

First, Second, and Third Person Speaking: A Generational Approach to Understanding Immigration

Rebecca Mercado-Thornton
Oakland University

Immigration is a polemic issue. Undocumented people have been scapegoated for a variety of economic and political conditions. This article serves as a step back from macro-level policy discourses and engages readers with a more storied approach to understanding the nuances of immigration. Through several micro-level discussions, I attempt to put the human experience at the forefront of the discussion surrounding immigration, rights, and social justice. In this article, I share my own family history on the path to citizenship and compare it to a present-day story in order to show how the historical context frames the story of the immigrant experience.

Keywords: Immigration, Storytelling, Citizenship

Omnipresent, when I was growing up, were residual influences of my abuelo's immigration to the U.S.—he was both overly frugal and slightly affectionate. As a Mexican immigrant, he made a conscious effort in every social interaction to prove his “American-ness.” He trained out his accent, swapped out his tortillas for white slices, and moved his family out into nice, white suburbs—attempting to exterminate any indication of his foreignness.

His daughter, my mother, was a small indigenous-looking woman with a flatter face and undeniably darker skin. She was the un-malleable piece that always left the puzzle of my grandfather's American Dream unfinished. As far as the “good white folk” in the suburb were concerned—she was black.

And then there's me. Skin so fair that my passing privileges always remains intact and unquestioned, although I have always begrudged this.

Through the “showing” of my own Latina identity, I dig back into the collective memory of my abuelo's immigration story, to the assimilation pressures faced by my mother in the 60s, to “tell” my story about the multi-generational discourses



of immigration. I then compare my family story of immigration (with the plushy comfort of citizenship), to the story of my friend, a DREAMer struggling to be recognized as a “legitimate” immigrant. This comparison leads to my argument about the meaningfulness of the *how* and the *when* immigration occurs and ends, which shapes the discourse of identity in the American consciousness.

The Original DREAMer

On the first official week of my “big girl” job (as my family likes to call it) at Oakland University, which is just north of Detroit, I was confronted with a situation that continues to give me pause. Returning from our university center with my Subway bag swinging in my hand, I

approached the concrete stairs, which lead to the patio outside of the hall where my office is located. As I slowly ascended the stairs, I asked for permission to cross the patio from the man I saw bent over, fixing the bricks of the patio design. Presuming that he was Latino based upon his familiar skin complexion, the type of manual labor he was doing, and the white man standing above him seemingly “supervising” his work, I asked him in Spanish, “esta bien para pasarlo?”

When the man looked up at me, I was startled by the deep crevices of his crow’s feet and the lines that chiseled parentheses around his mouth. It was not until I saw his face that his age became visceral to me. Where I come from, this man looked old enough to be at least my father, maybe even my grandfather. Before I saw his face, I naively assumed that because of the arduous nature of his work, and the much younger man standing over him, that he would be younger. His facial expression also mimicked my surprise, he was shocked that I spoke to him—and in Spanish, “Ah! Habla en español?”

I sheepishly responded as I always do to this question, “algunas veces.” I say sometimes, because most of the time my Spanish fails me, especially at the most inopportune times. And to be fair, it is perpetually spotty, due to a lifetime of infrequent use. After my response, his face immediately transformed from shock to inquisitive. He stood up from his bent position to look me in the eye. He moved to stand uncharacteristically close to my face for a professional context, but very familiarly close, as is customary in my family. His eye contact with me was intense yet comfortable. He began to question me, “Un estudiante o un maestro?” He looked back at the building and gestured towards it with one hand, and then back at me, he asked me if this was “my building”?

He was not interested in where I come from or how I learned Spanish, which are the primary questions I am presented with because of my fair skin and “unauthentic” accent. He wanted to know who *I* was in relationship to *this* building, which he has been working on for the past few days. The

building which he has so easily blended into, becoming almost invisible to the dozens of employees who pass in and out of it, daily. “Un maestro,” I said, sucking in air, carefully balancing the tightrope between confidence (what I need in academia to be taken seriously) and modesty (what my cultural background has taught me to value).

He allowed a small smile, “en serio?” he asked slowly and rhetorically. Quickly becoming cognizant of the transgression he committed, outwardly expressing emotion, his mouth closed to hide his teeth. He pursed his lips to give me the look, a look I had spent my entire childhood searching for. The look, for me, is just enough; it is not gushing, or dramatic, it actually presents itself to the untrained eye as a simple approval. But the look was always partnered with a gentle head nod, and we just knew. But, en este momento, rather than be confined to just the look that our culture expects and permits from men, he allowed me to the opportunity to hear the words. He said to me, “usted me hace orgulloso,” or “you make me proud.”

As much as I tried to make meaning from this interaction, I became hastily aware of the sandy blonde haired man who was once standing above him, watching him work, now watching us share this moment. The expression on the boss’s face was not so much frustrated, although his worker was no longer even remotely pretending to be busied. After the boss and I crossed eyes, the man stepped back from me and said, “Estoy *aquí* para que usted puede estar *allá*” or “I am *here* so that you can be *there*,” pointing again towards the building where my office is.

To motion the end of the conversation, he bent back down and picked back up his tools, and resumed his work. I turned away slowly, walked a few steps, and pulled back a heavy metal door. I was greeted by the cool air of our air conditioning system. Once I was inside and out of sight, I looked out the glass door to see the same image of the one I stumbled upon earlier, the older Latino bent over on his knees applying cement to the bricks, and the younger white man standing above him close by, just watching.

Empowering Immigrant Stories

As I mentioned earlier, this situation continues to linger with me because it is so complicated. Yes, it is a clear and painful visual and storied representation that reaffirms the very real existence of racist and classist hierarchies that plague our society, even seemingly “progressive” academic ones. It does, as Casas and Santo (2012) claim in an earlier issue of this journal, indicate the very real problems that stem from un-kept promises of economic growth and development, on a variety of levels. And it also illustrates the never-ending class struggle that immigrants face not up until retirement, but up until death. However, this hyper-critical lens on this situation is not sharp enough to see all of the nuances present for me. What about the pride he found in me, without even knowing me or my family history? What about the idea the laborer presented, that I get to be *here*, because he is *there*? How does this micro-story speak to larger “logical and ethical questions” about migration and human mobility (Casas & Santo, 2012, p. 2)?

Many immigrant rights advocacy groups are recognizing the power of storytelling; encouraging and empowering immigrants to share their stories (ReformImmigrationforAmerica.org, 2012; dreamactivists.org, 2012). Groups in my community in Detroit, specifically, but also at the national level in D.C., are organizing workshops to train community leaders to encourage immigrants to speak up. As DreamActivist.org—a youth-led, multicultural social media hub working towards the adoption of the DREAM Act—puts it on their website: “Public narratives are stories told to inspire others to act. They communicate our values through the language of the heart and translate those values into action” (dreamactivists.org, 2012). Their website contains the largest archive of stories from young people all over the United States who are undocumented and fighting to protect the pursuit and achievement of their dreams. They believe, as I believe, that “stories are our biggest weapon in the fight to achieve our dreams” (dreamactivists.org, 2012).

Stories have real power for transformative change. In a special issue centered on storytelling and social justice, organizing author, Caren Schnur Neile (2009), writes that, “Storytelling is the most effective, not as a quick fix, but rather as a catalyst for change” (p. 69). It is through storytelling that we create paradigm shifts. A good storyteller can make us imagine ourselves in situations thought to be unimaginable. A good storyteller can move someone from intolerance and injustice to acceptance and advocacy. A good storyteller can move someone from “shrill voices of hate” to booming demands to get back to “principles of equality” (Casas & Santo, 2012, pp. 2-3). This is how we make a social issue such as immigration, which has been so polarized by policy makers and politicians, accessible. This is how we can make people recognize the privileges of citizenship—see the struggle as, “not a result of choice, nor conditioned by ‘natural’ advantages or disadvantages that may lie on the other side of the origin-destination divide” (Casas & Santos, 2012, p. 2), but as a real social dilemma begging for real substantive, practical, and fair change.

Let me offer one story amongst stories to begin this shift. Below details the story of how I arrived *here*. What were the workings, even before I was an idea, which gave me this life trajectory? How do I have the ability to sit in an air-conditioned office as a Mexican-American tenure-track professor under the age of 30? What opportunities were afforded to me because of the sacrifices of my abuelo and my mother, the availability of affirmative action programming, and all the invisible and unearned social services that citizenship often guarantees? This micro-story I offer for scrutiny, is not for the sake of “decorative flourish,” as Ruth Behar (1996) calls it, but rather a small contribution to reveal the “unearned” (McIntosh, 1988) and unwarranted privileges I was given because someone else struggled through being displaced, unwelcomed, and discriminated against. By exhuming my citizenship privilege, I hope to disintegrate the power of the dominant narrative of immigration that are popularized, and redesign a new story that

promotes political and social solidarity for those on both sides of the divide.

Arriving

My abuelo traveled to this country through, what dominant culture now accepts as, a legally “legitimate” means of immigration. My abuelo’s name was Manuel Mercado de Acévedo. He came to the United States in the 1940s through the “Bracero Program” (Snodgrass, 2011), which was initiated during World War II to aid in agriculture. Because poor American men were summoned to war in Europe and East Asia, and in order to prevent agricultural production from plummeting, the government needed bodies to harvest the fields for its citizens. Franklin Roosevelt negotiated with then Mexican President, Manuel Avila Camacho, for temporarily loose immigration policies. Franklin Roosevelt allowed Mexican men to immigrate to the U.S. for farm work, with the assumption that once the war was over, they would return back to Mexico (Snodgrass, 2011). As a farm laborer, working beside and amongst other Mexican men, my abuelo, could socialize in his native tongue, and eat foods that reminded him of home. During that time, my abuelo heard rumors from other workers that more money and better working conditions were possible in the automobile industry in Detroit. Through a series of walking stints and hitchhiking, he made his way to Detroit.

On the assembly lines, my abuelo stood with black, brown, but mostly white men. Standing side-by-side, both on the lines, black, brown, and white men worked together with a shared goal. But with this introduction of people of other races, my abuelo’s attitude about his Mexican identity began to shift, like many other nonwhite people—he felt the pressure of assimilation (Thompson, 2001). Through major socialization processes like joking, teasing, and even bullying my abuelo stopped speaking Spanish, learned and spoke exclusively in English, and instructed my abuela to stop packing tortillas in his and his children’s lunchboxes. When he, my abuelo, and his children moved to a mostly white neighborhood, his American Dream seemed

further achieved and solidified, and he would not return. In an oppressively white, racially homogenous section of the city, he forbade his children from speaking Spanish, even in the privacy of their home, anglicized the pronunciation of their names, and instructed them to dress, speak, eat, and act like all of the other children in the neighborhood.

My mother, who had skin shades browner than most blacks, and hair almost as kinky, could not hide her Mexican identity, even though she tried desperately to do so in that neighborhood. Never really blending into my abuelo’s singular interpretation of the American Dream, and his desire to be an oh-so-slightly-more-tanned version of the *Cleavers*, my mother rebelled and left his home far too early and pregnant.

My father, who only stayed around long enough to get my mother pregnant four more times, left us not too long after. And thus, my family was one of those unlucky anomalies, managing to roll back a generation in terms of social class. Incredulously, my brothers, my sister, and I managed to grow up on my mother’s minimum wage salary from Taco Bell. The pinnacle of the American Dream, to be able to give your children an even better life than your own, was work undone by my mother in six critical years. We grew up in a neighborhood that would have made June and Ward roll up their and lock their doors.

Growing up with a mother who had skin as dark as the black people in our neighborhood (also racially homogenous, but in darker hues), but performed a more assimilated identity, my brothers, my sister and I were confused when we were small children. A similar autobiographical experience is documented in Richard Rodriguez’s (2012) book, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*. Rodriguez discusses being brown as a paradox, a state of in-betweenness, that I have come to learn and feel. Like Rodriguez posits, we saw ourselves as we were: brown; neither black like our neighbors nor white like we felt the pressure to act. We knew that our ethnic identity was Mexican, but we minimally performed cultural

traditions that would distinguish us as such. We beat piñatas on special occasions, we knew only *dichos* in Spanish, and we ate *nopales*, but only for holidays. We were both conscious of our Mexican heritage and/but conscious of our intricacies that made us American. I never felt wholly “American” nor wholly “Mexican” as a small child. So when my classmates would ask me if I was “mixed,” confused by my mother’s dark skin and my own ambiguous (but light) skin tone, I would reply with the most simple and obvious answer, “yes.” Although I knew my answer was only a hybrid between what they wanted to hear and what I felt inside. Choosing the “right” race box on standardized tests for me was a constant source of existential anxiety.

As a teenager, a voracious reader, and my family’s declared “rebel,” I began searching for information that explained my marginal racial identity. Finally audacious enough to ask my abuelo the questions that were not to be asked, I learned my family’s history, my country’s history, *our* history. I pieced together bits and scraps of information I was able to gather from my abuelo, my great aunt Lorreta, and my tías, and contextualized them with the history I was learning. I realized that my family was currently living and performing the residual consequences of assimilation that had to occur (both voluntarily and involuntarily) during the 1950s and 60s in Detroit and other metropolitan cities in the Midwest. Non-white immigrants had been forced to and pushed themselves to relinquish any cultural practices that distinguished them as something other than white America (Delgado, 1999; Thompson, 2001). The pressure to assimilate came from a variety of social contexts—in my abuelo’s work at Ford; in school from white teachers; and in interactions with neighbors. My abuelos learned very quickly what lessons and values they should and should not impart to their children. This inevitably trickled down to my generation and me.

While in high school, I knew I had to regain the language that had been spoken and lived just a generation before mine. I never missed a semester or a class period of Spanish. I knew I would need it

for the travels I would make to reconnect with my extended family still living in the Zacatecas countryside that my abuelo had left as a teen. And when I was old enough, dumb enough, and had enough money, I traveled to the Mexican countryside to reconnect with my roots. In Mexico, I was able to (albeit temporarily) hone my Spanish skills, meet my distant relatives, and just become familiar with the living conditions and scenery of my ancestors. Connecting with the landscape and the practices of my people became especially important to me after my mother passed away when I was fourteen.

As a result of a combination of uncontrollable factors—my mother’s passing, my Mexican-American heritage, being the first person in my family to go to college—I was afforded a lucrative scholarship, which partially funded my overpriced undergraduate education. The opportunity to apply for this scholarship, the Multicultural Advancement Scholarship, was mailed to my front door simply because I checked two boxes on my college application: Citizen of the United States and Hispanic. Receiving this scholarship, and the federal loans (that only citizens are eligible for), were *the* reasons I was able to attend. Feeling obliged to the university because of that scholarship, I appear in numerous advertising brochures and other marketing materials that make grandiose claims about the “diversity” of that institution.

Beyond being a part of the marketing deception, I was also employed by offices such as Minority Student Services and the Multicultural Education Center. But I enjoyed college and did fairly well. Because I performed the “model minority” stereotype, and I expressed interest in becoming an academic, I was encouraged to apply for the McNair Scholars Program. This affirmative action program helps students who are low-income, first generation, and underrepresented prepare for and get accepted to PhD programs. As a McNair scholar, I had access to worlds that I never knew existed; the world of people with parents with advanced degrees, who drove Range Rovers, and had two forks at the dinner table. The

McNair program bequeathed the skills and scores I needed to compete with people from those worlds: Graduate Record Examination practice tests, personal statement workshops, and a thesis simulation. But most critically, the McNair Program gave me the confidence to even apply to a PhD program. I, indubitably, have arrived *here*, through the advantages of social services and affirmative action programs. The future of these programs (because of the color of the population they most often serve) remains indefinitely tentative.

Departing

My experience as a second generation Mexican-American is not unique. I only hope I have explicated the historical and social conditions well enough for readers to understand and contextualize the desire, but also the necessity, for assimilation processes to occur in our grandparents' and even our parents' generations. Presently, the social and contemporary conditions make possible and even encourage a reconnection to one's marginal cultural heritage. There are real financial incentives to being Mexican and/but American. In this supposedly, "post-racial" "post-affirmative action" society, one's race is not something that holds us back, but rather supposedly lifts one up (Orbe, 2011). Tokenism, as in the Oprah case that Cloud (1996) discusses, is thought to be her gift, an opportunity for her to rise up against the economic conditions that previously oppressed African Americans, not a downfall. And from the stories above, I too have benefitted from being a token.

To extend this conversation to a different context, I often hear my students proudly exclaiming their Irish or Italian heritage, although they cannot even identify the generation or even the time period that their ancestors arrived to the United States. Having the right "ethnic" background is no longer taboo and keeping certain kinds of cultural traditions alive is celebrated in public spheres. The economic precedence to (re)learn another language is undeniable. Potential employees who are bilingual are seen as valuable

company assets, not as racial liabilities. But to be clear, how one learned that Other language is just as important as whether or not one knows it. There are still good and bad ways of acquiring language skills, learning an Other language in a controlled environment like the classroom is notable and even a prized "exotic." But knowing another language as a result of one's suspicious citizenship could cost a job. There are right and wrong ways of speaking, even if you were born right here in the United States.

Those, like myself, living a self-proclaimed "Mexican-American" identity in the United States, live the very real privileges of the second half of that "hyphenated identity" (Visweswaran, 1994). These privileges are afforded to us because our ancestors immigrated; diversity promoting scholarships, cultural heritage months, and affirmative action initiatives, are often denied to our more recently-immigrated brothers and sisters. We share an unusual tension, the gift and the burden of being Other in a modern America that prides certain kinds of diversity. The public acceptability of having explicit pride about one's cultural heritage is a gift to millennials who are simply born on the "right" side of an artificially official border. We are "given permission" by the dominant culture to re-appropriate some languages, some customs, and some traditions once performed and lived by previous generations, so long as we have the papers to prove it.

But in a society that prides itself on having numbers that reflect certain kinds of diversity, how do we simultaneously exist in the same United States that elects California representatives who say things like, "I hate illegals" or devises plans, such as Herman Cain's to build electric fences along the border?

The New DREAMers

In 2005, under George W. Bush's administration, in an attempt to tighten up homeland security, the federal government passed the "Real ID Act." The Real ID Act was detrimental to my city, in particular, because several families I know and am related to suffered

major job losses as a result of its passing. The Real ID Act requires a new standard in order to obtain a driver's license—one must provide either a social security card and/or documentation of “legal” status. Beyond a number of jobs that were lost as a result of The Real ID Act, a lingering fear was created among undocumented people. The very real and justified fear was that while driving to and from a job (if you still had one that is), you could be pulled over for a minor traffic infraction or an unnoticed taillight, arrested, separated from your family, and deported.

A local, young, outspoken undocumented activist in Detroit, Sergio, discusses this fear that I mention. On a snowy February day, Sergio agrees to meet with me at, what has become the community gathering place, Café con Leche, in Southwest Detroit. Tourists and outsiders know Southwest Detroit as the city's “Mexicantown.” But unlike the proliferation of “authentically” Mexican restaurants, Mexicantown, is very true to its name. Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of undocumented immigrants living in the city, the Alliance for Immigrant Rights and Reform (herein AIR), estimates that about 100,000 undocumented people live within the city's limits (michiganimmigrationreform.org, 2012). In Southwest, you will hear more Spanish than English, you can purchase tacos de lengua for fifty cents from a taqueria on the corner, and you can find thousands of square-inch painted tiles arranged on the side of a building to display an elaborate mural of Cesar Chavez. But in Southwest, between and amongst the rows of dilapidating shotgun homes, is a lingering sense of silence. People here are immobilized by a fear, a fear that can only be understood by those who fall outside of the protection that citizenship gives.

Sergio is one of the brave ones, one of the very few people who live and work in the city and are not afraid of boisterously advocating for immigration reform though he has no guaranteed protection from deportation. Sergio and his family came to the United States on a tourist visa when Sergio was just eight years old, and just “overstayed their welcome” as he puts it. His

father, like my abuelo, thought that he had finally achieved the American Dream after just a few years of being in the U.S.; bought a house in his the suburbs, had a steady paycheck, and sent his kids to a good public school. His dream collapsed after the Real ID Act was passed. His employers demanded documentation he could not furnish. And so Sergio's family lost their house and the family moved back to Southwest, an overt reminder of the limits designed to keep those who are born on the other side of the divide in their place.

Sergio, for many years, resigned to this fear that unifies this section of the city until a flier from AIR found him. Now, he and others from AIR host and facilitate “house parties” which debunk popularized myths held about undocumented immigrants, they educate immigrants about their rights and services extended to them through grassroots organizations in the community, and they train people to organize on behalf of practical and fair immigration reform. He is one of the young and handsome faces on the front lines, advocating not just for DREAMers, but for the protection of rights for all undocumented people, and herein lies one of the many problems of proposed reform. In 2012, after the failing of the DREAM Act (The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act), Obama signed a memo, which deferred action for certain undocumented young people who arrived to the United States as children (more commonly known as, “DACA”). As such, in Southwest those most often subject to harassment and deportation are men in their 20s, 30s and 40s, who are oftentimes the primary financial providers for their homes. These men are outside of “the certain” undocumented young people that the Obama administration signed to protect.

As a ravenous consumer and analyst of national discourse, as a granddaughter, cousin, friend, neighbor, and advocate for many undocumented people, I posit that the experience of immigrants living and struggling presently in the United States is not shared by previous generations of immigrants. The story has since

shifted from Lady Liberty exclaiming, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free....I lift my lamp beside the golden door” to criminalization and punishment for those who now make the journey. I am not capriciously arguing that Lady Liberty’s sentiments were ever meant to be extended to those with more undesirable skin colors, but the level of fear and shame that our present day undocumented brothers and sisters live and dwell with, is incomparable. And let me be clear about how the acceptability of immigration has a long intricate history tied to economic incentive. Acceptability ultimately swinging the pendulum of immigration policy to the side that benefits the political economy of the United States, but this level of xenophobia is a new breed cultivated in age-old hate.

Beyond the fear and shame that burdens undocumented people in my city, is the very real terrorism perpetrated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Several months ago, while dropping off his daughter at her school, a man who I will call, “Hector” was targeted and detained by two ICE agents. This negates their own policies—not to target parents on their way to schools and churches—but the amnesty that these spaces were supposed to offer are not being respected. We are making orphans out of the children who attend our local elementary schools. ICE agents, I believe, are not especially cruel in my city. I strongly suggest that these unacceptable practices occur more often, across the United States, than the dominant culture chooses to acknowledge. When I asked Sergio about Hector’s situation specifically, he responded; “It’s sad, yes...but I hate to say this, it’s like...we’re almost used to being treated this way...” Sergio acknowledges that he does not have a family he is fiscally responsible for; however, his silence ended the day he “got fed up with” living in constant fear. He says: “I just got sick of it, worrying on my way to and from work if I was going to get pulled over, I hated feeling like I had a target on my back; that’s no way to live.”

This constant fear is ingrained so deeply in the consciousness of undocumented people that some

have accepted it as natural; people have gotten so “use to being treated this way.” Sergio attended middle and high school with students who share his story but remain silent to the rampant injustices, which infect and manifest in our community: unfair labor practices, dehumanizing working conditions, detainment, arrest, and deportation. Most of my life, and evident during my conversation with Sergio, it has been difficult for me to imagine how and why so many people in our community would remain completely noiseless about an existence so laced with fear that people are afraid to drive their own cars, walk their daughter to school down the street, or speak up about workplace atrocities in the same city that led the bloody fight for autoworker’s rights?

My abuelo was part of that cacophony—very outwardly indignant about the systematic mistreatment of autoworkers *because he could be*. He had already earned the trust of his brothers of the line, through time spent and foreignness tucked away, living under an entirely different zeitgeist, and privileged with economic conditions that did not force the public to point fingers in blame. He did not operate in the everyday with the trepidation of being detained on the street, handcuffed in front of his children, and uprooted from his home. Due to the robust economic conditions of the United States, and the auto industry in Detroit specifically, he was able to define himself a citizen. Let us not underestimate the power of political economy in shaping personal and national identity.

Immigration Then and Now

Discourses that prohibit people already living in the United States of citizenship and naturalization need to be exposed, redirected, and amended. It is these discourses—national, economic, and personal—that serve as the very real barriers of obtaining citizenship and all its privileges. When we have the protection that citizenship offers, we can speak up about the injustices that have become epidemic. We can assemble to ensure that people are paid fair wages, that worker’s rights are not just a catchphrase but a reality, and human dignity is restored. How do we

get to this place without the deep sacrifices of assimilation, as was my abuelo's plight, and under economic distress? I propose some suggestions that I believe would help expedite the process.

First, I propose that all first, second, and third generation immigrants (and beyond) recognize and deconstruct the privileges they enjoy, not as their birthright but as unconscious participation in a system that perpetuates power imbalances. We must become cognizant of the "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions [and] assurances" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 3) to which we have become conditioned not to acknowledge, because it eases our guilt about the lived conditions of our undocumented brothers and sisters. By acknowledging the privileges of citizenship, we inadvertently upset and redirect unequal distributions of power.

Part of acknowledging our citizen privileges, is making transparent the process. Chart your family history, familiarize yourself with the broken process of your family's arrival to the United States and share it with others as I have here. The function that sharing your family history creates is unearthing the myths surrounding the achievability of the American Dream and making unlikely connections. By exposing the story of how and why I arrived *here*, I am confessing that it would not have been possible without my abuelo leaving Mexico, assimilating to the dominant culture at the high cost of his identity to achieve some financial success, my mother withstanding overt acts of racism in the suburbs, and the myriad of social services and affirmative action programs. I admit that a countless number of factors, beyond my control, had to fall into place so that I could have the privilege to write this in an air-conditioned office, exclaiming my outrage about our broken immigration system and the injustices that it permits.

Second, once we have acknowledged our privilege and shared our stories we must stand in social solidarity with undocumented people. We must exercise our right to participate in democracy, in ways that hold politicians accountable for promises made and promises

broken, to lessen the exercises of terrorism perpetrated by organizations like ICE, and redesign real immigration reform which keeps families together and protected. Standing in social solidarity with our undocumented brothers and sisters also requires a complex understanding of why they might remain silent to injustices, and when we are obligated to raise the protest for and with undocumented people. When your community embraces undocumented leaders like Sergio, we should know when to stand behind them.

Lastly, we must work to redesign an everyday talk that exposes xenophobia and rework our exclusionary discursive practices. Beyond combating blatant words of hate, we must dispel commonplace language such as, "illegal aliens," "foreigners," and "invaders." This anti-immigration rhetoric is used too casually and too naturally. By appropriating this language, we are dehumanizing immigrants and it must stop. Whenever I speak about immigration, I espouse the language I am hoping others will adopt; "undocumented people," or even better, "our undocumented brothers and sisters," and always in terms that invites mutual understanding from the multiple stakeholders.

In the past year, I have not seen the man, whose work path I crossed, on the first week of my job. But I have mentioned the story, and every time I do, it evokes emotion. At times, I am angry, angry at a system of globalization that enlarges the gap between the rich and the poor. At times, I am saddened by the fact that a white man standing over a brown man "supervising" his work is more than just an eyesore, it's an allegory for life. At times, I am sad that certain men work strenuous jobs, such as laying bricks, while others at the same age think that "strenuous" is having to carry your own golf bag around the course. Other times, the story has a redemptive quality, the telling serves as a reminder to be proud of and humbled by the distance between *aqui* and *alla*.

References

- Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Casas, J. F., & Santo, J.B. (2012). Recent issues in Latino labor and migration around the globe: Interdisciplinary approaches. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 4(1), 1-6
- Cloud, D. L. (1996). Hegemony or concordance? The rhetoric of tokenism in "Oprah" Winfrey's rags-to-riches biography. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13, 115-137.
- Delgado, R. (1999). Citizenship. In R. D. Torres, L. F. Miron, & J. X. Inda (Eds.), *Race, identity, and citizenship: A reader* (pp. 249-252). Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Dreamactivist.org. (2012). *Our stories*. Retrieved February 2, 2013 from <http://www.dreamactivist.org/about/our-stories/>.
- McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. Retrieved February 2, 2013 from <http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>.
- Orbe, M. P. (2011). *Communication realities in a "post-racial" society: What the U.S. really thinks of President Barack Obama*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Reform Immigration for America. (2012). Retrieved February 2, 2013 from <http://reformimmigrationforamerica.org/about-us.html>
- Rodriguez, R. (2002). *Brown: The last discovery of America*. New York: Viking
- Schnur Neile, C. (2009). Storytelling and social change: Introduction to the special issue. *Storytelling, Self, & Society*, 5, 69-71.
- Snodgrass, M. (2011). The Bracero Program, 1942-1964. In M. Overmyer-Velásquez, (Ed.), *Beyond the border: The history of Mexican-U.S. migration* (pp. 79-201). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, H. A. (2001). *Whose Detroit? Politics, labor, and race in a modern American city*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Visweswaran, K. (1994). *Fictions of a feminist ethnography*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.