

2020

## "Yo, Indocumentadx:" Latinx Undocumented Immigrant Identity, Freedom, and Anti-immigrant Discourses in the United States

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<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorsthesis/801>

“YO, INDOCUMENTADX:” LATINX UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT  
IDENTITY, FREEDOM, AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT DISCOURSES IN THE  
UNITED STATES

by

GUADALUPE RIVAS NAVARRO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Science  
in the Department of Anthropology  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term

2020

Thesis Chair: Dr. Nesselte Falu

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis explores how some undocumented Latinx immigrants thrive and understand their personhood and security in the current “immigration crisis” in the U.S. Using ethnographic tools such as interviews and participant observation, I gathered undocumented Latinx immigrants’ narratives about living in Orlando, Florida. I concluded that American immigration policies use lack-of-freedom strategies to limit their experiences and rights as human beings, also as a means to deter future immigrants. Through the lens of undocumented Latinx immigrants’ stories, I analyze the relationship between freedom, power, and identity in the social hierarchy of privileges in the United States to understand how their experiences are negatively affected by intersectional issues. The COVID-19 pandemic was a breaking point that made more visible the structural inequality and vulnerability of undocumented migrants alongside other marginal populations. In this research, I expand an anthropological discussion to think through more just alternatives of life and humanizing immigration policies in the United States. I raise both anthropological and philosophical questions for addressing these social justice matters.

*Key Words:* Undocumented Immigration, Latinx Studies, Freedom, Intersectionality, COVID-19.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This thesis is dedicated to my Babu, who taught me to fly. Thanks to my mother, Rossana, my father, Luis, my brother, Federico, and to my partner, Mauricio, for all their love and support. Thanks to my incredible family and friends from Argentina and from Orlando, for giving me the tools that would allow me to grow, organize, and speak up my thoughts and beliefs. Thanks so much to those who trusted in me to tell me their stories and allowed me to share them in my study. I also wish to thank Dr. Beatriz Reyes-Foster for her constructive comments on my work and to my mentor, Dr. Nesselte Falu for her immense patience, her insightful enagement, and encouragement through this learning path.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

This anthropological study examines undocumented Latinx immigrants' experiences during the current immigration crisis in the United States. I seek to comprehend how their migrant identities are shaped by social categories such as illegality. I show how and why the stereotype of "illegal alien" - a group of people that represents a threat for the American economy and its traditions- has been constructed by political contentions. By understanding undocumented immigrants' constraints and threats to their humanity, I demonstrate how stereotypes reproduced by the public discourse negatively impact the subjectivities of undocumented Latinx people. I argue that being an undocumented Latinx immigrant is a human condition or a mode of existence, in the sense that their lived experiences are tainted by the menace of deportation and related social threats such as police violence. Such a social condition inevitably causes deep fear, uncertainty of the future, and the burden of navigating discrimination. Still, hierarchy of the power structures in U.S. society rely upon the undocumented immigrant experience to maintain such structures with exploited labor without benefits as evidenced during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the main questions guiding my research are: (1) how do U.S. immigration policies affect undocumented Latinx immigrants and shape their limits of freedom?, (2) how do broad anti-immigrant discourses (re)produced by the media and by politicians shape the subjectivities of Latinx undocumented immigrants?, (3) which sociopolitical strategies generate limitations of freedom?, and (4) how

does this current moment render more visible Latinx undocumented immigrants' plights during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Undocumented immigration is far from being just phenomenon limited to the US; instead, it is a local symptom of a broader global system of economy. Undocumented immigration could be understood as an “epiphenomenon of migration and citizenship policy” for it is intimately connected with both the political economy of migration and citizenship of the country that has shaped those policies (Samers 2003:556) and with the broader free-market system that incessantly remodels national economies. Undocumented immigration is thus *produced*, as it is an analytical concept created and continuously shaped by federal and state-level political interests, cultural biases, national history, and international economies (Samers2003). This political category has a real impact on the lives of thousands of human beings. In this study, I am concerned with how such a vulnerable community like the undocumented Latin immigrants one thrives in their everyday lives and resist the different forms of sociopolitical (and many times physical) violence. I analyze the ways in which they perceive the world, relate to other individuals, and participate in different social categories that intersect and overlap in the context of U.S. society. These categories are gender, socioeconomic class, race, and ethnicity. Thus, I examine how undocumented immigrants living in Orlando, Florida embody and resist the stereotypical construct of “illegal alien” that so easily allows their criminalization and dehumanization in the public eye and the rhetoric of political leaders. This knowledge production of undocumented Latinx immigrants from Central Florida are reminders of the need to advance more scholarly and public discussions within and outside anthropology

regarding the treatment of undocumented immigrants in the United States and immigrant's human rights and will serve for future advocacy.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This literature overview examines structural discrimination and policing over undocumented Latinx immigrants and how they impact and affect their personal lives in health and freedom. Anthropologist Leo Chavez reminds us that the crossing of political borders complicates our questioning of how migrants experience becoming “illegal border crossers who must live and work clandestinely” (2013:3). Illegal immigration reflects our human capacity to use language to categorize and materialize shared realities and lived experiences for undocumented immigrants. We live in a highly interconnected world where some countries have to deal with inequalities and precariousness more than others, and thus, the receiving societies may have to learn new ways to conceptualize the movement of peoples between such disparate worlds in a way that is not violent for the most vulnerable and marginalized.

#### **Anti-immigrant Public Discourse and Language Ideologies**

National anti-immigrant feelings and reactions escalated in the 1920s, 1930s, and the 1950s leading to public policies to restrict the entry and mandate deportation of immigrants from different nationalities (Chavez 2013:21). The U.S. Congress passed regulations to limit the access of undocumented immigrants that would become expressed in the Immigrations Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. Following that, in the 1990s, some states such as California,

after experiencing a harsh economic recession, adopted an anti “illegal-alien” rhetoric that would serve as an initiative used by other states as well that would “solve the problems” in the economy, education system, health care, and even the relations between local and federal governments. Leo Chavez explains the strong cultural assumptions put forward by emerging societal rhetoric that social services, rather than jobs, were the magnet drawing undocumented immigrants to the United States. Consequently, the U.S. Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRRIRA) in 1996, which made it harder for immigrants to adjust their status to legal making it easier to deport immigrants by broadening the range of deportable offenses within public discourses and new policies (2013: 22).

In *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* (2001), Leo Chavez analyzes popular” magazines’ and newspapers covers’ messages portraying “American identity” in relation to Latinx immigrant identity. The book is valuable for understanding how representations of undocumented immigrants have been historically constructed in the U.S. Chavez reveals the increase of anti-immigrant public debates and public-policy initiatives during the latter of the twentieth century. He states that “[those covers] represent two opposing yet interlocked views of immigration, a double helix of negative and positive attitudes that have existed throughout America’s history. Immigrants are reminders of how Americans, as people, came to be, and immigration is central to how [they] view [them]selves as a nation” (Chavez 2001:3). This idea of American national identity expressed in the popular culture is fundamental to comprehending opposing public opinion formation toward immigrants. Those anti-immigrant cultural processes are rooted in identity formation and binary representations of “us” versus “them.” These representations contributed to seeing immigrants as newcomers within social

categories of “otherness” and other stereotypes. Stigmas toward immigrants were evident in the concerns about population growth, economic competition, and various cultural threats to society. These polarizing views, as Chavez explains, constitute the immigration dilemma in American society (Chavez 2001:4). It is important to continue to examine the history of public rhetoric about immigrants in order to analyze the current politics of this U.S. nation. As in the case when the present Administration used “racist resentment, anti-immigrant sentiments, and in general, conservative rhetoric to win the elections of 2016” (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018: 528). We need to question why those anti-immigrant strategies were successful and why those specific symbolic ideas enforce superior patriotic American identity. The crisis of immigration of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the U.S. is an established national legacy that justifies the use of restrictive policies and reproducing of political ideologies that portrayed immigrants as “symbolic weight in the narrative of American peoplehood” (Massey and Pren 2012:2). Therefore, the stereotypes of Latinx undocumented immigrants as “illegal aliens” who come to take advantage of the benefits of the country and its people have been historically constructed. The fact that those have been constructed shows that there has been intention to construct. Moreover, that public narrative is not only a framework used to judge “illegal” immigration in the U.S. It has been embodied in the representation that undocumented immigrants have of themselves once they arrive here.

Chavez remind us that illegality is an economic and political tool to strip individuals of political agency (2013:26). Chavez’s understanding that illegality is social, culturally, and politically constructed is critical for understanding that immigrant status is deeply marked by the political decisions of governmental representatives (2001: 192).

Latinx people, in general, not only undocumented immigrants, shape their identities with linguistic practices. Jonathan Rosa, a linguistic anthropologist, explains that “these popular discourses demonstrate how conceptions of Latinx difference -the stereotypical characteristics associated with US-based (im)migrants from Latin America and their descendants- are closely linked to a set of anxieties and ideologies surrounding race and language” (2018:2). Stereotypes are major culprits for constructing immigrants as inferior also through ideas of Third World vs. First World (Chavez 2001:260). The Third World vs. First World images are not natural to immigrants’ perception of themselves. They are used with a purpose and reproduced by the media and public discourse to resonate with taken for granted narratives about Latinx immigrants prevalent in U.S. society. That gives to those who reproduce these narratives the power to communicate their messages and uphold U.S. status quo. Stereotypes feed alarmist attitudes such as “low-income, low-skilled people whose threat of invasion derives from their numbers, reproductive capacities, and competition for jobs with low-educated, low skilled U.S citizens” (2001: 261). A racialized image is constructed through language and visuals, creating identity. The image of Latinx people in the U.S. has been purposely created, but not by them. Such identity forges a representation that violently simplifies and homogenizes their diversity under aspects that are relevant for the hegemonic narrative of the country. The image of Latinx people, similarly to that of other minorities that have helped build the nation, has been sewed on the foundations of a cultural narrative. This invokes racializing categories to distinguish peoples and their status within a social hierarchy. The words used both in the media and in political rhetoric to represent undocumented Latinx immigrants are drawn by determined political and ideological positioning and subject of fierce contention (Demby 2013).

In the year 2013, when discussing over the possibility of new immigration reform during President Barack Obama's administration, advocates said that "illegal immigrant" is dehumanizing and racialized. Republican consultant Frank Luntz, instead, chose to use that term in public statements to push for immigration enforcement. Jonathan Rosa said that the State Department's definition of immigrant explicitly refers to lawful status, making the term "illegal immigrant" a contradiction. Moreover, Rosa points out that the decisions over terminology are not inconspicuous- since the ways people use language can have social consequences.

Undocumented Latinx immigrants hold the weight of the colonial logic that has historically shaped their modes of perception and identification for themselves and at the eyes of the colonizers. As they inhabit U.S. territory, they also must face the consequences of the racial logics -forms of biopolitical technologies of control- that have rendered institutions, individuals, and more recently the media to reproduce the insidious assumptions and biases for people of non-white descent. The arbitrary relationship between "undocumented immigrant" or "illegal alien" with "Mexican" and then with, as seen after President Donald Trump's 2016 rally, "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists" provide a clear example of how hegemonic linguistic ideologies can shape the social perception and treatment of a group of peoples- and even naturalize violent discrimination.

### **Undocumented Health Precariousness**

Undocumented immigrants represent a disenfranchised minority with adverse experiences and unique circumstances that faces significant obstacles to receiving healthcare,

and exposures related to psychological trauma and economic distress including fear of deportation, significant financial difficulties, increasing likelihood of greater disease and comorbidities (the simultaneous presence of two chronic diseases or conditions in a person). Blommel et.al. propose three categorical levels to think about these barriers to care: the individual, the health system, and policy. These researchers argue that in the individual sphere we can find that “adding to a lacking of financial resources, these patients are often reluctant to seek care due to shame and stigma associated with their residency status, difficulties in communicating with providers and a lack of understanding the complex and fragmented ways in which the US healthcare system operates” (2018:2). Some healthcare barriers are consequence of immigration policy further reinforcing notions of health-related deservingness. Medical anthropologist Nolan Kline shows that there are hidden relationships between immigration enforcement laws and recent health reform laws -such as, for instance, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)-, which excludes immigrants from certain types of health services. Kline’s research exposes how increasingly harsh immigration policing provide health facilities a “license to discriminate” against undocumented immigrants, resulting in some facilities dumping undocumented patients or unlawfully transferring them from one hospital to another (20019: 281).

Globally, undocumented immigrants are excluded from health entitlements often on the basis of moral judgements regarding their deservingness to social services. In the U.S., undocumented Latinx immigrants are excluded from health care facilities thorough a practice called “patient dumping” (Kline 2019). This kind of immigrant policing affects undocumented immigrants’ bodies and overall wellbeing, and it is legitimized by a recent health reform law

mentioned above, ACA. When ACA passed, as Kline notes, it continued a history of alienation of undocumented immigrants from publicly funded health services in the U.S. Such kind of alienation has been rooted on the idea of undocumented immigrants' racial difference, their "moral corruption," and more recently, their alleged criminal deviance linked to undocumented status (2019: 281). As Nolan Kline explains,

"deservingness is a moral articulation of belonging that captures judgments about groups of people distinct from juridical conceptualization of rights and entitlements. (...)

Moreover, deservingness assessments are always relational and conditional, hinging on a comparison of self to other and weighing considerations of presumed or actual characteristics-intrinsic or extrinsic, mutable or immutable- regardless of the salience of such characteristics to the issue in question" (2019:282).

Moral judgments crystallize societal ideas of deservingness in public discourses about undocumented Latinx immigrants leading to systemic discrimination and deprivation of the right to live with dignity and to health access.

These "deservingness projects," as Kline calls them, are "ways in which governmental authorities think and act upon populations for determining sets of rights, entitlements and obligations (...), [and] are directly related to biopolitical technologies of control, such as race" (2019:283). This explains the *modus operandi* that functions behind the process of decision-making at the time of passing legislation targeting immigrants. Legislative actions shape ideologies that legitimize a specific image of undocumented immigrants to naturalize discriminatory treatment.

## **Freedom and Fear**

Freedom and fear are important analytical tools for understanding the vulnerability of undocumented immigrants in local U.S. contexts. The limitations of freedom significantly impact strivings to establish a life in the U.S. as a Latinx undocumented migrant. Karen Hacker et al. study the impact of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on immigrant health, focusing on groups of immigrants living in Everett, Massachusetts. These researchers argue that both documented and undocumented Latinx immigrants have faced a changing landscape with regard to immigration policy enforcement. That is due to approval of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, and the creation of the ICE agency after the attacks of September 11, 2001, which resulted in increased detention and deportation levels (Hacker et al. 2011:586). This group of researchers used a community-based participatory research to investigate how immigration policies impact on immigrants' health and overall wellbeing. They claim that undocumented immigrants maintain "low profiles" to avoid becoming prey to local police enforcement and violence. They experience fear and the pressure to hide from the law because of the increased police and immigration surveillance. This disrupts "their ability to seek employment, maintain social relationships, and access public services and spaces" (Ornelas et.al. 2020:293). This condition of vulnerability and the necessity of living in a clandestine world make them target of stigma.

Anthropologist Deane Barenboim offers a critical phenomenological analysis of how undocumented Maya immigrants' navigate the sociopolitical and existential condition of "illegality" in the United States. She argues that "the specter of state surveillance and the threat

of law enforcement produce particular politics of (im)mobility for indigenous migrants. (...) The power of the state [is] imagined, envisioned, anticipated, and, ultimately, embodied by migrants” (Barenboim 2016:80). She explains that indigenous migrants from Yucatan, Mexico, embody “illegality” as a sociopolitical condition and thus create tactics of invisibility that allows them to thrive in a very hostile environment. Migrants who participate in her research expose their sentiments of insecurity and exclusion while living in California. They contrast those sentiments to their sense of being at peace and their *tranquilidad* when they were in Yucatan. They practice invisibility by avoiding public spaces like supermarkets, schools, and hospitals, since there they can “come into contact with figures of authority including social workers, doctors, and la Migra or police” (Barenboim 2016:84). Her study is relevant to show how state power becomes embodied in subjectivities and everyday practices. In the case of undocumented Latinx indigenous immigrants, they have to become invisible to be able to overcome the lack of protection, the unpredictability, and the vulnerability produced by immigration policies and surveillance. Undocumented immigrants’ freedom is thus conditioned by the fear of facing the consequences of their immigration status.

U.S. Immigration policy has procured a world for Undocumented Latinx immigrants where they must navigate through hostile and adverse obstacles that have not been –in the overwhelming majority of the cases- a direct consequence of their individual behavior. They should not be systemically lumped under the category of criminals because of their decision to come to this country to thrive and search for a better life. The options that the labor market has for them are in general limited to the construction and hotel industry, farm work, and domestic services, which are most of the times “low-profile” jobs under the minimum wage or in which

the probabilities for exploitation are increased, since they are hired under the conditions of their *status*. Anthropologist and physician Seth Holmes explains that,

“it became clear that the complex of ethnicity, citizenship, labor, and housing maps onto a hierarchy of health status and suffering. The further down the ladder from Euro-American to indigenous Mexican one is positioned, the less control over time one has, the more degrading treatment by supervisors one receives, the more physically taxing one’s work is, and the more exposed one’s body is to weather and pesticides. Disparities in many areas of health in the US fall along this hierarchy of ethnicity, labor, and citizenship” (Holmes 2006:1782).

Latinx undocumented immigrants are situated in an inferior position because of their ethnicity, their race, and their migratory status when compared to white American citizens. Their place in the Euro-American ladder, as Holmes notes, makes them deserving of discriminatory treatment. This is reflected not only in the lack of opportunities for access to health services but in the absence of recognition of their suffering and their vulnerable situation in U.S. society.

“Structural vulnerability,” as anthropologist Sara Horton calls it, is a useful concept that redirects our attention to “the bodily, material, and subjective states that structural mechanisms produce” and the “forces that constrain decision making, frame choices and limit life options” (Horton 2016:5) for undocumented Latinx immigrants. Through her idea of structural vulnerability and her research with Latinx undocumented farmworkers living in California, we can see that across the U.S., state and federal governments shape undocumented Latinx workers’ work behavior through labor policies by dictating how long, when, and how they will work. She explains that

the concept of structural vulnerability helps us see that migrants' decisions are not only shaped by immediate social structures, "they emerge from their historically generated habitus" (Horton 2016:6). Work habitus and health care habitus, she argues, could be thought as a set of attitudes regarding work and health care seeking that are shaped by their migration histories and precarious occupational and legal statuses (Horton 2016:6).

Noland Kline analyzes how immigrant policing as an intentional form of biopolitical control contributes to overall health disparities among undocumented Latino immigrants (2017:396). He explains that during his ethnographic fieldwork in Atlanta, Georgia, he could see how "the multilayered immigrant policing regime consisting of federal laws, state legislation, and local police practices impacts undocumented Latino immigrants' health and sustains an unequal health system" (2017:397). He draws attention to the ways in which this marginalization and constant fear perceived by individuals leads them to make use of "parallel" medical systems. In Georgia, both state and federal immigration laws can be enforced by local agents, who are "granted discretion in choosing who they stop and arrest for a broken taillight or other infraction, and they can effectively determine how aggressive immigrant policing regimes are". In Atlanta, as it happens in Florida after President Trump's Ban of Sanctuary Cities in April 2019, law enforcement agents usually make use of racial profiling strategies to effectively "catch" and deport Latinx immigrants, who comprise the largest population identified for deportation under Secure Communities because of their "visible phenotypical features" (2017: 398). The panorama of precariousness is imminent for Latinx undocumented immigrants because of their unique intersectional position in regard to ethnicity, race, class and migratory status. Their freedom is

limited due to the stringent anti-immigrant policies, lack of access to social services, and the concomitant fear and stigma that these kinds of political strategies produce.

Anthropologist Beatriz Reyes-Foster provides a conceptual framework to better comprehend the different “registers of visibility” in which Latinx undocumented immigrants exist (Reyes-Foster 2016:1177). Immigrants who come from Latin America and are undocumented are assigned social categories that identifies them in the United States. Apart from their undocumented condition, they embody “various co-existing modes of existence” that correspond to “different inter-connected domains” (2016:1177). Reyes-Foster’s analysis enables an acknowledgement of the “ontological pluralism” of Latinx undocumented immigrants’ multiple modes of existence. The different registers of existence that constitute their subjectivities are materialized only through freedom. If individuals are stripped off their freedom, their agency and their identities are impacted as well.

### **Intersectionality and Latinx Undocumented Immigrants**

Latinx undocumented immigrants encounter myriad of challenges upon their arrival in the U.S. The factors that shape their experiences are social categories that position them into specific places within American society. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to frame the understanding of the intra group differences that engage social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures in the U.S. and beyond (Carbado 2013: 304). Crenshaw provides an analytical framework to explore how different social

categories such as gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality intersect with one another and overlap. Particularly, she teaches that the experiences of women are shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. This framework enables us to understand the structural intersectionality of racism and patriarchy (Crenshaw 1994:1). In the case of Latinas who are undocumented immigrants, identity factors such as gender, Latinx identity, and their undocumented status affect their limited access to employment, healthcare, and education in the United States (Renfroe 2020:35). According to SaraJane Renfroe, men and women do not enter the migration process equally as a consequence of patriarchal structures in society and policy (2020:38). Renfroe conducted a study with undocumented Latina immigrants living in Central Florida and claims that “gendered structures shape women’s experiences before migration and during the decision-to-migrate process, and also in their lives in the United States” (2020:38). She asserts with her study that it is more difficult for women to go from being undocumented to documented, and that migrant women statistically experience higher negative health impacts than male migrants related to stress (2020:39). The concept of intersectionality thus aids my analysis of Latinx undocumented immigrants’ experiences because it reveals perspectives of privilege and victimhood within power structures in which they participate. This non-monolithic group must endure unequal treatment and stigmatization by social institutions and public discourse due to their social identity and not because their individual power to decide their own identity.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This thesis explores how the social identities of undocumented migrants are shaped by broader anti-immigrant discourses in the United States. For this, I use the term “Latinx” instead of “Latino” (masculine form of this term in Spanish) to express gender neutrality and include transgender and non-gender-binary Latinos and Latinas (Ornelas et.al. 2020:290). I used participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The participants identified as undocumented immigrants born and raised in Latin American countries and currently live in Orlando, FL. The interviews were conducted in the participants’ houses and lasted approximately one hour each. I recruited 9 participants and I was able to engage in participant observation with all of them. Two participants agreed to non-audio recorded conversations and seven to audio recorded semi-structured interviews. The interviews were documented by note-taking and audio recorded with consent. These were transcribed and analyzed both individually and by identifying the patterns that appeared across them. Themes of illegality, fear, vulnerability, and disempowerment were recurrent and therefore, examined to better understand how their identities have been shaped by anti-immigrant discourses.

The varied demographic information of my small sample also compelled me to engage some intersectional analysis. The intersection of categories such as race, gender, age, nationality, and socioeconomic class before and after migrating to the United States was also explored. One participant from Uruguay, four from Argentina, one from Colombia, and one from Venezuela.

Their ages ranged from 25 to 70 years old. Four participants identified as men and five as women. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. To assure the confidentiality of my participants' identities, I used pseudonyms for all of them and did not associate them with any identifiable data. Participant observation included attending informal events such as birthday parties and *asados* (barbecues) to which they invited me over the span of two years. That enabled me as a researcher to be involved in my participants' social world and thereby to understand how their actions are continually constructed having as a reference both their Latin American cultures and the new one in the United States.

As part of my analysis, I recur to the Internet in search for content related to Latinx immigration and political discourses related to immigration in the United States. I examined social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, legal documents located in the White House's webpage, and news associated to Latin American migration and American immigration policies.

This study required ethical considerations such as recognizing the precarity and vulnerability of my participants' situations. Establishing trust was critical and required a lot of effort and transparency concerning my research's purpose on my part to reassure them of the protection of their identities. Their participation signaled the urgency of the need to be heard. I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Central Florida to engage in ethical and responsible research with human participants.

## Chapter 4

### *“Yo no soy nadie aquí”*

One morning at the park, I asked Natalia<sup>1</sup> what she would do if she had *papers*, that is, documents that state that she has legal residency in the United States. She looked at me, made a gesture with her hands in the air, and told me “Ay, Guada, so many things: I’d buy a house, put my business, I’d travel to so many countries, I’d have medical insurance, I’d be able to go back to Argentina and see my family again.”<sup>2</sup> Natalia is 26 years old. She arrived here in 2017 and she has worked as a caretaker of twins since then. Through this domestic work, she learned to speak and understand English – it required a lot of courage to manage the language deficit in that foreign home and alongside most things to manage and navigate since she decided to stay here after her tourist visa expired. She pointed out that she considers herself a very responsible and hard-working person, and thus all of desires for her life may be possible to obtain if she had legal residence. She explained to me that before she overstayed in the U.S., she did not consider the difficulty to find a path toward acquiring citizenship. After she realized that things were harder than she imagined, still she did not regret her decision to stay. She said, “here, I have to face *one* kind of fear: the police. But at home, I fear that someone would rob me, kill me, rape me. I love Argentina but I also must search for my own happiness.” Differently from Deana Barenboim’s participants, for Natalia “*tranquilidad*” is not an idea that she relates to her home country. She

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<sup>1</sup> All the names used are pseudonyms that protect participants’ real identities.

<sup>2</sup> The quotes from interviewees were originally said in Spanish but were translated to English by the author.

prefers to stay in the U.S and face the consequences of the term “illegal” over her shoulders than going back to her country to experience worse situations of vulnerability and lack of protection.

There is a common belief in U.S. society that if we behave in a certain way, then we will achieve our pursued outcomes. Many people are guided by their assumptions to entitlement and to act in ways that feel coherent with their perception of the world. This assumption rests on the idea that *we* as individuals are the only and main source of will for our actions. Because of this assumption, many people believe that their actions have consequences (as opposed to believing that our actions and their consequences are determined by external sources). This fundamental belief is intertwined with the ideas of freedom that Americans hold as part of their national identity. There is a correlation between individual- will- and freedom to act. However, this paradigm does not apply for all the individuals under the same national territory and immigration policies remind us of such human inequity. In Natalia’s and many other cases of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., she does not have the option to choose which projects she will pursue in her life. There are structural policies that circumscribe the possibilities she will have as an individual who lives in a community. Such boundaries directly affect a person’s freedom, for they have fewer options to choose from than an U.S. citizen or a lawful permanent resident. This dilemma deeply impacts the perception of self and identity. In this chapter, I will explore through the lens of undocumented Latinx immigrants’ experiences and stories the linkage between power and freedom for understanding how it determines an individual’s entitlement to act and be perceived as fully human. In order to do that, I will first disentangle the different notions of freedom in which undocumented immigrants participate and consider “freedom” to be a social construct that reminds us how some people are regarded to *deserve* more than others. By

acknowledging the textured lives and identities of undocumented immigrants as opposed to lumping them under the word “illegals”, I will show the further dehumanization that this population has had to face in the United States.

### **Notions of Freedom**

It is important to think about freedom in different ways. In this research, the concept of freedom could be thought of as both an “abstract” concept and a “practical” one for the purpose of analysis. I refer to freedom as abstract to remit to a chain of representations that were originated in a cultural setting and sewed within personal landscapes of thought. I say that freedom is practical because it is also the possibility to actively materialize whichever belief or desire that previously existed in the mind of an individual in the real world. Freedom, thus, is the conversion point between subjective reality and the world. Natalia, for instance, feels that she could do “so many things” if she had a legal residency. However, she also sees that her immigratory status signifies an obstacle for her personal fulfillment since it conditions her possibilities to act and pursue her goals in life. Her limited avenues to advance her life in her desires and visions is deeply intertwined with other kinds of absences. She said, “I don’t have rights here, *yo no soy nadie aquí* (I am no one here), *para nadie* (for nobody). There are many things that I could do, but because I am no one, I can’t.” How is this feeling of limitation of freedom related to the place a person occupies in society? In a society that values freedom as a fundamental right of individuals and punishes wrongdoings through lack-of-freedom strategies, like imprisonment (or more currently, “detention camps” for undocumented immigrants), are

immigration policies constructed to deter migrants from coming by confining their identities to small, circumscribed, portions of freedom? In order to legitimize the non-deservingness of freedom for undocumented immigrants, the media and political discourses (re)produce images of “illegal aliens” that aim the focus of the public view on the negative aspects of immigration. Thus, by criminalizing and demonizing undocumented Latinx immigrants, an antagonism between freedom and their image is created and assumed as normal.

At many of the invited barbecues and birthday by undocumented Latinx immigrants during my recruitment process, I learned that “being undocumented” was a constant topic in conversations. My participants created a sense of community among them in which they would refer to their undocumented condition indirectly but permanently to denote the limits that it imposes over their actions. For instance, within their group, someone would do a comment about not being able to drive without stating any reason, but the others would understand and act consequently (i.e. by driving that person home). Natalia invited me to her birthday party one day. That day, she wished to “get papers soon” as she blowed her birthday cake’s candle. She explained to me that she thinks all the time about ways in which she can get a legal residency. She also feels the constant burden of the threat of deportation, that is not something she is allowed to forget. Her behavior is shaped by that fear: everyday as she is about to get in her car, she knows that the police could detain her and that she would have to leave everything she obtained here to return to Argentina.

Although US values frame the idea of freedom as a fundamental human right, there is an inequitable and unjust scale by which freedom is measured and applied to marginalized humans

such as undocumented immigrants. This logic implies, consequently, that freedom is a privilege for *legal* peoples and the limitation of freedom a punishment for *illegal* people. The nation-state controls the freedom of some populations by associating illegality with different forms of human diversity and with the intent to ignore the causes that lead migrants to flee their nations in the first place. These sociopolitical processes dehumanize those who seek help and refuge and normalize such inferior human treatment. These inequity practices enforce violent and ever emerging cultural paradigms by institutions, such as the government and law enforcement violence, grounded in hierarchies of privilege. At the same time, these state sanctioned practices coerce and push to the margins bodies by way of categorizing them as “non-American” or “others.”

Anthropologist Jason De León recounts his search for human bones, remains, and other human material belongings along the desert of Arizona to identify and humanize the “illegal” people who dared to walk across the dreadful environmental conditions of the arid region and ultimately died in the process. Indeed, his anthropological research and context differs to my search for the humanity of the living we should take heed in De León’s provocative and often life-threatening work that evidences the cultural assumptions that reinforce the disregard for human life through the ignored calamities experienced by undocumented Latinx immigrants whether by crossing un the Arizona desert or navigating an undocumented life in the U.S. He says, “for so many Americans, this person -whose remains are so ravaged that his or her sex is unknown- is (was) an “illegal”, a noncitizen who broke US law and faced the consequences. (...) If they can keep calling them ‘illegals’, they can avoid speaking their names or imagining their faces” (2015: 26). The idea that anyone who came to this country or stayed here “illegally”

deserves denigrating, dehumanizing, or even not treatment at all (and even, in some cases, death), is an ideological deeply problematic rooted thinking that massively permeates Americans' minds. The most basic kind of freedom -the possibility to live and thrive- is constantly threatened, prohibited or controlled by social categories of privilege such as class, race, gender and other forms of oppression and power.

The politics of freedom shaping decisions of “who deserves what” are mechanisms of governance used to impose state power over individuals' identities. Most of my interviewees stated that they know that they do not rely upon or trust legal protections from the state. Unfortunately, neither do they have full awareness about their human and civil rights in the U.S.. Some participants believed they do not have any rights at all. It is my interpretation that by stripping away the dignity of undocumented immigrants, they are distanced from understanding their rights and to feel entitled to believe in themselves in pursuit of such rights. It is hard to distinguish between human and civil rights as an undocumented immigrant. As a result, the self-perception of being an outsider where they live, work, and carry out life is entangled with how they shape their perception of the self. Systemic interruptions of freedom, such as the political construction of the “illegal” stereotype, social stigmas, health precariousness, economic insecurity, and police persecution all lead to deep embodiment of fear and trauma, and are everyday reminders of how individual and community agency are challenged in a society that denies them a place for belonging.

## **Intersectionality at the Margins: Belen and Camilo**

Belen and Camilo have had very different experiences being undocumented immigrants. Camilo, a male Latinx who is undocumented, came to the U.S. already knowing how to speak English, and having a strong admiration and knowledge of U.S. culture and values. He invited me to his workplace to talk one day to conduct his interview. I asked him questions about his experiences as an undocumented immigrant that he openly answered while his boss sat in the next cubicle and clients entered the small store. After a month of Camilo's arrival from Uruguay, he secured work, began hanging out with new friends, comfortably settled in his mother's house without personal financial urgencies. He studied a B.A. in Business before coming to the U.S. I asked him if he ever feared any risk of being targeted by the police for being undocumented. He responded, "if you do everything by the book, you won't get caught. I don't usually think about the fact that I'm undocumented, and I am not afraid." He reported that he loves the United States, the music, the culture, and the environment. When I asked him if he experienced discrimination of any form, he responded with a no and said, "well, there was one occasion when I was with my friends at Publix and someone yelled at us to speak in English since we were in America, but nothing else besides that." He blames individuals for being ignorant enough to discriminate. He continued explaining that some people feel that being undocumented is a limitation. He thinks that "In Florida, Latinos are like 70 percent of the population. If *they*'d want to deport us all they'd have done it already. They have all the power to know everything about you. I don't think it is as dangerous as they say." Camilo refers with "they" to the omnipresent power of the U.S. government. His comment presupposes the idea that U.S. institutions have the sovereign power to know and control the lives of the people who live under their jurisdiction. This sovereign

power “allows” him to stay and carry out life in the U.S., he thinks. His experiences as an undocumented immigrant are shaped by the categories that constitute his social identity. He might not have experienced many situations of violent discrimination or oppression due to his gender, his socioeconomic and cultural background before migrating to the U.S, and his “visual phenotypic traits” -which are not associated to the racial stereotype of Latinx undocumented immigrant as portrayed by the media-. Within the social category of “undocumented immigrant”, Camilo has the privilege of not being racially targeted by the police because he appears to be ethnically white. Within his own Latinx community, because of the gender roles assumed by his culture, he also experiences privilege for being male.

Belen described her fear of being undocumented differently than Camilo. She told me that last year a police officer stopped her when she was waiting for a green light at an intersection because of “suspiciousness”, as the officer declared. She had a Colombian license instead of an American one, so the officer made her step out of the car, asked for backup and, among all the questions he asked, one of them was “where do you have the drugs hidden, *Colombiana?*” The police took her to jail that night. She told me that while she was having a nervous breakdown, all she could think of was “why are they treating me like this? They put me in jail with all these criminals, but I didn’t do anything”. Belen told me that she and her sister own a cleaning company where they work and earn their living. She revealed to me that for undocumented women everything is tougher and solitary. When Belen wants to meet someone and engage in a relationship with men, they disappear after they learn that she is an undocumented immigrant. Others, after they find out that she is undocumented, say that they can help her get documents but instead take sexual advantage of her and leave her. She said, “I’ve

been in really awful and dangerous situations. They lie and I don't want to *give* them sex in exchange for papers." Social categories such as gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, and economic status play an important role in the previously mentioned relationship between freedom and power for undocumented immigrants. Belen, a Latinx undocumented immigrant who identifies as a woman, is 30 years old, non-English speaking, is brown-skinned, and hardly interacts with English-speaking people. In her interview, she explained to me that she feels targeted by discriminatory and racist treatment by the police and other Americans. After that time that the police stopped her, she has suffered panic attacks and does not want to drive her car anymore. As a woman, she also suffers the burden of a patriarchal system in which women are objectified and subjected to other people's will. Furthermore, she and the people who could potentially engage in any kind of relationship with her believe that she cannot run to the police or any other entity for protection. She is "on her own" because she is living here "illegally." as she says. As a result of the intersection of social categories such as immigration status, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality, she experiences different social conditions exacerbating her into almost constant state of fear and fundamentally forcing her to live in societal margins. Camilo and Belen are both Latinx undocumented immigrants living in Orlando, but their articulation with society is different. They have different genders, socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, and personal histories. That shapes their individual experiences and conditions the way they are seen and treated in society.

All of my participants entered the U.S. as tourists. For Latin American individuals, acquiring a tourist visa is not easy because of its cost and the requirements they have to be able to demonstrate in order to apply for it (such as having a certain amount of money in a personal

bank account, properties, and signals that a migrant would prefer to go back to her/his country rather than staying in the U.S. illegally). Thus, my participants had the socioeconomic privilege of counting with such requisites to be able to migrate to the U.S. Class privilege in country of origin is an intersectional category important for gaining perspective into the reasons that made them migrate in the first place. Furthermore, that privilege also distinguishes undocumented immigrants who might arrive in the U.S with financial support when compared to those who crossed political borders between Mexico and the U.S, who are, in fact, a minority. <sup>3</sup>

### ***“Yo, indocumentado”***

The stories and experiences of undocumented immigrants shed light on important issues about the social construction of identity and migratory status. The politics of exclusion ingrained in U.S. society function to control individual freedom. For some individuals, “being undocumented” is part of what defines their identity in American society. The migratory status of Latinx undocumented immigrants is thus a social category that positions them in an inferior place within the American socioeconomic hierarchy and restricts their rights as human beings. This broad social category of “undocumented immigrant” intersects with others such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class creating specific conditionings and further limitations to immigrants’ freedom. Belen and Camilo are examples of the specific intersectional realities that exist within the undocumented Latinx population. Within the social category of undocumented immigrant,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2006/05/22/modes-of-entry-for-the-unauthorized-migrant-population/>

we encounter multiple modes of existence. However, this category makes them “invisible beings” (Reyes-Foster 2017:1178), for their suffering and vulnerability are unacknowledged by American immigration policies.. Their invisibility is expressed in the lack of social spaces within the American system that are allocated for their participation and their acknowledgement as individuals, and not only for their punishment and persecution.

In conclusion, incorporating the image sent to the public by powerful sovereign authorities as a self-image produces fear, guilt, suffering, and an uncomfortably feeling of having to hide from those who are meant to protect the people. Individuals who reside in the United States without authorized documentation internalize so deeply those contradictions and those messages of non-deservingness that is not unusual that those become part of their identity. Undocumented Latinx immigrants must normalize living in clandestinely and choose alternative and unsafe paths to thrive in life. Understanding power in an extended way to include notions of freedom shows how power works “from below.”

## Chapter 5

### Public Discourses, Illegality, and Personhood

Latinx undocumented immigration has historically been represented as a scapegoat for causing many social calamities in the American society. Latinx undocumented immigrants are blamed for damaging the American economy when they are accused by the media for taking the jobs of American citizens, and for migrating to the U.S. to take advantage of the social services. They are also blamed for bringing the worse aspects of humanity to the well-developed and civilized American society when they are named by politicians as “bad hombres”, rapists, criminals, and drug dealers. Nonetheless, these dilemmas reflect the negative consequences of neoliberal and racist policies that constitute America’s modern socioeconomic model. Latinx undocumented immigration is a symptom of broken global and national economies and political systems that fail to provide suitable living conditions to its citizens in Latin America. The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) highlights in the article “Illegal Immigration and its Effects on the lives of Americans,”<sup>4</sup> the consequences of undocumented immigration and states:

“\* Illegal Immigration causes an enormous drain on public funds; \*The needs of endless numbers of poor, unskilled illegal entrants undermine the quality of education, healthcare and other services for Americans; \*Job-desperate illegal immigrants unfairly depress the wages and working conditions offered to American workers, hitting hardest at minority

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/issue/presidential-administration/trump-administration-immigration-accomplishments>  
Accessed in February, June, and July 2020.

workers and those without high school degrees; \*Illegal immigration contributes to population growth, overwhelming communities by crowding classrooms, consuming already limited affordable housing, and increasing the strain on precious natural resources like water, energy, and forestland; \*Illegal Immigration undermines national security, allowing potential terrorists to hide in the same shadows.

FAIR's positioning is presented here as an example of anti-immigrant ideology that constitutes a common representation of Latinx undocumented immigrants in the United States. Such depiction is reproduced by the media and taken to its limits by President Donald Trump, who embraces an anti-immigrant positioning as one of his strongest emblems since he launched his presidential campaign in 2015.

In this chapter, I explore how broad social discourses and policies incessantly circulate demonizing and criminalizing perceptions of Latinx undocumented immigrants. These narratives deeply impact their sense of personhood, for they are internalized in the form of fear and guilt. I interpret some of President Donald L. Trump, Jr.'s violent discourses to situate him as a fear producing political symbol that effectively conveys the image of "illegality" in relation to Latinx immigrants. I will also discuss the critical landscape that undocumented Latinx immigrants had to experience during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I will also show how the pandemic allowed for more transparency of structural inequality and the vulnerability of this disempowered population.

## Construction of Illegality

President Donald Trump's administration agenda has severely normalized criminality in relation to immigration. The attribution of criminality toward Latinx immigrants has been sculpted through pervasive public discourse as well as the enforcement of executive orders since he assumed the presidency in 2016.<sup>5</sup> Criminalization of Latinx undocumented immigrants has led to restrictive immigration policies and human rights abuses both at the border and across the United States, such as inside detention centers. President Trump has produced a deeply racist and dehumanizing portrayal of Latinx undocumented people since his 2015 presidential campaign. In his words,

“When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people ... But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting ... They're sending us not the right people.”<sup>6</sup>

His explicit racism and symbolic violence toward this population generates in the collective imaginary a homogenic category under which anyone who is Latinx and undocumented falls. The diversity of each individual is erased after arriving in the United States when given a stigmatizing, stereotyping label. Nevertheless, such kinds of assumptions have been refuted by

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/issue/presidential-administration/trump-administration-immigration-accomplishments>. Accessed in February, June, and July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/>. Accessed in March 2020.

empirical studies that show that foreign-born individuals have less involvement in criminal activity and far lower rates of incarceration than the native-born (Chouhy 2020:1012). Donald Trump's brutal rhetoric on undocumented immigration seemingly ignores facts,<sup>7</sup> but has led some of his fanatic supporters to take his commentaries literally and act violently. There are far more probabilities of engaging in violent behavior if there is no identification with the other- or if someone does not recognize the other as equally human (De Leon 2015: 26). Trump's most violent and explicitly dehumanizing language has been reserved for Latinx immigrants.<sup>8</sup> His view represents a traditional and conservative American perspective, shared by a large percentage of people living in the country and many times intimately linked to ideas of nationalism (Lozano 2019: 21; Chouhy 2020: 1013).

### **COVID-19 Pandemic as a Breaking Point**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the whole world at a global and local level, not only by representing a high risk for health but also because of its immediate and future economic resonances. It has also worsened the long-standing systemic health and social inequities. Latinx, Black, and Indigenous communities show higher rates of hospitalization or death from COVID-19 than non-Latinx white populations.<sup>9</sup> Latinx undocumented communities find themselves at a

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/22/622540331/fact-check-trump-illegal-immigration-and-crime> Accessed in June 2020.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/02/trumps-most-insulting-violent-language-is-often-reserved-immigrants/> Accessed in March 2020.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html> Accessed in June 2020.

particularly difficult crossroad with increased risk compared to whites. They experience health precariousness, job insecurity and general economic hardship in their “normal lives” (Ornelas et.al. 2020). The pandemic presents yet as another opportunity to further stigmatize undocumented immigrants as a public health hazard to the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Anthropologist Jason De Leon states that the construction of citizenship and non-citizenship is intrinsically related to the configuration of sovereignty within the limits of a nation. He further that sovereign authorities reclaim their power through the ability to declare “states of exception,” which “allows the state to suspend legal protections afforded to individuals while simultaneously unleashing the power of the state upon them” (De Leon 2015:26). In the same sense, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown to be a state of exception, where sovereign authorities as the government and the police have the ability to materialize their anti-immigrant agenda under the “justification” of a pandemic (Garcini et.al. 2020:230).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major breaking point in American history; it symbolized the unveil that hid privilege, social hierarchies, and racist assumptions used to justify social inequalities and oppression. Latinx undocumented population is persecuted and being held in detention centers across the country in unsanitary conditions that allow an easy spread of the virus;<sup>11</sup> and that is getting increasing attention from the media as political tensions grow for the coming presidential election of 2020. Latinx undocumented immigrants are more scared about

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspension-entry-immigrants-nonimmigrants-persons-pose-risk-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus/> Accessed in June 2020.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.latinousa.org/2020/06/18/covid-19-cases-quadruple/> Accessed in June 2020.

their economic situation and deportation<sup>12</sup> than they are of contracting COVID-19 (Gomez 2020). Even though a human's value should not be awarded based on their economic contribution to a country, their role as essential workers for the American economy has been finally somehow recognized even by the media.<sup>13</sup> However, they remain completely vulnerable and unprotected as they are more exposed to contagious, have more underlying (physical and mental) health problems, and are denied economic aid and access to health (Ornelas et.al. 2020: 295). Structural racism impacts Latinx undocumented immigrants' health disproportionately in a holistic manner; as many of them have been affected by the service industries that had to close their doors by CDC policies, and are excluded from the social safety network (Page et.al., 2020).

### **Embodying Illegality**

Many participants of my ethnographic study commented that they “fear Trump” as they fear the police. Fear was a word used by them to convey a sense of vulnerability that abounded in their everyday lives. It also referred to a lack of control over their own lives- they were at the mercy of the police or the U.S. policies, which at any given moment could change their existences forever– and that, of course, terrified them. This fear, however, was something to which they got to become accustomed to. All my participants used the word “illegal” to refer to themselves. Although the process of migration and socialization into the American culture has

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<sup>12</sup> <https://theconversation.com/why-latino-citizens-are-worrying-more-about-deportation-133216> Accessed in June 2020.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/us/coronavirus-undocumented-immigrant-farmworkers-agriculture.html> , <https://time.com/5823491/undocumented-immigrants-essential-coronavirus/> Both accessed in June 2020.

been different for each- thus tailoring their subjective ways to understand and cope with reality-, they have integrated the category of illegal as a part of their personhood. Belen experiences the label of illegal immigrant as a burden in her life, a personal characteristic that she must hide in order to be treated better by others. She explains to me as if she was apologizing that “everything she does is legal, except the fact that *she is illegal*.” Camilo, instead, has normalized that label to the point that he is able to separate it from his behavior, making it just his migratory status. He believes that if he follows civil rules, there is no reason for the police to persecute him. Natalia, like Camila, has embodied illegality very deeply- it is a spiritual battle the one she endures to accept her subjective and objective reality as “the place she has here”, and make the best she can with the small square of opportunities that she has been allowed to have. Their experiences show a small portion of the myriad of ways humans deal with broader discourses that are meant to modify individual subjectivities to make them fit in specific structures. The symbol of Donald Trump is a strong reminder of their inferiority. Anti-immigrant narratives in the United States are modern tales that have been largely normalized as part of our Western cultures as justifications of colonialist and white superiority that remain at the basis of our sociopolitical and institutional structures. These larger and sovereign powers are able to assert their control over their territories by continuously reconstructing individual subjectivities. Latinx undocumented immigrants find themselves at the intersection of categories such as race, gender, and nationality, that are vulnerable to different forms of violence. The embodiment of these kinds of narratives that refer to “illegality” as a “personal characteristic” represents incredibly difficult challenges for Latinx peoples, as it poses limitations to the personal wellbeing and their human and spiritual freedom.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

This work does not pretend to establish a generalized truth in regard to Latinx undocumented experiences. Rather, I want to further the existing debate through opening a window that shows the dichotomies that exist in the American society between legal and illegal when these binary labels are applied to people. These two constructs should not be used to categorize and signify humans. It strips them of their humanity. There is nothing intrinsic to a human being that could be termed as illegal. The ever-widening range of experiences of Latinx undocumented immigrants and the stories they tell show the articulation between the legal American system, American culture and values, and the social hierarchies that individuals occupy.

My research was shaped by my positionality as a Latina migrant and my close experience with undocumented immigrants. I learned from an intimate perspective how anti-immigrant narratives affects the subjectivities of the people I love and how their freedom has been impacted by fear and stigma because of their migratory status. I want to contribute to scholarly and activist discussions by humanizing Latinx undocumented immigrants and making visible their precariousness and suffering. It is important to identify categorical differences between humans inhabiting the same nation to enhance the potential to create better policies that acknowledge differences while promoting equality and justice.

**Table 1:**

**Participants' Demographics**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Mode of Entry</b>	<b>Time living in the U.S.</b>
Natalia	26	Argentinean	Tourist Visa	3 years
Camilo	31	Uruguayan	Tourist Visa	8 years
Belen	32	Colombian	Tourist Visa	4 years
Rosario	29	Argentinean	Tourist Visa	17 years
Magdalena	63	Argentinean	Tourist Visa	17 years
Santiago	70	Argentinean	Tourist Visa	20+ years
Joaquin	30	Argentinean	Tourist Visa	19 years
Sebastian	35	Argentinean	Toursit Visa	19 years
Bettiana	28	Venezuelan	Tourist Visa	5 years

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