocumented young adults experience belonging. In the sections that follow, I examine some of the prominent patterns of ethnic identification that emerged amongst respondents. I start by discussing how Latino undocumented young adults in both regions conceptualize what it means to be American, which I find is primarily associated with being White. However, undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta also distinguished themselves from U.S.-born Latinos. I then discuss the two major ethnic identity formations that emerged. Finally, I discuss how Latino undocumented young adults conceptualized the benefits of DACA and potential citizenship, which Latino undocumented young adults approached with a sense of ambivalence.

The contradictions of being labeled American for undocumented young adults

As discussed in the introduction, my interviews with respondents cover a range of topics, but focus on several outcomes and experiences, one of which is identity. In one portion of the interview, we talk specifically about their experiences and ideas about what it means to be an

American or a citizen. While their experiences and understandings of immigration law are woven throughout the interview narrative, this specific series of questions often elicits a physical response—respondents may laugh, shrug their shoulders, or sigh. These physical responses and their subsequent reflections about what it means to be a citizen, to belong, or to be an American are indicative of the lived contradictions experienced on a daily basis by many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed. While I have a hunch that ideas about belonging and exclusion cross their mind daily, they are likely passing thoughts as they move from school to work, work to home, and home to hanging out with friends, partners, and family. Often, this series of questions provides undocumented young adults with an opportunity to reflect out loud about their everyday experiences of belonging and exclusion, and what it actually means to them to be an American.

The most common verbal response to questions about citizenship, belonging and what it means to be American is some variation of “I am having a hard time with this question.” While my interviews are open-ended, this series of questions often takes the following form: “What does it mean to you be an American? What does it mean to you be a citizen; or what does citizenship mean to you? How do you identify?” Esmirna, who was 23 at the time of our interview, migrated to Los Angeles from El Salvador. Esmirna lived in El Salvador with her grandmother until she was 7, when her mother sent for her; this time spent in El Salvador with her grandmother may have created a stronger tie to her home country. However, her 16 years living in the United States had also made her feel like she was American. At the time of our interview she had just graduated from college, and was preparing to attend graduate school. In response to my question, “What does it mean to you to belong in America? Do you feel like you belong?” she answered,

The reason why I'm having a hard time with this question is because ...I thought I want to be American and I am an American. I love this country but once I started gaining a critical aspect of this country, it's not so much that I don't want to be American, it's that I want to keep in mind my roots, keep in mind where I came from, and at the same time contribute to this society... I want to say words in Spanish and be able to express myself and express my culture, and if that's not considered American, because American is mostly associated with white, Eurocentric kind of thing...So I'm kind of in limbo because I don't feel completely American in the mainstream term of white [laughs]...

Like Esmirna, respondents, regardless of where they grew up, were cognitively and emotionally assimilating long-held desires to be seen as American, a growing understanding of the exclusionary and racialized nature of that category, and a complicated relationship with their home countries. José, who lived in the greater Los Angeles area and was enrolled in community college, stated:

J: I've never really considered myself an "American-American." I kind of don't like the idea of being an "American-American."

E: What's that mean?

J: Going to baseball games, going to football games, driving the sedan. I guess I really - I don't want to say it but I'll say it - a white-washed culture. I'm like, I can't fathom the idea that I'd do that, you know?

José associated being American with particular cultural behaviors that he rejected because he also associated these behaviors with whiteness. Later in our interview, he admitted that while he could never imagine himself "assimilating" by assuming these behaviors, he also could not imagine living in Mexico. José's mother, who had returned to Mexico and was living there, gave him a sense of life in Mexico, and he remarked: "I don't think I can go back there, even if for a short vacation...So, we've been here most of our lives. We know a lot of stuff you know?" By the end of our interview, however, José had not chosen an ethnic identity. Instead, he seemed to be defining who he was more by what he did not want to be—an American-American.

Respondents from the Atlanta area expressed similar feelings of being different. Ashley, who migrated to the Atlanta area from Mexico at the age of two, echoed Esmirna's sense of not quite belonging in the United States, but conversely could not imagine truly belonging in her home country. As we discussed her experiences growing up in the Atlanta area at the kitchen table in her parents' home, she explained:

It's just like growing up in like it's weird, because growing up in a culture, like you didn't feel American, obviously you're very different. But it's also a lot different than like Mexican people growing up here as citizens, because they don't have to deal with that loss. So it's like I always felt like I was in between, I guess. In between being Mexican and American...

Like Esmirna and José, Ashley who grew up in a predominantly white suburb of Atlanta, expressed a feeling of *ni de aquí, y ni de allá* (neither from here, neither from there). This feeling was influenced by their legal status as well as their ideas about who is, and what it means to be "American." For some undocumented young adults, to be American is to be white. While Ashley doesn't quite articulate what it means to be American as sharply as Esmirna does, she does distinguish herself, a Mexican undocumented immigrant, from American culture. She also describes leaving Mexico as "having to deal with a loss," something that she implies that U.S.-born Mexicans may not encounter--highlighting the intersection of legal status and race that make her experience unique. This experience of being in between two countries was prevalent in the narratives of the Latino undocumented young adults interviewed in Los Angeles and Atlanta.

Reactive Ethnicities: The Complications of Identifying Your "Home Country"

Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta who identified with both their country of origin *and* as American were wrestling with making sense of their seemingly contradictory attachments to their home country and the United States. Jasmin, who migrated to the Atlanta area when she was three years old and had lived in the United States for 15 years,

discussed a photography project she had just completed as part of a class for Underground University. Her subject was her brother, also an undocumented immigrant, and to represent what she termed an identity crisis, she composed the photograph in the following way:

I had an identity crisis for the longest...I remember we had a photography class last semester. I used my brother as the subject I like got a paper bag and put it over his head with a question mark, and I picked up the American flag on one side and the Mexican flag on the other side... I didn't know where I was from because all my life I have been here. But you're not supposed to be here, you're not American. So I was like I'm not American, but I wasn't Mexican, because I don't know barely any of the culture or the slang...

For Jasmin, her self-described identity crisis was rooted in her experience growing up and feeling like she was not supposed to be here. As a result, she never felt entitled to embrace an American identity. At the time of our interview, though, she was more comfortable with the idea of identifying as American. I think this could be attributed in part to her participation in Underground University and her idea that embracing her American identity, especially in a hostile state like Georgia, was empowering. Yet she also seemed to struggle with the idea that embracing an American identity meant a rejection of her Mexican identity. Nevertheless, this greater sense of peace with being American influenced her decision to include the American flag alongside the Mexican flag in the photo, an image that she felt was representative of her ethnic identity journey.

Undocumented young adults from both states expressed concern that, although they felt they were American in their tastes and in their childhood experiences, choosing an American identity only would be construed as denying their country of origin. Nallely, who migrated from El Salvador to an hour outside of Atlanta, and had lived in the United States for 14 years, asserted that while she considered herself American, she was not denying her "culture." She elaborated,

I don't think that, by considering myself an American I'm denying my El Salvadoran identity. Some people are very like, "It's one or the other." You have to recognize the possibility that both exist. At this point when you live longer in another country, it's been your native country, it's hard not to consider yourself an American from that aspect.

During our interviews, Latino undocumented young adults from Los Angeles and Atlanta expressed a sense that identifying as only "American" would constitute making a choice or signaling assimilation. So identifying with their country of origin (El Salvador in Nallely's case) as well as identifying as American helped Latino undocumented young adults integrate their bi-cultural experiences. Francisco, who initially migrated with his family to California and then eventually moved with them to Atlanta, explained, "We love Mexico, we say we're Mexicans, but we're from the United States... I do consider myself an American. Even though I'm Mexican, I'm a Mexican-American... I consider the United States my country, too"

Like Francisco, Yesenia, who grew up in Los Angeles, came to a hyphenated identity, but after a long personal journey of making peace with the United States. At the time of our interview, she had not completely gotten over her the sense that when she was growing up, the United States was tearing her family part, and "that I couldn't see the people I used to see before and I couldn't leave when I wanted to leave, it made me irritated and very mad. As I started growing up I realized all the things I couldn't do." Yesenia had developed a deep animosity toward the United States, which pushed her toward a Mexican identity. In conjunction with her father instilling a sense of pride about being from Mexico, this further shaped her ethnic identity.

So I identify as Mexican because I always had that resentment of leaving Mexico and always that nostalgia of how it would be to live there. I am proud to be from there, so I do identify as Mexican because of that. For Chicana, I think that one is more because of what I'm doing now. Before I used to have this idea that I'm Mexican and that's it, but I think that lately, because I've been working as part of an undocumented student organization at the university, I kind of started realizing more of how much I didn't hate the U.S. I don't it hate it as I thought I did before. I appreciate what I've done here and the things I can do because of it. That's why

I identify as Chicana, because I am from here. A part of me, regardless of whether I was born here or not, I lived here all my life.

Interestingly enough, it was Yesenia's involvement in the undocumented student organization on her college campus that exposed her to the idea of identifying as Chicana—a politicized Mexican-American identity. Although Yesenia never mentioned identifying as American, acknowledging that she was from “here,” i.e. the United States, constituted a step toward a hyphenated, albeit politicized identity.

For Latino undocumented young adults who identified as solely from their home country, their choices revealed an equally complex relationship to ideas of home, growing up in the United States, and “Americanness.” While we might expect Latino undocumented young adults from Atlanta to develop the *strongest* sense of connection to their home countries because of the hostile climate, respondents from both Los Angeles and Atlanta ethnically self-identified as being from their country of origin. Haciél, who migrated to California when she was 11 years old and was enrolled in college in the Los Angeles area, conveyed her understanding of her ethnic identity in one of the more interesting ways that came up during interviews:

I'm not an American, I'm not. I guess I have...what's it called? Assimilated to it. I do listen to music, and all that stuff, and I have a couple white friends, and I am in higher education, which is not common among Latinos, but I'm not an American. If you were to ask me, Mexico and U.S. get into a war, who would you support? Mexico.... It's because I feel like America isn't really what I thought it would be... America is so selfish, it's so politics, it's all money. I do believe that's what America stands for, not Americans, but America.

Although Haciél grew up in California, in a relatively welcoming state policy context, and was enrolled in a four-year university from which she was about to graduate, she was reluctant to identify as American, because of her ideas about what the country stood for. Instead, she conceptualized her ethnic identity choice as a hypothetical war. Her choice, “not American”, was focused on rejecting negative values that she perceived to be American values. Like Haciél,

Alondra, who migrated when she was 11 years old, also identified as only Mexican. Earlier, she described a belief that her hometown in the Los Angeles area was not that different from where she lived in Mexico, and her ethnic identity choice was motivated by a sense of pride.

I'm really proud to be Mexican. I'm always talking Spanish when I can. It just makes me feel more like home. I don't know, it just feels good to be Mexican. I respect America because thanks to it I learned English, I have a great education, and hopefully I can get a good job. I have no regrets towards it. I just don't like the people that are so negative and have negative thoughts towards immigrants. I don't know. I don't know if I see myself as an American.

Despite growing up in a community where she felt particularly safe and describing generally positive experiences in her predominantly Latino high school, Alondra's ethnic identity was tied to pride; like Haniel's, it was *also* connected to a rejection of anti-immigrant sentiment, a perceived American value.

Itzel, who migrated to the Atlanta area when she was 6 years old, described her perception of a changing Atlanta. When she first arrived in the area, she remarked, her mother would make tortillas from scratch because there were no Hispanic stores that sold tortillas. However, she and I conducted the interview at a pizza place tucked away in a Latino shopping market that included a taquería, carnicería, and panadería. Despite the shift in the Latino population, during our interview, Itzel described the current context in Georgia as especially racist toward undocumented Hispanics. She listed several instances when either her father or her uncles were harassed while driving. She also recounted that when she accompanied her brother, who was born in the United States, to apply for his driver's license, he was questioned by the DMV clerk about whether his birth certificate was real. She described her brother as looking "Hispanic...and so he doesn't look like he was born here." These experiences shaped her ethnic identity and during our interview she stated,

I always say I'm from Mexico. I don't like to say that I'm from here, because I don't know, I just...I always think about that. I always say I'm from Mexico. I don't know much about it (*Mexico*). It's kind of embarrassing sometimes...but I always say I'm from Mexico. Even my brother says he's from Mexico.

For Itzel and her brother, a U.S.-born citizen, their experiences of discrimination, seen both through their parents' eyes and their own, strengthened their ethnic identity. Annette, who migrated from Peru and lived about an hour outside of Atlanta, stated that she was proud of her Peruvian heritage, although she realized that she grew up as "American."

I am very strong to my roots and if they ask me if I rather be an American or Peruvian, I am going to choose Peruvian because that is who I am. I am from Peru 100%. My family is like an American, that is how I grew up, that is how I was raised as an American. But who I am as a person, I am a Peruvian and I am proud of it.

Annette discussed her ethnic identity in terms of a choice, or seemingly being forced to choose an identity. This idea of choice came up in both Haniel and Annette's interviews and is reflective of the choices that Latino undocumented young adults have to make when it comes to their ethnic identity. While it is well-established that ethnic identities are shifting and contextual, I expected Latino undocumented young adults to be more certain about the benefits, both perceived and actual, of citizenship. On the contrary, as I learned during interviews, Latino undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta were ambivalent about citizenship.

Latino Undocumented Young Adults Questioning Citizenship

As music in Spanish blared over a loudspeaker in a café in Santa Ana, California, I interviewed Karina, who migrated to Orange County with her parents and brother. Both she and her brother applied and received Deferred Action, which has given Karina the ability to work in the field she trained in during college, child development. At the time of our interview, she graduated from a California State University in the area, and was on her second post-college job. She also recently purchased a brand new car, of which she was very proud, and she was

considering moving out of her parents' mobile home. Karina attributed much of her success to the passage of DACA, but even with this, she remained ambivalent or even hostile to the idea of becoming a citizen. During our interview, she explained:

It's just very frustrating. I think the only reason to become a US citizen is for the benefits it would come with, not to identify as "Oh, now I'm a US citizen. Have more respect for me..." I think the benefits would be a reason for me to become, if it was possible, but I've come to a place where I don't *desire* to be a US citizen.

Karina's ambivalence about being an American may have been rooted in her experiences as an undocumented student activist and as a Chicana/o Studies major in college. Like Karina, during the process of "learning to be illegal" (Gonzales 2011), other respondents went through periods of wanting to be a citizen, primarily for the practical benefits it offered. As Brenda, a nineteen-year-old college student in California, elaborated, "This might differ with me but if I get my papers or not ... I don't know what I would do if I had them. Does that make sense? Because I'm used to not being with them." Brenda's reflection highlights the enduring power of growing up undocumented. Carlos, also from California, shared Brenda's ambivalence about the possibility of becoming a citizen.

E: If you had the option to become a citizen, is that something you would do?

C: I don't know. That's always been, for me, a complicated question I think because being undocumented becomes part of your identity, so it's really complex to think of yourself as anything different. Obviously, there is a slew of legal benefits that come along with it, that's definitely great.

Even though Brenda and Carlos, like sixty-one of the respondents, had DACA, they expressed feelings of ambivalence about the possible impact of citizenship on their sense of belonging and their identity. In fact, when undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta discussed citizenship, they were most enthusiastic about the opportunity to travel—specifically, to travel to their home countries. Ariana, who lived in Atlanta, commented, "I mean honestly I

really don't care if I'm a citizen or not, the only reason I would want it is because I love traveling. Without it, you can't do it.” Besides the opportunity to travel that citizenship would open up, Latino undocumented young adults expressed an understanding that if they could qualify for citizenship, they might be able to apply for their undocumented parents, an opportunity that some were waiting for younger, U.S.-born siblings to act upon. But their reasons for desiring citizenship were pragmatic. Very few expressed what Jennifer expressed toward the end of the interview:

EB: If you had the opportunity to become a US Citizen, would you become one?

J: Yeah, no doubt.

EB: What would it mean for you?

J: I really feel like I'm from here. No matter, even though I'm undocumented, this is where I'm from. If I were to go back to Mexico, I would feel like I am visiting, not like it's where I'm from. It (*being a citizen*) would just be kind of like being accepted into a place where you already feel you belong.

For Jennifer, having citizenship would be a formal acknowledgement of a feeling she already has, that of belonging. For Jennifer, acceptance and legal citizenship were inseparable. But for most Latino undocumented young adults, citizenship was just a pragmatic step to securing a future for themselves and their families.

The Long Reach of Federal Immigration Law and Context

While Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta described distinct social contexts and experiences of discrimination, their ethnic identities did not follow a clear between-state pattern. Instead, I found more similarities in ethnic identification across California and Georgia. I think this speaks to the long reach of the federal immigration context in shaping Latino undocumented young adults' ethnic identity development processes. As previous research suggests (Feliciano and Tovar 2009; Rumbaut 1998), particularly hostile contexts can strengthen

immigrant youth's ties to their home countries. I think that on some level, Latino undocumented young adults who identify more strongly with their country of origin (e.g. Mexico, Peru, etc.) are reacting to nested hostile contexts. While they don't articulate this in interviews, it's possible that Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia view inaction on the federal level as opening the door to the hostile policies and treatment that they and their parents have experienced. Certain Latino undocumented young adults in California, who identify *only* with their country of origin, may be reacting to a federal context that they perceive as hostile, even they live in a welcoming state. Latino undocumented young adults in California expressed gratitude for the opportunities that living in the United States afforded them, and yet they hesitated to embrace an American identity.

For Latino undocumented young adults in both states who identified as either a hyphenated identity, or as being from their country of origin as well as being American, this reflected a process of integrating what can seem at times to be two contradictory identities. These undocumented young adults often expressed a sense that to choose one or the other was a false choice, and not representative of their identity experiences. While one could assume that choosing both identities signals an alignment with the Dreamer narrative of "Americanness," the tension and hesitation that was conveyed during interviews signals a dialogical process between feelings of Americanness and pride in one's cultural heritage. For some Latino undocumented young adults, claiming the identity of "American" and country of origin was a strategy for empowerment. This may be where the social movement narrative of "Americanness" is rooted, but in many ways that message has been misconstrued as patriotic discourse or loyalty. So the tension that I sensed in interviews when I asked Latino undocumented young adults if they "considered themselves American" reflected a vision for America that included them, and their

families. Even those who chose their country of origin as their primary ethnic identity, did so in conversation with perceptions of the exclusionary values and beliefs that American, and therefore, “Americanness” represented.

CHAPTER 4

Pathways to Educational Belonging in New and Old Destinations

*“You’re not even allowed to apply or anything. So my sister... she called the office, the admissions office, and was like, “I’m trying to send in my application, it’s not working, I don’t know what happened.” And then they asked her things... they started asking her like, “what did you put?” And then she told them, “oh well I put that I don’t have status.” And then... that’s when they told us like, “Oh well, you can’t apply.” And that’s when we started researching what can we really do and we found out that we can’t apply to these schools and basically we can’t get in-state tuition here, basically... **it was like basically finding out all our college options were just not gonna be possible at all.**” (Melanie, 21, Georgia)*

*“I told her (*her guidance counselor*) that I still needed help with my Dream Act and she just told me there was nothing she could do about it because she was helping the FAFSA students... **it made me feel like I didn’t belong**, like I was just another random student nobody cared about. So I got mad [*laughs*] and I went to the library and I just did my application on my own.” (Yesenia, 20, California)*

Both Melanie and Yesenia were college-bound during high school. Melanie attended a large public high school in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. Yesenia also attended a large public high school in a suburb of Los Angeles, California. Both made themselves competitive for college by taking advanced placement classes, preparing for their college entrance exams, and participating in extracurricular activities. Both were not only “college-ready;” they were also competitive college applicants. Yet when I interviewed each of them, only one was enrolled in college. Even though Yesenia, who lives in Los Angeles, initially faced challenges during the college and financial aid application process, at the time of our interview she was a sophomore at public four-year university in Southern California. Melanie, who lives in Georgia, a state with extremely restrictive college access laws, had recently quit her job at McDonalds and was applying to colleges for the third year in a row, in hope of finally realizing her college attendance dreams.

Each year approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school (Passel 2003). While the United Supreme Court held in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) that undocumented

children have a right to a public education through 12th grade, their futures are more uncertain after high school (Gonzales 2011; Abrego 2006). As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, access to postsecondary education is left up to individual states, resulting in a policy landscape that is as complex as it is contradictory. 18 states, including California, extend in-state tuition to eligible undocumented immigrants, significantly reducing the cost of college (National Council of State Legislators 2015). In contrast, three states, including Georgia, either explicitly ban undocumented immigrants from attending public universities and/or require that undocumented immigrants pay out-of-state tuition, making public higher education practically impossible to access (National Council of State Legislators 2015). In this chapter, I explore the influence of these types of laws on the educational experiences and pathways of Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta.

While it seems intuitive that the educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in California, a welcoming state, would be more positive than those in Georgia, a hostile state, I find that Latino undocumented young adults in both states express feelings of educational exclusion much more similar than might be expected. I show that for Latino undocumented young adults, educational access has meaning both because of the structural opportunity to participate *and* because of what participation symbolizes: belonging. To capture both the structural and emotional components of access and participation in higher education, I develop the concept of educational belonging. Educational belonging highlights both the presence and absence of opportunities for full participation in the education system, and captures a range of educational experiences shaped by contextual differences, including state laws and policies and family obligations. I suggest that considering educational belonging, in contrast to traditional

approaches to immigrant educational success, facilitates an analysis of the emotional implications of educational experiences.

Educational belonging is important to highlight because undocumented young adults who have grown up in the United States have developed values, identities, and aspirations that are influenced by being “American.” But their experiences have also been shaped the practical reality of growing up “illegally”. In this chapter I demonstrate how Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia and California experience educational exclusion at *different* points in the educational pipeline, but I also show how this exclusion creates *similar* feelings of frustration, anger, and disappointment. I examine how state laws and policies mediate their experiences of educational belonging and exclusion. I then discuss how conceptualizing educational participation as encompassing both access/completion *and* sense of belonging more accurately captures the educational experiences of undocumented young adults in divergent contexts of reception.

Formative Schooling Experiences and Learning Belonging and Exclusion

Because many Latino undocumented young adults migrate during childhood, the first institutions they encounter are schools. The 70 undocumented young adults I interviewed migrated to the United States between the ages of 4 months and 13 years old. Their primary socializing experiences were in the public school system. In both California and Georgia, participants described early feelings of apprehension and anxiety in school, primarily because it was a new environment and they did not speak English. Participants in both Los Angeles and Atlanta described being placed in ESL classes or paired with bilingual classmates to ease the transition to school. A small minority of participants who migrated to the Atlanta area in the early 1990s reported that theirs was the only Latino family in the community, and found the

early school transition to be more difficult. However, certain important differences distinguished the formative schooling experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in Los Angeles from those in Atlanta, reflecting the migration histories of these two metropolitan areas, a dimension I discussed in the previous chapter. Just as the unique migration histories of each state and region shaped the way Latino undocumented young adults articulated their ethnic identities, the history of Latino migration to each region also shaped undocumented young adults' early school experiences. These early experiences are crucial to understand precisely because they form the foundation for later educational aspirations and expectations.

Early Schooling Experiences in Los Angeles and Atlanta

Participants who grew up in the Los Angeles area attended schools that were predominantly Latino. This facilitated a smoother transition in school, in contrast with students who migrated to Atlanta, in two key ways. First, they described being in classrooms where they encountered not only other Latino students, but also Spanish-speaking teachers; this helped them feel more comfortable. Julieta, who migrated to Culver City from El Salvador when she was two years old, described how she learned English in the following way:

When I came here I didn't know English. But since I was little, I just picked up the language really fast. I don't even remember how I learned it or anything. I did, in elementary school, I did have Spanish speaking teachers, which helped a lot. They were bilingual.

Not all students appreciated being in classrooms with Spanish speaking teachers. As Martha reflected on her early schooling experiences, she felt that her placement in English Language Development (ELD) classes had held her back:

The teacher would change me to another class because I didn't know English. So when they would start learning the alphabet they would change me to a class where a teacher actually spoke Spanish, so that I could learn the alphabet in Spanish, but I already knew it, so it made me angry.

These contrasting experiences highlight how schools in the metropolitan Los Angeles area were equipped to work with Latino undocumented students by offering English language development classes and bilingual teachers. However, Martha's understanding of this experience also highlights the fact that this experience can sometimes be stigmatizing.

In addition to schools being more institutionally equipped to work with Latino undocumented students, respondents who grew up in the Los Angeles area also stated that they often did not talk about their status with other students when they were in elementary school, in part because of the assumption that most people were undocumented. Estefania explained, "Because throughout the whole school year it (*being undocumented*) wasn't a problem and no one really cared. Especially in L.A. because a lot of people are undocumented, so it's, I guess, common and you don't really talk about it." Mirelsa's tourist visa expired while she was in middle school, and she graduated from a large public high school in downtown Los Angeles: "I guess we didn't really talk about being undocumented...I knew some people who were also undocumented. But we didn't talk about it on a regular basis." While respondents said that they didn't discuss their status in part to protect themselves and their families, there was also a sense in Los Angeles that their status didn't matter for their *early* schooling experiences--primarily because, as Latino children, they didn't stand out in their schools.

In contrast, participants who migrated to the Atlanta area often migrated to communities that were either predominantly Black or predominantly White, reflective of Georgia's new immigrant destination status. Those who migrated to central city neighborhoods in Atlanta had experiences similar to Marco who migrated at the age of 7:

In school I struggled at first. I went to a predominantly black elementary school and we had a Hispanic community that was slowly growing so around 20-15 kids in the whole elementary school... It took me 8 months (*to learn English*) but it was really choppy.

Second grade I kind of got to learn a lot of words and I was ESL program; came third grade and I got out of the ESL, my English got a lot better, I started reading at that point.

While those who migrated to more suburban areas described experiences similar to Alondra,

The first school that I enrolled in was in Commerce, Georgia. That was basically an all-white pretty affluent community. That was helpful for learning English because I didn't have a lot of people to talk Spanish with, so it forced me to...I was on survival mode.

Marco and Alondra's experiences were similar to those of the other Latino undocumented young adults interviewed in Georgia, and reflective of the state's transition to a new immigrant destination. These early school experiences constituted a key process for undocumented young adults to learn exclusion but also belonging.

Learning Belonging in a "College For All" Era

Once respondents in both Los Angeles and Atlanta transitioned out of ESL/ELD classes and into more mainstream classes, they described educational experiences that they perceived as similar to those of their citizen peers. Most of the participants did grow up, though, in communities that could be characterized as low-income. They therefore encountered some of the same structural barriers faced by many first-generation college-aspiring Latino youth, including limited access to resources, college knowledge and support (Terriquez 2015a; Seif, Ullman, and Nuñez-Mchiri 2014). Despite these challenges, several of the Latino undocumented young adults interviewed in both Los Angeles and Atlanta described a similar process, not only aspiring to go to college, but also being socialized into a college-going culture. Like their citizen peers, Latino undocumented young adults have grown up in a "college for all" era (Rosenbaum 2001; Goyette 2008). In the United States, earning a college degree has become a cultural norm (Goyette 2008). For most low-income high school students, attending college is not only an expectation, but is also reinforced by the reality that social and economic mobility is tied to educational mobility.

For immigrant youth, including undocumented youth, the weight of college expectations may be heavier, as they carry their parents' migration hopes and dreams with them throughout their schooling experience (Louie 2012; Smith 2006).

Louie (2012) finds that immigrant youth strive to do well in school and attend college as a way of repaying their immigrant parents' sacrifice; this is referred to as "keeping the immigrant bargain." While the concept suggests a rational-choice perspective of immigrant educational attainment, the obligation that immigrant children feel toward their parents and families is emotional. In both California and Georgia, undocumented young adults described being motivated to attend college by watching their parents work so hard to support them. Some young adults described this motivation and obligation through tears, or with body language that conveyed the weight of these "dreams"—physically drawing in their bodies, casting down their eyes, or shifting their weight in their seat. As Victoria explained during our interview at her parents' home in Georgia,

They wanted us to get a good education, have good job opportunities. And I don't know, like kind of just thinking about it, they sacrificed so much and they still are. So I kind of feel like I owe them going to college and getting my degrees and stuff. Like that is my ultimate payback for them.

While undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta both described a desire to "keep the immigrant bargain" by attending college, the opportunity to fulfill this bargain is mediated by state laws and policies. For undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta, the transition out of high school is a critical moment, because as previous research documents, it marks the end of a long period of legal protection (Perez 2009; Huber, Malagon, and Solorzano 2009; Abrego 2006). Gonzales (2011) identifies this transition as a process of "learning to be illegal." As undocumented young adults negotiate their legal status outside of the legally protected space of the K-12 school system, he explains, their experiences come closer to those of

undocumented immigrants who migrated as adults. He finds that the labor market trajectories of undocumented young adults, both those who drop out and those who attend college, eventually converge in the low-wage labor market. Similarly, Abrego (2006) finds that undocumented young people face diminishing returns once they graduate from high school, even in a state like California that has accommodating higher education laws. She argues that Latino undocumented young adults do not only face significant structural barriers on the road to college; they must also engage in an emotional process of coming to terms with their college-going goals and the reality of their legal status.

Similarly, I find that beyond the structural barriers faced by undocumented youth, educational exclusion has significant emotional implications for undocumented young adults, as they must wrestle with the consequences of not being able to reach their goals. For some undocumented youth in Georgia, learning about the limitations of their status derailed their educational trajectories. Mateo was 26, and as one of the older respondents in Georgia he could speak to his educational experiences in the context of the shifts in political climate state. He said that “not meeting requirements” for his driver’s license and college made him feel “ashamed.” He eventually dropped out of high school, because he believed that because of his legal status he wasn’t entitled to benefits like higher education. During our interview, he elaborated,

And like professors would tell me “man, there are people throwing money for people like you to go to school and to me it was like “ah but the thing is I’m undocumented.” Well I didn’t think of myself as undocumented, back in those days I thought of myself as **illegal**.

For Mateo, the distinction between thinking of himself as undocumented versus “illegal” reflected how he internalized the anti-immigrant discourse that was rampant in Georgia as he was coming of age. While his status, coupled with what he termed “other issues,” eventually led him to drop out of high school, his understanding of his legal status within a hostile social and

policy context altered the expectations he had of himself. As Menjivar and Abrego (2012) suggest, the way contemporary immigration laws are enacted and enforced constitutes a form of legal violence, shaping and disrupting individual immigrants' lives on a routine basis. For undocumented young adults, like Mateo, legal violence is experienced through "blocked paths to mobility and intense stigmatization" (Menjivar and Abrego, 2012:1408). As previous research suggests, blocked paths to mobility can result in depression, lack of motivation, and altered expectations for the future. Building on this work, my findings suggests that for undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta, the consequences of altered expectations for their futures, while structurally very different, engender similar feelings of exclusion--what I term a lack of educational belonging. In the next section, I examine how state laws and policies create lack of educational belonging at different points in the educational pipeline, but engender similar feelings of exclusion.

Educational Belonging & Exclusion at Different Points in the Pipeline

Educational Belonging in Georgia

Saul, a lanky 20-year-old, was in the 11th grade when policies 4.1.6 and 4.3.4, collectively known as "the ban," took effect. During our interview, which we conducted at the dining table of his parents' home, he stated that it was during 10th grade that he became serious about attending college. He was looking forward to starting the college application process, but after learning that the ban would prevent him from attending, he fell into a depression. He stopped doing his homework and he let his grades slip. Despite this setback, in his senior year, with prodding from a good friend, Saul decided to explore community college as an option. He visited the admissions office of Southern Crescent Technical College, the closest two-year college, and learned the following:

“So we went there and asked about the applications, and then that’s when I found out again, they were like ‘well, these are the in-state tuition rates, but this is what you have to pay, out-of-state tuition, which is 3 or 4 times more, and I was like ‘wow, this is ridiculous’...I was like, I’m not paying this, especially for a technical school.”

Several of the undocumented youth I interviewed in Georgia echoed Saul’s statement that the financial challenge of paying out-of-state tuition prevented them from attending even two-year colleges. For example, Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year college⁴ in the Atlanta area, would cost an undocumented immigrant \$21,000 for two years versus the \$7,600 in-state tuition rate.

At the time of our interview, Omar had been out of high school for two years. While he attended the University of North Georgia right out of high school, he was not able to continue because he could not afford it. He was taking a year off from the University of North Georgia, and planned to work and attend Athens Technical College, the two-year college in his community:

It (*his undocumented status*) has, it has, because it’s hard for me to pay for college. Last year I attended University of North Georgia, and it was hard because I was paying out of state tuition. I paid 5 grand for 12 credits...and here in Athens Tech, I tried to apply earlier to enter spring semester. But apparently their policies have changed and now even for Deferred Action students from the beginning, they’re charging them as international. So that’s three to four times...

As Omar emphasized, even attending Athens Tech was out of his financial reach. Despite this, Omar was actively saving to return to college. He saved about \$150 from each paycheck for college, but recently had been unable to save as much as he would have liked because his father, also an undocumented immigrant, was out of work. So Omar contributed \$100 to his family every week for food and bills, which reduced the amount of money he could save so that he could return to University of North Georgia.

⁴ In Georgia, the two-year college system includes both community colleges and technical colleges. Two-year colleges are run both the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia.

In addition to the requirement that undocumented immigrants pay out-of-state tuition at any college or university, an unrelated but still consequential policy was enacted in January 2015, while I was doing my fieldwork. The Board of Regents announced that certain smaller colleges would merge with larger colleges in order to streamline administrative costs. Two of the colleges that were merging were Georgia Perimeter College, the two-year college in the Atlanta area, and Georgia State University, one of the five colleges included in the ban. The announcement created uncertainty about whether or not undocumented young adults would then also be banned from Georgia Perimeter College. Jovan, a 23-year old DACA recipient, was working at a Super Target, and remarked that the merger created uncertainty for him and other students who might consider attending Georgia Perimeter:

“...There is Georgia Perimeter, but um, it’s soon merging with Georgia State University, and that’s one of the schools where I’m banned from, so I don’t know if they are going to continue the same policies of banning us from that. So it’s in a limbo altogether, and I don’t really want to put up a fight with that...”

The consolidation of several campuses across the state created a sense of anxiety about narrowing educational opportunities. While Policy 4.3.4 (out-of-state tuition) made the cost of attending two- and four-year colleges nearly impossible for undocumented young adults, policy 4.1.6. (the ban from top 5 colleges and universities) heightened the negative impact of seemingly neutral policies like the consolidation of smaller colleges and universities with larger ones. Participants asserted that like most of their citizen classmates, they preferred to stay in the state of Georgia to attend college. This was due in part to their desire to be close to their parents, many of whom were also undocumented. Given these practical constraints, this meant that many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed were not enrolled in college at the time of our interview.

While the Board of Regents' policies presented structural barriers to college completion and entry for undocumented young adults, these policies also had symbolic implications. During our interviews, many undocumented young adults expressed feelings of rejection, disappointment and frustration over these policies. Like Saul, who fell into a depression upon learning that his legal status would make it difficult for him to attend college, other undocumented young adults described similar instances of depression both during and after high school. Jovan, for example, recalled an incident at a party during his senior year of high school:

I do remember this one time I went to a party, my friends and me were drinking, and you know having fun, and I just broke down crying in front of them because I told them, you know I couldn't go to school, you know I couldn't do the military, I couldn't do all of this, and I felt just stuck...

For Jovan, who went to a predominantly white high school in a suburb of Atlanta, this party was one of the first times he revealed his legal status to his friends, who were not undocumented. While many of his friends were planning to go to technical or state colleges, Jovan felt stuck and excluded from the opportunity to "go off and leave this small town to find something... figure out life." Both Araceli and her younger sister, who was also undocumented, worked hard in high school to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them, including taking Advanced Placement courses. Araceli, who described herself as a "very hard worker," also regularly worked 50-60 hours a week as a waitress at a local restaurant, both to contribute to her family's household income and to be able to save enough to eventually go to college. Because of her full-time work schedule, I interviewed her on her one day off during the week, and during our interview she explained,

It's just the limitation of what I can do frustrates me. It's frustrating. That's how I feel. I feel frustrated. I know for a fact that my parents do too. They want us to go to school. They came here to give us a better life, to get a better education. The fact that I can't get it frustrates me. It makes me angry. I can't do anything about it. I don't have a say in the government. I can't vote. I can't. It's my country, too. This is all I know. The fact that

they're limiting me to not only my potential, my success, my education, my right as a human being to get that education, frustrates me.

During our interview, it was clear that Araceli was proud of her work ethic and her contribution to her family's economic well-being. But like many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed in Georgia, she was frustrated that her intellect and her work ethic were not being used to improve her own and her family's life. In short, Araceli and other undocumented youth felt that they were failing not only themselves, but also their parents.

Like Araceli, Ines worked 60-70 hours per week as a manager at a pizzeria. Her work schedule was demanding and unpredictable, and because of this, I interviewed her at the restaurant when her shift was over. Ines, who had done very well in high school, wanted to become a pastry chef. While she knew that there were different routes she could take to achieve this, she wanted to attend a culinary arts program to give herself the best chance of securing a good job in a competitive industry. However, attending a culinary arts program at a technical college or a culinary school was impossible because of the cost. During our interview, it became apparent that being prevented from attending school not only made her feel stuck, but was also taking an emotional toll on Ines. Through tears, she told me, "I always get teary, because it means a lot to me. It means a lot to me to be able to go to school. I felt like, in a way, I felt like I had let my parents down, because I wasn't able to do more. But she (*her mom*) was like, 'You don't have to go to school to be good.'" For Ines and many of the other undocumented young adults I interviewed in Georgia, the Board of Regents policies created a structural barrier to upward mobility but also had significant implications for their sense of belonging, creating what I conceptualize as a lack of educational belonging. While undocumented young adults in California have more opportunities to access college, I found that they similarly felt a lack of

educational belonging. In the next section, I discuss how educational belonging played out for undocumented young adults in California.

Educational Belonging in California

In October 2001, California Governor Gray Davis signed Assembly Bill 540, which allowed eligible undocumented youth to pay in-state tuition at California public colleges and universities. Even with in-state tuition, previous research has highlighted the challenges undocumented youth face on the road to and through college (Enriquez 2011; Gonzales 2011; Abrego and Gonzales 2010). One of the greatest challenges faced by undocumented youth attending college in California was figuring out how to pay for it, as they were ineligible for both federal and state financial aid. In 2013, after years of activism by undocumented youth in the state, the California Dream Act took effect, granting state and institutional aid to eligible undocumented immigrants. Many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed were transitioning out of high school or out of community college when the California Dream Act took effect, and this impacted their perceived access to college. For some undocumented young adults interviewed, this made it seem possible to attend a University of California campus.

The change in law also created a new category of students, CA Dream Act students, who needed guidance about how to apply for financial aid. As Yesenia expressed in the quote opening this chapter, the process of filling out her “Dream Act” and getting no assistance made her feel like she did not belong. Several, but not all, undocumented youth interviewed in California, described similar experiences of lack of support from institutional actors such as high school counselors in navigating the college application and financial aid process. In addition, at particular campuses of the University of California, some students described confusion over how much financial support they were getting, and little to no transparency about their financial aid.

Kelvin, who grew up in the Pomona Valley, had attended community college for four years before he was able to transfer. He stated during our interview that he had been accepted to his dream college, UC Berkeley. But he still did not know whether he would be able to go, because his financial aid offer was unclear:

I was finally able to get on the portal. Then I saw the numbers. It was really confusing. I just remember seeing like, “I need \$5,000 by the time I get there and by the time I get accepted to attend UC Berkeley.” I was like, “Whoa, I need to come up with \$5,000 in 2 months or 3 months” so I was working almost 3 jobs because I wasn’t sure if it was going to be covered.

Kelvin, like many undocumented young adults, is part of a financially vulnerable family. To cover the potential \$5,000 he might be expected to pay, he continued working his retail job at Pier 1 imports and started to work a second job at a warehouse. He said, “I was basically on my feet all day, just running around.” After several phone calls, Kelvin learned that he would only be responsible for \$2,500 of his educational costs that year. While that was more manageable than the \$5,000 he thought he would have to pay, it was still a large amount for Kelvin. He did, however, work enough to save cover the \$2,500 and to save some money for emergency expenses. But during our interview, I sensed that Kelvin continued to worry about having money to pay for college. He mentioned that he planned to work again over the summer, “Right now, I’m just hoping that, financially, it’s going continue to cover it. I am looking for a summer job just in case there is a percentage of it that I do have to pay.”

Like Kelvin, other participants worried about paying for college each year, but they also had to develop strategies to manage the money they received from financial aid. Thus, Yesenia received three different institutional scholarships, which covered her tuition and housing, and left her with about \$1,000 for ten weeks of living expenses. As a result, each quarter was a financial and personal struggle for her. She joked that she survived by eating “a lot of top ramen.” In her

first year, she explained that even though she didn't have to pay anything out-of-pocket for college, financial stress was a defining part of her college experience. While this experience may not seem very different from that of any low-income student, Yesenia connected her financial stresses in college to her both her own and her parents' precarious legal status. During our interview, I learned that she occasionally sent money home to her family and this was due in part to her parents' periods of unemployment. While Yesenia appreciated the opportunity to be in college, she was constrained by her status at times from fully participating in college life. This included not being able to take trips with friends, or secure certain internships. While she could accept these experiences as minor inconveniences, she also pointed out during our interview that she changed the course of her career plans because of her status.

Y: I have, a lot, actually. My dream has always been to be able to represent the U.S. in another nation. I've always really wanted to do that. The issue with that is, I can't get internships to get any experience for that because I need to be a citizen.

E: Even with DACA you can't get the types of internships that you want?

Y: Even with DACA, I can't, no. I have to be a citizen and I can't be a citizen. Whenever I do find an internship that is working for the government, it's always I can't do it because I can't go, I don't have the money for it, I don't have the citizenship status for it.

Other participants expressed a desire to work for the government, but were also acutely aware that their lack of citizenship status precluded them from realizing their goals. Miguel, for example, attended a California State University and was enrolled in a master's degree program in engineering. While he was happy to be in the program, he decided to attend graduate school only after he was let go from an internship in aerospace engineering, which required citizenship. During our interview, Miguel had a good sense of humor about this situation, but his answers revealed that he has always wanted to work in aerospace engineering. He recounted being asked to leave:

Yeah, I was like whatever, if they say go home then I'll just go home. [laughs] So I was doing my thing and I get a call at HR and I go to HR and they said give us your badge and you're not allowed at the facility. So I wasn't allowed back in the facility. That sucked.

While Miguel was pragmatic about his dismissal, and implied that he was expecting it, he had to change his career pathway, and instead pursue mechanical engineering. Miguel may have been able to handle the dismissal better than one might expect because he had other options, including attending graduate school, as indeed he did. Unlike Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia, access to a college education allowed Miguel to continue pursue his larger goals, but also had to let go of some of his original expectations for his future.

The Implications of Educational Belonging

For Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia, educational exclusion happens at different points in the educational pipeline. In Georgia, the transition out of high school is fraught with uncertainty and altered expectations. This experience mirrors that of Latino undocumented young adults in California prior to the enactment of the California Dream Act, which has made paying for and accessing college easier (Abrego 2006). I find that the two-pronged ban has both practical and symbolic implications for Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia. The undocumented young adults I interviewed in Georgia reported a range of academic performance indicators, ranging from being enrolled in advanced placement courses to the non-college prep track. Nevertheless, they all expressed a desire to attend college. Despite this desire, many were not enrolled in college one, two, or three years after high school graduation. Many attributed this to the policy requiring that they pay out-of-state tuition at *any* public college or university. The Board of Regents policy 4.3.4 (out-of-state tuition) has the greatest immediate practical impact for full educational participation amongst undocumented

young adults in Georgia. This educational exclusion not only has long-term implications for their structural incorporation, but also has socio-emotional implications, as Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia must navigate the emotional ups and downs of feeling educationally untethered.

I found that the Board of Regents policy 4.1.6. (ban from top 5 public colleges) also had significant symbolic value for Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia. I was unable to discern from interviewees' self-reported academic experiences whether they were competitive candidates for these colleges. Regardless, however, Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia aspired and desired to attend these institutions, and these aspirations shaped their perceptions of exclusion. As I recounted at the beginning of this paper, Melanie and her twin sister's dream of attending the University of Georgia, an aspiration shared by many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed, was literally and figuratively shut down during the application process. This not only prevented them from applying to UGA, but also sent them both into a period of depression and uncertainty. As Saul said during our interview, he felt like the State of Georgia no longer cared about what happened to him and his future after high school. During our interview he expressed the belief that through these two policies, the state of Georgia was basically saying to him, "Okay, thanks for coming...good luck." While he had some sense of humor about the messages these policies send to undocumented young adults in the state, there was an edge of bitterness to his sentiment that implied that he and other undocumented young adults living in Georgia felt unwanted. Given the general political climate and attitudes toward undocumented immigrants in the state of Georgia, this may indeed be the intent of these policies. However, I find that despite these policies, Latino undocumented young adults are staying in the state and are unfortunately stagnating.

For Latino undocumented young adults in California, their futures may seem more certain, but blocked opportunities manifest in different ways and at a later point in the educational pipeline. While state laws and policies in California have alleviated much of the burden of attending public colleges in the state, undocumented young adults continue to face challenges. I find that there are two key points in the educational pipeline for undocumented young adults. These include navigating the financial aid application process prior to entering college, and then navigating a host of “college experiences” that are developed with citizen students in mind. This includes experiences such as getting an internship, studying abroad, living on campus, and being able to fully participate in the social life of their colleges and universities. While these experiences may seem inconsequential, they may have long-term implications for whether and how Latino undocumented young adults are incorporating, both socio-economically and socially.

For high-achieving Latino undocumented young adults in California, college becomes a contested space for negotiating feelings of belonging and membership. As Menjivar and Abrego (2012) suggest, this process of altering expectations for one’s future constitutes a distinct form of legal violence. In addition, the short-term security provided by DACA is tempered by the long-term uncertainty created by the absence of pathway to citizenship. For most of the undocumented young adults I interviewed, there was a cautious optimism about DACA. Latino undocumented young adults in California do recognize the benefits of being able to move freely about the state without the fear of deportation, but for some, DACA provided little to no opportunity to fulfill their larger goals and dreams. In this sense, the socio-emotional impact of state laws and policies on the everyday educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia and California are more similar than I expected--a surprising finding.

This suggests that conceptualizing educational incorporation only as participation and completion does not fully capture the complexity of the educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in these two very different contexts of reception. I suggest that we consider thinking about educational incorporation as a process of participation *and* sense of belonging. If we connect belonging, defined as opportunities for *full* participation, and common measures of educational participation, a fuller picture emerges of the educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in two divergent policy climates. This chapter also suggests that state-level policies can ameliorate or exacerbate the exclusion of undocumented immigrants; however, because these state laws are nested in a broader federal context, I argue that Latino undocumented adults in California and Georgia share much more similar feelings of exclusion than one might expect.

In this chapter, I focused primarily on showing how state laws and policies shaped the educational pathways of Latino undocumented young adults, and the surprisingly *similar* feelings of educational exclusion participants experienced because of nested socio-legal contexts. In the next chapter, I examine the ways undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta are creating their own educational belonging by mobilizing to change institutional policies. I highlight the motivations and constraints that Latino undocumented young adults face as they consider engaging in activism. Finally, I argue that this process of negotiation is integral to fully understanding the multiple--and sometimes competing--obligations that Latino undocumented young adults encounter.

CHAPTER 5

The Immigrant Bargain Extended: Undocumented Youth (Non)/Participation in Activism

On January 9, 2015, over twenty undocumented youth and about thirty documented student allies attended a teach-in at the University of Georgia, one of the five universities in Georgia that undocumented youth are barred from attending because of their legal status. A sign posted on a classroom door read “Desegregation in Progress.” Nearly fifty years earlier on this same date, the University of Georgia officially desegregated and allowed the first African-American students to attend the campus. During the course of the teach-in, student activists listened to the experiences of Civil Rights Activists Lonnie King and Loretta Ross. Ms. Ross emphasized, “my first radical act was my parents and I fighting for my right to an education” (Pitti 2015). As it was in the Civil Rights Movement, *access* to education has been a central issue for the undocumented youth movement. Drawing on the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, starting in 2010, undocumented youth activists began to participate in peaceful acts of civil disobedience regularly resulting in their arrest. At 5 P.M., when the University of Georgia police ordered participants to leave the classroom or face charges of criminal trespass, all but 9 participants stayed in the classroom. Four of those who stayed behind in the classroom were undocumented, and knowingly risked arrest.

Diana, one of the undocumented students who was arrested, explained during an interview at her home over a month later that she was motivated in part by her parent’s sacrifice. Through tears, she said, “my parents sacrificed everything for me to have a better life....and for Georgia to take that away, it’s just, it’s just something that I am not going to allow.” While participating in acts of civil disobedience has become more commonplace among undocumented youth activists, this type of activism is still just one way that the undocumented young adults I

interviewed in Georgia and California described their civic engagement and activist participation. In both California and Georgia, I initially recruited participants who were peripherally involved in the broader undocumented student movement. In Georgia, starting with undocumented youth activists was key because of the extremely hostile legal context. But because I was able to offer participant referral incentives in both California and Georgia, I also interviewed undocumented young adults who did not identify as “activists.” In this chapter, I explore how undocumented young adults in Los Angeles and Atlanta came to a decision to participate in activism. I also examine how participation varies *between* and *within* state contexts. In order to understand why some undocumented young people mobilize and others do not, I identify various factors, including hostile and welcoming state policies, that shape individual participation in activism.

In Los Angeles and Atlanta, I found that undocumented young adults’ experiences of belonging and exclusion influenced their participation in the movement. As previous research establishes, the claims for inclusion that undocumented young adults make in both regions revolve around a sense of belonging that develops primarily because they grew up in the United States. This sense of belonging is disrupted as they experience moments of exclusion during the transition to adulthood, and some undocumented young adults find their way to mobilization (Enriquez and Saguy 2016; Unzueta and Seif 2013; Nicholls 2013; Abrego 2011). I find that while the claims to access and inclusion in California and Georgia are similar in nature, the goals of the undocumented student movement in both states are very different and are shaped primarily by state laws and policies that create political threats or opportunities. In addition, as mentioned above, I find that *individual* pathways to mobilization vary *between* and *within* states, and that this variation is shaped primarily by other factors, including employment, family, and education.

I argue that undocumented young adults' perceptions about what it means to keep the immigrant bargain--that is, to recognize their parents' migration sacrifices--profoundly shapes how undocumented young adults engage in activism. In the sections that follow, I examine what we know generally about activist participation and what we have learned, thus far, about undocumented youth mobilization. I then provide a historical analysis of undocumented youth activism in both California and Georgia, and the current state of these movements, providing a context for a better understanding of individual pathways to mobilization.

The Rise of the Undocumented Youth Movement

Undocumented youth activism is part of a longer legacy of Latino and immigrant activism (Bloemraad, Voss and Lee 2011; Gonzales 2008; Martinez 2008). The undocumented youth movement has evolved since 2001, coinciding with the introduction and re-introduction of the DREAM Act, which would have provided a conditional pathway to citizenship for immigrants who migrated to the United States as children and remain in the country without legal permission (Cebulko 2014). In addition, laws like California's AB540, which allow undocumented youth who meet certain requirements to pay in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities, have also given rise to a vibrant undocumented youth movement by creating a space for undocumented immigrant youth to come together on college campuses (Galindo 2012; Seif 2011, 2004; Abrego 2008). These campus and community-based organizations have facilitated the politicization process by creating spaces for undocumented youth to connect with one another, share stories, and develop strategies to push for social justice (Terriquez 2015b; Negron-Gonzales 2013; Nicholls 2013; Abrego 2008).

Spurred in part by the sudden passing of DREAM activists Tam Tran and Cinthya Felix in 2010, undocumented youth activists declared that they were "Undocumented and Unafraid!"

(Wong et al. 2012). During the summer of 2010, undocumented youth activists made two bold moves. The first was to advocate for passage of the DREAM Act as a “stand-alone” bill not tied to Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR), legislation that many of the national immigrant rights organizations were advocating. Secondly, drawing inspiration from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Movement and the youth activists of the Civil Rights Movement, undocumented immigrant youth activists across the country launched a campaign based on undocumented immigrant youth publicly sharing their legal status and engaging in acts of civil disobedience (Nicholls 2013; Pallares 2013; Seif 2011; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014). In May 2010, five undocumented youth walked into Senator John McCain’s Arizona office and refused to leave until he supported the DREAM Act, participating in a sit-in that resulted in their arrest. Following this action, the tenor of the DREAM movement radically shifted. In that same year, undocumented youth activists across the country participated in a several high-profile actions including a trek from Florida to Washington, D.C. (Trail of Dreams), hunger strikes, and additional acts of civil disobedience. These actions rippled through campus and community-based undocumented student organizations, the heart of the DREAM movement (Nichols 2013). While this was a vibrant and exciting time, there was also a climate of uncertainty surrounding these actions, particularly around acts of civil disobedience, fueled by record deportations under the Obama administration.

Unfortunately, in December 2010, after successfully making it through the House of Representatives, the DREAM Act did not make it to the Senate floor for a vote, effectively killing the bill. Although the DREAM Act’s failure was crushing to undocumented youth activists, rather than squash further activism, this led the same activists to continue to engage in acts of civil disobedience. This has pushed the immigrant rights agenda forward and, in

conjunction with other movement strategies, resulted in the introduction of the DACA program. In this chapter, I explore how undocumented youth in Los Angeles and Atlanta made sense of this shift in activism, by exploring how they negotiated getting involved in undocumented youth activism and balancing their own and their parents' hopes and dreams for a better life.

The Immigrant Bargain and Undocumented Youth Activism

In his study of Mexican immigrants in New York City, Robert Smith (2006) finds that children of immigrants carry their parents' migration experiences with them. He suggests that some immigrant children push themselves academically in hope of realizing their parents' hopes and dreams for migrating to the United States, a dynamic he terms the immigrant bargain. Louie (2012) further examines the immigrant bargain in her study of 1.5 and 2nd generation Colombian and Dominican immigrant youth. Building on her earlier research about Chinese immigrant families, Louie (2004) finds that as immigrant optimism permeates these families' narratives, both immigrant parents and children are driven to take advantage of the opportunities the United States offers. One of these key opportunities is a better education, and it is the primary way that immigrant parents and their children perceive opportunities for economic and social mobility (Lee and Zhou 2014). While we can assume that most of the youth in both Smith's (2006) and Louie's (2004, 2012) study are either citizens or authorized immigrants, research about the undocumented 1.5-generation suggests that despite legal barriers and challenges, they and their families also place significant value on realizing their parents' hopes and dreams through education (Cebulko 2014; Enriquez 2012; Gonzales 2011; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Abrego 2006).

Abrego (2006) finds that undocumented immigrant youth develop educational aspirations and expectations similar to those of most U.S.-born youth; they hope to go to college and plan to

start successful careers. While their educational trajectory is less certain after high school, during high school, undocumented immigrant youth often harness multiple sources of support to try to reach their educational goals (Enriquez 2012). Enriquez (2012) finds that the emotional support provided by parents through encouragement and motivation is integral for undocumented immigrant youth to continue to and through college. The constant encouragement and motivation parents offer further deepens undocumented youths' emotional commitment to improving their lives through education, both for themselves and for their parents. Despite this deep commitment, and especially prior to the announcement of DACA, undocumented immigrant young adults were constrained from realizing their educational and career goals because of their legal status. Access to higher education gave rise to the undocumented student movement, and has become a central part of the movement's framing and advocacy efforts (Dingeman-Cerda, Burciaga, Martinez 2016; Enriquez and Saguy 2015). The movement's commitment to advocating for access to higher education is an expression of the lived experiences of undocumented immigrant youth, and also reflects one of the major reasons for their parents' migration. As the undocumented student movement has evolved over the years, the connection between education, family, and activism has become intimately intertwined for undocumented youth activists.

Advocating for Educational Belonging in California and Georgia

In the previous chapter, I discussed how despite very different college access laws and policies, undocumented young adults in California and Georgia experience *similar* feelings of exclusion. I introduced the concept of educational belonging, and argued that despite being able to attend college--a measure of integration in the immigration literature--participants in California described various instances of incomplete belonging. In Georgia, the pathway to

educational exclusion happened right after high school, creating a more profound sense of incomplete belonging amongst participants. In the sections that follow, I show how college access laws not only shaped individual experiences of incomplete educational belonging, but also influenced the goals and strategies of the undocumented student movement in each state. I then discuss individual experiences of activism within the broader context of the undocumented youth movement in each state. I start with a description of the undocumented student movement in California, in part because it is considered the “home” of undocumented youth activism and has made the most gains in terms of educational access for undocumented young adults. While California has long been one of the centers for undocumented student activism, Georgia, like other states which have passed hostile laws and policies aimed at undocumented immigrants, has also seen the emergence of a vibrant undocumented youth movement.

Undocumented and Unafraid in the Golden State

In January 2001, California Governor Gray Davis signed Assembly Bill 540 (AB540), which allowed eligible undocumented youth to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities. AB540 was the second in-state residency tuition (ISRT) policy enacted in the United States and was the result of an advocacy partnership between legislators and undocumented youth activists (Seif 2004). Undocumented youth activism in California, however, started in the 1980s with the formation of the Leticia A. Network, a group of concerned educators and undocumented students who legally challenged the classification of “non-resident” for tuition purposes (Seif 2004). Realizing that the lawsuit could not move forward without undocumented youth participation, the Leticia A. Network worked closely with undocumented youth to get their stories and experiences across while still protecting students’ identities. Through the turbulent 1990s, which saw the passage of California’s Proposition 187 (discussed

earlier in this dissertation), and into the 2000s, undocumented youth activists and their citizen allies wrestled with the question of whether to have undocumented youth reveal their legal status in order to share their story. The consequences of sharing their legal status at rallies, marches, and in legislative hearings were unknown. Yet undocumented youth activists knew that without putting a human face to their activism, it would be difficult to appeal to the public. During the fight for California's in-state tuition law, AB540, undocumented youth activists organized with the help of Latino non-profit organizations (Seif 2004).

The struggle for in-state tuition in California had two important implications for undocumented youth activism, both in the state and nationally. First, educational access was and continues to be a central movement issue. As I discussed in the previous chapter, demands for educational access in California have changed as the policy landscape has shifted and become more welcoming. Rather than advocating for basic educational access through in-state tuition and financial aid policies, the participants I interviewed are seeking full inclusion in the "educational experience" through participation in a range of educational opportunities including internships, study abroad, and social experiences. Later in this chapter, I show how the Latino undocumented young adults I interviewed in the Los Angeles area experience and articulate their individual pathways into activism. In addition to pushing educational access to the forefront of the undocumented youth movement in California, the effort to pass AB540 also had the unintended consequences of further mobilizing undocumented youth (Abrego 2008).

Following the passage of the AB540 law in 2001, undocumented student clubs and organizations sprouted on college campuses across California (Abrego 2008; Nicholls 2013). Abrego (2008) suggests that the AB540 law had important instrumental and constitutive effects for undocumented youth. Beyond providing undocumented youth the opportunity to pay in-state

tuition, Abrego argues that the law also provided undocumented youth with a socially acceptable identity, that of “AB540” student. As opposed to the criminalized and stigmatized “undocumented” or “illegal” label, identifying as an AB540 student not only gave undocumented youth a greater sense of confidence and willingness to seek out institutional support from financial aid counselors and professors, but also made it easier for undocumented youth to find one another to form campus-based groups (Abrego 2008). It is important to note, however, that this organizing was not without fear. In previous research about undocumented youth activism in Southern California, I found that during this early period of student mobilization, undocumented youth activists considered even the most mundane social movement activities, such as forming or joining an organization, calling Congress to pass a bill, or participating in a march or rally to be fraught with uncertainty for undocumented youth. Maximiliano, who was an “early riser” in the undocumented youth movement, recounted during an interview in 2010:

We went through this whole, it took us probably two months to decide whether we were going to start an AB 540 group or not. And we decided we were. So we started the group and that's when we came out and that's when we started telling people, you know, we're AB 540. Because we didn't want to use undocumented...Because you never know if people are, have good intentions or bad intentions.

Despite this fear and uncertainty, throughout the 2000s, undocumented youth in California continued to build a dynamic movement. In California, the undocumented youth movement developed a focus on passing the DREAM Act and securing state financial aid for undocumented students. While the former was unsuccessful, in 2012 Governor Jerry Brown signed the California Dream Act, granting state and institutional financial aid to undocumented students enrolled in public colleges and universities. The law took effect in January 2013, and had been a statewide movement goal since the passage of AB540 in 2001. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the CA Dream Act radically shifted the educational opportunities of the Latino

undocumented young adults I interviewed in California because for many, it coincided with their transition out of high school. For two participants, Kelvin and Joshua, it meant that they could finally transfer to a four-year university, with less worry about how to pay for college. While the CA Dream Act is a significant victory for undocumented youth in California, in other states like Georgia, policymakers have taken a different stance and are actively excluding undocumented youth. In the next section, I discuss the emergence and current state of the undocumented youth movement in Georgia.

Undocumented and Unafraid in the Nuevo South

In 2011, Jessica Colotl was an undergraduate student at Kennesaw State University, a public college located about in the metropolitan Atlanta area. On her way home from school, Jessica was pulled over for a minor traffic violation, but she did not have a driver's license because she was undocumented. Despite having immigrated with her family when she was ten years old, and spending half her life in Georgia, under the Secure Communities program, Jessica was referred to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and sent to a Federal Immigration Detention Center in Alabama. Her arrest and the deportation proceedings that followed were part of a larger firestorm in Georgia around issues related to undocumented immigrants. One of the key public reactions to her arrest was outrage that Jessica was paying in-state tuition at Kennesaw State. This was despite the passage in 2010 of the Georgia Board of Regents policy 4.3.4, requiring that undocumented immigrants pay out-of-state tuition. The saga played out on local TV and there was significant coverage on the local Spanish television stations. The Georgia immigrant rights community rallied around Jessica, and she was eventually released from detention and returned to Kennesaw State as a student paying out-of-state tuition.

I situate my discussion about the emergence of the undocumented youth movement in Georgia around the arrest of Jessica Colotl because for many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed, it was a defining moment of their young adult experience. For some, it was the first time they learned about the Board of Regents' policies and realized that they may not be able to attend college. Her story was part of what they viewed as a broader trend in the state of anti-immigrant sentiment. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, the Board of Regents policy was passed in conjunction with HB87, a "show me your papers law" that included a range of harsh provisions aimed at the undocumented immigrant community. For many of the participants from Georgia, the Board of Regents policy had the most acute impact on their day-to-day lives. As Mateo stated during our interview,

It was on the local news...I think it was when that girl from Kennesaw got pulled over and that's when it all started...and they found out she was going to Kennesaw State as an undocumented student...and that's where all these anti-immigrant folks like started freaking out. They were like, "Oh these illegals are coming to our schools" and that's when the politicians were like, "Oh we got to do something about this." That's really where the ban came out of. That's how I saw it.

Although the ban took effect the year before Jessica's arrest in 2011, the media coverage of her fight not only to stay in the country but also to finish college, made "the ban" a reality for many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed. Because of this, ending the ban became a central organizing issue for undocumented youth activists in Georgia. Because the ban coincided with heightened activism around passing the DREAM Act in 2010, undocumented young adults in Georgia were mobilizing and the ban provided a state-level focal point for their activism. This became the central mobilizing issue, following the failure of the DREAM Act. Just as in California, community-based undocumented student organizations mobilized in the major cities including Atlanta, Athens, and Savannah. Unlike activists in California, however, undocumented

youth in Georgia do not have the central organizing space that college campuses provide. Instead, undocumented youth mobilize around an undocumented student identity and create dynamic community-based spaces for activism that have fueled the growth of the undocumented student movement in Georgia. A key community-based space for undocumented activism in the state is Underground University, a grassroots non-profit organization based in the Atlanta area.

In response to the ban, in 2011, faculty from the University of Georgia, located in Athens, GA, about 90 miles outside of Atlanta, started an underground university modeled after the Freedom Schools in the Deep South. Underground University professors include faculty from other colleges in the state including the University of North Georgia, the University of Georgia, and Emory University. Underground University offers tuition-free, college-level classes and movement leadership training to undocumented young adults in the state. Faculty and students meet once a week in an undisclosed location, and over the course of four hours, undocumented students take a range of courses including *Race, Immigration and Incarceration in the United States*, *History of Social Movements in Mexico*, and *Introduction to Ethnic Studies*. In addition to these courses, students can participate in a college prep program which includes preparing applications to attend college primarily at out-of-state institutions, applying for scholarships, and navigating college life. Liberation University is also a key organizing space for undocumented youth, although not all students who attend LU on a weekly basis are involved as activists. In addition to LU, the Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance (GUYA), a community-based undocumented student organization, has been a key site for activism in the state. However, when I was conducting my fieldwork, GUYA seemed to be regrouping as some core members had left the state for college, had recently become parents, or were focusing their energies on navigating their futures.

Despite a hostile context and fewer undocumented student organizations, the undocumented youth movement in Georgia is very active. Undocumented youth activists have taken a dual-purpose approach to increasing higher education *in* Georgia, focusing on increasing access to higher education in-state at both public and private institutions. For example, an ally student group at Emory University successfully advocated for the university to commit to admitting and fully funding five undocumented students per year, starting in the 2015-2016 school year. There are also ally groups at Kennesaw State University and Georgia State University highlighting the undocumented student movement's primary focus on the issue of increasing college access to the state's public colleges and universities. Using tactics similar to those of the larger undocumented youth movement, since 2011 undocumented youth activists and citizen allies in Georgia have regularly participated in acts of civil disobedience. These have included disrupting the Board of Regents meetings, shutting down traffic in Atlanta, and occupying a classroom at the University of Georgia, an action I described at the beginning of this chapter. Contrary to the intended impact of the state's hostile laws, some but not all undocumented young adults in Georgia are actively resisting these efforts through activist participation.

In the sections that follow, I explore the ways Latino undocumented young adults think about activist participation in both Los Angeles and Atlanta. While many of the undocumented young adults I interviewed in both places were involved in the local undocumented student movement in their communities, several were not. I find that *individual* pathways to mobilization vary *between* and *within* states, and that this variation is shaped primarily by other factors, including employment, family, and education. I argue that undocumented young adults' perceptions about what it means to keep the immigrant bargain, that is, to recognize their

parents' migration sacrifices and legal vulnerability here in the United States, profoundly shapes undocumented young adults' choices to engage or not to engage in activism.

“Coming out” in Accommodating and Hostile Contexts

In order to understand how and why some undocumented young adults mobilize, it is necessary to first understand the specific challenges related to social movement participation that are tied to legal status. In both California and Georgia, most of the undocumented young people I interviewed grew up aware of their legal status. Several, though not all, remembered coming to the United States, and their migration stories ranged from the mundane to harrowing. For many this experience of crossing, whether by land or air, was the first discovery of the clandestine character of their existence in the United States. Their childhood experiences, though, were punctuated by contradictory moments of belonging and exclusion. While many described elementary and middle school primarily as sites of belonging, undocumented young adults in both locales also described discrete experiences of exclusion during their childhood years. During our interview, Victoria, who migrated with her family to Georgia on a tourist visa from Uruguay, explained that she knew they were undocumented because of the way her parents acted. When I asked her to describe how she knew, she recalled a state of constant vigilance: “...it was just like always fear. Just always looking out for police when we were driving, or making sure we weren't out at a certain time of the day.” Hugo, who migrated from Mexico to the metropolitan Los Angeles with his mother and sister, echoed Victoria's sense of growing up in fear: “...they told us not share it (*his status*) with anybody. As a result, fear was instilled from a young age of my status and my identity as well.”

Despite growing up with this fear, undocumented young adults in California and Georgia developed strategies during high school for sharing their status with trusted friends, and

occasionally teachers or counselors. However, I noted a significant difference in the “coming out” stories of Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia. In the metropolitan Los Angeles area, the sheer size of the undocumented Latino community, coupled with a more welcoming environment, made it slightly easier for undocumented young adults to disclose their status to others, *especially* as they approached the college application process. In contrast, undocumented young adults in the Atlanta area reported feeling like the only undocumented student in their high school. They reported that they had few to no opportunities to disclose their status to friends or teachers. This is in stark contrast to previous research about the integral role of these institutional agents in providing key social capital and connections both to colleges and universities, but also to possible mobilization opportunities (Gonzales 2016; Enriquez 2012).

This sense of isolation led participants in Georgia to avoid seeking help during the college application process, and closed off opportunities to find support from other undocumented youth or guidance counselors and teachers. During interviews conducted in 2010 with undocumented student activists in Southern California, I found that their experience of sharing their legal status one-on-one with trusted confidants other than family and friends, is an important part of the process of “becoming an activist.” (Burciaga 2012). Similarly, Enriquez and Saguy (2016) suggest that successful private experiences of disclosing status opens the door to disclosing status in more public settings--in the context of activism, for instance. I expected that undocumented young adults in Georgia would be less likely to feel comfortable sharing their status, both in general and in activist spaces, because of the hostile climate and fewer opportunities during high school to become comfortable with their undocumented identity.

This was indeed the case for some undocumented young adults in Georgia but I also found that others were actively engaged in the undocumented youth movement in the state. In

addition, I found that in California, where youth have multiple opportunities to successfully disclose their status, the undocumented youth I interviewed were less engaged in the broader undocumented youth movement in the state, which has become multi-faceted. California-based undocumented youth organizations have been focusing on anti-deportation campaigns (Patler and Gonzales 2015), ending the school-to-deportation pipeline (Burciaga 2015), and advocating for expansion of state benefits like healthcare (Plascencia et al. 2015).

The most interesting pattern that emerged from the experiences of undocumented young adults in both Los Angeles and Atlanta, including participants and non-participants, is their perception and understanding of *how* their commitment to their family impacted their participation in activism. Whether undocumented young adults were “active” or not in the movement, they all made sense of their participation or non-participation through the lens of what it meant to give back to their family and keep “the immigrant bargain.” The starkest contrast to emerge then was between undocumented youth activists in Georgia and campus-based activists in California, as both groups viewed themselves as keeping the immigrant bargain. Within each state, and especially in Georgia, obligations such as working and helping with siblings, both activities connected to family, also influenced whether undocumented young adults simply had the time to participate in activism.

What it Means to Keep the Immigrant Bargain in California and Georgia

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain in California

Because they were enrolled in college, respondents in California were involved primarily in undocumented student organizations on their campus; this was due in part to the incomplete sense of belonging they felt because of their legal status. Respondents viewed this involvement on campus as an important part of the undocumented student movement, but some were hesitant

to call it activism. While, the undocumented student movement started on college campuses in California, the shift in the larger DREAM movement toward direct action, including hunger strikes and acts of civil disobedience, also shifted undocumented young adults' understanding of "activism." Imelda, who was enrolled in a four-year university and was a member of an undocumented student advocate group that planned an immigration awareness event on campus, cautioned: "I wouldn't consider myself an activist, yet... I've participated in small things, but they've never been in an activist space." Jessica, also enrolled at a four-year university and involved in the undocumented student organization on her campus, echoed Imelda's sentiment when reflecting on her activism, "I feel like I am a low-key activist. I definitely focus on school way more than I do activism." Both Imelda and Jessica articulated the prevalent understanding among undocumented youth about the nature of activism in the current historical moment; they both believed that being an "activist" meant going out and protesting in the streets. The significant and rapid shift in the tactics and strategies employed by the undocumented youth movement may have had the unintended consequence of narrowly circumscribing what constitutes activism. Respondents in California understood this particular brand of activism to be a significant time commitment that was at odds with the priority they placed on their schooling.

This was not just a perception, however. Kelvin, who was a transfer student at a four-year university, revealed that his early involvement in the undocumented student movement impacted his education during community college:

I took a break for about a long while after probably 2011. I dedicated a lot of my time to these two communities (*the undocumented and LGBTQ communities*) and it takes a lot of time, that's why I was at *Greater LA Community College* for I think 4 years, which was longer than I expected. I really had pressure from my family too, "When are you going to transfer? When is that going to happen?" They never said, "You need to stop your activism. That's distracting you" or "That's bad" or anything. It was just, "You need to transfer. You need to get your priorities straight and figure out a way to balance your time" or what-not.

As a first year transfer student to his “dream school”, Kelvin made the conscious decision to focus his efforts on school, despite encouragement from university staff and faculty to get involved in various campus groups. He elaborated,

I think I’m still looking for something... I met a really good friend, his name is Eric. He’s really active in the community, but I think he was also taking a break. He’s like, “It’s good to take a break. It’s good to recharge and find yourself,” but he’s started getting involved again. I just became really busy the last month or so, with midterms, and final papers.

While Kelvin did not rule out getting involved again on his new campus, he was cautious about the idea, and was prioritizing his studies. During our interview, he stated that it made him feel “selfish,” but that he also felt an internal pressure to finish school, especially because he took four years to transfer from community college to a four-year university. Beyond the shifting idea of what “activism” means within the broader context of the undocumented youth movement, respondents in California stated that school was their priority because of the challenges of getting to college as an undocumented young person, even within a relatively positive policy climate like California.

The day-to-day struggle of negotiating college as an undocumented student forced many undocumented young adults in California to prioritize their education over “activism.” Alejandra, who was enrolled at a four-year university, wanted to be “hardcore,” meaning going to protests and marching, but also noted that her “...main focus is graduating. I just want to graduate with a good GPA so that if sometime later in life I want to go to graduate school I have the grades.” Like Alejandra, participants in California were motivated to do well in school in part because they grew up watching their parents struggle because of their legal status, lack of

education, and related lack of career opportunities. Alejandra made this clear later in the interview:

I've always seen my mom doing little jobs here and there, like selling Avon and always staying at home. I don't want to be like that... no I want to work and do something for myself. I want to be able to have a career and be like, "Look mom, I did it. It stopped." That's it.

Alejandra related this desire to be the first in her family to have a "career" as opposed to just a job as limiting her involvement in "the movement:"

I feel like maybe I need a little more knowledge of the movement. It's mostly school. Right now I'm like, "I want to graduate." I can't afford to mess up. Having a good GPA is what brought me into having so many scholarships, so I don't want to mess it up.

Undocumented young adults in California made sense of "smaller" involvement on their campus as part of a larger plan to prioritize their education and eventually give back to their parents. Like Alejandra, who had DACA protection, they engaged in "low-key" participation not out of a fear of deportation or similar uncertainty, but a concern about the time activism might take away from their other responsibilities, including school and work.

The majority (30/35) of the undocumented young adults that I interviewed in California were working part-time to help finance their education, and support themselves while they were in school. While they were grateful for the opportunity to receive state and institutional aid, many still needed to work to pay for books, food, and other expenses. For many, this left little time to dedicate to the type of activism they imagined would make a difference. Maria, who was a leader in the undocumented student organization on her campus and regularly represented her campus at statewide meetings for undocumented students, stated:

A lot of my activism does take place on campus...I feel like activism is ... it varies. I think I try to be as good of an academic activist as possible. It's hard to get through all those readings but I do believe that's one form of activism is studying because ... you study, you graduate, you get the job that you worked hard

to get and you give back to your community. I think those are the good hearted people, that's what they do, they give back.

Maria and other undocumented young adults in California viewed their academic achievement as not only giving back to their family, but also eventually creating a pathway to give back to their community. Meanwhile, as undocumented young adults in California were keeping the immigrant bargain according to the more traditional conceptualization of this idea, respondents in Georgia also constructed a narrative wherein they were keeping the immigrant bargain. In the next section, I examine mobilization amongst respondents in Georgia, both participants and non-participants.

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain in Georgia

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced Diana, a soft-spoken young woman with long black hair and a huge smile. During my time in Atlanta, I was Diana's volunteer driver; every weekend for nearly three months, I took her from her home to Underground University. During our car rides I came to realize, though, that Diana's soft voice hid her power and commitment to the undocumented student movement. Diana graduated from high school in 2012, the second year the ban was in place. She excelled in high school and was an active member of the school band. She was also in a serious relationship with a citizen, and they were planning on going to college together and, according to Diana, "making it more serious." Tragically, her partner died a month before high school graduation. For Diana, his death, in conjunction with being undocumented, profoundly impacted her life, and it was apparent during our interview that it was difficult for her to disentangle the precise cause of the deep depression she fell into following her high school graduation. During our interview, she confided in me about the very dark period she experienced in 2012, when she finished high school.

We were setting up a future together, it was just, we were building it and then all of a sudden like the rug is pulled from under my feet. I couldn't go to school, I couldn't work, I couldn't drive it's just like my life was not going in the direction I wanted to and it was so... frustrating and I just wanted to give up.

From 2012 until 2014, Diana was housebound and severely depressed. In 2014, her father found a newspaper article about Underground University and encouraged Diana to attend a class. He told her, "you have to go here, they help students get to college. We know that you've been having difficulty and it's not your fault, it's just we can't pay for it, and there's just so many other factors." Diana, who was terrified to disclose her status to teachers and counselors in high school, was worried that it was ploy to lure undocumented immigrants. So when she arrived in class that first Sunday, she overcame her nervousness, and was instead empowered by what she found. As evidence of how far Diana had come, during one of the classes that I stayed to observe, the group had a lip sync battle to build community among students. Diana, who described herself as "extremely shy," performed Bruno Mars' "Uptown Funk" and in our car ride home she admitted to me that it was huge accomplishment for her to get out there; this was a testament not only to Diana's personal resolve but also to the significance of building communities of support among undocumented youth (Nepstad 2014).

During my time in Atlanta, Diana was one of the most prominent student activists at Underground University and the undocumented student movement in Georgia. Part of her path to mobilization included participating in the January 9 sit-in action at the University of Georgia, and her motivation was rooted in her parents' sacrifice: "my parents sacrificed everything for me to have a better life...and for Georgia to take that away, it's just, it's just something that I am not going to allow." But like other undocumented youth activists in Georgia, she demonstrated a commitment to the broader undocumented youth community.

I was like “you know you got to do this” (*be arrested*). Because the endpoint is not me just getting the education. It’s about everyone getting education... Because I know my sister wants to stay here like, it’s not fair that I have these amazing opportunities. I got to go visit these schools...And every other undocumented student in Georgia doesn’t have the amazing opportunity that I did. And so I want to be able to open up that for them. And I know that a lot of them don’t want to leave because their parents are undocumented. It’s just all these issues that would be better if they just went to school here in Georgia.

Diana, who had traveled to visit colleges like Dartmouth, Smith, and Hampshire as a part of a Underground University’s Fall college tour, realized that her experience was unique compared to other undocumented youth in Georgia, like her sister. In addition, as Diana implied, the continued legal precarity of undocumented youths’ parents in a hostile state could preclude them from going out of state for college. Other undocumented youth who were engaged in the student movement in Georgia shared similar sentiments. They were motivated not only to change the laws in Georgia so they could get an education, but to also improve things for others, including their siblings. For instance, Victoria made peace with attending college out of state, but she also had a younger sibling who was undocumented, and she wanted him to have the option to attend an in-state college. Thus, she was motivated both by her parents and future generations.

...you know my mom is like I didn’t finish high school, your dad didn’t finish high school, you have to be the first one in our family to go to college, to do something. We didn’t come here, bust our ass for nothing. I’m like you’re right, you’re right.

Marco, who was an only child, and did not want to attend an out-of-state college because he needed to be close to his parents, stated that he was also motivated to participate in activism because of “future generations.” During our interview, he explained:

One of the reasons why I do this, is to help future generations that are going to be illegal. Because you know, here in the U.S. it’s always made target of one group at a time, and right now unfortunately it’s us, the Latinos... if we can change things now and make them better for future generations to come.

For undocumented youth activists in Georgia, involvement in the movement is motivated both by a sense of duty to their parents and also by a commitment to the broader undocumented youth community in the state, who may not be as connected as these young people are. While the immediate benefit would be for them and their families, they also exhibited a collective consciousness about their activism.

For undocumented young adults in Georgia who were not actively involved in the undocumented student movement in the state, the biggest constraint was time. For non-activists, work, which often occupied more than 40-50 hours per week, left little time for activism. In their perception, working provided two related ways of keeping the immigrant bargain. First, in the short term, undocumented young adults worked to contribute to their family's expenses, including rent, buying food and other household supplies. When I interviewed Ines, who graduated from high school in 2013, she stated: "I've been working since I was 14, and I've always contributed at home, with my mom and my dad." Ines was referred to me by a student at Underground University, and while she was very enthusiastic about participating, at the time of our interview, she was working 60-70 hours per week. I had an extremely difficult time coordinating the interview with her. After several texts back and forth, we managed to conduct the interview at her place of work in between two shifts. She apologized for the scheduling challenges, and explained that besides home, this was the place where she spent the most time. During our interview, she expressed the fact that she felt her life had stalled:

I've been working for about 2 years now here, after I graduated. You feel really like you want to do more, but at the same time, you feel like you can't. It's just like, you're just there. It becomes the same cycle. You feel like you're being trapped in the same cycle, you graduate and you just work. Even though you don't want to do that ...

During our interview, she expressed an interest in participating in activism, but her primary concern was her work schedule. She continued:

After so many things that I went through, I kind of just laid low for a little while, just started working, just regular. I didn't really get much into contact with any other groups until now, when I heard about that (Underground University). I want to start. I'm nervous about work, because I actually work weekends, I work 12 hours. The other days, I work 15. I live here more than I live at home, I work here a lot.

Despite an interest in getting involved, Ines's financial obligations to her family required that she work many hours per week, and prevented her from participating in Underground University.

In addition, undocumented young adults who worked (thus limiting time available for activism) did so because they were saving to eventually attend college. Esmeralda, who graduated from high school in 2014, desperately wanted to attend Georgia State University, located in the metropolitan area. She was accepted to Oglethorpe University, a private university in the Atlanta area, but was unable to attend because the financial aid they offered was not enough to cover the whole cost. She hoped to be able to eventually attend the college if she could save enough. She was working at a bakery in the Atlanta area, and she described the number of hours she was working per week as "pretty low, about 35 hours per week." When I interviewed Esmeralda in February, she mentioned that during the Christmas rush, she worked 18 hours on certain days, and that some weeks she lost track of how much she worked but it felt like "100 hours." This was Esmeralda's second job since she graduated from high school, and with more steady work and a more mature sense of her finances, she had been able to save \$7,000 that she planned to use toward college. But her work schedule prevented her from participating in activism, although she had recently started attending Underground University, to seek help in applying to college. Her attendance depended on her work schedule, which varied from week to week.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how undocumented young adults' understanding and perception of what it means to keep the immigrant bargain influenced their individual pathways to mobilization. This is due in part to their understanding of the costs and risks associated with activism, but also reflects their obligations and priorities. In both Los Angeles and Atlanta, I find that undocumented young adults' priorities also reflect their understandings of what it means to "keep the immigrant bargain." The immigrant bargain suggests that in order to do justice to their parents for the sacrifices they have made, immigrant children will strive to achieve academically. For most of the respondents, focusing on school, working to contribute to their families, and being arrested in order to "get an education" are all facets of recognizing the sacrifices their parents made, during and as a result of migration. Respondents in *both* Los Angeles and Atlanta articulated a narrative in which their actions reflected their understanding of how they ought to honor their parents' sacrifices. In Los Angeles, where most respondents were enrolled in college, prioritizing their education meant that they could become economically self-sufficient and eventually help their parents, the most straightforward interpretation of the idea of "keeping the immigrant bargain." For activist respondents in Georgia, their hope was for activism to change policies in the state and allow them to eventually fulfill the immigrant bargain. For non-participants in Georgia, constraints such as having to work to support their families constituted perhaps yet another way that immigrant children fulfill the immigrant bargain. Examination of participation or non-participation in activism highlights the intersection of state laws and policies with family obligations and educational goals/realities, and the way these shape undocumented youth mobilization.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“I plan my life a lot so I have different plans. Like plan A, plan B, plan C, and everything after that, but I think if there’s nothing I can do about the whole reform, I’m probably going to end up just going to a university, a law school, here because I can practice here in California. I guess I would do that but I wouldn’t be content, because I’m still stuck.” Yesenia, 20, California

“I see myself in the next 5 years in some sort of college. I am not going to say university or technical college, because I don’t know to be honest...I guess still living in the United States... but if I’m 25 and I don’t know what I’m doing with my life I’ll return to Mexico and do something.” Eduardo, 20, Georgia

Toward the end of our two-hour interview, Yesenia, who was in her second year of college at a four-year public institution in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, confided that her future plans included eventually entering law school. Conveying her knowledge about the California Supreme Court holding allowing non-citizens to apply for professional licenses, including law licenses, she seemed resigned to practicing law in California. Yesenia also conveyed resentment about feeling “stuck” in California, despite the relative certainty that she would eventually get a college degree, promising social and economic mobility but not necessarily the freedom she was hoping for. In contrast, Eduardo, who was working the night shift at a food distribution company in the metropolitan Atlanta area, was obviously more uncertain about what his future held. He hoped to be in college, but didn’t know exactly how that would happen. Would he be enrolled at a two-year (e.g. technical) college or at a four-year university? When I interviewed Eduardo, he should have been in his second year of college like Yesenia; instead, he had been working at a series of jobs since graduating from high school. He finally secured a full-time job with the business where his parents also worked. In the short term, Eduardo was considering moving to Florida for the summer to work at a resort with a friend, and

deciding what to do after that. If he didn't know what he was doing with his life in five years' time, he would consider returning to Mexico.

I started this study with this question: what role, if any, do state immigration laws and policies play in the lives of Latino undocumented young people in two distinct contexts of reception? Contrasting Yesenia and Eduardo's plans for their future highlights the way state laws and policies mediate Latino undocumented young adults' educational and economic outcomes, but also how these laws shape the *possibilities* they envision for themselves. While Yesenia and Eduardo expressed a similar sense of *stuckness*⁵, at that specific moment, their lives were qualitatively different. Yesenia was set to graduate from college in two years, hypothetically poised to enter law school. Eduardo, on the other hand, might still be "figuring it out." While this can be attributed most directly to accommodating or restrictive state higher education laws, inaction at the federal level has created a situation where young people like Yesenia and Eduardo, as well as nearly 2 million other undocumented young adults, are in a state of legal limbo (Gonzales 2016). Drawing from the data presented in the preceding chapters, I show that while state laws and policies are a key mediating factor in the lives of Latino undocumented young adults, the impact of these laws and policies needs to be understood in relation to the federal policy context *and* Latino undocumented young adults' connection to their family. Yesenia and Eduardo have divergent social mobility trajectories. However, I also find that despite very different political, legal, and social contexts, Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia expressed surprisingly similar feelings of uncertainty. What might explain this counter-intuitive finding? Ultimately, I argue that Latino undocumented young adults occupy a unique socio-legal position that is shaped by nested legal and social contexts resulting in inclusion and exclusion that can co-exist at the same time.

⁵ Thank you to Jennifer Chacon for articulating this sense of being stuck as "stuckness."

In this dissertation, I contribute a more nuanced perspective to current research about Latino undocumented young adults, which has focused primarily on youth and young adults growing up and living in California (Gonzales 2016; Enriquez 2012; Abrego 2006, for exceptions *see* Martinez 2014; Silver 2014; Cebulko 2013). Using the case of Latino undocumented young adults in two distinct contexts of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), I argue that legal status is experienced in multiple and layered ways. This is a step forward in our understanding of the incorporation trajectories and experiences of illegality amongst this group, precisely because legal status is dynamic and shifting. In this concluding chapter, I underscore this overarching assertion by connecting the findings and theoretical implications of the previous chapters to broader discussions of liminal legality, belonging and immigrant incorporation.

Undocumented Immigrant Youth and Liminal Legality

In 2006, Cecilia Menjivar introduced the concept of liminal legality, described as the gray area between legal statuses, to explain the long-term uncertainty characterizing the experiences of Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants with temporary protected status. Menjivar argues that being neither fully documented or undocumented profoundly shapes the everyday experiences and futures of these immigrants. While she focuses primarily on formal legal status, i.e. the effect of federal immigration laws and policies in shaping the lives of liminally legal immigrants, she cautions against attributing legal uncertainty exclusively to this lone factor. Heeding this call and building on the concept of liminal legality, I introduce nested socio-legal contexts as a way of conceptualizing the dialogic nature of federal immigration laws and policies, state laws and policies, and individual experiences of illegality. In this dissertation I further argue that undocumented young adults' understandings of illegality are informed both by their own legal exclusion and that of their parents, or other family members. Individual

experiences of illegality are, therefore, best understood in relation to key social relationships. These relational experiences of illegality emerged from the data analysis process as participants' narratives captured individual moments of legal exclusion, as well as familial and communal experiences of legal exclusion.

As expected, Latino undocumented young adults living in Atlanta, Georgia, described an increasingly hostile anti-immigrant climate that colored their experiences and understandings of illegality. Even as Latino immigrant enclaves grew in the metropolitan Atlanta area, creating a precarious sense of inclusion, proposed laws and policies in the state, including the Board of Regents ban, sent a clear exclusionary message to Latino undocumented young adults. This law, in conjunction with a suite of laws and practices, was intended to make life difficult for Latino undocumented immigrants in Georgia, and respondents described these difficulties and challenges as individual *and* family experiences. In contrast, after a tumultuous period in the wake of Proposition 187, an early antecedent of the restrictive state immigration laws of the 2000s, the current historical moment in California positions the state as one of the most welcoming locales for undocumented immigrants. By enacting a number of measures in the recent five years, including expanding financial aid to undocumented students and granting driver's licenses to all undocumented immigrants, California has become a leader in passing state-level accommodating laws that acknowledge--to a certain extent--that undocumented immigrants are a part of the fabric of the state. Thus, Latino undocumented young adults in California described much more positive day-to-day experiences than Latino undocumented young adults in Georgia. Respondents from California even described the physical space, language, and community in Los Angeles as so similar to their home countries as to render their undocumented status irrelevant at times. Despite this trend toward more accommodating state

laws, Los Angeles-based Latino undocumented young adults still reported deportation anxiety for their parents and uncertainty about their own futures.

In one of the most comprehensive studies to date about the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults, Roberto Gonzales (2016) argues that Latino undocumented youth transition to illegality in young adulthood after graduating from high school. In contrast, I find that this transition to illegality starts much earlier than high school, with distinct experiences of seeing their parents endure exploitative working conditions, fears about driving, and public shaming for their status. Respondents in both California and Georgia witnessed their parents being treated this way even as they were being socially integrated as students in public schools, learning English, and making “American” friends. These early experiences of illegality highlight how Latino undocumented young adults begin to experience coinciding legal exclusion and social inclusion long before they graduate from high school. My findings support previous research about post-high school graduation experiences of legal exclusion as more acute, precisely because of the extended period of social inclusion Latino undocumented young adults experience through 12th grade (Gonzales 2016; Abrego 2008); however, I also highlight the fact that Latino undocumented young adults have been negotiating and managing inclusion and exclusion for most of their lives. In my dissertation, I show that while the transition to illegality is delayed for Latino undocumented young adults in California in comparison to their counterparts in Georgia, both groups live in anticipation of becoming stuck, or eventually reaching the bounds of ameliorative state and/or federal policies.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, for example, highlights how Latino undocumented young adults can experience the same administrative policy differently, depending on where they live. Building on recent research about the short-term

benefits of DACA (Patler and Cabrera 2015; Gonzales, Terriquez and Rusczyk 2014; Wong and Valdivia 2014), I find that state policies not only mediate the short-term effects of DACA, but may also have unintended long-term consequences. DACA also underscores the unique socio-legal location of Latino undocumented young adults and highlights the value of understanding their experiences through the lens of nested socio-legal contexts. In Georgia, Latino undocumented young adults were grateful about the short-term benefits of DACA, including getting a driver's license and work permit. Yet DACA also had the unintended consequence of strengthening their connection to the state, as they felt more responsible for their family's safety and well-being as a result of their protected status. In addition, for many young adults, DACA did not open the door to college as many had hoped. Latino undocumented young adults in California similarly felt tied to their home state, due in part to California's accommodating laws, as well as the connection to their families. While they expressed a desire to leave the state, they did not know what opportunities or restrictions awaited them in other states. Consequently, many planned to stay in California for the foreseeable future.

DACA was intended to ease some of the uncertainty of being an undocumented young adult, and my findings suggest that this is happening to a degree. Respondents in both California and Georgia were optimistic about the short-term benefits of receiving DACA. However, in both states, Latino undocumented young adults were only cautiously optimistic about the potential long-term benefits of the administrative policy. DACA, like Temporary Protected Status, may keep undocumented young adults in a prolonged state of suspended or liminal legality (Menjivar 2006). I find that this state of liminal legality not only impacts Latino undocumented young adults' educational participation, but also has a profound impact on their sense of belonging, as many participants expressed tension around what it means to be American. In my dissertation, I

explore both the structural and emotional dimensions of the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults, and in doing so I highlight how institutional inclusion does not inevitably engender feelings of belonging.

The “double consciousness” of Latino Undocumented Young Adults

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois described the experience of being African Americans in terms of having a double consciousness, or the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (2); additionally, he described his own desire “to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American” (3). The concept of double consciousness is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of Latino undocumented young adults, because they view themselves through the “eyes” of exclusionary immigration laws *and* racialized narratives about undocumented immigrants. Although they have been characterized in the popular and scholarly discourse as American in every way, except on paper, my interviews revealed a complicated relationship to being defined as American and “Americanness.” This complicated relationship is not necessarily a revelation, as previous research about the immigrant experience in the United States has been primarily concerned with the extent to which immigrants see themselves as integrating into American society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 2003; Rumbaut 2005; Kasinitz et. al 2008). This dissertation adds to the immigrant incorporation literature by exploring how the experience of a racialized legal status impacts Latino undocumented young adults’ conceptualizations of Americanness, and their understandings of the boundaries, both actual and symbolic, that separate them from American citizens. While I found that Latino undocumented young adults desired to be citizens, both as a pragmatic solution to the uncertainty that permeated their lives and as a form of validation of their lived experience, respondents were ambivalent about what it meant to be American.

Their ambivalence revealed the extent to which “American” continues to be primarily associated with being White. Latino undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia who rejected “Americanness” were conveying their understanding of the racial hierarchy in the United States; this structure clearly placed them outside of the “American” category because of their racial identity *and* their legal status. Those who readily identified as American, however, did so as a way to cognitively assimilate a lifetime lived in the United States, and they did so primarily in relation to the idea of returning and living in their home countries--something many of them could not imagine doing. This variation in identity development among Latino undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia is in line with previous research about ethnic identity development among children of immigrants and immigrant children (Rumbaut 2005). My findings underscore how identity development processes, especially among immigrant young adults, are not outcomes; instead, as Rubén Rumbaut (2005) suggests, they are “complex products of people’s ongoing efforts to interpret, understand, and respond to the social, cultural, historical situations in which they find themselves” (161). For Latino undocumented young adults in both California and Georgia, the broader federal context of harsh enforcement and deportation policies influences their interpretation of what it means to be American. It also highlights the unique double consciousness of Latino undocumented young adults, as they seek to integrate their identity as non-citizens and racialized subjects *and* their social inclusion in certain aspects of American life.

Ambivalence, as an affective dimension of the experiences Latino undocumented young adults, captures the emotional implications of the structural exclusion they experience. Further fueling this ambivalence is the temporary nature of DACA, which has conferred short-term benefits but maintained long-term uncertainty. Latino undocumented young adults in both states

expressed concerns about what the future held for them. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, those in California were more optimistic about the future, while Latino undocumented young adults living in Georgia seemed even more uncertain about what DACA meant for their long-term plans especially without a college degree. As one participant from California put it, “I’m good *for now*.” For the most part, Latino undocumented young adults in both regions are living their lives within the boundaries of their liminal legal status; this dissertation suggests that state laws and policies are a key mediating factor, but that federal law and policy (or inaction) continue to be powerful forces shaping Latino undocumented young adults’ incorporation pathways as well as their sense of belonging. This comes across most clearly in the realm of education, and more specifically access to higher education, through the accommodating or restrictive laws and policies I discuss in the following section.

Educational Access and Educational Belonging

The undocumented young adults I interviewed migrated to the United States between the ages of 4 months and 13 years. School, therefore, was their primary socializing experience. Most respondents, as they moved through the K-12 system, developed not only the aspiration but also the expectation that they would attend college. This goal was informed in part by the narrative *and* the reality that a college degree is required for social and economic mobility. Respondents in both states were also deeply motivated by their parents’ migration sacrifices. For respondents in Georgia especially, this made their educational exclusion all the more painful. While respondents in California were meeting their educational goals, they felt that there were several college experiences that they were excluded from because of their legal status. This included certain internships, study abroad⁶, and even particular careers. Participants in both states wrestled with

⁶ DACA recipients can participate in study abroad through advanced parole, but respondents expressed apprehension and uncertainty about the application process and about being able to return.

the need to alter their educational expectations to adjust to their socio-legal realities. For participants in California, the outcome of these altered educational expectations is not as dire as for participants in Georgia, because they will graduate from college. Nevertheless, in both states, participants expressed frustration and a sense of being stuck in their educational pursuits. To bridge these experiences, I explore the meaning held by college access, both because of the opportunity to participate *and* because of what full participation symbolizes, what I term educational belonging.

Educational belonging, in contrast with traditional approaches to immigrant educational success, facilitates an analysis of the emotional implications of educational experiences. In this dissertation, I suggest that we consider thinking about immigrant incorporation in education as participation *and* sense of belonging. If we define belonging as connected to opportunities for full participation and common measures of educational participation, a fuller picture emerges about the educational experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in these two divergent policy climates. Educational belonging also facilitates an understanding of how Latino undocumented young adults can access higher education, and yet still feel like they do not belong, underscoring the reality of coinciding inclusion and exclusion. I show that state-level educational access policies can ameliorate or exacerbate the exclusion of Latino undocumented young adults, and I argue that there is an emotional dimension to full educational participation. Since college is a key point in the transition to adulthood in the United States, Latino undocumented young adults' exclusion from the experiential aspect of college participation has implications both for their social mobility and for their continued sense of social inclusion or belonging.

Roberto Gonzales (2016) finds that Latino undocumented young adults can be characterized as either college-goers or early-exiters. In drawing this distinction, he highlights the way some Latino undocumented young adults are pushed out of the educational system prior to high school graduation. I find a similar dynamic among Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia; however, their expulsion is happening after high school graduation. Although not by design, this dissertation focuses on a group of a self-identified college-goers in both states. All of the participants graduated from high school, and during high school had every intent of attending college. Yet the majority of respondents (28/35) living in Georgia were not enrolled in college, while all respondents in California were either enrolled in college or were college graduates. This demonstrates that for high-achieving Latino undocumented young adults, the barriers to educational success remain high, and the opportunities to participate in the way they desire are limited. I find that the desire to have a full educational experience is intrinsically motivated, but is also motivated in part by the sacrifices respondents' parents made in migrating to the United States, or what sociologists refer to as the immigrant bargain (Louie 2012; Smith 2005).

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain: Undocumented Youth Activism

Building on previous research about the immigrant bargain, I examine how Latino undocumented young adults make sense of their parents' migration sacrifices, and more specifically what this means for their non/participation in undocumented youth activism. In the past ten years, the undocumented youth movement has grown and undocumented youth activists have been at the forefront of the immigrant rights movement, yet we still know relatively little about the individual pathways into undocumented youth activism, or about what constrains activist participation among undocumented immigrant youth. Throughout this dissertation, I

argue that Latino undocumented young adults' lives are shaped not only by federal and state laws and policies but also by familial experiences of illegality, what I term nested socio-legal contexts. I find this concept particularly salient for understanding why some Latino undocumented young adults participate in undocumented youth activism and others do not.

In both Los Angeles and Atlanta, I find that undocumented young adults are motivated by different priorities that reflect their understandings of what it means to “keep the immigrant bargain.” The form assumed by this concept of “keeping the immigrant bargain” varied primarily according to personal responsibilities and obligations, but state contexts shaped Latino undocumented young adults' perceptions of these obligations. In Los Angeles, where most respondents were enrolled in college, prioritizing their education meant that they could become economically self-sufficient and eventually help their parents--the most straightforward understanding of “keeping the immigrant bargain.” Activist respondents in Georgia hold out hope that their activism will change policies in the state and allow them eventually to attend college. For non-participants in Georgia, constraints such as having to work to support their families are perhaps yet another way for immigrant children to fulfill the immigrant bargain. In each of these cases, we can see how the interaction of multiple socio-legal contexts shape the opportunities and actions of Latino undocumented young adults.

I add to the growing body of research about undocumented youth mobilization (Enriquez and Saguy 2016; Nicholls 2013; Abrego 2011; Seif 2011) by examining participation *and* non-participation among Latino undocumented youth. Thus far, most research about undocumented youth mobilization has focused exclusively on very active undocumented youth in more accommodating contexts like California. Surprisingly, I found a very active undocumented youth movement in Georgia, and the tactics they employed were similar to those used by

undocumented youth activists across the United States. This is a testament to the growth and emergence of the undocumented youth movement as a national social movement. By comparing participants and non-participants, I show that activism is one of several ways for Latino undocumented young adults to “keep the immigrant bargain.” While keeping the immigrant bargain took on different forms, including focusing on school, working to contribute to their families, and participating in activism in order to get an education, respondents in *both* Los Angeles and Atlanta articulated a narrative in which their actions reflected their understanding of honoring their parents’ sacrifices. By examining participation or non-participation in activism among Latino undocumented young adults, this dissertation highlights the ways that state laws and policies intersect with family obligations and educational goals/realities to shape undocumented youth mobilization.

The Incorporation of Latino Undocumented Young Adults

How immigrants experience integration has long been a question of central concern for American sociologists. Previous research demonstrates that context of reception, primarily through government policies, is a key factor in shaping immigrants’ incorporation trajectories (Menjívar 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). In this way, context of reception serves as a theoretical bridge enabling this study to consider the precise role of legal status in shaping immigrant inclusion and exclusion. This dissertation contributes to the growing field of studies about the role of legal status in shaping immigrant integration by comparing the incorporation experiences of Latino undocumented young adults in California and Georgia. While previous research about Latino undocumented young adults focuses almost exclusively on young people living in California (Gonzales 2016; Enriquez 2015; Abrego 2011), this dissertation extends our understanding of the lives of undocumented young people by

considering the shared and divergent trajectories of individuals living in very different micro-contexts of reception.

In this dissertation, I conceptualize the complex, dynamic and shifting social and legal contexts that Latino undocumented young adults inhabit as nested socio-legal contexts. This conceptual framework provides promising theoretical direction for the study of undocumented youth integration because it extends sociological analyses beyond macro-level factors such as federal immigration laws. While Latino undocumented young adults in both states readily pointed to their liminal legal status as the main source of their exclusion, they also articulated the influence of both state context *and* their connection to their family on key dimensions of their lives, including their sense of belonging, their educational aspirations, and their participation in activism. I find that these individual, familial, and legal contexts shape the incorporation and mobility opportunities available to Latino undocumented youth, and that these contexts interact to create both inclusion and exclusion. I assert that conceptualizing these contexts as nested broadens our perspective of the integration processes of Latino undocumented young adults because it accounts for the multiple and sometimes competing influences that shape not only their actions, but ultimately their incorporation trajectories.

This also suggests that are multiple policy entry points for improving the lives of Latino undocumented young adults. It was clear from interviews that the most direct and substantive policy solution is a pathway to citizenship, similar to what the DREAM Act would have accomplished. Undocumented young adults are well aware of their unique social position that situates them as “most deserving” of immigration relief. But as I learned through interviews, undocumented young adults’ experiences of illegality are both an individual and familial experience. As such, immigration policy reforms and relief need to include their parents and

extended family members. In 2014, President Barack Obama attempted to ease some of the burden of “shared” illegality by proposing the Deferred Action for Parental Arrivals (DAPA) and DACA+ programs. The lengthy legal battle that ensued following the introduction of these programs amplified the continued political and legal vulnerability of the undocumented immigrant population. To the extent that the legal challenge to DAPA and DACA+ is an indication of the larger political climate, Latino undocumented young adults and their families remain uncertain about what the future holds for them. Beyond federal immigration policy reform, this dissertation highlights the increasingly important role of state laws and policies in facilitating or constraining immigrant incorporation.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate that state laws and policies shape the lives of undocumented young adults and their families. The state’s power to grant or withhold access to higher education, driver’s licenses, and other social benefits profoundly impacts how Latino undocumented young adults navigate and negotiate their everyday lives. It is through a series of quotidian encounters that Latino undocumented young adults develop a sense of inclusion or exclusion and, ultimately, a sense of belonging--a key indicator of full incorporation. In addition, my research highlights the role of institutions, like public schools and colleges, in mediating the integration of Latino undocumented young adults. While this is not a novel finding, in the case of Latino undocumented young adults living in California, who ostensibly are the most structurally and institutionally included, they continue to experience limitations because of their legal status. This highlights the multiple and nested dimensions that shape the integration of Latino undocumented young adults, even in polarized contexts of reception like California and Georgia.

While this dissertation focused primarily on high-achieving Latino undocumented young adults, the conceptual framework of nested socio-legal contexts has promise for examining other

undocumented immigrant groups. Future research should consider how nested socio-legal contexts might highlight the interaction of law and varying familial responsibilities and obligations, and this interaction's power to shape the integration trajectories of undocumented immigrants who migrated as adults as well as members of other racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, while this dissertation focused primarily on federal and state laws and policies, local and municipal policies and ordinances have also become increasingly important for immigrant integration; future research should consider this additional layer in shaping socio-legal experiences, not only those of Latino undocumented young adults but also those of other undocumented immigrants. As the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States continue to navigate daily life, it is incumbent upon sociologists to continue to develop ways to theorize the complexity of negotiating multiple and varied social and legal influences. In doing so, we can continue to make empirical contributions to conversations about racial, social, and legal inclusivity and equity.

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