

Desires of Belonging and Betrayals: Narratives of “coming out” and the Terms of Recognition in (Un)documented migrants

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1. Introduction

Immigration is a highly contested issue in the twenty-first century. In particular, in North America debates surrounding immigration have framed the issues in dualities: migrants as dangerous, hordes, and “illegal” in contrast to migrants who are to be “rescued” and on a path to citizenship (Fukushima 2015). As illuminated by Cecilia Menjivar, migrants are defined by liminality (2006) and what Douglas Massey calls a “selective hardening of the border” (2008: 31). As Syrian refugees, the Rohingya, and labor migration made headline news another group of immigrants emerged in the U.S., the DREAMers. DREAMers are undocumented migrants who were raised in the United States, many working and even college going. Story-after-story, the DREAMers are portrayed as “ideal migrants”: educated, working, and victims of migration, often to the detriment of their family and/or parents, who crossed with them. Contrasting the DREAMers are migrants who do not fit into that “ideal immigrant” image, partly because they migrate on their own terms, crossing the border on foot to find work, forced to smuggle drugs, and are not seen as perfect “victims” (Srikantiah 2007). Instead, their image is connected to a dominant ideology of migrants as criminals or undesirable – many of the migrant like the central American and Mexican youth interviewed by the author for her expert reports – were detained, denied entry and eventually deported, regardless of age (Luibhéid 2002). Therefore, as a political group emerged, as “the dreamers” came out of the shadows, the majority of undocumented migrants were, and still are, unable to speak publicly out of fear of deportation.

As some types of crossings become “legible” for citizenship, others are bound to being seen as incompatible to accessing citizenship, and “the rights to have rights” granted by state institution. The demand to confess, to give clear account of one’s sexual identity are clear, while the terms of recognition shift

ambiguously. The slippage occurring downplays the fundamental power of the state to reject subjects desiring citizenship – for the DREAMers, undocumented by status but growing up within American institutions. We argue that there is a slippage between “coming out” within the same nation, as an act of challenging heteronormativity and patriarchy, and, as a domestic political discourse, full of potential in building coalitional and queer community solidarities, and coming out of undocumented youth, expressing their desire of recognition and belonging directly to the state and its authorities. It is this desire to belong through a necessary relation to the state, that we argue, is bound to a precarious condition, leading to betrayal by the state power. We question here the role of the state in affording rights according to the predominant model of modern bourgeois democracies, and the demand for visibility of the undocumented¹.

Through a transnational feminist methodology we trace the undocuqueer political subject through an interdisciplinary analysis of laws, media discourse, campaigns, artist works, poetry, and the reflexivity of the scholar as an expert witness. To begin, we offer a historical background of “coming out” in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex community as signified by recognition and self-disclosure. And how coming out shapes the undocuqueer movement and DREAMers. We then offer a contextualization of our methodologies: transnational feminist methodologies – a methodology that traces across multiple sites, scenes, and modalities to unearth subjects who are traditionally erased and/or are fragmented. We then apply our methodology to tracing the undocuqueer political subject as one that is legally created and also contested through visual arts, as illuminated in the work of Julio Salgado. We then examine the appeals for recognition through “coming out” through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and the testimonials of the undocumented youth themselves. Then we examine the risks that are bound to disclosures through reflexive witnessing of the work Fukushima has done in the community as an “expert” on immigration. Then we contend with homonationalism through the “It Gets Better” campaign. In the light of this rejection, doubts around sexual identity, we query through a transnational feminist framework, the terms and limits of recognition of coming out, as it continues to be reified in U.S. narratives, retaining an Anglocentric definition.

¹ Recently, various political scientists have argued that neoliberalism reconfigured a state/market relation based on a new privatized notion of the individual, deeply eroding the foundations of democratic subjects and hollowing democracies from within (notably Wendy Brown 2015).

2. Historical and Political Background

“Coming out” was popularized in the 1970s, emerging during the Gay liberation/queer movement: to be out, to disclose one’s sexuality, to one’s community, was central to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender movements (LGBTQIA+) especially in the U.S.² To be out signified a particular kind of emancipation of the individual and the collective – to be “recognized”. To come out is also, already, a form of “self-disclosure”, it is about one’s identity, and the power of communicating it in public, but also an act of creating new terms of recognition. The analogy of closet, widely explored by queer scholarship, was based on the empowerment of disclosing the truth about sexual life, risking to lose family support, a job, a house and physically becoming vulnerable to homophobic attacks. The high risks taken personally by individuals refusing to live in fear and to bear secrets, were compensated by the collective power of numbers, the prospect of moving to gay-friendly neighborhoods in large cities, the opportunity to join and create welcoming, non-biological families and communities. Over time, decades after the initial impetus of the liberation movement, the state started recognizing legal rights to gay and lesbians, and, to a lesser extent, to trans people. Thus, the image of “coming out” has circulated as a story of empowerment and victory conquered through suffering, connecting the self, the body, and a political identity. This narrative of progress is not untypical in the contemporary U.S. political discourse, especially if we think of the women’s and the civil rights movements. This recurring “faith in progress” was heightened by the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and his re-election in 2012. The Obama administration contributed to that perception with promises, and, some concrete measures aimed at promoting minorities.

² We use the term LGBTQIA+, adding the plus to denote the broad spectrum of sexualities. If at the beginning of the gay liberation movement, the term “gay” included all, it had become clear that LGBT was a more useful acronym, because it pointed to the specificities of existing as lesbians, trans and bisexuals. Also, when the term queer emerged as distinct from, and in contrast with, hegemonic notions of gayness it was added to the acronym. More recently, criticism of the surgery performed at birth on babies lead to an important inclusion of intersex activists. Similarly, the recent movement for asexual visibility has lead to adding the A to the acronym. LGBTQIA+ looks and is queer, in its awkwardness, and it reflects the intention of a coalition among those who do not fit in easily in any category, and those actively reject gender binaries and heteronormative sexualities (including homonormative ones). Such linguistic forms of gender activism will continue to change in unpredictable ways. The + is a welcoming gesture toward its ever changing composition, it indicates the impossibility of encompassing all forms of activism and self-definitions in any gender and sexual identity a priori.

In this context, the twenty-first century immigrant rights organizing has been inspired by narratives of “coming out”. For the undocumented migrant in the United States, coming out has been characterized by navigating multiple dualities: coming out of the shadows was liberating in the sense of stopping the fear of living in secret, the fear of being “outed” by neighbors (or made visible), schools or law enforcement agencies; the risk involved was compensated by the potential right to stay and work legally in the United States on a temporary basis (i.e., Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Within this desire/hope and demand for rights, there are also practices of “national coming out of the shadows day”, and a “coming out as undocu-queer.” In this article, we examine policies such as the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals, the Trump administration’s immigration executive order, the Dream Act, and California state dream act/AB540. We also examine a range of contents (public statements, media discourses and political campaigns by the undocumented queer activists) through a transnational feminist methodology. With a transnational feminist analysis, we analyze the images of queer migrant subjects and the appeals for recognition, arguing that the discursive and social usage of “coming out” by undocumented (queer) migrants, furthers normative forms of recognition by the state and US institutions: acceptance, acceptability, victimhood, and vulnerability.

By situating state power and precarious conditions as central forces shaping transnational migrants’ lives, we examine the normative frames and the modalities of resistance, central to the undocumented migrants who “come out” both as queer and as migratory subjects. Through a transnational feminist praxis, this article centralizes subjects who continue to cross subjectivities while in a precarious state of oscillation between risk and prospective security.

3. Transnational Feminist Methodologies

Transnational feminism emerges as a critique of liberal, Western notions of gender equality, where universal notions of the subject, the law, gender, and equality itself, are questioned. Transnational feminism connects and translates struggles and ideals in multiple contexts, maintaining a strong politics of location (as suggested by Adrienne Rich in 1984). There is a respect towards struggle, culture, gendered subjectivity, in all their political trajectories. Strongly rooted in intersectionality, transnational feminism offers an approach that opened Anglophone U.S.-based feminists to global comparisons and useful political alliances and critiques of gender and power.

Drawing upon queer and feminist transnational theorist Gayatri Gopinath and queer theorist Jack Halberstam, we further a transnational feminist methodology that is defined by scavenger methodologies. Scavenger methodology draws upon “different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies” of the human (Halberstam 1998: 13). Through scavenger methodology, queer lives and subjects can be unearthed (2005). Therefore, through capturing the self expression of DREAMers, we articulate the tracings of the fragments of subjects who have been erased multiple times. These tracings are found in the law, media discourse, campaigns, artist works, poetry, and the multiple witnesses. What follows in this section is a framing of the transnational feminist methodologies that inform our own praxis.

Transnational feminisms methodologies are shaped by a genealogy of transnational feminists. Alexander and Mohanty grappled with transnational feminism as a project that theorizes gender comparing various contexts across the world, that understands inequalities, as premised on a white Eurocentric, masculinist, and heterosexist regime, and, through anti-racists, anti-capitalist and feminist positions, grappling with economic, political and ideological formations (1997: xix). We discuss here the DREAMers and migrants as transnational subjects defined by “scattered hegemonies,” (Grewal, Kaplan 1994: 7). As such, a transnational feminist methodology is built upon a dynamic field of decolonial possibilities intersecting with the impacts of capitalism, racism, and heterosexism, on diasporic and transnational subjects. Transnational feminist scholars we draw upon include: Jacqui Alexander (2005), Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1994), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Anne McClintock (1995), Jasbir Puar (2007), Ella Shohat (1998), Colette Guillaumin (1995), Paola Bacchetta (2002, 2010).

In particular, we draw from the work of Alexander, her critique of hegemonic forms of queerness spreading neo-colonial practices uncritically, and the related questions of readability and translation of gayness across borders. Also, we find especially relevant to our methodology the work of Paola Bacchetta, and Eithne Luibhéid, on readability of sexual identity, in the interactions between immigrants and authorities, whose question the migrant’s heterosexuality and its performance in interrogations. Bacchetta’s reflections on the continuing erasure of the queer of colors in comparative political contexts are also fundamental to our project. The fact that queer and migrants are rendered non-existent is not new, as Bacchetta points out (2010), yet, the forms of erasure continue changing: such subaltern subjects are forced to inclusion via assimilation to the mainstream, via material and symbolic violence of silencing, erasing, dividing and creating hierarchies of assimilability. We draw from Trinh, especially, on the methodological

question of listening/ relaying the point of view of the undocumented.

“Who speaks?” and “Who speaks for whom?” (Trinh 1989) which imply, as Bacchetta states in her later contribution, asking also “Who cannot speak (here-now)?” “Who is beginning to speak (here-now)?”(2010).

Since the authors are not undocuqueer, they methodologically chose to “speak nearby” a group of people continually threatened to be deported as immigrants, rejected as queers, thus, who is actively silenced and symbolically erased.

In various contexts, transnational feminism is also in close dialogue with post-colonial and de-colonial theories put forth by Stuart Hall, (1988, 1996) Maria C. Lugones (2003), Achilles Mbembe (2001), Walter Dignolo (2000), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), Edward Said (1993), and Gayatri Spivak (1993), Rey Chow (1992).

After September 11th 2001 (colloquially referred to as 9/11), transnational feminism offered essential contributions to respond to widespread Islamophobia, especially the kind embraced by progressive “liberals”, since it tended to polarize ideologically Western notions of individual rights of women with Islam as oppressive for all women (Puar 2007). Almost two decades later, heteropatriarchy, islamophobia and racism continue in the U.S. and Europe. Global political networks of conservative groups share ideological tools aimed at reducing the social circulation of ideas surrounding gender, queerness, mobilizing against queer and trans people’s rights. Particularly relevant to this discussion are the concepts of homonationalism and the Anglocentrism implicit in the “coming out” model.

Finally, transnational feminism helps situating phenomena across contexts, making possible the witnessing of the multiple scenes and sites where differing uses of homonationalism preserve as a product of whiteness. Politically, a transnational feminist praxis is useful for people of color in the U.S., because it offers multiple positionalities, beyond the narrow boundaries of identity politics. It also makes possible coalitions through shared critiques of masculinity in politics, eurocentrism and the specific ways in which gender, class, and ethno-racial differences are rendered “other” in multiple contexts. As a methodology, transnational feminism resonates with projects of liberation and creation of anti-colonial political power based on rejecting the Western democratic, capitalist model of inclusion and assimilation of differences into hegemony. In this essay, a transnational feminist analytic is used to examine the role of queer, undocumented migrants in the U.S. – undocuqueer.

Our methodology involves a critical feminist discourse analysis, based on listening to the fragments narratives of the undocuqueer. Being a recent social movement, the subjectivities often emerge through collective statements, slogans, and posters, which we will analyze in this essay. The authors also draw from one

of the few studies of college students conducted at the University of California Berkeley, in which the students were asked to describe barriers in education due to their status.

4. Undocuqueer as a new political subject

Since 2008, the movement promoting an immigration reform brought to high visibility the category of undocumented youth. Within the large group of 12 million people, those who migrated to the U.S. in young age appeared to be the most socially and linguistically integrated in US society, and they became the public face of a social movement that embraced the politics of visibility, with the slogan “undocumented and unafraid”. The first goal they achieved was changing the language used in the media and political discourse on illegality, being “alien”, mostly carrying negative connotation was shifted to “undocumented”, now embraced institutionally by state and local policies.

Another strategy involved developing strong internet and web presence, creating slogans, art, and images to circulate via Facebook and more recent social media. The twenty-first century images of undocuqueers delineate the undocumented as young, strong, cool, people of color claiming an identity of their own³. This confluence of new social media, the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012, and the long-discussed need for immigration reform, contributed to build momentum and a general positive reception of these images, considered “cool” and youth-oriented. As illustrated in Julio Salgado’s artworks (See image 1), “Give me all your greens” an image that circulated at University of Utah as part of the poster images promoting Pride week, the image speaks to how capitalism shapes undocuqueer lives. There is a stylized, brown skinned male, possibly Latino, who is contending with the money and the fruit of opportunities of migrating. Behind him are lines of other undocumented migrants who have crossed. A few religious references in the image, such as the snake and the apple, illustrate how a betrayal is upon the migratory subjects. A betrayal of what the “dream” means, and the little economic opportunities that migrants have when migrating to the US, where they work in low wage industries. Additionally, Salgado, who identifies as undocumented and queer created a poster series called “I am Undocu-Queer” to capture undocumented youth. Salgado is quoted as saying that to “have these youth ... saying ‘this is how we are, this

³ See the website: action.dreamactivist.org as well as Twitter’s #HeretoStay.

is who we are’ – it was historic. I could not not pay attention to it” (Seif 2014). The traces of the undocuqueer, captured in Salgado’s work illuminate resistance, where one campaign image of a queer, undocumented, unashamed person states, “I’ll be damned if you force me back into a fucking closet!” (See image 2). The image of the closet invokes state violence of forcing migrants to go into hiding – the undocuqueer illuminate it is not negotiable, claiming their identity in the face of state efforts to deport and erase undocumented youth.

Inevitably, the connection between social media and age of majority of users feed this perception, together with the fact that legal experts and immigration reform allies were actively promoting the idea that the specific group of undocumented, brought to the U.S. by their parents and essentially growing up as Americans, socialized as such, and attending American schools should be given a path to accessing jobs and higher education. Both a grassroots movement and a more structured set of goals to promote immigration reform, the DREAMer is a particular migrant subject, who in dominant mainstream media are portrayed as undocumented youth who are achieving, well behaved, “perfectly assimilable subject”, and the embodiment of the unjust and broken U.S. immigration system. In spite of perceptions of choice/lack of choice, the undocuqueer claim their identity conveying it as empowerment (See image 3). Here, identity is oppressive – yet the ability to claim ones identity is empowerment, where another poster campaign image states, “I didn’t choose my identities. But I chose to use my identities to empower myself” (See image 3).

The undocuqueer in Salgado’s posters articulate their politics intersectionally, as subjects acknowledging publically their complex traits, and embracing an intersectional approach, given the crossing of multiple boundaries of identities, locations, borders. It is no surprise that the words of various Black feminists, especially Audre Lorde, Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Angela Davis are often acknowledged in their speeches, slogans and interviews. Their political demands are always already intersectional, because they clearly see oppression as related to identity, and their identity as intersectional. They also embrace intersectionality as a point of strength that leads to empowerment. While this is consistent with identity based forms of political subjectivization, making it a clear assertion of political identity, it has an ambivalent effect, underlying the unresolved question of how self-empowerment can translate into structural power in the current, hostile political climate.

In such utterances, the undocuqueer performs a double “coming out”, rejecting shame for living in multiple marginalities, calling for recognition, and expecting to be supported in a community. The first step of empowerment furthers

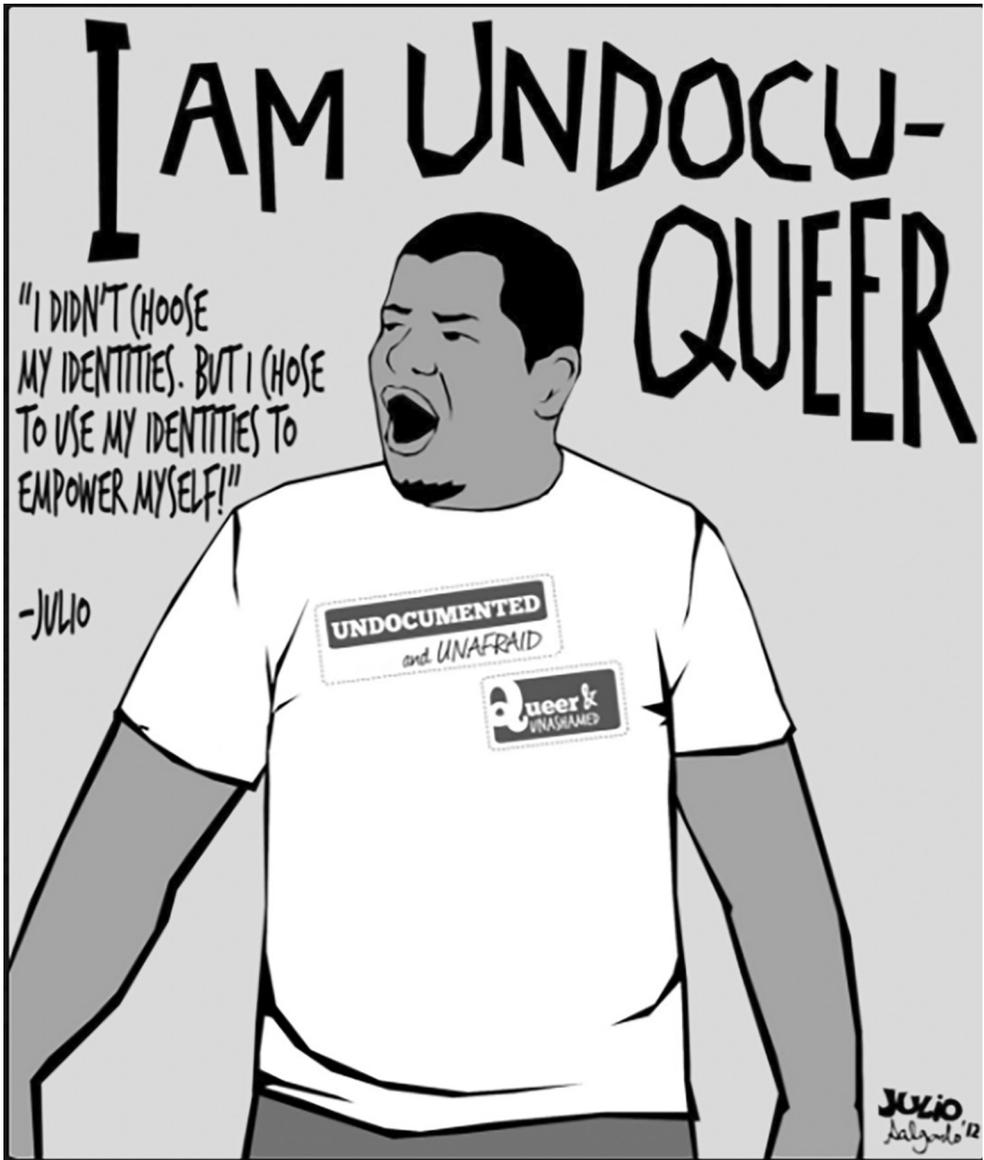
a new sense of authenticity to one's self, and starting the searching for a community of similar people and allies that would grant acceptance and support (San Francisco, feminist, radicals). In the case of undocumented, the first coming out, the authenticity moment of declaring publically one's status, is immediately translated into a deal with the state: coming out, declaring one's status could lead to protection from deportation, granted by the federal government. In this moment, undocumented youth's gesture of "coming out" is invited, even welcomed, by the State. However, the narrative of empowerment hides the other side of a two-sided coin of U.S. democracy and hegemony. The potential power of the authorities to gather data about immigrants and use them to carry out deportations. Living out of the shadow meant entering into the white light of power (as Foucault put it, describing a different context). The contradictions of the states' ability to reject subjects is visibly illustrated in legal events in the United States in 2017, and the debates surrounding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.



1. University of Utah "2017 Pride Week at the U" flyer. Artwork by Julio Salgado, *Give me all your greens*, June 2017.



2. Artwork: Julio Salgado, on-line campaign, July 2017.



3. Artwork: Julio Salgado, on-line campaign, 2012.

In 2017, in Utah, Pride week organizers, believed it was important to make the links between the undocumented movement and LGBTQIA+ organizing. Ella Butler, the assistant director for marketing at the University of Utah's career and development center and the co-chair to the Pride committee, stated that "the committee wanted to revisit, reclaim, and reimagine queer resistance in the wake of DACA being repealed, the events of Charlottesville, and the ever-present news of trans people of color being killed"⁴. The related events featured images of Julio Salgado and other Jotería artists⁵, who are simultaneously unapologetic, queer, undocumented, Chicax, and plus-sized, collectively articulating an intermingling of such identities" (Ochoa 2015).

5. Coming Out and the Appeals for Recognition

In September 2017, the Trump Administration announced the rescinding of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program – the elimination of DACA encompassed a phasing out and discontinuing of any reauthorizations (Cullinane, Kopan, Shoichet 2017). The rescinding of DACA has been part of ongoing legal and political debates, and the administration rationalized the effort as "restoring law and order," where DACA made it "impossible" for Trump to "Make America Great Again", as the president stated on September 5th 2017.

DACA was an executive action under the Obama administration, where DACA recipients, also known as Dreamers, deferred deportation, and were allowed to legally reside in the United States for two years (and to renew this status) if they arrived undocumented before their sixteenth birthday and prior to June 2007. The temporary status of DACA led 800,000 undocumented migrants to "come out of the shadows" (Gomez 2018). DACA was built upon the ideas furthered through the proposal of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act). The DREAM Act and the dreamers it created, proposed undocumented minors receive path towards citizenship. The legal responses to DACA have been varied. As some have been met with deportation⁶,

⁴ Julio Salgado describes himself as an "artist" who uses art for activism (Salgado, Rodriguez 2012; Seif 2014). He gave a poignant quote about himself at a campus event in 2017: "I am a Queer Artist of Color and I'm Still Alive". See more at <http://www.trumba.com/calendars/university-of-utah?trumbaEmbed=view%3Devent%26eventid%3D125177681>.

⁵ See <https://www.joteriaoficial.com/>

⁶ Take for example of the cases of Juan Manuel Montes-Bojorquez and Richard Gonzalez covered by the national public radio NPR on April 2017.

others have seen the courts push back against the executive order, citing it as “arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law.” (Gonzalez, Montes-Bojorquez 2017).

The undocuqueer movement contributed to a greater social acceptance of undocumented youth, a positive media images, and increased ally-ship from mainstream society. The state of California and its higher education institutions promoted a “DREAM Act” bill, successfully past, that granted access to higher education in October 2010 (AB130 and AB131).

However, for this limited group, about one million, immigrant status adjustment was not achieved until 2012, with the executive memorandum signed by Barack Obama, called DACA, that granted the right to receive a social security number, and a temporary work permit and status that sheltered this group from deportation. This policy achievement facilitated a hopeful glimpse toward the prospects of comprehensive immigration. DACA created a strong premise for expanding the protection from deportation to parents of DACA recipients, through DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, introduced by another executive order in 2014, with the aim of giving 3 years deferrals to a population of 3.5 million parents. It was eventually blocked in court in 2015. In this period of time, such federal initiatives have fostered a sense of positive reception, fueling promises for many families. While the number of recipient of DACA remained relatively limited, institutions and allies encouraged undocumented immigrants to disclose their status, on the basis of trust and hope. Many undocumented expressed their “unafraid” and “unashamed” in similar terms to the “coming out” of the gay liberation in the 1970s.

Although the federal efforts continue to be a dream, in California, in 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 540 into law, the California Dream Act. The California Dream Act allows students to apply for state-funded financial aid, especially those who graduated high school in California, illustrating “merit and need.” In 2013, Lisa García Bedolla and Evelyn Nakano Glenn published, “Innovation Grant Research Report: Working Together to Improve Campus Climate for Undocumented AB540 Students at UC Berkeley”. Under AB540, students who have attended a California school for three years or more, obtained a GED or a high-school diploma are able to pay in-state tuition. Not all AB540 students are undocumented, and not all undocumented students are eligible to be AB540 students. Nonetheless, the report illuminates the undocumented student experience at University of California Berkeley. Some students highlighted, even if eligible, they were unaware of the resources for AB540 students. As DACA appealed for undocu/queer to come out of the shadows, not all felt like they could.

As one student named “Steven”⁷ stated, in 2013: “Should I be completely honest? I just felt uncomfortable showing them all my documents... they were still not completely sure what to do, how to work on my case.” In the same report, another student echoes similar sentiments to “Steven”; “Maricela” states:

It’s really hard for me to come out to them. I think it’s only you (the interviewer) and my GSI (graduate student instructor) in political science that know I am undocumented. I had to explain why I struggle in class, I just did not have time to complete all the readings [...] she was really helpful and went out of her way to meet with me in different hours and help me with assignments[...] I don’t know if I will receive that kind of response from other people though”(Bedolla, Glenn 2013: 9).

In retrospect, it is crucial to examine the questions of trust, hope and betrayal. We interrogate how initial success of the movements interacted with legal precarity and how expectations of safety, desire to be visible and belong shaped the activist’s actions and political subjectivity. As legal precarity shapes the lives of undocumented migrant students, they also navigate a complexity of identities. As illuminated by “David”:

It was not until a year and a half ago that I started thinking ‘I am undocumented but I am also queer’ [...] It’s something that I feel very fragmented about, I can’t find that center ground for myself while I try to be inclusive with my identity [...] If I am not fighting, it’s just difficult [...] I can not even process or digest what it means to be both queer and undocumented (Ochoa 2015: 28).

The undocuqueer movement has galvanized a sense of belonging across multiple identities and subjectivities, operating through a narrative of “coming out”; a multifaceted coming out of the shadows and of the closet, which bridges queer and migrant identities – in slogans like “undocumented and unafraid,” “queer and unashamed” (Cisneros 2017). The risks involved in coming out to benefit from DACA and the California Dream Act, for undocumented queers are combined with the tensions of coming out about sexual identity. In “David’s” words, this multiplicity is hard to “digest”, finding a meaning in being both undocumen-

⁷ Note that in the text presented here, the actual names of undocumented people were changed and pseudonyms were used for public statements.

ted and queer appears difficult, even if coming out is politically needed.

Prominent figure Jose Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer award winning journalist, is the embodiment of how migrants are coming out in these dual ways as both undocumented and queer (Rivera-Silber 2013). The undocuqueer migrants mobilizing to further legal recognition for the DACA recipients and DREAMers, continue to solidify a limiting duality. In the appeals for recognition, what is furthered is a notion of an ideal citizen who should be afforded the rights to have rights. Sustaining how subjects of the dreamer movement are bound to dualities of citizenship, legality, and victimhood, when recognition is tied to the state. As conveyed by Eithne Luibhéid (2002) the condition to meet in order to be offered legal help are set by utterances that must be recognized - one must state something publicly, one must prove to be worthy of the forgiveness of the State.

However, the precarity of the word “temporary deferral from deportation” became later a full on betrayal, when DACA was abruptly rescinded in the Fall 2017. Telling the truth to the state, as subjects vulnerable to its authority, did not coincide with pleading to a community for acceptance, and, when not granted, finding another community of support, a welcoming place to live. The slippage was central to the deal that undocumented coming out found themselves drawn to. In this moment when such slippage between community and the state happened, a perception of security prevailed over the political precarity of DACA, with pernicious effects in the long term. Large immediate risks were involved in outing oneself and one’s family in exchange for a temporary protection and a hope for a deferred dream of being safe in the long term. Migrants felt empowered to run those risks, and received such temporary protection.

Today 10 million people in the United States reside in a household with at least one adult who would have been eligible for DAPA⁸, with two thirds of those adults having lived in the United States for 10 years or more (Park, Parlapiano 2016).

Queer and undocumented also felt empowered by their personal, sexual identity’s public recognition. On this level, the undocumented queers appear to be outsiders and insiders to the LGBTQIA+ movement in the U.S. As recent immigrants, they grapple with different repertoires, performances and legibility issues: they must learn to fit-in a Eurocentric, Western, American gayness, and to identify and dis-identity with such repertoire (Alexander 2005; Puar 2007). While performing the gender binary to fit in the categories given in the federal

⁸ Both DAPA and DACA were rescinded in 2017.

application forms to regularize their immigrant status, they also register their marginality within hegemonic LGBTQIA+ institutions, predominantly white and middle-class.

6. Coming Out & Homonationalism

On a political level, the campaigns “It gets better” started in 2010, was propelled from a storytelling movement based in Los Angeles, California, to one with global reach in 2011 – 60000 individuals had shared their stories from 20 different countries around the world and 62574 pledged to help “it gets better”⁹. “It gets better” was aimed at queer youth and presented a specific discourse of progress and trajectory of success (2010). The campaign featured videos of coming out stories, inspiring young people to utter their sexual identity, and to leave a trace of it on line, within an American frame, culminating in gay pride parades and substitution of an online community support with everyday life. According to the spoke persons Dan Savage and Terry Muller, the campaign brought forth positivity, affective emotions of tears and fun photos. We interrogate here how such forms of digital support can also be misleading, since those invited to come out are given the perception that coming out would in itself lead to the right to be recognized in general.

A slippage emerged, between the short term support narratives of online communities, and the implicit idea that such community support would eventually translate into a legal right to marry, family creation, and secure jobs. In the context of immigration, the goal of being granted legal residency was not expressed in the DACA deal as a long term, progress, from which there was no going back to the closet of undocumented status. The word “temporary”, conveys precarity, while the risks of coming out is rejection. Once the truth is shared, one faces a potential rejection immediately where there is no guarantee of forgiveness or later openness to “belong again”. For the undocuqueer, there is no going back into the closet. The long term advantages are not clear, while the immediate empowerment lies in the emergence of one’s true self, and in the fact that allies feel compelled to support the person in the short term.

In a way, then, the queer and undocumented appeal for recognition through forms that are expected in Western bourgeois democracies, using the “American” narrative of progress and meritocracy, where groups are supposed to struggle for

⁹ <https://itgetsbetter.org/>

progressive inclusion of minorities and extension of rights. While they had performed their part “correctly” according to the American political standards, their effort to gain acceptance and prove that they were competent political subjects, worthy of citizenship, were not met with a strong recognition. They were rather betrayed in their hopes and desire to belong, by the State, while the Federal government embraced homosexual marriages and family making for the queer citizens.

The fact that coming out as a rhetoric is aimed at a form of empowerment that hides the material legal vulnerability of the immigrant, begs the question: is it an emancipatory gesture that enables a violent act from the State to happen? What is the role of disjointed temporalities, the contrast between a long lasting hope, and the short term consequences of political changes?

This duality of coming out as emancipatory and outing as violent is key to contend with. The DACA recipients perform narratives of “deserving immigrant”, in order to further their recognition. The queer undocumented perform a queerness recognizable to US homonationalism. Even at a time when the US mainstream political sphere appears very heteronationalist, there still seem to be sufficient room to include some forms of queerness: in its military, in its political leadership, as long as it does not challenge nationalism and loyalty to the State.

7. Disclosure & Risk

Many ambiguities emerge when discussing sexual identity, especially in interactions with immigration authorities, and the outcomes of such information disclosure are not only unpredictable, but also fraught with erasures and other acts of silencing and discursive violence.

In 2017, Fukushima was called to provide expert reports to be submitted to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) with regards to undocumented Central American and Mexican youth who had been detained since 2014 and experienced violence at the US-Mexico border. In spite of their experiences of abuse, the youth were interviewed because they continued to be in immigration limbo. In many ways, their stories were reminiscent of trafficking-coerced and forced to work as lookouts for smugglers, as drug mules, and human smugglers. Fukushima recalls one youth in particular, from El Salvador. We will call this youth “Carlos”. The goal here is not to essentialize Carlos, but rather, to offer, through the exemplar of scholarly activism, an anecdote of witnessing the complexity of coming out in multiple ways. When Carlos told his story for a support expert report, and the discussion of sexuality came up, he spoke of his sexuality with uncertainty.

He seemed doubtful, unable to commit to liking boys, but conveying a desire for boys at the same time. His reflection on his sexuality would be described by some in the United States as “queer questioning”. However, his context mattered – Carlos was from El Salvador, a religious country that enforces heterosexuality. As conveyed by David Morales, an attorney,

The LGBT communities suffer many types of very serious discrimination in El Salvador, including intimidation, verbal and physical aggression, and arbitrary detention by municipal and national police (Lakhani 2015).

In the end, Carlos did not express a clear homosexual identity and was not granted asylum. This outcome makes clear an underlying need to express a “well founded fear”, and a tangible proof of it in the form expected by US authorities, as an individual’s clear utterance on their identity and sexuality. These expectations reflect a specific language surrounding victimhood. His hesitations surrounding sexuality, accepted with distance are part of a “coming out” – out of the shadows, out of the closet – show how limited the notion of coming out it, as it discursively circulates in mediascapes and shapes in U.S. policies.¹⁰

Coming out in the United States has turned into an organized endeavor that leads individuals to make private and public disclosures surrounding their undocumented status. Organized actions have included National Immigrant Youth Alliance’s “Coming Out of the Shadows Week of Action” and similar high profile events. Walter Nicholls illuminates how dreamers’ testimonials illustrate a narrative of “coming out”. Describing a Los Angeles community meeting, Nicholls focuses on two undocumented women:

I noticed the girl on my right, Maria, wipe a tear from her eye. I looked across from me and saw a different girl, Cathy, whose eyes were getting red. [...] I asked Cathy if she knew someone who was undocumented. She nodded. I asked “Are you undocumented?” and she said “yes” tearfully. “Have you ever revealed yourself?” and she said “no.” “So, this is your coming out” I added, and we applauded for her. She said she came here when she was nine, didn’t bother going to college because she didn’t know how. [...] It was at that point the girl to my right, Maria, started crying [...]

¹⁰ Mediascapes are defined by Arjun Appadurai as sites where information is disseminated (i.e., newspapers, magazines, television, film etc.), which provide a large and complex repertoire of images narratives and ethnoscapas to viewers throughout the world. (Appadurai 1996: 35).

What's interesting, Maria and Cathy didn't know this about each other [...] So in the end, it became a coming out of the shadows (Nicholls 2013: 5-6).

“Cathy” and “Maria” represent a repertoire of coming out that is now part of undocuqueer organizing and its affective power. This coming out happens not just in face to face meeting, but quite often on social media, the internet, or other media platforms, and it is referred to as “transmedia *testimonio*.”

Building on the work of John Beverley's concept of *testimonio* (2004), Arely Zimmerman conceptualized the “transmedia *testimonio*”, understood to be about the personal narratives representing collective experiences across various media platforms (Zimmerman 2016). Collectively, the testimonies illustrate the multi-faceted-ness of coming out as shaped by risk (Cisneros, Bracho 2018) and by the relationship to the “closet” as a liminal space (one is in and out of the closet), having affective possibilities and impossibilities (i.e., fear and hopes).

Undocuqueers are coming out publicly via news media on local and international online news platforms such as “East Bay Express” (2017), “Huffington Post” (2013), “Mitú” (2015), “NBC Latino” (2012), “Splinter” (2017), “The Daily Aztec” (2017), and even in the documentary *Forbidden* (2017). Collectively, those who chose to be named publically (Bismark, Yahaira Carrillo, Felipe Matos, Yosimar Reyes, Juan Rodriguez, Cuahuctemoc Salinas, Julio Salgado, Moises Serrano), and the unnamed undocuqueers, are the embodiment of a sensibility of belonging outside of the nation-state, through a term that pulls them together – undocuqueer, both coming out of the shadows and of the closet.

Their transmedia testimonies reflect a sensibility that creates a crossing of bodies and collectivities who have been erased, silenced and disciplined by the State. We argue that rather than appealing for terms of legibility and recognition that are bound to the nation-state, the testimonios offer a form of belonging that exceeds the horizon of legal recognition by powerful institutions: a decolonial belonging. Contrasting with the Anglocentric colonial imperative to “come out” of the shadow and of the closet, the transmedia testimonios witness a new belonging. Through images, slogans and self-representations, the undocumented subjectivities further a decolonial imaginary, a queer notion of belonging to a collective that is not bound to the national, but in many ways must exist inside and outside of it.

8. Conclusion

You remember that your mother almost didn't make it through the Border
Or any legislation, this time around
She won't make it into health care packages
She won't be remembered during press conferences
She will be dissected, research
How much she doesn't belong will be published
They don't tell you this when you migrate
(Guiñansaca in Segal 2015: 30)

As conveyed by undocumented Ecuadorian poet, Sonia Guiñansaca, the scholarship on immigration continues to contend with narratives of belonging. Since we have too dissected the political subject of the undocuqueer in our writing, we are not innocent here. However, we have sought to contend with the messiness of recognition and claims of belonging to a society, a nation, a queer community. Much of the tension surrounding belonging is bound to notions of recognition and legibility. People continue to be excluded from citizenship, and there will always be humans who will not be seen as “human enough” to belong in colonial constructions of the nation. As long as the nation-state continues to be the site of recognition, organizing to appeal for a citizenship will reinforce the dualities of Western bourgeois democracies, rather than creating alterities. Instead of appealing for migrants' rights to have rights, due to their imagined ideal citizenry, their ability to grow economies, the notion of a “family” and family rights, or, their victimhood as vulnerable subjects in need of protection, this article calls for a queering citizenship, in the ways it is understood and enacted.

Through a transnational feminist methodology, we have scavenged a range of sites, materials surrounding laws, media campaigns, art works, poetry, and reflexive analysis to discuss the subjectivity that is produced through the politics of coming out for undocuqueer. Their “coming out” is part of an uncertain process that include acts of betrayal and backlashes. Through art and the internet, undocuqueer migrants are coming out of the shadows. While this cultural work has created a positive image of undocuqueer/undocumented migrants, and a larger social acceptance, the undocuqueer continue to be defined by a legal precarity.

Drawing upon Karma R. Chávez's *Queer Migration Politics* (2013), we see the politics of undocuqueer as coalitional work, and we argue that this coalition also includes a “messiness” and an uncertainty that are part of the collective work of imagining a form of belonging through “coming out”. We argue that while

“coming out” is coalitional, it also includes violence – for the undocumented, the denial to basic rights continues well into the twenty-first century. Recalling Carlos, who risked in the face of self-disclosure: he will not make it into healthcare packages. Many “Carlos” are bound to rejection and (un)belonging, in a contradictory relationship with the Law and with scholar activists who welcome them.

Sometimes, coming out can reinforce homonationalism, as illuminated in the “It gets better” campaign, where Anglocentrism continues to manifest itself. This is most notable in how “coming out” is not only a mode of creating belonging, but also one that can and does facilitate surveillance. As conveyed by Cisneros and Chávez (2013), rights based discourses on sexuality, legitimize colonial, racial and sexual control, through a reification of “deserving” and “undeserving people” (Chávez 2013: 33):

The struggle to define inclusion and exclusion is ongoing. Since 2017, when the Trump Administration ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program – 800,000 who had come out of the shadows have become deportable (Kopan 2017). In 2018, lawsuits and appeals unfolded against the Trump Administrations’ efforts to undo DACA. In an era of anti-immigrant sentiments, it is essential for transnational feminists to contend with the politics and materiality of legal recognition. When the terms of recognition are dependent on the State, a kind of recognition that is tethered to a possible rejection from the State comes into being. The federal government’s turn against undocuqueer subjects who came out, is an act of betrayal, with deeper implication than a temporary rejection. It materially manifests itself in the threat of being criminalized or deported.

Through witnessing undocumented queer migrants as producing art, self-representing in social media, and “coming out” as political subjects in relation to the Law, we have offered an analysis of the complexity of their appeals for belonging, the betrayals by the State, and the emergence of a decolonizing collective imaginary.

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Abstract

“Coming out” was popularized in the 1970s, emerging as central to the Gay liberation/queer movement. To be out, to disclose one’s sexuality, to one’s community, was central to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender movements (LGBT). To be out is a means of a particular kind of emancipation of the individual and the collective – to be recognized. To come out is to self-disclose, it is about one’s identity, but also to create the terms of recognition. The image of “coming out” have been central to the strategies of twenty-first century immigrant rights organizing. For the undocumented migrant in the United States, coming out has been bound to dualities of forced coming out of the shadows as a means to take a risk with the hope that one may enter a path towards citizenship (i.e., Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) or

being forced because one's family is outed by their neighbors or law enforcement agencies. Coming out has also been a strategy of resistance where a migrant's coming out has been bound to a rhetoric and practice of "national coming out of the shadows day," and "coming out as undocu-queer." Through transnational feminist methodologies, we will examine a range of texts and sites of display produced through the content, interviews, and materials of undocumented queer "coming out." Therefore, in this article, we examine policies such as the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals, the Trump administration's immigration executive order, the Dream Act, and California state dream act/AB540. We contend that through the discursive and social usage of "coming out" for undocumented (queer) migrants, that normative forms of recognition are negotiated: acceptance, acceptability, citizenship, victimhood, vulnerability, and the human. We examine the normative frames that are central to undocumented migrants who "come out" - queer, as queer subjects and as migratory, and subject to state power.

Il termine *queer* emerge negli anni 90 negli Stati Uniti dal post-strutturalismo, come evoluzione e critica dell'identità *gay* che si forma dagli anni '70, dal movimento di liberazione omosessuale. Questo saggio esplora le dimensioni locali e storiche del termine, analizzando esempi di come il termine *queer* venga usato oggi in modo intersezionale dai migranti. Queste istanze offrono un ampliamento della sessualità *queer* a soggetti che portano differenze multiple, rendendole non assimilabili. In particolare, si descrive il movimento *undocu-queer* guidato dai giovani immigrati negli Stati Uniti che organizzano marce e dichiarazioni pubbliche per ottenere il diritto allo studio e al lavoro. La rete di giovani immigrati *sans papier* è formata da persone arrivate in USA da piccoli, e che pure dopo aver vissuto tutta la vita negli Stati Uniti non hanno diritto al lavoro, alla copertura sanitaria, e rischiano di essere deportati. La loro vita è un esempio di precarietà multipla, legata alla sessualità oltre che allo *status* migratorio.

Key words: precarity, vulnerability, undocumented, queer, migration.

Parole chiave: precarietà, vulnerabilità, senza documento, strano (omosessuale), migrazione.