

Performing Precarity:
Decolonial Performance Collaborations
With Undocumented Communities

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Abstract

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This dissertation draws upon my field work relating to contemporary performance practices in the United States that collaborate with undocumented Latina/o immigrants. Drawing on the latest scholarship regarding undocumentedness, I argue that this population, due to the economic and social realities it faces, constitutes an internal colony of the US. In this regard, I frame the various processes related to these performances as “decolonial epistemologies,” à la scholars of decolonial thought such as Walter D. Mignolo, María Tlostanova, and others. Drawing upon first-person interviews with participants and spectators, as well as my own presence at several live performances, I argue that these artistic efforts (which manifest in the diverse media of theater, experimental video, and public ceremony) are designed not only to counter the mainstream discourse that regularly criminalizes and dehumanizes undocumented immigrants, but also to provide meaningful, inter-subjective learning experiences for those involved. Closely examining the social and economic contexts (as well as the aesthetics) of these unrecognized practices, this study offers a unique lens which shows how performance both garners a greater visibility for undocumented immigrants, and also effects positive change to their state of precarity in the US.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Media Representations of Undocumentedness in the 2016 Presidential Race	4
Undocumented Immigrants as an Internal Colony of the United States	9
Research Methods and Key Findings	23
Review of Literature	32
Breakdown of Chapters	60
Chapter One: <i>Undocumented, Super Doméstica, and Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle</i>	70
The Decolonial Impulses of Performance Collaborations with Undocumented Communities	70
Ends of the Theatrical Spectrum: <i>Undocumented</i> and <i>Super Doméstica</i>	74
The “Alteristic” Impulse of eSe Teatro’s “Dialogues with Dignity”	89
From Dialogues with Dignity to “Undocumentedface”	120
Chapter Two: Decoloniality in Community-Based Theater: Teatro Jornalero Sin <i>Fronteras’ El Niño Dios Viene pa’l Norte</i>	130
A Brief Historiography of Mexican Shepherds’ Plays	134
A Decolonial Pastorela’s Opening Night	142
Structural Challenges to Building Community Through Performance	157
Decoloniality of Text and Performance	171
Chapter Three: (Un)documentaries: The “Postmodern” Aesthetics of <i>Pulpo/Octopus</i> and <i>Maria TV</i>	185
Undocumentaries as a Distinctive Genre	186
Yoshua Okón’s <i>Pulpo</i> and Remunerated Memory	208
Rodrigo Valenzuela’s <i>Maria TV</i> – The Effectiveness of a Fragmented Aesthetic and Decolonial Communitas	223

Chapter Four: Anti-Ritual and a “Passive” Performance of Citizenship:	
The <i>Undocu-Graduation 2015</i>	246
The <i>Undocu-Graduation</i> as Decolonial Ritual	247
The Social Drama of US Legislation and the Unique Challenges facing Undocumented Youth	254
The Goals, Results, and Reflections of the <i>Undocu-Graduation</i>	269
Conclusion: An Uncertain Future	292
Works Cited:	301
Appendix One: Questions for Participants	317

PREFACE

First among the impulses to write about performance collaborations with undocumented communities was my reaction to a video entitled *The Amazing Racist: Mexicans*. The internet-based work, which I must have seen sometime around 2011, depicts a man (stand-up comedian Ari Shaffir) purposefully driving to a Home Depot-type store in Southern California to disingenuously contract with several day laborers in the store's parking lot. The presumably "comedic" video shows Shaffir negotiating with the laborers while claiming to have a considerable amount of carpentry work for them in helping him build a deck. After six of the men climb into the back of Shaffir's truck, he then proceeds to drive them directly to the Los Angeles County Immigration Office, from which the duped and panicked men flee on foot. Shaffir's "candid" cameraman continues to film as Shaffir himself doubles over laughing. Meanwhile the men he has described as "illegal," "animals," and "beaners" scatter in multiple directions.¹ The rather sadistic stunt was clearly designed to foment a notoriety for Shaffir's over-the-top comedy, especially given the fact that his "Amazing Racist" character has appeared in other similarly exploitive videos. And while the work may be considered provocative comedy, it could also be argued that the prank is generally dehumanizing and cruelly punitive for his "coaxed" and unwitting (even powerless) performers. This empathetic sentiment, along with its constant opposite (that undocumented immigrants are sub-human criminals that need to be punished) pervade the online comments that have trailed Shaffir's video on different websites over the years.² But one thing that never seems to be discussed in the online forums is how,

¹ See Ari Shaffir, "The Amazing Racist: Mexicans," *YouTube*, April 19, 2011, accessed May 15, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evZu9c1nJIw>

² See Latino Rebels, "#NoMames: The Ignorantly Shameful Mexican Immigration Prank Video," *Latino Rebels*, April 25, 2013, accessed May 12, 2017.

despite one's attitude toward undocumented immigration, the video itself seems to capture quite profoundly both the racist anxieties toward undocumented immigrants (or those *perceived* as undocumented), and the fearful state of social and economic precarity that undocumented immigrants contend with daily. After all, whether one finds Shaffir's admittedly "racist" prank funny or not, the comedian seems to have used "real" day laborers (and not paid performers), to make his somewhat indiscernible point. Thus, it was perhaps Shaffir's recorded, staged, and disseminated encounter that first planted a seed in my mind that would later become a study of experimental performances that collaborate with undocumented communities. Although I reached out to Shaffir for an interview, as I considered his video a unique "collaboration" that would fit within this study's parameters, he tersely claimed that the men in his video were not only *not* undocumented but in fact "were only actors playing a role."³ And while I tend to disbelieve Shaffir's claim, I have no way of knowing for sure, since he refused to participate in this study. Moreover, it is greater than "The Amazing Racist's" refusal to be interviewed that leads me to disbelieve his assertion that the men were merely actors. Rather, it is my personal intimacy with the kind of men and labor sites he used in his controversial work. My professional association with undocumented laborers bears some scrutiny here.

I moved to Los Angeles in 1999, and spent the next twelve years there, creating original theater and performance. Like most actors in L.A (or anywhere), I relied on a day job to make ends meet. Having learned from my dad the skills of carpentry, I quickly became aware of the quick moneymaking possibilities of building sets for independent films and theater. In late 2002, during a dry spell of set building, I decided to inquire after carpentry work at a residential remodel that was conveniently located across the street from my house. Needless to say, that's an

³ Ari Shaffir, email message to the author, July 19, 2015.

enticing commute for L.A. Minutes after inquiring, the job boss hired me on the spot. One of his first questions to me was: “Do you speak Spanish?” I fibbed (a little) and told him “Sure.” He replied, “Great, maybe you can talk to these guys for me,” referring to his group of Latino construction workers.

As it turned out, that simple act of crossing the street would prove to be one of the most pivotal decisions of my life. Over the next decade, I worked alongside a great number of undocumented workers, primarily from Mexico and Guatemala: carpenters, masons, painters, plumbers, drywallers, roofers, landscapers and housekeepers. Ultimately, I found myself in a management position at another small construction company, where my employer profited by my ever-increasing Spanish skills. He relied on me not only to manage the jobsites, but also (through the social networks of our undocumented workers) to recruit new laborers as needed. This involved my own complicity in the dubious practice of enjoining the men to acquire “*chueco*” (Spanish: “fake,” literally “twisted”) social security cards, which, if ever finding himself in a tight spot with the state Labor Board, the contractor could claim he “thought” were “real.” I can’t say I was surprised by these practices, but over the years I came to a deeper understanding of the conditions of undocumentedness, a condition, which, in all honesty, I had never really thought that much about prior to my time in L.A.

The friendships I built over this decade (2002-2012) still run deep, and it was surely due to my relationship with these men that I continued my education, beginning with Spanish language courses at the U.C.L.A. Extension program. We shared perhaps five hundred lunches together, swapping stories, cracking jokes, inefficiently trying to teach each other our respective languages, and, of course, *nos encabronamos el uno al otro*,⁴ as construction workers are wont to

⁴ Mexican Spanish (vulgar): pissing each other off.

do. One running joke among us, not without serious political undertones, was the fact that I had migrated to Los Angeles from a greater geographical distance than a good handful of them, and yet I was the one who was “legal.” Little did I know then that my association with these undocumented men, including socializing at soccer games, weddings, and dinners at each other’s homes, would have such a profound effect on my thinking, let alone lead me toward the topic of a doctoral dissertation after leaving construction to pursue graduate studies. It has become clear to me now, however, having completed this stage of my investigation into this unique phenomenon, that many others in the US who have either experienced undocumentedness themselves or have had intimate experiences with undocumented communities, are now engaged in speaking to that condition with experimental art, notably performance. Rather like “The Amazing Racist’s” provocative video, these practices seek out marginalized immigrants in order to expose the conditions of undocumentedness. And while this may be the case, the performance practices I’ve researched operate in solidarity with the communities they collaborate with, seeking to expose the *conditions* with which they contend, rather than the persons themselves. It is my hope that, in some ways, this report may indeed serve a purpose similar to its various case studies: to fashion a conduit wherein the embodied voices of the original collaborators can persist for a new audience.

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The artists and collaborators of these projects are too numerous to mention, but I strive to list the key people here. Without their dedication to their art, or their generosity with their own, uncompensated time, this project would not exist. After all, it is their work I am writing about. For the artists connected to eSe Teatro in Seattle, I am deeply grateful to Rose Cano, Meg Savlov, and Jose Carillo. From Casa Latina in Seattle, thanks to Haydee Lavariega and David Blanco. To all the committed artists involved with Teatro Jornalero (who fed me while I was in L.A.). I am *especially* indebted to the "TJ" artists Lorena Moran, Jose Alarcon, Juan Parada, Juan Carlos Munguia, and Cesar Ortega. To Michael John Garcés at Cornerstone Theater and Meaghan Ortiz at IDEPSCA, both in Los Angeles. Rodrigo Valenzuela, Yoshua Okón, Flor Alarcón, and Flower Mariana Krutina were all key to my understanding of the processes of

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To all the undocumented individuals who remain anonymous in this study, and to my undocumented friends who inspired it, this study is dedicated to you, *con ganas*.⁵

⁵ Spanish: with enthusiasm.

INTRODUCTION

“The undocumented *need* media! We do not have a media infrastructure that connects us, that builds empathy, that tells the story of this emerging population.”

- Jose Antonio Vargas⁶

This study is an investigation into a unique performance methodology that has recently emerged in the United States, and one which engages directly with one of the most contentious socio-political issues of our time, namely the experimental use of undocumented⁷ Latina/o⁸ immigrants as collaborators in works of performance. To necessarily delimit my case studies by

⁶ Jose Antonio Vargas, “Define American: My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant,” (Public Lecture) University of Washington, Kane Hall, Seattle, October 6, 2016). Vargas, widely regarded as the most high-profile undocumented immigrant in the US, was brought to the US as a child from the Philippines. Vargas won a Pulitzer Prize for reportage on the Virginia Tech massacre in 2006 and subsequently came out as undocumented. His media organization, Define American, launched in 2011, seeks to change the debate around immigration by offering a public platform to tell recorded stories of the undocumented community.

⁷ On various terminology (“undocumented,” “unauthorized,” “extra-legal,” and “illegal,”) see Lois Ann Lorentzen, introduction to *Hidden Lives and Human Rights: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration, Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation*, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), xiv. Lorentzen points out that many scholars prefer the term *unauthorized* rather than *undocumented* immigrant. She writes: “They observe, correctly, that many immigrants do indeed possess ‘documents,’ so it is not technically correct to call them undocumented.” However, the term undocumented, according to Lorentzen, is more “widely used and recognizable,” (xiv). I use the term undocumented throughout this study primarily because it is the term that most of the English-speaking undocumented immigrants I interviewed used to describe themselves. Most Spanish-speaking interviewees used the term “*sin papeles*,” (without papers), while others used terms such as “*indocumentada/o*,” and “*ilegal*.” For purposes of consistency, and its general correlation to “*sin papeles*,” I use undocumented.

⁸ The term “Latinx” (which challenges both the female/male gender binary implied by the term Latina/o and the supposedly “gender neutral” version of masculine words in Spanish) has recently gained traction in both academic and non-academic circles to be more inclusive to various gender identities. For this study, however, I have chosen to use the term Latina/o. The primary reason for this is that the term Latinx was never employed by any of the interview subjects, who, when describing themselves or their community, tended to use the terms Latina, Latino, or their specific nationality (e.g. *Mexicano*). Hence the use of the more progressive term Latinx in this particular study might risk imposing a post hoc category on the interview subjects.

geography and time, the performances examined herein all took place either in Los Angeles, California or Seattle, Washington between the years of 2010 and 2016. The main body of research is my own first-person interviews with participants and spectators, as well as my attendance at various performances themselves. Notably, these performance works span various media. While a number of these works fit within the category of community-based theater⁹ others would be considered experimental video, or even performance art. Yet another I consider to be a combination of political protest, communal celebration, and ritual. Though these performances span diverse media (theater, film, ritual), they are linked by the various qualities they share in varying degrees. For instance, each exhibits a core desire to bring greater public visibility to undocumented communities through the medium of performance. Each gestures toward the creation or maintenance of community, whether within or beyond the undocumented community itself. Each attempts, in its own way, to exorcise the various ontological realities related to undocumentedness, including (but by no means limited to) anxiety, isolation, precarious labor, and solidarity. Additionally, each is predicated on collaboration with undocumented immigrants, who either help write the performance text or act as performers themselves, sometimes fulfilling both roles. These collaborative processes, moreover, often unify the various participants (albeit sometimes temporarily) across class divisions in the creative act of joint artistic practice. And lastly here, there is a general claim on the part of these

⁹ Community-Based theater is distinct from Community Theater, which is a popular form of amateur theater in the US where community members produce plays that were often once popular on Broadway. Community-Based theater, on the other hand, is a theatrical model wherein professional theater artists collaborate with a specific community and generate an original theater piece centered on specific community issues. The participants often have a shared identity (ethnic, sexual, class) and their lives *directly* inform the subject matter of the play. See Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1 – 13.

performances that they offer platforms within the public sphere wherein the “voice/s” of the participants can be heard beyond the limited enclaves to which scholars of undocumented immigrants have referred as “shadowed” or “hidden” lives.¹⁰ These shared qualities, I argue, gesture toward the humanization of subjects that are regularly dehumanized by powerful discursive practices. Largely oppositional to both the rhetorical practices that regularly criminalize undocumented immigrants, as well as the neoliberal economic processes that have, in many ways, given rise to what some have termed the “immigration crisis,” the artists working in this unique field attempt to create visual, vocal, and embodied representations of undocumentedness that reveal complicated and personal realities. As these processes regularly (although by no means always) create positive, even “therapeutic” learning environments for their participants, I see them as “decolonial epistemologies” in the vein of recent philosophers associated with the decolonial turn.¹¹ As I argue below, undocumented immigrants essentially comprise an internal colony of the United States, and these performances militate against the existential realities of this colonial condition. As of this writing there has been no formal academic study of this phenomenon, or any cohesive attempt within the field of theater and performance studies to understand the emergence, aesthetics, or efficacy of these

¹⁰ Leo Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*, 3rd Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013); *Hidden Lives and Human Rights: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration*, Volumes 1-3, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014). For this study, I have drawn extensively on the all three volumes of *Hidden Lives and Human Rights*. This collection, published in 2014, contains over 35 essays by some of the leading scholars who study issues related to undocumented immigrants. The subjects in this volume span the history of undocumented immigration and US immigration law, gender and sexuality among undocumented immigrants, economic factors that impact and are impacted by undocumented immigrants, and the undocumented youth movement.

¹¹ In my view “decolonial epistemologies,” as advocated by thinkers such as Madina Tlostanova, Walter D. Mignolo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres equate to the liberating processes of collective knowledge formation at work within many of my case studies. The work of these decolonial thinkers is outlined in the Review of Literature below.

methodologically related projects. It has been my goal, therefore, to examine closely the methods, intentions, and receptions to a limited number of recent performances that fall under this category in hopes that this study may clarify for both scholars of performance and immigration how performance is wielded to publicly negotiate identities often referred to as “liminal” or “on the margin.”¹²

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF UNDOCUMENTEDNESS IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

It is pertinent to mention here that while the research for this study was being conducted (2015-2016), the issue of undocumented immigration reached new (and divisive) levels in the US public consciousness. While the prior decade was marked by heated—and performative¹³—debates over what many view as “illegal” immigration (ultimately resulting in little immigration reform at the federal level) the US presidential campaign of 2016 took the performance of undocumentedness to hitherto unseen heights. For instance, during a live, televised debate Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton was posed a question regarding immigration reform. Notably, the question was asked by the Guatemalan wife of an undocumented immigrant who had been deported five years before after being arrested for driving with an expired license. Also visible in the studio audience were the woman’s five children who had not seen their father

¹² Lorentzen, introduction, *Hidden Lives and Human Rights: Volume 1*, x; Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, *Labor and Legality: An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹³ Movements in both the “anti” and “pro”-immigrant camps often took on performative aspects in the early 2000s. For example, the Minuteman Project of “volunteer” border protectors in 2004, and the protests of the DREAMER (undocumented youth) movement both derived an efficacy from embodiment, spectacularity, media coverage, and ideological representations. See Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 132-151. See also Walter J. Nicholls, *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 1-19.

since his deportation. Interestingly, the drama of this staged moment seemed to play into the hands of both Clinton supporters and her detractors for similar reasons. For instance, the exchange between Clinton and the woman was both reviewed online as “an especially touching moment,”¹⁴ on the one hand, and ridiculed on the other as an “empathy measuring contest”¹⁵ between Clinton and her opponent, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. But if the Clinton/Sanders performative moment of undocumentedness centered on the empathetic response to an immigrant woman *present* in the televised space (something then unseen in prior presidential debates), the media platform of then Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump, depended on a much different kind of embodied *proxy* for the undocumented. Playing to the emotions of a live and televised crowd at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, Trump gave the stage to three US citizens whose family members were previously killed by persons in the country “illegally.” These three people, Trump later stated, were “just three brave representatives of many thousands who have suffered so gravely.”¹⁶ In typical Trump fashion, it was not explained whether he meant that thousands of US citizens have lost a loved one due to criminal activity in general, or that he was reporting that thousands of US citizens have indeed been killed by undocumented immigrants. His remarks, however, would seem to insinuate the latter.

¹⁴ Esther Yu Hsi Lee, “One of The Most Important Questions of The Democratic Debate Came from this Immigrant Woman,” *Think Progress*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 9, 2017. <https://thinkprogress.org/one-of-the-most-important-questions-of-the-democratic-debate-came-from-this-immigrant-woman-f6dca4358c99#.9bhdwupp5>

¹⁵ Michael Qazvini, “WATCH Hillary and Sanders Pledge to Violate the Law to Help an Illegal Immigrant,” *The Daily Wire*, nd., accessed March 9, 2017. <http://www.dailywire.com/news/4045/watch-hillary-and-sanders-pledge-violate-law-help-michael-qazvini>

¹⁶ Allison Graves & Neelesh Moorthy, “Who were the victims of illegal immigrants Trump named at the RNC?” *Politifact*, July 21, 2016, accessed March 9, 2017. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2016/jul/21/who-were-victims-illegal-immigrants-trump-named-rn/>

Regardless of the facts, or that either (now) President Trump will prevail in his campaign promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, or that Clinton would have protected families from deportation had she become president, one thing seems perfectly clear: The mediated “visibility” of undocumented immigrants in 2016 (whether they were positioned as victims or villains), was staged in such a way as to play intensely on spectators’ emotions. And although the performances I’ve examined all took place before Trump’s successful run for the White House, two of them explicitly dealt with his (then) ever-growing popularity on the campaign trail. Moreover, and aligned with the impulses of both Clinton and Trump, the performances I investigate in this study all rely on public representations of undocumentedness that equally engage with notions of empathy, ire, visibility, truthfulness, authenticity, family, anxiety, community, villainy, and victimhood.

The Anti-Immigrant rhetoric of Donald Trump’s campaign, to be sure, was not the first of its kind. Anti-immigrant sentiment in the US, in various manifestations, has waxed and waned over the last two centuries. Trump’s public language, however, that often centers on phrases such as “anchor babies,” “illegal immigrants” as “rapists,” and “bad hombres,”¹⁷ all fit within the

¹⁷ Brian Bennet, “Not just ‘bad hombres’: Trump is targeting up to 8 million people for deportation,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 2017, accessed, March 9, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-deportations-20170204-story.html>; See also, Michelle Ye Hee Lee, “Donald Trump’s false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime,” *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2015, accessed March 2, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald-trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/?utm_term=.8fe755a130c5. Noah Bierman, “Donald “Trump says the wall he’ll build on the border could bear his name,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 2015, accessed March 10, 2017. See also Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). Widely seen as derogatory, the term “anchor baby” is a metaphor for the alleged strategy among undocumented immigrants of having a child in order that they will be a U.S. citizen who will someday apply for their family’s legal residence. Leo Chavez points out that “those who promote the widespread existence of this plan have not

discursive paradigm of what Leo Chavez has termed the “Latino Threat Narrative.” This narrative, one which predominantly relies on the “spectacle” of “illegal immigration,” constructs Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrants from Latin America (and particularly Mexico) as an inassimilable, hostile force bent on the “reconquest” of the Southwestern US in retribution for US’s “annexation” of thousands of square miles of Mexican territory after the military conflict between the two nations in 1848.¹⁸ Perhaps most importantly for my study, the Latino Threat Narrative, as Chavez argues, both objectifies and “dehumanizes” undocumented immigrants via *public spectacle*.¹⁹ Manifestations of this spectacle include media coverage of volunteer border

been distracted by the fact that such a child could not assist its parents in obtaining legal residence for at least twenty-one years, and the process could take years from that point,” (88).¹⁸ Ibid., 1-20. Once the colonial powers of England and Spain were effectively defeated in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War of Independence, respectively, the nascent countries of the United States and Mexico grappled to maintain the borders they inherited from their erstwhile colonial masters. Large sections of these borders were ill defined, undefined, or highly disputed. Chiefly among the disputed territories was that of the territory of Texas, which the US claimed to be part of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, a claim first disputed by Imperial Spain and, later, the nation of Mexico. In 1836, shortly after the abolition of slavery in Mexico, and along with it the Mexican prohibition of further US citizen immigration to the Texas region, angered Anglo-Texans (along with some Mexican nationals residing in Texas) claimed a new republic. After its failure to establish itself as an independent nation, Texas was annexed by the US in 1845. This event quickly precipitated a deterioration in Mexico/US relations, leading to the US’s provocation of the 1846-1848 war between the two nations, a conflict which resulted in Mexico ceding half of its territory to the US. This territory eventually resulted in all or part of the US states of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Utah, Nevada, and California. In the process of this territorial annexation, an estimated one hundred thousand Mexicans were absorbed into the US population. In 1853, the Gadsden Purchase of southern sections of what would become Arizona and New Mexico effectively created the Mexico/US border as it stands today. Thus, upon its entry into the United States, the US Southwest was already a geography that contained long-standing communities of Spanish, Mestizo, and Mexican decent. This historical fact is not lost on Mexican-Americans today, and is reflected in the popular line of T-shirts and bumper stickers that read: “We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us.” For a more complete history of the Mexico/US Border, as well as evolving US immigration law See Chavez, *Shadowed Lives*, 9 – 13; Kevin R. Johnson and Bernard Trujillo, *Immigration Law and the US-Mexico Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 125 -127; and Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15 – 37.

¹⁹ Chavez, *The Latino Threat*, 5.

patrol groups such as the Minutemen, magazine covers and other print media images that construct the image of mobs of immigrants pouring over the southern US border, political cartoons, and corporate advertising. Similarly, the scholarship of Jonathan Xavier Inda, which trains the Foucauldian lens of “governmentality” upon the issue, sees a multi-layered regulatory regime that creates “illegal immigration” as a visible “problem object” and thus a “target” that (as the argument goes) only the government can solve.²⁰ It is clear that both the campaign media spectacles of Trump and Clinton operate within this notion of governmentality: they both propose to present governmental solutions to the “problem,” and at the same time rely on spectacular representations of undocumentedness that attempt to influence the position of their audience. And while the spectacles related to the Latino Threat Narrative may dehumanize undocumented immigrants, the performances I have studied, by and large, attempt to do precisely the opposite: to humanize the participants in such a way that the audiences might see deeper into the complexities of undocumentedness. To guide my study of these diverse performances, I draw upon Chavez, Inda, and many other scholars of undocumented immigration to assist me in understanding the nature of the issue, its historical origins, and its impact on US society. The major and most recent findings regarding undocumented immigrants are outlined briefly in the following section. What’s more, in drawing together contemporary scholarship regarding undocumented immigrants and my own field research, I argue that undocumented immigrants in the US comprise what is essentially an “internal colony.”

²⁰ Jonathan Xavier Inda, *Targeting Immigrants: Government, Technology, and Ethics* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 5-8.

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS AS AN INTERNAL COLONY OF THE U.S.

The theory of internal colonialism that emerged in the late 1960s is different from “classic colonialism” in that it does not entail the establishment of an *external* colony by the “mother country” wherein an indigenous (or local) population is economically, socially, politically, and psychologically dominated by an external colonizing power.²¹ It is rather an attempt to define a system of structural discrimination that replicates the exploitive colonial relationship *within* a single territory and/or nation. Although related ideas were already in play for over a century, theories of “internal colonialism” emerged in the US in an effort to grasp systems of institutionalized racism and cycles of poverty, most notably within the African-American and Chicano communities.²² In light of the extreme disparities between the political and economic power held by Chicanos and their Anglo counterparts, for example, early theorists of the “internal colony” regarded it as “existing in a condition of *powerlessness*.”²³ The theory, however, lost critical traction over the ensuing decades, especially as critics argued that it did not properly factor issues of class. For instance, an increasing number of Chicanos throughout the 1970s and 80s moved steadily into the middle classes, troubling the idea that the pervasive

²¹ See Robert Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” *Social Problems*, 16.4 (Spring, 1969), pp. 393-408.

²² Charles Pinderhughes “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” *Socialism and Democracy* 25:1 (2011), 241. Pinderhughes traces a genealogy of African-American ideas such as “Nation within a nation,” “Semi-colonialism,” and “Domestic colonialism,” back to 1830.

²³ See the essay “The Barrio as an Internal Colony” by Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz, and Charles Ornelas (1972) [emphasis original]. The authors state: “In political terms, the situation of internal colonialism is manifested as a lack of control over the institutions of the barrio, and as a lack of influence over those broader political institutions that affect the barrio. In essence, then, being an internal colony means existing in a condition of *powerlessness*,” [emphasis original], quoted in William Childers, *Transnational Cervantes*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

structural discrimination of internal colonialism was primarily based on race.²⁴ It is important to note, however, for the purposes of my argument, that even for its earliest proponents, the theory of internal colonialism was (a) predicated on a certain degree of racial prejudice, (b) not characterized by a geographic distinction between the territories of colonizer and colonized, (c) centered on the exploitive colonial *relationship* between groups, and (d) that the colonized group equates to an “economically dispensable” population.²⁵ More recently, scholars of internal colonialism have argued that the theory is still viable, especially in light of the economic, structural, and racialized inequalities that continue to plague US society. John R. Chavez has suggested that the theory might apply to “illegal immigrants,” but does not develop it systematically.²⁶ For his part, Charles Pinderhughes argues forcefully that the theory of internal colonialism will not be abolished unless a “sweeping transformation of American society” transpires.²⁷ Moreover, Pinderhughes sees a new theory of internal colonialism based on US

²⁴ See John R. Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands: The Persistence of Internal Colonial Theory,” *Journal of World History* 22.4 (December 2011), 792.

²⁵ See Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 194 – 197. See also Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” 393-408. Barrera in his 1979 development of the theory, explained that in addition to there being “no clear geographical distinction between the [colonizer’s] metropolis and the colony,” what was most important was the *relationship* between colonizers and the colonized. This relationship, which exists primarily in the economic realm, but extends to all social realms (i.e., political and educational systems), is fundamentally characterized by “systemic structural discrimination within a single society.” Moreover, one central aspect of the internal colonial relationship that cannot be extracted from this structural discrimination is “racial prejudice,” (Barrera 194-197). Blauner, for his part, argued that African-Americans were an “economically dispensable population,” (Blauner 394).

²⁶ John R. Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 809.

²⁷ Pinderhughes “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” 248. Primarily (although not exclusively) focused on the how internal colonialism can still apply to the African American community in the 21st century, Pinderhughes traces the theory through the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Malcom X, and The Black Power Movement of the 1960s, and Robert Blauner, author of *Racial Oppression in America* (1972). Pinderhughes, for instance, sees DuBois’ list of the common characteristics of colonial peoples as still applicable today, both within the US and beyond. Du Bois’ characteristics include: (1) physical and/or psychological

society's pervasive "features of subordination and oppression," and not one based on geographic distance, majority/minority numbers, foreignness, or migration, whether involuntary or voluntary.²⁸ As Pinderhughes model informs my argument that undocumented immigrants comprise an internal colony in the US, I include his definition here:

I define internal colonialism as a *geographically-based* pattern of subordination of a differentiated population, located within the dominant power or country. This subordination by a dominant power has the outcome of *systematic* group inequality expressed in the policies and practices of a variety of societal institutions, including systems of education, public safety (police, courts and prisons), health, employment, cultural production, and finance. This definition includes the subordinated population – the colonized – and the land on which they reside within a former settler colony or settler colony system.²⁹

In Pinderhughes assessment, the US constitutes a former settler colony, as its original founders colonized lands that were previously inhabited by indigenous populations. However, the structural inequality of internal colonialism does not merely apply to the relationship between the settlers and the lands *original* inhabitants. On the contrary, the features of subordination and oppression extend to communities that *compulsorily* reside in the colonial system, the African-American community, for example. My argument here is that undocumented communities in the US face the precise kind of economic, class, racial, and social subordination that the early

violence, (2), economic exploitation, (3) poverty, (4) illiteracy, (5) disenfranchisement, (6) denial of cultural equality, and (7) the denial of participation in the political process, (Pinderhughes, 238). It is clear to me that based on criteria such as these, undocumented communities in the US fit Du Bois' model rather well.

²⁸ Ibid., 236.

²⁹ Ibid., 236 [italics original].

theorists of internal colonialism set out to define. Consider the following key findings in contemporary research regarding undocumented immigrants in the US. When applied to the statistical and existential realities related to undocumented immigrants, especially regarding economics, racialization, and political power, the theory of internal colonialism retains a fair amount of validity.

Scholars of undocumented immigration tend to agree that the undocumented, or “illegal immigrant” is a construct of historical (and especially legislative) forces in the US during the twentieth century that incrementally facilitated an increase in border militarization, formal deportation procedures, immigration quotas, and, notably, the categorical racialization of immigrants.³⁰ These forces collude to create what Mae Ngai has referred to as the modern “caste” of undocumented immigrants: “impossible subjects” residing within (and contributing to) the nation, but who are ultimately excluded from national membership.³¹ Anthropological studies of undocumented immigrants tend to conclude that life as an undocumented immigrant is both socially and economically precarious, as the inability to work legally as well as the fear associated with being exposed and deported create life circumstances marked by low-income, isolation, and a lack of social and political rights.³² In light of this general lack of political rights, though, it must be noted that numerous studies have shown that marginalized groups such as undocumented immigrants often exercise a “cultural citizenship,” or “societal membership,” that

³⁰ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-14.

³¹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 6.

³² See Leo Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*, 3rd Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013); Douglas S. Massey, *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007), 142-143; Juan Thomas Ordoñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States*. Oakland: University of California Press. 2015).

militate against the politics of exclusion.³³ In certain ways, many of the performances I examine in this study operate along the lines of cultural citizenship: inclusive processes that seek to create or affirm communal space for the participants. My argument here does not rest on the assumption that undocumented immigrants within the US retain no rights whatsoever. Indeed, as the undocumented population is one that is extremely heterogeneous, so are levels of agency.

When considered broadly, economic statistics further support the idea that undocumented immigrants comprise an internal colony that is economically exploited by a colonial system. For instance, out of the estimated eleven million undocumented immigrants currently in the US, eight million were working as of 2014, making up five percent of the civilian labor force.³⁴ These individuals work in nearly every sector of the job force, although they tend to be concentrated in jobs like agriculture, construction, domestic work, meatpacking, service jobs, and manufacturing.³⁵ Critically, undocumented immigrants, according to the US Government, annually pay *billions of dollars* in income, sales and property taxes.³⁶ A recent study concluded

³³ Notions of “cultural” or “societal” citizenship suggest that immigrants, despite (or because of) marginalization, contest their precarious status by participating in *inclusive* activities such as community groups, cultural rituals, and political activism wherein they can claim both “rights” and “space,” (Rocco 53).³³ See Kathleen M. Coll, “‘Yo no estoy perdida:’ Immigrant Women (Re)locating Citizenship, *Passing Lines: Sexuality and Immigration*, ed. Brad Epps, Keja Valens, & Bill Johnson González (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 389-410; Aihwa Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States,” *Current Anthropology* 37, 1996), 732-62; Raymond A. Rocco, *Transforming Citizenship: Democracy, Membership, and Belonging in Latino Communities*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014).

³⁴ Jeffrey S. Passel & D’Vera Cohn, “Size of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Workforce Stable After the Great Recession,” *PEW Research Center: Hispanic Trends*, November 3, 2016, accessed March 10, 2017. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/11/03/size-of-u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-workforce-stable-after-the-great-recession/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ United States, Congressional Budget Office, “The Impact of Unauthorized Immigrants on the Budgets of State and Local Governments,” December 2007, Pub. 2500 (1-16), Washington DC: Government Printing Office.

that undocumented immigrants pay an estimated \$11.74 billion in state and local taxes nationwide each year.³⁷ To that end, however, government reports show that US states generally incur costs that *exceed* the revenue received from undocumented immigrants, primarily in the costs of education, health care, and law enforcement.³⁸ While this is often used as an argument against undocumented immigration, one needs to consider, at least, that as undocumented immigration becomes increasingly criminalized, the amount of state taxes they pay go toward their own possible incarceration and deportation. Additionally, consider the numbers at the federal level that clearly reveal a level of economic exploitation. According to the federal government's own reporting, undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars annually into a tax system for which they receive practically no benefit whatsoever, as they are ineligible by law for federal benefits programs.³⁹ For instance, although undocumented immigrants have paid an estimated \$300 billion into the Social Security Trust Fund, they are legally barred from receiving Social Security benefits.⁴⁰ To be sure, not all undocumented workers pay federal taxes. However, millions do with the hope that it may improve their standing with the government if comprehensive immigration reform were to happen.⁴¹ In addition to the millions of dollars in annual tax payments to local, state, and federal coffers in the US, undocumented immigrants also contribute substantially to the Gross National Product of their home countries, in the form of

³⁷ "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions," *Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy*, March 2, 2017, accessed March 17, 2017. <http://www.itep.org/immigration/>

³⁸ United States, Congressional Budget Office, "The Impact of Unauthorized Immigrants," 9-11.

³⁹ United States, Social Security Administration, "Effects of Unauthorized Immigration on the Actuarial Status of the Social Security Trust Funds," April, 2013, Pub. 151 (1-5), Baltimore, MD: Office of Chief Actuary. The Office of Chief Actuary estimated that undocumented immigrants paid an estimate of 12 billion dollars into the Social Security Trust Fund in 2010.

⁴⁰ H.A. Goodman, "Illegal immigrants benefit the U.S. economy," *The Hill*, April 23, 2014, accessed March 5, 2017.

⁴¹ Maria Sacchetti, "Undocumented and paying taxes, they seek a foothold in the American Dream," *Washington Post*, March 11, 2017, accessed March 11, 2017.

cash remittances. Generally unable to participate politically in their home countries, due to their physical absence, undocumented immigrants thus pay into the economies of *two* nations, and yet exercise little political rights in either. Although it is practically impossible to measure the exact amount that undocumented immigrants send home, it is almost surely in the range of billions of dollars, often sent to family members in small cash amounts.⁴² Despite that undocumented immigrants contribute substantially to the economy of the US, cash remittances to their home countries are often viewed as threats to the US economy. For this, among other reasons, they remain one of the most despised immigrant populations in the US. A recent sociological study that examined the mental categorization of persons in different social strata concluded that undocumented immigrants are not only the most despised group of immigrants in the US in general, but that they are often not perceived as “fully human.”⁴³ This perception of them as not fully human goes toward normalizing what sociologists Cecilia Menjivar and Leisy Abrego have termed “legal violence.”⁴⁴ This form of violence, in which undocumented immigrants are contradictorily punishable by law, and yet excluded from legal protections, creates a “*social suffering*” exacerbated by labor exploitation, barring of education, and extended family

⁴² Jeffery H. Cohen, “Rethinking Remittances for Undocumented Immigrants in the United States,” *Hidden Lives, Volume 3: Economics, Politics, and Morality*, 191-206. Cohen notes that although the World Bank reported global remittance flows at \$529 billion in 2012, this estimate is based on “legal monetary flows,” and “does not include transfers that follow informal, unofficial, and extralegal routes,” (192).

⁴³ Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 150. Massey quotes a 2006 sociological study that graphs respondents perceptions of immigrants based on notions of the immigrants “warmth” and “competence.” Whereas immigrants from Asia rated high on competence, the elderly and housewives rated highest for warmth. Undocumented immigrants rated toward the very bottom of both categories, however, a portion of the graph “usually reserved for the most detested and socially stigmatized groups, such as criminals and drug dealers,” (150).

⁴⁴ Cecilia Menjivar and Leisy Abrego, “Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants,” *American Journal of Sociology* 117:5 (2012), 1380-1421.

separations.⁴⁵ Within a regime that blurs the boundaries of immigration and criminal law, undocumented immigrants are progressively excluded from “‘normal’ spaces and societal institutions,” and this sense of exclusion becomes internalized.⁴⁶ This internalization of violence relates directly to the ontological concept of “the colonality of being,” which is explained in the literature review below, and which, I argue, is viable to describe the existential state of undocumentedness.

In addition to internalized violence, actual physical violence is also a pervasive threat to undocumented communities, and thus further reinforces their status as an internal colony. As the militarization of the Mexico/US border has increased substantially in the last two decades, unauthorized border crossings have become substantially more expensive with immigrants accruing additional debt related to migration, notably in the form of the higher rates now charged by human smugglers.⁴⁷ Even more consequential is the fact that while the US government has repeatedly described the militarization of the border as a “success,” the cost in human lives has skyrocketed due to the dangers related to border crossings which have increasingly occurred in the remote mountains and deserts of the US Southwest. Numerous scholars have characterized the current situation as a fundamental disavowal of human rights on the part of the US, as well as creating “a landscape of death,” which economically desperate immigrants still attempt to traverse.⁴⁸ This violence is not limited to migrant deaths occurring because of the harsh

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1384 [*italics original*].

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1391.

⁴⁷ Kathryn Farr, “Human Trafficking and Coerced Labor,” *Hidden Lives and Human Rights in the United States: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration*, Volume 2: Human Rights, Gender/Sexualities, Health, and Education, ed. Lois Lorentzen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 91-115.

⁴⁸ Inda, *Targeting Immigrants*, 165. See also Wayne A. Cornelius, “Death at the Border: Efficacy and Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Control Policy,” *Population and Development Review*, 27.4 (December 2001), pp. 661-685.

conditions of border crossing, but includes abuse at the hands of the US Border Patrol (now the largest law enforcement agency in the US), and violent midnight raids by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.⁴⁹ Some of the more egregious ICE actions, such as breaking windows of people's homes and threats of tear gas during immigration raids, have been described by witnesses as "Gestapo-like" tactics.⁵⁰

Taken together, the above statistics and findings regarding undocumented immigrants surely reveal a state of internal colonialism. Economic exploitation, racial prejudice, subjection to violence, and lack of political rights all collude to constitute the fact that undocumented immigrants comprise an internal colony to the United States. This is precisely why I find the literature of the "decolonial turn" (examined below) resonant to my examination of these unique performance collaborations. The performances under examination all militate, in their own way, against this state of colonization. But a large question remains, one that the reader may already have been asking: Why would people *purposefully, consciously, and of their own will* migrate to a place where they are an oppressed, colonized subject? One of the main criteria of the early theories of internal colonialism was that the subordinated population suffered "compulsory" or "involuntary" entry into the dominant civilization.⁵¹ African-Americans and Chicanos, for example, were forced into the US by the African slave trade and the US annexation of Mexican territory in 1848, respectively. They had no choice but to become "colonized" subjects, and this is surely why the theory of internal colonialism emerged from the political struggles of these communities. But surely undocumented immigrants are not *forced* to come to the US. Surely,

⁴⁹ Brian Bennett, "Report finds little progress at curbing Border Patrol abuses," *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 2016, accessed March 31, 2017.

⁵⁰ Bill Ong Hing, *Ethical Borders: NAFTA, Globalization, and Mexican Migration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 2.

⁵¹ Blauner, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt," 396.

they must know that life in the US as an undocumented immigrant is not a utopic state of racial, economic, and political equity. And clearly, they are not born into the colonial system like African-Americans and Chicanos. After all, if they had been born in the US, all the points made above would be mute. Therefore, does not the very idea of them being a “colony” fall apart due to the fact that they immigrated here on their own free will? When one looks at historical colonial systems that apply to Africans, Palestinians, Indigenous Americans, or (British Colonial) Indians, what one see is that the colonial powers *came to* the lands of the people they would colonize, not the other way around. And though this argument may hold some water, especially with those who rhetorically degrade undocumented immigrants, the historical record shows that the reason people migrate without authorization is because they have few other choices. What’s more, the social conditions that undocumented immigrants often flee from are in many cases the result of actions already taken by the colonizing power, namely the US.

Actions taken by the US in the second half of the twentieth century have had the direct effect of *increasing* undocumented immigration to the US, most notably actions at the legislative, economic, and military level. As noted above, the construction of the “illegal immigrant” is a product of historical factors, most notably US immigration law. As one brief example, it has been widely argued that The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which adjusted quotas on immigration from different global regions (and additionally placed quotas on immigrants to the US from the Western Hemisphere for the first time), recast traditional Mexican immigration as “illegal.”⁵² After the passage of the 1965 law, which was claimed to be consistent with liberal values in that it barred racial considerations from visa applications, the new quota for

⁵² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 261. Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 129; Johnson and Trujillo, *Immigration Law and the US-Mexico Border*, 125 -127.

the Western Hemisphere (including Mexico) equated to a 40% drop in pre-1965 immigration levels. Thus, since the US agricultural economy had already established its dependence on the “guest worker” Bracero program, which comprised hundreds of thousands of “legal” Mexican immigrants, the new quotas (paying no heed to economic and social realities) turned the once legitimate agricultural workforce into “illegals.”⁵³ By the next decade, deportations of Mexican immigrants were eight times the rate of all other countries in the world *combined*.⁵⁴

In terms of economic policies, free-trade agreements by the US have also backfired in their goals to reduce undocumented immigration. Take the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) ratified by the US, Canada, and Mexico in 1994. Often vilified as a “bad deal” for the US by President Trump, what seldom seems noted by the US mainstream media are the deleterious effects of the agreement on Mexicans. Touted as a remedy for undocumented immigration, on the assumption that reduced trade tariffs would spur economic development in Mexico, it has, in many ways, had the opposite effect. Consider the corn industry for example. As a result of the effects of free trade, Mexico now imports most of its corn from the US. This is primarily due to multiple related factors. On the one hand, government farm subsidies in the US support domestic corn production to the tune of billions of dollars a year.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 258 - 261. The Bracero Program (1942-1965) between Mexico and the US brought hundreds of thousands of temporarily contracted Mexicans to work in US industries, primarily agriculture. This government-sponsored program, officially designed to regulate the influx of workers to meet US labor demands, had the additional result of creating the “extralegal” system among US employers and Mexican workers in which the employers actively recruited undocumented workers through the network of their workers’ family and friends. These social networks not only provided lucrative (if unofficial) resources for the US employers, but also contributed to the workers becoming accustomed to US lifestyles of consumption. See Gomberg-Muñoz, *Labor and Legality*, 30-32; Leo Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 9-13.

⁵⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 261 [emphasis original].

⁵⁵ Hing, *Ethical Borders*, 13.

This supports the industrialization of corn agriculture in the US, which necessarily demands large numbers of low-wage workers to work the huge tracks of land. Additionally, this also reduces the price of corn produced in the US, undercutting Mexican corn prices. On the other hand, the Mexican government cannot match the subsidies for its corn farmers and thus many there have ceased operations altogether. This, in turn, has created a population of displaced Mexican agricultural workers who tend to migrate to fill the jobs on the industrialized farms in the US. Thus, in critical ways, free trade between the US and Mexico simultaneously creates poverty in Mexico *and* low-wage jobs in the US that necessarily attract those that have become impoverished.⁵⁶ Since the ratification of NAFTA, Mexico has lost two million agricultural jobs. Additionally, as geographer David Harvey has observed, the privatization of agricultural land in Mexico since the 1990s has resulted in many Mexican *campesinos* being “close to starvation,” and forced off the land.⁵⁷ For Harvey, within the paradigm of neoliberal economic policy, the “disposable worker,” such as displaced Mexicans, is the global prototype.⁵⁸ Lastly here in terms of US actions that have resulted in what I argue to be the internal colony of undocumented immigrants is US foreign policies that have served to foment political violence and social chaos from which people flee, especially in Central America.⁵⁹ Such is the case in the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, for instance, where the US openly supported both state-sponsored violence and right-wing guerrilla movements covertly during the Cold War. For

⁵⁶ Notably, the US, in its negotiations for NAFTA myopically excluded the subject of labor migration from the bargaining table. The US trade representative involved insisted that the issues of free trade and immigration were unrelated. See Ong, *Ethical Borders*, 11-12.

⁵⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁹ Douglas Massey, “Why Migrate? Theorizing Undocumented Migration,” *Hidden Lives and Human Rights, Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation*, 67-69. See also Peter Winn, *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006), 542-564.

instance, in 1980s El Salvador, the US government under Ronald Reagan supported the military-led government's war with leftist guerrillas in the name of fighting communist expansion.⁶⁰ The twelve-year war resulted in over 75,000 deaths, widespread human rights abuses, and massive migration out of the country, most of it headed to the US. Over the course of the 1980s, the US saw an eight-fold increase in immigration from El Salvador, much of it unauthorized.⁶¹ Similarly in Guatemala, the US's three decades (1960s – 1990s) of military support for a variety of dictators, as well as the CIA-led ouster of Guatemala's democratically elected president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in 1954, fomented and helped sustain a brutal conflict in which over 200,000 civilians were killed.⁶² The "scorched earth" policy conducted by the successive Guatemalan regimes against Leftist guerrilla forces, drawn largely from native Mayan populations, is generally understood as a "genocide."⁶³ More broadly, scholars of global immigration patterns have concluded that the vast majority of immigrants leave their countries because of poverty, war, domestic abuse, and climate change, a "reality that often excludes them from refugee status."⁶⁴ Moreover, while the United Nations has drafted rules designed to protect refugees globally, there is no international law or agency charged with protecting undocumented immigrants.⁶⁵

While the few causes of undocumented immigration sketched above merely scratch the surface, they are nevertheless pertinent to my study. For instance, several immigrants I

⁶⁰ Ibid., 554-564.

⁶¹ Jose Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in the United States*, 129 – 135.

⁶² Ibid., 135 – 139; See also Allan D. Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009); Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring – Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 13-32.

⁶³ Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide*, 171.

⁶⁴ Beth Lyon, "International Law and Undocumented Migration," *Hidden Lives and Human Rights*: Vol. 1, 125.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 126.

interviewed for this project originated from El Salvador or Guatemala, usually leaving the country due to political violence or poverty, and often both. Other interview subjects left their countries of origin for reasons connected to non-state social violence and domestic violence. Others yet were brought to the US at a young age by their parents, and were thus unaware that they were fleeing anything. My argument in favor of the internal colonialism model is not to suggest that all undocumented immigrants are displaced *campesinos*, or that all eleven million of these individuals are desperate refugees of political violence. To state as much would be completely inaccurate. The undocumented friends I've had for years before this formal research project began are certainly *neither*. If anything, this project has shown me that undocumented immigrants, even within the limited "Latina/o" category, are an extremely heterogeneous group of individuals.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, and despite the lack of a demonstrative "compulsory" or "enforced" entry into the US, I argue that the theory of internal colonialism can be applied to this population. Considering this, my argument is basically two-pronged: (1) US government policies (legislative, economic, and military) have *contributed* to economic and political instability in countries around the globe (especially in Latin America) that both triggers civilian displacement in countries of origin while at the same time stimulating undocumented immigration to the US, with its demand for cheap, exploitable labor. (2) Upon entry into the US, undocumented immigrants are subjected to a structural system of social, political, occupational, economic,

⁶⁶ Although clearly not all undocumented immigrants in the US are Latina/o, my study necessarily concentrates on artistic projects that collaborate with Spanish-Speaking immigrants, mostly from Mexico and Central America. This limitation is primarily due to the trajectory of the research, as well as my own limitation of only being bilingual in Spanish and English. For demographic clarity, 80% of undocumented immigrants in the US are from Latin America, with the top countries being Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Other countries such as China, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines each account for 2% or less of the undocumented population. Other European populations, although present, are even smaller. See Massey, "Why Migrate" *Hidden Lives and Human Rights*, Vol. 1, 67-69.

racial, and educational inequity that *equates* to a colonial system in the very ways that early theorist of internal colonialism described. Located within the colonizer's own territory, and upon which the colonizer economically feeds, this population maintains severely limited political rights and its individuals are considered "dispensable." It is for these reasons that I find the current literature of the "decolonial turn" useful in my examination of these performances. This literature is elucidated below. Additionally, as the course of the research went on, I came to see this project as an act of solidarity with the individuals who made this study possible. After all, it is their artistic visions that have made this study possible, and it is my hope that this research (in its own way) allows these projects to be heard and seen again by a different audience. As decolonial scholars Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova have suggested, solidarity with one's subject must go beyond sympathy. Otherwise it is merely paternalistic. Decolonial solidarity must be a partnership. It must be "reciprocal."⁶⁷

RESEARCH METHODS AND KEY FINDINGS:

The purpose of this study has been to gain insight into the ways that theater artists, experimental videographers, and other political actors are using theater and performance techniques to represent or speak to the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the United States. This study is important because it will help students and scholars in theater and performance studies better understand how members of undocumented communities have found themselves participating in performative practices that are not always under their control. To be sure, some of these projects were conceptualized by individuals who are neither undocumented immigrants, nor immigrants at all. However, that number is small when compared to the overall

⁶⁷ Tlostanova, Madina V. and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 12.

demographics of the participants, directors, and organizers. As of this writing there has been no formal academic study of this unique phenomenon, or any cohesive attempt within the field of Theater and Performance Studies to understand the emergence, aesthetics, or efficacy of these methodologically related projects, many of which claim to actively advocate for social change. But what kind of social change truly takes place on account of these performances? And if one were to attempt to measure that change, how would one go about it? These two questions have, in a large part, guided this study. But there are surely other questions as well: By whom are these performances conceptualized and produced? Under what economic, social and spatial conditions do the performances take place? How do these various conditions affect the final performance product? Who is positioned as a performer, and by whom are they positioned? As many of these performances are non-professional, how have they come to be a performer in the first place? On the other hand, who inhabits the role of spectator? Is the spectator always aware of what the performance is, or who created it, or who is performing? Moreover, is the spectator always aware that a performance is going on? As we shall see in certain case studies, most notably in Chapter Three, spectators can indeed be unaware of their own spectatorship. Additionally, what I critically position as “performance” in Chapter Four (the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*) is not necessarily seen as such by the “performers” themselves, individuals whose undocumented condition in the US is one of severe precarity. From this follows a question that has not necessarily guided the research for this study but one that has haunted the entire process nonetheless: to what extent does an academic study of performance collaborations with undocumented communities risk intellectualizing a phenomenon that for the participants has real-life stakes that the author may never truly comprehend? To this end, I have attempted to investigate these practices by seeking out those who made them whenever possible, and to glean

from them what these processes meant *to them*. It has only been by seeking out and asking questions of the main participants that this study can come near to answering its two most essential questions: Why and to what degree do the participants contribute to both the creative process and the finished artistic product? And to what extent are those involved affected by their participation in these performances? Clearly, there is no single answer. As this study involved personal interviews with a heterogeneous population, reasons for participation, as well as how the processes affected the participants, vary widely. The following is breakdown of key elements of the interview processes and some of the key findings that the interviews produced.

INTERVIEWS

Over the course of this research, forty-eight individuals were interviewed. While the totality of the interviews took place between the Spring of 2013 and late 2016, the bulk of the interviews were conducted in 2015, as the parameters of this project took on a more defined shape. Interviewees were (by and large) either direct participants or spectators to the performances under examination. For instance, out of the forty-eight individuals interviewed, twenty-nine interviewees had *directly* participated in the performances, either as a performer, director, writer, or producer. Additionally, fourteen persons were interviewed that were spectators at the various performances. Thus, participants and spectators comprise 85% of the total interviews. The remaining five interviewees were persons closely associated with the performances in some manner. For instance, I interviewed Michael John Garcés, the Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater in Los Angeles, whose 2007 play *Los Illegals* was the impetus for the members of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Labor Theater Without Borders) to form an independent theater group. Teatro Jornalero is the subject of Chapter Two. Similarly, I interviewed Haydee Lavariega, Volunteer Coordinator of Casa Latina, an immigrants' rights

center in Seattle. Casa Latina had hosted an early workshop production of Rose Cano's 2014 play *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle* for an audience of immigrant day laborers. Cano's play is the main case study of Chapter One.

Crucially, additional demographics apply to the interview subjects in terms of their immigration status. For instance, out of the twenty-nine participants interviewed, thirteen were undocumented immigrants at the time of the interview. Additionally, three of the spectators who were interviewed were also undocumented. Importantly, seven participants to the performances were Latina/o immigrants to the US who were *formerly* undocumented. These persons had, in various years prior to the interview, achieved either authorized immigration status or US citizenship. For instance, Jose Carillo, the 84-year-old actor who played the role of Don Quixote in the early workshop productions of *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, and who had been brought to the US "illegally" in the 1930s when still "an infant in arms," attained citizenship in 1953.⁶⁸ On the other end of this spectrum, Juan Parada, the director of Teatro Jornalero's production examined in Chapter Two was brought to the US as a child when his father fled the US-supported war in their native El Salvador in the 1980s. For his part, like many other undocumented immigrants in the US, Parada did not know he was undocumented until he reached college age. Parada, did not attain citizenship until 2004. The sense of solidarity with undocumented communities was a major theme in many of the interviews I conducted, and this solidarity is what drives many of the artists examined here. The impulse for immigrants who were formerly undocumented and now collaborate with undocumented communities I later refer to as "Altercity," a fraternal (but hierarchical) notion among colonized subjects developed by decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Altercity, and other key concepts related to

⁶⁸ Jose Carillo, conversation with the author, November 7, 2015.

decolonial theory are further explained in the review of literature below. Additionally, the remaining nine performance participants consisted of five Latina/o immigrants to the US who had *never* been undocumented, three non-immigrant citizens of the US, and one Mexican national who currently resides in Mexico.

It is important to note that what I refer to as “performance collaborations with undocumented communities” did not necessarily set out to do so in an overt or explicit manner. It would be an overstatement to suggest that the creators of these performers specifically sought out undocumented individuals and either invited or paid them to perform. Indeed, for some performance creators, the actual immigration status of the performers is secondary, or even unknown. The early performance workshops of *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, for instance, took place at a homeless mission for Latina/o immigrants in Seattle, as well as Casa Latina’s day labor center. Although this play was “collaborative” in the sense that the playwright sought feedback from these audiences to help shape the play, neither she nor anyone in the play’s cast asked about the immigration status of those who gave feedback. As expressed to me by one participant, the play was largely about homelessness, and less about undocumentedness explicitly. Further, several artists expressed to me that it would be beside the point, generally unproductive, and even pointlessly threatening to ask a performer about their immigration status. An example of this would be the case study of Chapter Three, *Pulpo/Octopus* by the Mexican artist Yoshua Okón, who hired Guatemalan day laborers at a Los Angeles Home Depot as performers for his experimental video. The point of investigation for Okón’s video was the marginalization of the Guatemalan day labor community in the US and its “invisible” relationship to the US-supported civil war in Guatemala in which *all* the performers were combatants. He did not ask any of his performers about their immigration status, as it was in no

way criteria for being cast in the video and, further, it would almost surely disrupt the sense of artistic collaboration. However, in my investigation of the work (and as the parameters of this study required) I traveled to the Home Depot in Los Angeles and was able to locate one performer who kindly granted me an interview. I was not surprised to find out that the man, indeed, was undocumented and learned from him that other participants were undocumented as well. Both his experience of undocumentedness and his experience as a paid performer in *Pulpo/Octopus* are primary sources of material for my analysis in Chapter Three. On yet another end of this spectrum, the case study explored in Chapter Four (the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*) is essentially a performance of undocumentedness and is the only performance examined in this study that is *solely* conceived, produced, and performed by undocumented immigrants. To be clear, whether or not the primary artists involved see these performances as explicit mediations of undocumentedness, for my purposes (and as I am interested mostly in the collaborative process and its affect) the *undocumented participants are the link that tie these performances together*.

What is most important however, is the nature of the interviews and how they were conducted, especially regarding undocumented immigrant interviewees. All interviews for this research were voluntary. Additionally, all interview materials and methods for this research were approved by the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division (HSD), and I am especially grateful to Bailey Bell and Adrienne Meyer for their assistance in guiding me through the HSD procedures. Since several of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, HSD required that I supply them with interview materials in both Spanish and English.⁶⁹ Although I conducted all the personal interviews myself (whether in Spanish or in English), I am additionally grateful to Anna

⁶⁹ For a complete list of interview questions see Appendix One.

Witte, formerly of the UW Spanish and Portuguese Department, for assisting me in finalizing all the interview materials for submission to HSD. Additionally, either video or audio recordings were made of all interviews with the express and stated permission of the interviewee. These recordings allowed me to do accurate transcriptions of the interview material. Additionally, Anna Witte assisted me on a total of two final transcriptions and translations. Anna's translation assistance is noted at each of these instances, and I have included all Spanish translations in the footnotes. Unless otherwise noted, all transcriptions and translations were completed by myself.

The interviews were geared toward obtaining information about both the participant's transnational background as well as their experience of the creative process, including what they felt to be the performance's goals and overall effectiveness, especially as it relates to perceptible changes in their own subjectivity. Questions for performers included (1) What was your experience in making this performance? (2) What do you feel to be the ultimate "theme" or "message" of the performance? (3) What was the most uncomfortable moment for you in making this performance? (4) Would you be willing to participate in a similar performance in the future? and (5) Upon seeing the finished product, how did the artistic product differ from what you originally thought the performance might be like? At times, my conversation with the interviewees would diverge from the set list of questions, especially as they would sometimes relate their personal histories to me. In some cases, the interview was conducted bilingually, with the interviewee and myself switching from English to Spanish. In these cases, I always followed the lead of the interviewee, making it clear to them from the beginning that they should feel free to use whatever language with which they were most comfortable. In most of the cases, the interviewees expressed gratitude to me for being interested in the subject. This was not always immediately the case however. For instance, as a person doing "investigative research" involving

undocumented individuals I was, at times, met with suspicion. In the case of Jose Carillo, the actor initially declined to participate in this study, but later changed his mind upon meeting me at a literary event and hearing me talk about the project in person. Additionally, there were some individuals who, although they had expressed initial interest in participating, ultimately chose not to participate. In these cases, I did not ask why they decided not to participate, so I cannot speak to their reasons for declining.

To conduct this study, it has been important to put myself into close contact with both the artists who create this work as well as the work itself. One advantage of investigating these performances is that I have sometimes been able to attend the live event. Although this is not always possible, I have made a concerted effort to contact the primary people involved, whether directors, producers, performers, or spectators. Generally, I made initial contact with possible interview subjects with the help of the main artists who had created or overseen the performances and were easily reachable online. After initial contact (and usually an interview) with the main artist, I was put in touch with other participants. This contact was sometimes face-to-face and sometimes via email, or social media. For instance, after making initial email contact Lorena Moran, the project director of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras, she accepted my offer of coming to Los Angeles. Over the course of three months in 2015 (September – December), I took three research trips to Los Angeles documenting Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras' production of their latest play. During these trips, I conducted a good number of interviews, and I am grateful to the participants for their time. If my abovementioned "solidarity" with the participants was reciprocal at all, Moran later requested the interview and rehearsal videos that I shot while in L.A. She was then able to produce a promotional video for the group from the original footage. I was also able to shoot some additional (non-interview) footage at Moran's request for the

promotional video. In terms of the use of social media for contacting interview subjects, Rodrigo Valenzuela, the creator of *Maria TV* (Chapter Three), put me in contact with several performers via Facebook, who graciously agreed to talk to me about the project. Regarding Chapter Four (the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*), I initially met the graduation's producer Ray Corona at a public information event on immigrant's rights.⁷⁰ Ray invited me to the graduation, and then later to the headquarters of the Washington DREAM Coalition to interview the other undocumented graduates. Their testimonies regarding their experience are the backbone of that chapter. Lastly here, in terms of how contact was made with interviewees, I was given permission by the staff at the Frye Art Museum to interview museumgoers who had experienced watching Valenzuela's *Maria TV* when it was installed there in early 2015. As some spectators wandered in and out of the viewing booth, I purposefully restricted my spectator interviews to museumgoers who saw the *entire* video.

A note on interviewee names and anonymity.

Due to the precarious nature of some interviewees' immigration status, I use only the names of interviewees who have given me their express permission to do so. In some cases, the interviewee remains anonymous. As an example:

Unnamed *Pulpo/Octopus* participant, conversation with the author, September 16, 2015.

A note on translations and interview quotes.

Throughout this study, I employ the use of italics in many of the interview transcriptions. These italics are not an attempt on my part to emphasize what I feel to be important about the

⁷⁰ Corona is an undocumented graduate of the University of Washington Bothell. It was Corona who first had the idea for the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*, some years after graduating. Thus, although he was the event's main producer, Corona did not walk in 2015 as a graduate.

interviewee's statement. Rather they are intended to convey the emphasis of certain words and phrases as spoken by the interviewees themselves. In other words, when a word or phrase is *italicized* within a quote from a personal interview, the italicization represents the word or phrase that the interviewee stressed to make their point. A brief example here from Margaret O'Donnell, an immigration rights lawyer turned playwright in Seattle. Here O'Donnell stresses several phrases at the end of the quote.

The play that I wrote just now . . . this is my area. This is what happens when immigrants from Latin America are shoved into the legal system [. . .] I know the system. I know the stories. [. . .] The reason I wrote [this play] is because I'm passionate about this theme, which is: people who are the most vulnerable, who have no knowledge of our culture, who don't speak the language, are thrust into the most *Byzantine, obscure, and cruel* immigration system that almost any country has ever devised. *And we don't know it! It's hidden from us.*⁷¹

Also seen in the above example, I sometimes employ both bracketed and unbracketed ellipses. To explain, a bracketed ellipsis indicates a small cut I've made from the transcript, to achieve flow for the reader while preserving meaning. An unbracketed ellipsis, on the other hand, represents a pause that the speaker took while speaking.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since this study extends to the realms of Performance Studies, Immigration Studies and decolonial thought, I draw on several texts that inform the project overall and throughout. Several of these texts are interview-based anthropological studies of immigration that I have

⁷¹ Margaret O'Donnell, conversation with the author, October 25, 2015.

found incredibly useful in guiding both my argument and my research. Other texts are rooted in the main theories and concepts of the discipline of Performance Studies. I employ these concepts to grasp both the performative aesthetics and creative processes of the primary case studies. Lastly, I further ground this study in the main concepts of the recent “decolonial turn” among scholars of history, culture, and art. If the concepts taken from Performance Studies have allowed me to analyze the aesthetics and processual nature of these works, I find that the concepts of the decolonial turn have allowed me to ground my analysis on a socio-political level. This is not to say that decolonial thinkers are unconcerned with aesthetics. On the contrary, I draw inspiration for my analyses from the concept of “decolonial aesthesis” outlined in the Decolonial Manifesto, penned in 2011.⁷² Decolonial aesthetics (in the artistic vision of its theorists), celebrates transnationality and those who live in the border regions (geographic, mental, and social). Decolonial aesthetics is wary of art practices that discursively tend to homogenize culture due to the pressures of globalization, and militates against global consumerism. And decolonial aesthetics grounds its perspective in the migratory history of those from the global south to the imperial and colonizing regions of Europe and the US. As many of the participants to this study not only originated in the colonized regions of the Americas, I interpret both their desire to craft performances that mediate undocumentedness *and* their willingness to share their perspectives with me in hopes that their stories reach a wider audience as gestures of decolonial aesthetics.

Anthropology and Undocumented Immigrants

⁷² “Decolonial Aesthetics (I),” *TDI+Transnational Decolonial Institute*, May 22, 2011, accessed March 21, 2017. <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>

The work of anthropologists who have studied undocumented immigration are surely many, and I do not claim to be familiar with the totality of that field. However, and for the sake of clarity, I mention a few anthropological studies here. These studies have influenced not only my thinking but my research process, and I further find that they connect directly with several of my case studies. For example, I draw inspiration from the work of Anthropologist Juan Thomas-Ordoñez, who conducted two years of field research with undocumented day laborers in Berkeley, California. This research culminated in his book *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States*. Not only do I draw insights from Ordoñez in terms of his conclusions, but also his methodology. Troubled by the many aspects of migrant studies in the US that tend to celebrate the notions of “community,” and “agency,” Ordoñez sought to consider the “darker side” of the issue.⁷³ What he found in his research, which primarily consisted of his going to the same informal day labor site in Berkeley, CA and getting to know the male day laborers over a long period of time, was a paradoxical community which both operated in terms of the day laborer’s support for one another as well as competition within the group, among numerous other characteristics. In the social environment that the day laborers commonly referred to as “*la situación*,” (“the situation,” or the circumstances of their being undocumented), Ordoñez came to see their world as fractured, marked by economic precarity and the inability to make lasting friendships. In some ways, Ordoñez study mirrors my previous work with undocumented immigrants in the construction field, albeit with considerably more formal aspects. What I take away from Ordoñez’s work, however, is his attempt at seeing the day labor community for what it seemed to be and his negotiation of being an “outsider” to the community he was studying. His

⁷³ Juan Thomas Ordoñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), xi.

work particularly influences my analysis of the theatrical work of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Chapter Two), and the video-based performance *Pulpo/Octopus* (Chapter Three). The research for these two chapters required me navigate the world of day laborers, many (but not all of them) undocumented.

Also useful to my research has been the work of Anthropologist Richard Flores, who, as a self-described “ethnographic intruder,” has participated in the performance tradition of Mexican Shepherd’s Plays (*Pastorelas*) in San Antonio, Texas since the 1990s.⁷⁴ Flores’ long collaboration with his research subjects has given him a nuanced understanding of this religious and community tradition. Notably, Flores ties his analysis of the *Pastorelas* to Raymond Williams’s concept of the “structure of feeling,” or how social forces are “actively lived and felt.”⁷⁵ For Williams, the structure of feeling refers to “the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities [economic, social, cultural, artistic] combin[e] into a way of thinking and living.”⁷⁶ This structure, which Williams describes as the lived experience “in solution” with its historical moment, is most clearly articulated in artistic forms and conventions.⁷⁷ Flores, grounding his analysis through the lens of

⁷⁴ Richard Flores, “‘Los Pastores’ and the Gifting of Performance,” *American Ethnologist*, 21:2 (May 1994), 272.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁷⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 47. Williams, militating against the idea of a clear line between base and superstructure in classical Marxism, urges for an analytic of culture that seeks to restore to “genuine parity” the economic and artistic aspects of society. Cultural analysis thus begins with an attempt to recover “the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities [economic, social, cultural, artistic] combined into a way of thinking and living,” Williams calls this felt sense, the *structure of feeling*, or “the actual experience [in solution] through which [the character and patterns of a culture] were lived” [italics original], 46-47.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 47. I find it interesting that Williams uses the chemical metaphor “in solution” for one of his most influential ideas. Like a chemical mixture, in which different fluids mix together “in solution,” one blending into another, performance too is marked by fluidity. The ideas, images, and sounds of a performance operate together as an intangible transaction between performer and

Williams, sees within the *Pastorela* tradition a “gifted labor” that transcends the “necessity” of economically-driven labor that accounts for classic Marxist alienation.⁷⁸ Through his own lived experience of both the “in-home” *Pastorelas*, where performances are given for free, as well as those staged for the highly commercialized tourist zone in San Antonio, where performances are delivered for a wage, Flores concludes that the in-home *Pastorelas* constitute a nutritive space for collective identity, communal action, and “a momentary lapse in the dominant logic of commodity experience.”⁷⁹ Flores sees the potential for social and political empowerment in the *Pastorelas* despite the discussions that have characterized popular religion as secondary to active forms of consciousness raising.⁸⁰ In my own research (particularly in Chapters Two and Four) I also see the tendency of “gifted labor,” one that creates meaning for the various participants. More specifically, the volunteer efforts of participants in Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras and the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* both operate, in part, on the nutritive act of gifted labor.

Another anthropological study that I have found useful, and which directly intersects with my research, is the book *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate* by Walter J. Nicholls.⁸¹ Nicholls, in his study of the “DREAMer” movement (the political activism of undocumented immigrant youth who were

audience. For Williams, the structure of feeling operates in “the least tangible parts of our activity,” (48).

⁷⁸ Flores, “‘Los Pastores’ and the Gifting of Performance,” 277; See also Richard Flores, “Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location,” *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*, ed. Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. García (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 217. Notably, Flores dates the modern *Pastorela* tradition of San Antonio, Texas to 1917, when the director had fled the violence of the Mexican Revolution. As we shall see in Chapter Two, the fleeing of state violence, as well as the urge for the participants to celebrate Latin American heritage, persists in the Los Angeles-based work of Teatro Jornalero.

⁷⁹ Flores, “‘Los Pastores’ and the Gifting of Performance,” 282.

⁸⁰ Flores, “Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location,” 218.

⁸¹ Walter J. Nicholls, *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

brought to the US at a young age and have primarily grown up in the US), sees a movement that is primarily based on notions of representation and visibility. For instance, in regards to the DREAMers' unique social position, Nicholls sees a "niche opening" from within which these "de facto Americans" can successfully craft a public voice, and thus contribute to the culture at large.⁸² Dissimilar to the criminalized "border crossers," these young people, Nicholls argues, can position themselves as innocent victims whose quest for equality and/or deportation relief can appeal to "American" notions of "equality, fairness and justice."⁸³ Notably for my study, Nicholls sees an inherent performativity in the undocumented youth movement, where they are able to "craft representations" that "demonstrate their humanity."⁸⁴ In their search for political recognition, Nicholls argues, undocumented youth discovered that "the act of representing became not simply a means to an end [. . .] but rather an end in its own right."⁸⁵ Additionally, Nicholls wields Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical concept of "bare life," or the rights-less subject who is at once excluded from and captured within the political order, to examine undocumented communities in general.⁸⁶ Nicholls especially sees Agamben's notion of the banished internal

⁸² Ibid., 11, 170.

⁸³ Ibid., 12, 171.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11, 169.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 9. See also Sarah Dooling, "The Production of Bare Life and Spaces of Possibilities for Alleviating Homelessness in Seattle, Washington" (PhD diss, University of Washington, 2009). Dooling clarifies that for Agamben, the nucleus of state power lies in its ability to categorize individuals who threaten the legitimacy of its authority as "biological entities beyond political recognition," (31). Such legitimately (read: *legislatively*) banned "outsiders," who importantly exist *within* the territorial field of the sovereign (the state) are reduced, in Agamben's term, to "bare life." Such "banished" subjects not only lack political redress from violence (both personal and state-sanctioned), but furthermore serve to define the political and conceptual boundaries of those who do function as "full political beings," non-immigrant, voting citizens, for example, (52). For Agamben, the most exemplary occurrence of a modern state's sovereign power over bare life was manifested in the Nazi concentration camps.

outsider whose very life “lacks political value” in the undocumented youth who live in US states where anti-immigrant legislation is more onerous.⁸⁷ To be clear, the rights of undocumented immigrant youth vary from state to state, with some states effectively banning undocumented youth from higher education in general.⁸⁸ Nicholls’ work informs my own in at least two ways: I proceed from his performative analysis on the DREAMer movement to examine the case study of Chapter Four, the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*. Additionally, I find Agamben’s notion of bare life, useful in my analysis of *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle* (Chapter One), which paints a particularly bleak picture of homelessness and undocumentedness in the Pacific Northwest. Other scholars who have done interview-based field work with undocumented youth further aid this study. Among these scholars are William Perez and Elżbieta M. Goździak, both of whom have elucidated the layered realities of undocumented youth, including challenges faced in education and both family and social life.⁸⁹ The *Undocu-Graduation 2015* examined in Chapter Four is a performative celebration of undocumented youth, and this chapter (like the studies I cite from) is abetted deeply by first-person interviews with the undocumented participants.

Theater and Performance Studies

Foremost among performance scholarship that informs this study is Jan Cohen-Cruz’s work on “community-based theater.” This type of theater, unlike either professional or amateur

⁸⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 133.

⁸⁸ For a state-by-state breakdown of laws that apply to undocumented youth and education see the DREAM Educational Empowerment Program (DEEP). DEEP, “About Us, *United We Dream*, n.d., accessed April 5, 2017. <http://unitedwedream.org/about/projects/education-deep/>

⁸⁹ Elżbieta M. Goździak, “Dreams Deferred: The Effects of Undocumented Status on Latino Youths’ Education and Livelihood,” *Hidden Lives and Human Rights*, Vol. 1, 145-173; Perez William Pérez, *We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009).

community theater, generally responds to collectively significant issues and involves trained theater artists working with members of a specific community. The playscript is frequently generated by the community members themselves (often working with a playwright), and community members often comprise both the cast and audience. The community is often unified by a shared identity, be it ethnic, class-based, sexual, political orientation, or geographic.⁹⁰ Since most of the performances I examine within this study intersect with the practice of community-based theater, the concepts that Cohen-Cruz has developed regarding the form have influenced my approach to the works, regardless of medium. For instance, Cohen-Cruz has identified four main principles that tend to guide community-based theater projects, all of which gesture toward the pieces I have studied. Importantly, these principles are “mutually reinforcing.”⁹¹ These four principles are (1) Communal Context, wherein the performance promotes a collective vision, depends upon the lived experiences of the subjects, and often affirms a “misrepresented culture, (2) Reciprocity, marking the process as jointly-owned, listening-based, and non-hierarchical, (3) Hyphenation, meaning the operation of interdisciplinary functions such as ethnography, therapy, education, and a disregard for traditional aesthetics, and (4) Active Culture, marked by a sense of inclusivity, diversity, and the idea that everyone, regardless of a lack of training in theatrical arts, has artistic potential.⁹² These practices, while often inspiring and providing the participants with a “key positive experience,” can run the risk of being exploitive, especially when considering the motivations of the artist in charge.⁹³ Although these practices can ideally “uncolonize the imagination,” of the participants, Cohen-Cruz asks to what extent they are “worse than

⁹⁰ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 92-99.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

colonialism,” if first world artists merely capitalize on the experiences of those they work with.⁹⁴ Questions such as this, centered on exploitation, are particularly relevant to my examination of experimental videos (Chapter Three) that operate on the short-term and utilize immigrant performers as paid participants.

The work of Anthropologist Victor Turner, highly cited amongst Performance Studies scholars, and integral to the emergence of the discipline itself, further provides me with analytical tools with which to examine the processes of performances within this study. Firstly, I use Turner’s ritual-specific concept of “communitas” to shed light on the process of *Maria TV*. For Turner, communitas characterizes the inter-subjective relationship between people jointly undergoing ritual transitions. Temporarily sheltered from their daily social structure, in which they are “segmentalized” into limiting roles based on class, gender, age and ethnicity, the participants in ritual (an “anti-structure” that often occurs in a sacred space where societal norms are provisionally suspended) have the potential for experiencing this temporary “flash of lucid, mutual understanding on the existential level.”⁹⁵ Facilitated by the “liminality” of ritual (or the space wherein societal rules are suspended), communitas, according to Turner, is a “desire for a total, unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards [the participants’] uniqueness in *the very act of realizing their commonness*.”⁹⁶ And while many of the performance processes that I witnessed

⁹⁴ Ibid., 86 - 91.

⁹⁵ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Seriousness of Human Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 48.

⁹⁶ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974), 274 [emphasis added]. Performance scholar Richard Schechner likens communitas to philosopher Martin Buber’s concept of “I-Thou” (*ich-du* in German), a “dialogic” and pure encounter between one being and another, outside of universal categories. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70-71.

during the research phase implied a sense of togetherness and community, my interviews with participants of *Maria TV* indicated that the private, in-studio, filming process lent itself to the deeper “intersubjective illumination” that *communitas* suggests. Additionally, regarding the work of Turner, I utilize his concept of “social drama,” to frame my understanding of the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*. For Turner, social dramas are the “aharmonic processes” found in many human societies, which consist of four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and *either* reintegration or recognition of schism.⁹⁷ According to Turner, the “breach” phase indicates challenges to (or infractions of) social norms and/or laws.⁹⁸ The second phase, or “crisis,” then follows, which is marked by heightened conflict, the taking of sides, and (often) the widening of the breach. Thirdly, in order to limit the spread of the breach, “redressive mechanisms” are brought into operation.⁹⁹ Notably, the performance of public ritual can act as a redressive mechanism to the crisis. The fourth phase is either reintegration of “the disturbed social group,” often with a change in the group’s status and influence in the given society, or the “social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation.”¹⁰⁰ I find Turner’s concept particularly salient for the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*, as I see it clearly as a redressive mechanism to what many perceive as the “crisis” of undocumented immigration. More importantly, and of vastly more importance than my analysis, what kind of integration will be accomplished the *Undocu-Graduation*’s producers has yet to be seen.

⁹⁷ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 37; Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 69.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

Two other concepts developed in Performance Studies also inform this study. These concepts are “restored behavior, as developed by Richard Schechner and the “scenario” as theorized by Diana Taylor. For Schechner, “restored behavior” is not only the main characteristic of performance itself, but also the symbolic and reflexive “material” with which behavior itself can be transformed.¹⁰¹ Found in performance mediums as diverse as shamanism, trance, theater, and dance, restored behavior constitutes a manipulation of the original. In other words, individual actions that are carried out on a daily basis constitute “behavior:” the quotidian movements, vocalizations, and interactions of persons in the non-rehearsed process of living and operating in the world. Within the unique sphere of performance, however, (a process that Schechner refers to as “twice-behaved-behavior), everyday behavior is suspended. In its place is the separate, manipulable material of restored behavior. Operating as the “subjunctive mood” of behavior, the “what if this were to happen?” aspect of performance, the original behavior (and thus culture) can be worked on, transfigured, challenged, or changed.¹⁰² I find Schechner’s theory particularly useful, mainly because certain performances under examination here are problematically autobiographical. Stated more clearly, the “autobiographical” elements within performances (namely *Super Doméstica* and *Pulpo/Octopus* of Chapters One and Three respectively) often require the participants to reenact violent moments of their own past. Whether the restoration of behavior can bring about transformation in the lives of the participants is a major question that resonates through this study.

Similarly, Diana Taylor also sees performance as a platform wherein social norms can be challenged. Viewing performance as both “an episteme,” and “a means of intervening in the

¹⁰¹ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 35.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 36.

world,” Taylor offers her concept of the “scenario.”¹⁰³ For Taylor, the scenario constitutes a “paradigmatic setup that relies on supposedly live participants, [is] structured around a schematic plot, [and which has] an intended (though adaptable) end.”¹⁰⁴ Using the mock battles between the Moors and Christians as an example (performance practices used by the Spanish colonialists in New Spain in the sixteenth century to indoctrinate the native Mexican population into Spanish culture and religion), Taylor sees the opportunity for “strategic repositioning” on the part of the native performers.¹⁰⁵ Notably, the native Mexican performers obliged to take part in these spectacles were variously dressed as “Moors” or “Christians,” when, in fact, they were neither. The possibilities for conflict, parody, and reversal engendered by such a scenario, Taylor argues, require that the viewer deal wrestle with “the social construction of bodies in particular contexts.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, bodies in theatricalized context are powerful signifiers. Moreover, the incongruence between performer and character (or the cast and the entire set-up for that matter) is where meaningful subversion can emerge. Furthermore, the conscious choices made by performers in adaptable scenarios (sometimes improvisationally in the moment of performance, while at other times succinctly rehearsed) can deeply affect—even disturb—an audience. I find Taylor’s concept of the scenario useful in nearly all the performance contexts I examine. Whether it is a politicized version of a Mexican Shepherd’s Play performed by amateur actors (Chapter Two), a semi-improvisational (but carefully manipulated) autobiographical performance recorded on video (Chapter Three), or the public reclamation of a mainstream

¹⁰³ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 13-15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

ceremony by undocumented youth (Chapter Four), all these adaptable scenarios offer the undocumented participants the possibility of the “strategic repositioning” that Taylor suggests.

The most relevant Performance Studies text that informs this study is the recent *Performance, Identity, and Immigration Law* by Gad Guterman (2014). Indeed, in many ways, Guterman’s book is a jumping off point for my project. Notably, his study is an in-depth analysis of not only the major shifts in US immigration law, but the “growing repertoire” of plays that feature undocumented characters, border crossings, deportations, and so forth.¹⁰⁷ One of Guterman’s main concerns is just how these theatrical representations “can bring those forced into spaces of nonexistence out of the shadows and, in so doing, mitigate the violence characteristic to those spaces.”¹⁰⁸ In many ways, this is exactly what the performances under examination in this study attempt to do. Additionally, one of Guterman’s main contentions (which also undergirds my own concerns) is that theater *about* undocumented subjects is rarely performed *by or for* undocumented audiences. More explicitly, Guterman calls the practice of mainstream theater that attempts to portray undocumented characters as practicing the questionable “ventriloquism” of “undocumented face.”¹⁰⁹ “[W]hat are the repercussions of representing undocumented characters, however positive the portrayals,” asks Guterman, “if

¹⁰⁷ Contemporary Latino Theater scholar Jon Rossini has questioned the regular use of certain narrative tropes in what might be called the “Border Crossing” genre of modern Latina/o dramaturgy. For Rossini, such plays as Josefina López’s *Detained in the Desert* (2011), and Anna Ochoa O’Leary’s *No Roosters in the Desert* (2010), create an “odd form of voyeurism” through the “problematic fictionalization” of border crossers and the violence they encounter. Ultimately, Rossini argues that the dramatic tropes within these plays shift the critical lens away from the US’s reliance on low-wage undocumented labor, and instead create an artistic framework that squarely places the “responsibility on the choice of the [border] crossers” themselves. Jon Rossini, “Desert Geography: Rethinking Space and Theater,” unpublished paper, courtesy of Jon Rossini.

¹⁰⁸ Gad Guterman, *Performance, Identity, and Immigration Law: A Theatre of Undocumentedness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

those in undocumentedness are precluded from partaking directly in the process of theatre-making and theatre-going?¹¹⁰

Guterman's book, which ends with the brief (and provocative) case study of undocumented performers who work for tips as Disney characters in Times Square, practically invites scholars to take the next step in the field. "The scope of my project has not allowed me to explore in depth other kinds of performance," Guterman writes, "especially those emerging in nonprofessional, community, and educational contexts [. . .]. Perhaps this book can offer tools with which to study these cultural texts as well."¹¹¹

Decoloniality

If the above works in the field of Anthropology and Performance Studies help guide and define central elements of this study, concepts derived from the decolonial thinkers outlined below also assist me in establishing a theoretical foothold with which to deepen my view of these performance collaborations. In essence, the intent behind many of these practices is not only to produce moving political performances, but also (in the words of one key participant) to "educate, empower, and transform" the participants themselves.¹¹² As outlined above, the harsh, existential qualities of undocumentedness in the US equate to what I argue is fundamentally a state of internal colonialism. For this reason, I find literature of the "decolonial turn" advantageous as an overall theoretical linchpin.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 68.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹¹² Lorena Moran, conversation with the author, September 15, 2015. Moran is the project director of Teatro Jornalero, whose personal struggles with undocumentedness are reflected in several of their original plays, most notably *Esclavitud Moderna* [*Modern Slavery*]. She told me that "*parte del trabajo de Teatro Jornalero es para educar, empoderar, y transformar la comunidad*" [part of the work of Teatro Jornalero is to educate, empower, and transform the community].

Postcolonial Feminist Theorist Chela Sandoval, for instance, in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), develops various critical orientations that philosophically undergird several of my case studies. While one major operation of Sandoval's is to reveal the "juncture" between the critical theorists of the twentieth century (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, etc.), and the voices of subordinated people (Fanon, Anzaldúa, etc.), I do not engage systematically with her finer arguments in this regard.¹¹³ I do, however, find critical traction in her decolonial reading of the theory of postmodernism as articulated by Frederic Jameson. For Jameson, the postmodern condition that arrived in the late twentieth century was a fractured and schizophrenic one, marked by the "disappearance of the individual subject."¹¹⁴ The infiltration of multinational capitalism (and its never-ending chain of commodities) into the psychic, physical, and aesthetic sphere of everyday life created "psychopathologies" related to linguistic fragmentation, psychic decentering, and the addiction to photographic images, among numerous other factors.¹¹⁵ Sandoval, while not contending that Jameson was wrong, adeptly points out that the "neocolonial" paradigm he describes is nothing new for colonized subjects. On the contrary, marginalized and colonized populations have historically contended with the "fractured" sensibilities that Jameson laments for first-world citizens. Moreover, Sandoval argues, these subjects (i.e. "the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, the marginalized") have been forced to experience "postmodern" fragmentation as a "precondition of survival."¹¹⁶ Since Jameson does an extended analysis of experimental video as the art form "par excellence" of the

¹¹³ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 9.

¹¹⁴ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁶ Sandoval, *Methodology*, 27, 9.

postmodern condition, I fold Sandoval's critique of Jameson into my analysis of the "fractured" and experimental videos that collaborate with undocumented immigrants in Chapter Three.

Additionally, I derive philosophical inspiration from Sandoval's theory of "differential oppositional consciousness" as practiced by twentieth-century US feminists of color. Drawing upon the work of "US Third World feminists" such as Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde (among others) Sandoval identifies a mode of "consciousness in opposition" that functioned outside and counter to the "hegemonic models" of "liberal," "Marxist," and "cultural" feminism that dominated the characterization of feminist theoretical practices in the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ For Sandoval, the hegemonic models are merely "imaginary spaces," that "rigidly circumscribed" what was perceivable for thinkers and activists who might want to work across their boundaries.¹¹⁸ Most important for this study, Sandoval's US Third World mode of "differential oppositional consciousness" is fluid, mobile, self-conscious, tactical, and "performative" in its challenges to social powers.¹¹⁹ It is also not exclusively feminist. For Sandoval, this "differential" mode (her metaphor is shifting gears in a car) allows potentially resistant subjects (whatever their orientation) to move "between and among" ideological positions in their quest to transform dominant and oppressive powers.¹²⁰ Moreover, Sandoval's model demands a fluid sense of not only ideology, but of *identity* as well, or an ability (in her

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 47-53.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 54-64. Sandoval grounds her model of oppositional consciousness (an activist transformation of subjectivity through self-recognition) in four critical points: the "Equal-Rights Form," "The Revolutionary," "The Supremacist," and "The Separatist." (56-57). The fifth mode, that of the *differential*, "undermines the appearance of the mutual exclusivity" (58). Functioning as the medium through which the other modes of oppositional consciousness become effectively converted, the differential, argues Sandoval, "depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized," and thus, "performative," (58).

¹²⁰ Ibid., 58.

words) to “cruise” from one identity to another. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, whose writings on the “new mestiza,” theorized a border consciousness that operated between nations, races, and sexualities, Sandoval’s model constitutes a “technology of power” where identity *must* be migratory. She writes:

The cruising mobilities required in this [oppositional] effort demand of the differential practitioner commitment to the process of metamorphosis itself: *this is the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity as masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideology, aesthetic, and political positions*” [emphasis added].¹²¹

Ultimately, Sandoval explains, the qualities of this oppositional practice (both in action and theory) can be thought of as “repositories within which subjugated citizens can either *occupy or throw off subjectivities* in a process that at once enacts and decolonizes their various relations to their real conditions of existence.”¹²²

In a similar theoretical move, decolonial feminist historian Emma Perez identifies what she terms the “decolonial imaginary” in her examination of Mexicana and Chicana cultural movements of the early twentieth century.¹²³ The decolonial imaginary, for Perez, is a “rupturing space,” where the agency of colonized subjects can be enacted against assimilation, acculturation, passivity, silence, and oppression. Notably, this space of resistance is “intangible.” For Perez, it is primarily this “interstitial” (in between) space that Third World women occupy and where agency on the part of the oppressed is enacted; where “fragmented identities”

¹²¹ Ibid., 62.

¹²² Ibid., 54 [emphasis added].

¹²³ Emma Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary, Writing Chicanas Into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

negotiate social dilemmas through “multiple, mobile categoric identities.”¹²⁴ Although Perez does not mention the art of performance per se, I see several qualities of performance resonating in her theoretical space of resistance. For Perez:

The decolonial imaginary is intangible to many because it acts much like a shadow in the dark. It survives as a faint outline gliding against a wall or an object. The shadow is the figure between the subject and the object on which is it cast, moving and breathing through an in-between space.”¹²⁵

As we can see in the critical theories of both Sandoval and Perez, “differential oppositional consciousness” and the “decolonial imaginary” both resonate deeply with traits of theater and performance. Theater and performance also depend on tricksterism, a fluid sense of identity, masquerade, and the reflection of subject to object. Theater and performance too are constituted in the intangible, interstitial realm of shadows. Theater and performance are both an ephemeral reflection of reality and a material part of reality, often wielded in the name of social change. That Sandoval’s and Perez’s notion intersect so deeply with performativity *and* resistance on the part of oppressed peoples, I find them particularly useful in thinking through my case studies. The participants to the performances that I examine equally “cruise” across categories of identity in the process of performance creation, be they artist, activist, day laborer, student, educator, refugee, domestic worker, undocumented immigrant, performer, actor, or trans-national subject.

In addition to Perez and Sandoval, I also draw from the theoretical work of Anibal

¹²⁴ Ibid, 6-7.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 6. On the mobility within this space of resistance, Perez writes, “the oppressed as colonial other becomes the liminal identity, partially seen yet unspoken, vibrant and in motion, overshadowed by the construction of coloniality, where the decolonial imaginary moves and lives. One is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another,” (6-7).

Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Madina Tlostanova, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, all thinkers of the recent “decolonial turn.”¹²⁶ I especially find critical traction in their notions of “coloniality,” “decolonial epistemologies,” “Altericity,” and “the coloniality of being,” all described in the pages that follow, and all of which I tie to the performances throughout the study. For these theorists, decolonial projects hinge on epistemic attempts to “detach” or “delink” from what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano has described as the “colonial matrix of power” (*el patrón colonial de poder*). This matrix (initially implemented in the sixteenth century via the European colonization of the globe) produced hierarchies of knowledge, discourse, language, geography, art, and, most injuriously, human beings. The human taxonomy initiated by the colonial matrix of power was hierarchical and based on the concept of race, with those at the bottom (e.g., African Blacks and Indigenous Americans) systematically dehumanized. Further, this hierarchy (for decolonial thinkers) did not end with the era of colonialism and colonial administrations. Rather, it has been promulgated in the Western Hemisphere (especially by US Imperialism in Latin America) and continues to define modern subjectivity within the inequitable system of economic globalization and neoliberalism. The inequity of these policies continues to disadvantage subjects in formerly colonized areas of the globe.¹²⁷ Importantly, for Quijano, the

¹²⁶ By focusing on the colonial history of the Spanish empire, decoloniality intends to go beyond the British colonial-centered framework of much “postcolonial” theory (e.g., Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, et al.). However, decolonial thinkers tend to see decoloniality as complimentary to postcolonial discourse, and often draw upon the work of postcolonial writers such as Franz Fanon. See Mignolo and Tlostanova, *Learning to Unlearn*, 9.

¹²⁷ Neoliberalism is a set of political-economic practices that have increasingly been adopted (sometimes by force) by nations around the globe since the 1970s. Based on ideas of entrepreneurship, private property, and free trade, Neoliberalism also dictates that the state should play a limited role in market forces such as environmental and labor regulation and the privatization of industries. However, despite the “freedom” allowed to industries and multinational corporations, the vast majority of individuals across the globe do not enjoy such economic and entrepreneurial freedom. Moreover, despite the claim that the state should

colonization implemented in the early modern period was not just over the *body* of the colonized (those whom he connects to the “exploited,” and “dominated” racialized subjects of today), but also over their *imagination*; the production of images and symbols, as well as modes of producing knowledge were suppressed by the “seduction” and valorization of European languages, artistic aesthetics, and capitalism.¹²⁸ The underlying and pervasive “logic” of this global system, what Mignolo calls the “darker side of Western modernity,” is understood as “coloniality.”¹²⁹ This logic, and its accompanying phenomenon of “permanent suspicion” towards the basic humanity of people of color, did not end with the passing of European colonialism, but rather is immanent in the very ontology of twenty-first-century subjects.¹³⁰ In the words of Nelson Maldonado-Torres:

[C]oloniality *survives* colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.”¹³¹

withdraw from economic decision-making, neoliberal policy nevertheless depends on the state to regulate money, secure private property rights, and to provide legislative, police, and military structures to enforce the functioning of the markets. See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 1- 4.

¹²⁸ Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21.2-3 (2007): 169. See also Walter D. Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 8. For his own purposes, Mignolo succinctly outlines Quijano’s formulation of the “*patrón colonial de poder*” (colonial matrix of power), which operates along the four interrelated domains of control: economics, authority, gender/sexuality, and knowledge/subjectivity.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁰ Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21:2 (2007), 245.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

Delinking from this omnipresent system depends on emerging systems of knowledge that carve new paths, and break away from the colonial matrix of power embedded in globalized society.

For Tlostanova, whose work often concentrates on Post-Soviet culture and art practices, and Mignolo, often focused on Latin America, this process of epistemically “delinking” from the colonial matrix requires a kind of “critical border thinking” that can agitate for a more balanced, equitable, and ultimately “pluriversal” world.¹³² Essentially a utopic concept, this pluriversal world would be one not based on the supposed “universalism” of a single hegemonic system (i.e., Eurocentrism/hierarchies of language), but rather an “intercultural” one, that celebrates the perspectives and voices of those who exist within the borders between languages, ethnicities, and nations.¹³³ New systems of knowledge formations, or “decolonial epistemologies,” as termed by Mignolo and Tlostanova, are required to bring about this delinking from the colonial matrix.¹³⁴ These epistemic processes could include any cultural or political project that is centered on (or produced) by modes of knowledge that have been suppressed by coloniality: Indigenous communities in the Americas or Post-Soviet Muslim communities in Central Asia, for example.

¹³² Walter D. Mignolo & Madina V. Tlostanova, “Theorizing from the Borders Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9.2 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006): 205–221. For Mignolo and Tlostanova “critical border thinking” is similar to the notion of “double consciousness” developed by African American theorist (and early decolonial thinker) W.E.B. DuBois. For DuBois, double consciousness is the unreconciled “two-ness” associated with the internal conflict of African Americans, always measuring themselves through the eyes of the oppressor. Double consciousness is the “split-subjectivity” of contradictorily being an American and an oppressed negro (210-211).

¹³³ Mignolo and Tlostanova, *Learning to Unlearn*, 7.

¹³⁴ Mignolo and Tlostanova, “Theorizing from the Borders,” 210. See also Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xvi. Quijano uses the reflexive Spanish term “*desprenderse*” [to detach oneself, or shake off]. Although Mignolo and Tlostanova’s term “delink” implies this reflexive quality, *desprenderse* seems relatively equivalent to Sandoval’s notion that differential oppositional consciousness is a practice wherein “subjugated citizens can either occupy or *throw off subjectivities* in a process that at once enacts and decolonizes their various relations to their real conditions of existence,” [emphasis added], (Sandoval, 54).

Additionally, these movements are often characterized by what Mignolo calls “bilanguaging,” or the existential quality of “living-in-between” languages, as opposed to the basic “skill” of bilingualism.¹³⁵ Bilanguaging, moreover, as a “way of life,” disrupts the “purity” of colonial monolingualism and the enforced one-to-one relationship of language to the state, a condition implemented in the colonial period and which continues in many localities today.¹³⁶ At their core, decolonial epistemologies are active and highly localized responses to (1) the violent legacy of colonialism, (2) the dehumanization of colonized peoples, (3) the subjugation of local knowledges, and (4) the rhetorical hegemony of European languages. These utopic modes of knowledge formation constitute an opportunity to “learn to unlearn” the perverse knowledge that subjects acquire within the system of coloniality.¹³⁷ These processes, which I describe throughout this study as *liberating processes of collective knowledge formation for colonized subjects*, are emergent throughout the globe. Examples provided by Mignolo and Tlostanova are such entities as the Zapatista movement beginning in the 1990s, which sought to empower the Indigenous Mayan community in southern Mexico, Amawtay Wasi, (the Intercultural University of the People and Nations of Ecuador) that offers university-level education based on Andean

¹³⁵ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 252.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 251. Notably, Mignolo, like Sandoval, also draws on Gloria Anzaldúa’s *La Fronteriza* (1987), who writes of Chicano Spanish as a “living language,” or “*Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*,” [A language that corresponds to a way of life], Quoted in Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 256.

¹³⁷ Tlostanova, Madina V. and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 12-13. Mignolo and Tlostanova take the phrase “learning to unlearn” from the pedagogy of Amawtay Wasi, the Intercultural University of the Peoples and Nations of Ecuador. With knowledge systems built on “intuitive,” Indigenous models, rather than Western style pedagogy, Amawtay Wasi (a “pluriversity”) is open to all Ecuadorians, both indigenous and not. Notably, indigenous people in Ecuador were only allowed to register at national universities beginning in 1987. See also “Quiénes Somos, *Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi*, 2017, accessed April 6, 2017.

<http://www.amawtaywasi.org/>

ancestral knowledge, and Via Campesina, the international peasants' movement that globally advocates for farmworkers' rights.¹³⁸ In terms of organizations that promote decolonial epistemologies in the sphere of undocumented immigrants in the US, I would add to this list Freedom University in Georgia, that provides tuition-free education to undocumented students in that state who are otherwise barred from higher education.¹³⁹ Additionally, the organization United We Dream, which advocates for the higher-education of undocumented youth in the US, could be seen as a decolonizing platform that promotes a liberating collective knowledge formation.¹⁴⁰

Importantly to this study, art and aesthetic practices are not outside the realm of decolonial epistemologies. On the contrary, decolonial thinkers see art and aesthetics as fundamental to the decolonial process. These thinkers, Mignolo among them, have recently crafted their own artistic manifesto that addresses their anxieties regarding recent art theory that celebrates both the appropriation of cultural differences as well as the homogenizing tendencies of globalization.¹⁴¹ Decolonial art practices, in their minds, strive to reaffirm and celebrate those who live in the border regions, those who have been forced to live between cultures. These practices, confronting the colonization of the imagination, seek to “remove the veil from the

¹³⁸ Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 213-251; Mignolo and Tlostanova, *Learning to Unlearn*, 12-19.

¹³⁹ “Our Mission,” *Freedom University*, n.d., accessed March 22, 2017. Opened in 2001, Freedom University, whose faculty includes faculty at Emory University, Morehouse College, Georgia State University, and Georgia Tech, teaches courses in human rights, social sciences, biological sciences, language arts, and creative arts. Since Georgia law bans undocumented youth from attending Georgia's top universities, Freedom University sees the targeting of those individuals as a “modern era of educational segregation in the U.S. South.”

<http://www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com/>

¹⁴⁰ DEEP, “About Us, *United We Dream*, n.d., accessed April 5, 2017.

<http://unitedwedream.org/about/our-missions-goals/>

¹⁴¹ Alanna Lockward, et al. “Decolonial Aesthetics (I),” *Transnational Decolonial Institute*, May 22, 2011, accessed March 21, 2017.

hidden histories of colonialism.”¹⁴² For her part, Madina Tlostanova specifically sees theater (and other performance forms) as an artistic arena where critical border thinking can “rethink” the caricatures of Orientalist/Colonialist discourse.¹⁴³ Tlostanova is especially interested in the border-crossing potential of what she terms “creole” or “hybrid” theatrical projects that not only bring together international theater artists on the one hand, but also actively grapple with the scarring effects of globalized culture on the other. These performances are positioned by Tlostanova as radical new forms of art that can upset colonialist discourse through “border performances” that blend of language, artistic medium, genre, fact, and fiction.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, she sees experimental video projects that actively blur the boundaries of testimony and documentaries as “digital forms of resistance” to inequality, xenophobia, and environmental violence faced by disenfranchised communities.¹⁴⁵ I find Tlostanova’s concepts regarding video particularly stimulating, since Chapter Three of this study looks specifically at experimental video projects that both depend on (and blur) the testimonies of their immigrant participants.

Lastly here within the decolonial turn are two critical concepts that I utilize and refer to throughout this study. These two concepts are “the coloniality of being,” and “Altercity,” as developed by decolonial phenomenologist Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Each of these terms

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Madina Tlostanova, “Visualizing Fiction, Verbalizing Art, or from Intermediation to Transculturation,” *World Literature Studies* 1:7 (2015), 7. Tlostanova’s examination of Ilkhom Theater’s *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* (premiered Tashkent, 2006), for instance, argues for a “pluritopical hermeneutics” in decolonial theater that attempts a dialogic and experiential learning platform that foregrounds cultural difference. The play is loosely based on the life of Russian artist Alexander Nikolayev (1887-1957), whose spiritual experiences in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) are theatricalized through a blend of Western, Orientalist, and Central Asian aesthetics.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

informs my interpretations of the various performances in this study. I elaborate briefly on the two terms here.

Drawing on the work Anibal Quijano and the postcolonial writer/theorist/psychiatrist Franz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres understands the “coloniality of being” as the “lived experience of colonization,”¹⁴⁶ in other words, the actual state of being for colonized subjects. As Maldonado-Torres argues, this ontological state is characterized by several qualities, chief among them are (1) the very humanity of colonized subjects (historically people of color) is perennially in doubt, and thus marked by a “permanent suspicion,”¹⁴⁷ (2) the racism underlying the coloniality of being is inextricably tied to the emergence of the capitalist system in the sixteenth century and which continues today in its modern globalized forms¹⁴⁸ (3) the colonized perceive life itself as a permanent struggle against ever-present violence and subjugation,¹⁴⁹ (4) the normalization of violence conducted against colonized subjects results in their being considered a “dispensable” population deemed both “killable,” and “rapeable,”¹⁵⁰ and (5) the

¹⁴⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21:2 (2007), 242.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 254. Maldonado-Torres draws directly on Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism* (1965), in which Fanon writes that the colonized subject “perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. This ever-menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future.” Notably, Maldonado-Torres positions this against the phenomenology of German philosopher Martin Heidegger. For Maldonado-Torres, Heidegger’s phenomenological concept of “Dasein” (in which the subject determines her/his ownmost possibilities because of the anxiety accompanying the knowledge of the subject’s inevitable death) cannot be applied to colonized subjects as a valid ontological model. For Maldonado-Torres (working through Fanon) colonized subjects’ encounter with death is not an “extra-ordinary affair,” but a *constitutive feature of daily reality* (251) [emphasis added].

¹⁵⁰ The dispensability of undocumented immigrants can be seen in the US border protection policies that have claimed “success” in the name of national security while at the same time resulting in the skyrocketing of immigrant deaths in remote border areas. See Cornelius, “Death

colonial condition obliterates the generous and “trans-ontological” dimension of gift giving between and among the colonized.¹⁵¹ The coloniality of being, in other words, relegates the colonized to a lesser state of being, one in which the colonized are denied both their basic humanity as well as the intersubjectivity (person-to-person contact) that otherwise lends meaning to human life.¹⁵²

What militates against the dehumanizing qualities of the coloniality of being are positive projects of decolonization that hinge, in part, on the concept of what Maldonado-Torres terms “Altericity.”¹⁵³ Altericity is best described as the generosity of one colonized subject toward another. Importantly, however, Maldonado-Torres’ concept hinges on the fact that the intersubjective generosity occurs between subjects that are both identified as “Other” within the colonial matrix, but where one occupies a higher status than the other. Franz Fanon, for instance

at the Border,” 661-685. In terms of the extreme challenges that women migrants face, including the reality of rape and “nonresistant” sexual relations in payment for passage to the US see Carlos Salinas Maldonado, “*La ruta de las que serán violadas: Las inmigrantes centroamericanas con rumbo a EE UU saben lo que les espera en México – Un anticonceptivo inyectable simboliza su sufrimiento.*” [The route of those who will be raped: Central American immigrant women headed to the US know what waits for them in Mexico – An injectable contraceptive symbolizes their suffering], *El País*, November 14, 2011, accessed May 23, 2015. For a documentary film examination of the precariousness of human life in the process of immigrating to the US from Central America see *La Bestia [The Beast]*, dir. by Pedro Ultras, Visiones Films (Miami, FL: Venevision International, 2011).

¹⁵¹ Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” 258.

¹⁵² Both Quijano and Mignolo (as well as Maldonado-Torres) see the eradication of intersubjective knowledge in the solipsistic “*cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am) of René Descartes, (See *Ibid.*, 245-252). For Quijano, Descartes influential formula is reductive, locating knowledge (and its source) in the isolated individual. Quijano argues that the production sites of all knowledge are rather located within “intersubjectivity and [the] social totality,” (Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity,” 172). Mignolo, for his part, converts the Cartesian *cogito* into a highly-localized center of identity and knowledge formation that (for him) is the anchor of decolonial epistemologies: “I am where I think and do,” (Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xvi.)

¹⁵³ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 156-158.

(although a colonized subject) was a highly-educated individual who ultimately sought to help persons whose suffering he saw as more acute than his own.¹⁵⁴ Fanon's actions, therefore, would be considered "alteristic." To this end, and since one aspect of the coloniality of being is that colonized subjects are stripped of their ability to give and receive freely, Maldonado-Torres sees this Fanonian generosity as fundamental to the decolonial process.¹⁵⁵ Indeed Maldonado-Torres sees the "restoration of the logic of the gift" the precise meaning of decolonization.¹⁵⁶ Altericity is the generous act that reclaims the intersubjective experience otherwise denied to colonized subjects. In the end, Maldonado-Torres (by means of Fanon) sees the aim of liberation for the colonized not so much as a struggle for freedom—although freedom and equality are vital claims—but as a struggle for *human fraternity*. When this fraternity is achieved, the community of colonized subjects are recognized not only as possessors, "but givers as well."¹⁵⁷ In this regard, "altericity" is the "radical affirmation of sociality and interhuman contact" with "the Other who is 'below.'"¹⁵⁸ In other words, altericity is much less of a top-down paternalistic generosity toward marginalized people from those at the top, and rather more lateral: the generosity, fraternity, and "*non-indifference*," toward those who are marginalized to a greater degree.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Fanon, the Martinique-born psychiatrist and postcolonial writer was educated in France (of which Martinique was a colony at the time of Fanon's birth) and later went on to join the anti-colonial forces of Algeria's National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération National*) in 1955. Algeria achieved independence from France in 1962, one year after Fanon's death due to leukemia.

¹⁵⁵ Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 260.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁵⁷ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 151.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 158. The "other" who is lower in the societal scheme Maldonado-Torres terms the "sub-Other," (158).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 158 [emphasis original].

I find Maldonado-Torres' term particularly apt for my examination of the following case studies. Invariably within these performance collaborations, there are immigrant individuals operating at different social levels: educators, activists, medical professionals, artists, actors, day laborers, domestic workers, homeless Latina/os, etc. If one operational thread runs through almost all the case studies, regardless of artistic medium, it may indeed be altericity. More often than not, the organizers, directors, and producers of these performances are *formerly* undocumented immigrants who mobilize their own agency to assist those who still inhabit the precarious position of undocumentedness. In the words of one formerly undocumented performance organizer, her theatrical company is always seeking to collaborate with those individuals who are the most "troubled." To that end, her "alteristic" impulse was clear: "Because they are the ones who need us the most. I don't need artists who are the best actors, or who have training. No, I need the people who have the most problems. All the people who are rejected by everybody else."¹⁶⁰

As sentiments such as this were evidenced across the board in my research into these performance collaborations, I find the literature of the decolonial turn both provocative and useful. In other words, through my first-hand experience of researching these performances (and interviewing those who made them) I see an alteristic attempt to epistemologically delink from the colonial matrix of power; to create communal platforms that recognize and reaffirm the humanity in those who have been threatened with the lesser-than-human status often associated with undocumentedness, to expose or transcend one's own position and/or culpability within the colonial matrix of power, and to engage in *liberating processes of collective knowledge*

¹⁶⁰ Moran, conversation, 2015. Spanish Original: *Porque son las que nos necesitan. Yo no necesito artistas que son los mejores actores . . . o graduados, o no graduados, no. Yo necesito las personas con muchas problemas. Todas las personas que rechazan las demás.*

formation for colonized subjects (decolonial epistemologies) in an attempt to learn beyond the limits of what regressive political discourse may have us believe.

BREAKDOWN OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One

In Chapter One I examine three plays: *Super Doméstica* (2004) by Eulalia Camargo, *Undocumented* (2015) by Margaret O’Donnell, and *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle* (2014) by Rose Cano. As of this writing, none of these plays have been published. Each, however, has had their own production history, whether as staged readings, workshops, or full productions. I begin with a brief analysis of *Super Doméstica* and *Undocumented* because despite their differences (the former was “written” by a formerly illiterate Latina female immigrant from El Salvador, the latter by an Anglo Immigration Rights Lawyer from the US) the two plays exemplify the seven “decolonizing impulses” that I argue mark all the case studies in this study, regardless of medium. Thus, by drawing out these seven impulses from two distinct plays by two unique writers, I establish a theoretical thread that allows me to contextualize the methodologies, aesthetics, and socio-political goals of all the artistic processes examined here that collaborate with undocumented communities. Importantly, both O’Donnell and Camargo are *first-time* playwrights with little prior theatrical experience. Additionally, their plays attempt to dramatize traumatic and abusive events related to undocumentedness that derive from their *personal and professional* lives. These dramatizations, I argue, attempt to exorcize what both writers see as the “lesser-than-human” status that brands undocumented immigrants in the social, occupational, and legal realms. And perhaps most importantly, these amateur playwrights both seek to produce their plays in non-traditional theater settings (such as labor rallies and churches)

that attempt to politically inform audiences about the realities of undocumentedness. In the case of *Super Doméstica*, an undocumented domestic worker was cast in the title role.

The main case study of Chapter One is *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle*, written by Rose Cano. Cano is the Artistic Director of eSe Teatro, one of the main companies producing Latina/o theater in Seattle, Washington. Notably, my examination centers on the early staged readings that eSe Teatro produced as play development workshops at diverse locations throughout the city. These locations included homeless shelters, day labor centers, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers.¹⁶¹ Cano, herself a Latina immigrant as well as Spanish-language medical interpreter, adapted the stories of her real-life patients. Her play is a reinterpretation of Miguel de Cervantes' classic duo as undocumented, homeless Mexican immigrants navigating the labyrinthine system of health care clinics, day labor centers, homeless missions, tent encampments, and civil courts in contemporary Seattle. My interviews with participants and spectators evidence that these early staged readings (what the playwright termed "Dialogues with Dignity), were profound experiences for most involved. Jose Carillo, for instance, who played the title role in the staged readings and who has been acting ever since his early days of working with Herbert Blau and Jules Irving at the San Francisco Actors Workshop in the 1950s, called the Dialogues with Dignity the "most meaningful experience of [his] 60-year acting career."¹⁶² However, the play itself depicts an extremely dark vision of undocumentedness. For instance, the play stages the death of Don Quixote's misidentified "princess" Dulcinea as a murdered border-crossing Mexican female. I argue that the

¹⁶¹ As she utilized feedback from the various audiences to help guide her writing process, Cano refers to these diverse audience members as her "co-authors," (Rose Cano, conversation with the author, May 24, 2014.)

¹⁶² Jose Carillo, conversation with the author, November 7, 2015.

undocumented characters in the play equate to theatrical representations of “bare life,” the biopolitical concept developed by Giorgio Agamben that describes the modern, rights-less subject whose very life “lacks political value,” for the state.¹⁶³ Notably, Cano’s dark representations of undocumentedness were sometimes found objectionable and “too sad” by certain audiences, especially Latino day laborers.¹⁶⁴ Cano, however, stuck to her creative vision and the play was eventually performed as a professional production. The professional production, going beyond the grass-roots vision of the original community dialogues, problematically entered the paradigm of what Gad Guterman has termed “undocumentedface,” the practice of casting non-undocumented individuals to portray the undocumented. Chapter One thus explores the processes of the original workshops, as well as drawing on the reflections of key participants, to raise broader questions that apply to all subsequent chapters: How is the performance text created, and what is the text’s relationship to the performer? Who performs the text? And for whom? In what kinds of spaces do the performances occur? And equally, if not most importantly, who is in control over the artistic process? Although I argue that the theater artists I interviewed approached the Dialogues with Dignity from an “alteristic” stance, issues related to theatrical finances, the urge for professionalization, and the difficulty maintaining the connection with the original “marginalized” audiences threaten to undermine an otherwise optimistic process.

Chapter Two

If *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* offers a dark vision of undocumentedness while at the same time struggling to keep its connection to its original audiences alive, the community-

¹⁶³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 133.

¹⁶⁴ Cano, conversation.

based model of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Laborer Theater Without Borders) examined in Chapter Two is one that, I argue, is remarkably more inclusive and celebratory. Since 2007, Teatro Jornalero has been producing original plays for audiences of day laborers in Los Angeles, California. Importantly, Teatro Jornalero garners its performers *directly* from the day laborer community itself, and thus the cast is largely made up of *untrained, non-professional* performers. Working with professional directors and playwrights over a months-long process, the community members directly influence the text of the play by engaging in “story-circle” sessions. During these sessions, the playwright gathers information from the performers and adapts it directly into the play. The community members, in turn, serve as the performers in the productions that tour to day laborer sites, as well as other locations such as homeless shelters, churches, and hospitals. As of this writing, none of the plays generated by Teatro Jornalero have been published or received critical attention by theater scholars.

For Chapter Two my fieldwork investigates Teatro Jornalero’s 2015 collaboration with both homeless Latinos in Los Angeles as well as a grass-roots Latina/o activist organization in the city of Long Beach. At the time, this proved to be the largest project Teatro Jornalero had yet to conceive and produce. For Chapter Two, I investigate the process of Teatro Jornalero’s adaptation of a Mexican *Pastorela*, a “Shepherd’s Play,” whose form dates to the middle ages and which was imported to Mexico by the Spanish colonialists in the sixteenth century. Importantly, the *Pastorela*, like other forms of colonial drama, is an adaptable ideological weapon, especially for colonized subjects. For its part, Teatro Jornalero, working with playwright Cesar Ortega, crafted a radical *Pastorela* suited to the political milieu of 2015, reinterpreting the traditional character of Lucifer as (then) Presidential Candidate Donald Trump. In the context of the play, the Trump character is positioned both as a demonic force and a

cartoonish buffoon, with playwright Ortega drawing on actual statements made by the candidate for the dialogue. I argue that the play is thus an alteristic action on part of the professional immigrant artists to provide a platform where day laborer and undocumented communities can publicly militate against the mainstream rhetoric that dehumanizes them. My interviews with participants revealed a deep sense of collectivity, solidarity, and inclusivity. And although the Teatro Jornalero process is one that, I argue, is more inclusive than that of eSe Teatro in Chapter One, various challenges faced by the group resulted in an overall theatrical aesthetic that was extremely unpolished. These challenges include the economic precarity within the day laborer community, homelessness, untrained performers, and the difficulties of commuting in Los Angeles County. Ultimately however, the Teatro Jornalero process is (as evidenced in my three-months' worth of field research with the group), much more focused on the creation and maintenance of community than either the professionalization of their performers or a well-developed and engaging performance aesthetic.

Chapter Three

If the work of Teatro Jornalero is largely unconcerned with aesthetics, the experimental videos I examine in Chapter Three consider aesthetics to be one of their top priorities. Filmed and edited exclusively for gallery and museum installation, the collaboratively made videos *Pulpo/Octopus* (2010) by Yoshua Okón and *Maria TV* (2014) by Rodrigo Valenzuela are what I term “undocumentaries.” These videos, alternately elegant and disturbing, are intriguing performance creations that live somewhere between the genres of documentary film, performance art, and *testimonio*.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, these two artistic processes are largely similar

¹⁶⁵ *Testimonios* are the late twentieth-century Latin American literary genre of first-hand retellings of traumatic realities associated with the violence and degrading living conditions

in terms of how the productions were created, and (clearly unlike the work of Teatro Jornalero) were rather short-lived. For instance, the filming process itself, either done out of doors (*Pulpo/Octopus*) or within a studio (*Maria TV*) only lasted for a maximum of three days. For these processes, each artist contracted with immigrant individuals who served as *both* the performers and authors of the performance text. Within those three days, the immigrant performers were compensated with a daily wage and food to perform in semi-improvisational set-ups that were rooted in their own personal experiences. For *Maria TV*, Valenzuela set up an in-studio environment wherein his all-female Latina immigrant cast responded to performance prompts, as well being asked to mimic the overly dramatic dialogue of a Spanish-language *telenovela* (soap opera), all while wearing the homogenizing costume suggestive of a house maid. For his part, Okón contracted with Guatemalan day laborers outside a Los Angeles Home Depot, all veterans of their countries civil war, to reenact military maneuvers based on their own experiences. The black and white T-shirted performers, who were all K'iche'-speaking Indigenous Mayans, performed the military maneuvers within the Home Depot parking lot beneath the intermittent gaze of the Home Depot customers and staff. I argue in Chapter Three that these unique performances capture the liminal qualities associated with undocumentedness in three primary ways: (1) the deliberate homogenization of the performers via uniform costuming, (2) the foregrounding of the performer's physical displacement (both in-studio and in public), and (3), the utilization of what I call "de-voicing" techniques; the amateur performer's

associated with war and state violence. Notably, *testimonios* were commonly compiled by "literate professionals," as many of the individuals whose stories they purportedly tell speak another language than the one in which the testimony is written. See Kay B. Warren, "Telling Truths: Taking David Stoll and the Rigoberta Menchu Expose Seriously," *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 200-201.

spoken words are often either delivered as a disembodied voiceover or remain unsettlingly untranslated from their original (K'iche') language. In other words, through a fractured, somewhat ambiguous aesthetic, these performances (ultimately mediated through the impersonal distance of a digital screen) are designed to provoke an awareness within their potential audiences of the social and economic marginalization of the immigrant performers.

To position my argument in Chapter Three, I employ Chela Sandoval's decolonial reading of Frederic Jameson's theory of postmodernity, especially as Jameson provides an extended analysis of experimental video as the art form "par excellence" of postmodernity. The "new" fracturedness of Jameson's "citizen-subject" in postmodernity, Sandoval argues, is a condition that colonized subjects have lived with for centuries. As my interviews with spectators clearly revealed, the fractured, yet meticulous and circular aesthetics of *Maria TV*, in which the anonymous women's voices are collectivized, created a work that was both haunting and humanizing. Additionally, my interviews with performers revealed both a darker and a lighter side to these processes. On the one hand the performers in *Pulpo/Octopus* agreed to participate not out of a desire for a collective art process that sought to "humanize" them, but that it was simply paid "work." On the other hand, I argue that the process of making *Maria TV* constituted an inter-subjective, therapeutic ritual among the participants that provided a collective, cathartic experience—this, despite the arguably ambiguous aesthetic of the final work itself.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four examines what I argue is the least ambiguous and (to some extent) unartistic performance of the entire study. What's more, not only are the stakes of the performance demonstrably higher than the performances examined in Chapters One through Three, my final case study is the *only* performance conceived, produced, and performed *solely* by

undocumented immigrants. Chapter Four examines the inaugural “*Undocu-Graduation: 2015*,” an independent commencement ceremony conceived by the Washington DREAM Coalition, a group of politically active undocumented students from diverse institutions throughout Washington State.¹⁶⁶ If the prior case studies derive some of their efficacy from either the alteristic (and funded) impulses of sympathetic (non)undocumented immigrants or an aesthetic ambiguity that speaks to the condition of undocumentedness, the *Undocu-Graduation* enjoyed almost no budget, and the lack of ambiguity is indeed essential to the goals of its producers. As in similar graduation ceremonies on which it is clearly based, the graduates’ names are listed in the audience’s program. Additionally, the graduates’ names are read out loud during the ceremony, and photographs of the graduates are openly displayed in the space of performance. Indeed, the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* constitutes a performance of undocumentedness, and further acts as a public “coming out” ceremony for the participants.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, I argue the performance constitutes a *ritual of citizenship* otherwise denied to the “Undocu-Grads,” who were all brought to the US at a young age by their undocumented immigrant parents.

In addition to outlining US legislation that pertains to undocumented youth and education, I position the *Undocu-Graduation* within the scope of what Anthropologist Victor Turner has described as “social dramas.” For Turner, social dramas are the macro processes of social change in many human societies that consist of four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and *either* reintegration or recognition of the schism between contesting parties.¹⁶⁸ As evidenced by my interviews with the Undocu Grads, they see their ceremony as an act designed to redress the

¹⁶⁶ I also attended and conducted interviews at the subsequent *Undocu-Graduation 2016*. The inaugural ceremony, however, provides the bulk of the performative material that I analyze.

¹⁶⁷ Ray Corona, conversation with the author, January 31, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 61-87.

social crisis faced by undocumented youth across the nation, and especially within Washington State. Notably, Washington State has passed laws giving undocumented students both the right to pay in-state tuition and to apply for financial aid. This legislation, moreover, was passed *because* of the activism of undocumented students, including some of *Undocu-Graduation's* producers. In light of these facts, and abetted by my field research into the ceremony, I argue in Chapter Four that the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* operated with three main performative goals: (1) to craft a disciplined performance of citizenship that publicly displayed to lawmakers and undocumented parent spectators the effects of progressive immigration reform, (2) to inspire new generations of undocumented students in their goals for achieving academic success, and (3) to gift themselves a public ritual that provided them with a deeper sense of personal transformation that their prior institutional graduations did not supply. The courage of these individuals to publically perform both their undocumentedness and their accomplishments within a system that disenfranchises them, speaks, once again, to live performance's potential to alter the landscape of the current political discourse, and to "decolonize the mind" of both the performers and spectators.¹⁶⁹

Taken together, these case studies provide a glimpse into what clearly seems to be an emerging new medium of performance in the United States. I argue that these case studies performatively mediate conditions related to undocumentedness through direct collaboration with undocumented communities. Although each of these mediations manifests in its own generic way, most of the diverse case studies share similar goals and/or results. By focusing on first-person interviews with participants and spectators, the economic and social contexts of each

¹⁶⁹ Alejandra Pérez, conversation with the author, June 30, 2015. Alejandra (a University of Washington senior at the time of the interview), is a leading member of the Washington Dream Coalition as well as one of the main producers of the *Undocu-Graduation*.

performance, as well as the relationship between the main artists and their collaborators, we can see that the intersubjective dynamics within these creative processes often constitute a “decolonial epistemology”—a liberating processes of collective knowledge formation for, what I argue, are colonized subjects. These processes, moreover, often engender a sense of community among the participants and act as therapeutic mechanisms for those involved. Additionally, these performances often seek to craft positive representations of undocumented immigrants that speak back to the mainstream rhetoric that regularly dehumanizes them. However, this is not to say that these performances exist within some utopic realm where the social change envisioned by the creators is always realized, even partially. On the contrary, what is also evidenced within the interviews and my own attendance at several of the performances is that the maintenance of community between artists and their collaborators (as well as the artistic aesthetic) is often compromised by homelessness, the precarity of day labor, untrained performers, limited time, and insufficient budgets. And while most of the participants I interviewed would gladly participate in similar projects in the future, the very future of projects such as these now experiences an intensified precarity of its own. As the caustic rhetoric wielded against undocumented immigrants in the 2016 Presidential Election transcends its performative spectacularity and becomes enforceable law in the new “Trump era,” performance collaborations such as these will surely be under increased and mortal threat.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Nigel Duara, “Atty. Gen. Sessions calls for harsher penalties for migrants who repeatedly enter the country illegally,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 2017, accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-sessions-arizona-20170411-story.html>

CHAPTER ONE

Undocumented, Super Doméstica, and Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle.

I stayed with these women, *and learned*. I said to them, ‘I can stay with you so I can defend my rights as a domestic worker. But I don’t want to go back to being beaten, beaten by anybody, because that woman beat me. She said I didn’t have papers, that I didn’t have a Green Card, or anything. And my problem was that I didn’t know how to read. I didn’t know anything. I was completely illiterate. But for all my life, my mind has been very sharp [. . .] What we did is I told them the story, and the women wrote it down, in Spanish and English [. . .] And then they repeated what I had said. But since it was *me* that experienced the incident with the woman, it wasn’t very difficult.

Eulalia Camargo
Author of *Super Doméstica*¹⁷¹

This is my world too. I’m in this world. The play that I wrote just now . . . this is my area. This is what happens when immigrants from Latin America are shoved into the legal system [. . .] I know the system. I know the stories. [. . .] The reason I wrote [this play] is because I’m passionate about this theme, which is: people who are the most vulnerable, who have no knowledge of our culture, who don’t speak the language, are thrust into the most *Byzantine, obscure, and cruel* immigration system that almost any country has ever devised. *And we don’t know it! It’s hidden from us.*

Margaret O’Donnell
Author of *Undocumented*.¹⁷²

SECTION ONE: THE DECOLONIAL IMPULSES OF PERFORMANCE COLLABORATIONS WITH UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITIES.

¹⁷¹ “Yo me quedé con ellas, aprendiendo. Pero yo les dije, ‘yo puedo quedar con ustedes para poder defender mis derechos como doméstica. Pero yo no quería volver a ser golpeada, golpeada por alguna señora, porque esta señora me golpeó. Porque ella dijo que yo no tenía papeles, que yo no tenía Green Card, nada.’ Y mi problema era que yo no sabía leer. No sabía nada. Yo estaba “zero” letras. Cero. Pero mi cabeza, yo toda la vida fui muy lista [. . .] Lo que hicimos fue que plactiqué la historia, y ellas fueron escribiendo en Español e Inglés [. . .] y ellas me repitieron lo que digo. Pero como yo tenía la experiencia del accidente con la señora, no fue muy difícil,” (Eulalia Camargo, conversation with the author, September 18, 2015).

¹⁷² Margaret O’Donnell, conversation with the author, October 25, 2015.

I begin this chapter with the above epigraphs not because I will attempt an in-depth study of the theatrical work of these two first-time playwrights, but for the fact that these extremely dissimilar writers can be viewed as demonstrative poles of this study's entire concern: individuals from unique backgrounds who are compelled toward original, performative collaboration with undocumented communities. Additionally, the textual methodologies, political concerns, psychological impulses, and linguistic considerations of these writers are not only emblematic of the kind of theater that will be examined in this and the following chapter (the work of eSe Teatro and Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras, respectively), they are also in many ways comparable to the characteristics of nearly all the individuals in this study regardless of the performance medium with which they work. For instance, even though these female, first-time playwrights have extremely diverse backgrounds (one is an Anglo immigration lawyer in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, while the other is a formerly-illiterate Latina immigrant and domestic worker from Guatemala), they have, in a sense, both landed in the same location of desire. Consider for a moment the seven decolonizing impulses that each of the women (completely unfamiliar with each other's plays) seem to share: (1) Both writers, untrained in the theatrical arts, have recently found themselves drawn to the art of playwrighting in order to channel their professional experiences within the social milieu of undocumented immigrants.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Although there are certain public spaces that have a higher population of undocumented immigrants (day labor centers, immigrant activist organizations, and legal assistance offices, for example), it would be misleading to state that undocumented immigrants somehow occupy a space separate and isolated from the "general" population. As Lois Ann Lorentzen points out in her introduction to one of the most recent studies on undocumented immigration, the roughly 11.2 million undocumented immigrants in the US are "for the most part working people with children who have lived in the United States for a decade or longer." They are "neighbors, workers, and parents, part of the fabric of our life together." Lois Ann Lorentzen, introduction to *Hidden Lives and Human Rights in the United States: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration*, Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), vii.

(2) Both writers have extra-theatrical, activist-oriented goals of mitigating the harshness of the “coloniality of being” under which, I argued in the introduction, certain undocumented immigrants live; a dehumanized, rights-less condition marked by permanent struggle.¹⁷⁴ (3) Both writers are sincerely invested in what they believe to be the decolonizing epistemological possibilities of *live* theater, both in performance and process. O’Donnell speaks of the “alchemical,” and “transformative” power of live theater,¹⁷⁵ while Camargo suggests that the suffering of immigrants can truly be “revealed” in theater’s liveness.¹⁷⁶ (4) Both writers seek collaboration with undocumented immigrants, whether as performers or as contributing audience members who may act as dramaturgical guides to the creative process. (5) Both writers closely consider the aesthetics and celebratory nature of bilingualism (or, more specifically, what Walter Mignolo terms “bilanguaging”) in live theater for specific audiences.¹⁷⁷ (6) Both writers aim to

¹⁷⁴ See Introduction, pages 51-54.

¹⁷⁵ “[Theater is] engaging in a way that a novel or short story can never be. And so, getting a live theater audience, having real people act this . . . it’s that alchemy that happens in theater that is just impossible to create anywhere else. The actors themselves . . . and everybody hears and listens to it . . . getting ready for the production [. . .] it’s transformative,” (O’Donnell, conversation with the author, 2015).

¹⁷⁶ “In theater, the stories of the poor who come to the United States to be able to work and to support their families who remain in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, different places, reveal themselves in liveness. Live theater is good because it reveals the problems of every person, what they suffer from, what bothers them, and why they wanted to come to the United States. They come because they are hungry. Their children are hungry.” Spanish Original: “*Con el teatro, se da conocer en vivo las historias de los pobres que vienen a Estados Unidos para poder trabajar, para sostener sus familias que quedan en Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, different place [. . .] Un teatro en vivo es bueno porque se da conocer los problemas de cada persona, de lo que sufren, de lo que tienen, para que quieren venir a Estados Unidos. Vienen porque tienen hambre. Sus niños tienen hambre,*” (Eulalia Camargo, conversation with the author, September 14, 2015).

¹⁷⁷ Mignolo argues that the ideology of the modern one-to-one relationship between languages and territories is a product of colonialism, having displaced the natural diversity of “plurilinguaging” (multiple languages being spoken within one territory). This ideology, constantly reinforced in coloniality (the hierarchical systems of languages, geographies, and beings with which the contemporary world contends), is challenged by “bilanguaging” (a mode of life which exists in between languages - as opposed to the “skill” of bilingualism.) For

access the embodied immediacy of theater to psychologically process human trauma, whether their own or of those with whom they are in close contact. And finally (7), both writers see their brand of theater as a decolonizing tool of empathy and *solidarity* towards those who do not enjoy the basic rights of citizenship that they themselves do.¹⁷⁸ As the research conducted for this study has shown me, this kind of performative “oppositional consciousness” (i.e., self-conscious resistance)¹⁷⁹ to both structural and symbolic violence levied against undocumented immigrants in the US is not only evident in the artists who make *theater* about, for, and with undocumented communities, it is also at work within the individuals who make art and performance outside theater’s traditional bounds; artists of this category will be considered in this study’s Chapters Three and Four that, respectively, pertain to experimental video (*Pulpo/Octopus* and *Maria TV*) and public ritual (*Undocu-Graduation 2015*).

Mignolo, bilanguaging, “as a way of knowing and living emerging from the detritus of colonial and national expansion, could contribute in the struggle to reconvert subaltern memories from places of nostalgia to places of celebration.” Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 266.

¹⁷⁸ Drawing on *The Wretched of the Earth*, one of the foundational work of postcolonialism by Frantz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres identifies within contemporary political struggles an urge not only for freedom in and among colonized subjects, but also a vertically oriented “human intersubjectivity” in which the idea of fraternity is anchored in “*the upsurge of a loving subjectivity toward one who is ‘below,’*” [emphasis added]. Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 156.

¹⁷⁹ See Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*. The theory of oppositional consciousness (the recognition of the part of subordinated subjects that resistance to oppressive power relations is possible) is expanded by Sandoval in her “decolonial” reading of 20th century critical theory. She argues that the primary strains of poststructuralist critical theories that developed in the 20th century (Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, etc.) are “fundamentally linked to the [linguistically fractured] voices of subordinated people” (8). Moreover, this oppositional consciousness is a self-conscious mobilization of agency on the part of the subordinated, and thus “performative” (58.) I explore this “postmodern” connection to subordinated voices further in Chapter Three, which links the postmodern aesthetics of experimental video and the psychological stresses related to undocumentedness.

Although neither of the works of Eulalia Camargo or Margaret O'Donnell are primary case studies here, their suggestive projects are worth exploring to set the stage for the primary case study of this chapter. The primary case study of this chapter is eSe Teatro's 2014 production of Rose Cano's *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle*. Examined more closely, however, are the related "Dialogues with Dignity" workshops (2011-2013), which presented early sections of Cano's play to homeless and undocumented communities. Eventually, these public workshops, which assisted the playwright in shaping the final script, led to a professional production of Cano's play at Seattle's ACT Theater in 2014.

Ends of the Theatrical Spectrum: *Undocumented* and *Super Doméstica*.

Margaret O'Donnell's 2015 play *Undocumented* could be looked at as an exercise in professional/artistic intermediation, a trait shared by Cano, whose play springs directly from her work as a Spanish/English medical interpreter. For her part, O'Donnell is a Seattle-based immigration lawyer with over thirty years of experience in the legal trade, including extended work in Ciudad Juárez, the notoriously violent border city in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua and the hub of deportee processing in Mexico. Her five-act play, which follows the tribulations of an undocumented family of Mexican immigrants in Seattle, seeks to layout the particularities and complexities of the United States' system of detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants who are suspected of criminal activity within the US. Exploring myriad legal situations through action and dialogue, the play depicts incarcerated immigrants' "options" for deportation proceedings and (potential) return to the US. For instance, O'Donnell's character Freddy, the father of a financially struggling family of three, is landed within the deportation system due to charges of domestic violence against his wife Luisa. In fact, the charges stem from a linguistic misunderstanding on the part of the police, and Luisa

(monolingual in Spanish) is unable to convince the police to drop the charges; although he struggles with alcoholism, Freddy is not actually physically abusive to either his wife or their twelve-year old daughter, Karina, an aspiring dancer. Nevertheless, Freddy's ongoing criminal charges and incarceration in a privately run, for-profit detention center, as well as his family's inability to post the \$10,000 bail, ultimately leads to his "voluntary departure" back to Mexico, a move on his part designed to avoid both an official deportation order and an lengthy removal (deportation) proceeding.¹⁸⁰ Adjusting to life without Freddy, Luisa and Karina begin to gain individual agency through a successful small business venture and a dance scholarship, respectively. For his part, Freddy attempts a dangerous return to the US through the Sonoran Desert. At the play's end, Freddy is featured in two juxtaposed border crossing scenes, one hallucinogenic and happy, with his daughter as a hiking companion in a lush Pacific Northwest-style forest, the other in the harsh environment of the Sonoran Desert. In the latter scene, Freddy succumbs to the heat, hunger, and misery of his failed attempt to reunite with his family. Freddy's death in the desert is implied in the ambiguity of the play's closing moments.

Although O'Donnell's play features the well-trod border crossing trope exhibited in numerous contemporary Latina/o plays (especially the extreme physical degradation immigrants face as they migrate across the desert of the US Southwest), many of these other productions are

¹⁸⁰Margaret O'Donnell, *Undocumented* (Unpublished Playscript, 2015), 95; Transactional Records Access Clearing House (TRAC), "ICE 'Book-Out' Reasons," *TRAC Reports*, May 22, 2013, accessed March 3, 2016. "Voluntary departure. Permission granted to an alien to leave the U.S. voluntarily, at his/her own expense, by a designated date. The permission is offered by the Department of Homeland Security either before or during a removal hearing in Immigration Court. Immigrants often request voluntary departure as an alternative to receiving a formal order of removal from the U.S. This alternative can be very important to the individual from a legal standpoint because the consequences of a removal order include long-term bars (restrictions) to re-admission to the U.S. and immigration benefits." http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/320/bookout_definitions.html.

intended for Latina/o, bi-lingual, or multicultural audiences, who conceivably may be sympathetic to the plight of undocumented immigrants.¹⁸¹ However, O'Donnell (whose initial staged readings in Seattle were performed for audiences of undocumented immigrants, and upon whose feedback she changed the play “dramatically”) aims her final artistic product directly at non-immigrant audiences with a script entirely in English.¹⁸² Dissimilar to the trend in certain contemporary Latina/o dramas that theater scholar Jon Rossini has argued attempt a kind of “mainstreaming” by being written and presented in English, here the playwright’s linguistic choice is a matter of theater’s potential to illuminate a cruel reality for an uninformed, *Anglo* audience.¹⁸³ “White people don’t know this is happening,” O’Donnell told me. “We need to know it. The Spanish-speaking people know it. *They live it. Everyday.*”¹⁸⁴

Of primary importance here is the fact that O’Donnell changed her play due to the direct suggestions of early audiences, comprised partially of undocumented immigrants that O’Donnell is professionally acquainted with. In this way, the playwright (concerned not only about her inexperience in crafting an effective script, but also with a providing a sense of fidelity to the complicated reality she wishes to present), attempts to create characters that are as “believable”

¹⁸¹ Recent plays such as Jorge Ávila’s *Maricopa* (2015), Javier Malpica’s *Papá está en la Atlántida* (2005), Josefina Lopez’s *Detained in the Desert* (2013), and Kara Hartzler’s *No Roosters in the Desert* (2010), among others, have imaginatively dramatized the harsh, dangerous border crossing experience.

¹⁸² In a theatrical conceit akin to Karen Zacarías’ *Mariela in the Desert* (2005), the actors in *Undocumented* speak English, while it is implied early on that their characters are speaking in Spanish.

¹⁸³ Jon Rossini. *Contemporary Latina/o Theater: Wrighting Ethnicity* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 2008), 18. Rossini also is careful to point out that the use of English in Latina/o plays is not merely a capitulation to an English-speaking audience, but that many Latina/os are monolingual English-speakers.

¹⁸⁴ O’Donnell, conversation, 2015.

as possible.¹⁸⁵ And for many of her initial audience members, the behavior of Freddy’s wife Luisa was not believable at all. Sadly, Luisa’s assertiveness and initial pushback against her husband’s unemployment and alcohol abuse struck immigrant female audience members as “too American,” and thus highly unrealistic.¹⁸⁶ Although Luisa initially set out to gain US citizenship through a U-Visa (a pathway to citizenship for undocumented victims of domestic violence), in the play’s latest version, Luisa does everything she can to help Freddy, even pleading for help from her loathsome male boss at a cleaning service who insists Luisa sleep with him.¹⁸⁷ Luisa, however, resists her boss’s sexual advances, maintains her dignity, and Freddy is faced with deportation. As we shall see later in this chapter, both the ideas that the playwright seeks dramaturgical guidance based on audience feedback and that the myriad situations in the play are derived from professional contact with undocumented immigrants are also integral to the process

¹⁸⁵ O’Donnell, conversation, 2015. O’Donnell is certainly not alone as an Anglo artist attempting to process their own professional experience with undocumented immigrants. Novelists such as J.P. Bone (author of *Illegals* – 1996) and film-maker Brandon Kohl (*Day Labor* – 2009) represent just two artists whose professional relationships with undocumented immigrants have been channeled into an artistic product. See: J.P. Bone, *Illegals* (Berkeley: Minefield Publications, 1996) and Brendan Kohl, “Day Labor,” *Vimeo*, accessed December 5, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/33184314>.

¹⁸⁶ As the audience members related to the playwright: “They said ‘That woman wouldn’t act like that. She would not be so assertive. She would put up with his drinking. She would never, never, not fight for him.’ So, I changed the play on what they said. *I changed it dramatically*. I changed it so that she stayed with him till the very end. She did everything she could,” (O’Donnell, conversation with the author).

¹⁸⁷ Although many of O’Donnell’s female clients have been the victim of domestic violence, the crime often goes unreported, leaving the victim without the U-Visa option. One third of O’Donnell’s clients apply for the U-visa, which, according to the playwright is the “easiest option for undocumented citizens” to gain citizenship, (O’Donnell, conversation, 2015); For detailed U-Visa information, see: “Victims of Criminal Activity: U Nonimmigrant Status,” Department of Homeland Security, web, February 11, 2016, accessed March 3, 2016; Part of Congress’ “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act” of 2000, the U nonimmigrant status (U-Visa), is set aside for immigrants who are crime victims and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation of criminal activity. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status>.

of Rose Cano's *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*. These notions, however, are not as strongly evident with the straight-forward, agit-prop style of Eulalia Camargo's *Super Doméstica*, a short play that hinges on a single traumatic moment and whose performance methodology (that of being performed for diverse community audiences) more closely aligns with eSe Teatro's Dialogues with Dignity project.

If O'Donnell is attempting a decolonizing epistemology for a "white," English-speaking population whom she feels needs to be educated in the innumerable legal details of a "cruel" and "Byzantine" immigration system (a system with which she has advanced knowledge), Camargo, on the other hand, strives for an immediate and emotional reaction from a Spanish-speaking audience through traumatic reenactment. Moreover, the power of this reenactment is rooted in both the semiotics of alternative theatrical spaces and the theatrical immediacy of amateur performers enacting autobiography.¹⁸⁸ Both concepts, as we shall see, intersect thoroughly with the theatrical case studies of this and the following chapters. Additionally, as it is equally important to O'Donnell as it is to Camargo in the construction of the artistic product, the professional experience of the individual artist is essential to the creative process.

Camargo immigrated to California in 1971 from her native Guatemala and for the next thirty years was employed as a domestic worker in Los Angeles, California.¹⁸⁹ Functionally

¹⁸⁸ Caridad Svich has examined how the "autobiographical" plays of Latina playwrights such as Migdalia Cruz, Cherrie Moraga, Milcha Sanchez-Scott (among many others) constitute a literature of resistance to socio-political norms and gender expectations. For Svich, the act of Latina playwrights creating theatrical versions of themselves offers to the audience a "reconfiguring of the truth," and thus an alteration of the status quo. See Caridad Svich, "Latina Theatre and Performance: Acts of Exposure," in *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre, and Performance*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 178-193.

¹⁸⁹ In recent testimony from Gilda Blanco of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, domestic work is best understood as an isolated profession, one often marked by various kinds of employer/employee abuse (physical, sexual, wage theft, etc.). Gilda Blanco, "Stories of

illiterate (both in English and Spanish) upon her arrival, but hardworking and with three children in Guatemala, Camargo briefly worked for a woman in Beverly Hills who physically abused her. Camargo's experience of abuse became the touchstone of her play *Super Doméstica*, which has been performed at fundraising events for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA),¹⁹⁰ the Domestic Workers' Alliance in New York City (DWA), and a private, in-home gathering for members of the Services Employees International Union (SEIU). Camargo's play, often performed for audiences of fellow domestic workers, thus shares numerous traits with radical, workers' theater, a predominantly amateur genre that can be traced back to at least the early twentieth century.¹⁹¹ Like much of workers' theatre, Camargo's play is

Migration and Actions for Justice" (Public Lecture), University of Washington, Seattle, May 6, 2016). Additionally, domestic workers make up a considerable workforce across the US. As of 2006, it was estimated that there were over 100,000 domestic workers in the Los Angeles area alone; See also Leadingham, Kevin, and Anayansi Prado. *Maid in America*. New York, NY: Women Make Movies, 2004.

¹⁹⁰Under the fiscal sponsorship of the United Way, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant's Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), was founded as a multiethnic collaborative of advocacy groups, social service providers, policy makers, and legal services organizations dedicated to advancing the human and civil rights of immigrants and refugees in Los Angeles. In 1993, CHIRLA was officially established as its own 501(c)(3) non-profit organization; "Our Story," Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, accessed May 4, 2016; <http://www.chirla.org/our-story>.

¹⁹¹ The international history of workers' theater (created by and performed for workers) is storied and well documented. From the massive outdoor pageants of the Industrial Workers of the World in the nineteen-teens, to the proliferating Russian Blue Blouse theatrical companies that played in Soviet beer halls and union clubs in the 1920s (which directly influenced Hallie Flanagan and the "Living Newspapers" of the left-leaning Federal Theatre Project (1935-1939), through the smaller German-language troupes in the US in the 1930s, to the arrival of El Teatro Campesino (and thus Chicano Theater) in the 1960s on the picket lines of the United Farm Workers of California, and to the SEIU's own "Say it with a Skit or Song" program of the 1980s, numerous scholars have explored the goals, aesthetics, triumphs, failings, and influential artists of these (and many other) worker's theaters. Key texts include (but are not limited to): Jorge A. Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*, Tempe: Bilingual Press, 1982; Colette Hyman, *Staging Strikes: Workers' Theatre and the American Labor Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997; Elizabeth A. Osborne, *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl, and Stuart Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and*

not intended for a traditional theater space. It has been staged both indoors and outdoors at different political events, dramatizes the real-world struggles that domestic workers face, and depicts the triumph of workers over the conditions with which they contend. Most relevant to this study is that at the heart of *Super Doméstica* lies the reenactment, exposure, and inversion of historical violence committed upon the immigrant body. My following analysis of the play derives from two sources: the performance excerpt included in Anayansi Prado's domestic worker documentary *Maid in America* and a video recording of an in-home performance given to me by Camargo.¹⁹²

The play's simple three-act structure briskly moves through the straightforward plot: the female domestic worker (played by Camargo herself) is engaged in serving the well-to-do employer a breakfast of toast and coffee. The employer, who insists on referring to the employee as "Stupid María," bitterly complains about the "burnt" toast and the "coldness" of the coffee (which the domestic worker has already re-heated at the employer's prior insistence). The domestic worker moves in and out of the scene, from the kitchen to the living space, as the employer continues her ugly diatribe against her employee. Soon enough, the scene escalates. The domestic worker begins to push back against her employer's unrealistic demands, insisting

America. London: Routledge, 1985; Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon: Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain, 1917-1934*, London: Routledge, 1986.

¹⁹² Additionally, my analysis of Camargo's play is centered on my conversations with the playwright/activist herself. For performance analysis, I draw on two different video-taped versions of the play: an outdoor version that was featured in Anayansi Prado's documentary film *Maid in the America* (2004), and a taped version at an SEIU fundraiser in 2005 at a private Malibu residence. Anayansi Prado was also interviewed for this study. The 2005 Malibu recording was provided to me by Camargo. For Camargo, the outdoor version lacked the power of the indoor event, largely because of a discrepancy between the performance intensity of the different actresses who played the character of the female employer. My efforts at retrieving a written script were unfruitful.

that the coffee should indeed be hot enough by now. The contemptuous employee then throws the scalding coffee in the domestic worker's face, burning her skin.¹⁹³ The humiliated and scalded domestic worker protests, and the employer (switching now to speak in English) picks up a phone and calls Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to have the woman arrested and deported. The domestic worker panics at the thought of "*La Migra*," and pleads with her employer not to report her to the INS. A violent scuffle ensues and the employer throws the domestic worker to the floor, who is sobbing when the Immigration Officer rather immediately appears and attempts to place the domestic worker under arrest. At the last minute, the crying domestic worker is suddenly saved by the red-caped female "*Super Doméstica*," who, like a comic book hero, swoops into the final scene to humorous and cathartic effect.¹⁹⁴ The Immigration Officer, helplessly pushed aside by the *Super Doméstica*, attempts to reassert control of the situation:

Immigration Officer: What's going on here? Who are you?

Super Doméstica. I'm here to defend her. I'm the *Super Doméstica*!

Immigration Officer. Oh, really? And what kinds of rights does she have?

Super Doméstica. She has rights! She has rights in this country as a worker. And

all over the world as a human being! (*The Super Doméstica spreads her arms*

wide. The Immigration Officer lets go of the Domestic Worker. Super Doméstica

leads the Domestic Worker back to the center and places a red cape around her

¹⁹³ Camargo suffered burns to her face and arms from this incident and for which she received medical attention. However, like most individuals employed in domestic work, she lacked medical insurance. The result of this encounter was that the husband of the female employer paid Camargo \$3,000 to cover her medical expenses. Camargo left this position of employment shortly thereafter, (Camargo, conversation, September 18, 2015).

¹⁹⁴ In both performance recordings the audience erupts in laughter and applause at the character's revelation of her identity.

shoulders.) Let's go! I now pronounce *you* a Super Doméstica. And you will be an example of those facing similar situations.¹⁹⁵

The actors bow, and the audience, delighted in the highly-unrealistic rescue of the domestic worker, leaves the play (ostensibly) with a heightened sense of the sometimes-brutal realities that domestic workers face. This common labor condition has been described by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo as the “new world domestic order,” a neo-colonial paradigm of employment that is defined by isolation, ambivalence, low-wages, non-regulation, and the predominance of immigrant women of color.¹⁹⁶ Despite its brevity, *Super Doméstica* engages with all these troubling characteristics.

In essence, the play derives its power from four immediate factors. Firstly, the rescue of (and the radical transformation undergone by) the abused character resonates with the empathetic audiences comprised of fellow domestic workers and union members. Although it may be a simplistic and comic rendition, the figure of the Super Doméstica is metaphoric of the idea of

¹⁹⁵Spanish Original: Immigration Officer: *¿Qué pasa? ¿Y usted? ¿Quién es?*

Super Doméstica: *Estoy aquí para defenderla. ¡Soy la Super Doméstica!*

Immigration Officer: *Así. ¿Y qué derechos tiene ella?*

Super Doméstica: *Ella tiene derechos como trabajadora - aquí en este país y como ser humano en todo el mundo [. . .]. Vamos. Ahora yo te convierto en una Super Doméstica, y serás el ejemplo para toda las demás en la misma situación.*

Kevin Leadingham & Anayansi Prado, Impacto Films, and Women Make Movies. *Maid in America* (New York, NY: Women Make Movies, 2004). (Transcription by the author).

¹⁹⁶ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). In her Los Angeles-based research on domestic workers, Hondagneu-Sotelo interviewed sixty individuals (employers and domestic workers), noting that the masses of affluent professionals in Los Angeles have come to rely on Latino immigrant workers almost as a “social obligation.” In her study, which I see as a reinforcement of the notion that undocumented immigrants constitute an internal colony in the US, Hondagneu-Sotelo deduces “[e]ven as they enjoy the attendant privilege, many Americans remain profoundly ambivalent about positioning themselves as employers of domestic workers. These arrangements, after all, are often likened to the master-servant relations drawn out of premodern feudalism and slavery, making for a certain amount of tension with the strong U.S. rhetoric of democracy and egalitarianism,” (10-11).

progressive solidarity among workers and immigrants, both undocumented and not.¹⁹⁷ Akin to the rough aesthetics employed in the 1960s by El Teatro Campesino, whose broad portrayals of *patroncitos* (bosses) and *campesinos* (farmworkers) sought to upend the colonizing structure of farmworker's demoralized realities with broad, theatrical comedy, the simplicity of the super heroine becomes a galvanizing and effectual trope. Second (and as a balancing point of tension to the comic nature of the play's end), the audience is made aware that the play's central event is taken *directly* from the life experience of the writer/performer. The audience is thus drawn into the ugly scenario because the aesthetic distance generally associated with an actor's portrayal of a character is radically diminished, if not essentially eradicated. I argue that this trait, that of the individual immigrant reenacting actual live violence is perhaps the most extreme possibility of the performance methodology under consideration. Moreover, it is primarily through embodied reenactment (here in front of an appreciative audience) that enables transcendence of the individual trauma. This "twice-behaved-behavior," as performance scholar Richard Schechner might have it, arguably has more potential for social transformation than an actor in a rehearsed (and repeated) role.¹⁹⁸ Camargo's past suffering is reenacted, recognized, overcome, and she

¹⁹⁷ In the performance recorded for *Maid in the U.S.A.*, the Super Doméstica was portrayed by an undocumented female immigrant who, since the recording of the performance, has returned to her country of origin. Trained as an accountant, the woman was unable to secure employment above domestic work due to her undocumented status. (Anayansi Prado, conversation with the author, September 17, 2015).

¹⁹⁸ For Schechner, restored behavior is the main characteristic of performance, both in terms of its reflectiveness toward reality and its symbolic power. The distance created by performance additionally allows the original behavior to be worked on, transfigured, challenged, or changed. In this way, the autobiographical trauma experienced by Camargo is not only framed as performance, and thus a critical apparatus for social change, but as a reiterated (and transformed) experience that she actually had herself. See Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 35-37.

emerges out of the play as transformed into the actual activist she has become in her real life.¹⁹⁹ Third, and adding to this sense of “reality,” is the sometimes-unnering techniques of amateur actors in violent scenes. Virtually unrehearsed when it came time to perform at the Malibu fundraiser, the amateur performers, untrained in such methods as stage combat, enacted by default what seemed to verge on actual physical violence.²⁰⁰ While it does not appear that anyone was in actual physical danger (or that the coffee in the scene was actually hot) the grim silence of the audience during the physical altercation, in which the jacket of the domestic is nearly torn from her body, I argue, speaks to another level of unintentional realism. Lastly here, I would suggest that certain performances of *Super Doméstica* (and indeed several of the performances that will be examined in this study) rely of what Marvin Carlson has identified as “ghosting,” a phenomenological characteristic endemic to all arts, but most particularly to theater. For Carlson, “ghosting,” is the “haunted” repetition that marks all aspects of theater including the recycled actor’s body, the repeated dramatic text, and the space of performance itself, all of which conspire to create extra-theatrical resonances within the mind of the spectator.²⁰¹ For instance, if an audience were to see a play about unemployed factory workers in Detroit staged in an

¹⁹⁹Camargo credits her performance work as contributing to both her literacy and her political awakening. She has now worked part time for the Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles for twenty-five years (for whom she has often performed the character of “Super Pasajero,” or “Super Passenger”) for media events. She also attributes the workshopping of her own and other plays to her ongoing process of gaining literacy as well as personal agency. Camargo: “But now, thanks to God, I know how to read, I know how to write. *And I had an awakening*. Because I was asleep. I was asleep in the senses when I came to this country. I had no family here, I came to work, this was before my work with the [Bus Riders] Union.” Spanish Translation: “*Pero ahora, a Dios gracias, yo sé leer, yo sé escribir, y desperté. Porque yo estaba dormido. Yo estaba dormida en el sentido, cuando llegué a este país. No tenía familia, vine a trabajar, eso salía antes de mi trabajo con el sindicato,*” (Camargo, conversation, September 18, 2015).

²⁰⁰ As Camargo related to me, the performers were asked to present the play on the same day as the fundraising event and they talked through a “rehearsal” on the car ride to Malibu, (Camargo, conversation with the author, November 20, 2015).

²⁰¹ Marvin, Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 1-15.

abandoned Detroit factory, the space's accoutrements (i.e., the defunct machinery, the dirty windows, the smell of grease) would all have an effect on the spectator's reception of the play. Removed from the safe space of a proscenium theater, the audience unwittingly enters a more specific sense of memory and history, and thereby, per Carlson, creates a deeper sense of meaning for the audience. In the case of Camargo's performance at the private Malibu residence, I would argue that the play is imbued with a ghosted resonance: Camargo, in the "role" of the domestic worker, physically moves from an *actual* kitchen to an *actual* dining room, the furniture and decor of the Malibu residence do not *suggest* a facsimile of affluent house in which a domestic worker might be employed, *but exists materially as such*, and the low ceilings and lack of theatrical lighting add to a sense of claustrophobia and dimness, as if the spectator is witness not to a performer in a dramatic role, but a prisoner in a house. This is not to imply that the actual house itself was the scene of the original crime, and thus situated to "ghost" the actual events, as Carlson has explored in site-specific productions.²⁰² My point here is to suggest that the semiotic layers of reenactment in spaces *similar to* the original event offer a different kind of ghosting. It is precisely this kind of ghosting that Cano's play *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* negotiated in its readings at homeless shelters and day labor centers (locations also depicted within the play). On the other hand, and as we shall see in Chapter Three that examines

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 134. Carlson writes that in site-specific performance "written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience, or, in more extreme cases, new works are created that are directly inspired by the extratheatrical associations of these locations" (134). Rather than exhibiting the direct intentionality of either of Carlson's two models, I suggest that the ghosting in Camargo's Malibu presentation is an unintentional, albeit powerful byproduct.

experimental video, certain artists choose to explore the existential condition of undocumentedness when “location” is all but removed.²⁰³

In the brief explorations above, we see that although O’Donnell’s and Camargo’s plays are radically different in tone, aesthetics, use of language, dramatic time, and authorship, they are extremely similar in dramatic content and artistic intention. These two works thus combine to offer us a paradigmatic performance model that can be levied to both contextualize and begin to understand the methodologies, socio-political goals, and various participants who collaborate to make performance by and for undocumented communities. Whether (on one end of the spectrum) they are wrought by a single author who intends intellectually to shed light on the “legal violence” committed upon undocumented individuals and their families,²⁰⁴ or (on the other) written collectively to reenact and thus transcend personal violence and trauma, they all conspire to exorcize what they see as the lesser-than-human status of undocumented immigrants in the US. This lesser-than state, pervasive in the hierarchical world of neoliberal globalization, is termed by decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres as “the coloniality of being.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, these performances are not usually intended for “professional” production.²⁰⁶ Rather

²⁰³ Rodrigo Valenzuela’s *telenovela* reenactments with Latina immigrants for his video work *Maria TV* (2012) were filmed in an empty studio, periodically in front of a purposefully empty Green Screen. This de-centering, “non-location,” I argue in Chapter Three, attempts to be an aesthetic recreation of the liminality that undocumented immigrants are often perceived as inhabiting.

²⁰⁴ Menjivar and Abrego, “Legal Violence,” 1380-1421. Cecilia Menjivar and Leisy Abrego argue powerfully that the post 9-11 convergence of immigration law and criminal law in the US has resulted in a normalized “legal violence” directed at undocumented communities. See Introduction, page 15.

²⁰⁵ Maldonado-Torres, *Coloniality of Being*, 252.

²⁰⁶ One exception of course is the culminating run of eSe Teatro’s *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* at ACT Theater in 2014. Although I will examine textual aspects of the 2014 professional production later in this chapter, my primary focus here is on the play’s initial workshops at diverse spaces around the city of Seattle.

they, like the other case studies of this dissertation, seek to resonate within locations alternate to traditional theater spaces, certain “heterotopic” counter-sites of contemporary society as theorized by Michel Foucault. Such sites, as Foucault wrote, are where utopias are “enacted:” museums, shelters, hospitals, art galleries, and homeless missions.²⁰⁷ Each of these, spaces, as we shall see, carry their own weight, both historically and semiotically. These combined factors, I argue, ultimately cohere into a decolonial epistemology (a liberating process of collective knowledge formation for colonized subjects) which intends to outlast the ephemerality of live performance. In other words, through my experience of coming to know these performances and those who made them, I see various attempts (at times successful) to delink from the colonial matrix of power; to recognize and reaffirm the humanity in those who have been threatened with a lesser-than-human status; to learn beyond the limits of what regressive political discourse may have us believe, and to expose or transcend one’s own position and/or culpability within the colonial matrix of power.

Having established the various characteristics of this theatrical/performative model, the next section takes up this chapter’s primary case study: Rose Cano’s play *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle* (hereafter *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*) and the associated “Dialogues with Dignity” project conducted by eSe Teatro. The Dialogues with

²⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring, 1986), 22-27. Although Foucault does point out that the theater itself is also a heterotopic site, where a single site is capable of juxtaposing several, the heterotopias are utopic enactments *in and of themselves*. He writes: “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted,” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24). To my thinking, the desire on the part of artists to stage performances at sites such as day labor centers, homeless shelters, and parking lots reflects an urge to highlight, contest and invert the practices usually found there.

Dignity were staged excerpts from Cano's play that were performed in a variety of heterotopic locations in Seattle between 2012 and 2014. Funded with a Seattle Office of Arts and Culture grant entitled "Empowering the Homeless Through Theater," these dialogues consisted of thirty-minute talk back sessions with homeless, day laborer, and other community audiences. The dialogues were conducted in public hospitals, libraries, rehabilitation centers, a tent city of homeless citizens, a homeless mission, and Seattle's Casa Latina, an immigration rights and day labor center for Latina/o immigrants. These readings utilized the post-show question-and-answer sessions with the various groups not only to let the audience's voice be heard, but also to serve the formation of play's script that it might become a more accurate representation of the precarious realities of homelessness in Seattle.²⁰⁸ This precariousness (although imaginatively rooted to Cervantes' early modern knight of La Mancha), was witnessed firsthand and over a long period by the playwright in contemporary Seattle. The following section examines the impulses and reflections of various participants of the Dialogues with Dignity project, arguing that eSe Teatro's effort to create a space of human intersubjectivity through the representation of "bare life" constitutes a decolonial epistemology and thereby an effort to delink from the colonial matrix of power.²⁰⁹ Importantly, these dialogues were conducted in spaces outside institutional theaters: day labor centers, homeless missions, rehabilitation centers, hospitals. These are types of the Foucauldian heterotopias that echo, mirror, and contest the mainstream spaces of the sanctioned norm. Casa Latina, for instance, a Seattle day labor center that publicly provides resources and communal space for many undocumented immigrants, inverts and challenges mainstream discourse that seeks to label such individuals as placeless and/or anathema to society

²⁰⁸ Cano, conversation with the author, May 24, 2014.

²⁰⁹ Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical concept of "bare life," and how it relates to *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* is clarified in this chapter's following section.

in general. It is within such alternative performance spaces that the Dialogues with Dignity sought to connect with marginalized audiences that might feel a personal connection to the play. Indeed, as performance scholar Gad Guterman has noted, undocumented communities are quite often prevented from seeing “legitimate” theater due to the directly exclusive systems of subscription-based audiences, high-ticket prices, monolingualism, and lack of outreach.²¹⁰ Thinking through barriers of class, economics, and language, however, the artists working with eSe Teatro strove to both deepen their artistic process and, perhaps most importantly, publicly recognize both the humanity of and the extreme challenges faced by individuals who are regularly criminalized in mainstream US discourse.

SECTION TWO: THE “ALTERISTIC” IMPULSE OF ESE TEATRO’S “DIALOGUES WITH DIGNTY”

We need more dedicated people who are willing to work in the community and take the theater to the community. To me that’s the new thrust, that’s the new theater of America. You know, tear down the temple. Tear down the bureaucratic establishment that runs the theater. More collective. More people who are in agreement with the need to deal with the problems the community is concerned with. And go to them and ask them, “*What can we do for you?* What do we need to do here?”

Jose Carillo²¹¹
Actor, Dialogues with Dignity

Altericity is the *Yes* of love expressed as *non-indifference* toward the Other, primarily toward the Other who is “below.”

Nelson Maldonado-Torres
Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity, 158 [italics original]

²¹⁰ Guterman, *Theatre of Undocumentedness*, 93.

²¹¹ Jose Carillo, conversation with the author, April 2, 2016.

In chapter twenty-two of *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes' groundbreaking 1605 work that some consider to be the "birth of the novel,"²¹² the chivalrous and insane protagonist, upon encountering a chain of fettered and galley-bound slaves, nobly recalls his solemn vow to "favor those in need and those oppressed by the powerful."²¹³ What ultimately moves Quixote to violent and decisive action in the scene is the tale of the intelligent and well-spoken prisoner Ginés de Pasamonte, (who is manacled in irons at the waist and neck in such a way as to prevent all movement), and who has not only already served "four years on the galleys [. . .] tast[ing] the overseer's whip," but has also penned his own autobiography in prison.²¹⁴ Although Quixote rashly decides to free the prisoners (who have met their incarceration through "need of money," "lack of favor," and the "twisted judgment" of the legal system), the famous knight errant is subsequently robbed, stripped, and beaten by the men he has just liberated.²¹⁵ Sancho Panza, Quixote's semi-reliable, and money-seeking squire does not escape the violence either, and the two half-naked wanderers manage to flee into the nearby Sierra Morena mountains, grateful, at least, for the small provisions remaining in Sancho's donkey's unrifled saddle bags. Such are the daily vicissitudes of Cervantes' mad anti-heroes: lack of shelter, want of clothing, fruitless labor, violence brought upon the body by an inability to understand the social environment, scarcity of food, and their reduction (despite Quixote's lofty intentions) to a state of dehumanized indignity.

²¹² Harold Bloom, Introduction, *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), xxiii. The status of Cervantes masterpiece as merely a "novel," however, has been challenged by many. William Childers, for example, has suggested that while calling *Don Quixote* the "first modern novel" is generally a statement meant to give Cervantes' masterpiece stature, it is a notion that has actually "tended to shrink its multifarious, transcultural significance down to a single dimension," William Childers, *Transnational Cervantes*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), xiv.

²¹³ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 170.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

When Rose Cano, playwright and artistic director of Seattle's eSe Teatro (also a Spanish/English medical interpreter at Seattle's Harborview Hospital) first saw shackled Latino prisoners brought to the Emergency Room for medical treatment from King County (WA) Jail, her mind reflected back to this episode in Cervantes' classic. Almost instinctively, she asked herself "What would Don Quixote think?"²¹⁶ For the previous fifteen years Cano had been employed as an interpreter in small, local health clinics in Latina/o communities around King County, often visiting elderly and pregnant patients in the privacy of their own homes, even getting to know some patients over a number of years.²¹⁷ Upon commencing her work at the large, publicly-funded hospital in Seattle's urban downtown, however, Cano suddenly found herself dealing with situations distinctly more intense than at her previous employment: assault victims, women in labor, victims of jobsite and traffic accidents, drug addicts, chronic inebriates, and the mentally ill, many of them homeless and/or undocumented immigrants.²¹⁸ As time went on, many of the experiences she was having as an interpreter were bringing Don Quixote and his comfortless misadventures more and more to the forefront of her mind. "I've seen many, many patients, homeless and otherwise, who come in for an assault," she told me.

²¹⁶ Rose Cano, conversation with the author, May 24, 2014.

²¹⁷ "[In the clinic work] I would go out to a lot of people's homes to interpret. So I saw a lot of how people lived, and their lifestyle and their homes [. . .] It was very eye opening. I mean it was part of the job, [and] I feel privileged to have heard thousands of people's stories. At sometimes really pivotal moments in their life. Having just given birth [. . .] I used to interpret at Labor and Delivery, so I would be there for moments of people's joy, and I see everything! [. . .] Sometimes I would see the same women over a ten-year period with different pregnancies," (Cano, conversation, 2014).

²¹⁸ Cano estimates that about 80% of her patients are from Mexico, although Harborview's patient population from other countries (especially Central American) is rising. Critical to this study, most Cano's patients are non-citizens. This is not to say that most of Cano's patients are undocumented. A good number of Cano's patients are permanent legal residents in the US. Of primary interest here is how Cano's distillation of her interpreter experiences resulted in an undocumented protagonist.

They've been assaulted for various reasons, and homeless people are very vulnerable to that. Sometimes they are beat up by other drug addicts or criminals. And so . . . there was a man, I didn't even meet him, because there's a big board that tells you what patients are coming in to the ER. And it read "Sixty-seven-year-old male, found down, cracked teeth" [. . .] And I thought this is the exact same scene as in *Don Quixote* when they get beaten to a pulp and they knock his teeth out. He tells Sancho, "Count my teeth, Sancho, count my teeth! How many are left?" And [Sancho] says "two." And [Don Quixote] says "How am I gonna eat?"²¹⁹ [. . .] And when you stop and think about that . . . without teeth, you're really defenseless on the street. One, you have very limited access to food and meals, but without being able to chew it [. . .] that can really complicate your health [. . .] The emergency room . . . *left an impression on me.*²²⁰

Over time, Cano became deeply familiar with the myriad challenges that homeless Latina/os face when trying to access health care and her outlook became more and more political. Dealing predominantly with an indigent population, Cano (herself a Seattle-raised immigrant from Peru) became oppositional to the systemic inequities she witnessed among the homeless in the health care system. As many of her patients' life situations intersected with homelessness, undocumentedness, and a limited grasp of English, Cano had also come to view them as "three

²¹⁹ In chapter eighteen of the first part of *Don Quixote*, the knight loses several teeth at the hands of rock-throwing shepherds. Don Quixote has mistaken their sheep for an enemy, army and proceeds to slaughter them with his lance. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman, 124-133.

²²⁰ Cano, conversation, 2014.

times voiceless.”²²¹ And she wanted to do something about it. This ultimately lead her to develop an experimental theatrical project that sought to give voice to the underprivileged population with which she had become intimate. This action on the part of a middle-class, professional Latina immigrant to help struggling immigrants who lack the kind of agency she herself has, equates to Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ concept of altericity. Altericity is the fraternal drive of a subject within a colonized system to help fellow “Others,” who are lower on the colonial hierarchy.²²² Additionally, and much like Margaret O’Donnell’s dramatization of her extensive legal experience (*Undocumented*, discussed above), Cano adapted the stories of her *real-life* patients, reinterpreting Cervantes’ classic duo as undocumented, homeless Mexican immigrants navigating the labyrinthine system of health care clinics, day labor centers, homeless missions, tent encampments, and civil courts in contemporary Seattle. Although it can be inferred that Cano’s process of artistic “collaboration” with an undocumented community began in the intense environment of medical interpretation, importantly, it did not end there. As opposed to merely adapting the stories of her patients independently and proceeding to put her work on a public stage, Cano was also pulled by a sense of solidarity with those who her play was attempting to depict. Consequently, she envisioned a deeper level of long-term collaboration, one with a more overt sense of community engagement. Having been employed as what I consider a “story hearer,” Cano had an embodied accumulation of precarious narratives exceedingly beyond that of the average citizen.²²³ These narratives, for Cano, contained within them the possibility of

²²¹ “All these gentlemen that are homeless Latinos are *three times voiceless*: One, that they are homeless. Two, that language is a barrier, they speak no or limited English. And three, that they are undocumented, quote unquote illegal [. . .] so that is an incapacitating effect,” (Ibid.).

²²² Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, 156-158. See Introduction, pages 54-58.

²²³ In her duties as a state-licensed medical interpreter, Cano was contractually obligated to neither “embellish” nor “paraphrase” a patient’s statement while in conversation with a medical

social transformation for the very community from which they had come. Thus, the Dialogues with Dignity project was born, ultimately being sustained through a \$6,000 Seattle Council of Arts and Culture grant for a period of three years (2011-2014).²²⁴

The “Empowering the Homeless Through Theater” grant enabled Cano to keep the project going intermittently for three years. Active in the Dialogues with Dignity as organizers and performers were two of Cano’s longtime theatrical collaborators Meg Savlov and Jose Carillo, who were also interviewed for this study. Overall, the group’s impulse squares firmly with the notions of fraternity and altercity when it comes to decolonizing projects. Maldonado-Torres, sees within the struggle for liberation among colonized subjects not just a struggle for freedom and equality, but a desire for the formation of a human community. Central to this community formation is the recognition that the colonized “Other” (in this situation Seattle’s homeless and undocumented community members) are not only “recognized as possessors but *givers* as well.”²²⁵ It was not merely that eSe Teatro wished to present a version of precariousness for those it claimed to represent; as if the performances were a kind of paternal “gift” to marginalized individuals placed lower on the social ladder. Central to the entire effort was the recognition that the audiences had something to offer the company, that their opinions

provider (Cano, conversation). In this way, her profession is to hear what the patient says with the upmost accuracy. Moreover, as an interpreter, Cano’s additional responsibility is to reiterate the patient’s Spanish statement in spoken English. In other words, the interpretation process is not merely an exercise of the mind, but an embodied experience similar to the tradition of orally recorded histories.

²²⁴ Cano also has the desire to create an adaptive, national model for fundraising for the homeless that would use the play as a touchstone. Ideally, different advocacy/activist/theater groups around the US could use the skeleton of her episodic, Seattle-based script, adapting it to the realities of their own locale. Cano describes this would-be effort as a kind of *Vagina Monologues* that would raise funds for homeless shelters, day labor centers, and food banks nationwide. Cano, conversation, 2014.

²²⁵ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 151 [emphasis added].

were valuable, and that their feedback would be considered. “I consider this population as my co-author,” Cano states, reflecting on the dialogue audiences. She continued, “they’ve helped me author this with the different characters, and points of view, and situations. I’m eternally grateful for that. What I can do is show this reality to other people.”²²⁶

As my research into eSe Teatro’s process showed, the alteristic impulse was not only evidenced in the attitudes of the key artists who participated in the Dialogues with Dignity project, but was their primary reason for participating in the first place.²²⁷ “If it was going to be about the homeless, it’s got to have some sort of call to action at the end of it,” actor Jose Carillo reported to *Real Change*, Seattle’s homeless newspaper early in the process, “Do something, donate money, write to somebody, take some kind of positive action.”²²⁸ Carillo, who was brought to the US “illegally” as a child and for whom Cano had the role of Alonso Quijano/Don Quixote²²⁹ in mind, additionally sees the US’s situation with its undocumented population as a multi-layered issue that US legislators are fundamentally incapable of resolving.²³⁰

²²⁶ Cano, conversation.

²²⁷ Drawing on *The Wretched of the Earth*, one of the foundational works of postcolonialism by Frantz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres identifies within contemporary political struggles an urge not only for freedom in and among colonized subjects, but also a vertically oriented “human intersubjectivity” in which the idea of fraternity is anchored in “*the upsurge of a loving subjectivity toward one who is ‘below’*” [emphasis added]. The desire for human interaction and sociality that would cut across socio-economic/class lines and is expressed as “non-indifference toward the Other, primarily toward the Other who is ‘below’” in social status Maldonado-Torres terms “altericity.” Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 156 – 158.

²²⁸ Aaron Burkhalter, “Quixotic in Seattle,” *Real Change*, December 28, 2011 - 3 January 3, 2012, 11.

²²⁹ Alonso Quijano is the personal name of Cervantes’ famous knight “Don Quixote.” Notably, although the main character’s name in Cano’s play is also “Alonso Quijano,” none of the other characters he interacts with seem to know his real name. This is not to say that he is called “Don Quixote” by them either. In fact, the character is only addressed by his name towards the end of the play when the character appears before a civil judge to determine whether he is mentally and physically fit enough to return to the street after a violent beating.

²³⁰ Although Carillo has been a citizen of the US since the 1950s, his family has a history with undocumentedness. He was brought to the US by his Mexican parents as an infant in the early

[The current political situation] seems too complex of a problem for the government to deal with. I mean, how do you deal with eleven million people who are here illegally? [. . .] It seems to me partially racist, maybe *mostly* racist. Not willing to admit people who they see as inferior, somehow lacking in the qualifications to be equal with American citizens that are established here already. It seems to me cruel and unusual that we don't consider these people as *refugees* from a situation that *we created* in Central America and Mexico, that *were still contributing to* [. . .] If you're poor and starving . . . to me that's the worst kind of oppression. Political oppression. It's a semantic swamp. A semantic *game*. A *deadly game*."²³¹

Carillo's position that the undocumented are (in many instances) refugees from ongoing violence in their home countries is in step with many of the immigrant interviewees who participated in this study. For many immigrant individuals who I interviewed for this project, their decision to come to the US was one based on immediate survival, rather some naïve belief in an abstract "American Dream." A typical example came from a day laborer from Venezuela who saw professional *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* production at ACT Theatre. He related to me:

[Life in the US] is nothing perfect, but it's better than Venezuela. It's not a problem of survival [. . .] For example, when you leave from your house [in Venezuela], *you don't know if you'll come back alive*. You can get killed on the

1930s, one of the most difficult periods in US/Mexican immigrant relations, largely because of The Great Depression (See Chavez, *Shadowed Lives*; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*). As Carillo related to me: "When my father first came, he came illegally. He always said he carried me in his pocket when he swam the Río Grande," (Jose Carillo, conversation with the author, November 7, 2015).

²³¹ Carillo, conversation, November 7, 2015.

street due to the lack of security that's there. A lot of crime. This is the biggest problem, apart from [the fact that] the politicians there can't offer any solution, because *there is a permanent confrontation*, daily [. . .] In Venezuela, it's normal that you could die: on whatever day, at whatever hour, whatever place, because that is the normal situation [. . .] I'm surprised. All my life I was there—in the middle of all that—and here I am, alive. [You ask me] “When am I going back?” I don't know because it just gets worse and worse. And the problem . . . there are many problems: a political problem, a social problem, individual problems, problems at every level—where the people don't understand how it began, where it will end, what they are going to do, *in who to believe* . . . it's sad, everything goes on. So . . . nothing.²³²

It was thus, in alteristic solidarity with this “refugee” population, that Jose Carillo chose to participate in the Dialogues with Dignity.²³³ The veteran Seattle performer, whose decades-long theatrical career stretches back to the early days of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop with

²³² “*Nada perfecto, pero no es como Venezuela. No es un problema de sobrevivencia. [. . .] Por ejemplo, sales de tu casa, no sabes si va a regresar vivo. Te pueden matar en el calle por la inseguridad que hay. Mucha delincuencia. Este . . . es el mayor problema, aparte de toda la gente política que hay que no se presta una solución porque hay una confrontación permanente, diaria [. . .] En Venezuela, la normal es que te puedes morir: cualquier día, cualquier hora, cualquier lugar, porque la circunstancia es la normal [. . .] Me sorprende. Toda mi vida estuve allí – en medio de todo eso – y estoy vivo [. . .] “¿Cuándo vuelva?” Yo no sé, porque va de mal en peor. Y un problema . . . son muchos problemas: un problema política, un problema social, un problema individual, problema de todo nivel, donde la gente ya no entiende cual es el principio, cual es el final, que van a hacer, en quien van a creer . . . es muy triste todo lo que sucede. Entonces . . . nada,” (David Blanco, conversation with the author, March 22, 2016).*

²³³ Carillo, conversation, November 7, 2015.

Herbert Blau and Jules Irving, had this to say of the Dialogue with Dignity readings at Seattle's Union Gospel Mission:

We knew at the Mission that there were large groups of Latinos and that they had no place to sleep at night. So we did a couple of shows there. And those were some of the best ones because these people all spoke Spanish. Even though they didn't understand the English, what they related to was the depiction of homelessness on the stage. And that was their greatest reward. And for me the greatest accomplishment of the show. To give them a sense of "*You're not alone*. People recognize that there's a problem." And it's acknowledged and that's *a rare occasion for people who are homeless*.²³⁴

In the case of Meg Savlov, an actress who has been doing bilingual theater since 1982, and whose notions of solidarity are also rooted in her long experience as a bilingual doula for Latina immigrants, she also viewed the dialogues as an empathetic tool for community building.²³⁵ Savlov, who performed in all the Dialogues with Dignity, and, as eSe Teatro's community outreach coordinator, organized the workshops, had this to say of the production's activist origins:

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Savlov is currently a Disease Intervention Specialist in the King County Public Health Department and was a Spanish/English doula for three years. The program within the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, which (in years past) enabled her to deliver "top notch medical care" to undocumented immigrant women at home has been, in her words, "gutted." Savlov: "It was really powerful. That was the experience. Especially going and visiting these women in their homes and hearing their story and coming back and forth and crossing the Río [Grande]. I really understood that a lot of young women were stuck in their apartments while the guy was out working. It's not like being in the [East] Village and walking to the market and seeing your *prima* (cousin). They were stuck. There's a lot of depression there. I mean, where's the community?" (Meg Savlov, conversation with the author, November 11, 2015).

The goal of this play was to explore the experience of homeless, undocumented, Spanish-speaking Latino men in Seattle trying to navigate especially the health care system. Rose and I both work in Public Health. We've both interpreted for Latino men in the ER who have had these horrendous accidents [. . .] How do you navigate that whole thing?²³⁶

And reflecting upon the Casa Latina performance of the Dialogue's with Dignity:

There was a Panamanian man there talking about what it meant to be an alcoholic and drinking, and then another man stood up and said "*Lo que es importante es El Amor!*" And he stood up—he was in the back of the room—and he was gesturing and he was talking about "*El amor*" with all of this incredibly poetic language.

And it was like [Rose and I] were both having the same idea: "There he is.

There's Don Quixote *en carne. En Vivo* [In the flesh. Live]. You know, this beautiful man who was so open, and so free with his expression . . . and how *moved* everybody was, how *attentive* they were, and how *available* they were.

Because then again [. . .] this is *Teatro*. This is *Teatro de la carpa*.²³⁷ Getting out there into the fields, into the streets, into the Casa Latinas where the workers are

²³⁷ Here Savlov compares the Dialogues with Dignity to the energetic performances of the highly popular Mexican *carpa* (tent show), a working-class form of touring performance that saw a resurgence after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Marked by "highly cultivated improvisation," ribald slapstick, and *rasquache* aesthetics, these collapsible, mule-drawn tent shows presented comedians, musicians, dances, puppet shows, clowns, ventriloquists, and more. Tracing the origins of El Teatro Campesino to the *carpa* tradition, Yolanda Broyles-González closely examines how the tradition has, throughout Mexican history, "served as a counterhegemonic tool of the disenfranchised and oppressed." Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press. 1994), 7.

waiting to get called for their job that day. *And people are completely open and hearing it.*²³⁸

This sense of decolonizing altercity exhibited by both Carillo and Cano runs parallel to performance scholar Jill Dolan's "utopic" notion of theater and performance. For Dolan, utopic theater can "offer a public space for renewing our critical attention to the machinations of dominant ideology," as well as creating a space that may overthrow "all conditions of oppression and enslavement."²³⁹ And while the artists of eSe Teatro certainly sought to draw critical attention to the ideology that contributes to the disenfranchisement of the undocumented, it remains to be seen whether the play itself overthrew those actual conditions. After all, the Dialogues with Dignity were intended to "empower" the homeless by recognizing them as citizens of value, not to solve the homeless crisis in Seattle. But if Dolan is correct in her notion of such an idealistic offering in "public space," then a consideration of what kind of public space is also critical, especially as it concerns experimental theater projects such as *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*. The efficacy of the Dialogues with Dignity project (i.e., that the play spoke to and was influenced by its initial audiences) lies in the fact that many of the locations in the play directly intersect with the actual performance locations.²⁴⁰ For instance, after the two protagonists' fruitless search for day labor outside a Home Depot, the character of "Sancho

²³⁸ Savlov, conversation, 2015.

²³⁹ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 141.

²⁴⁰ The play and its excerpts have also been read in many spaces *other* than the kind of social environments one might find at a day labor center or homeless shelter. For instance, other reading locations included a forum on Victims of Violent Crime at Seattle University, the Ethics Forum at Harborview Hospital, Skagit Valley Community College, and Seattle's Health Care for the Homeless' annual retreat. My focus here is primarily on the Casa Latina and homeless shelter readings, as spaces such as these most directly intersect with the locations in the play.

Panza²⁴¹ laments that they should have gone to Seattle's Casa Latina, a day labor center where they would at least receive free coffee and be indoors until returning to the homeless shelter.

Sancho. We should've gone to CASA Latina first, like yesterday. Right at 7am.

[. . .] Fake social security numbers don't work like they used to. *No tenemos papeles Señor* [We don't have immigration papers Señor]. This corner is the

best shot at a day's work. *Esperamos Señor* [We wait Señor] We still got 6

hours before we can go back to the shelter. *6 horas Señor* [six hours Señor].²⁴²

The characters thus exist in a daily state of limbo, navigating between prospective labor sites and shelters. It is precisely this kind of daily limbo experienced by undocumented day laborers in the US that has been described by Juan Tomas Ordoñez as an existence “compartmentalized and fractured,” as well as one marked by a “disarticulate[ed] self-image” that emerges from long-term family separation, peer-to-peer competition, economic marginalization, and the mistrust of institutionalized assistance, among other factors.²⁴³ Additionally, as seen in the above excerpt

²⁴¹ Like the character Don Quixote, Sancho Panza too has a “real” name. Only in the play's final moments is it revealed that the character's name is Enrique Zancas.

²⁴² Cano, *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, 9.

²⁴³ Like my own work with undocumented workers in the construction industry (albeit unofficial), Ordoñez spent two years at an informal labor contracting site in Berkeley, California, getting to know the workers there. Troubled by the many aspects of migrant studies in the US that tend to celebrate the notions of “community,” “agency,” and “political and social organization,” Ordoñez sought to consider the “darker side” of the issue. His research into what the men he interviewed referred to as “*la situación*” [“the situation” – their social exclusion as undocumented immigrants in the US], revealed a world of symbolic violence, real and imagined state persecution, and a compromised ability to make friends among peers. Deeply considering the realities of transnational migration in a neoliberally globalized economy, Ordoñez concludes that, “[l]iving by the day wage is not an aberration of economic practices that has been brought on by uncontrolled immigration; it is a rational response to the market, a system of social, political, and economic organization that enables the contradictory nature of these men's existence. Living *la vida de un leibor* [life as a self-described “unit of labor”] is a form of inclusion that guarantees marginalization” [italics original]. Juan Thomas Ordoñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 236.

from the play, the characters inhabit a dual language space (English/Spanish). However, the monolingual Quijano/Quixote character relies on his quasi bi-lingual friend Sancho to interpret the word around him. Rather than being a celebration of bilingualism, the audience views a fractured existence marked by miscommunication. Indeed, as the play moves on, Quijano's inability to speak English further marginalizes him. In their efforts to represent precisely this kind of linguistic marginalization, precarious income, and daily existential limbo, Cano and company went to Casa Latina to produce a Dialogue with Dignity. Once again, the feedback of the day laborers proved central to the company's decolonizing effort. What's more, Casa Latina, as an environment that extends educational and labor assistance to immigrants, can already be viewed as a heterotopic space of decolonization.

Founded in 1993, shortly before the increase in Central American immigrants to Seattle instigated by the passage of NAFTA in 1994, Seattle's Casa Latina operates a number of programs geared toward advancing the agency of Latina/o immigrants in the city: a job center, women's advocacy groups, domestic worker training, language classes, etc.²⁴⁴ The philosophical center of all Casa Latina programs is the pedagogical model of Paolo Freire's Popular Education, which attempts to unveil the connections between knowledge and power for those with less access to education and to support the "evolution of critical consciousness in disenfranchised communities."²⁴⁵ As Freirean scholar Antonia Darder argues, although the methods of the Brazilian pedagogue are now nearly half a century old, "[t]here is no question that the dehumanizing currents of the contemporary neoliberal agenda [. . .] require us to grapple

²⁴⁴ *Casa Latina: A Brief History*, [Organization Publication], (Seattle: Casa Latina, 2002).

²⁴⁵ Antonia Darder, "Paolo Freire and the Continuing Struggle to Decolonize Education," in *Paolo Freire: The Global Legacy*, ed. Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 42.

seriously with the struggle for our humanity, as Freire argued, in the face of oppressive forces that seek to colonize every aspect of our lives, from birth to death.”²⁴⁶ It is through Freire’s model that Seattle’s Casa Latina (and similar organizations) attempt to provide a collective, educational space that fosters, in the words of Walter Mignolo, “intellectual decolonization.”²⁴⁷ As related to me by Haydee Lavariega, the center’s Executive Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator, Casa Latina seeks to engage with a “horizontal” way of sharing knowledge. “Whenever we come to a room,” she told me, “there is no one who is going to bring more than anyone else.”²⁴⁸ Particularly skeptical of artistic projects that seek to engage with and/or hire the workers (thirty percent of whom are homeless and a certain percentage of them undocumented), Casa Latina attempts to ensure that all workers are treated ethically and fairly.²⁴⁹ Certain members of the day labor community have come away from artistic projects (both as performers or audience members) with the feeling that they have been used as “guinea pigs,” or are, in the long run, merely “data” for the researchers.²⁵⁰ And although artistic projects have sought to

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

²⁴⁷ Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 265.

²⁴⁸ Haydee Lavariega, conversation with the author, January 6, 2016.

²⁴⁹ One recent artistic endeavor conducted in collaboration with workers from Casa Latina is the participatory photography project titled *FotoHistorias*. Billed as an “open-ended method to document the life experiences” of migrant communities in the cities of Seattle, Washington, Nogales, Mexico, and Cali, Colombia, *FotoHistorias* utilized qualitative analysis software to identify themes in the hundreds of photographs taken by individuals in the three cities. Helmed by researchers at the University of Washington, the testimonies and reflections of *FotoHistorias* are compiled online as well as in a print publication, the proceeds of which will benefit Casa Latina. Richard Gomez and Sara Vannini, *FotoHistorias: Participatory photography and the experience of migration*, (Seattle: University of Washington Information School, 2016).

²⁵⁰ When I interviewed Lavariega for this project I learned, somewhat to my surprise, that Margaret O’Donnell (the playwright of *Undocumented*, discussed above), and the filmmaker Rodrigo Valenzuela (discussed in Chapter Three) had both utilized Casa Latina resources in the development of their artistic projects. O’Donnell had offered to do a reading of her play at Casa Latina, whereas Valenzuela had hired workers from Casa Latina to perform in his original film *Diamondbox*. It was Casa Latina’s experience with Valenzuela that led them to establish a different set of required paperwork when it comes to artistic projects involving the workers. As

capitalize on the center's worker population, these instances are rare. The fundamental mission of Casa Latina is to provide a network for employment and the advocacy for Latina/o immigrants' rights in Seattle.²⁵¹ In their sixteen years of existence Casa Latina has offered childcare programs, domestic worker training, a wage theft prevention program, and both ESL classes and street theater founded on the "spect-actor" techniques of Brazilian theater artist and activist Augusto Boal.²⁵² In Boal's method of Forum Theater, the spect-actor is the audience member who is able to insert themselves into the (socially conscious) play, change the course of the play's conflict with their "real life" point of view, and thus rehearse for actual social change. Although not actively using Boalian techniques, the Dialogues with Dignity reading at Casa

Lavariega told me: "The workers [now] will tell us what they want to work on. It has to be something that comes from the workers [. . .] Whenever somebody comes from the outside, saying: 'My project is all ready! Ready to go,' it's like . . . Hmm? How do I [the worker] get to participate?" (Lavariega, conversation, 2016).

²⁵¹ Casa Latina is an affiliate member of the National Day Labor Organizing Network (NDLON) in Los Angeles, who, in collaboration with Cornerstone Theater, helped produce John Michael Garcés play *Los Illegals*, the 2007 production that used day laborers as actors and which gave birth the theatrical ensemble Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Labor Theater Without Borders), the subject of Chapter Two. Teatro Jornalero regularly collaborates with El Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) which also organizes day labor centers in Los Angeles, California modeled on Freire's method of critical pedagogy.

²⁵² Boal, who was jailed and tortured during his country's military dictatorship (1964-1985), is best known for his original theatrical "system" Theater of the Oppressed. This system of participatory exercises (image theater, forum theater, and invisible theater predominant among them) seeks to enfranchise those who are politically, economically, or even emotionally marginalized by hegemonic systems. Boal's legacy is vast, especially as it includes the invention of the "spect-actor" (the participatory audience member who is encouraged to stop the onstage action and—by stepping into it—improvise a situation that practically rehearses for real social change). Only by including the voice of the audience can the collective truly decide what action to take in problematic social situations such as unjust employment practices or domestic violence. This may be Boal's greatest insight of all: the ability to see past the bounds of traditional theater and invite a play's (and perhaps reality's) political transformation at the hands of the imagination of the working-class audience. For Boal: "The spectator is encouraged to intervene in the action, abandoning his condition of object and assuming fully the role of subject [. . .] This stage focuses on the [play's] theme and furthers the transition *from passivity to action* [emphasis added]," Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group. 1985), 132.

Latina proved helpful to Rose Cano, whose play eventually depicted an incident of wage theft for the main characters. Moreover, it was not merely that certain spectators supplied Cano with a list of events that might be included in the play's plot. The Don Quixote-like "eloquence" of certain audience members' reactions was fundamental to the intersubjectivity of the dialogues overall.

Cano continued:

We went to Casa Latina at 7:30 in the morning, because that's when the workers go. It was great, because in almost every setting there is a Don Quixote. There is someone who is eloquent. It always surprised us; that it wasn't all just uneducated people that couldn't express themselves. There were a lot of people who were eloquent speakers, whether they had a big education or not [. . .] The take away was that people on the street are a lot more educated than we give them credit for. Whether they had a second-grade education or whatever, people were eloquent in expressing their stories.²⁵³

And although often eloquent in their reflections back to the cast, the comments regularly reflected the spectators' harsh realities. One Casa Latina worker's post-play comment affirmed the play's overall theme of the individual's resistance to a dehumanizing situation: "*Para que la calle no nos vence; Para no volverse animal; Hay que hacerse duro.* (So we don't succumb to the street; so that we don't become animals; We have to make ourselves hard)."²⁵⁴ As is evident from such statements, the readings fostered an open space where critical reflection on the conditions of undocumentedness and homelessness was encouraged with *those who actually experience it in their own spaces*. Such site specificity, like the Malibu production of *Super*

²⁵³ Cano, conversation, 2014.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Doméstica (discussed above) is abetted by the “extratheatrical associations” of real spaces already ghosted with layers of significance for the spectator.²⁵⁵ eSe Teatro thus saw the play’s process as an intersubjective epistemological experiment. On the one hand, the playwright and her team of actors could instigate a dialogue with certain homeless and undocumented individuals through which the individuals felt acknowledged and empowered. On the other hand, by taking the play to the “real” spaces of marginalization, the artists involved could learn through the dialogues how to make the play more “real,” and thus prepare it for professional production.²⁵⁶ Additionally, the reflections of immigrants who saw the play, both in its incipient and final form, evince a sense of re-humanization and validation in witnessing it, although, as we shall see, not always without reservation. One Venezuelan immigrant, a day laborer at Casa Latina who eventually saw the play in its professional run at ACT Theater had this to say of his experience:

Yes, [the production] had magic. And how fantastic that you can find here in Seattle people doing [this kind] of theater [. . .] That, although I don’t know their history, I don’t know how “professional” they are—it has an atmosphere of magic. And where one can see deep work happening. That it’s not just something like “look how beautiful I am,” and “look at the famous people I’m working

²⁵⁵ Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 134.

²⁵⁶ “I wanted to do these reading at shelters as script developments. To do two things at once: to develop the art, and to serve a public need. We later called them Dialogues with Dignity [. . .] We go to the shelters, read them, and see the response. And at the same time, we could illicit a dialogue that would be a catalyst for people to talk about how they felt about different things: about having a bad [medical] interpreter, or having no interpreter, what’s it like when they go to the emergency room, whether they have access to health care. It opens up a lot of conversation,” (Cano, conversation, 2014).

with,” and “look who’s looking at me,” and “how pretty I look”— it’s a work of depth, professional work. Work that has soul.²⁵⁷

In a similar vein to the above testimony, another immigrant spectator to the play was emotionally moved not only by the representational power behind the dramatized immigrant narrative, but also by the onstage use of her own native language. She told me:

I did love the play, and I think it’s important in Seattle to do theater in Spanish. I was really happy go to a piece that I can identify [with], and *people talking my language*. That was the first thing that I was really happy about [. . .]. They talk about our struggles. I don’t even remember the whole piece . . . but I remember myself identifying with some moments, some parts of the piece that I feel reflect my own struggle as an immigrant. And that was also really empower[ing]. I feel . . . I feel *reflected*.²⁵⁸

This undocumented immigrant’s positive reaction to the use of Spanish in the play is in line with the goals of eSe Teatro. The company, as one of the few Latina/o Theaters in Seattle, actively pursues a model of inclusivity aimed at the production of professional theater that explores the cultures, stories, and languages of Latinidad and which also provides a voice for local artists,

²⁵⁷ “*Sí, tuvo magia, y qué chévere que puede encontrar aquí en Seattle una gente que hace teatro [. . .] que aunque no sé la historia, no sé que tan “profesionales” son – tiene una atmósfera donde hay magia. Y donde se ve que hay un trabajo de fondo. Que no simplemente aparecer y “mira que bonito soy” y “mira con que famosos estoy trabajando,” y “mira a quien me veo, mira que lindo me veo” – un trabajo de fondo, un trabajo profesional. Que tiene alma.*” (David Blanco, conversation with the author, March 22, 2016). Blanco is a Venezuelan immigrant who has not only worked as a day laborer out of CASA Latina, but also has intensive actor training in theater.

²⁵⁸ Unnamed Spectator to *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, conversation with the author, March 22, 2016. Although this interviewee speaks Spanish as a first language, portions of our interview, like the one above, were in English.

staging work in Spanish, English and Spanglish.²⁵⁹ Cano herself, as a bilingual playwright and professional interpreter who (although an immigrant from Peru) has spent most of her life in Washington State, seeks to reflect accurately the local linguistic quality of individuals who exist between languages.²⁶⁰ This quality of “living-in-between” languages, or what Mignolo terms “bilanguaging,” is not just the basic skill of bilingualism, but “a way of life,” similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of Chicano Spanish as *un modo de vivir* [a way of life].²⁶¹ What’s more, bilanguaging disturbs the hegemonic notion of national languages (“English Only”) and is fundamental to decolonial epistemologies.²⁶² What’s ironic, however, in respect to eSe Teatro’s inclusive artistic mission to bring works incorporating Spanish to the stage, is the fact that the main character’s marginalization is due, in large part, to his linguistic isolation as a monolingual Spanish speaker. Reliant on the “quasi”-bilingual (and also undocumented) Sancho Panza, who often misinterprets the world for him, Cano’s title character suffers throughout the play in a state of linguistic fracturedness. This linguistic fracturedness results not only in Quijano/Quixote’s inability to understand the world around him, but also (as we shall see) in the character’s violent death at the hands of the Seattle Police. Thus, although it would seem from the spectator testimonies above that certain immigrant audience members experienced something positive in *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, what was actually depicted onstage could be considered

²⁵⁹ eSe Teatro, “About Us,” *Ese Teatro*, 2017, accessed April 29, 2017.

<http://eseteatro.org/about/>

²⁶⁰ “Washington at this point is a bilingual state; some people speak Spanish only; some people speak English only; some people speak bilingually, where the subject of the sentence is in English and the predicate is in Spanish. It’s an interesting grammatical exercise. As a playwright, I like listening to that.” (Cano, conversation, 2014).

²⁶¹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 251-256. Notably, Mignolo, like Sandoval, also draws on Gloria Anzaldúa’s *La Fronteriza* (1987), who writes of Chicano Spanish as a “living language,” or “*Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*,” [A language that corresponds to a way of life], Quoted in Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 256.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 252.

negative in the extreme. To be sure, much of Cano's near-plotless play is one dystopic scene after another, culminating in the reality-based deaths of two of the main characters.

In critical plotline apart from the undocumented Quijano/Quixote's urban tribulations, Cano transforms Cervantes' original mis-identified princess "Dulcinea"²⁶³ into the character of "Dulce," an undocumented female Mexican migrant. Dramatically constructed as a series of flashback correspondences, Dulce's narrative is tightly wound up with Quijano's deteriorating mental state. Initially, she is back home in Mexico, awaiting his cash remittances from money earned in the US. When neither the remittances nor any word from Quijano materialize, Dulce, desperate to support herself, moves north to the border zone and finds work at one of the thousands of *maquiladoras*.²⁶⁴ Dulce's letters (spoken in Spanish by an actress, whose lines are accompanied by a simultaneous English-language voice over) proceed to reveal that Dulce has contracted with a human smuggler so that she may cross into the US and begin to look for Quijano herself.

DULCE. (Voiceover). I found someone to help me cross. He is a "coyote" named Frescón. They call him Frescón because he is cold-blooded. He never sweats. Not even crossing the desert. Not even when immigration stops him. El Frescón. My friend recommends him . . ."²⁶⁵

Later in the play, the final break in Quijano's fragile mind is completed when Dulce's correspondences eerily shift, emanating now from a locality beyond death. How Quijano has

²⁶³ Dulcinea del Toboso is the name given to a neighboring farm girl by Don Quixote in Cervantes' novel. Imagined as a princess in Quixote's mind, it is, in part, for her honor that he proceeds to become a knight and pursue heroic adventures.

²⁶⁴ Mexico/US borderzone factories where foreign-owned (predominantly US) companies operate with little regulation and hire low wage workers for manufacturing, many of them young women.

²⁶⁵ Rose Cano, *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, 33.

received these “letters” from beyond remains a mystery, reifying the blurred lines between fantasy and reality for the displaced, undocumented hero. Whether a ghost, or a fiction in Quijano’s mind, his beloved explains:

DULCE. (Voiceover). He killed me. He killed me with my own hammer. Frescón. He took my hammer and left me in the desert. He threw me out of the truck and I don’t even know on which side of the border I landed. He didn’t even sweat that Frescón. He didn’t even cover me with sand. Alonso . . . I couldn’t wait for you anymore. Why did you abandon me? You abandoned me.”²⁶⁶

Cano’s interpretation of Quixote’s princess is thus a metonym for the thousands of women and girls whose murders have gone unsolved over the last twenty years in the industrialized border zones like Ciudad Juárez.²⁶⁷ A city where US corporations operate with little labor and environmental regulation, Juárez’s *maquiladoras* employ thousands of low-wage-earning women. Notably, Juárez’ endemic culture of impunity regarding its shocking rate of femicide, in which the brutal rape, mutilation, and murder of hundreds of women have gone uninvestigated, has caused it to be termed “The Murder Capitol of the World.”²⁶⁸ Cano’s Dulce thus becomes a

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 54.

²⁶⁷ Cano’s dramaturgical choice thus intersects with other recent stage plays that interpret the murders in Juárez and elsewhere along the US/Mexico border. Other plays include: *Las Mujeres de Juárez* (*The Women of Juárez*) by Rubén Amavizca-Murúa in 2006, *Braided Sorrow* (2006) by Marisela Treviño Orta, and *Mujeres de Arena: Testimonios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez* (*Women of Sand: Testimonials of Women of Juárez*) by Humberto Robles in 2002. Such works, according to theater scholar and director Christina Marín, “attempt to give voice and dignity back to the hundreds of young women who ha[ve] been swallowed up by the border.” See Christina Marín, “Echoes of Injustice: Performative Activism and Femicide Plaguing Ciudad Juárez,” *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, Ed. Julie Shayne (Albany: University of New York Press, 2014), 184.

²⁶⁸ Joseph Kolb. “Violence Against Women Worse Than Ever in Juárez, Expert Say,” *Fox News Latino*, July 5, 2012. Web. Accessed March 12, 2015. See also Marín, “Echoes of Injustice,” 2014. Nearly 11,000 people were killed in the city from 2007 to 2013. However, city officials have recently claimed that the city has seen a 40% drop in homicides over that last two years

ghostly embodiment of how, according to feminist border scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, “the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”²⁶⁹ Disabled by the “formal and informal economies” that force her migration northward, the character, whose very subjecthood is violently erased in the course of the play, inhabits a migrant/worker/female/body, that, as Alicia Camacho has argued, is “not entirely [her] own.”²⁷⁰ The murder within the play, moreover, engendered decidedly negative reactions from certain audience members. Latino day laborers at Casa Latina, for instance, strongly suggested that the play be changed. For these men, most of whom have left loved ones behind in their countries of origin, the death of Dulce crossed the line of acceptable adaptation.²⁷¹ In the final script, however, Cano chose to maintain the death of Dulce as a way to inform the play’s audiences of the realities faced by Mexican female migrant workers.

And yet Cano’s play is not only an embodied investigation into the violent realities of undocumented border crossing. In its expansive dramaturgical goals, it also engages in a literal

(2015 – 2017). See Molly Hennessy-Fiske, “Former murder capital of Mexico presents sunnier image for pope,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2016, accessed, February 24, 2017.

<http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-pope-juarez-20160209-story.html>

²⁶⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 25.

²⁷⁰ Alicia Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 255, 254. Schmidt Camacho examines the economic and cultural displacement experienced by workers in the industrial labor force that straddles the Mexico/US border. With a detailed economic study of the reorganization of mass production “across geographical space,” which gave rise to the area known as “Maquilatlán,” (the border/factory zone in which social ills are endemic), Schmidt Camacho profiles the creative forms of expression and resistance employed by workers. Poems, novels, songs, and manifestos are all included in her study to investigate the phenomena she terms “fronteriza [feminine/border] subjectivity.”

²⁷¹ “The point is that a lot of these guys left family behind. [. . .] So I asked them, via a show of hands, ‘Who has left somebody behind?’ It would virtually be everybody. Everybody, right? [. . .] Some people said that was too sad of an ending. Take that out. Why does she have to die? They thought that was too sad. There was somebody who knew the Don Quixote story, and he said, ‘But she doesn't die.’ So it was interesting. They challenge the play as well,” (Cano, conversation, 2014).

representation of the troubling conditions of homelessness as they specifically relate to the city of Seattle. In crafting the climax of the play, for instance, Cano turned to the true story of Native American wood carver John Williams, a psychologically troubled chronic inebriate and partially deaf homeless man who was shot and killed by the Seattle police in 2010. Williams, a member of the Northwest Native American Ditidaht Nation, made a living as a traditional carver, selling his crafts to local shops and passersby on the street.²⁷² In August 2010, Williams, inebriated and wielding a carving knife, was shot at close range by a Seattle police officer. Williams, who may not have been able to hear the officers command to release the knife, was killed at the scene, and the videotape from the officer's patrol car show that Williams was given a mere thirteen seconds to comply before being shot four times in the chest. Although there was no evidence to show that Williams would have attacked the officer, no criminal charges against the officer were filed.²⁷³ The incident caused increased tensions between the Seattle Police Department and both homeless and Native American communities. As a theatrical ghosting of Williams' tragic story, Don Quijano, who has been given a carving knife by a local Native American woman, is ultimately shot down by a police officer near the end of the play. Enraged, drunk, and now despairing at the loss of his beloved "Dulce," the monolingual Quijano is unable to heed the police officer's English commands. Reenacting William's real-life death, Cano's script reads that a projected image of a stopwatch counts down from thirteen seconds until the fatal shots are heard. For Cano, the uncomfortable exploration of how human lives are ultimately devalued by the complex

²⁷² Lynda V. Mapes, "Carver's death a violent end to a tormented life," *Seattle Times*, October 15, 2010, accessed April 21, 2017. <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/carvers-death-a-violent-end-to-a-tormented-life/>

²⁷³ Casey McNerthney and Levi Pulkkinen, "No Charges in Woodcarver Shooting by Seattle Police Officer," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 15 Feb. 2011, accessed 7 June 2014.

realities of homelessness in Seattle was essential to her desire that the play reflect those realities. For the playwright, interpreting the story of John Williams not only served to deepen the script's relationship to the city, but also exemplified how the utter lack of dignity on the streets contributes to death itself.²⁷⁴

The undignified deaths of Dulce and Quijano theatrically depict lives on the extreme margins, lives, moreover, that are subjected to violence outside the individual's control. Quite unlike plays such as *Super Doméstica* (discussed above), where the abused, undocumented immigrant body is heroically saved, the plot of *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* more darkly projects the liminality and powerlessness of the social outcast, their cultural and linguistic fracturedness, as well as the mundane violence experienced by those at the bottom (or especially outside of) the "legal" US citizenry. It is a representation, in many ways, of persons who have been reduced to what Giorgio Agamben has termed "bare life."²⁷⁵

For Agamben, the nucleus of state power lies in its ability to categorize individuals who threaten the legitimacy of its authority as "biological entities beyond political recognition."²⁷⁶ Such legitimately (read: legislatively) banned "outsiders," who importantly exist *within* the territorial field of the state are reduced, in Agamben's term, to "bare life." Such "banished"

²⁷⁴ "I thought about the people who live on the street. And to really make it Seattle, I thought of what happened to this carver John Williams. What I wanted to show [in the play] was that [Quijano's] hallucinations—his take on the world—was not understood, right? And he doesn't speak English. So, when they say "Put down your weapon, sir. This is your last chance," we see on stage that thirteen seconds go by on the clock, and then he's shot. Because that's what happened to John Williams. [. . .] This lack of dignity, that's what kills people. That's the point I was trying to make with this play, and hopefully I'll make it. We'll see," (Cano conversation, 2014).

²⁷⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

²⁷⁶ Sarah Dooling, "The Production of Bare Life and Spaces of Possibilities for Alleviating Homelessness in Seattle, Washington" (PhD diss, University of Washington, 2009), 31.

subjects not only lack political redress from violence (both personal and state-sanctioned), but furthermore serve to define the political and conceptual boundaries of those who do function as “full political beings,” non-immigrant, voting citizens, for example.²⁷⁷ Sarah Dooling, in her recent study of homelessness in Seattle has identified that the “persistent punitive regulations that are enforced in [Seattle] public spaces” (i.e., street sweeps, “bum-proof” bus stops, the privatization of public spaces, ticketing for sidewalk sleeping, etc.) ultimately result in bare life: “ambiguous and persistently vulnerable lives,” excluded, expelled, and erased from urban society.²⁷⁸ I argue that *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* attempts to reenact precisely this existential condition. The non-narrative plot, described as “variations on a theme” by actor Jose Carillo, enacts an exhausting search for food, shelter, rest, paid labor, medicine, legal reprieve, and personal safety. Quijano and Sancho Panza’s wandering take them from a scene of menial labor contracting outside a Home Depot, to a near-wordless environment of sickly individuals sleeping under a freeway, to the Seattle waterfront, to a hygiene center, where they attempt to clean up and heal from the ravages of bedbugs. Quijano fumes at the lack of dignity that he and his friend experience:

DQ. *Vivimos como perros. Perros pulgosos. Y no como perros de acá. Los perros acá son millonarios. Gordos. Me gustaría vivir como un perro de aquí y andar*

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 52. Dooling is careful to consider the critiques of Agamben’s theory, particularly that it has been seen as “overly deterministic” in its description of the sovereign/bare life relationship. For Agamben, the most exemplary occurrence of a modern state’s sovereign power over bare life was manifested in the Nazi concentration camps. For some, Agamben’s theory fails to take into consideration the practices of resistance and “antagonistic social politics” that the “banished” often engage in (Dooling, 62). Whereas Dooling leverages the production of bare life to reveal how “regulations and management approaches among policy makers” “situate homeless individuals as outlaws” (64), my concern here is how the embodied re-enactment of bare life presented to individuals who may intersect that condition establishes a humanistic, intersubjective exchange wherein the condition is revealed and challenged.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 61, 53.

*en el carro del año. Dormir en una cama de lujo. Vivimos como perros Mexicanos.*²⁷⁹

DQ. We live like dogs. Flea-bitten dogs. And not like dogs from here. The dogs here are millionaires. Fat. I would love to live like a dog from here and ride in the latest model car. Sleep in a luxurious bed. We live like Mexican dogs.²⁸⁰

Panza calms the old man down, takes a shaving kit out of the hygiene bag provided by the shelter, and begins to gently lather the old man's face. "Nothing like a shave to feel like a human being again," he says, "When I shave, my foot doesn't even hurt anymore" referring to his chronically painful diabetic condition.²⁸¹ The encouraging words of the self-described "illegal" thus elicit for the audience the character's knowledge that their status as human beings is contingent on maintaining a clean and normative body, one unmarked by the deleterious effects of the street. This brief scene of human-to-human caring, one of few in the play, militates against the dehumanizing realities that both homeless and undocumented individuals face.

In a city that has recently declared a state of emergency due to its ongoing challenges with homelessness,²⁸² geographer Tony Sparks has investigated Seattle's newly created imbalance between "upscale consumption [. . .] and world-class cultural activities," on the one hand, and a "homeless industrial complex" that is "uniformly dehumanizing" on the other.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Rose Cano, *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, 35.

²⁸⁰ Translation by the author.

²⁸¹ Cano, *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, 35.

²⁸² In the wake of a January 2016 multiple shooting that left two people dead in Seattle's downtown homeless encampment known as "The Jungle," city officials began clearing residents out of the area on May 17, 2016. See Joseph O'Sullivan and Christine Clarridge, "Seattle aims to clear out The Jungle homeless camp," *Seattle Times*, May 17, 2016, accessed May 18, 2016.

²⁸³ Sparks, Tony, "As Much Like Home as Possible: Geographies of Homelessness and Citizenship in Seattle's Tent City 3," (PhD diss. University of Washington, 2009), 12.

Sparks, who spent seven months living in Seattle's Tent City 3 (the nation's first publicly sanctioned nomadic tent encampment for the homeless and where a Dialogues with Dignity reading took place) identified a major theme in the fifty personal interviews he conducted with Tent City 3 residents. The interviewees nearly unanimously felt that the existing system of homeless management (i.e., shelters, missions, hospitals, etc.) routinely treats homeless individuals as "children," "idiots," or "lesser breeds."²⁸⁴ Furthermore, this attitude of the homeless as inferior "other" is evidenced in the press reportage on the city's current efforts to sanction safe locations for individuals who reside in their vehicles. A resident of Seattle's affluent Magnolia neighborhood had this to say of the city's effort to place a "safe lot" in her area: "I hope the people who are truly homeless and living in RVs get the resources they need. But this [safe location] won't take care of the criminals and drug users living in RVs and committing property crimes. They need to leave our neighborhoods."²⁸⁵

Sparks thus sees Tent City 3 as a mode of political resistance to the culturally constructed notion of the homeless individual as a criminal "other" who exists outside the capitalistic "paradigm of propertied citizenship."²⁸⁶ Additionally for Sparks, Tent City 3's self-sustaining and collective model resists the erasure in modern society of "home's" meaning as an affective "cultural and emotional space," rather than merely a material (and owned) location.²⁸⁷ In other words, notions of "home" as familial attachments, inter-human responsibility, or the place of

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁸⁵ The "safe lots" plan was initiated, in part, due to costs incurred from the difficulties in managing unsanctioned homeless encampments in the city. Seattle conducted 38 "cleanups" of illegal camps between November 2, 2015 and early January 2016. This equates to roughly one cleanup every two days. See Daniel Beekman, "New 'safe lots' to hold homeless living in vehicles," *The Seattle Times*, January 20, 2016, A6.

²⁸⁶ Sparks, "As Much Like Home as Possible," 26.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

one's birth are given less weight in a society driven by accumulation and the individual's contribution to the economy. Most importantly, if one falls outside the single parameters of "property as home," one is reduced not only to non-citizenship, but to a less-than-human status. If we thus consider the implication that the alteristic intentions of *Dialogues with Dignity* entered Tent City 3 as a space already imbued with a decolonial intent, it is no wonder that the play and its actors were eventually well received by the Tent City audience.²⁸⁸ "People wanted to talk to us for a *long* time," Cano told me:

It was dark, we couldn't see anymore. I said, "You know, we really gotta go." Telling us about their different situations, how hard it was to find housing once you're homeless, just to cross that line to get back in—because they said once you've been evicted from some place, no one wants to take you anymore. So, that's the kind of incapacity that you're talking about. It's really hard. There's something that changes mentally, I think, too.²⁸⁹

And although the play's main foci are the issues surrounding homelessness, especially as it relates to Seattle communities, undocumentedness itself (in situations such as that experienced

²⁸⁸ At first the Tent City 3 residents were hesitant to come close to the performance. By the end of the *Dialogues*, however, the actors and the self-governing homeless citizens found multiple connections between themselves. According to Cano, "We had a little performing area under an awning. And no one wanted to come up. *Nadie quiere acercarse* [Nobody wanted to get close]. We went to them. We had a great performance [. . .] Pretty soon we had a little audience. And this man was reading, and he said, 'Come here,' and he said, 'Do you know this guy?' and he was reading Cervantes! He didn't even know that's what we were doing [. . .] That was an amazing discussion. There was someone there who said, 'I studied literature at a college in California,' but now he was homeless. There was a woman who talked about being condescended to. And she hated that. People say, 'Oh, you're homeless. Poor thing!' Other people talked about their health. *They were choosing to live in that intentional community*. Because that was better for their situation, obviously, than living out on the street. They were finding it a *positive* situation. So, it was really moving," (Cano, conversation, 2014).

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

by the play's main characters) is its own form of bare life. Moreover, undocumentedness in the play is a varied (and constant) world-making force.

The play's explosive opening moment depicts a raving, undocumented inebriate wracked by delirium tremens and hallucinations of "La Migra" (US Immigration Enforcement) as he detoxes while strapped to an Emergency Room gurney. The character, whose name is simply written as "Borracho" ("Drunk") screams in Spanish as the hospital staff awaits the medical interpreter, and no translation is offered for English speaking spectators.²⁹⁰ Those audience members who may speak Spanish quickly learn that the patient is a construction worker who is in the depths of a drug relapse, that he has been robbed at knifepoint of eight hundred dollars (a month of earnings), and that his brother has recently been deported. The confusion in the scene reigns for a few moments, until the medical interpreter arrives. Collectively the nurse and the interpreter explain to the man that he will be injected with valium, allowed to rest at the hospital for a while, and then taken (space permitting) to a local detox center where the police can take his statement. This "fictional" character, a conglomeration of several of Cano's interpretation encounters (drug relapses, beatings, robberies, undocumentedness, hallucinations, etc.) is soon wheeled offstage, never to appear in the play again. It is a brief and stark glimpse into a multi-layered human crisis. Any resolution is withheld, and the patient disappears back into the system, fearful of the uniformed staff and pleading to the interpreter that he be allowed to stay:

²⁹⁰ As the theater-going community in Seattle is predominantly English-Speaking, eSe Teatro has received criticism for staging works solely in Spanish. Related to me by the company's community outreach coordinator, who organized all of the Dialogues with Dignity: "We've done readings all in Spanish and *we got complaints about it* [. . .] So, we keep experimenting. There will always be language and cultural issues. If it provokes discussion, great. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, let's take another look at it," (Savlov, conversation, 2015).

Borracho. *No se vaya, Doña. Doña! Vine a trabajar. Trabajo en construcción.*

*(interpreter leaves) Tengo que dejar. Por la familia. Tuve una recaída. Veo La Migra rondando por ahí . . . Los que estan de uniforme.*²⁹¹

Borracho. Don't go, Ma'am! Ma'am! I came to work. I work in construction.

*(interpreter leaves) I have to stay here. For my family. I had a relapse. I see immigration authorities rolling all around this place . . . All of these in uniform.*²⁹²

The man grabs the interpreter's hand and she quickly and "firmly" pulls away, as the gurney is removed to make room for the next patient in the busy ER.

As the play moves quickly forward, we soon learn that undocumentedness is not limited to minor characters such as Borracho, but is rather an indelible quality of the two main protagonists. We next meet "Sancho Panza," a quasi-bilingual, high-school dropout from Eastern Washington of Mexican (Michoacán) ancestry who was brought "illegally" to the US at the age of one. Sancho is introduced to the audience as an overweight, unconscious diabetic who has been brought to the Emergency Room from a nearby shelter. As Panza is revived (and the nurse checks his swollen feet for street-worn sores that are common to homeless diabetics), it is quickly established that Panza takes no medication, has no regular doctor, and that his last meal was a "super-size Coke" and some French fries.²⁹³ Sadly, Panza's untreated diabetes, as well as his constant hunger, haunts him throughout the play. But, given his social circumstances, it is a condition that he can do little about. The nurse prescribes him Metformin, a diabetic medication, and refers him to the Pioneer Square clinic, a real-life location in Seattle where the homeless are

²⁹¹ Cano, *Don Quixote*, 4.

²⁹² Translation by the author.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

offered free healthcare.²⁹⁴ As it turns out, Panza has been brought to the hospital by the elderly Alonso Quijano/Don Quixote. Quijano, a fellow undocumented immigrant (also a Mexican national) was the person at the shelter who realized that the unconscious Panza needed medical attention. Now befriended, the two men thus become each other's partner in survival, and the plot begins to unfold: a series of dramatic and comic scenes depicting the localized geographies and daily tribulations of the Seattle homeless experience. This practice of "buddying up" (spending long periods of time with another individual for stability and safety) is common to the homeless and was reinforced as realistic by certain homeless spectators. eSe Teatro's community outreach coordinator, Meg Savlov, recalled audience reactions confirming the accuracy of this aspect of the play:

[They said] this is how life on the street is. You find somebody. You help them. You feel like you are doing something by helping them [. . .] You learn to depend on somebody. It's all about that kind of friendship. What we see in this play is this friendship. And that's what is moving us. Because that's what you rely on in the street.²⁹⁵

SECTION THREE: FROM DIALOGUES WITH DIGNITY TO "UNDOCUMENTEDFACE."

Over the two-year period that the Dialogues with Dignity were conducted (2011-2013), sentiments such as those above confirm that the readings and talkbacks had proved valuable spaces of collaboration to eSe Teatro. In the fall of 2014, the fully developed script moved into its "professional" production in the 60-seat black-box Eulalie Scandiuzzi Space at Seattle's ACT

²⁹⁴ "Pioneer Square Clinic," University of Washington, *UW Medicine*, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.uwmedicine.org/locations/pioneer-square>.

²⁹⁵ Savlov, conversation.

Theatre.²⁹⁶ As a final act of solidarity towards the communities that had helped shape the script, eSe Teatro staged a final Dialogue with Dignity. This staged reading of the full-length play was produced in the Scandiuzzi Space with invitations sent out to the many organizations that had hosted the original Dialogues (Casa Latina, Union Gospel Mission, Tent City, etc.) Jose Carillo, the veteran actor who was brought to the US “illegally” as an “infant in arms” some eighty years before would be unable to portray Don Quixote in the professional production due to health reasons.²⁹⁷ In fact, none of the actors who performed in the Dialogues with Dignity, except Cano in a variety of small roles, was cast for the professional production. Carillo, nevertheless took the opportunity to express his gratitude to the community members who were at the final staged reading. He recalled telling the audience:

I just want to interject here. This has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my acting career. I’ve been on stage for over sixty years, and this has been one of the most interesting. I didn’t get rich. I didn’t make any money but it was the most rewarding [. . .] Feeling that what I was doing was affecting someone, somehow, in a positive, helpful way. *That was the reason I wanted to do theater.*²⁹⁸

At this final staged reading, a homeless audience member who had originally seen the play in its incipient form had returned to ACT Theater to see the outcome. His final comment was recalled

²⁹⁶ It should be noted that although the actors were paid a stipend for their performances in the ACT production of *Don Quixote*, it was not an Equity contract. Actor’s Equity is the AFL-CIO affiliated labor union under which professional theaters operate, and which serves to protect actors from low-wages and substandard working conditions.

²⁹⁷ Carillo, conversation, 2015.

²⁹⁸ Jose Carillo, conversation, 2015.

by Meg Savlov: “*Gracias por hacernos sentir que somos visibles*,” (Thank you for making us feel that we are visible).²⁹⁹

It is evident (given the feelings expressed by both the actors and the spectators), that the Dialogues with Dignity had indeed created a decolonizing platform for human intersubjectivity, an achievement also sought by the other creative artists examined in the following chapters. A dedication to intersubjectivity (human-to-human experience) across ethnic, class, and national lines is indeed integral to any decolonizing project no matter the scale. In the heterotopic performance spaces of labor centers, missions, and homeless camps, eSe Teatro made an effort to recognize *as human* persons whose very humanity is in question due to immigration status, level of income, language skills, and ethnicity. Critically, many of their audience members’ daily existence is one far outside of the culturally constructed norm, where private property is the ultimate measure of one’s humanity.³⁰⁰ Consequently, eSe Teatro sought to challenge this materially-based notion of humanity with the “human” immateriality of performance. Theater, after all, is largely dependent on the non-materiality of intersubjectivity, since without the experience of a live audience, live actors performing alone simply do not constitute an act of Theater. As the evidence in this chapter suggests, the Dialogues with Dignity can clearly be seen as a utopic renewal of “critical attention to the machinations of dominant ideology,”³⁰¹ where (through a humanistic interchange of live performance and immediate reflection), both actors and audience were “empowered.” Born out of the playwright’s desire to mediate her professional experiences with homeless and undocumented communities, the Dialogues were activist-

²⁹⁹ Savlov, conversation.

³⁰⁰ Sparks, “As Much Like Home as Possible,” 21.

³⁰¹ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 141.

oriented, achieving in many of the spaces a collective learning environment for both cast and audience.

It would be misleading, however, to see the Dialogues as overly utopic and to ignore the misgivings or disappointments experienced by the participants themselves. As we have already seen, the playwright (particularly in the instance of the murdered Dulce) did not always change the script based on audience feedback. And although the initial audiences might have indeed felt somewhat empowered while in their *own spaces*, to what extent were they ultimately empowered if the structural issues that the play attempted to representationally exorcise (poverty, hunger, homelessness, undocumentedness, etc.) prevented them from seeing the “finished” play at a “legitimate” theater? A play, moreover, they had supposedly “co-authored?” It remains important to mention that in their attempts to garner an audience for the final Dialogue with Dignity at ACT, eSe Teatro struggled to have their original audience’s see the finished script. Savlov estimated that out of the hundreds of people who had seen the initial readings, about ten of the original homeless clients attended the final Dialogue, continuing:

It’s not easy, Chris, to get people. Some people did come. From Chief Seattle, from Union Gospel [Mission], from Tent City. But it was very much part of the mission [. . .] We said ‘We want you to know that you are seen. We want you to feel you can walk into a theater where you normally wouldn’t be welcome. You are welcome here.’ *But getting them there?* Oh, we had *plans*. Maybe we can get them hygiene kits, maybe we can get them snack bags. *We just couldn’t do it, you know.* We just didn’t have the organizational and funding capacities.³⁰²

³⁰² Savlov, conversation, 2015.

Having thus concluded the Dialogue with Dignity series of workshops, eSe Teatro moved ahead with the production of the full-length play at ACT Theater in 2014. Moving away from the energetic, sometimes outdoors, and invariably unpredictable performance spaces that had first given life to the project (shelters, labor centers, rehabs, etc.), the play now inhabited a “legitimate” theater space. But it was no longer the *Teatro de la Carpa* that had been described by Meg Savlov, resonant with the community-based feeling that went along with presenting the Dialogues at the very spaces inhabited by the audience members that the play itself was trying to depict. Indeed, as pointed out to me by Jose Carillo, who could not perform in the ACT production due to health reasons, the very space that the play was to be produced in could itself be considered a marginalized space *within* a “legitimate” theater. The Scandiuzzi space, after all, is the small black box theater in the basement of the ACT building, an Equity organization that hosts at least five separate performance spaces, some with hundreds of seats. The Scandiuzzi space is what Carillo, who sees the small black box as emblematic of Latina/o Theater’s marginalization within mainstream theater in general, calls “the basement closet.” He added: “That’s what that room is, basically. *It’s a storage room*. And they used to love to tell people, “Oh, we’re doing this at ACT,” but hey, it’s *downstairs in the sub-basement!*”³⁰³ The outspoken actor also took issue with the fact that when it came to the professional production, a non-Latino was hired to direct the play, although eSe Teatro’s bi-line at the time was “Latinos Take the Stage.”³⁰⁴ Carillo’s comments are telling, and reflect an on-going anxiety in the Latino Theater community in regards to ever-shrinking access to space, talent, and funding.³⁰⁵ It is worth noting,

³⁰³ Carillo, conversation, 2015.

³⁰⁴ “What disturbed me most about that was that for all that is said about “Latinos take the stage,” the director ended up being an Anglo,” (Carillo, conversation, 2015).

³⁰⁵ At the recent convening of the Latino Theater Commons Steering Committee at the University of Washington April of 2016, conversations between theater artists, scholars, and

however, that more recent productions by eSe Teatro have been produced in one of ACT's larger spaces, the Bullitt Cabaret, which can seat one hundred and fifty spectators.³⁰⁶

In addition to Carillo's concerns about the significance of space, Savlov noted other significant changes in the final production at ACT. For one, Savlov felt that once the production was "out of their hands," it ultimately took on a much "grimmer" tone.³⁰⁷ "It was much sadder than the workshops," she told me, quite different than the experience of occasionally having the "Don Quixote[s] 'en carne'" in the audience: the passionate, expressive gentlemen who had made the Dialogues with Dignity so memorable, and who, along with others, had been so available in their conversations with the actors, and so "completely open and hearing" the play.³⁰⁸

Perhaps the single biggest obstacle faced by eSe Teatro as they moved toward the professional production was that they could not find a Latino actor to play the title role. Due not only to Carillo's health issues which prevented him from taking the role, as well as the limitations of the Seattle theater scene, but also because the production was not paying Equity wages, eSe Teatro was ultimately put in the position where they had to cast a non-Latino actor as Quijano/Quixote. This actor, moreover, only spoke Spanish as a second language. Bearing in mind that the character is an undocumented, mono-lingual Spanish-speaking, Mexican immigrant from Michoacán, whose speeches are often constructed in a "classical" Spanish in

Latino theater artists in the Pacific Northwest often centered on issues related to lack of funding and access to space. See Maria Enriquez and Christopher Goodson, "Latinx Theatre Commons Seattle Convening: Latinx Theatre in Unexpected Places," *Theatre Topics*, 27:1 (March 2017): E-21- E-29.

³⁰⁶ Cano's most recent play *Bernie's Apartment* (2016) is a dramatization of Latina girls in the foster care system in the Pacific Northwest. An adaptation of Federico García Lorca's 1936 play *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Bernie's Apartment* was booked in the larger space at ACT.

³⁰⁷ Savlov, conversation, 2015.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

imitation of Cervantes, this casting decision had serious ramifications for the ultimate production. As Savlov reflected on the challenges and outcomes of the difficult casting situation:

We couldn't find anybody. We searched. We were looking for months [. . .] We did an outreach in Portland [. . .]. There is nobody in this city. Jose Carillo is the guy. And he was not available. There wasn't anybody in that age range that was available [. . .]. I'm grateful that we found Will Rose. I wish we could have had somebody who had a better grasp of the Spanish and the culture. But he didn't really *read* as Mexican.³⁰⁹

Constrained by several issues, eSe Teatro ultimately made the decision to cast the non-Latino actor Will Rose, a long-time colleague of both Cano and Savlov, as the lead character. That eSe was able to find and cast an actor that (although non-Latino) was nevertheless deeply dedicated to the project resonates with the notion of “coalitional casting” as put forth by theater scholar Patricia Ybarra.³¹⁰ Ybarra, reflecting on the reality that theater companies do not always have access to actors who “fit” a cultural role exactly nevertheless have the opportunity to tell diverse stories onstage if the commitment to the story is central and treated with sensitivity. Since the act of theater necessarily involves an act of transformation, Ybarra further contends, it remains a

³⁰⁹ Savlov, conversation, 2015. Notably, Savlov herself is not Latina, although the community has described her as an “honorary Chicana.” A self-described “New York Jew,” Savlov has worked in bi-lingual (Spanish/English) theater since 1982. She contends: “My heart is in it. I’m not pretending to be anything I’m not. But when I returned to NY from South America in 1981, my whole paradigm shifted, my whole understanding of life shifted. And so, I’ve been working with Spanish-speaking people, mostly from Latin America, ever since then. It was just how it worked. [. . .] I have learned over the years to make sure that my participation is seen as appropriate to people who could potentially feel “what’s this white girl doing here?” But I’ve never felt that experience. Multicultural means all the cultures, right? (laughing) And . . . I don’t really identify as white either,” (Savlov, conversation, 2015).

³¹⁰ Patricia Ybarra, “Message from the President,” *Association for Theatre in Higher Education*, December 4, 2015, accessed February 16, 2017. <http://www.athe.org/news/264165/Message-From-the-President.htm#.VmMxuBOhk0Y.facebook>

space where performers can get in touch with their own identities, including the “privileges that come along with them.”³¹¹ Coalitional casting, as opposed to color-blind casting (the controversial practice in which an actor’s ethnicity is not considered in casting choices), entails a political commitment toward social justice and an acute awareness on the part of the production team. For Ybarra, coalitional casting is an inclusive creative decision, and “requires realizing that no single story is universal unless everyone’s story is.”³¹² And though eSe Teatro’s casting choice was primarily constrained by demographics and economics—employing a non-Latino actor who was committed to the idea of the project—for some theater scholars it is not merely about ethnicity, but also about undocumentedness itself. Gad Guterman, in his recent study of US plays that depict undocumented characters, but rarely, if at all, employ undocumented actors asks the provocative question:

[W]hat are the repercussions of representing undocumented characters, however positive the portrayals, if those in undocumentedness are precluded from partaking directly in the process of theatre-making and theatre-going?³¹³

Guterman ultimately suggests that the widespread portrayal of undocumented characters within the professional theater that generally impedes undocumented communities from participating in the cultural product results in what he terms “undocumentedface,” a questionable

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid. Similarly, Latina/o Theater Historian Brian Herrera has also contributed recently to the conversation surrounding coalitional casting, especially regarding university theater and its particular ability to serve as an arena of exploration for cultural and ethnic identities. In his recent tour of university, community college, and high school productions of Lin Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes’ *In the Heights*, all of which cast non-Latina/os in decidedly Latina/o roles, Herrera sees three essential principles that can guide such casting practices: Linguistic Fidelity, Cultural Competence, and Creative Coalition. See Brian Eugenio Herrera, “But Do We Have the Actors for That? Some Principles of Practice for Staging Latinx Plays in a University Theater Context,” *Theatre Topics*, 27.1 (March 2017), 23-35.

³¹³ Guterman, *A Theatre of Undocumentedness*, 68.

“ventriloquism,” wherein “the undocumented are representable and represented but not present in the theatre.”³¹⁴ I certainly do not wish to imply that eSe Teatro’s choice to cast a non-immigrant (Anglo) actor in the role of Quijano/Quixote constitutes an act of “undocumentedface.” Surely the activist-oriented commitment of the Dialogues with Dignity project over the course of two years, in which the artists were minimally remunerated, reflects an attempt on their part to make marginalized populations “present” in the theater by taking the theater to them. This attempt was successful in a variety of ways, as this chapter has shown. My concern rather, like Guterman’s, is: at what point does the professional theater, however well-intentioned, depart from the daily realities faced by undocumented communities? How “empowering” is it when communities that border on bare life are involved in the initial generative workshops, only to be excluded from the final product due to structural limitations outside the control of the theater company (homelessness, poverty, transportation, etc.)? What would a model of theatrical engagement look like if undocumented communities were more in control of the process? Even more, what if undocumented actors were to portray undocumented characters in scripts they wrote themselves?

The following chapter, which focuses on the Los Angeles-based Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Labor Theater Without Borders), examines such a model. Their brand of community-based theater, inspired by Cornerstone Theater’s production of Michael John Garcés’ *Los Illegals*, has been collaborating with day laborers (many of them undocumented) for now over a decade. It is a theatrical model that not only develops the performance script with feedback from the community participants, à la eSe Teatro’s Dialogues with Dignity, but one that *also puts those participants on stage*. In the words of Garcés, now Cornerstone’s current

³¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

Artistic Director, the work of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras is “hugely important” as a “vital avenue for people to tell their own stories.” It is a process that Garcés feels gives people who are powerless a voice, and that, if contributing to a constellation of other decolonizing forces, could help change society itself.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ “The kind of work that Teatro Jornalero is doing is vital because it is an avenue for people to tell their own stories. For people to take control of the narrative. It creates trust platforms and empathy platforms for people that *they* have control over—as opposed to being objectified or pitied. I think that is *hugely* important to building a healthy and strong movement. I also feel that it gives people who are otherwise powerless an opportunity to feel that they are part of it and that they have a voice. And I have seen it happen over and over again. Teatro Jornalero is a shining example. But it’s only one. It has to be part of a constellation of these kinds of things in order to affect societal change. Do I think it can change society? Absolutely,” (Michael John Garcés, conversation with the author, September 17, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO

Decoloniality in Community-Based Theater Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras' *El Niño Dios Viene pa'l Norte*³¹⁶

Whether this place in history develops into a location for freedom that links, though community, and conscious building activity with other similar sites of struggle and solidarity, into a movement for freedom beyond the local is unknown. But I am convinced that without the emergence of local sites, enacted in this case, through the religious performance of Los Pastores, the shift from local to broader collective struggles will be more difficult to attain.

Richard Flores

“Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location,” 218.

What we—and by “we” I refer here to all those who share decolonial projects—put on the table is an option to be embraced by all those who find in the option(s) a response to his or her concern and who will actively engage, politically, and epistemically, to advance projects of epistemic and subjective decolonization and in building communal futures.

Walter Mignolo

The Darker Side of Western Modernity, xxviii.

[Day laborers] are more than just people who make things with their hands. They are people who make things with their souls [. . .]. Immigrant workers can also be artists and have something important to share and experience and contribute, right? Because there's all this talk about immigration and Trump and nonsense, and you don't hear a lot from the workers themselves. They don't get to say their experience of what they are feeling,

Maegan Ortiz³¹⁷

Executive Director, IDEPSCA

If eSe Teatro's process of workshop-to-professional production ultimately resulted in several limitations, including the general exclusion (although unintentional) of persons who initially helped in “co-authoring” the play through community-centered readings and feedback

³¹⁶ English Translation: *The Baby Jesus Comes to the US*.

³¹⁷ Maegan Ortiz, conversation with the author, December 17, 2015. IDEPSCA (*El Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California*) (The Institute of Popular Education of Southern California) organizes day labor centers in Los Angeles, California and is modeled on Paolo Freire's inclusive method of critical pedagogy. IDESPCA is funded by the City of Los Angeles.

sessions, the work of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Laborer Theater Without Borders, hereafter Teatro Jornalero), actively seeks to eradicate those limitations. Since their initial organization as an independent group, stemming from Cornerstone Theater's 2007 production of Michael John Garcés *Los Illegals*, which collaborated with undocumented day laborers as actors,³¹⁸ Teatro Jornalero has been recognized as a valuable cultural entity for day laborers in Los Angeles.³¹⁹ By and large, this population consists of many undocumented immigrants from Central America and Mexico. Working with established playwrights and directors from the Latina/o Theater community (often immigrant artists who helm the months-long creative process), Teatro Jornalero has now produced some thirty short plays about *and for* the day labor community. Similar to eSe Teatro's "alteristic"³²⁰ impulses that led to the Dialogues with

³¹⁸ It is important to note that while Cornerstone could not "legally" pay the undocumented day laborers to perform in *Los Illegals*, this legal obstacle is somewhat of a moot point since Cornerstone's general policy is to work with performers who (although they might receive a small stipend) primarily *volunteer* their time. In reviewing this manuscript, Garcés made it clear that the legal obstacles to paying undocumented performers was "emphatically not the major reason" that they were not "hired" by Cornerstone. In lieu of a stipend, the performers in *Los Illegals* were given gift cards that could be redeemed for groceries. (Michael John Garcés, email message to the author, April 14, 2017). Garcés play *Los Illegals* was inspired by Lope de Vega's Spanish Golden Age drama *Fuenteovejuna* (1619). In de Vega's original, based on a historical incident from the fifteenth century, the residents of a small town take collective responsibility for the murder for their villainous ruler. In Garcés 2007 adaptation, the community of day laborers outside a Home Depot-style construction store similarly take collective responsibility for an act of vandalism committed by one of their members. The act of vandalism was fomented by an incident of wage theft against the worker. For a definitive history of Cornerstone's early years touring the US and doing community-based theater with diverse audiences, see Sonya Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

³¹⁹ Bleyer, Jennifer. "Immigrant actors tell their story." *Christian Science Monitor*. 29 June 2009; See also "¡Mientras esperan trabajar, se ponen a actuar!" Un Nuevo Día, *Telemundo*, accessed January 15, 2017. <https://www.telemundo.com/shows/2016/05/24/mientras-esperan-trabajar-se-ponen-actuar>. This recent Spanish-Language television profile highlighted the most recent work of Teatro Jornalero.

³²⁰ In my field work with Teatro Jornalero, I discovered that a good number of the key artists working with the group are *formerly* undocumented immigrants. Both the play's director Juan Parada and musical director Jose Alarcon, for instance, are formerly undocumented immigrants

Dignity project, the artists involved with Teatro Jornalero also seek to empower day laborer and undocumented communities. Unlike the aspirations of eSe Teatro, however, which seeks (in certain ways) to professionalize the Latina/o Theater community in Seattle by hiring regional Latina/o talent and producing both established and emerging Latina/o playwrights, Teatro Jornalero's goals, I argue, are more centered on communal process with less of a focus on artistic product. Inclusive to nearly any community member who wishes to participate, regardless of their level of training in the theater, Teatro Jornalero follows a model of community-based theater that stages stories from the day labor community by recruiting community members as performers.³²¹ Additionally, much of Teatro Jornalero's expanding canon of plays has been performed at day labor centers, often in tents or other makeshift stages. In this way, the work of Teatro Jornalero exhibits the same kind of decolonial epistemology of Eulalia Camargo's *Super Doméstica* (see Chapter One), that seeks to create an intersubjective and liberating learning experience through autobiographical and site-specific performance. If Camargo's experience as a playwright, however, was limited to a few performances at various immigrant's rights events,

from El Salvador and Mexico, respectively. Their "loving" impulses toward the amateur participants are in line with the decolonial concept of altercity, which Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes as the "radical affirmation of sociality and interhuman contact" between colonized subjects, as well as "the *Yes* of love expressed as *non-indifference* toward the Other, primarily toward the Other who is 'below,'" (Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 158) [emphasis original]. In the words of Teatro Jornalero musical director Jose Alarcon: "We're doing everything with love. Because we have no money. We give them love and try to be positive. [. . .] You see Juan [Parada]? *He's just giving love left and right*. And so is Lorena [Moran]. I'm supportive. I'm not too much of a loving guy, but I try . . . I give a lot of support, (Jose Alarcon, conversation with the author, December 18, 2015).

³²¹ Community-based theater is a field in which theater artists collaborate with communities whose lives and experiences *directly inform the subject matter of the performance*. Often utilizing community members as performers to examine and/or exorcise social issues relevant to the community, community-based theater has been termed by some as theater "of the people, by the people, and for the people." See Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1-13.

Teatro Jornalero's process is one centered on community engagement with long term goals. As of this writing, none of the plays conceived and produced by Teatro Jornalero have been published.

This chapter examines Teatro Jornalero's most ambitious project to date: *El Niño Dios Viene 'pal Norte* (hereafter *El Niño Dios*) written by the playwright Cesar Ortega, who received substantial contribution from participants at story circles and feedback sessions with the performers over a period of months. *El Niño Dios* is an adaptation a traditional Mexican Shepherd's Play (*Pastorela*) which depicts the Biblical journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem to visit the newborn Jesus Christ. Like many popular religious dramas that were imported to New Spain in the sixteenth century, *Pastorelas* prove highly adaptable to both specific locale and contemporary social milieu. These aspects of the *Pastorela*'s adaptability are examined in this chapter's following section. Importantly, and unlike all previous Teatro Jornalero productions, the 2015 *Pastorela* adaptation collaborated with two outside organizations to create both the script and the cast. Working with the Long Beach-based non-profit *Latinos en Acción* (Latinos en Action), whose goal is to strengthen and enrich Latino families in the region, and Mission Dolores, a homeless mission in central Los Angeles, Teatro Jornalero had the largest cast they had ever tried to work with for *El Niño Dios*. As will be explored in this chapter, these ambitions (centered on bringing together two distinct communities), created their own distinct challenges. These challenges, as my research revealed, informed not only the rehearsal process, but also the script itself as well as the final performance.

Culled from my interviews with participants as well as my attendance of both rehearsals and performances over a three-month period, this chapter investigates both the significance of the process for the participants themselves (intentions, reflections, challenges), as well as the

nature of the script itself (both as a cultural artifact and a reflection of contemporary society). Thus, two broad questions guide my analysis overall: If, on the one hand, the project's central idea was to bring communities together, what were the final outcomes of those goals? On the other hand, if the adaptation of a religious play that was originally a product of colonialism and conquest can be adapted as a tool of resistance for undocumented communities in 2015, just how exactly does that resistance manifest? Notably, *El Niño Dios* re-interpreted the traditional *Pastorela* character of Lucifer as Presidential Candidate Donald Trump. This artistic choice, which seemed intended to provide immigrant and undocumented communities an embodied, collective space within which to challenge the xenophobic rhetoric on Trump's campaign trail, reflected an anxiety that surely resonates even deeper in 2017.³²² However, the adaptation of the *Pastorela* for political reasons is nothing new. This chapter's following section is a brief outline of the history the *Pastorela*, both as a cultural artifact and as an adaptable "scenario," which lends itself to embodied, theatrical conceptions of both crisis, resistance, and resolution.³²³

SECTION ONE: A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MEXICAN SHEPHERD'S PLAYS

Nativity plays, treating the events described in the Christian gospels relating to the birth of Jesus to Mary and her husband Joseph, came to the Americas along with the first Spanish

³²² The playwright Cesar Ortega, speaking in December of 2015: "I felt this year it was more important to pay attention to what is happening politically now. With Donald Trump . . . I mean this is just really an insane person. Well, I don't want to say he's an insane person. Actually, he's a very smart person, because he really knows what he is playing [. . .] With the remarks that he has made, he's really working out to feed the racism, the fear, the anger [. . .] and now he's the leading candidate. Which is crazy. [. . .] At first it was like a joke. People were like, "This is ridiculous, who would vote for this person?" Like we were back in time to when people were making those white supremacist remarks, and now he's the leading person. So, I feel like the play [. . .] which can only be so long – I'm still trying to reduce the play [. . .] I feel like it's more important to talk about what's going on now. And what's going on with Donald Trump, and how it's really affecting our community. And how [the play] can change who we are and what we look like," (Cesar Ortega, conversation with the author, November 21, 2015).

³²³ Diana Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, 13.

colonizers and were utilized by members of the church to indoctrinate the native population to the ideas, world view, and symbols of Christianity.³²⁴ The idea of wholesale “indoctrination” into Christianity through dramatic spectacle, however, has been contested by numerous performance historians. Scholars such as Diana Taylor, for instance, have argued that popular colonial dramas, while certainly useful to the Spanish colonizers, also provided the indigenous population with an embodied form of agency in which resistance to the colonial system could be subversively enacted.³²⁵ Yolanda Broyles-González has similarly argued that the “spirit of resistance” inherent in traditional narrative of the *Pastorela* (i.e., the humble shepherds’ struggle against the powerful Lucifer), is what accounts for the play’s “inordinate popularity.”³²⁶ To be sure, the play, whether as tool of indoctrination or resistance, persisted and evolved as a popular cultural tradition in New Spain, and characters’ of a distinct “Mexican” type date back to as early as 1574.³²⁷

Pastorelas, which depict a group of rustic shepherds who journey to Bethlehem to see the newborn Christ, were preserved in handwritten manuscripts and the memories of performers in the Americas for more than four centuries. These texts, sometimes on the verge of disintegration in private homes and parish libraries, were largely unstudied until the early 1900s, and then primarily by folklorists and ethnographers. Further, it has been claimed, by *Pastorela* scholar

³²⁴ Juan Bautista Rael, *The Sources and Diffusion of the Mexican Shepherds' Plays* (Guadalajara, México: Librería La Joyita, 1965), 40. Rael unquestionably states: “The religious theater continued to be used *successfully* to indoctrinate the natives and to keep their faith throughout the rest of the 16th century and in the following centuries” [emphasis added].

³²⁵ Diana Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*. Taylor reads both an act of “parody and resistance,” as well as “strategic repositioning” in the mock battles between the “Moors and the Christians” in which the conquered natives were forced to perform, (30).

³²⁶ Yolanda Broyles-González, “Native Dialectics and Cultural Subversion: The Santa Barbara Pastorela,” *Gestos*. No. 11. April (1991): 127-128.

³²⁷ Robert Potter, “The Illegal Immigration of Medieval Drama to California,” *Comparative Drama* 27:1 (Spring 1993), 143.

John Igo, that the “Eurocentrism” of theater historians had relegated Mexican *Pastorelas* as an academic subject to one of “terra incognita” well into the second half of the twentieth century.³²⁸ That said, by the middle years of the twentieth century, a handful of historians had taken on the challenge to trace both the origins and distinct regional iterations of this particularly Mexican form of drama, one understood by some historians to be born out of the hybridity of the Spanish colonizers’ didactic religious dramas and the theatricality of Aztec ritual.³²⁹

Juan Bautista Rael’s 1965 comprehensive study of four hundred years of Spanish language nativity plays (both published and unpublished), sought, in many ways for the first time, to “throw light on the origins” of this understudied theatrical tradition.³³⁰ For his research in the 1960s, Rael scoured Mexico, the American Southwest, and parts of Latin America for nativity drama scripts from anybody he might encounter (“shoeblacks” included), eventually examining more than 100 variations of the play, and classifying them into 37 “independent” texts.³³¹ Many of the “texts” that Rael encountered, however, did not necessarily exist on the page, being either hand-written manuscripts that had been passed down generationally within a family or mnemonically preserved via the performers’ tradition of orality, a historically denigrated form of “ephemeral” or “nonreproducible knowledge” included in what Diana Taylor has termed “the repertoire.”³³² Rael describes the general method of textual preservation he encountered in his fieldwork:

³²⁸ John N. Igo, “Los Pastores: A Triple-Tradition,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 19:3 (1985), 132.

³²⁹ Broyles-González, “Native Dialectics,” 127-132; Adam Versényi, *Theatre in Latin America: Religion, Politics, and Culture from Cortés to the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 94-98.

³³⁰ Rael, *Mexican Shepherds’ Plays*, 9.

³³¹ Rael, *Mexican Shepherds’ Plays*, 45, 47.

³³² Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, 20. As opposed to the “supposedly enduring materials” of the archive, Taylor posits that the repertoire “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures,

when a manuscript wears out, a new copy is made and the old one is thrown away. Where plays are not transmitted in manuscript form, generally they are transmitted orally. Such was the case in many Mexican villages where the only versions available were those preserved in the memories of the play director or the players, many of whom were illiterate (Rael 47).³³³

Akin to Rael's commitment to throwing light on the origins of Mexican *Pastorelas* was the work of other mid-twentieth century scholars, who, in an effort to preserve the musical genealogy of *Pastorelas* in the US, recorded songs with community elders in the Southwest, many of whom had learned the music from their parents who had been born in the mid-nineteenth century.³³⁴ Similarly, folklorists such as John Englekirk traced the extreme diffusion of the New Mexican *Pastorela*, as well as the emergence of its "truncated variants," conducting research up the Rio Grande valley from "manuscript to manuscript and hamlet to hamlet."³³⁵ However, despite the extreme dedication of these scholars to record for posterity the subtle twists and turns in the *Pastorelas*' textual history, few of them reveal a sense for the play's subversive political potential in performance, a potential quite openly mined in Teatro Jornalero's *El Niño Dios*. What's more is that, despite the active and ongoing performance tradition of *Pastorelas* well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, Rael (in seeming contradiction to the girth of his

orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge."

³³³ Textual retention of *Pastorelas* through a practice of orality and memory are at work for playwright Cesar Ortega, whose family has a long tradition with the genre in Mexico. Notably, Ortega outlined his first *Pastorela* for Teatro Jornalero, titled *El Manto de Ilusión (The Cloak of Dreams)* entirely "from memory," (Ortega, conversation, 2015).

³³⁴ Richard B. Stark, T.M., and Rubén Cobos, *Music of the Spanish Folk Plays in New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 1969), 12, 219.

³³⁵ John. E Englekirk, "The Source and Dating of New Mexican Spanish Folkplays," *Western Folklore* 16 (1957), 252, 253.

own study) had concluded as far back as 1965 that the appeal of the *Pastorela* was a “very limited one,” and that religious Mexican folk drama had “probably reached its maximum development.”³³⁶ Anthropological analysis of the *Pastorela* tradition in 1980s, however, gives us a clearer view into the actual workings of this then, and now, still-lively tradition.

Working in what he referred to as the “terra incognita” of *Pastorela* scholarship, John Igo described the *Pastorela* as still a “living force,” tallying more than 35 versions *not* reported by Rael, and concluding that the San Antonio (Texas) *Pastorela* alone had produced some 25,000 performances since 1718.³³⁷ Igo’s 1985 description of the *Pastorela*’s unsophisticated aesthetics (crepe paper and tin foil props, etc.), sometimes identified as *rasquache*,³³⁸ as well as his description of the amateur acting style, mirror, in many ways, my observations of Teatro Jornalero’s *El Niño Dios* that utilized a cardboard box as an MTA bus and dollar store fairy wings and tin foil to depict the angel visiting Christ’s birth.³³⁹ Although Igo’s analysis is rich in performative description, he ultimately suggests that the performers themselves are not aware of the complex dramaturgy of the performance they are engaged in, and that, ultimately, due to this lack of understanding, as well as incoherent acting style, the *Pastorela* “has to be read to be appreciated.”³⁴⁰ While I concur with Igo that the aesthetics of a *Pastorela* in performance can be deeply confounding due to the impoverishment of the *mise-en-scène* as well as actors’ lack of

³³⁶ Rael, *Mexican Shepherds’ Plays*, 43.

³³⁷ Igo, “Los Pastores,” 132.

³³⁸ Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms* (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 1982), 200. The term *rasquache* is another one of those words that defies translation, but it can be loosely interpreted to mean “underdog,” “unsophisticated,” or “funky” in contemporary English vernacular.

³³⁹ Igo, “Los Pastores.” As Igo describes the rough performance, “In the acting, there is no thought given to the meaning—the lines are rattled off as fast as the speaker can manage them. No effort is made to be understood [. . .] the performers perform for the grace of their souls, not for the personal glory or for the edification of the audience,” (134-135).

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

professional training (a reality this chapter will explore), and that in reading a script one gets a clearer look at the play's language (much like any drama), I would add to this that it is in *the process of performance* itself (and here I mean not only the play's presentation, but rehearsals and preparation) where a deeper meaning of practice occurs. Along these lines, investigations of several materialist and performance scholars writing in the 1990s are thoroughly helpful to my analysis of my experience witnessing the work of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras.

Medieval theater scholar Robert Potter, for instance, has valorized what he deemed the “illegality” of Mexican Shepherds' Plays, tracing their subversive qualities back to the banned religious drama of the early colonial period through their persistence in Mexican communities in the American Southwest after US's annexation of Mexican territory after 1848. Potter additionally attributes the then current “revival” of *Pastorelas* to new waves of immigrants in the early 1990s. He presciently anticipates the Teatro Jornalero adaptation by a quarter century when he states that the hard journey of the shepherds in the play retraces the path of those who've crossed the border without authorization, “strangers in a strange land – huddling together for warmth and support.”³⁴¹

Maria Herrera-Sobek has analyzed El Teatro Campesino's 1991 *Pastorela*, filmed originally for PBS' “Great Performances,” through the bifocal lens of Foucauldian “heterotopias,” (the “enacted utopias” and counter-sites of juxtaposition and simultaneity that constitute modern society), and the postmodern “obsession for breaking boundaries.”³⁴² Valdez's

³⁴¹ Potter “Illegal Immigration,” 151.

³⁴² Herrera-Sobek, Maria, “Luis Valdez's *La Pastorela*: ‘The Shepherd's Play’: Tradition, Hybridity, and Transformation,” *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, Culture*, ed. Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. García, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 326. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring 1986), 24. For Foucault, “heterotopias,” as opposed to “unreal” Utopias, are “real places [festivals, nursing homes, prisons, boats cemeteries, museums, the theatre]—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding

choice to balance what seem to be traditional family values with a multiplicity of *vato locos*, Chicano code-switching, and the empowerment of down trodden farmworkers, according to Herrera-Sobek, constitutes a “strategic weapon” that can subversively advocate for social change within an accepted religious tradition.³⁴³ For Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez this “Christian camouflage,” or “cultural subversion” is a mode of oppositional consciousness that allows for the critique of culture that might otherwise be prohibited.³⁴⁴ Drawing on the notion of *relajo* put forth by Mexican Phenomenologist Jorge Portillo, Broyles-Gonzalez suggests that that the *Pastorela*’s inherent inclination toward hybridity, parody, wit, and satire carves a protected space where freedom is rehearsed.³⁴⁵ The *Pastorela* is thus a hybrid form that illustrates the reality of “living in the other’s field, of living within an alien order.”³⁴⁶ This notion that *Pastorelas* such as *El Niño Dios* have the potential to reflect the existential dilemma of immigrants in the US is key to my reading of the Teatro Jornalero process.

Paramount among these scholars in informing my own work, however, is the research of anthropologist Richard Flores, who, as a self-described “ethnographic intruder” in the *Pastorela* traditions in San Antonio, Texas, sees within the local, century-long performance practice a unique fluidity of “gifted labor,” one outside the “dominant logic of commodity experience,” and, indeed, quite dissimilar to economically-driven labor that accounts for classic Marxist

of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”

³⁴³ Herrera-Sobek, “Luis Valdez’s *La Pastorela*,” 326.

³⁴⁴ Broyles-González, “Native Dialectics,” 128, 127.

³⁴⁵ Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*. According to Diana Taylor *relajo* denotes “a specifically Mexican mode of debunking hegemonic assumptions through a disruptive acting-out. *Relajo* signals an attitude of defiance, or disrespect, as it contests the dominant show—or the show of domination—put forward by those authorized to speak.” For Taylor “*relajo* is an *act* with an attitude,” (68,75).

³⁴⁶ Broyles-González, “Native Dialectics,” 128.

alienation.³⁴⁷ Drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of the "structure of feeling,"³⁴⁸ (through his lived experience of both the in-home *Pastorelas*, where performances are given for free, as well as those staged for the highly commercialized tourist location of San Antonio's San José Mission, where performances are delivered for a wage), Flores concludes that the in-home *Pastorela* constitutes

a transformative gift, both because it claims to bring to life meanings of Christmas other than the dominant, usually commercial, ones and because the social relations that emerge in the dialectic between the labor of performance and the labor of gratitude create and sustain bonds that are based on sociability.³⁴⁹

More recently, Flores has problematized the in-home *Pastorelas* and their tendency to reproduce traditional gender "traps." Whereas the women participants quite often merely fulfill the production's aspects of domesticity (making the food) and religious devotion, the men's exclusively physical labor (i.e., constructing the set) as well as their "carnavalesque" drinking, in the end, for Flores, carry "little political weight."³⁵⁰ Ultimately, however, Flores' in-depth investigation sees beyond these gendered behaviors and argues that, in fact, all participants, become active agents in a "performative dialectic whereby men and women construct the home as a place of the 'possible'—a location of freedom [. . .] within the 'real.'"³⁵¹ In the larger view, one opposed to a dismissal of the plays as "apolitical remnants of traditional culture," Flores

³⁴⁷ Flores, "Los Pastores' and the Gifting of Performance," 272. Flores dates the modern *Pastorela* tradition of San Antonio, Texas to 1917, when the director had fled the violence of the Mexican Revolution. As we shall see, the fleeing of state violence, and the urge to celebrate one's Latin American heritage persists in the Los Angeles-based work of Teatro Jornalero.

³⁴⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 46-48. See also this study's Introduction, footnotes 70 and 71 (pages 34-35).

³⁴⁹ Flores, "Los Pastores and the Gifting of Performance." 280 [emphasis added].

³⁵⁰ Flores, "Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location," 217.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

(who has served as an active participant in performances since the 1990s), sees within the *Pastorela* a “nutritive ritual space for collective identity and communal action.”³⁵²

While considering these notions of political subversion, gifted labor, and the structure of feeling, this chapter explores the various aspects at work in the community-based methodologies of Teatro Jornalero, methodologies that seek to empower, educate, entertain, and, ultimately politicize, a community of people who occupy critical spaces in the cultural and economic heterotopia of the contemporary United States. The analysis that follows is based on three primary sources: (1) the company’s story circle workshops, rehearsals, and performances as observed by myself over the course of three months, (2) in-person interviews with several of the production’s participants, and (3) a textual analysis of the *Pastorela*’s adaption (abetted by my various conversations with the playwright Cesar Ortega). As we shall see, the “oppositional consciousness,” that accounts for the inordinate popularity, adaptability, and longevity of the *Pastorela* (as well as the population the *Pastorela* has the potential to serve as a strategic political weapon), is readily evident in the decolonial philosophies, praxis, and goals of Teatro Jornalero artists.³⁵³

SECTION TWO: A DECOLONIAL PASTORELA’S OPENING NIGHT.

God crosses the border every night. With every family that comes looking for a better life. We ask and pray that God look over these actors. Let God look over the jornaleros, and let us never give up the fight for a world that is more just. A world where people from all races can live in peace.

Ted Gabrielli³⁵⁴

Pastor of Dolores Mission (Boyle Heights, Los Angeles)

³⁵² Ibid., 218.

³⁵³ Broyles-González, “Native Dialectics,” 128.

³⁵⁴ Ted Gabrielli, closing prayer, December 17, 2015. Spanish Original: “*Dios cruza la frontera cada noche. Con todas las familias que vienen acá para buscar una vida mejor. Rezamos y pedimos que Dios cuide de estos actores, que cuide de estos jornaleros. Y sigamos con la lucha para un mundo mejor. Un mundo donde todas las razas puedan vivir en paz.*”

These words spoken by Pastor Ted Gabrielli of Mission Dolores (a Jesuit Catholic parish and homeless shelter serving Boyle Heights on the east side of Los Angeles) followed directly upon the final moments of Teatro Jornalero's latest adaptation of a *Pastorela*, or a traditional Mexican Shepherds' Play. This contemporary *Pastorela* titled *El Niño Dios Viene pal' Norte* (hereafter called *El Niño Dios*), depicted the new born baby Jesus and his exhausted parents Maria and José occupying what is not a rustic manger in ancient Jerusalem but a weather-beaten camping tent on the streets of contemporary Los Angeles, a city whose mayor has recently declared a state of emergency because of the homeless population that currently hovers around 40,000 individuals.³⁵⁵ Moreover, this population is largely concentrated in the area immediately west of Mission Dolores. Just moments before Gabrielli's prayer, the outdoor audience had witnessed the climactic defeat of the devilish and xenophobic "Mr. Ronaldo Trumpaldo" (Teatro Jornalero's dramatic stand-in for the character of Lucifer and one based on Donald Trump, then candidate for the US presidency). Also vanquished were Trumpaldo's band of deportee-hungry demons at the hands of the righteous archangels Miguel and Gabriel, who, in addition to their meta-physicality indicated by their simple all-white costumes, are workers at "Angelvision" an alternative media channel that produces Spanish language news and educational programs for the Latina/o community. At the plays closing moments, the archangel Gabriel, played by an undocumented day laborer who has collaborated with Teatro Jornalero for more than five years,

³⁵⁵ Peter Jamison, David Zahniser and Matt Hamilton, "L.A. to declare 'state of emergency' on homelessness, commit \$100 million," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-homeless-funding-proposals-los-angeles-20150921-story.html>. Additionally, one million undocumented immigrants are estimated to be living in Los Angeles County and the adjacent Orange County. See Knoll, Corina, Cindy Carcamo & Brittny Mejia, "L.A., Orange counties are home to 1 million immigrants who are in the country illegally, analysis shows," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2017, accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-illegal-immigration-los-angeles-20170208-story.html>.

and who is (according to some of the participants), the “best” actor in the company,³⁵⁶ explained the true meaning of Christmas to the audience of family, friends, members of the press, charity organizers, mission employees, as well as the homeless residents of Mission Dolores itself. The angel, standing to the side of the urban nativity scene, adorned with a tin-foil star, told the audience:

After a long trajectory, our friends [the shepherds] have arrived at last. And here they wait for a new dawn, full of love and hopes. (He takes two steps backwards, but then returns). Oh, and I almost forgot, the message that I wanted to give you. In this very special time, don't forget that the most important thing is to give love and not material things. Here's to a very Merry Christmas, and a prosperous new year! ¡Feliz Navidad!³⁵⁷

And with that anti-materialist message of the transcendent nature of human love connected to the birth of Christ, Musical Director José Alarcon (who himself overcame a state of poverty and undocumentedness and who considers himself to be a living example of the “American Dream”³⁵⁸) launched into an acoustic version of *Feliz Navidad*, the popular holiday classic

³⁵⁶ This performer, although he remains unidentified in this study, has recently been profiled on Spanish Language television because of his work with Teatro Jornalero. Having enjoyed acting some twenty years ago as a young man in Mexico, he has recently returned to the craft with Teatro Jornalero. An undocumented day laborer in the construction trades, he related to me that his participation in Teatro Jornalero has been extremely rewarding. He felt that his participation was not only mentally “therapeutic,” but also served as a distraction from “vice,” (Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 1, conversation with the author, November 21, 2015).

³⁵⁷ Spanish Original: *Ángel: Después de una trayectoria larga, nuestros amigos por fin han llegado. Y un nuevo amanecer lleno de amor y esperanzas les espera. (Da unos pasos hacía atrás, pero regresa.) Oh, y casi lo olvidaba, el mensaje que les quería dar. En este tiempo tan especial, no olviden que lo mas importante es dar amor y no cosas materiales. ¡Que tengan una muy Feliz Navidad, y un prospero año nuevo!*” (Cesar I. Pérez Ortega, *El Niño Dios viene pal' Norte*, [unpublished manuscript], courtesy of the playwright), 19.

³⁵⁸ José Alarcon, conversation with the author, December 18, 2015.

originally recorded by José Feliciano in 1970. The crowd immediately responded to the familiar riff, singing in unison, with some rising to their feet to applaud the twenty-one performers who had by then gathered for a final bow upon the concrete stairs that had served as a stage for this tent-covered, and energetic community performance.

Directly behind the audience was a line of charity volunteers who had set out some ten to fifteen cardboard boxes on folding tables to accept donations for impoverished local communities: clothing for infants, toddlers, children, adults, and non-perishable food. Although the final message of Teatro Jornalero's latest play was one of anti-materialism, it became clear in the performance space itself that material goods are still essential, and for some, hard to come by. Whether the handful of homeless mission residents (who it seemed had chosen not to watch the play and remained in the mission's open-air sleeping room sitting on cots and watching a big screen TV) felt that the production and its associated charity volunteers has intruded on their refuge is unclear. The congratulatory atmosphere among the cast members and the spectators persisted for close to an hour as people milled around enjoying *champurrado*³⁵⁹ and *tamales*. *El Niño Dios* marked what is more than thirty original premieres by Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras, a company committed to the advancing the visibility of and the solidarity within the day laborer communities of Southern California.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Popular during the holidays, *Champurrado* is a Mexican chocolate-based hot drink traditionally prepared with corn flour.

³⁶⁰ "Teatro Jornalero – About Us," Cornerstone Theater, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://cornerstonetheater.org/teatro-jornalero/about-us/>. "Our mission is to improve the lives of day laborers everywhere through the creation of plays by and for the day labor community, over 25,000 strong in the LA area. Responding to an often degrading and hostile work environment and an increasingly anti-immigrant climate nationally, the troupe uses theater, music and dialogue to educate immigrant workers about their rights; inspire day laborers to use theater as a tool for change-making; empower the community by reflecting their stories in their own voices; and humanize the immigration debate for the community at large."

Since their organic emergence from Cornerstone Theater's 2007 production of Michael John Garcés' *Los Illegals*, and which collaborated with Latino day laborers (*jornaleros*) as actors in an original play that sought to illuminate the social liminality and legal double-binds of immigrant laborers operating within the informal US economy, as well as the social constraints of those who regularly encounter jornaleros in that economy, Teatro Jornalero has presented their growing-body of community-based work at a multitude of labor centers, public schools, church gymnasiums, hospitals, and missions across Southern California, as well as a national conference on labor in Washington D.C.³⁶¹ Quite recently, some members of Teatro Jornalero have collaborated internationally, staging theater workshops with youth in El Salvador whose towns have been shrinking due to migration to the US.³⁶² Albeit rewarding for both organizers and participants, as well as having the potential to bring greater renown (and therefore critical funding) to Teatro Jornalero, this kind of international outreach proves difficult to the company overall due to the immigration status of several ensemble-members who are undocumented, and therefore unable to enjoy the privileges of international travel. More specifically, their participation in an international theater workshop would most likely derail any economic or social progress they have made since coming to the US, and they would almost certainly be barred from reentry under the Trump administration's new immigration policies.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Garcés, conversation, September 15, 2015. After *Los Illegals*, Garcés was asked to speak about the play's impact on the day labor community at a conference on Transnational Art Making, the Ford Foundation granted \$200,000 to the development of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (TJSF). The funds were allocated to Cornerstone Theater as TJSF's fiscal sponsor in hopes that TJSF would eventually get its own 501(c)(3) non-profit status. As of this writing, according to Garcés, Teatro Jornalero's independence from Cornerstone has been achieved, (Garcés, email message to the author, April 14, 2017).

³⁶² "Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras: Cruzando Fronteras 2012," *Cornerstone*, accessed February 19, 2017. <http://cornerstonetheater.org/teatro-jornalero/international-projects/>.

³⁶³ See Brian Bennet and Del Quentin Wilbur, "Trump administration clears the way for far more deportations," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 2017, accessed April 22, 2017. Having been

Notwithstanding the last 150 years of fluctuating attitudes and legislation in the US towards undocumented immigrants,³⁶⁴ the current political climate in 2015 was comprised of no less than a major presidential candidate who only seemed to gain in popularity (among certain voters) by fomenting animosity towards immigrant “Others,” and who would eventually go on to win the presidential election.³⁶⁵ Even under (then) President Obama’s administration at the time

elected on a platform that openly vilified undocumented immigrants, as well as calling for the construction of a border wall between the US and Mexico, President Trump expanded the federal government’s deportation priorities in his first month in office. Trump’s directives not only set the stage for the hiring of thousands of new border enforcement agents, but allowed agencies to conduct more immigration raids, detentions, and deportations of individuals with minor infractions such as driving without a license.

³⁶⁴ Contrary to contemporary border enforcement policies regarding northward immigration across the southern border, US policies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century were largely designed to *promote* (albeit regulate) the legal migration of Mexican laborers to support US industries. Due to labor shortages incurred by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, for instance, Mexican laborers were actively courted by US policies to meet the labor demand. Further, the Dillingham Commission (1911), exempted Mexicans *exclusively* from the head tax for immigrants to promote Mexican labor migration. Of long-lasting significance was the twenty-two-year Bracero Program (1942-1965) which brought hundreds of thousands of temporarily contracted Mexicans to work in US agricultural industries during the labor shortages of WWII. These programs and policies have, in turn, been followed by the vacillations of US immigration policy since the mid twentieth century. Both the 1950s and 1990s, for instance, were marked by restrictive moments of increased deportations due to the perceptions around undocumented immigration: Operation Wetback in 1954 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. On the other hand, it was during the Republican administration of Ronald Reagan that saw the 1986 passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which granted lawful status to approximately one million noncitizens from Mexico, while at the same time created employer sanctions for hiring undocumented immigrants. And while 2005 saw the controversial proposal (and later congressional failure of) the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Control Act, which would have classified undocumented immigrants as felons, in 2012 President Obama signed the executive order DACA (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) that sought to decriminalize undocumented youth who had been brought to the US as children. For more complete histories of the evolution of US immigration law, especially at the state level, see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Johnson and Trujillo, *US Immigration Law and the US-Mexico Border*, and *Taking Local Control: Immigration Policy Activism in U.S. Cities and States*, ed. Monica W. Varsanyi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

³⁶⁵ It may be worth noting here that Trump won the electoral vote (304 to 227), whereas his opponent Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by an estimated 2.8 million votes. Trump later claimed, without evidence, that he lost the popular vote due to “millions” of people voting

of Teatro Jornalero's production, more undocumented immigrants had been deported than in any other period in the entirety of US history.³⁶⁶ It stands to reason then that the ambitious work of Teatro Jornalero was a theatrical examination of this divisive reality. However, *El Niño Dios*, in its final form, does not merely operate as didactic agit-prop play that boldly advocates for Latina/o immigrant workers' rights à la its Chicano predecessor El Teatro Campesino, although on some levels it is quite openly this. Upon close examination, I find that *El Niño Dios* (both in process and performance) is a complex interplay of colonial religious drama, subversive political satire, a real-world attempt to build bridges within the greater community of Latina/os in Los Angeles County, and, not finally, an obstacle-laden experiment in precarity that still manages to operate despite systemic challenges of unpredictability, limited funding, and non-professionalism.³⁶⁷ For these reasons, *El Niño Dios* (and I would argue the work of Teatro Jornalero in general) emerges as a localized project of decolonial epistemology in many ways dissimilar to that of eSe Teatro's *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*, although, as my research

“illegally.” See Matt Pearce, “Trump falsely claims that millions voted illegally, costing him the popular vote,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 27, 2016. Accessed, April 30, 2017.

³⁶⁶ Cecilia Menjivar, “Implementing a Multilayered Immigration System: The Case of Arizona,” *Hidden Lives and Human Rights in the United States. Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation*, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 179-204.

³⁶⁷ Lest the word “non-professionalism” evoke for the reader images of ego-driven actors, tyrannical directors, or even blasé attitudes toward the project itself, let me clarify that what I'm calling the “non-professionalism” inherent in the Teatro Jornalero process is one of a different ilk. Unlike many of the aspiring, unpaid, and therefore “non-professional” actors in Los Angeles, very few of the Teatro Jornalero participants seem to entertain any thought of becoming professional theater artists or actors, even though some ensemble members have a long-standing active commitment to the company (9 years for one collaborator). In fact, I would argue that their particular brand of non-professionalism is *extremely unique* and comprised of no less than three main factors, each of which deeply effect both the creative process and the final artistic product: these factors are (a) the social and economic reality of the participants, (b) structural realities of transportation, geography, and housing (or lack of housing), and finally (c) an almost total lack of professional actor training within the cast. These factors are individually explored within this chapter.

revealed, one with very similar aims.

As explored in this study's Introduction,³⁶⁸ decolonial epistemologies attempt to “delink” from what decolonial scholars have called “the colonial matrix of power,” the underlying structure of western civilization dating to the sixteenth century, which is currently embodied in globalized neoliberalism and its pervasive hierarchical system of labor, nationality and race.³⁶⁹ For decolonial thinkers, this system (in which the modern subject has been refashioned—or reduced—to a consumer/entrepreneur) is historically tied to the philosophy of thinkers like Rene Descartes and Martin Heidegger.³⁷⁰ The fundamental ontologies of this genealogy of European thought (*I think, therefore I am*) have demoted, if not yet entirely erased, the “trans-ontological,” receptive dimension of human reality (in other words the reciprocal self-Other relationship), which takes primacy in decolonial phenomenology, and, I would argue, in the spectator/performer relationship in general. Moreover, this “trans-ontological” dimension has historically been denied to colonized subjects, whose humanity is marked by a “permanent suspicion.”³⁷¹ The capacity of colonized subjects to have and to give to others is reduced in the colonial matrix of power, thereby relegating colonized subjects to a state of lesser-being. This state of lesser-being, or what Nelson Maldonado-Torres terms the “coloniality of being,” is most

³⁶⁸ See Introduction, pages 44-58.

³⁶⁹ Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 1-23. Mignolo draws on Anibal Quijano's 1992 formulation of the “*patrón colonial de poder*” (colonial matrix of power), which operates along four interrelated domains of control: the economy, of authority, of gender/sexuality, and of knowledge/subjectivity.

³⁷⁰ For a critique of Heidegger's ontological theory of Dasein see Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” 249-251. For Maldonado-Torres, Heidegger's Dasein (in which the subject determines her/his ownmost possibilities because of the anxiety accompanying the knowledge of the subject's inevitable death) cannot be applied to colonized subjects as an ontological model because for colonized subjects the encounter with death is not an “extraordinary affair,” but a constitutive feature of daily reality.

³⁷¹ Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” 244.

evident in the normalization of violence upon the colonized body, which results in the “rapeability” and the “killability” of this “dispensable population.”³⁷² It is the task, therefore, of decolonial epistemology to “learn to unlearn”³⁷³ from this accepted (coerced) system of thought and engage in projects that move toward another possible world. This act of delinking is echoed in the work of Chela Sandoval, who identifies as *performative* the “revolutionary maneuvers” (*movidas*) of oppositional consciousness that seek to engage with logics other than those driven by Western law, macronarratives, and the ego.³⁷⁴ Drawing on the writings of Frantz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres suggests that these moves are primarily possible only via an initial, and “pre-theoretical” “cry,” on the part of the colonized (the “damned” for Fanon). The “cry” is not merely a plaintive utterance, but an interjection that functions as the “call of attention to one’s own existence.”³⁷⁵ I argue that *El Niño Dios* (and the work of Teatro Jornalero in general), constitutes precisely this kind interjection against the ontological coloniality of being: transformative, public acts that attempt to restore the “logic of the gift” (the ability to give and receive freely) for US third world subjects who exist within a neoliberal system predicated on the

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁷³ Madina Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 1-28.

³⁷⁴ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140. For Sandoval, this kind of oppositional consciousness is a form of agency that is “self-consciously mobilized,” and thus “performative,” (58). Sandoval states further that “practitioners of the differential mode of social movement develop and mobilize identity as political tactic to renegotiate power: *identity is thus both disguised and not disguised in a form of differential consciousness that thrives on oscillation,*” [emphasis mine]. I want to suggest here that the work of Teatro Jornalero, which theatrically depicts the subjectivities of the performers themselves (through a heterotopic landscape of performance event and performance site), operates equally on an oscillatory level. For instance, the presence of undocumented actors performing at an outdoor work site for undocumented workers necessarily derives its meaning (and entertainment value) via the porous relationship between the “onstage” action and the social milieu of the site itself. Sandoval’s decolonial reading of Frederic Jameson’s theory of postmodernism (especially how it relates to experimental video) is examined in-depth in the following chapter.

³⁷⁵ Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” 256.

colonial matrix of power and the normalization of war-like violence.³⁷⁶ Although I recognize that the notion of this epistemic shift is far-reaching (referring to the organizations that can “replace, displace, or redo current forms of nation-states,”³⁷⁷ this does not necessarily rule out smaller, more local forms of decolonial epistemologies through art making.³⁷⁸ As the work of Madina Tlostanova has shown, decolonial epistemologies are strongly at work in such post-Soviet media as visual art, fiction, and, especially, theater.³⁷⁹ Tlostanova argues specifically that post-Soviet decolonial theater projects can manifest a “dialogic and experiential” learning platform that both grapples with globalization and values the crossing of geographic, artistic, and cultural borders.³⁸⁰ It became clear to me, during my many conversations with Teatro Jornalero ensemble members and collaborators, that many of them recognized the work not as an artistic mechanism to create a body of entertaining plays (although over the years they have surely done this), but

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 260.

³⁷⁷ Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 23.

³⁷⁸ Flores, “Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location,” 218. Flores, reflecting on his in-depth Anthropological work in San Antonio, Texas *Pastorelas* concludes: “Whether this place in history develops into a location for freedom that links, though community, and conscious building activity with other similar sites of struggle and solidarity, into a movement for freedom beyond the local is unknown. But I am convinced that without the emergence of local sites, enacted in this case, through the religious performance of Los Pastores, the shift from local to broader collective struggles will be more difficult to attain.”

³⁷⁹ Madina Tlostanova, “Visualizing Fiction, Verbalizing Art, or from Intermediation to Transculturation,” *World Literature Studies* 1:7 (2015) 3-15. Tlostanova is especially interested in the border-crossing potential of what she terms “creole” or “hybrid” theatrical projects that not only bring together international theater artists, on the one hand, but also actively grapple with the scarring effects of globalized culture on the other. Tlostanova is especially skeptical of art criticism that would seek to neuter the concepts of creolization by suggesting that modern global culture is now somehow homogenous due to greater migration and intercommunication. Her examination of Ilkhom Theater’s *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* (2006), for instance, argues for a “pluritopical hermeneutics” in decolonial theater that attempts a “dialogic and experiential” learning platform that foregrounds the interplay of cultural difference. The play is loosely based on the life of Russian artist Alexander Nikolayev (1887-1957), whose spiritual experiences in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) are theatricalized through a blend of Western, Orientalist, and Central Asian aesthetics.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

one effort, in a constellation of efforts, that seek to “educate, empower, and transform”³⁸¹ a community challenged by the material results of globalization, the psychological effects of undocumentedness, and the violence endemic to their lives. Teatro Jornalero general director Lorena Moran grew up in Guatemala during the prolonged armed conflict there,³⁸² a time when theater groups that sought to empower lower-class communities were prohibited. In her conversation with me in September of 2015, Moran indicated clearly that the Teatro Jornalero community is acting locally, but thinking in larger terms:

We, who are the oppressed, in some ways, we are like sheep. They hit us from one side. They hit us on the other. They always want to be herding us like a flock of sheep. But there’s a very important detail: We think, We feel, We are human beings. And the moment will come when we will take action. I don’t know when this moment will be, but those of us who are in organizations like Teatro Jornalero, what we want to do is raise consciousness with our compañeros that we are human beings, who need respect. And that we need to look for opportunities. Also educate ourselves. As we become conscious and educated, we will take power. And when we take power for ourselves, well, we’re going to be prepared

³⁸¹ Moran, conversation, 2015. “*Parte del trabajo de Teatro Jornalero es para educar, empoderar, y transformar la comunidad.*”

³⁸² The 36-year “civil war” in Guatemala (1960-1996), largely fought between various Guatemalan military regimes and leftist rebel groups was a result of the US-backed coup d’état that resulted in the ouster of Guatemala’s democratically-elected Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in 1954. Árbenz, in direct conflict with US interests, had implemented a series of land reform laws benefitting the rural (and largely indigenous) poor. Although the term “civil war” is often used to describe conflict, it is generally understood that the years of state violence against indigenous communities constitutes a “genocide” similar to the US’s “scorched earth” strategy in Vietnam. See Allan D. Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 171; Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring – Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 13-32.

to take the next step. Maybe the actions we are taking are very small. But we are certain that these small actions can turn into larger ones, in continuing to educate and raise consciousness within our community.³⁸³

Moran's well-articulated statement exemplifies the kind of epistemological shift called for by decolonial thinkers, that institutions at all levels engage in projects that aim to "decolonize" the colonized subject, and, in turn, work toward building "communal futures."³⁸⁴ Clearly the epistemic shift that comprises Teatro Jornalero's goals is not theoretical, but rather based on grass-roots praxis. This praxis, I argue, ultimately speaks more to the process of *creating plays*, rather than having an eye on the final production.

One major component of Teatro Jornalero's script making process is the "story circle," wherein the participants share true stories and reflections about their experience as immigrants in the US.³⁸⁵ These circles not only act as a prompt to the playwright for the purposes of the *Pastorela*'s adaptation, but also create a working environment in which participants learn from and begin to trust one another by sharing and comparing personal stories. While many of the

³⁸³ Spanish Original: "*Entonces, nosotros, los que somos los oprimidos de alguna manera, somos como borregos. Nos pegan de un lado, nos pegan de otro lado. Nos quieren siempre seguir llevando. Como una manada de borregos. Pero hay un detalle muy grande: que pensamos, que sentimos, que somos seres humanos. Y va a llegar el momento en que vamos a tomar una acción. No sé cuándo va a ser ese momento, pero los que estamos en organizaciones como Teatro Jornalero – lo que pretendemos es crear conciencia; crear conciencia con nuestros compañeros de que somos seres humanos que necesitamos respeto, y que tenemos que buscar oportunidades. También educarnos. Y en a la medida en que seamos conscientes y educados, vamos a tomar el poder. Y cuándo nosotros tomemos el poder de nosotros mismos, pues, vamos a estar preparados cómo para dar el siguiente paso. Tal vez sean unas acciones muy pequeñas, las que estamos haciendo. Pero estamos seguros de que estas pequeñas acciones después se pueden convertir en más grandes en continuar educando y creando conciencia dentro de nuestra comunidad,*" (Moran, conversation, 2015), [Transcription assistance: Anna Witte].

³⁸⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xxviii.

³⁸⁵ The cast and crew of *El Niño Dios Viene pal' Norte* was comprised almost exclusively of immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Chile. One cast member, the performer who played the Virgin Mary, was born in the United States.

story circle questions center around the hopes and the day-to-day reality for the participants (questions that will be examined in the fourth section of this chapter) they in no way preclude the participants from sharing personal experiences that are negative or traumatic. In this way, the Teatro Jornalero story circles, a technique for devised work that playwright Cesar Ortega learned while working with Cornerstone Theater, seek to gain insight into the structure of feeling for a particular interpretive community (in this instance the day laborer community). Moreover, this structure of feeling is one that closely resemble Maldonado-Torres' "coloniality of being," revealing the ontology of undocumented immigrant reality, whose "citizenlessness" bears out both psychologically and in the material world. Indeed, in many ways, the playwright is attempting to manifest the coloniality of being in the physical world through performance in hopes that the transaction between performers and spectators will create opportunities for dialogue, laughter, and solidarity among the jornalero community.

While my previous work in construction had made me familiar with the personal histories of certain undocumented workers in the US (men whom I got to know over a long period), as my research in Los Angeles continued, I felt relatively unprepared for the stories of violence that my interview subjects related to me over the course of my field-work. While there is no physical violence depicted in *El Niño Dios* (although it is clear that the discourse of Trumpaldo and his devils is symbolic of the "legal violence" that undocumented immigrants are regularly subjected to via the body of US laws that delimit their lives),³⁸⁶ the personal biographies of the ensemble members abound with acts that were difficult for me to imagine. Related to me were such instances as the murder of an ensemble member's parents by machete during the civil war in El

³⁸⁶ Cecilia Menjivar and Leisy Abrego, "Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants," *American Journal of Sociology* 117:5 (2012), 1380-1421.

Salvador, the murder of a sister, the murder of a son, the abuse at the hands of state authorities in Mexico to the point of perceived immanent death, the survival of an attempted murder at the hands of a home intruder, as well as numerous instances of state and domestic violence that led to the individuals' migration to the US. For instance, in the case of two ensemble members, who were brought to the US as young children, their older family members were fleeing the violence in Central America in the 1980s. For Lorena Moran, who left her three young children in Guatemala, the decision to come to the US resulted in a suicidal condition that was only relieved by her experience in Teatro Jornalero.³⁸⁷ As she told me:

When I lived in Guatemala, for personal situations, I came to feel like a worm. My emotional state—I suffered from intense domestic violence, and literally I came to feel like a worm, something that was useless [. . .]. I came [here] like this cocoon, of a butterfly. And when I came to this country, my wings opened and I managed to put colors on them, the colors that *I wanted* to put there [. . .]. I believe we all come to this country with different dreams. For some it's an opportunity to make a better life for our children. Or in my case, to save our own

³⁸⁷ Moran, who first encountered representatives of Teatro Jornalero on her birthday in 2007, was working as a *jornalera* in construction. Having left her three children in Guatemala with an abusive husband, she became suicidal after coming to the United States. Although she holds a university degree and worked as a professional salesperson trainer in Guatemala, she found herself working in the informal economy as a day laborer. Her experience of sexual harassment in the construction field became the subject of her first Teatro Jornalero play *Esclavitud Moderna (Modern Slavery)*, in which she played the lead character. As she related to me, “When I entered theater, all of my suicidal thoughts began disappearing,” [*Cuando yo empecé en el teatro, todos esos pensamientos suicidas se fueron desapareciendo*]. Although the early funding period of Teatro Jornalero allowed Moran to be employed by Cornerstone Theater for five years, as of this writing (with the flow of funds reduced), Lorena Moran is back working in construction. “We have a budget of \$22,000,” she told me, “but both my heart and logic tell me that if I take a salary out of that, my project will die,” [*Tengo un presupuesto . . . aproximadamente veintidós mil dolores [. . .] pero mi corazón y mi lógica me dice que si yo tomo para mi salario, mi proyecto se va a morir*], (Moran, conversation, 2015).

lives.”³⁸⁸

This is not to say, however, that the company’s proximity to violence has ended merely because they now live in the US. The day before I arrived in Los Angeles for my initial work with Teatro Jornalero, a young man who had recently participated in their acting workshops had been killed in a drive-by shooting in South Los Angeles, and the first story circle at Mission Dolores began with a moment of silence to remember their friend. Additionally, during my research, one undocumented collaborator, who attended rehearsals and was cast in the play but eventually did not perform, was struck by a car near the homeless mission where he was then currently residing. It should also be noted that one long-standing member of the troupe, a man who regularly takes charge of handling the lighting equipment as well as running lights for the show, was embroiled in deportation proceedings at the time of this writing. Everyday violence such as this can in no way be removed from any analysis of the workings of the company. In fact, it seems clear to me, based on my experience with the ensemble members, that the company’s artistic and community-building goals constitute direct action against such violence (both physical and symbolic). The section that follows examines some of the structural challenges faced by Teatro Jornalero in their attempts to build community through the *Pastorela* rehearsals and performance. As will become clear, these challenges stem from a variety of factors including economics, housing, geography and transportation, as well as the level of actor training held by individual cast members. These

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Spanish Original: “*Cuando viví en Guatemala, por situaciones personales, llegué a sentirme ese gusano. Mi estado emocional—yo sufrí de violencia doméstica muy fuerte, literalmente llegué a sentir me ese gusano, algo que no sirve [. . .] Yo vine como ese capullo, de mariposa. Y cuando llegué a este país, se abrieron mis alas y lograba poner los colores que yo quise ponerle a mis alas [. . .] Considero que todos venimos con varios sueños a este país. O, en mi caso, para salvarnos la propia vida.*”

challenges, I argue, would eventually affect the performance on a material level.

SECTION THREE: STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES TO BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PERFORMANCE.

Every single one of those people, whatever their challenges were, enjoyed themselves at some point or another. *And to hear the applause?* It's a community that needs a voice. I get emotional. Because, "why not?" Everyone should have this opportunity. Everyone should have it. And if we don't have these challenges, then it's not going to be Teatro Jornalero.

Juan Parada³⁸⁹
Director, *El Niño Dios Viene Pal' Norte*

Of primary importance in the workings of Teatro Jornalero is the fact that none of the performers get paid, technically. The funding of the company, however, does allow them to pay the members of the core creative team (the playwright, the director, the musical director, and the scenic designer) although these are one-time initial payments at the beginning of what turns out to be a lengthy creative process.³⁹⁰ For the performers (to whom it is suggested that they come to rehearsal up to four times a week) they merely receive a "stipend" designed to cover their transportation costs, e.g., gas money or bus/train fare. But it is not merely an issue of funds (or lack thereof) that prevents participants from getting paid. Teatro Jornalero faces the practical challenge that it would be against the law to pay a good number of their participants. According to Michael John Garcés, Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater, this is the core problem for

³⁸⁹ Juan Parada, conversation with the author, December 20, 2015. Originally from El Salvador, Parada was brought to the US at the age of six by his undocumented parents who were fleeing the violence of the ongoing war in their country. When their plans to return to El Salvador never materialized, the family stayed in the US. Parada, however, was unaware of his undocumented status until he reached college-age. He only received permanent resident status in 1999 (his mother having been granted amnesty in the 1986 immigration reform law), and became a US citizen in 2004. He is a graduate of the MFA Acting program at The California Institute of the Arts.

³⁹⁰ Teatro Jornalero received around \$8,000 for the production from The California Arts Council, The Arts Council for Long Beach, and Building Healthy communities.

artists who wish to collaborate with undocumented immigrants on a professional level.

According to Garcés, whose play *Los Illegals* gave birth to Teatro Jornalero in 2007:

I can't put my company in jeopardy for paying [undocumented] people when it's against the law, we would get fined or shut down by the IRS [. . .] The truth of the matter is, and we are very transparent about this, we can't pay people who are undocumented. That is just the fact. That's the crux of the dilemma. So, you either *just don't do that at all*, or you provide a program in which people participate, because they think it's valuable for them to participate. Because that's . . . where you land.³⁹¹

Although Teatro Jornalero does provide a transportation stipend to participants so that no one should pay out of pocket to get to rehearsals, the situation created from the community-building goals of *El Niño Dios* had the effect of making transportation issues more demanding than usual.

As Teatro Jornalero has grown their canon of plays, forging connections with like-minded partners in other communities, so have they grown in their ambitions to educate and empower underserved Latina/o populations across California.³⁹² *El Niño Dios*, according to the artists involved, was Teatro Jornalero's most ambitious production to date. Given the fact that some members of the core creative team live in Long Beach, some twenty miles from Boyle Heights, the idea was born to bridge the Latina/o activist community in Long Beach and the homeless population at Mission Dolores, an institution where certain ensemble members had

³⁹¹ Garcés, conversation, 2015. It is also important to note here that paying performers is not in line with Cornerstones goals or practice in general, as their community performers work as volunteers. More importantly, an undue focus on legality and payment, for Garcés, gives short shrift to the aesthetic and community practice of Teatro Jornalero. Bigger than the challenge of paying undocumented performers, were the legal problems regarding administrative and leadership roles when Teatro Jornalero was formed, (Garcés, email message to the author, April 14, 2017).

³⁹² Avila, Robert, "Labors of Love," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, July 16, 2013, accessed August 5, 2015.

previously resided, and where one is now employed. Teatro Jornalero's Long Beach community partner, an organization from which thirteen of the twenty cast members came, was the non-profit health and well-being advocacy group Latinos in Action.³⁹³ Although the twenty miles separating Long Beach and Boyle Heights takes about thirty to forty minutes in mid-morning or late-night traffic, driving between these locations in the late afternoons or early evenings (rehearsals were ideally conducted between 5:30 and 8:00 pm) can often take more than an hour and a half. If one is dependent on public transportation, as was the case with several cast members, transportation time becomes even harder to guess. Thus, in their attempt to bridge the communities of Long Beach and Mission Dolores, Teatro Jornalero created a situation in which it became very difficult for cast members to attend all rehearsals—although, to be clear, rides were offered when available. Eventually, the decision was made to effectually have “two” casts, one comprising mainly the Long Beach participants (who were cast as the shepherds and could therefore rehearse these scenes together), and one comprising the Los Angeles group (who made up Lucifer/Trumpaldo and his band of demons). Thus, it seems that the forging of community would have to wait until the week of opening, as the two casts (rehearsed separately) were not brought together until a few days before the performance. Although a few members of the Los Angeles cast could make some of the rehearsals in Long Beach, none of the Long Beach cast members saw the rehearsal or performance space at Mission Dolores until they arrived there on opening night.

³⁹³ “Latinos in Action California,” *Facebook*, accessed February 12, 2016. “*Latinos en Acción es una Organización No Lucrativa, con la Misión de Fortalecer y Enriquecer la calidad de vida de Las familias, jóvenes e individuos,*” (np). Translation: Latinos in Action is a non-profit organization, with the mission of strengthening and enriching the lives of families, youth, and individuals.

As my attendance at the process became more regular, I was able to give participants car rides to their residences on a number of occasions. In-car conversations with two participants, both homeless and undocumented and then residing at a Salvation Army mission, gave me insight into the economic realities of participating in the *Pastorela*. One performer, who was cast as one of Lucifer's devils, and seemed to be enjoying himself immensely in the performances, responded somewhat surprisingly when I asked him if he was looking forward to participating in another production:

Me? No, no. It's a shame . . . I don't think so. I need money and they don't pay. I don't like living here [at the Salvation Army Mission], and I need money. I'm having fun, and I'm willing to finish [the performances] because I said I would. But I probably won't do it again. [. . .] One more [performance] and it's vacation time for me."³⁹⁴

Thus, although the performer was receiving the stipend as well as a discounted bus pass for senior citizens, the remuneration was not enough to justify his commitment to future productions.³⁹⁵ What is remarkable, however, is the performer's willingness to finish the project, despite extraordinary transportation and economic challenges, a willingness that seemed to stem from his sense of being part of something that had become very important to all involved. This was not the case, however, with all the performers who were initially cast in the production. For instance, the day laborer and former Mission Dolores resident who was cast as

³⁹⁴ Spanish Original: "*Me? No, no. Es una pena. No . . . pienso que no. No me pagan y necesito dinero. No me gusta vivir acá. Y necesito dinero. Me divierto y voy a terminar porque es lo que les dijo. Pero es probable que no voy a seguir [. . .]. Una más, y, entonces, vacaciones,*" (Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 3, conversation with the author, December 18, 2015).

³⁹⁵ Ibid., The sixty-two-year-old performer, whose last undocumented entry into the US was in 1999, and who often needed to get to doctor's appointments for tendonitis in the shoulder, was paying \$20 per month for his discounted MTA pass.

Lucifer/Trumpaldo, a role that is traditionally viewed as both the most demanding and the one often reserved for the most accomplished actor, was forced to bow out of the show less than a week before opening because he had acquired a stint of regular work. Earlier, another first-time participant who had been cast as “Ezequiel,” one of the principle shepherd’s, left in the middle of a rehearsal without explanation and never returned. Roughly a week prior to this incident, this homeless and undocumented immigrant had told me that his experience with Teatro Jornalero had, in fact, become very meaningful for him, saying:

The rehearsals have been beautiful and gratifying because they help me so much. To learn, and also to be, for me, a kind of therapy . . . a mental therapy. And to have fun [. . .] Since I suffer from a lot of stress, participating in Teatro Jornalero has been like a kind of therapy for me, to relax [. . .] And the script, I like to laugh a lot . . . it makes me want to continue participating, to meet more people – to develop myself more as a human being.³⁹⁶

Although the reasons that the participant left during rehearsal were never determined, his sudden, inexplicable departure from the project is a clear example of the unpredictability and state of fracture that has been identified in anthropological field work with day labor communities in California.³⁹⁷ But the precarity that Teatro Jornalero navigates on a weekly basis is not only

³⁹⁶ Spanish Original: *Muy bonita. Una experiencia muy bonita, y además gratificante, porque me ayuda mucho; aprender y también me sirve como, como una terapia . . . una terapia mental. Y para divertirme [. . .] Porque he sufrido de mucho estrés, entonces, participar en Teatro Jornalero me ayuda como terapia para relajarme [. . .] el guión, me gusta mucho más de reír, me hace . . . me dan ganas de seguir participando, de conocer más personas – desarrollarme más como ser humano también,*” (Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 2, conversation with the author, November 21, 2015).

³⁹⁷ Juan Thomas Ordóñez, for instance, is suspicious of studies that emphasize the “notion of community” in immigration research. Ordóñez, in his book *Jornalero*, offers a darker “scenario that is closer to most contemporary urban settings; that is, an array of people living and working in a world they inhabit as individuals and *whose understanding of the social, political, and*

inherent in the population they wish to serve and empower. It is this very same social precarity that the company attempts to mitigate through community-based theater, always attempting to incorporate as many willing participants as possible. Nevertheless, the participants are volunteers, and economic reality can take its toll on the artistic process. As playwright Cesar Ortega explained to me:

Sometimes working with this particular community, it's very unpredictable – what's going to happen. Sometimes they have to move to a different city [. . .]. For example, the people we are working with at Mission Dolores, they are looking for shelter. They can only stay there for a certain amount of time. After that, they have to move somewhere else [. . .]. Imagine having to live off of \$200 a week [as a day laborer]. Or \$150? Where do you eat? Where do you sleep? Your cell phone? These things that you need. Your clothes that you need. The boots that you need to get the work that you have to do. Then calling and staying connected with the people that you love [. . .] and then saving some of the money to send them? It's like, how do you really survive in this place?"³⁹⁸

Although the economic realities of the jornalero population are a factor in how the rehearsal and production process play out, this is not to say that the fact that the participants merely receive a stipend preclude people's willingness to participate overall. In the case of the character of the messenger Angel, for instance, the role was eventually split into two due to the growing number of people who wanted to participate, and the limited number of roles.³⁹⁹ My conversations with

economic conditions that affect them is compartmentalized and fractured," [emphasis added], (Juan Thomas Ordóñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press. 2015), 4.

³⁹⁸ Ortega, conversation, 2015.

³⁹⁹ Parada, conversation, 2015.

the cast members overwhelming indicated that receiving payment (or not) was no one's primary concern. Although by no means a "typical" case, the experience of Juan Carlos Munguia exemplifies the kind of exuberance and dedication I witnessed on the part of many performers.

Juan Carlos was brought to the US as a young child from El Salvador in 1986 because his father feared that he might be conscripted into the country's military as a child soldier, a practice conducted during the El Salvadoran government's US-sponsored war with Marxist guerrillas that killed some seventy-five thousand people and saw one million people displaced.⁴⁰⁰ Juan Carlos subsequently grew up in Los Angeles, where he attended high school and participated briefly in school and church performances. It was there that he got his first taste of theater (a common trend among participants) and first experienced performance's ability to touch the "spiritual" side of the spectators, witnessing both laughter and tears on the part of the audience.⁴⁰¹ I interviewed him at the offices of IDEPSCA (*El Insituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California*), a non-profit organization that—like Seattle's Casa Latina profiled in Chapter One—uses popular education based on the pedagogy of Paolo Freire to organize and educate low-income communities.⁴⁰² Juan Carlos is the community health organizer for IDEPSCA, which also runs a number of formal labor centers in Los Angeles, where day laborers can contract jobs for regulated rates of pay. What I learned from Juan Carlos is that his desire to work with Teatro Jornalero stretched back several years, but that his ability to do so had always been hindered by

⁴⁰⁰ Peter Winn, "Making Revolution," *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3rd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press), 554-555.

⁴⁰¹ Juan Carlos Munguia, conversation with the author, December 17, 2015.

⁴⁰² "Our Mission," *El Insituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California*, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://idepsca.org/node/16>. "Our mission is to contribute towards the transformation of creating a more humane and democratic world through the use of popular education. Specifically, our goal is to organize and educate low-income community members who want to resolve problems in their own communities."

various life circumstances. Through his association with IDEPSCA, Juan Carlos had actually seen Teatro Jornalero perform in the past at both the Hollywood and Pasadena job centers. When he saw how affective the live plays were for the jornalero audience, he couldn't help but ask himself, "What if I were on the other side of this?"⁴⁰³ Despite his internal urge to become involved (an urge that seems to come from not only Juan Carlos' natural talents as a performer, but also his dedication to the jornalero/immigrant community), he remained on the sideline for several years. Early in 2015, at the request of a colleague at Mission Dolores to try out for a "Christmas Play," Juan Carlos showed up at the audition, only to realize then (when he saw Lorena Moran approaching the mission), that it was to be the latest production of Teatro Jornalero: "And the next thing I know, on the day of the casting, here [she comes]," he said. "And I'm like 'Oh my God, *is it really gonna be her?*' So, I was really excited when I saw her."⁴⁰⁴

The excitement that Juan Carlos showed in *El Niño Dios* (playing one of Trumpaldo's devils with great relish) can hardly be underestimated, nor can his dedication to the project overall.⁴⁰⁵ Although part of the Los Angeles cast (and reliant on public transportation), Juan Carlos managed to go to several rehearsals in Long Beach, much to the surprise of his fellow cast

⁴⁰³ Munguia, conversation, 2015.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Maegan Ortiz, Executive Director of IDEPSCA, has often dealt with creative artists who want to "use" the day laborers at her organization for various projects. But she's often wary of an artists' intention and has rejected several of these contracts due to the unspecific nature of the project. In regards to the work of Teatro Jornalero, especially as it relates to Munguia's experience, she had this to say: "What I've seen through Juan Carlos' work, and some of the other workers who have been involved with Teatro Jornalero, not just for this time but for others is that day laborers are more than just laborers. They are more than just people who make things with their hands. They are people who make things with their souls, and I think we don't recognize the Art that anybody has inside [. . .]. Immigrant workers can also be artists and have something important to share and experience and contribute, right? Because there's all this talk about immigration and Trump and nonsense, and you don't hear a lot from the workers themselves. They don't get to say their experience of what they are feeling," (Ortiz, conversation, 2015).

members. When I asked him during the interview whether he got paid for his participation, Juan Carlos reflected a sentiment that aligns with the phenomena of “gifted labor” in *Pastorela* performances as put forth by anthropologist Richard Flores, who sees the creation and maintenance of social bonds in the non-commercial sphere of the performance process that includes shared talk, food, and labor.⁴⁰⁶ In answer to the question Juan Carlos said:

I don't really want to answer that question, because the payment that I get is within my heart. The payment that I get is by seeing people laugh. I'm not into receiving financial payment for this. My major payment is the one that I get by seeing people laugh and have a good time. That's my payment. And yes, I do get paid if that's the case [. . .] And there's always good food. I don't go anywhere without food. If there's food, I'll be there.⁴⁰⁷

Whether it was Juan Carlos' dedication to making as many rehearsals as possible, his long-standing desire to work with a grass-roots, decolonizing project such as Teatro Jornalero, or his natural exuberance and sense of comedic timing that ultimately led to his stand-out performance as the red polo-shirted devil, is hard to say. I imagine however, it is a confluence of all three. He especially seemed to enjoy himself in the scene which, significantly, features the first spoken lines of English in the play. This linguistic shift clearly simulates the hierarchy of language within the colonial matrix of power,⁴⁰⁸ and is meant to capture the symbolic violence that

⁴⁰⁶ Flores, ““Los Pastores’ and the Gifting of Performance,” 280.

⁴⁰⁷ Munguia, conversation, 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Walter Dignolo argues that, although Spanish was the original colonizing language in the Americas, its status was demoted to “subaltern” with the coming of the Enlightenment. Beginning with the eighteenth century, French, German, and English, according to Mignolo, would go on as the key languages of imperial expansion, science, and modernity. See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 259.

undocumented immigrants face in mainstream discourse. The scene takes the form of a Donald Trump campaign rally, and Ortega utilized verbatim language from Trump himself. Juan Carlos, emerging from the audience *à la* a concerned reporter relished in the dialogue of his “demonic” character, making sure to leer at audience members as he moved like a predator through the fourth wall:

Mr. Trumpaldo! We have 11 million of illegals living in this nation!

(He slowly looks to the audience, seemingly to both win them over and implicate them) And they are giving birth, as we speak, to more illegals!! *(He shudders at the thought)* Ughh! What will you do about that?!⁴⁰⁹

Soon enough the audience was riled up, with shouts of “*Racismo!*” coming from the spectators, and the mock press conference proceeded with Trumpaldo making a speech composed of actual quotes from Donald Trump mixed with broken Spanish. Juan Carlos, the first-time participant with Teatro Jornalero, seems to have fulfilled his years-long desire: to bring happiness and joy to the audience.⁴¹⁰

It should not go without saying however, that the performer had one central fear. Not a fear that there might be repercussions for this kind of political performance, or that ICE would show up to do one of the sweeps that were conducted against undocumented immigrants that very week in other states,⁴¹¹ or that even the audience would fail to laugh. Juan Carlos’ fear, the only one he conveyed to me during our conversation, was that the other performers would forget

⁴⁰⁹ Ortega, *El Niño Dios*, 12. (The italicized description of the actor’s performance is mine, not the stage directions).

⁴¹⁰ Munguia, conversation, 2015.

⁴¹¹ Juliana Jiménez Jaramillo, “Obama Said He Would Focus on Deporting Criminals. He’s Targeting Families Instead,” *Slate.com*, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2016/01/06/ice_raids_on_central_american_families_are_not_what_obama_promised.html.

their lines. As I watched the show that night, this fear seemed well founded, as what appeared to be profound unfamiliarity with the text was exhibited by various performers. Additionally, their unfamiliarity with the performance space seem to muddy several exits, ultimately transforming what was meant to be a 30-minute play into more than a solid hour. It was revealed to me later that not only had the process of having separate casts and separate rehearsals embroiled the project with irregular challenges, most of the cast (unable to effectively learn their lines) was book-in-hand the night before opening. “They are very sensitive people,” musical director Jose Alarcon told me in our interview prior to the closing performance:

They can get their feelings hurt very easily. So you have to be really, really careful how you talk to them. We’re dealing with regular people. Not actors. They get offended very easily. With professional actors, you pay them . . . so you can say, ‘Hey, I need [these lines memorized] for tomorrow.’ You can’t say anything like that here. You can say ‘Please, can you memorize the lines.’ But they don’t get the whole thing [. . .]. There are scenes where they couldn’t learn the whole text. So the whole acting is lost. [. . .] My suggestion for next time is “*Text, text, text, text, text, and more text. Do it over and over again.*”⁴¹²

This clear lack of actor training and preparedness affected the production on several levels: the spectators couldn’t hear many of the lines, some actors generally had their backs to the audience, laughing and breaking of character was endemic, a single hand-held microphone that no one had rehearsed with was added at the last minute, and, ultimately, one performer failed to show up at the final performance. These factors, in the end, conspired to create what, overall, was a rather bewildering onstage presentation. It must be stated, however, in regards to

⁴¹²Alarcon, conversation, 2015.

what I term “non-professional” aesthetics, that long-standing Teatro Jornalero ensemble members (who generally have the most onstage experience), were given *smaller* roles.⁴¹³ This choice allowed the *first-time* performers an opportunity to participate on a deeper level. Although Parada ultimately wished that there had been more “cohesion” between the Long Beach and the Los Angeles groups, “it’s never been about the performance” for him. “It really is about building a sense of community. Bringing a cast together, and yes, culminating into a big show. But it’s how we get there that’s important. And that we get there as a community. As a group.”⁴¹⁴ Juan Carlos Munguia summed up this sense of community and accomplishment when he related to me that, in the end (whether or not cues were missed) he came to know complete strangers who have the same kind of “heart” for the audience that he has.⁴¹⁵ For him, this was the greatest honor of participating.

Last, but surely not least, among the structural challenges of economics, transportation, housing, and lack of actor training that Teatro Jornalero negotiates in their particular brand of grass-roots theater, are the psychological conditions endemic to both undocumentedness and the precarity of being a day laborer in the US.⁴¹⁶ The playwright Cesar Ortega had initially taken on these realities with another *Pastorela* commissioned by Teatro Jornalero the year before, titled *El Manto De Ilusión (The Cloak of Dreams)*. This *Pastorela* was performed exclusively by day laborers, as opposed to the more ambitious project of casting from two communities. As he

⁴¹³ Several of the Teatro Jornalero actors participate regularly in director Juan Parada’s *Talleres with Juan* (Acting Workshops with Juan), that instruct in movement, voice, and acting.

⁴¹⁴ Parada, conversation, 2015.

⁴¹⁵ Munguia, conversation, 2015.

⁴¹⁶ Garcés, conversation, September 17, 2015. As Garcés explained to me, many of the participants in Teatro Jornalero are recent immigrants, coming from the “raw place” of fleeing terrible economic conditions and communities ravaged by civil war. Additionally, this population has the privilege of being exposed to art making as a platform for social change.

explained to me, the holiday season for jornaleros can be a difficult time, psychologically. Those who have left family behind in their country of origin are often prone to increased alcohol and drug abuse around the holidays, accompanied by an increase in suicide in the jornalero community. Ortega's story circle workshops, centered on the hopes that immigrants held for themselves and their families as well as the "meaning of Christmas," were not always welcomed by individuals at the labor centers Teatro Jornalero visited. One man, when asked to write or draw his "hope" on the communal piece of cloth that was intended to physicalize the illusions of the immigrant experience, resolutely refused. Although Ortega had made it clear to the man that he did not have to participate, or that he could surely leave if he wished, the man would neither participate nor leave. "He just kept asking 'Why?'" Ortega told me. "Like, 'Why do this? Why do you want me to do this? Why should I do this? [. . .] why, why, why, why, why?'"⁴¹⁷

It was at that moment that Lorena Moran shared with the group her experience as a mother separated from her three children, and that for her, "Christmas" was in Guatemala, not in the US, a country whose international economic practices conspire with its domestic laws to simultaneously rely on undocumented immigration and relegate undocumented immigrants to an quasi-agential state of "guaranteed marginalization."⁴¹⁸ The complexities of this condition, as argued in this study's Introduction, relegates undocumented communities to a state of "internal colonization."⁴¹⁹ It was only after Lorena shared her story that the resistant participant began to

⁴¹⁷ Ortega, conversation, 2015.

⁴¹⁸ Juan Thomas Ordóñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015). Ordóñez concludes, from his in-depth, two-year study of one jornalero site in Berkeley, California, that "[l]iving by the day wage is not an aberration of economic practices that has been brought on by uncontrolled immigration; it is a rational response to the market, a system of social, political, and economic organization that enables the contradictory nature of these men's existence. Living *la vida de un leibor* [a life as a "unit of labor"] is a form of inclusion that guarantees marginalization," [italics original], (36).

⁴¹⁹ See Introduction, pages 8-22.

“really open up,” sharing his own painful longing for family, and the traditional songs and smells he associated with Christmas in his home country, tapping into a personal reality that the other immigrants recognized and with which they could empathize.⁴²⁰ Thus, existing in a system with limited opportunities for mental health and community outreach, the day laborers who do encounter the work of Teatro Jornalero encounter much more than a group of dedicated artists (both amateur and professional) seeking to collectively devise and enact live works that speak to (and for) the jornalero community. What is primarily at stake is not that the production will lack aesthetic cohesion, or, at worst, fall apart in performance, but that those who *do not* encounter the communal, decolonizing epistemic shift that Teatro Jornalero urges will continue to subsist (regardless of talent or stage presence) within the coloniality of being and never partake in the collective, existential cry, or “call of attention to one’s existence.”⁴²¹ Lorena Moran sums up this risk in her philosophy of the Teatro Jornalero casting process:

I pay a lot of attention to those who I know need us the most. My husband always asks me, “Lorena why are you always looking for the people who are so troubled?” Because they are the ones who need us the most. I don’t need artists who are the best actors, or who have training. No, I need the people who have the most problems. The people who are most rejected by everybody else.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ Ortega, conversation, 2015.

⁴²¹ Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” 256.

⁴²² Moran, conversation, 2015. Spanish Original: *Pongo yo mucha atención en las personas que yo sé que nos necesitan. Y dice mi esposo, ‘¿Lorena por qué siempre busca las personas conflictivas?’ Porque son las que nos necesitan. Yo no necesito artistas que son los mejores actores . . . o graduados, o no graduados, no. Yo necesito las personas con muchas problemas. Todas las personas que rechazan las demás.*

SECTION FOUR: DECOLONIALITY OF TEXT AND PERFORMANCE.

I'm telling you man, we're doing miracles. That's what we're doing. I'll put it right there, man. It was a miracle. Teatro Jornalero is a pure miracle [. . .]. Let me tell you something: these guys that are participating in Teatro Jornalero, they will never be the same. *They will never be the same*. They are changed, man. We changed them. We showed them some light in this miserable television culture. Living together . . . *with fraternity*. The people that we are, I guess, lucky enough to have education, we are showing them beyond the couch and the TV.

Jose Alarcon⁴²³

Musical Director, *El Niño Dios Viene Pal' Norte*.

If both the Teatro Jornalero rehearsal and performance process are, in part, built upon inclusion, regardless of what might be the precarious social or psychological state of the possible participants, the opening moments of *El Niño Dios* (as well as the overall structure of the play's plot) mimic that very process of inclusion. As shall become clear in this final section of the chapter, *El Niño Dios* is, I argue, a theatrical representation of its own material processes: the building of community amongst subjects yearning for agency, the physical journey undertaken by the play's actual participants, and the unconditional (and non-material) gifts of labor and love between colonized subjects. Chela Sandoval, in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed*, points out that "love" (for US third world feminists, and thus, in turn, decolonial thinkers) manifests not merely as a romantic or familial feeling between individuals, but as "a set of practices and procedures that can transmit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness" that can militate against the status quo.⁴²⁴ "It is love," Sandoval further suggests, "that can access and guide our [. . .] revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being."⁴²⁵ This particular move toward the decolonization of the subject (what Maldonado-

⁴²³ Alarcon, conversation, 2015.

⁴²⁴ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

Torres would view as the “restoration of ethics” to the self-Other relationship),⁴²⁶ is clearly seen in playwright Cesar Ortega’s first major departure from most traditional *Pastorelas*: the creation of the fractured character of “Gitana” (Gypsy), and the shepherdesses’ immediate urge to lovingly bring her into their intimate community.⁴²⁷ In the first scene with the shepherdesses Dorinda, Felisa, and Tomasa (who are not true shepherdesses in the world of *El Niño Dios*, but rather Latina residents of Long Beach), the women’s regular gossip (*chisme*) session at the local laundromat is interrupted by the play’s first crisis: the entrance of the mournful Gitana, a homeless resident of the Los Angeles River and its environs. As her song reveals, Gitana’s fragile mental state was formed long ago, upon her being orphaned by the deportation of her parents:

GITANA. <i>Yo soy la triste gitana</i>	GITANA. I am the sad gypsy
<i>Que por estos mundos voy</i>	That wanders through these worlds
<i>Sin consuelo ni alegría</i>	Without comfort or happiness
<i>Sin cariño y sin hogar</i>	Without affection and without a home
<i>De una madre las caricias</i>	The soothing caresses
<i>A gozar nunca llegué</i>	From a mother never came
<i>Pues la migra despiadada</i>	You see, the heartless <i>migra</i>
<i>A mis padres me robó</i>	Stole my parents from me
<i>Y por eso es tan amarga mi niñez</i>	And for this my childhood has been so bitter
<i>Como ha sido mi niñez</i>	So bitter my childhood has been

⁴²⁶ Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 256.

⁴²⁷ Ortega’s play contains no “Hermit,” the traditional character who joins the group of shepherds along their journey and is often used for social commentary, engaging dialectically with the character of Lucifer and, at times, improvisationally with the audience; See Potter, “The Illegal Immigration of Medieval Drama to California.”

<i>Cuando me ven cantando</i>	When they see me singing
<i>Dice la gente, dice la gente</i>	The people say, the people say
<i>Dichosa la Gitana</i>	How lucky is that gypsy
<i>Que nada siente, que nada siente.</i>	That doesn't feel a thing, not a thing. ⁴²⁸

Despite Gitana's outward appearance of destitution and madness (she enters the laundromat pushing a shopping-cart full of cans and cardboard, singing to herself, seemingly unaware of her surroundings and the other women), the shepherdesses are unafraid. On the contrary, they immediately begin sharing with Gitana their own stories of immigrant hardship. Felisa tells Gitana of the deportation of her children and her subsequent abandonment by her husband. This altruistic sharing seems to soothe the disconsolate Gitana, and she allows herself to accept the women's invitation to a meal, despite her initial reservations and her economic need to continue collecting the cans and cardboard on which she subsists. In the following scene that feature the shepherds, Gitana is introduced to the others, including the young Gila and the gluttonous Bartolo (staple Mexican *Pastorela* comic characters and usually engaged to one another), and the group engages in a communal meal of bread, potato chips, tacos, and a two-liter of soft drinks around an outdoor bonfire.⁴²⁹ Here Gitana learns of how the other shepherds have come to be acquainted with one another, revealing the structure of feeling within this particular community that the playwright gleaned from the various story circles: as it turns out, the other shepherds have met through the social networks of both Mission Dolores and Latinos in Action,

⁴²⁸ Ortega, *El Niño Dios*, 4. Translation by the author, [translation assistance: Anna Witte].

⁴²⁹ This is precisely the kind of food provided by Teatro Jornalero to their participants at the numerous rehearsals I witnessed.

many of them having been forced out of living in Los Angeles due to gentrification and the accompanying increase in rents. Additionally, several the male shepherds are day laborers who commute to Los Angeles from Long Beach in the daily search for employment. The performers in the play thus simultaneously represent “fictional” characters, day labor spectators, and *their own selves*, while Gitana operates as a metaphor for the individuals who have been transformed by their experience of working with Teatro Jornalero. She becomes an example of the psychologically scarred homeless citizens and day laborers who have found within the workshops of the theater company not only avenues for empathy, education and empowerment (the decolonizing epistemic shift) but, on a more basic level, physical sustenance in the form of the shared food that accompanies any Teatro Jornalero rehearsal.⁴³⁰ Both “*disguised and not disguised*,” the performers mobilize their own identities as a political tactic, with the intention that the oscillation between the spectators and performers create a social bond through the depiction of love, gift-giving, and the (re)valorization of the self-other relationship among colonized individuals.⁴³¹ Shortly after the completion of the group of shepherds, with the addition of the (now accepted) Gitana, the Angel appears to announce the birth of the Christ child—his blinding light initially mistaken by the shepherds as a flying saucer, or perhaps the police:

⁴³⁰ Flores, “‘Los Pastores’ and the Gifting of Performance,” 280. For Flores, the social relations that are created and sustained in the Pastorela tradition are constitutive of “people sharing food, talk, space, and labor, [which they] create through their mutual involvement in performance,” (280).

⁴³¹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 144. For Sandoval, “practitioners of the differential mode of social movement develop and mobilize identity as political tactic to renegotiate power: identity is thus both *disguised and not disguised* [my italics] in a form of differential consciousness that thrives on oscillation.”

ANGEL. Do not be afraid good-hearted and humble people [. . .] In the city of Los Angeles a child has been born who brings gifts to the world. Go hastily to see him and to adore him, for in him you will find what you need. But I warn you: go with caution, because there will be surprises in your path, and men of bad faith await you.⁴³²

And thus, the shepherds begin their journey, not to Bethlehem, but over the same twenty miles between Long Beach and Los Angeles that had separated the production's two casts in the first place. As it turns out, this journey, too, is full of obstacles. So much so that the shepherds (due to the forces of Lucifer and his demons) become separated along the way, and the plot hinges – much like the precarious rehearsal process itself – on whether all will “come together” at the end. And while it may be convenient to interpret the disoriented shepherds as a metaphor for the disjointed cast, this may risk too much reflection on the disarray of the final performances. As previously addressed, this disjointedness was largely due to the ambitious social goals of this company that arguably puts process over product. What is clearly more important is the generation of meaning within the heterotopia of space, both within the play as well as the various performance venues. It should be noted that *El Niño Dios* played for four nights in December 2015 at places as varied as an educational center for children with special needs, the Mission Dolores homeless shelter, a church gymnasium, and a large conference room at a Long Beach hospital.⁴³³ Notably, at the last performance (one staged at the request of Latinos in

⁴³² Spanish Original: “*No os asustéis hombres buenos y de corazón humilde. Mi nombre es Miguel, y he venido a darles una buena nueva. En la ciudad de Los Angeles un niño ha nacido y al mundo regalos ha traído. Ir presurosos a verle y adorarlo, que en el encontraran lo que vosotros necesitáis. Pero os advierto, ir con cautela que sorpresas les aguardan, y hombres de mala fe les esperan,*” (Ortega, *El Niño Dios*, 8).

⁴³³ One participant later reflected on the significance, for him, of both the diverse audiences and spaces: “At first I was nervous, but once I realized our audience was real jornaleros seeking jobs, kids with disabilities & families struggling with financial difficulties, it made the experience and the fear go away. With the help of the director Jose, coordinator Lorena & the entire staff, it

Action for their annual Christmas awards dinner), Teatro Jornalero was not the only act on the bill. They were preceded by a crooning Mariachi singer in full regalia, folkloric dancing in the style of the Mexican state of Jalisco, and a bi-lingual Clown. They were followed by a DJ and a visit from Santa Claus. And while the making of meaning in such a heteroropic space is somewhat difficult to discern (some teenagers, for instance, seemed quite bored with the performance and a few of them never looked up from their phones), the entrances of Lucifer and his demons, played on the floor of the conference-style room, were the delight of all the children. As for the variegated spaces within the play itself (the enacted utopias, in which real sites are contested and inverted), the playwright attempted to relate the participants' fears, dreams, and cultural longings to select real-life geographies: The Mexico/US border is reimagined, for example, as the desert of the Holy Land, wherein Mary and Joseph are twenty-first century refugees. The Los Angeles River is suggested as a place where community takes root, as opposed to common notions of its waterless, urban desolation. And the theatrical space itself, a homeless mission serving primarily male Latino immigrants (many of them undocumented), becomes a space where the powerful voices of xenophobia can be collectively challenged.⁴³⁴

As previously noted, the story circle format of script devising is employed by the playwright to harness a structure of feeling of this interpretive community. In the case of Teatro Jornalero, this community comprised (in part), of subjects who—because of the disempowering effects of US immigration law—are situated within the coloniality of being. Members of this

made it fun and self-rewarding,” (Carlos Hernandez, email message to the author, December 22, 2015).

⁴³⁴ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24. Foucault’s third principle of heterotopia is theatrical juxtaposition, stating “[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus, it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another,” (25).

community, moreover, regularly contend with prolonged separation from members of their family, political and economic crises in their countries of origin, as well as marginalization and economic precarity within US society. Thus, it was of primary concern to the playwright in his adaptation of the traditional *Pastorela* to customize the script for the actors and, hopefully, the audience. While several of the ideas that emerged from the story circles served well to pepper the script with humorous lines (such as two of the shepherdesses meeting in yoga classes at Latinos in Action, references to the Long Beach Aquarium, and geographical markers such as actual street names along the journey from Long Beach to Los Angeles), it was in the story circles themselves where deeper conversations took place and connections were made between participants. The superstitious Bartolo, for instance, is struck with fear when (after the division of the shepherds), his small group of pilgrims is making its way along the cement *arroyo* of the L.A. River. There he is certain that he will encounter the terrible “Sihuanaba,” or the “woman who transforms herself.”⁴³⁵ This Pre-Conquest Central American myth, one with which the playwright was unfamiliar prior to the story circles, tells of a beautiful Indigenous woman who morphs into a monstrous shape after luring men (as possible mates), to locations such as caves, desolate rural paths, and rivers. According to “real” accounts, contact with la Sihuanaba can result in muteness, delirium, or even death for the victim.⁴³⁶ While the cowardly Bartolo’s fright serves as comedic material in performance, the initial offering of La Sihuanaba as an answer to a story circle question was a revelation of sorts for two participants. Ortega had posed the question, “What would you find in the Los Angeles River?” to the story circle group at Mission

⁴³⁵ “Sihuanaba,” *Celebrating Latino Folklore an Encyclopedia of Cultural Traditions*, ed. Maria Herrera-Sobek, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 669. Accessed January 15, 2016.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 670.

Dolores. One participant, an immigrant from El Salvador replied, “la Sihuanaba,” not only eliciting a strong reaction from another participant from Guatemala, but prompting a debate between the two Central Americans as to where the legend originated. Each participant claimed La Sihuanaba as their “own,” meaning that both were sure that the legend had originated in their own (and not the other’s) country. While the Mexicans in the group had nothing to offer in terms of a resolution, as none of them had heard of the myth, Ortega and the group eventually understood the story circle moment as one which made them more aware of the interconnectivity between their often essentialized national identities. As it turns out, La Sihuanaba (who indeed goes by many names throughout Central America) predates the construct of modern national boundaries, thus giving the story circle participants a moment to reflect on the Indigenous origins of their modern sensibilities.

While the L.A River is central to the heterotopia of the greater Los Angeles basin that serves as one of the play’s locations, Ortega also took advantage of another real location that was brought up in the story circles to put forward the complexity of immigrant identity within the commercialized zones of Southern California. As Bartolo’s group is led through the L.A. River by Gitana (whose homeless experience now serves her well to guide her *compañeros*), their equally lost peers have unintentionally arrived at “Plaza Mexico,” a shopping mall that lies just off the 105 Freeway in Lynwood, about halfway between the downtowns of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Plaza Mexico, however, is no ordinary shopping mall. Inspired by the architectural layout of the ancient Mexican city of Monte Alban, and featuring notable attractions such as a life-size replica of a forty-ton colossal Olmec head statue, a 10-foot diameter Aztec stone calendar, bronze statues of various Mexican Revolutionary figures, a chapel complete with icons

and candles, a traditional cast-iron *zócalo*⁴³⁷ stage, and a two-story replicated façade of a sixteenth-century Catholic church that serves as one of the mall's main entry ways, Plaza Mexico is a virtual simulacrum of the "Mexican" experience, albeit one geared toward consumption as much as community. Billed on its website as a 420,000-square foot "wonderland of shopping, dining, and entertainment," the Plaza Mexico experience is perhaps best described by former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger who proclaimed, "Literally I felt I was in Mexico City . . . They've created a Mexico within California."⁴³⁸ Despite the Schwarzenegger's enthusiasm, however, the responses to the story circle questions that were posed to the Teatro Jornalero participants as to their feelings toward Plaza Mexico revealed conflicting attitudes of either nostalgia or ire over the capitalist appropriation of Latin American culture. For instance, one participant felt that the plaza, which also features a replica of Mexico City's neoclassical *The Angel of Independence* monument, was a "good idea" and an "exceptional" place of nostalgia for him.⁴³⁹ For others, however, the mall was clearly a place of the "exploitation of nostalgia," tapping into immigrants' longing for an authentic experience of home, as well as their wallets.⁴⁴⁰ Yet a third participant, an undocumented gentleman who spent five years in a Mexican prison and who is perhaps less inclined toward the fabrication of nationalistic nostalgia, observed that,

⁴³⁷ *Zócalo*, meaning "town square," is a common feature in towns throughout Latin America. A small, circular bandstand with an iron railing and a covered roof will often be located at the town's central square.

⁴³⁸ "About the Plaza," *Plaza Mexico*, accessed February 16, 2016.

<http://www.plazamexico.com/abouttheplaza.php>

⁴³⁹ "*Es una réplica de un centro muy especial para los Mexicanos y [. . .] Es buenísimo estar allí.*" English Translation: "[Plaza Mexico] is a replica of a center that is very special to Mexicans [. . .]. It's a fantastic place to be," (Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 1, story circle, December 18, 2015).

⁴⁴⁰ "*Parte de la idea es de explotar la nostalgia y los consumismo de los Latinos.*" English Translation: Part of the idea [of Plaza Mexico] is to exploit the nostalgia and the consumerism of Latinos," (Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 3, conversation with the author, December 18, 2015).

despite any of its outward features that attempt to speak to a sense of cultural longing, Plaza Mexico is owned by an international corporation from China.⁴⁴¹ In the script that was eventually developed, Ortega craftily chose this already contested space for the appearance of the play's most contentious character. It is here, at Plaza Mexico, the quintessential "wonderland" of consumerism and nostalgia, that Ronaldo Trumpaldo makes his first appearance.

Considering the fact that story circle responses to the question "What does Donald Trump eat?" included such colorful answers as "illegal immigrants," "the misery of Hispanic people," "snakes filled with venom," and "gunpowder and nails to fuel his abusive speech," it is no wonder that the over-the-top evilness of Ronaldo Trumpaldo single-handedly steals the show.⁴⁴² Although, as previously mentioned, the actor playing Lucifer/Trumpaldo bowed out of the show the week before opening night, the production's set designer (trained actor and formerly undocumented immigrant) Geraldo Davalos stepped into the role and went on with one day of rehearsal. As Lucifer transforms into Trumpaldo with the *rasquache* aesthetic of nothing more than an ill-fitting blonde wig, his first scene takes the form of a press conference:

⁴⁴¹ Interestingly, Plaza Mexico is not only owned by a Chinese corporation (M&D Regional Center LLC) but was constructed so that the Chinese investors could achieve US residency through their financial contribution to the US economy. Under the Department of Homeland Security's EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, immigrant entrepreneurs are eligible for permanent residency if they can commit at least \$500,000 to a commercial enterprise in the United States. Thus, although Plaza Mexico investors may cater, if only unintentionally, to undocumented immigrants, they have secured the possibility of their own legal residence in the US with a nominal, although substantial, fee. See "About Us," *M&D Regional Center*, accessed February 16, 2016: "On September 9, 2009, M&D Regional Center, LLC was designated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as a Regional Center under the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Pilot Program," (np).

⁴⁴² Teatro Jornalero story circle, Mission Dolores, September 17, 2015. Unnamed participant responses to the question "What does Donald Trump eat?": "*personas ilegales*," "*la miseria de los Hispanos*," "*culebras lleno de veneno*," and "*pólvora y clavos para hablar pura abusada*."

LUCIFER. Thank you, Thank you . . . What a great honor it must be for you, to honor me tonight! Our country is in serious problems, verdadero Pro-ble-mo okay? Yes, I speko MexiCAN. The US has become a dumping ground for everyone else, un ba-su-rrero verdadero. Our country needs a leader, un lidolor! Yo soy muy rich! (audiencia aplaude) Muy, muuuuy rico, okay? That is why I am running for candidate . . . We need me for president. Let's make America white . . . I mean great again! (audiencia aplaude).⁴⁴³

DIABLO 1. Mr. Trumpaldo! We have 11million of illegals living in this nation! And they are giving birth, as we speak, to more illegals!! What will you do about that?!!

LUCIFER. All 11 million of illegals have to go, okay. Anchor babies have to go, adios. ¡¡Hasta la vista, babies!!⁴⁴⁴

After lambasting the “MexiCAN” members of the “audience” (including the angel Miguel who has infiltrated the audience space to challenge the xenophobic politician), Trumpaldo is off to Arizona, where they “love” him. This satire, where the actors and audience openly boo and shout down what has become the seemingly well-accepted racism within mainstream US politics, allows for a brief moment of utopic inversion—a stage dream in which the undocumented have a greater voice than those with privilege, money, and power. And though we later see Lucifer again, not as Trumpaldo this time in his final scene, but as the mercenary seller of the American Dream, the semiotic residue between actor and character is hard to wash off. Having lured Bartolo and Gilita to his shop, where they can use their “old broken down immigrant dream” as a

⁴⁴³ Ortega, *El Niño Dios*, 12.

⁴⁴⁴ This last line seems to have been improvised by the actor. Although it is not in the script, it elicited one of the biggest laughs of the night.

down payment for a gleaming 2016 model, Lucifer still seems more Trump than ever as he mystifies his would-be victims with the marvels of living in a capitalist society. Just as the hypnotized Bartolo and Gilita, still separated from their family of shepherds are about to sign on the dotted line, the Angels Miguel and Gabriel and some of the shepherds (fresh from the press conference at Plaza Mexico) enter the shop, and their collective power is enough to vanquish Lucifer, and his turncoat demons, to the dark abyss. Soon enough the entire group of shepherds is reunited, and they begin their adoration of the Christ child, who is born to the undocumented María within the confines of a camping tent on the streets of Los Angeles. The blue-draped virgin (herself a dialectic between indoctrination and resistance⁴⁴⁵) signals to the shepherds as a sign of hope for the true, immaterial meaning of Christmas:

MARIA. I think that everyone has forgotten the meaning of this birth. But there is still hope.⁴⁴⁶

Lucifer, however, as the story goes, is never fully defeated. Rather it is the ongoing struggle between forces that gives meaning to human life. To be sure, the US political environment in 2015 (when then candidate Donald Trump was gaining in popularity, in part due to his anti-immigrant rhetoric), surely gave the participants of Teatro Jornalero a virulent force to struggle against. Thus, the dialectic between Trump and the undocumented immigrants (both as

⁴⁴⁵ Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 63. Broyles-Gonzalez points out that veneration of the Virgen de Guadalupe, for instance (a *native* image inherent in Mexican *Pastorelas*) became so popular that it “broke down the resistance of the Catholic Church,” (63); See also Jeanette Favrot Peterson, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?” *Art Journal*, 51.4 (Winter 1992), 39-47. Skeptical of reading Guadalupe as primarily a symbol of freedom for native populations in sixteenth century New Spain, Favrot Peterson argues that the image of the virgin (an apparition that appeared to the Christianized native Mexican Juan Diego in 1531) has variously been used as a “symbol of liberation as well as one of accommodation and control,” (39).

⁴⁴⁶ María: “*Creo que se les olvido el significado de la navidad. Pero aun hay esperanza,*” (Ortega, *El Niño Dios*, 19).

characters and performers) fit easily within the performative scenario of the *Pastorela*. Through the centuries, the *Pastorela* has proved endlessly adaptable as an ideological weapon. At the same time, the *Pastorela* is, of course, a colonial product, cemented in the faith of the Spanish conquerors, and thus the colonial matrix of power. If Teatro Jornalero seeks to do anything, it is to be an active part of the struggle that seeks, along with other actors, to disassemble the continuing matrix of coloniality: to educate, to empower, to transform. As we have clearly seen from the individual testimonies and shared experiences in this chapter, Teatro Jornalero seeks to mitigate the ontological realities for undocumented immigrants through a long-term project based upon community building, sustained artistic relationships, and the power of (unremunerated) “gifted labor” in both rehearsals and live performances. That the process of Teatro Jornalero is both existentially therapeutic and spiritually uplifting for the participants is clear based on my research. And while the rough aesthetics of unpaid, largely untrained performers can result in a chaotic and bewildering theatrical product, what I witnessed in my field research was the coming together of two Latina/o communities who had, until then, no connection to (indeed little awareness of) the other. The rough aesthetics, moreover, seem to deter few people from actively wanting to participate. As of this writing, members of *Latinos en Acción*, as well as first-time performers such as Juan Carlos Munguia, continue to participate in Teatro Jornalero events and performances.

While considering the above goals, methods, characteristics, and outcomes of the Teatro Jornalero process, the next chapter in this study is an examination of a medium that shares many traits with community-based theater, but one that differs in several significant ways. The next medium examined, one also marked by the creative artist’s impulse to collaborate with undocumented communities in the realm of performance, is experimental video. These videos,

(two of which I examine in depth through my interviews with directors, performers, and spectators), are filmed projects that are conceptualized for gallery or museum installation. These videos are similar to both the Dialogues with Dignity workshops and the Teatro Jornalero process in that they create the performance script by incorporating voices from undocumented communities. However these videos often record the personal testimonies of paid participants verbatim, only to play them back in a highly edited framework where the visual aesthetics of the work become a major, if not primary, concern. Additionally, whereas both the eSe Teatro and Teatro Jornalero process ultimately depend on the live, intersubjective transaction between performer and audience, these works depend of the voyeuristic qualities of viewing persons who have been recorded but are no longer present. To be sure, these videos are not necessarily designed for undocumented audiences. And although these works, as my research revealed, were initiated by the artists' alteristic sense of solidarity with the immigrants they collaborate with, a number of questions arise: What, if anything, changes for the participants of these performance collaborations if the polished aesthetics of visual art takes precedence over the rowdy, *rasquache* quality of live theater? What kind of decolonizing epistemology, if any, is nurtured in performance situations where performers participate largely because they are being paid? Are such works capable of creating a sense of community among participants along the lines of long-term, community-based projects like Teatro Jornalero? To what extent do the artists risk exploitation of the performer, whose past experience (often traumatic) is mined as the performance text itself? And lastly here, what kind of affect are such works capable of generating within spectators, who merely view the participants through the irredeemable distance of a digital image? These, and other questions, guide the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

(Un)documentaries:

The “Postmodern” Aesthetics of *Pulpo/Octopus* and *Maria TV*

I don't do this project with the intentions of being high art. I just do it because I want it to be well-recognized and seen in museums and galleries. And it would be really ridiculous trying to explain to [the performers] like, “Listen ladies, this is about the deconstruction of the gaze within the postmodern structure of the global economy.” Why would you want to pretend that you are smarter than them, at any given point? You know, *nobody needs that*.

Rodrigo Valenzuela⁴⁴⁷
Artist, *Maria TV*

To tell you the truth, when I went to the Frye Museum, that was the first time I ever saw the entire product. So I didn't see it before. I personally feel that it was very well done. I honestly felt, like, “Oh my God,” . . . it was just nice to see how all those pieces that we worked on, and were practicing, and that we were taught . . . that [Rodrigo] was able to put together this . . . this . . . product, this . . . video . . . or, um . . . this . . . what is it called? [. . .] This . . . piece of theater. This piece of *awareness*.

Flor Alarcón⁴⁴⁸
Performer, *Maria TV*

I couldn't tell if that was a script they wrote or if it was all just . . . I mean there was a soap opera interspliced with it . . . and there's definitely some connection with that. I *assume* it was a soap opera, I don't know what that was.

Viewer 4, Male, 20s⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Rodrigo Valenzuela, conversation with the author, January 31, 2015.

⁴⁴⁸ Flor Alarcón, conversation with the author, July 30, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Conversation with the author, April 12, 2015 (Frye Museum, Seattle, WA).

A Note on Interviews: For this chapter, I interviewed thirteen spectators of *Maria TV* during its 2015 installation at the Frye Museum in Seattle on two different occasions. In the body of the chapter I have used testimony from eleven of the thirteen testimonies. To distinguish between the different spectators, I have numbered them. The numbers corresponding to the anonymous viewers (i.e., “Viewer 4”) represents the order in which the interviews were conducted. I am grateful to the Frye's Communications Director Chelsea Werner-Jatzke for her assistance in making this research possible. At the museum, I only interviewed people who had (in my observation) remained in the viewing room for the entire video. Museum-goers who wandered in and out of the viewing room without watching the whole video were not considered. Collectively these spectators were somewhat diverse in both ethnicity (Asian, Latina/o, European, Caucasian)

SECTION ONE: UNDOCUMENTARIES AS A DISTINCTIVE GENRE.

As my research into the theatrical work of eSe Teatro and Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras in Chapters One and Two (respectively) has shown, creative collaborations with undocumented immigrants in the genre of live theater can prove very efficacious regarding the decolonizing goals of the theater artists involved. For its part, Rose Cano's *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Homeless in Seattle* (and especially the related Dialogues with Dignity project), proved to be a successful platform to (re)narrativize and perform the real-life stories of both the homeless and the undocumented in Seattle. To this point, the immigrant spectators I interviewed had largely positive things to say about ESe Teatro's theatrical ability to "magically" "reflect the struggle" of the immigrant community.⁴⁵⁰ However, this process (as explained in Chapter One) can ultimately be compromised both by the inadvertent restrictions placed on spectatorship for those who cannot afford theater tickets, as well as the problematic practice of "undocumentedface:" non-

and age (roughly mid-20s – 70s). I did not, however, specifically ask after the individuals' demographics, although I do indicate their sex and approximate age.

⁴⁵⁰ "I did love the play, and I think it's important in Seattle to do theater in Spanish. I was really happy to go to a piece that I can identify [with], and people *talking my language*. That was the first thing that I was really happy about. [The play] talks about our struggles . . . I don't even remember the whole piece, but I remember my self-identifying with some moments, some parts of the piece that I feel reflect my own struggle as an immigrant. And that was also really powerful. I feel . . . I feel reflected" (Unnamed *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle* spectator, conversation with the author, February 22, 2016); "When I came to Seattle and saw this play, I was reconnected with the magic that theater has [. . .] I also said that I don't remember what the plays I've seen are like, like every detail, or what happened, no. It leaves me with an emotion. Any play that I've liked, or that has touched me, I am left with the emotion of it, with the magic that theater has. And with this play, that is what happened to me." Spanish original: "*Cuando vine a Seattle y veo esta obra, me reconecté con ese magia que tiene el Teatro. [. . .] También decía que yo no recuerdo como son las obras que veo, así cada detalle, ni como fue, no. Me quedo como con una emoción, de una obra que me haya gustado o que me haya tocado, yo me quedo con la emoción, con esa magia que tiene Teatro. Y con esta obra, me pasó.*" (David Blanco, conversation with the author, February 22, 2016).

immigrant (or documented immigrant) actors portraying the undocumented for middle-class, privileged audiences.⁴⁵¹ The community-based methods of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (as explored in Chapter Two), however, tackle these compromises by engaging in a committed, ongoing creative relationship with undocumented communities, one in which the immigrants not only contribute to the development of the play's script but are engaged as performers as well. And although the final theatrical product of Teatro Jornalero can be marked by a chaotic, unrefined, amateur aesthetic, the group's decolonizing and fraternal impulses, as well as the "therapeutic" aspects of the Teatro Jornalero model supersede, in many ways, any artistic shortcomings. But the strictly theatrical practices of Ese Teatro and Teatro Jornalero do not define, by any stretch of the imagination, the totalizing genre of what constitutes performance collaborations with undocumented communities.

In this chapter I take up another remarkable method of performance making, namely the move made by two conceptual artists to hire Latina/o immigrants (day laborers and domestic workers specifically) as "autobiographical" performers in experimental videos: non-narrative, conceptual works that attempt to capture an "essence" of the individuals, as opposed to relating a particular story. The performative process of these artistic products is often short-lived: the artist, after having contracted the performers, shoots footage for a few days then edits the material into a final product in relative isolation. As these projects differ from the community-centered methods of the long-term theater projects explored in the previous chapters, this chapter addresses questions of agency, transparency, methodology, and exploitation. Here again, the research centers on first-person interviews with both the participants and spectators to get at the

⁴⁵¹ Guterman, *A Theatre of Undocumentedness*, 93.

heart of the artistic and receptive process.⁴⁵² Additionally, I use Marxist scholar Frederic Jameson's postmodern theory of experimental video, as well as Chela Sandoval's decolonial critique of Jameson, as a lens with which to analyze these works aesthetically. I argue in this chapter that these videos, often intended for gallery or museum installation, rely on the "postmodern" aesthetics of decenteredness, atemporality, and pastiche as a tactic to artistically capture the actual conditions of undocumentedness. These conditions include, but are not limited to, an existential sense of limbo, a sense of anxiety due to family separation and the precarity of waged labor, and the supposed (but highly problematic) notion of "invisibility" of undocumented immigrants. Unlike the stage plays previously examined, which tend to rely on Aristotelian narrative structures, I argue that these experimental videos generate affect through three main techniques: (1) the deliberate homogenization of the performers via uniform costuming, (2) the foregrounding of the performer's physical displacement (both in-studio and in public), and (3), the utilization of what I call "de-voicing" techniques; the amateur performer's spoken words are often either delivered as a disembodied voiceover or remain unsettlingly untranslated from their original language, namely the Mayan language K'iche'. What's more, the words spoken by any given performer are often not identified as purely, or originally, their own.⁴⁵³

Despite the tendency to homogenize and "de-voice" the participants, the artists behind these two works tend to view themselves as advocates for the performers, believing that these

⁴⁵² For this chapter, I was able to interview both filmmakers on numerous occasions. I was also privileged to interview three participant performers. Acquiring interviews for this chapter was remarkably different than the previous chapters. Both videos were made some years ago (*Pulpo* in 2010, *Maria TV* in 2014) and many participants have become hard to locate. Additionally, several participants who were contacted (namely for *Maria TV*) declined to participate in this study for undisclosed reasons.

⁴⁵³ For his part, Valenzuela openly admits to creating a de-voiced aesthetic in his videos: "In none of the pieces do you see their mouth moving. Because I don't want to associate one voice with one face," (Valenzuela, conversation, 2015).

performative works can spark public dialogue surrounding issues of undocumented immigration, invisible labor, and human rights. In this way, these artists are following a decolonizing urge of solidarity with colonized subjects. These individuals, primarily due to conditions of ethnicity, language, immigration status, or gender, are “lower” on the hierarchical ladder of coloniality.⁴⁵⁴ As explored in the introduction and reiterated briefly here, decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres terms this sense of fraternity, this “radical affirmation of sociality and interhuman contact” with “the Other who is ‘below’ ‘altericity.’”⁴⁵⁵ I find Maldonado-Torres’ term of altericity particularly apt in these artistic situations primarily because the filmmakers (also Latinos operating in the US), are funded, male, internationally-exhibited artists who operate with an agency not enjoyed by many of their contracted performers. Moreover, as my interviews revealed, the artists’ urge to mobilize their own agency in the service of what one viewer described as an “ostracized population” is the creative seed that propels these works.⁴⁵⁶ The two main case studies examined in this chapter are *Pulpo/Octopus* (2010) by the Mexican artist Yoshua Okón, and *Maria TV* (2014) by the Chilean artist Rodrigo Valenzuela.

⁴⁵⁴ See Introduction, pages 48-51.

⁴⁵⁵ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 156-158. Importantly, Maldonado-Torres’ concept of altericity hinges on the fact that the intersubjective expression of fraternity occurs *between* subjects that are both identified as “Other,” one occupying a higher status than the other. The “other” who is lower in the societal scheme Maldonado-Torres terms the “sub-Other.” In other words, altericity is much less of a top-down paternalistic generosity toward marginalized people from those at the top, and rather more lateral: the generosity, fraternity, and “*non-indifference*,” toward those who are marginalized to a greater degree. Valenzuela, as a formerly undocumented immigrant Latino in the US, particularly fits the altericity model.

⁴⁵⁶ One viewer’s response to *Maria TV*: “What I thought was interesting at first was having that clip of the [*tele*]novela, and then taking those words and then transposing them to be said by non-actors, they take on a complete different meaning and form. That whole ‘If you ever look at me again,’ thing becomes this completely much more powerful [thing] because it’s applied to a population that is ostracized,” (Viewer 8, Female, 50s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

Maria TV is an internet and gallery-installed video work in which Valenzuela gathered together fifteen Seattle-area Latina immigrants (many of them professionally experienced as domestic workers) in order to film them over the course of three days “reenacting”—but primarily reacting to—melodramatic dialogue lifted from a Spanish-language *telenovela*. Over the three-day course of in-studio filming, the women participants created their own “dialogue,” at times using excerpts from the *telenovela* as a touchstone, in which they improvisationally related their personal experiences of migration and labor, as well as some of their frustrations with their status as undocumented (or formerly undocumented) immigrants. Thus, somewhat akin to Eulalia Camargo’s play *Super Doméstica* examined in Chapter One, which draws on the playwright’s experience of abuse as a domestic worker, *Maria TV* also generates its text from the first-hand experiences of the Latina laborers. Valenzuela draws on the notoriously isolating and abusive paradigm of female domestic work (an industry increasingly dependent on undocumented women of color) to frame the performance itself.⁴⁵⁷ But this is not the agit-prop of

⁴⁵⁷ The most commonly cited study on domestic workers is Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s 2001 book *Doméstica*. In her in-depth study of domestic workers in Los Angeles, a workforce that tops one hundred thousand individuals, Hondagneu-Sotelo argues, “Even as they enjoy the attendant privilege, many Americans remain profoundly ambivalent about positioning themselves as employers of domestic workers. These arrangements, after all, are often likened to the master-servant relations drawn out of premodern feudalism and slavery, making for a certain amount of tension with the strong U.S. rhetoric of democracy and egalitarianism,” Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11; Notably, in the fifteen years since the publication of Hondagneu-Sotelo’s study, the conditions of domestic work continue to be extremely neocolonial. Gilda Blanco, a formerly undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, now with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, recently recounted her fifteen-year experience of wage theft, 18-hour days, and threats of deportation at a recent symposium on human rights: “I became an activist, because every woman’s story is my story. Every woman suffering right now . . . I can’t enjoy the Green Card because I work with a lot of women and men who are suffering without documents here. So, I have to be struggling, and continue fighting for rights and respect for all immigrants in this country, because I am part of them, they are my family. They are my family,” (Gilda Blanco, “Stories of Migration and Actions for Justice” (Public Lecture), University of Washington, Seattle, May 6, 2016).

the live stage, with the autobiographical playwright in the starring role. Rather, it's the ambiguous aesthetics of video, built upon "gestures of alienation and displacement" that ultimately shape the performance.⁴⁵⁸ Notably, much of the "dialogue" is delivered as a voiceover, and Valenzuela often uses the aesthetic of an empty Green Screen background to both foreground *and* decenter the individual performer. Provocatively, Valenzuela (who is himself a formerly undocumented immigrant from Chile), also has his performers dress in generic, black and white maid costumes as they attempt to recreate the dialogue from the *telenovela*. This practice, I argue, both homogenizes the participants as well as draws the spectators mind toward a theme of labor and exploitation, all the while dismantling any stable sense of nonfiction. Speaking about his various video works,⁴⁵⁹ the artist explained to me that he operates with a documentary-like impulse, but by no means seeks to adhere to the rules of nonfiction:

In my mind they are documentaries, right? But experimenting with the form. While trying to be the most honest they can be with the information they are trying to transmit [. . .] I condition, in some way, the information to the form, the form to the information. I am very interested to make each [video] with a particular tone, and particularly not be recognized as a documentary, even if I approach it as one. The venue helps. I mean I show them in art galleries and

⁴⁵⁸ "Gestures of alienation and displacement are both the aesthetic and subject of much of my work. Often using desert landscapes and tableaux with day labors or myself I explore the way an image is inhabited, and the way that spaces and people are translated into images," Rodrigo Valenzuela, "Statement," *Rodrigo Valenzuela* (Artist's website), accessed November 28, 2014. <http://rodrigovalenzuela.com/>

⁴⁵⁹ Not under examination here are similar video works by Valenzuela. *Diamondbox*, for instance, is a short video work Valenzuela made in 2012 and for which the artist hired day laborers at a Seattle Lowes Home Improvement store. Contracted as performers, the workers describe their experiences of displacement and journeys of migration to the United States. *Diamondbox* is largely a filmic montage of faces and disembodied voiceovers.

museums. It's not like watching it in a theater [. . .] People can be weird about it and be like, "You should be very truthful." I don't want to sound pessimistic, but you need to manipulate truth in order to build consciousness.⁴⁶⁰

As this chapter will demonstrate, how the video artists manipulate the primary material has everything to do how the pieces are interpreted and received by spectators.

Similarly, the video work of the Mexican artist Yoshua Okón also defies the nature of traditional documentaries that seek to journalistically uncover the "truth" of a situation. For *Pulpo/Octopus* (hereafter *Pulpo*), Okón contracted a group of K'iche'-speaking⁴⁶¹ Mayan immigrant men at a Los Angeles, California Home Depot parking lot and filmed them "recreating" military movements they had conducted as soldiers in Guatemala's drawn-out "civil war."⁴⁶² Blankly suggestive of the fact that these untrained performers had fought on "both sides" of the brutal conflict in their country of origin, Okón dressed half the participants in black T-shirts, the other half in white T-shirts. Thus, each "side" of the replayed conflict seemingly becomes the undefined enemy of the other, stalking each other in the space framed by the looping video context. In the four-sided video projection (what the artist calls a "video

⁴⁶⁰ Valenzuela, conversation, 2015.

⁴⁶¹ K'ichee' (sometimes spelled "Quiché) is an indigenous language of Guatemala spoken by over one million people and roughly divided into five dialects. Anthropologist Sergio Romero notes that the term only came to denote a "language" after the Spanish colonial powers exerted control of the Maya in the sixteenth century. Romero notes that in pre-Columbian Guatemala, the term K'ichee' referred to an expanding polity in what is now Western Guatemala. See Sergio Romero, *Language and Ethnicity among the K'ichee' Maya* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015).

⁴⁶² Although the term "civil war" is sometimes used to describe the 36-year conflict, which began when the US supported a military coup against the democratically elected government of president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in 1954, it is generally understood that the years of state violence against indigenous communities constitutes a "genocide" similar to the US's "scorched earth" strategy in Vietnam. See Allan D. Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 171; Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring – Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 13-32.

sculpture”), the undocumented Mayan day laborers “patrol” the Home Depot parking lot with uncannily parodic military choreography; the men push one another around while riding on empty orange shopping carts, somersault across the pavement, crawl underneath parked vehicles, and wield imaginary rifles and binoculars. Notably, all of this takes place under the apathetic gaze the Home Depot customers, who (either seemingly or purposefully oblivious to the performers), come and go as the filming takes places. Okón’s “video sculpture” additionally features segments of K’iche’ dialogue, but none of the speeches are translated or subtitled, imbuing the video with both the audible poetics of the K’iche’ language, and the unsettling effect of not knowing what the performer is actually saying. For his part, Okón never asked the performers exactly what they were saying, and thus the untranslated dialogue hangs eerily (albeit intermittently) throughout the work.

Testimonios, Documentaries, Undocumentaries

Their emotions are coming out, but I wasn't clear whether they were sort of acting a part, or whether it was a true picture of what the individual themselves were feeling.

Viewer 6, Female, 30s⁴⁶³
Fry Art Museum, *Maria TV*

In some ways Okón’s and Valenzuela’s methodologies are akin to the Latin American literary genre of *testimonio*, the first-hand retellings of traumatic realities in which violence, and degrading living conditions are made “real by personalizing their effects and recounting heroic stories,” often with “cinematic detail.”⁴⁶⁴ Additionally, *testimonios*, much like the videos under examination here, are often compiled by “literate professionals,” (in this case an artist/director)

⁴⁶³ Conversation with the author, April 26, 2015.

⁴⁶⁴ Kay B. Warren, “Telling Truths: Taking David Stoll and the Rigoberta Menchu Expose Seriously,” *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 200, 201.

as opposed to the individuals whose stories they purportedly tell.⁴⁶⁵ In this regard, issues of translation, mediation, and agency, as well as concerns about “inaccuracies and omissions,” have made the *testimonio* genre a controversial one.⁴⁶⁶ But the differences between *testimonio* and these video works are readily evident. Although these works surely employ the performers to help create the performance text via an exploration of their own stories and experiences, the participants are never identified by name, nor is there an overt attempt to narrativize (or even highlight) the individual’s experience per se. And although some of these works have been described by certain art critics as a kind of “reality show,” they hardly intersect with *testimonio*’s overall “commitment to realism.”⁴⁶⁷

Rather, I argue in this chapter, both *Pulpo* and *Maria TV* derive their effectiveness due to a decidedly *nonrealistic* aesthetic; the techniques used by the filmmakers under examination here do not rely on *testimonio*’s literalness of faithfully adapting “real stories” to the page. Nor are they reliant on theater’s energetic transaction between live performers and their (also) live

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁶⁶ Consider, for instance the “dramatically mistranslated” English title of Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio: Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y Así Nació la Conciencia* (“My name is Rigoberta Menchú, and this is how my consciousness was formed”) becomes the decidedly less political and barely personal “*I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman from Guatemala*.” See John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 66.

⁴⁶⁷ Ellie Dicola, “Reality Check: Rodrigo Valenzuela and Ghosts, Monuments, Labor & Time,” Art Nerd Seattle, web, February 15, 2015, accessed October 13, 2016. Dicola argues: If [the work of Rodrigo Valenzuela] clearly *is* what it represents, what of the fiction that’s such a strong aspect of Valenzuela’s work? In a way, the work becomes inverted, which is fascinating [. . .] *Maria TV* is modeled somewhere between a reality show and a *telenovela*; the female cast air out their closets—tales about family, resources, work, self-sustenance.” For *testimonio*’s relationship to realism, see Warren, “Telling Truths.” Warren: “*Testimonio* writers share a commitment to realism, [engaging in a] realist mode of representation [that] creates the illusion of an unmediated window on the world to allow the vicarious experience of social realities outside the reader’s own life experience. [*Testimonios*] offer eyewitness experiences of injustice and violence in cinematographic detail,” (201).

audience. Rather the individual stories are ambiguously mediated through the digital screen, at once “cinematically” detailed, and yet fogged by destabilizing aesthetics. The artist’s methodology is primarily a two-part process: First, the artists generated the textual materials for their videos (both dialogic and choreographic) by facilitating a temporary space, usually for a few days, in which the creative contributions of the immigrant participants are filmed. This process involves both monetarily contracting the individual performers, as well as relying on the immigrants themselves to assemble the “cast” through their own social networks. This is quite different from the more time-consuming practice of theater explored in this study’s first two chapters. Secondly, the artists take the raw material from the shoot and edit the footage themselves in such a way as to produce a fractured, “postmodern” aesthetic. For instance, the individuals are never identified by name, a sense of temporality (of time moving forward) is conspicuously absent, suggestive emblems of consumption, globalization, and labor are depicted without literal explanation, there is a sense of estrangement via the “cannibalization”⁴⁶⁸ of other forms of popular performance (namely the *telenovela* and war reenactments). Lastly, the videos employ an open-ended structure in which no sense of narrative closure is achieved. For this reason, I term this particular phenomenon “undocumentaries,” an emergent genre alternative to the many documentary films that have recently been made about undocumented immigrants in the US. These traditional documentaries tend to depict quite literally the struggle faced by undocumented communities, relying on an emotional/narrative approach to “bring to life” the human side of immigration issues.⁴⁶⁹ According to filmmaker Anayansi Prado, whose

⁴⁶⁸ Jameson’s term, addressed below.

⁴⁶⁹ Recent documentary films such as *Documented* (2013) by Jose Antonio Vargas, *The Dream is Now* (2013) by Davis Guggenheim, *La Bestia* (2011) by Pedro Ultras, and *Maid in America* (2006) and *The Unafraid* (2016) both by Anayansi Prado are paradigmatic of this trend. Documentaries such as these closely investigate the struggles of individual undocumented

documentaries surrounding issues of undocumentedness have won her a recent MacArthur Fellowship, generating an emotional reaction is one of her main goals. Prado states:

The purpose of all of my films is to humanize the immigrant experience, particularly for undocumented immigrants. Like for *Maid in America*, it was really important for me to show what [the domestic workers'] lives were like outside of work. Like where they came from, if they had children, what were their own personal struggles, the impact they made on the families that they worked for [. . .] If I'm a mother and I see a mother talking about wanting to reunite with her kids, then I can relate to that basic human emotion. And so my ideas for my films is to make them as emotional as possible, and to really bring to life people as much as possible. So my audience can connect with them . . . [and] forget that this woman is undocumented, forget that this woman crossed the border undocumented, to forget that, and in that time that you're watching the film, you connect at that human level.⁴⁷⁰

immigrants, often attempting to explicitly tell the individual stories through conventional documentary film techniques: first-person-interviews, chronological structure, and narrated voice overs to maintain the didactic and temporal movement of the “non-fiction” subject. *Pulpo* and *Maria TV*, on the other hand, purposefully militate against the educational nature of traditional documentaries. Tangential to the practice of documentary films about undocumentedness is, of course, the long-established practice of undocumented immigrants being played by professional actors in narrative feature films. From *Espaldas Mojados (Wetbacks)* from director Alejandro Galindo in 1955, to Gregory Nava's Oscar nominated *El Norte* (1983) to more recent and smaller films such as *A Better Life* by Chris Weitz (2011), these, and a great number of other films have tried to capture in their own way the experience of undocumentedness. See David R. Maciel and María Rosa García-Acevedo, “The Celluloid Immigrant: The Narrative Films of Mexican Immigration,” in *Culture Across Borders: Mexican Immigration and Popular Culture*, ed. David R. Maciel & María Herrera-Sobek (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 149-202.

⁴⁷⁰ Anayansi Prado, conversation with the author, September 17, 2015.

This is not to suggest that *Pulpo* and *Maria TV* do *not* seek to engage the audience on an emotional level, or to somehow depict the day laborers or domestic workers as *nonhuman*. I merely argue that these projects self-consciously eschew the “union of image and narration, dialogues and interviews” commonly associated with the fact-finding and historically-minded methods of mainstream documentary filmmaking, in order to materially embody the existential condition of their very subjects.⁴⁷¹ Tellingly, neither the de-individualization of the performers, nor the creation of a collective (yet indeterminable) voice was not lost on the spectators I interviewed. Indeed, numerous viewers of *Maria TV* when it was installed at Seattle’s Frye Art Museum expressed to me that the work was powerful because the individual performers were *not* identified by name.⁴⁷²

Ethical Boundaries and (Re)colonial(?) Conditions

Cualquiera trabajo, estamos dispuesta.

(Whatever kind of work there is, we are available)

Unnamed Participant⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Michael, Tobias, *The Search for Reality: The Art of Documentary Filmmaking* (Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions), 184.

⁴⁷² “When it comes to their names, or not, [. . .] it seems maybe more powerful that the names aren’t there, I don’t know. It’s pretty powerful in any case, these anonymous people. Especially how they were filmed, presumably to be so natural, and so convincing, because they’re such real people that appear to be non-actors totally, but that’s just my impression. You know, Just people,” (Viewer 3, Male, 70s, conversation with the author, April 12, 2016).

⁴⁷³ Conversation with the author, September 16, 2015. The time I spent with this *Pulpo* participant was particularly telling of the social precarity that undocumented immigrants contend with. Not only a veteran of the conflict in Guatemala, but also the father of four children whom he had not seen in more than six years. The man lived with two other men (also from Guatemala) in a two-bedroom apartment in central Los Angeles, and had walked for twenty-five days on his journey to the US, eight of those in the desert of the US/Mexico border region. During the time we spent together, he also accompanied me to the opening night performance of *El Niño Dios Viene ‘pal Norte* presented by Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras. He was also in need of medical care due to non-diagnosed lump on his neck. Asking me if I could help him get medical care, I referred him to IDEPSCA, the organization in Los Angeles profiled in the last chapter, and which assists day laborers in several ways, including attaining medical treatment.

Notions of altericity and the artists' goals to engage with the subject matter on a human-to-human level notwithstanding, ethical questions of agency, transparency, representation, remuneration, and exploitation are still a large part of the picture: How are the performers contracted? How much are they paid? Under what conditions does the negotiating for payment take place? How are the intentions of the artist clarified for the performers, if at all? To what extent do the participants "participate" after the filming has concluded? These are just a few of the guiding questions that inform the research conducted for this chapter. Thus, in addition to the aesthetic analysis, I will try to draw as clear a picture as possible the conditions under which these works were made. Considering that these works exist at the intersection between community-based performance and the "performative turn" in visual art (a recent trend in post-studio art that often experiments with embodiment, labor on display, and duration), my research finds primary inspiration from scholars in both fields. Like community-based theater scholar Jan Cohen-Cruz, I consider just when (if at all) the methods of these artists who work with people with "less power" risk reiterating the conditions of coloniality in the process of art making. Per Cohen-Cruz:

Community-based performance sometimes takes place at the most extreme edge of difference, as artists with some privilege [. . .] ship in to so-called fourth-world pockets of entrenched poverty within the first world. And what do the artists do?—mine the raw materials, all that experience and all those stories. Then they leave with the natural resources and make their own art out of them. That's where the model breaks down; the market is in the first world because art does not have

the power to build up the fourth-world economy enough so it can serve as a market. In that respect, community-based art is *worse* than colonialism. [italics original].⁴⁷⁴

Similarly, in the realm of visual art, performance scholar Shannon Jackson has analyzed “social works” of art that experiment along the lines of embodied performance, installation, and sculpture that some have viewed as both cynical and exploitive of their human material. For example, such works like Santiago Sierra’s *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (2000), which hired both Chechnyan refugees and Guatemalan day laborers (in different iterations) to sit inside cardboard boxes as the work of art itself, has been viewed by some critics as acutely exploitative to the people Sierra hires. Jackson, however, seeks broader language that recognizes Sierra’s provocative works as being uniquely able to “expos[e] the reductive operations of social inequality by mimicking their forms,” while at the same time “cultivat[ing] an awareness in spectators of their systemic relation to the social issues addressed and to the durational, and embodied structures in which that address occurs.”⁴⁷⁵ Ultimately, for Jackson, works like Sierra’s not only raise questions about access, diversity, and representation, but also provoke an awareness on the part of the spectator of their own “enmeshment in systems of support, be they systems of labor, immigration, urban planning, or environmental degradation.”⁴⁷⁶ In other words, when the waged-labor body *is* the live artwork,

⁴⁷⁴ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 91.

⁴⁷⁵ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 60. Although *Maria TV* and *Pulpo* both operate with hired laborers to produce the artistic product, it must be noted that, unlike Sierra’s work, the hired laborers are not physically present when the final exchange between spectator and art occurs. Nevertheless (especially considering that Okón’s project hired the men to reenact their maneuvers *in front* of an unsuspecting “audience” of Home Depot customers), Jackson’s observations about “social” participatory art, and the “enmeshment” of the audience, are relevant here.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

the privileged viewer's position within the inequitable system of labor cannot be ignored, indeed it too becomes part of the art.⁴⁷⁷

In my view, both *Pulpo* and *Maria TV* also mimic the social inequality experienced by their participants, all the while riding a fine line between exploitation and empowerment. For instance, although the social inequity experienced by the day laborers may be the *subject* of Okón's video sculpture, it is also, not altogether ironically, what makes the piece possible. The precarious economic situation negotiated by undocumented, Mayan day laborers in Los Angeles may be on full (if mediated) display in *Pulpo*, but the video's production is also dependent on that very precarity; the men were available and willing to participate (as the epigraph at the top of this section suggests) primarily because it was remunerated "work."⁴⁷⁸ Additionally, à la Jackson's view that such embodied works expose relational systems, the *Maria TV* spectators I interviewed displayed their own heightened "sense of enmeshment" with the system of labor depicted on screen, namely female domestic workers. Thus, the concerns of Cohen-Cruz and Jackson (in both matters ethical and aesthetic) underlie my perspective on these striking works of digital filmmaking that blur the lines between community-based performance, visual art, and immigrant workers for hire.

⁴⁷⁷ See also Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012). Bishop's argument is similar to Jackson's in that it seeks to challenge reductive critiques of what she terms "delegated performance." Wary of "politically correct" critiques that would simplistically condemn these labor/performance collaborations as exploitation, Bishop points to the "alternative forms of knowledge," generated by the "perverse pleasure" of this type of art, (238). Bishop advises: "If one does not fall into the trap of merely condemning these works as reiterations of capitalist exploitation, it becomes essential to view art not as a part of a seamless continuum with contemporary labor, but as *offering a specific space of experience where those norms are suspended and put to pleasure in perverse ways,*" [emphasis added], (238).

⁴⁷⁸ Unnamed performer, conversation with the author, September 16, 2016.

Postmodern Aesthetics for the Colonized: Frederic Jameson via Chela Sandoval.

We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of art of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, metatexts which collate bits of other texts—such is the logic of postmodernism in general, which finds one of its strongest and most original, authentic forms in the new art of experimental video.

Frederic Jameson⁴⁷⁹

Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

Most important to this chapter is the postmodern theory of experimental video put forth by Frederic Jameson in his 1990 book *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* which informs my aesthetic reading of these videos. For Jameson, the fractured and circular aesthetics of experimental video constituted it as the art form par excellence of the postmodern condition. But this is not to say that Jameson's theory stands on its own for this examination. More accurately, it is Chela Sandoval's postcolonial feminist critique of Jameson's postmodern theory that truly inform my argument: that experimental video may be the performative art form par excellence to materially capture certain existential aspects of undocumentedness.

Writing in the late 1980s, Jameson identified a great number of what he saw as the troubling societal characteristics symptomatic of the multinational/consumer (i.e., "late") capitalism that arose in the second half of the twentieth century.⁴⁸⁰ Examining the creative elements of late capital's media culture such as commercial television, literature, fine art, and architecture, Jameson saw a host of what he saw as schizophrenic "psychopathologies" at work: (1) "linguistic fragmentation" was the result of the explosion of modern literature into a myriad

⁴⁷⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 96.

⁴⁸⁰ The three phases of capitalism: Market (1700s-1880s), Monopoly (1890s-1950), Multinational (1950-present).

of distinct styles,⁴⁸¹ (2) architecture that both “cannibalized” historical styles and imposed new categories of spatial enclosure resulted in a decentered human body unable to map itself to the external world,⁴⁸² (3) television, unlike its artistic predecessor film, operated on a “machine time” that was primarily designed to cycle the viewer from one commercial advertisement to the next,⁴⁸³ (4) new communication networks were resulting in the intensification of an “omnivorous” addiction to the photographic image,⁴⁸⁴ and (5) “History” itself, now forever out of reach, could only be sought through pop images and the “simulacra” (or hollow representations) of history, with little or no diachronic understanding.⁴⁸⁵ For Jameson, these postmodern conditions were total and globalizing. The infiltration of multinational capitalism (and its never-ending chain of commodities) into the psychic, physical, and aesthetic sphere of everyday life was a *neocolonial* condition, one which threatened to dissolve the “once-existing centered subject, both psychically and physically.”⁴⁸⁶ In order to resist this all-encompassing condition, Jameson argued, citizen-subjects must develop new “cartographic” proficiencies, that they might better “map” themselves within the schizophrenic territory of globalizing postmodernism. A new kind of “cognitive mapping” must be acquired to endow “the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.”⁴⁸⁷ In other words, the citizen-subject’s upmost need was to figure out how to situate oneself in the destabilizing field of globalized capitalism and how to effectively move from there. For Jameson, the prospect of such

⁴⁸¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 17.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 38-44.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15,

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

mapping was merely hypothetical. Radial new forms of political art (pedagogical and political) had yet to emerge in the struggle against the confusion by which postmodern subjects were beset.

Undoubtedly, Jameson was not the sole thinker explicating the relationship between the individual and the emergent technological society of the late twentieth century.⁴⁸⁸ And while historically there are arguments against the validity of postmodern theory, especially in the realm of art, where “Postmodernism’s” break from “Modernism” is not altogether clear, I do not engage with those arguments here.⁴⁸⁹ Rather it is the postcolonial feminist theorist Chela Sandoval’s critique of Jameson’s argument, in tandem with Jameson’s thoughts on “postmodern” experimental video, that help guide my analysis of these videos.

Writing a decade after Jameson, Sandoval, in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) succinctly points out what she terms “the other truth of postmodernism,” namely that marginalized and colonized populations have *already* contended with (and survived) within the realm of psychic fragmentation and decenteredness that Jameson, and others, lamented as the

⁴⁸⁸ Philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, for instance, in his seminal book *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) had already argued against the previously accepted “grand narratives” of modernity which assumed that technological progress marched steadily toward a liberating, utopian future. In his 1986 essay “Defining the Postmodern,” Lyotard, like Jameson, saw architecture and art as having the potential to reflect a kind of pathology that went along with the decidedly *unliberating* effects of technological development. For Lyotard, the decay of modernity’s grand narratives of progress and emancipation were readily evident in the now autonomous development of “techno-sciences,” that had become, according to Lyotard, “a means of increasing disease.” As opposed to being a response to actual human survival needs, technological development (perpetually becoming more and more complex), tended more toward destabilizing the human subject rather than creating a sense of individual wholeness or actual liberation. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, “Defining the Postmodern,” in Derrida, Jacques. *The Cultural Studies Reader* 2nd edition, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 142-145.

⁴⁸⁹ For a concise explanation of the philosophical critiques of Postmodernism, including those by Terry Eagleton, Jürgen Habermas and Bruno Latour, see Steven Connor’s Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-19; For another early reflection on postmodernism see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

ontological reality for “once-centered subjects” at the dawn of the twenty-first century. From Sandoval’s point of view, marginalized subjects (for instance Mexican-Americans in the multilingual borderlands of the Southwestern US) have *already contended* with a fractured “linguistic normality” for more than a century. Both minority and immigrant populations have historically been prevented from civic participation in the US and thus *already contend* with the “antinarrative” of progress that Jameson suggests as merely postmodern. The African diaspora in the US, due to oppressive regimes of slavery and cultural erasure, has *already contended* with a break in “diachronic sensibilities” in the form of eradicated familial and cultural ancestry. In other words, Jameson’s very idea of subject, as Sandoval points out, is rooted in the first world, neglecting the course of action taken by those who have historically held (or currently hold) out against conditions of social subjugation to survive.⁴⁹⁰ In response to Jameson’s hypothetical “cognitive mapping,” (the challenge to postmodern bodies that are “bereft of spatial coordinates”⁴⁹¹), Sandoval suggests a “differential cognitive mapping” that would operate as a mobile, diasporic “weapon of consciousness,” allowing “one to chart out the positions available and the directions to move in a larger social totality.”⁴⁹² Indeed, this is *already* the method with which colonized subjects have been forced to “map” themselves within the realities (geographic,

⁴⁹⁰ Sandoval, 27.

⁴⁹¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 48.

⁴⁹² Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 30. Emma Perez, in her study of feminist Mexican and Chicana movements of the twentieth century, terms this interstitial space of agency and resistance the “decolonial imaginary,” a rupturing space where the agency of colonized subjects can be enacted against assimilation, acculturation, passivity, silence, and oppression. For Perez, “[T]he oppressed as colonial other becomes the liminal identity, partially seen yet unspoken, vibrant and in motion, overshadowed by the construction of coloniality, where the decolonial imaginary moves and lives. One is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another,” (6-7). Emma Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

mental, physical, political, and aesthetic) of coloniality.⁴⁹³ In other words, there is nothing “neo” about neocolonialism for those who already exist in “postmodern” conditions. Ultimately, for Sandoval, Jameson’s manifesto against the “perpetually deforming structure” of postmodernism, is merely a “eulogy for the psychic stability of *first world subjects*.”⁴⁹⁴ And Sandoval’s “moment of truth” under the new regime of globalization reads as thus:

If, as Jameson argues, the formerly centered and legitimated bourgeois citizen-subject of the first world (once anchored in a secure haven of self) is set adrift under the imperatives of late-capitalist cultural conditions, if such citizen-subjects have become anchorless, disoriented, incapable of mapping their relative positions inside multinational capitalism, lost in the reverberating endings of colonial expansion, and if Jameson has traced well the psychic pathologies brought about in first world subjectivity under the domination of neocolonial drives in which the subject must face the very ‘limits of figuration,’ then the first world subject enters the kind of psychic terrain formerly inhabited by the historically decentered citizen-subject: the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, the marginalized.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ See also Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.) Sandoval, for instance, draws on Anzaldúa’s highly influential *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Anzaldúa, who grew up in the borderlands of the Mexico/US border region theorizes of a new political consciousness born out of the subjectivity of those who exist between races, cultures, languages, and sexualities. For Anzaldúa, “*la conciencia de la mestiza*,” (the consciousness of the mixed blood), is marked by the “living language” of Chicano Spanish. This “patois,” developed of necessity by those in the border regions reflects the identity of Chicanos, and is thus “neither *español ni inglés*, but both,” (Anzaldúa 77).

⁴⁹⁴ Sandoval, 22, [emphasis added].

⁴⁹⁵ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 27.

Importantly for this study, it is from within this decentered psychic terrain and especially its “modes of disorientation,” where Sandoval sees the potential for a differential cognitive mapping for those who negotiate the globalizing territory of the twenty-first century.⁴⁹⁶ In certain respects, charting the terrain of coloniality from the perspective of the colonized is both Okón’s and Valenzuela’s main operation. I see both *Maria TV* and *Pulpo* as operating with (and within) this ruptured, “postmodern” psychic terrain: collaborating with marginalized subjects to cultivate embodied, textual, and aesthetic forms of resistance to the systems of labor they are enmeshed with.

Additionally, it is a “juncture” with philosophies like Jameson’s (regardless of their shortcomings) where Sandoval sees the potential for a decolonizing theory to accelerate. I thus use Jameson’s theory of postmodern “experimental video,” by way of Sandoval, to illustrate what I see as the artistic and social potential for these collaborative works. If Jameson’s biggest blind spot was that he was unable to see that the lamentable existential characteristics of postmodernism *already* applied to the colonized, then I take up his theory of experimental video and apply it back to video works that, I argue, operate as decolonial epistemologies. In other words, one potential of these performative works is to create a liberating process of collective and inter-subjective learning for the participants. As will be argued in this chapter, Okón’s main operation is to expose the wound of coloniality within a public setting, caught on tape, whereas what emerges from Valenzuela’s distinctly more psycho-dramatic process is what I term “decolonial *communitas*.”⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁹⁷ “Communitas” is anthropologist Victor Turner’s term for the “intersubjective illumination” and mutual understanding that happens to co-participants in ritual (explored below). Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Seriousness of Human Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 48.

In addition to his contention that the era of late capitalism was defined by its fractured, schizophrenic subjects, Jameson also declared that experimental video (with its fractured barrage of images) was the art form par excellence of the postmodern Zeitgeist.⁴⁹⁸ In an age that was to become ironically “defined” by post-structuralist dismantlings of traditionally-held definitions, Jameson thought that experimental video’s unique ability (or better yet, its ontological drive) to destabilize the perceptions of the viewer, via a “pure and random play of signifiers,” constituted a bricolated jumble of unconnected signals that materialized “the unimaginable informational garbage [. . .] of the new media society.”⁴⁹⁹ Most unsettlingly perhaps, the kaleidoscopic, non-narrative aesthetics of experimental video were, for Jameson, a kind of “calculated assault” on the spectator, one perpetuated through boredom and the blockage of energies.⁵⁰⁰ Although Jameson’s exemplary case is the 1979 video *AlienNATION* (much more of a random collage than either of my case studies), it’s nevertheless my argument that his assessment of experimental video speaks directly to many of the destabilizing effects of *Maria TV* and *Pulpo*.⁵⁰¹ These works, although they employ human actors as the primary material, are themselves scarred by the “mechanical depersonalization (or decentering of the subject),” that Jameson saw in postmodern video.⁵⁰² These works, (fractured, non-diachronic, circular, and yet apparently deeply personal for their non-identified subjects) aesthetically embody the existential conditions of undocumentedness in ways that theater cannot do. As we shall see the in this

⁴⁹⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 69.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96, 73, 80.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

⁵⁰¹ *AlienNATION* (1979) by Edward Rankus, John Manning, and Barbara Latham is a plotless, twenty-nine-minute collage of repeating images, both static and moving. The images range from erector sets, mannequins, dissected Twinkies, Japanese monster films, advertising images, cartoon figures, cityscapes, textbook illustrations, and quasi-pornography, often rushing by in what Jameson describes as a “tempo of delirium,” (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 82).

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 74.

chapter's following two sections, Jameson's conviction that experimental video's power was part and parcel of its tendency to cannibalize and reshuffle preexistent cultural material ("metatexts," he wrote) still carries a fair amount of theoretical heft. For this reason, I will utilize much of Jameson's terminology as a critical orientation to identify certain structural elements within both *Maria TV* and *Pulpo*. Additionally, and beyond what I see as these work's postmodern aesthetics, I've attempted to understand the *process* of making these videos by interviewing the artists, participants, and spectators whenever possible. If aesthetics is one side of the coin of these performance methods (one geared toward a certain affect for the spectator in the museum or gallery), then the embodied encounter that took place under the gaze of the camera is surely the other.

SECTION TWO: YOSHUA OKON'S *PULPO* AND REMUNERATED MEMORY

I think it's a very hypocritical and comfortable argument to point the finger at us [artists] as the exploiters, when what we are really pointing out is the *structural exploitation* and the fact that we are all participating in that structural exploitation. So, I don't even think the piece needs to be justified in terms of the fact that we were nice to the workers. I mean, I do that out of my own ethic, but I don't pretend that I don't participate in exploitation. And I think the point of the piece is exactly to highlight the fact that *we are all participating in that exploitation*.

Yoshua Okón,⁵⁰³
Artist, *Pulpo*

Es un trabajo. (It's a job.)

Unnamed Participant, *Pulpo*⁵⁰⁴

If, as Jameson suggested, the power of experimental video is contingent on "postmodern" aesthetics such as fractured images, a non-diachronic linearity, incongruous imagery, reiterated

⁵⁰³ Yoshua Okón, conversation with the author, November 23, 2016.

⁵⁰⁴ Unnamed *Pulpo/Octopus* participant, conversation with the author, September 16, 2015.

logos that create a narrativity by default in the mind of the viewer, and the mechanical depersonalization of a schizophrenic subjecthood, an undocumentary such as Yoshua Okón's *Pulpo* certainly traverses similar ground. Indeed, a kind of neocolonial schizophrenia shadows the entire work, which, in the proper gallery setting, is projected on four different screens that surround the viewer for a total of eighteen, slowly-paced minutes. "I wanted you to feel surrounded by the piece," says Okón of this multi-sided, immersive aesthetic.⁵⁰⁵ Filmed entirely within the parking lot of a Home Depot over the course of two days, a dozen men from the Mayan day labor community in Los Angeles, California "reenact" their military experiences as combatants in the last years of Guatemala's brutal, thirty-six-year civil war (1960-1996). In the looping video projection, what Okón refers to as a "video sculpture," the men are dressed variously in Black and White T-shirts. This easily discernible binary stands as a semiotic marker for the two "sides" of the conflict. But the fluidity between the two groups is evident, and indeed, determining "which side is which," is completely immaterial. At one moment, for instance, the same performer is seen simultaneously on two different screens, dressed in white *and* black. The indiscernibility between the two sets of troops speaks overtly to the fact that the Guatemalan army, during the conflict years, practiced forced conscription, especially among indigenous Guatemalans, resulting in individuals fighting against their own communities. "It was not their war anyway," Okón maintains, "they were mostly kidnapped and forced to fight."⁵⁰⁶ As visual testament to the war, Okón delegated the men to "patrol" the Home Depot parking lot while riding in poised groups on heavy, metal lumber carts. At other times a single performer stands with imagined binoculars while being pushed around in the iconic orange shopping carts of the

⁵⁰⁵ Yoshua Okón, conversation with the author, June 13, 2013.

⁵⁰⁶ Okón, conversation, 2013.

big box home improvement store. The men also somersault across the hard, sun-drenched pavement, crawl underneath parked vehicles, and sweep the field with imaginary rifles. At times, the patrols seem to react to imaginary gunfire, firing in agitated response, dropping to the ground, crawling and running. This, even though no gunfire is heard. In fact, almost all sound in the entire video is composed solely of the organic noises of the parking lot and its environs: birds chirping, cars and trucks pulling in and out of the lot, the drone of US Interstate 5 some thirty feet overhead and the rattling wheels of the shopping carts.

But other sounds are used as well, and they are one of Okón's main techniques in establishing the "dislocation" upon which the video relies; the men also intermittently speak in K'iche', their indigenous Mayan language. Aesthetically, and evocative of Sandoval's notion that colonized subjects contend with a fractured linguistic normality, there is no translation by the artist, no subtitles, no voice over⁵⁰⁷ —indeed, no attempt whatsoever to convey, even imprecisely, what the men are saying. Indeed, as an artist, Okón was interested in *not* knowing.⁵⁰⁸ The result is twofold: The viewer's own sense of linguistic normality is thus foregrounded by the inability to decipher the men's speeches, and the participants are essentially "devoiced." The men merely stand in ambiguous pairs, back to back, slowly revolving with one hand outstretched in front of them at shoulder height. And although multiple participants are speaking, it is nearly impossible to tell whether the speeches are dialogic or not. Is it a conversation that the men are having amongst themselves? Is it scripted? Improvisational? Is it military language, or something more informal? Per postmodern aesthetics, it is ambiguous, disorienting, even boring. And even if the viewer could understand the K'iche', certain voices

⁵⁰⁷ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 25.

⁵⁰⁸ Although it was never the intention of Okón to illuminate for his audience what the men were saying (he merely asked them to speak in their "mother tongue," about their war experience).

are simply more audible while other voices remain obscured in the background: signifiers with no signifieds. This community of Indigenous Mayan day laborers, I argue, is thus made more visible by their autobiographical representation on screen, and simultaneously obscured.⁵⁰⁹

In step with these devoiced moments, when the men's indigenous speech punctures the arid soundscape, their *physical bodies* are also fractured by the video's frame (decentered, as Jameson might put it). Editorially reduced to disembodied parts, only the men's feet are seen. Or only their hands. Or only their faces with closed eyes. These sparse verbal actions total just over two minutes of the entire work, only ever appearing on one screen at a time, never on all four. Thus, the focus of the "surrounded" viewer is pulled directly toward these ambiguous, indecipherable linguistic moments, even if they only sporadically appear. I argue that this devoicing/fracturing technique on the part of the artist is metaphoric of certain conditions of undocumentedness under coloniality itself: voices excluded from public discourse, the precarity of indigenous languages, immigrant laborers symbolically reduced to a foreign homogeneity, even the fractured nature of day labor itself, a sanctioned extension of market forces that inhibits social organization while fostering a disarticulated self-image.⁵¹⁰ And while unlike the work of Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras discussed in the previous chapter, which seeks to mitigate the harsh conditions for day laborers in Los Angeles through an ongoing community-based theater project, Okón's quick process overtly disavows an overly activist role. If Teatro Jornalero (which has performed its plays at the same Home Depot in Los Angeles where *Pulpo* was filmed)

⁵⁰⁹ Okón: "To me, it was very important to bring up the fact that they are Native American. It's an important aspect, which is not completely central, but it's important. So that's why I asked them to speak in their native tongue. And in a way, I think it was also important for them as performers. To me, it wasn't so important what they talked about, and actually I was interested in not knowing," (Okón, conversation, 2016).

⁵¹⁰ See Ordóñez, *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States*, 1-20; See also Chavez. *Shadowed Lives*.

operates best when inspiring an audience of like-minded day laborers, *Pulpo*, on the other hand, does its work with the *other* audience: Home Depot shoppers who are all but oblivious to the dislocated combatants. For the artist, the “real players here are not the performers, but the people around them,” and, by extension, the consuming gallery audience surrounded by the four screens.⁵¹¹

And while the performer’s corporeality is fractured in the final edit, it is not merely the men’s voices or bodies that are subject to disjuncture. Structurally, the moments of “action” (militaristic, non-linear, synchronic) are sporadically intercut with mundane, depopulated images from the parking lot. These somewhat random images often appear in the only moments when all four screens of the video sculpture are engaged. For instance, the looming, orange sign of the Home Depot hovers ominously overhead in the bright California sky. The angular white lines of parking spaces are shot at slightly different angles and momentarily appear like minimalist paintings. The viewer sees the occasional oil stain on the asphalt, or the stand-alone storage sheds that are displayed prominently in front of the store’s entrance. In one four-sided shot, long blades of grass gently wave within the curbed islands of the parking lot, the blurred façade of the big box store in the background. These fragmented images could be considered the video’s “logos,” the overt signals amongst shifting signifiers in postmodern video that Jameson suggests operate as “shorthand for a certain kind of narration.”⁵¹² Although he feels that “ambiguity” is

⁵¹¹ Okón: “This is about *us*, not about them. The real players here are not the performers *but the people around them*. This is about privileged people, not about undocumented or marginalized people, because I think that at the end of the day, the big problem in the US, with regards to undocumented workers, is not lack of empathy. Because a lot of people are very empathic towards them. Or towards the issue. It’s the fact that nobody raises the connection of US foreign policy *and their presence*. In other words, nobody addresses the realities of global capitalism, which is the system that the US government has been aggressively imposing for something like seventy years all around the world,” (Okón, conversation, 2016).

⁵¹² Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 88.

not desirable to an artist, Okón, in his own terms, seeks to create a “disconnection between different elements within the frame” that, while “confusing the mind,” ultimately pushes the viewer to “rethink the way [they] look at familiar places.”⁵¹³ When I asked him about the disconnected images, he told me:

Yes, there is a dislocation between the action and the sound. There are things that don't match. That kind of throw you out of an illusion. But at the same time, *throw you in*. It's hypnotic, but at the same time its dislocated [. . .]. So, there is an incongruity there. But once you step back and kind of piece things together, you find a *new* congruity, or a new interpretation of reality. Which is basically my whole operation here.⁵¹⁴

Collectively the depopulated images comprise a meditative counter balance to the uncanny military choreography of the two groups of men: the two “sides” of the “reenacted” conflict. For instance, in one of the most jarring juxtapositions, a single individual (his black work jeans stained with what appears to be either white paint or drywall plaster) enacts a moment of getting gunned down. His body takes in the barrage of imaginary bullets, and he collapses to the hard pavement, head lolling back and forth. Immediately after this shot, the video quickly cuts to the façade of the Home Depot, in front of which a security guard (seemingly unaware of the camera) rolls slowly by in a golf cart. The eeriness of the competing shot is almost humorously reinforced by the fact that the golf cart, rather unexcitedly, rolls over a speed bump. It's a jolting incongruity that the viewer may not know how to take in. A man getting gunned down vs. a golf cart and a speed bump. According to Okón, this discomfiting

⁵¹³ Okón, conversation, 2016.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

humor seeks to implicate the viewer.⁵¹⁵ But to implicate them in *what* exactly is initially difficult to surmise. And if it is indeed discomfiting humor, as the artist suggests, it's hard to know when to laugh. As it turns out, Okón seeks to implicate his audience in their own ambivalent participation in the exploitive system of globalized consumer culture that Jameson decries as causing the postmodern condition in the first place. More particularly, it is the hegemony of US capitalism in the very country where the immigrant performers originate.

Okón's work is titled *Pulpo* (translation "Octopus") as it was the epithet given to the United Fruit Company (UFCO) in Guatemala. This US agricultural corporation held extensive landholdings and was a ubiquitously oppressive presence in Guatemala beginning in 1901, hence its "tentacles" reached into all aspects of Guatemalan society. The company's business interests were integral in fomenting the repressive state violence in Guatemala for most of the second half of the twentieth century.⁵¹⁶ The genocidal conflict was set in motion in 1954 when a CIA-led coup (acting in the interests of the UFCO) overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, a former Guatemalan army colonel. Under Árbenz's reformist presidency (1951-1954) some 300,000 to 400,000 workers in Guatemala had been successfully unionized, and Árbenz's agrarian reform law "Decree 900 (enacted in 1952), expropriated idle lands to the benefit of half a million Guatemalan peasants who had previously lived under

⁵¹⁵ In his interview with UCLA's Hammer Museum, which funded the work during the artist's residency there, Okón stated: "I hope and expect this piece to have a degree of humor, but also to have a degree of discomfort [. . .] Once you kind of find yourself laughing at something that's uncomfortable, automatically it implicates you. It does not leave you a way out anymore. You are already part of what you are watching," Yoshua Okón, "Hammer Residencies: The Making of Yoshua Okón's Octopus," Hammer Museum, 2008, accessed March 13, 2013.

<https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2011/hammer-projects-yoshua-okon/>

⁵¹⁶ John C. Welchman, "War and Peace (Volume II)," in *Pulpo/Octopus* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2001), 24-25.

extremely feudal conditions.⁵¹⁷ This turn of events in favor of Guatemalan's peasantry came on the heels of the nation's first democratically elected government in 1945, more than five-hundred years after the beginning of Spanish colonization.⁵¹⁸ Árbenz' political and social changes came as a great disruption to the corporate interests of the UFCO. For decades, the US company had enjoyed tax-exempt export privileges on its banana monopoly, controlled one-tenth of the country's economy, was the nation's largest landowner, and held exclusive rights to the railroad and telegraph systems.⁵¹⁹ The 1954 coup ushered in a succession of right-wing dictators, all backed by the US, who practiced a scorched earth policy against leftist guerrilla groups, many of them cultivated from indigenous communities. Guatemala's nine-year experiment with democracy after four hundred years of colonization was over. During the thirty-six years of ensuing conflict (1960-1996), over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or disappeared. It has been estimated that over 93% of the human rights violations were committed by government forces, and 83% of the victims were indigenous Maya.⁵²⁰ From the 1980s onward, although they have

⁵¹⁷ Although Guatemala achieved independence from Spain in 1821, the country continued to be ruled by the land-holding elite, and the indigenous population especially was kept in a state of abject penury. Throughout the nineteenth century, indigenous Guatemalans were systematically stripped of their land, then forced to work it. Well into the twentieth century, Guatemalan landless peasants were subject to harsh vagrancy laws, legally required to perform one hundred days of free labor per year to the government, as well as transporting the wives of landowners and military men on their backs. See Simon, *Eternal Spring*, 19-21.

⁵¹⁸ Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies*, 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 168-78. Aníbal Quijano describes the acts of cultural repression, genocide, and colonization of the imaginary against such populations in Latin America as "without a doubt, the most extreme case of cultural colonization of Europe," (Quijano, 170). Previously high cultures, such as the Maya in Guatemala, were reduced to peasant subcultures deprived of literacy, modes of knowing, and intellectual and artistic expression. See also Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 135 -138; "Guatemala: The Silent Holocaust – The Mayan Genocide," The Center for Justice and Accountability, 2016 accessed November 16, 2016. <http://cja.org/where-we-work/guatemala/>

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, np.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, n.p.; See also *A Century of Revolution* (ed.) Greg Grandin & Gilbert M. Joseph. (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 6-7, 276-280.

routinely been denied refugee status, Guatemalans have been part of the massive exodus to the US from devastated conflict zones in Central America.⁵²¹ According the PEW Research center statistics on Hispanic immigration to the US, the number of undocumented Guatemalan immigrants to the US rose by more than 500% from 1990 to 2014.⁵²² Many of these undocumented Guatemalans settled in the Los Angeles area, and continue to work in the informal economy of day labor at sites like the Home Depot in Cypress Park.

For Okón, the “gray area” of the Home Depot parking lot (US corporate-owned land, where the undocumented, low-waged day laborers are tolerated) is thus an extension of the colonizing network of forces that ties directly back to the UFCO’s troubling history in Guatemala.⁵²³ In other words, the parking lot *is* a space of coloniality, one which Okón seeks to temporarily remap. I thus see the reterritorialization of the conflict as an aesthetic experiment in the kind of differential cognitive mapping that Sandoval calls for. If, as Sandoval suggests, charting one’s position within the contending ideological systems of “postmodern” culture is a “weapon of consciousness” best derived from the position of the colonized, the veterans’ unsanctioned act of reenacting historical violence in a public space marked by coloniality is a challenge to the daily perception of all those involved, albeit unwillingly.⁵²⁴ But is it a perceptual shift that takes hold? Okón provocatively shifts the cartography of the original conflict onto US corporate-owned land, contracting the performers to publicly highlight their fraught relationship to the larger social totality (that of US consumerism), but only to capture simultaneously the

⁵²¹ Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 147.

⁵²² The estimated number of unauthorized immigrants from Guatemala in 1990 was 120,000. By 2014, the number had risen steadily to 550,000. “Unauthorized immigrant population trends for states, birth countries and regions,” Pew Research Center, November 3, 2016, accessed November 28, 2016. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-trends/>

⁵²³ Okón, conversation, 2013.

⁵²⁴ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 30.

distinctly (*non*)cognitive response of those witnessing the performative act. With the intentions of highlighting the invisibility of the men, Okón set out to craft an “abstract” staging of their military past in plain view of the consumer audience. In the end, hardly any of the Home Depot customers took any real notice. It was a reaction, in fact, that Okón was counting on to make his point. In essence, Okón purposefully stages a visual collision between his overt (re)mapping of the men’s bodies in public space and the way in which they are already mapped as absent by the general public. Okón’s says of the men:

Nobody’s looking at them. Period. The way I structured *Pulpo* is to highlight the invisibility. The fact is, [the worker’s presence is] an uncomfortable aspect of our system and reality, and it’s just more convenient to block it out of our view. It’s right in front of our eyes. But our minds are powerful. Illusions are powerful. We have the ability to make things disappear, even if they are in front of us.”⁵²⁵

Thus, any attempt at differential cognitive mapping, if considered as such, is only made evocative by the various reactions of the parking lot audience to which the remapping is directed. At various points throughout the video, shoppers, Home Depot employees, and other day laborers look on in various states of puzzlement and self-consciousness. Some passersby abruptly notice the camera, then run out of frame as if not to disturb the shot, not realizing their presence is integral to the relational theme. During what is perhaps one of Okón’s longest shots, a group of six black-T-shirted men are pushed from the front of the parking lot near the store’s entrance to the far back. The men stand poised, almost motionless, arms outstretched in all directions as if holding rifles, appearing as a kind of “octopus” in their own right. Two men, unseen, push the cart slowly toward Okón’s camera, which is set at the far end of the lot. The

⁵²⁵ Okón, conversation, 2016.

unsettling, uncut shot is only interrupted by the occasional passing car, and one set of distant shoppers that gesticulate toward the uncanny patrol: perplexed witnesses to the odd job.

Remunerated Memory.

In stark contrast to the practices of Teatro Jornalero, which, as I argued in Chapter One, relies on “gifted labor,” and for whom the incentive of money is relatively inconsequential to the day laborers who are willing to participate, the process of *Pulpo* explicitly depends on remuneration. The single performer that I was able to interview for this study explained to me that payment was his, as well as certain others’, primary reason for participating. In response to the question of whether or not he enjoyed the filmmaking process, the performer told me: “Yes. I remember, because at that time there was no work and we need money, so we were happy. They gave us money and that made us very happy . . . and the other guys said that as well.”⁵²⁶ The performers were each paid \$150 for about five hours of shooting. Additionally, Okón provided the cast with food and water.⁵²⁷ The shoot was funded by UCLA’s Hammer Museum, during the artist’s residency there, however museum officials declined to provide me with the overall budget. Nevertheless, Okón assured me that most of the budget for the shoot went to the workers themselves, which, as Claire Bishop points out, is common in this kind of “delegated performance.”⁵²⁸ Additionally, Okón contracted one of the performers at \$500 to serve as a central kind of “point man” and help put together the all-Mayan, all-veteran cast for the days of the shoot. Participation was restricted to Mayan immigrants who had served as combatants in the

⁵²⁶ Spanish Original: “*Si. Me acuerdo, porque hace tiempo no tiene trabajo y necesitamos dinero, entonces, está bien contento y nos dieron dinero . . . y bien contento . . . así dicen los amigos, si.*” (Unnamed Participant, *Pulpo*, conversation with the author, December 17, 2015.)

⁵²⁷ The day laborer/performer whom I spoke to for this study explained to me that, ideally, he earns \$100 for eight hours of work. This, of course, if he is fortunate enough to find an entire day’s work for any given day.

⁵²⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 232.

original conflict in Guatemala, and the filmmaker relied on the men's own remembrances of their military exercises to guide the choreography. Although he used more storyboards than he is accustomed to, mostly due to a lack of control over the parking lot, Okón admitted, "It would be ridiculous for me to tell them what to do."⁵²⁹ The piece thus depends on the residual, patterned experiences that are retained in the men's bodies: the military choreography of their past. Such reiterated, mnemonic reserves have been variously described by scholars of performance as "kinesthetic imagination,"⁵³⁰ "restored behavior,"⁵³¹ "the repertoire,"⁵³² and, perhaps most provocatively, immaterial "remains" that are not merely a performative method of keeping the past "alive," but rather a document of how the past is never actually over.⁵³³ Rebecca Schneider, in her examination of US Civil war reenactments (a tradition that *Pulpo* consciously "inserts" itself into⁵³⁴) theorizes that the popular practice constitutes a "cross-temporality" that collapses

⁵²⁹ Okón, conversation, 2013.

⁵³⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, (New York: Columbia, 1996). For Roach, "kinesthetic imagination," albeit deeply ingrained in habit and social systems, is also a fertile ground of imaginative reconstruction, one marked by "the truth of simulation, of fantasy, or of daydreams," (27).

⁵³¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction, 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2006). For Schechner "restored behavior," or "twice-behaved-behavior," is rehearsed action (physical, verbal, or virtual) that is "not-for-the-first-time," (29). For Schechner, a person may indeed be unaware that they are performing restored behavior, since all behavior is essentially citational of movement performed before.

⁵³² Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Taylor's concept of the "repertoire" includes modes of embodied knowledge that are central to cultural transmission: dance, theatre, song, ritual, witnessing, and other "forms of repeatable behavior that cannot be housed or contained in the [documentary] archive," (37);

⁵³³ Rebecca Schneider. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. (London: Routledge, 2011). Schneider writes: "If the past is never over, or never completed, 'remains' might be understood not solely as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past: bodies striking poses, making gestures, voicing calls, reading words, singing songs, or standing witness," (33).

⁵³⁴ Yoshua Okón, Artist's Website, 2013, accessed March 17, 2013.

<http://www.yoshuaokon.com/ing/works/works.html>

the distance between the reenactment and the original event in such a way that the two times actually “touch.”⁵³⁵ Contrary to conventional notions that performance is ephemeral, and that any form of mimesis is essentially an impure version of that which it claims to represent, Schneider claims that US Civil War reenactors in fact “drag” the past into the present. Via the performance of a “radically rigorous mimesis,” at times purposefully out of sight of any audience, that which is “remembered” by the participants is not delimited to the past, but rather recurs *in the present* as the “inexhaustible corpse” of the war itself.⁵³⁶ Schneider’s concept is, of course, apt in the context of *Pulpo*: certainly the temporal distance between the original conflict and the reenactment is dramatically reduced, as Schneider suggests of US Civil War reenactments, due to Okón’s employment of men who were *actual combatants* in Guatemala. Additionally, a “queasy sensation of cross-temporal slippage,” haunts the video, in which the men’s recreation of their own troubling past goes unremarked by the Home Depot consumers with which they share the space.⁵³⁷ In what is perhaps the most chilling clip from the video, one performer lies as if dead just outside the door of one of the ready-made storage sheds near the store’s front entrance. Another performer, seemingly “wounded” in the reenactment, slowly crawls toward the other only to succumb to “death” upon reaching the other body. As the two men lie motionless, Okón’s camera (now hidden from view of the public within a nearby car) captures seven different people walking by, including a Home Depot employee, who barely give a glance to the prone bodies. Most ominously, an undulating shadow twitches on the sunny pavement near the foot of one of the men. Although the object is unseen in the frame of the video, it is the shadow of the US flag, high above the corporate store. The ambivalence of the consumers that are

⁵³⁵ Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 35.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10,12.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

present is thus a repeat (“twice-behaved-behavior?”) of the ambivalence of the US population during its government’s four-decade support of the right-wing Guatemalan regimes.

Performance, thus indeed, can “trip the transitivity of time,” bringing the past directly into the present.⁵³⁸ As art historian John C. Welchman points out, *Pulpo* can be seen as an “extension” of the conflict, one which works “corrosively” on “the fault line between then and now, self and institution, war and peace.”⁵³⁹

Yet *Pulpo*, to be sure, also transcends Schneider’s case studies. *Pulpo*’s performers are not the gung-ho, Blue and Gray-clad weekend reenactors who are somehow bent on getting history “right.” They are not the amateur, enthusiasts whose “rigorous mimesis” and aesthetic fidelity to a bygone century supposedly result in a pulsing trace where “time and space seem to come undone, or overlap.”⁵⁴⁰ Indeed, they are themselves ex-soldiers who, outside of the incentive of payment from Okón, might have no interest at all in reliving the conflict from their past, a conflict that many consider a genocide against the performers’ own indigenous populations. And while Okón clearly sets out to expose the wound of coloniality, the project itself depends on the exploitable position of the men: their willingness to undertake nearly any kind of labor for a promise of cash. “Whatever kind of work there is, we’re available,” the one performer told me. And although his five hours of periodically crawling and somersaulting across the hot pavement of the parking lot left him in such a debilitated state that he could not work for some days after the filming, the man assured me that he would participate again with no hesitation if given the chance.⁵⁴¹ For him, getting paid one hundred and fifty dollars for less than

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵³⁹ Welchman, “War and Peace (Volume II),” *Pulpo/Octopus*, 31, 35.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁴¹ “The truth is, when the money arrived, when we had done everything, we were very tired. I couldn’t get up. Very tired, dragging. Like for a few of days I was very tired. We didn’t work [. . .]”

eight hours of work is not an opportunity to be turned down.⁵⁴² Thus, like other works of delegated performance that “exploit precisely *to thematize exploitation itself*,” Okón necessarily engages with a pre-existing structural exploitation in order to expose it.⁵⁴³ This is not to say that the artist is unaccustomed to accusations of exploitation—far from it. But for Okón, such “politically correct” accusations against artists as exploiters are merely “mechanisms of denial” that conveniently displace blame for a consumer-driven capitalistic system that people of privilege already inhabit.⁵⁴⁴ The discomfort, and its attendant humor, emerges in the attempt at exposing such contradictions.

If Okón deliberately set out to highlight the exploitation and invisibility of the men through a hypnotic aesthetic of dislocation, discrepancy, and irony, there was a final irony that emerged pertaining to this study. During my second interview with the undocumented performer

.] I couldn’t work after that. I was all bruised up here [gesturing around the shoulders], because all I was wearing was the T-shirt.” Spanish original: “*La verdad, cuando llegan su dinero, cuando hacemos todo, bien cansados. No me puedo levantar. Bien cansado, arrastrado. Como unos dos días, bien cansado. No, no trabajamos . . . no podía trabajar después de eso. Aquí salió colorado porque solo la playera tiene.*” (Unnamed *Pulpo/Octopus* participant, conversation, December 17, 2016).

⁵⁴² The performer informed me that he would ideally make \$100 a day for eight hours. Unfortunately, he was, at the time of our interview, only working very sporadically. He had averaged only two days of work per week for the last two months.

⁵⁴³ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 239 [emphasis original].

⁵⁴⁴ Okón: “Us, people of consumer culture, and people of privilege, we are a part of the reason why these guys are so fucked up. We are not beyond it. So, it’s very easy to get all politically correct and point to that fact. They are exploited, you know, beyond myself. [. . .] That kind of accusing me of exploitation, it’s incredibly hypocritical. And it’s a mechanism to stay in this state of denial [. . .] I think that’s a big problem with the Left in the US, you know. It’s incredibly uncritical, and it’s always pointing the finger at the external causes, without understanding that *we are part of the problem*. So, when a work of art implicates us, the first thing we do is, again, point the finger. So now it’s the *artist’s fault*. That doesn’t mean to say that I don’t participate in exploitation. I do participate in a capitalist system, so my piece highlights precisely that reality because it’s impossible not to participate. I mean I would like to meet one single person that is not wearing clothes that were made by slaves, or exploited workers,” (Okón, conversation, 2016).

from *Pulpo*, a man who was engaged in at least four combat situations in his home country during what he merely described as a “very dangerous time,” we took the opportunity to watch the video.⁵⁴⁵ As it turns out, it was the first time he had the opportunity to see it. He was primarily struck by how short it was, as well as by its unconventional aesthetics. When I asked him why it was that he was seemingly not in the film, he explained that out of all the shots that were in the final edit, it appears he is only in one. In the long, slow shot where the group of black-T-shirted men ride silently toward the camera, engaged in their own remunerated memory of their times spent stalking the Guatemalan highlands, the man I interviewed is one of the two men pushing the cart, unseen. In a work of art whose intention was to highlight the invisibility of men like himself, he was ultimately (re)rendered invisible.

SECTION THREE: *MARIA TV* – THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A FRAGMENTED AESTHETIC AND DECOLONIAL COMMUNITAS.

So all this “abuse of a disenfranchised person” or whatever it could come out as: like aestheticizing somebody else’s problem. Ultimately, I’m looking to aestheticize *my own* life story [. . .] I’m telling [my story] through other people’s lives, because I want people to understand that this is a *universal* problem. It’s not one particular thing. It’s not NPR. It’s not *This American Life*, where I find one special person to tell me their *incredible* story. I’m like, *this happens to thousands of people every week*.

Rodrigo Valenzuela⁵⁴⁶

Whether or not they are totally acting or that it’s part of their own story, you can’t tell. Maybe it doesn’t matter that much. But it’s important [. . .] It was also shot very interesting, with one person acting in front of the group. It’s intense watching them watch each other. [. . .] even though it’s only one person talking, it’s like them all talking.

Viewer 5, Male, 50s⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Okón supplied me with a version of the video in which the four quadrants, ideally projected onto four scenes in the gallery space, can be viewed on a single screen. It was this video that the interviewee and myself watched.

⁵⁴⁶ Valenzuela, conversation, 2015.

⁵⁴⁷ Conversation with the author, April 26, 2016.

If the performance genre of war reenactments is the “tradition” to which *Pulpo* plays upon (or unsettlingly parodies), the recycled performance material in Rodrigo Valenzuela’s *Maria TV* is an even more dominant cultural artifact, namely the *telenovela*. The “meta-textual” “cannibalization” (per Jameson) that feeds *Maria TV* begins immediately with dialogue heisted directly from *Ángel Malo (Bad Angel)*, a Chilean *telenovela* from the 1980s, and then foisted onto Valenzuela’s Latina performers. The first moment of *Maria TV* is merely a short clip from *Ángel Malo* which shows a man and a woman discussing their unborn child. The dialogue is stilted, and the over-emotional music in this establishing moment creates a melodramatic mood from the start of Valenzuela’s video. The music is instantly recognizable as the schlocky score of the soap opera genre, but the subject (a mother’s future estrangement from her unborn child) is a serious one. Directly after this clip, and then later at multiple points in *Maria TV*, the melodramatic music of *Ángel Malo* rises again and the female role of the following section of the *telenovellic* dialogue is “reenacted” by one of the immigrant Latinas (often in close-up and always in the maid costume) in front of an empty Green Screen.⁵⁴⁸

Female: What do you want from me?

Male: I want my son. Therefore, you will stay here until he is born. I want you to take care of yourself so he is born in the best conditions [. . .].

Female: Will you look at me again?

Male: We have nothing more to talk about. We will wait until the child is born and that is all.

⁵⁴⁸ A Green Screen is a mono-color background commonly used in motion pictures and television that enables a separate background to be inserted in post-production. Notably, Valenzuela uses the green screen (at times) behind the performers, but it remains empty and garish in the final video.

Female: And afterwards?

Male: Afterwards you will have to leave. That is the least that can happen to you after all you have done. You will leave to never come back. And you will forget that child forever.⁵⁴⁹

This, and other sections of *Ángel Malo*'s Spanish dialogue, continue to haunt *Maria TV* over the course of its seventeen minutes. Periodically throughout the video, we see the isolated Latina performer(s) in front of the empty Green Screen, often merely attempting to lip-synch to the melodramatic dialogue.⁵⁵⁰ Additionally, the performers are recorded speaking monologically in words that *seem* to be their own, although the exact origins of the text remain uncertain.

Valenzuela's technique, I argue, creates a dialectical contradiction in the viewer's mind: On one hand, the individual performer (floating in front of the blank Green Screen that *foregrounds* a sense of emptiness, non-location, and incompleteness) is nearly reduced to a homogenized prop, especially as she is draped in the maid's costume. On the other hand, the reiterative attempts by multiple participants to "reenact" the same dialogue conversely allows the viewer to see the women as a collectivized whole. This dialectic, hinged as it is on the reshuffling of the *telenovelic* dialogue, was described by one spectator as generating a contradictory effect of both

⁵⁴⁹ As opposed to Okón's *Pulpo*, Valenzuela provides English subtitles to *Maria TV*, which has considerably more spoken text. See Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Maria TV*, Vimeo, accessed October 8, 2016. English subtitles and translation by Rodrigo Valenzuela. <https://vimeo.com/99425035>.

⁵⁵⁰ Valenzuela himself states that the empty Green Screen acts a comment on Hollywood's dependence on the unreal: "At first I wanted them to act out the whole telenovela. But then I thought that one or two lines would be enough, you know. Between the budget and my time, I ended up boiling down ideas to the fastest form in some way. What is the minimum that is required? You know in some way, that is why the Green Screen is so meaningful for this project because the Green Screen in many ways symbolizes everything that is wrong with Hollywood. You don't want to build anything. You just want to use this imaginary background," (Valenzuela, conversation, 2015).

“empowerment” and “disconnect” regarding the performers.⁵⁵¹ Critically, despite that the fractured aesthetics of the video make an individual performer’s “true” voice largely indiscernible, many of the spectators expressed to me an assessment that the purpose of the video overall was to “give the women a voice.”⁵⁵²

Concerned, in part, with representations of Latinas in mainstream media such as TV and movies, Valenzuela deliberately approached the small-scale production process without a hard and fast plan. Culling his cast from mutual acquaintances and online social networks, the artist (having received \$13,000 in grants for the project)⁵⁵³ proceeded to set up within an empty studio with the aim of merely “setting up conditions in which [the performers] will react.”⁵⁵⁴ “I like running out of a script,” Valenzuela told me, suggesting also that his creative process hinges on “not being in control of everything.”⁵⁵⁵ Ultimately, the loose, spontaneous methodology of *Maria TV* became, in the words of the artist, a kind of “trust exercise” among himself and the participants, where, upon invitation and remuneration, the anxieties and personal tribulations of

⁵⁵¹ “It’s hard to give the individual power when you don’t know who’s speaking specifically. So maybe it is empowering to tell the story, but maybe a kind of disconnect on individual empowerment, when the actual person isn’t giving that dialogue back,” (Viewer 1, Female, 20s, conversation with the author, April 12, 2015).

⁵⁵² Three typical spectator responses:

“I think that intention in this piece was to give voice to the people who are voiceless in our society [. . .] I didn’t feel it as exploitation, but I definitely felt the rawness of it,” (Viewer 10, Female, 20s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

“I found it a very powerful statement about the situation they are in. They have no choices in life [. . .] That they had been voiceless before. And this has given them the opportunity to express themselves,” (Viewer 2, Female, 70s, conversation with the author, April 12, 2016).

“While they are kind of voiceless, and anonymous, and yet . . . they seem to be so vulnerable, but incredibly important. Like they’re important people in our society. And were not recognizing that. And politicizing that as we kind of go on our way, and live the good life,” (Viewer 3, Male, 70s, conversation with the author, April 12, 2016).

⁵⁵³ \$5,000 from 4 Culture, \$8,000 from Seattle’s Office of Arts and Culture. Rodrigo Valenzuela, email message to the author, October 18, 2014.

⁵⁵⁴ Rodrigo Valenzuela, conversation with the author, October 17, 2014.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

the Latina immigrants were solicited, heard, uncensored, and recorded.⁵⁵⁶ For their participation the women were paid \$150 a day and were provided with food, coffee, and water. The entire shooting process lasted three days. It should also be mentioned here that Valenzuela's method of not having a hard and fast plan is also evident in the fact that although the video begins with the *telenovela* reenactment, that particular portion of the video was shot (and conceived) *at the end of the production process*.⁵⁵⁷ Valenzuela's closed studio "workshop" process ultimately resulted, I argue, in a state of "communitas" or the "intersubjective illumination" felt by participants in social rituals as theorized by anthropologist Victor Turner. How these anthropological concepts relate to the process of *Maria TV* are discussed in the end of this section.

The acting on the part of the participants when attempting to "reenact" the *telenovela* dialogue, varies widely. For some viewers, the performers seemed to vacillate between an uncomfortable "self-awareness" and a real "owning of the emotions" of whatever dialogue was in play.⁵⁵⁸ Yet, as the video proceeds (and more text is compiled), the spectator is given minimal clues as to the origins of each section of dialogue, thereby conflating in the mind of the viewer the possible (but unknown) plot points of *Ángel Malo* with the "perceived" "realities" of the lives of the performers.⁵⁵⁹ In Valenzuela's words, this combination of text and image attempts a "hybridized narrative" that "sits ambiguously between action and enactment, or 'real life' and

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Valenzuela, conversation, 2015.

⁵⁵⁸ "It seems like equal parts empowering and deeply uncomfortable to the women. Like sometimes they were really owning those emotions, and sometimes it was clear that they were saying something "back" and very self-aware," (Viewer 11, Female, 20s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

⁵⁵⁹ Numerous spectators I interviewed at Seattle's Frye Museum when *Maria TV* was exhibited within in a larger show by Valenzuela were perplexed, albeit moved, by both the subject matter and the form.

fiction.⁵⁶⁰ A majority of the thirteen spectators I interviewed on two occasions at Seattle's Frye Art Museum seemed both equally moved and perplexed by Valenzuela's clever mash-up of subject and form. A typical response came from one viewer:

These people make up a big part of our economy and our everyday life, and they're just kind of ignored and pushed aside. So it's nice to see somebody who's bringing it to the forefront. [The intention is] probably just to humanize them more, I would say. The maid one [*Maria TV*] was really kind of surreal because he took this Mexican soap opera, it seemed to me anyway, I really didn't know what was going on . . . and had the ladies speak the dialogue from there. It could very well be part of their life. And so it seemed, you know, to humanize them; they're not just nameless faces, they're real people having real emotions, going through their real struggles that everybody goes through.⁵⁶¹

Thus, the artist had cleverly planted a seed in the videos' first moments, one to which the viewers' thoughts periodically return to create an overall theme. The conflation between the "polished" *telenovela* and what viewers described as the "ostracized" "real people" in the video actively created meaning for many spectators.⁵⁶² Additionally, how much the other spoken

⁵⁶⁰ Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Future Ruins* (Exhibition Catalogue), ed. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker (Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 2015), np.

⁵⁶¹ Viewer 4, Male, 20s, conversation with the author, April 12, 2016.

⁵⁶² Another representative example came from middle-aged female spectator: "What I thought was interesting at first was having that clip of the [*tele*]novela, and then taking those words and then transposing them to the nonactors; they take on a complete different meaning and form [. . .] it becomes this completely powerful [thing] because it's applied to a population that is ostracized. So there's this whole thing of not being seen, or not wanting to be seen. There's this whole thing of the polished soap opera [. . .] and then these real-life people. Because that's the one thing I felt they were. The actors feel really real, like everyday people. And I appreciate that a lot. And I think they are. But I don't know what they are," (Viewer 8, Female, 50s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

portions in *Maria TV* depart from *Ángel Malo* is never altogether clear. Take for example the following speech enacted directly after one of the *telenovela* sequences by one performer.

Notably, the performer (now dressed in the maid costume) is *not* in front of the Green Screen, but rather a nondescript floral-patterned wallpaper:

Performer: Again and again. Again and again you lied to me. Who do you think I am? Who do you think I am? Why do you ridicule me? Why do you ridicule me? It's a mockery. It's not just a lie. It's a mockery. Who do you think I am?⁵⁶³

And while this dialogue may seem melodramatic, scripted on par with any *telenovela*, the intensity with which the performer delivers the line far surpasses any of the other attempts at recreating the TV melodrama. The performer is poised, arms curled out before her, hands clutching the air, with eyes staring straight ahead. There is no other performer to whom she seems to be delivering the lines, nor does she look directly at the camera, but the spectator nevertheless senses a deep genuineness to the moment. And although, for its intensity, the viewer may be led to believe that the performer is experiencing a “real” moment, there is no indication whatsoever whether the line is lifted from the *telenovela*, scripted and rehearsed for this moment, improvised by the performer in this recorded moment, or previously improvised and here repeated at the filmmaker’s suggestion. It seems that Valenzuela has mimicked the *telenovela* but somehow without a shred of parody. This kind of neutral mimicry of linguistic forms and cannibalization of styles is what Jameson calls postmodernism’s “pastiche.” Unlike parody, however, with its satirical impulse of resistance, pastiche, Jameson argues, relates directly to the

⁵⁶³ Spoken Spanish original: “*Otra vez de nuevo. Otra vez de nuevo me mentiste. ¿Quién crees que soy? ¿Quién crees que soy? ¿Por qué te burlas? ¿Por qué te burlas? Es una burla. No es sólo una mentira, es una burla! ¿Quién crees que soy?*” Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Maria TV*, Vimeo, accessed October 8, 2016. (Transcription by the author).

disappearance of the individual subject and the death of a “healthy linguistic normality” in the conditions of postmodernism.⁵⁶⁴

But while Jameson laments pastiche as part of the psychopathology of the postmodern condition, Sandoval has a much different take on pastiche’s potential for marginalized subjects. For Sandoval, oppositional consciousness to hegemonic systems (the underlying decolonial operation I argue is at the heart of these undocumentaries) can manifest, at times, as “pastiche in action.”⁵⁶⁵ Sandoval writes:

I view postmodern pastiche as an aesthetic form that is both empty *and full* at the same time, a site of active possibility. It is a mode of production and perception that expanded in the late twentieth century to the point where all first world citizen-subjects are faced with the dissolution of subjectivity’s wholeness—not into the fragmentation of Jameson’s horror—but into the possibilities of an empty form capable of constantly refilling. The extremities of life lived in the regions of social subjugation, war, and postmodernism unlock the shackles of perception, and provide the methods by which postmodern being can fill with resistance.⁵⁶⁶

As demonstrated above by the testimonies of the spectators, Valenzuela’s cannibalization of aesthetic styles (namely the parasitic reshuffling of the *telenovela*’s dialogue with the disturbing, *yet indeterminable*, real-life experiences of the performers) became exactly the technique that

⁵⁶⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 15; “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.”

⁵⁶⁵ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 190.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 190 [italics original].

enabled viewers to see the pastiche, as Sandoval suggests, *as a work of resistance*. The blank hollowness of the telenovela, layered with the generic maid costume, is here filled by the viewer's perception that it resonates, somehow, with the participants' real lives. A number of viewers saw within the juxtaposition of the *telenovela*, the maid costumes, and the "real" dialogue of performers a strong political statement that touched on marginalization, visibility, class, and racism.⁵⁶⁷ To this point, it is precisely Jameson's contention that viewers of experimental video will have a tendency to "reassemble [the pastiche-like material] into *recognizable scenes and narrative sequences*," in order to make sense of them.⁵⁶⁸ The uncertain principle of language that courses through *Maria TV* (for instance an off-screen performer speaking of the near-impossibility of "returning home," or "being unable to feed her child," interwoven with the *telenovellic* dialogue in such a way that the viewer is unable to determine the original source of the line) is what, I argue, captures so powerfully the ontological realities of undocumentedness by evading both a problematic fictionalization and a didactic documentary style. If, for the sake of this argument, social works of artistic performance like *Maria TV*, which

⁵⁶⁷ Two representative examples:

"I think the costume is really important because this is what we see . . . you know, the racism in our culture [. . .] 'These people in general are servants, they're not to be seen or heard,' I mean, that's the context. And that part with [the *telenovela*] 'you make a child and it's none of your business what happens to it' [. . .] And these Latina women who are not recognized, and then you can leave, you know, you've made this child and you have no . . . just this fear, you know? 'We don't want to deal with you.' So, there's all these layers that hit on racism that are really very clear," (Viewer 8, Female, 50s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

"Giving them a maid's costume is pretty much like saying "these people are supposed to be in this place," It's a pretty strong statement. Where the artist is believing that they are supposed to fit in society [. . .] I would hope that people would watch it and feel something [. . .] I would hope that they are fully recognized as human beings rather than objects . . . the nanny, taking care of the kids and then disappearing when the child is two or three years old. I mean, that's a class thing. So, there's all these messages," (Viewer 9, Female, 20s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015).

⁵⁶⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 79 [emphasis added].

position paid immigrants as performers do create an enmeshing frame for the spectator that “exposes the reductive operations of social inequity”⁵⁶⁹ via a postmodern aesthetic that decenters and fractures the video’s subjects, let us consider one textual example from the video itself. A voice proceeds:

I came here when I was 17 years old, with fifty dollars in my bag and a suitcase. Without a mother. Without a father. Without a sister. I had no one. I didn’t know where to go, or exactly with whom I would live. Everything is a risk, and I think that everyone that comes to this country, comes with a risk, with an abyss of not knowing what is going to happen. And everyone that comes to this country, I think we always have the desire to go back home, and we say that in a year, in six months, nine months, ten years, and we are still here. The path here wasn’t easy. And the jobs were really hard too. You work twelve or ten-hour days, as a nanny, in the field, in the fast food restaurants. Every time I cleaned a bathroom, every time I picked a box of strawberries, tears fell down. I could not see myself doing that work for the rest of my life. But the fears were as simple as transportation from one place to another. Of going to the clinic to look for medical help. Of not knowing if you’re going to make it home or not.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁹ Jackson, *Social Works*, 60.

⁵⁷⁰Spoken Spanish original: “*Yo me vine a los diecisiete años con cincuenta dólares en mi bolsa y una maleta. Y sin papá, sin mamá, sin hermanas. Sin nadie. Yo no sabía a donde iba a llegar, exactamente con quién iba a vivir. Todo es un riesgo. Y pienso que todos los que vinimos a este país, vinimos con un riesgo. Con un abismo y no saber que va a pasar. Y como todo los inmigrantes, pienso que siempre tenemos el deseo de regresar a nuestras casas y decimos que en un año, en seis meses, en nueve meses, en diez años, y continuamos aquí, en esto momento continúo aquí. Y el camino llegar aquí no fue fácil. Pero el trabajo era muy difícil también. Esta trabajando doce, diez horas al día. De nanny, de campesina, en restaurantes de comida rápida. Y cada vez que hacía limpiaba el baño, o cada vez que recojía una cubeta de fresas, mis lágrimas se me salía, y no me podía ver haciendo este trabajo por el resto de la vida. Pero los*

Several things are essential to my reading of this extended moment: The voice is straight forward, unwavering, perhaps even matter of fact; the histrionic quality of the *telenovela* is gone. What's more, the speaker is simultaneously absent and present; as the voiceover plays, *no single individual performer is marked out as the speaker of these lines*. Instead, what we see is an extended montage of some of the women in various states of general immobility: listening, stretching, standing, focusing on something outside the frame of the screen. But looking at what (or whom) we do not know. At times, the women are in the empty, abstract set of the Green Screen, costumed as the maid. At other times, the blank, concrete background of Valenzuela's studio is the only backdrop. In certain shots, more than one individual is seen, but only one remains in the camera's focus, the other figure (in either the extreme foreground or background) is blurred, unidentifiable, yet indelibly present. In these shots, the multiple performers never look directly at one another. And lastly here, when the voice explains the fear of not knowing if she's "going to make it home or not" (*a la casa*), to where exactly does she refer? A home *here*, in the Pacific Northwest of the US? A house? Or home *there*, the aforementioned "*casa*" of the speaker's country of origin? And if so, just which country is that? It seems that Valenzuela's "random play of signifiers" has transformed this undisclosed "home" into the home of all of these women, temporarily inferred by an ambiguous, if seemingly personal, collage. As the epigraph at the beginning of this section suggests, Valenzuela's techniques of de-voicing, circularity, and homogenizing costumes created, for some viewers, an affecting dissolve between the individuals and the group.⁵⁷¹ One spoke for all, and all spoke as one. Thus, by purposefully

temores eran simplemente transportar de un lugar a otro. De ir a las clínicas y buscar asistencia médica. De saber si vas a llegar a la casa o no," Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Maria TV*, Vimeo, accessed October 18, 2016. (Transcription by the author).

⁵⁷¹ "It's intense watching them watch each other. [. . .] even though it's only one person talking, it's like them all talking," (Viewer 5, Male, 50s, conversation with the author, April 26, 2015.)

blurring the immigrant Latinas together, a tactic often employed negatively by certain media when referring to immigrants (especially undocumented immigrants), Valenzuela created a meaningful, empathetic experience for the viewers.

A further substantiation of the meaning created within the process of *Maria TV* comes from the actual experiences of the participants themselves. In their sometimes “embarrassing” attempts at reenacting the *telenovela*’s dialogue, one performer told me that a deep sense of camaraderie developed among the women as they were enjoined to inhabit the role of the *telenovela*’s star:

We, *the women*, we saw the difference, when we were trying to do that role [. . .] we got so excited. And between us, all of the women, we would say, “Oh, you are the best. Oh, you did it excellent. Oh my God!” We used to clap to one another. It was interesting, because maybe Rodrigo selected this person not because he wanted to choose that person, but because maybe he saw the excitement of all the other women [. . .]. Honestly, we were not only just pretending that it was a show. I was very engaged. Every single woman was deeply engaged: *This is real*. This is what we’re going through. Or this is what many women in our community go through on a daily basis. And to me it was so powerful not only to write, but *to tell my story live*. I went into tears. I was very emotional, and at the same time I had to maintain my posture to accomplish whatever we had to do.⁵⁷²

Multiple aspects of the in-studio experience are evinced in this brief testimony: (1) collectively engaged in the individual reenactments of the *telenovela*, the women (many of whom were strangers to one another at the beginning of the process), began to support and applaud one

⁵⁷² Flor Alarcón, conversation with the author, July 30, 2016.

another as the exercise went on; (2) it is suggested that the filmmaker's editing process was, in part, influenced by the supportive emotions that the women showed for one another; (3) despite the attempts to recreate moments from a *fictional* television show, the women became engaged in something described as "real;" (4), this "real" thing tied directly to the daily struggles of the Latinas' community; (5) there was a sense of purpose connected to the exercise, in that some kind of task had to be "accomplished," and; (6) the performer relates that the emotional power of the exercise hinges on the fact that it was performed *live* in front of others. Along these lines, Valenzuela saw the emergence of a kind of "group therapy" among the women as the three-day filming process went on, and as trust between the participants grew deeper.⁵⁷³ I see this kind of camaraderie between the Latina performers in the cordoned-off space of Valenzuela's studio (surely a part of the overall artistic process, but one ultimately obscured in the museum-installed video itself), as a manifestation of decolonial *communitas*.

Decolonial Communitas.

[C]ommunitas does not represent the erasure of structural norms from the consciousness of those participating in it; rather its own style, in a given community, might be said to depend upon the way in which it symbolizes the abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are quotidianly involved."

Victor Turner

*From Ritual to Theatre: The Serious of Human Play*⁵⁷⁴

The writings on ritual by the late Scottish Anthropologist Victor Turner have had a profound impact on the field of Performance Studies. In his seminal books *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (1974) and *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), Turner established and expanded on the ritual-specific experience of "communitas." For Turner,

⁵⁷³ Valenzuela, conversation, 2014.

⁵⁷⁴ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 47.

communitas characterizes the inter-subjective relationship between people jointly undergoing ritual transitions. Temporarily sheltered from their daily social structure, in which they are “segmentalized” into limiting roles based on class, gender, age and ethnicity, the participants in ritual (an “anti-structure” that often occurs in a sacred space where societal norms are provisionally suspended) have the potential for experiencing this temporary “flash of lucid, mutual understanding on the existential level.”⁵⁷⁵ Often facilitated by the donning of similar clothing, choreographed movement, and the temporary setting aside of status or rank in the ritual process, communitas is a “desire for a total, unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards [the participants’] uniqueness in *the very act of realizing their commonness*.”⁵⁷⁶ Importantly, this “*full human capacity*” is locked out of the quotidian social structure and is uniquely generated in the liminal process of ritual.⁵⁷⁷ In the best of all scenarios, the “[i]ndividuals who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous communitas become totally absorbed into a single, synchronized, fluid event,” and thus experience an “intersubjective illumination.”⁵⁷⁸ It is just this kind of absorption into a synchronized event that seems to have occurred in the making of *Maria TV*.⁵⁷⁹ My interviews with two performers indicate that this kind of intersubjective illumination seemed to occur in the “safe environment” that Valenzuela was able to create for the three days

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁷⁶ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1974), 274 [emphasis added]. Performance scholar Richard Schechner likens communitas to philosopher Martin Buber’s concept of “I-Thou” (*ich-du* in German), a “dialogic” and pure encounter between one being and another, outside of universal categories. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70-71.

⁵⁷⁷ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 46 [italics original].

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 48

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 48.

of filming.⁵⁸⁰ Common experiences of labor exploitation, the “core” language of Spanish, the donning of the maid costumes, and the collective, psycho-dramatic performance exercises combined to create a fluid, spontaneous atmosphere in which the commonness of the participants was realized. And while the making of *Maria TV*, in my view, does not constitute a ritual in the sense that the performers passed through a liminal phase into a new (or especially higher) social status, an intersubjective illumination is surely evidenced in the testimonies.⁵⁸¹ As one performer described the inter-personal exchanges:

One of the things was that [the *Maria TV* experience] was a reassurance to me that I was not alone. And many of the women, I don't think they feel alone. There was a core of the same language that we were all using. And that we all felt, “Oh my God, I thought I was the only person who had experienced this. But no, I wasn't” [. . .]. It was very interesting because even though I didn't know many of them, just the fact that we were immigrants, and the fact that we have done *very dirty jobs* that a lot of people don't want to do, that itself spoke [to] the connection that we felt among the group . . . *I felt* that we already had this connection [. . .]. And just feeling so much compassion for where the other *women* were. So many of the other women in the project were really struggling for their lives, people who were recent immigrants [. . .]. You could tell right

⁵⁸⁰ Flower Mariana Krutina, conversation with the author, October 10, 2016.

⁵⁸¹ Akin to the “liminality” (or the state of in-betweeness) which characterizes the “anti-structure” of ritual, Turner sees the independent, neutral, and privileged spaces of artmaking as “liminoid.” Liminoid spheres, disconnected in their own liberated way from everyday social structures, can also be conceived as “betwixt-and-between,” a realm where artists are at liberty to “*play* with the factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, [and] usually experimental combinations,” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 40) [italics original]. As a secluded, private, artistic process, I would argue that the filming of *Maria TV* was more dependent on liminoidness than liminality.

away when a person didn't have immigration status. Some people will say, 'I wish I could go back to my country. I wish I could have those jobs. I wish my child could do this and that' [. . .]. So how can we empower them? How can they continue to study or get higher paying jobs or raise their families better in every single way? Or living in a better neighborhood: getting out of those horrible apartments where not even the police will go, because I was living in those situations, you know?"⁵⁸²

The above testimony helps deepen an understanding of what occurred within the performance space from person to person: a relief from isolation, the comradeship of workers, compassion for those of undocumented status, the reflection of oneself in another. Considering this intersubjective exchange between the women occurred within the artists attempt to "address the socioeconomic struggles of an underrepresented group,"⁵⁸³ namely immigrant Latinas of varying immigration status, the *communitas* can here be considered decolonial.⁵⁸⁴

As explored in the introduction (pages 54-58) and later in Chapter Two (pages 149-151), decolonial thought (and thus decolonial projects) hinge on the notions of the "coloniality of being," and the "restoration of the logic of the gift" as put forth by decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres.⁵⁸⁵ The coloniality of being (a reduction of one's humanity due to the underlying – and pervasive – logic of historical colonialisms that originated in early modern

⁵⁸² Alarcón, conversation, 2016.

⁵⁸³ Valenzuela, *Future Ruins* (Exhibition Catalogue), np.

⁵⁸⁴ It was not Valenzuela's goal to determine the immigration status of his participants, and being documented or not was of no consequence when it came to the participants' eligibility to participate. Nevertheless, the immigration status of some individuals became evident throughout the process of collective improvisation, camaraderie, and emotional support.

⁵⁸⁵ Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 257, 260.

Europe⁵⁸⁶) is, in part, marked by the reduced capacity of colonized subjects to have and to give to others. Indeed, for Maldonado-Torres, this reduced capacity to give to others is *causal* to the coloniality of being; since colonized subjects are less able to give to one another, their basic humanity is reduced.⁵⁸⁷ Decolonial projects like the community-based work of Teatro Jornalero profiled in Chapter Two, and, as I argue here, *Maria TV*, are creative, epistemological processes that attempt to restore colonized subjects' ability to give freely to one another, and thus restore them to humanity. This would line up with the spectators' impressions that *Maria TV* attempted to highlight the humanity of the unnamed performers. More to the point, the non-material "gift" being given is the "trans-ontological" experience emergent in the semi-structured performance itself: camaraderie, group therapy, the "core" of a shared language, temporary collective empowerment, and the abolition of status among the various Latina immigrants. In other words, *decolonial* *communitas*. *Communitas*, hinging as it does on "personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretentiousness" in the sacred space of ritual, was in fact facilitated by Valenzuela through the collective *telenovela* reenactments, improvisational exercises, and the homogenizing maid costumes.⁵⁸⁸ For the artist, the costume serves as a "shield," behind which the performers can safely, and "truly express themselves."⁵⁸⁹ This overt uniform, stereotypical of female/manual/domestic labor, hit a unifying chord with the performers, many of whom had professional experience in the isolating field of domestic work. Ironically, however, this aesthetic embodiment of their marginalization became, in the performance context, an exciting and positive opportunity; it was a chance to "be the star." As one performer recalled, the

⁵⁸⁶ See Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 1-21.

⁵⁸⁷ Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 254-257.

⁵⁸⁸ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 48.

⁵⁸⁹ Valenzuela, conversation, 2014.

collective “expression of pain and frustration” among participants, as well as the emotional “rawness” of the acting exercises, ultimately blended with a positive feeling centered on the costumes themselves.⁵⁹⁰ Initially however, referring to the guided acting exercises that invited the women to explore past experiences of betrayal, the performer recalled an environment of emotional intensity:

You could see a lot of trauma come out of the other girls through the exercises . . . Rodrigo and all the other coaches that were there did a really good job of pulling out these very raw emotions [. . .]. There was a lot of emotion coming out, just seeping through [another woman’s] pores. And it was something that looked like *she needed to do* – she could go on forever, without getting into details about how hurt and betrayed she had been by her father, to the point where she was shaking . . . physically shaking. And that’s when everyone was like, “Holy crap, what is happening?” I almost feel like we had to stop and be like “Ok, let’s take a step back here.” Because it was very, very intense in that moment. [The exercise] took them back to a time that was not exactly positive. That was the point of the exercise. But it was guided, so that was good.⁵⁹¹

Regarding this environment, where the women were brought to a point of vulnerability, the performer still contended that a safe space was managed by Valenzuela. Indeed, as explained to me by the performer, Valenzuela would not have been able to generate such intense

⁵⁹⁰ This performer described the video’s theme as: “An expression of pain and frustration of what the women had gone through. Let’s use our own experiences to express that frustration which applies not only to you personally, but to what other women are feeling and experiencing as well, in the maid situations, or housekeeper situations [where] bad things can happen,” (Krutina, conversation, 2016).

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

performances had he not been unable to create a safe space to begin with.⁵⁹² This intensity, moreover, was ascribed to the fact that (other than the *telenovela* dialogue) the speeches were “completely unscripted” moments of “self-expression.”⁵⁹³ And although the artist disclosed that (in his experience), women performers talk more openly about their feelings than the immigrant men with whom he has worked, his clever introduction of the costumes facilitated a deeper, positive commonality among the performers.⁵⁹⁴ Notably, this is within an effort on the part of the artist to provide a space where the Latinas transform their marginalized experience into the role of “protagonist” and “star.”⁵⁹⁵ When asked if the participants seemed hesitant (or even insulted) to put on the costumes, the performer quoted above replied:

Not at all. If anything, I felt that everyone was excited to be a part of this, and putting on the costumes was kind of the most exciting part. It was a moment where everyone was, “Yeah, all right! Now we’re really gonna be actresses. That is definitely something I saw in a lot of the women that were there. This was kind

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ When asked if the suspicion that his hired performers sometimes initially feel recedes over the course of filming, Valenzuela replied: “I don’t know if the suspicion is ever lifted. But I think for being more vulnerable in some way, women are a lot less afraid to work on an art project, to do something crazy, than the men. Because the men, in some way, have this masculinity that can be crushed. Doing something that is like “gay,” or doing something too romantic, or doing something that actually asks them about their feelings. It’s just impossible to ask them about their feelings, to men. To women, you can talk about what they felt. You can ask the question: “How do you feel about this?” And they will answer. And men, they will be like, “Oh I don’t know,” (Valenzuela, conversation, 2015).

⁵⁹⁵ “It’s not about shining a light on [the participants] because that implies that they were in a place where somebody needed to look at them. I want to make these projects to bring them to a place where they are the protagonist. So it’s not about shining a light, like, ‘Oh they will remain in the corner, and just moving the light over there so people can see them.’ I just mean ‘Come here, and *you* be the star’ [. . .]. Just let them perform, and you will see how interesting they are. So building a space for performing. To build the place where they are the star. And you realize, yes, they were interesting. They were good. Like what was I doing wasting my time not paying attention to them,” (Valenzuela, conversation, 2015).

of like a really cool moment for them to shine, even though it was in these maid costumes, and yeah, they've been maids and housecleaners – they've been there done that – but this was *different*. Because they weren't exactly in that situation.

This was . . . *it was a star moment for them.*⁵⁹⁶

Notably, the segments wherein the participants wore the maid costumes were filmed at the end of the three-day process. At that point the women had been working together for a short, albeit intense, time. Certain things seem evident: A temporary “community” had begun to take shape, built upon both the uniqueness and the commonality between the women.⁵⁹⁷ As a ritualistic inversion of the normative structure of their daily lives (the kind on which *communitas* depends), the women were invited to perform the “star” role. Status, meanwhile, was set aside, guided by a sense of altericity on the part of the formerly undocumented artist. Within this protected anti-structure of the liminoid studio, performers began to “break out of their shells,” facilitated by the shield of the homogenizing costume.⁵⁹⁸ An intersubjective illumination began to emerge in the sharing of improvised testimony centered on stories of betrayal, anxiety, labor, and migration. In other words, the recorded process that was ultimately edited by Valenzuela into the fractured and ambiguous museum-installed video to which the spectators had such intuitive (and bewildered) reactions, was constitutive of a decolonial *communitas*. *Communitas* caught on tape. Ironically however, *any evidence of this communitas is largely absent in the video itself*. Gone are the moments when the performers (as described to me) generously applauded one another. Absent is any clear clue that things got so intense that everyone needed to “take a break.” And apart from brief clips showing the women helping each other tie the apron strings, Valenzuela manages to

⁵⁹⁶ Krutina, conversation, 2016.

⁵⁹⁷ Alarcón, conversation, 2016.

⁵⁹⁸ Krutina, conversation, 2016.

keep them separated, even oddly isolated, within the communal endeavor. It is this very dialectic, I argue, the tension between the embodied, intimate, personal, communal, traumatic, in-studio testimony on the one hand, and the decentered, de-voiced, homogenized, anonymous, and atemporal screen projection on the other, that so uniquely engages with undocumentedness. Homogenized (and often openly vilified), in public discourse, undocumented immigrants tend to protect their anonymity for reasons of personal and economic security.⁵⁹⁹ This condition is all too often referred to as “hidden” or “shadowed” lives. Yet on the other side, the corporeal and civic presence of undocumented immigrants is part of daily life in the US. As employees and employers, co-workers, co-commuters, co-shoppers, and fellow parents, undocumented immigrants are among all of “us,” to use a problematic term. Thus, by constructing the televisual space as one where the marginalized Latina immigrant becomes the “star” and the “protagonist,” Valenzuela makes visible subjects who are only ever made “invisible” by the constrictions of discourse.

Such notions of visibility are, as this chapter has shown, only part of what makes undocumentaries such as *Maria TV* and *Pulpo* compelling. To be sure, their fractured aesthetics, devoiced subjects, homogenous costuming, and unsettling ambiguity do not always make it entirely clear to what degree the subjects become visible. The perplexity of certain museum spectators to *Maria TV*, as well as the down-right obliviousness on the part of the “spectators” (Home Depot customers) in *Pulpo* would seem to only add to the general obscurity and incomplete understanding of undocumented communities. Moreover, these works’ dependence on waged labor (unlike the “gifted labor” exemplified in the Teatro Jornalero process) make

⁵⁹⁹ Of course, this sentiment does not, of course, ring true for all undocumented immigrants. This study’s last chapter deals with performative ritual and the undocumented youth movement, the common motto for which is “Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic.”

them easy targets for those who might accuse the filmmakers of exploitation for the purposes of art. But this is not to say that the performance text, generated largely by the participants themselves, is in some way disingenuous. On the contrary, the case here is radically different to both eSe Teatro's "audience feedback" and Teatro Jornalero's "story circle" writing processes in that (apart from the *telenovela* dialogue) the verbatim words of the participants are the *only* spoken text. Although Valenzuela momentarily cannibalizes telenovelic dialogue, no writer is employed to adapt a dramatic scenario (the Mexican *Pastorela*), let alone infuse a classic text (*Don Quixote*) with the "voices" of the marginalized. In other words, it is not pre-existing material that is adapted and/or infused with the voices, but the recorded voices *themselves* that are adapted through the technology of digital video. It is not, however, particularly remarkable that the medium of experimental video can offer a window into the world of certain undocumented communities. As one participant to *Maria TV* saw it, the power of video is derived by both its unique visuality and its utter repeatability for countless audiences.⁶⁰⁰

The next chapter in this study intersects and departs from the previous case studies in several ways. Like the works of *Pulpo* and *Maria TV*, the performance text examined in the final chapter is comprised solely of the words of undocumented immigrants. Additionally, as in the methods of eSe Teatro and Teatro Jornalero, the performance is utterly dependent on its liveness in front of a particular audience. However, quite unlike eSe Teatro and Teatro Jornalero, it is completely unrehearsed and in no way depends on dramatic characters. Unlike *Pulpo* and *Maria TV*, it pays little (if any) attention to artistic aesthetics at all. If the theatrical models of eSe

⁶⁰⁰ "I strongly believe in videos – people can visualize and see more stories – more than the person that has been directly affected by an issue in this case. So, this is a video, you can play it and see it as many times as you want. Instead of me trying to tell you the story," (Alarcón, conversation, 2016).

Teatro and Teatro Jornalero either fall into the traps of undocumentedface or nonprofessional performances, respectively, what would a performance of undocumentedness look like if it was completely free of the constraints of theatrical representations and character? If the medium of documentaries examined in this chapter tends to devoice its non-identified subjects for an intellectual, aesthetic, or emotional effect, what would a performance of undocumentedness look like if the performers participated not only to give their community a voice, but to also publicly identify themselves *as undocumented*? Moreover, what would a performance of undocumentedness look like if it not only depended on gifted labor, *communitas*, and liveness, but was also conceived, produced, and performed *solely* by undocumented immigrants with no participation whatsoever of a mediating, funded, alteristic artist?

CHAPTER FOUR

Anti-Ritual and a “Passive” Performance of Citizenship The *Undocu-Graduation 2015*

The institutions have not given us stuff. We have fought for it! We have built it! And we continue to do it every day. So, to the graduates here today: We *all* have to dismantle the status quo. Many people do not want to see us graduate, *and this is our resistance* [. . .] I encourage you all to fight and to question everything that you believe is not right. You have the power to dismantle the systems within institutions. And you have done so today. It is an honor to share this space with you today. So, congratulations class of 2016. May you always feel power and decolonize the spaces that you are in. We’re undocumented, unafraid, and *unapologetic!*

Alejandra Pérez
Keynote Address, *Undocu-Graduation 2016*⁶⁰¹

My parents crossed the border so I could cross the stage.

Customized mortarboard message
“Undocumedia” Twitter post, May 20, 2016⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ As a junior in 2015, Alejandra Perez, a double major in Society, Ethics, and Human Behavior and American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington, Bothell was one of the main producers of the inaugural *Undocu-Graduation 2015*. In the second annual *Undocu-Graduation* (2016), Alejandra, along with two other female undocumented graduates from Washington State, was the keynote speaker. While this chapter primarily draws upon the participant reflections and aesthetics of the *Undocu-Graduation 2015*, I do draw upon the second annual *Undocu-Graduation* as well, which I also attended.

⁶⁰² <https://twitter.com/undocumedia>; Media reports regarding undocumented graduates became particularly amplified in 2016 (the year following the inaugural *Undocu-Graduation 2015*). Due to the intensifying rhetoric against undocumented persons during the 2016 presidential race, several high school valedictorians chose to reveal their undocumented status during their valedictorian speeches. Invariably, these “coming out” performances were met with both support and backlash by the public. One Yale-bound high school valedictorian’s speech is typical of reactions against then presidential candidate Donald Trump’s proposal to build a wall between Mexico and the US. Larissa Martinez, a high school valedictorian in Dallas, Texas, said in her speech: “The most important part of the debate and the part most often overlooked is the fact that immigrants, undocumented or otherwise, are people too [. . .] America can be great again without the construction of a wall built on hatred and prejudice.” See Willa Frej, “Undocumented Valedictorian Takes Down Trump in Epic Speech,” *Huffington Post*, June 10, 2016, accessed August 16, 2016. For other undocumented grad stories see also: Katie Rogers, “Valedictorians in Texas Declare Undocumented Status, and Outrage Ensues,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2016, accessed August 2, 2016; Humans of New York, “I am an Illegal Immigrant,” *Facebook*, May 27, 2015, accessed July 26, 2016.

SECTION ONE: THE *UNDOCU-GRADUATION 2015* AS DECOLONIAL RITUAL.

I have thus far argued that performative collaboration with undocumented communities, whether they emerge in the genres of theater or experimental video, derive their efficacy from several decolonizing attributes: For one, whether they are conceived and executed by novice, semi-professional, or professional artists, the performance projects I have thus far examined all operate from within an activist-oriented framework. Additionally, this framework most often aims to produce a creative environment of decolonial epistemology (a liberating process of collective knowledge formation) for its undocumented participants through the creation of acts of performance, as well as offering (at times) a “safe space” for the processing of psychological trauma associated with undocumentedness. Additionally, these works are apt to employ an aesthetic of bilanguaging (a subjectivity between languages) as a gesture of empathy towards undocumented communities, many of whom daily operate in bilingual (or multi-lingual) systems. These various attributes work simultaneously in an attempt to humanize a population that is rhetorically dehumanized by powerful voices in the mainstream media, including that of the current President of the United States. Despite these similar qualities, the methods and results of the performances vary in critical ways.

As we have seen in this study, the art of Theater (*Ese Teatro*, *Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras*, *Super Doméstica*) offers a live platform for undocumented voices to be heard through the constructs of character, rough aesthetics, narrative plot, and the adaptation of real life events or personae to comment on the deleterious effects of power wielded against undocumented persons (*Teatro Jornalero*’s parodic stage version of Donald Trump, for instance. See Chapter Two). This liveness, while it can allow for the creation (or maintenance) of community during the energetic performance event is also marked by the unpredictability of amateur theatrical

production: missed cues, inaudibility, properties malfunctions, the breaking of character. On the other hand, the postmodern aesthetics of experimental video works that collaborate with undocumented persons (*Pulpo* and *Maria TV* of Chapter Three) create ambiguous performative landscapes where the namelessness and liminality often associated with undocumentedness is visually captured and then replayed in the more austere environment of a museum or gallery. Although the process of the video's creation can allow for a therapeutic, inter-subjective exchange between participants during the filming (what I've argued above as "decolonial *communitas*") ultimately the viewer is suspended in front of a static, non-live playback that cannot be altered by their presence. Thus, these works emerge more as a haunted, almost voyeuristic, peering into the "de-voiced" world of certain immigrant communities.⁶⁰³ This voyeurism, however, did generate feelings of empathy for the video's subjects, as evidenced in my numerous interviews with *Maria TV* spectators at the Frye Museum in Seattle.

And yet there is another kind of performance within the paradigm, one that functions with many of the same attributes of theater (the immediacy of a live audience, narrative structure, costumes, props, etc.) as well as being one that seeks to negotiate the same issues of the videos previously examined (the homogenization of immigrants, the exploitation of undocumented labor, social liminality, structural marginalization). And although this performance too operates with many of the same decolonizing attributes that I have identified within all the other case studies, it is, in many ways, altogether different. Unlike the theatrical productions of *eSe Teatro* and *Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras*, there are no "characters," no

⁶⁰³ As examined in Chapters One through Three, one common trope among artists and spectators is that these types of community-engaged performances that collaborate with undocumented immigrants (both in the genres of theater and video) offer the participants a "voice," and thus a public recognition that they might not otherwise enjoy.

“playwright,” no “actors,” and no “rehearsal.” Additionally, and in contrast to experimental videos examined in Chapter Three, there is no “editing,” no “alteristic” artist at the helm, little concern for artistic aesthetics, and an outright disavowal of the kind of ambiguity seen in *Pulpo* and *Maria TV*. Nonetheless, it is staged, public, highly performative, and seeks to create a liberating process of collective learning for colonized subjects. It also happens to be the only performance event in this study that was conducted entirely in English. Thus, it neither valorizes bilingualism per se nor attempts to depict a linguistic fragmentation. In my estimation, it is *a performance of undocumentedness* that, in relation to the others, is not only the boldest and most public, but also the one that is most unambiguously personal and therefore has the highest stakes. The subject of this final chapter, researched with the same intent and methods as the other case studies, is the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* (hereafter, *Undocu-Graduation*) conceived and staged by the Washington Dream Coalition, a grassroots political organization of undocumented youth in Washington State.⁶⁰⁴ The research conducted for this chapter, namely my interviews with thirteen undocumented participants (producers, students, graduates, parent/spectators), as well as my attendance at the inaugural *Undocu-Graduation*, reveals the political intentions, performance conditions, and post-ceremony reflections linked to this one-of-a-kind (and now on-going) public ritual.

On June 20th 2015, nine undocumented graduates from different parts of Washington State converged upon the outdoor plaza of Seattle’s El Centro de la Raza community center to

⁶⁰⁴ Upon their formation in 2009, the group called itself the Washington DREAM Act Coalition. After the passage of Washington’s Real Hope Act (the state version of the DREAM Act, and a piece of legislation for which the group lobbied), the group decided to remove the word “Act” from their official title. In fact, the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* was, in the words of event producer Moses Chege, an attempt to “rebrand” the coalition in front of the political audience.

walk at their own collective graduation ceremony.⁶⁰⁵ Whether the individual graduates were completing a high school, community college, technical college, or university degree was not a factor in their ability to participate.⁶⁰⁶ Dressed in caps and gowns of the various colors respective of their diverse institutions, these students were invited to walk across the stage and receive their “Certificate of Accomplishment” from the Washington Dream Coalition (WDC). The WDC is a grassroots political organization of undocumented youth in Washington State that had pushed for recent state-level legislation to grant undocumented youth greater access to higher education. Having achieved some success with their activist agenda, the WDC independently produced this commemorative ceremony to publicly mark the accomplishments of undocumented students who face distinct challenges. These difficulties are not often recognized by either educators or peers. I argue in this chapter that the WDC’s traditionally-styled commencement ceremony (in fact the only performance in this study that is conceived, produced, and performed *solely* by undocumented persons) constitutes a “performative ritual of citizenship,” one which attempts to humanize an otherwise vilified population in front of a high-powered audience of elected officials. Moreover, this ritual was staged with several goals not limited to the affect it might have had on the influential politicians in the audience. These goals include both the celebration of the undocumented community in Washington State more broadly, as well as attaining a deeper

⁶⁰⁵ Formed in 1972, Seattle’s El Centro de la Raza is an educational and advocacy center grounded in the Latina/o community. Offering bi-lingual programs for children and adults, emergency services, a child care center, various arts programs, and space rentals, El Centro de la Raza’s mission is “to build unity across all racial and economic sectors, to organize, empower, and defend our most vulnerable and marginalized populations and to bring justice, dignity, equality, and freedom to all the peoples of the world.” El Centro de la Raza, “About Us,” *El Centro de la Raza*, n.d. accessed August 5, 2016.

⁶⁰⁶ Although only nine students walked in the ceremony in 2015, over twenty had registered to participate in the event. Reasons varied for the registered students’ inability to participate: work, travel, and family conflicts, for example.

sense of personal transformation that the students' previous institutional graduations did not supply them. Similar to the ritualistic/spiritual qualities of community-based performance that Jan Cohen-Cruz observes as marshaling the "strength from those with shared values who have come before and striv[e] toward something that has yet to be," the *Undocu-Graduation* also sought to inspire a new generation of undocumented students.⁶⁰⁷ In other words, as presenting themselves as examples of successful undocumented students, the WDC, through performance, sought to push younger undocumented students to excel. Thus, like "efficacious" ritual (which Performance Studies scholar Richard Schechner has long viewed on a continuum with the "entertainment" of theater) the producers of the *Undocu-Graduation* sought to craft a performance that produced material results.⁶⁰⁸

According to anthropologist Victor Turner, the performance of public ritual is one type of mechanism that is often used to redress the "crisis" of social dramas. For Turner, social dramas are the "aharmonic processes" that he argues, are found in nearly every human society (whether on the micro or macro level), and which consist of four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and *either* reintegration or recognition of schism.⁶⁰⁹ This "spontaneous unit of social process" first manifests as a breach of social norms (the infraction of law or etiquette for instance) and may be contrived to challenge authority.⁶¹⁰ The second phase, or crisis, then follows, which is marked by heightened conflict, the taking of sides, and (often) the widening of the breach. Thirdly, in order

⁶⁰⁷ Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 85.

⁶⁰⁸ For diagrams of what Schechner terms the "Efficacy/Entertainment Braid," comparing the efficacy of ritual to the "show business" of theater see Richard Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory* (New York: Drama Book Specialists), pp. 75-79.

⁶⁰⁹ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors; Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 37; Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 69.

⁶¹⁰ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 68.

to limit the spread of the breach, “redressive mechanisms” are brought into operation.⁶¹¹ These can include formal and informal arbitration as well as the performance of public ritual, which attempts to quell the heightened emotion of the crisis. The fourth phase is either reintegration of “the disturbed social group,” often with a change in the group’s status and influence in the given society, or the “social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation.”⁶¹² I outline Turner’s concept here in some detail because, as this chapter will show, the *Undocu-Graduation* constitutes a performative “ritual of citizenship” crafted to redress what, for the participants, is an immediate crisis embedded in the United States’ current social drama regarding undocumented immigration, especially as it relates to undocumented youth who were brought to the US as small children and/or minors.⁶¹³

Additionally, whereas the performance of public ritual is traditionally viewed as a “rite of passage” and an emergence *through* a “liminal” state from one social position to an (often) higher social status (e.g., marriage, initiation, the swearing into office, etc.),⁶¹⁴ what undocumented youth often experience upon their graduation is actually a regression *into a lower*

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 70.

⁶¹² Ibid., 71.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 61-88.

⁶¹⁴ The Dutch-German-French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, (whose 1909 *Rites of Passage* greatly inspired Victor Turner in the latter half of the twentieth century) pioneered the “separation/liminality/reintegration” model of public ritual. According to van Gennep, the social transitions implicit in human existence (birth, marriage, advancement to a higher class, etc.) are often insured by “ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is *equally well-defined*” [emphasis added]; Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 3. However, for undocumented students in the US, the completion of an educational degree often results in the individual passing into an *undefined* position of *greater* precarity. Hence the need for the Washington Dream Coalition to conceive their own ritual, one which draws on the general aesthetics and tone of any high-school or college graduation, but one which exists independently outside of any institutional sanction.

social position, one fraught with a greater sense of liminality and economic precarity.⁶¹⁵ As we shall see in the body of this chapter, *Undocu-Graduation* was a direct response to the participants' "official" graduations at their home institutions that lacked (for many) the traditional quality of social transformation that ritual is intended to produce.⁶¹⁶ The need for a commemoration that elicited a deeper feeling of accomplishment, performed in celebration of community, is what drove the event's producers. In the words of Ray Corona, the WDC member who initially conceived and helped produced the ceremony, the *Undocu-Graduation* was a "passive political statement" that both marks the anxiety-laden precarity in which the undocumented graduates exist, but also openly celebrates both the graduates and their community. Thus, the performance enacts a momentarily staged utopia that lets its audience feel, in the words of Jill Dolan, "what the world might be like were some form of social justice or progressive change [. . .] even partially accomplished."⁶¹⁷ Prior to my close examination of the *Undocu-Graduation* ceremony, a brief look at the legislation that helps define the lives of

⁶¹⁵ Roberto G. Gonzales, *Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Elżbieta M. Goździak, "Dreams Deferred: The Effects of Undocumented Status on Latino Youths' Education and Livelihood," *Hidden Lives and Human Rights: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration*. Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 146. Goździak argues that while many Latino children are placed within the "untenable position of interminable liminality," unauthorized status alone does not adversely affect their formal education. "In fact," writes Goździak, "their lack of legal immigration status is *an incentive to stay in school for the relatively safe legal environment it affords*" [emphasis added], 146.

⁶¹⁶ For event producer Ray Corona, the visibility of social transformation was one of many considerations when planning the *Undocu-Graduation*: "In going back to not only the purpose of the event, but really looking at the logistical aspects and the aesthetics of the event, I think we definitely want it to feel and to highlight what the transformation looks like. To be really in tune with [the fact that] there is a transformation happening, which is why we're really looking at the details: the flow of the event and how various things will be highlighted. Because I think that [those details] will increase over all the feeling of transformation for the participants themselves," (Ray Corona, conversation with the author, January 31, 2016).

⁶¹⁷ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 141.

undocumented youth in the US bears some scrutiny. And while the four phases of Turner's social drama may also be applicable to the last century of US policy shifts towards undocumented immigration, for the purposes of this chapter I limit my examination to the thirty-five-year history of US legislation specifically regarding undocumented students (1982-2017). These three and a half decades of redressive legislation (both at the state and federal level) are not only a clear model of the four phases of a social drama, but the one in which the *Undocu-Graduation* manifests, and to which it directly responded. What's more (and as we shall see) legislation regarding undocumented youth in Washington State is what made the ceremony both meaningful and possible. The phases of this current social drama, to which I argue the *Undocu-Graduation* was a performative redressive mechanism, are outlined in this chapter's following section.

SECTION TWO: THE SOCIAL DRAMA OF US LEGISLATION AND THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACING UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH.

Since the Supreme Court's ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), undocumented immigrant children in the US have had the constitutional right to free public education from kindergarten through high school. At the time, the Court ruled that previous education laws in Texas, which sought to withhold public school funds to educate undocumented children, constituted a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US constitution, which guarantees the equal protection of the laws to any person within a state's jurisdiction.⁶¹⁸ Notably, the Equal Protection Clause does not state that these protections are reserved exclusively for US citizens. The Supreme Court's decision was clearly a "redressive mechanism" (in this case formal arbitration) that sought to address the social "breach" of the presence of undocumented

⁶¹⁸ "U.S. Constitution – 14th Amendment," Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, accessed August 6, 2016, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>.

youth in US public schools. Although this “infraction of law” might not have been committed by the students themselves, opponents of unauthorized immigration rarely make the distinction between immigrants who knowingly violate US policies and the undocumented children they bring with them. In its decision, the court stated that to hold children accountable for the action of their parents would not only contradict the “fundamental conceptions of justice,” but also deny undocumented children “the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation.”⁶¹⁹ Thus, the Court not only viewed the Texas laws as harmful to the undocumented children themselves, but to US society *as a whole* over the long term. Recent state laws that have challenged Plyler v. Doe, such as California’s Prop 187 (1994) and Alabama’s H.B. 56 (2011), which both sought to bar undocumented children from public education, have thus far been unsuccessful.⁶²⁰ Although the Plyler v. Doe decision guarantees that undocumented youth in the US have the right to free public education through high school, it does not confer upon them any kind of legal residency, whether permanent or temporary.

The decade after Plyler v. Doe was passed, the US experienced the economic boom of the 1990s. As has often been the case with a healthy US economy, the decade was accompanied by an increase in immigration, both documented and not. From 1990 to 2007,

⁶¹⁹ “Public Education for Immigrant Students: States Challenge Supreme Court’s Decision in Plyler v. Doe,” *American Immigration Council*, Web, June 15, 2012, accessed July 28, 2016, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students>.

⁶²⁰ Mark Z. Barabak, “The politics of California’s Proposition 187 in one chart,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 2014, accessed August 8, 2016; David Weigel, “Alabama tried a Donald Trump-style immigration law. It failed in a big way,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2015, accessed August 8, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/alabama-tried-a-donald-trump-style-immigration-law-it-failed-in-a-big-way/2015/08/22/2ae239a6-48f2-11e5-846d-02792f854297_story.html.

unauthorized immigration to the US rose steadily, going from an estimated population of 3,500,000 to a peak of 12,200,000.⁶²¹ This period can be interpreted as the “crisis” phase of Turner’s four-phase social drama, wherein the breach widens and ideological sides are taken up by opposing parties. And though anti-immigrant sentiment in the US has historically taken on many forms, the period since the 1990s has been characterized by an uptick in both rhetorical and performative anti-immigrant action. Notably, this period of the widening breach saw both the surge of resources allocated to the US Border Patrol in the form of “Operation Gatekeeper,” and of “The Minuteman Project” an extrajudicial citizen border patrol on the US’ southern border.⁶²² The last two decades of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of the media-driven narrative of the “Latino Threat” to US sovereignty: a public discourse that positions Latina/os (particularly Mexicans) as non-assimilating “*Reconquistadores*,” seeking to retake the lands of the US Southwest ceded to Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848.⁶²³

Since the recession of 2007/8 the number of undocumented immigrants within the US has fallen to its current estimate of 11,200,000, remaining steady since 2009.⁶²⁴ One legacy of the increase in undocumented immigration in the 1990s, however, is the number of undocumented youths who came to the US as children, either having been brought here by family members or

⁶²¹ “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Trends for States, Birth Countries and Regions,” *Pew Research Center: Hispanic Trends*, Dec. 11, 2014, accessed August 6, 2016.

<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/12/11/unauthorized-trends/>

⁶²² See Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁶²³ Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁶²⁴ It is worth noting that the “steadiness” of the undocumented immigration population in the US is due, in part, to deportations, naturalizations, deaths, and immigrants leaving the US on their own accord. Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “Unauthorized immigrant population stable for half a decade,” *Pew Research Center*, September 21, 2016, accessed September 24, 2016.

migrating as unaccompanied minors. Recent estimates of the number of undocumented children and youth under the age of twenty-four is 3,200,000.⁶²⁵ Another four million US citizen children have undocumented parents, constituting seven percent of school age children.⁶²⁶ And although an estimated 65,000 undocumented students graduate from US high schools annually, roughly 40% of undocumented youths ages eighteen to twenty-four have not completed high school, a rate more than double the national average.⁶²⁷ Moreover, of the 65,000 undocumented high school graduates, only 13,000 enroll in US colleges.⁶²⁸ Of this 13,000, an average of fewer than two percent actually complete a degree.⁶²⁹ In other words, the “crisis” phase of this social drama is not limited to notions of US sovereignty and the rhetorical tropes that call for a building of a wall between the US and Mexico. This crisis is also one of personal dimensions, namely for the undocumented youths who are forced to navigate an educational system in which they are disenfranchised. The low rates of graduation among undocumented students are due to several factors that have been well documented by those who study the lives of undocumented youth. Researchers such as William Perez, Iliana G. Perez, and Elżbieta M. Goździak have argued that these factors are rooted in economics, family and social relations, as well as structural aspects of the education system itself. I will address several of these factors here.

Among the economic challenges facing undocumented students is the fact that they and their families often accrue a considerable amount of debt during the immigration process.

⁶²⁵ William Perez and Iliana Perez, “Factors that Impact the Academic Success and Civic Engagement of Undocumented College Students,” *Hidden Lives and Human Rights: Understanding the Controversies and Tragedies of Undocumented Immigration*. Volume 1: History, Theories, and Legislation, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 284.

⁶²⁶ Goździak, “Dreams Deferred,” 146.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶²⁹ Moses Chege, “Closing Remarks,” *Undocu-Graduation 2015*, hosted by the Washington Dream Coalition, El Centro de la Raza, Seattle, WA, June 20, 2015.

Because of this, many undocumented students face pressure to contribute to either the family income, or remittances to their country of origin.⁶³⁰ Additionally, with parents often working more than one low-wage job to make ends meet, parental engagement with the students' education can vary widely. This engagement can especially vary due to the economic class the migrants occupied in their home country.⁶³¹ Some undocumented youth, on the other hand, have no parental support within the US. Having come here with the primary intention of working, many attempting to balance high school and work so they might send remittances back to their families in their country of origin. Others, sadly, have no immediate family either here or in their country of origin, and are thus faced to deal with work, high school, and immigration debt on their own.⁶³² As I argued in the introduction, this system of transnational remittances colludes with other social and economic factors (namely the US economy's reliance on this semi-permanent, foreign "underclass" with limited rights) that constitute undocumentedness as a form of internal colonialism.⁶³³ Economic factors notwithstanding, undocumented students also often face challenges due to underfunded public schools as well as the prejudices of faculty and staff who either overlook them due to racial stereotypes, or flatly refuse to help them because they

⁶³⁰ Goździak, "Dreams Deferred," According to Goździak, "the sending of remittances by a family is highly correlated with children not completing high school," (169).

⁶³¹ Ibid., 152. In her research, Goździak finds that unauthorized immigrants who occupied a middle-class status in their country of origin were more likely to engage in their children's education in the US than immigrants from working-class or rural backgrounds.

⁶³² Carcamo, Cindy, "Nearly 1 in 4 students at this L.A. high school migrated from Central America — many without their parents," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2016, accessed July 28, 2016. In her study of undocumented high school students in Los Angeles (just a handful of the more than 100,000 undocumented minors who have arrived in the last five years) Carcamo interviewed one Guatemalan orphan who is now \$10,000 in debt for his journey to the US.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-belmont-high-school-20160710-snap-story.html?lat>

⁶³³ See Introduction, pages 8-23.

personally consider them illegal.⁶³⁴ For these, and other reasons, some researchers have concluded that undocumented students are often “reluctant to develop close personal relationships with others for fear of their undocumented status being discovered,”⁶³⁵ or that they tend to “self-segregate”⁶³⁶ by socializing only with other Latina/os and/or Spanish-speaking youth, factors that collude to result in poor academic achievement.

Yet despite these challenges, many undocumented students strive to do well and stay in school, which is often viewed as a safer (albeit temporary) place than the work force. And while *Plyler v. Doe* does allow undocumented students free access to public K-12 education, it neither protects them, nor their family members, from deportation. In fact, as much current research has shown, upon finishing high school and entering the work force where they are suddenly susceptible to labor exploitation, undocumented students exit the “relatively safe legal environment [that public school] affords,”⁶³⁷ and are suddenly moved into a “new, disenfranchised underclass.”⁶³⁸ Harvard sociologist Robert G. Gonzales has identified this rude awakening for undocumented graduates as a process of “learning to be illegal.”⁶³⁹ Upon being “channeled into the bottom end of the labor market,” undocumented students must begin to navigate the world of cash-paying jobs in the informal economy, fake documents, and wage theft, as well as the numerable challenges that any young person faces while trying to start out on

⁶³⁴ Roberto G. Gonzales, “Learning to Be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood,” *American Sociological Review* 76.4 (2011), 603; Perez and Perez, “Factors that Impact Academic Success, 285; Goździak, “Dreams Deferred,” 153.

⁶³⁵ Perez and Perez, “Factors that Impact Academic Success,” 287.

⁶³⁶ Goździak, “Dreams Deferred,” 154.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶³⁸ Gonzales, “Learning to Be Illegal.”

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.* Gonzales argues that upon graduation, “[u]ndocumented children move from protected to unprotected, from inclusion to exclusion, from de facto legal to illegal. In the process, they must *learn to be illegal*, a transformation that involves the almost complete retooling of daily routines, survival skills, aspirations, and social patterns,” (602).

their own, only without the privileged status that allows them to do such things as open a bank account, apply for most jobs, or get a driver's license.⁶⁴⁰ Once faced with the realities of undocumented life beyond high school, many students, according to urban sociologist Walter J. Nicholls, "resign themselves to the impossibility of having a 'normal' American life and seek to make the most of their lives in the margins of the inhospitable country."⁶⁴¹ I argue, however, the *Undocu-Graduation* challenges this very idea of resignation in an openly (and public) performative act. As will be evinced in this chapter's third section, which centers on goals of the undocumented "performers" and the aesthetics of the ceremony itself, the *Undocu-Graduation* not only highlights the *possibility* of having a normal life, but publicly shows that the graduates *already* exist as "normal" and "American" subjects.

In the first years of this century, and in direct response to the crisis of the social drama in which undocumented students are embroiled, a major political movement arose. As the undocumented children who had been brought here in the 1990s came of high school and college age, many considering themselves "American" due to both their schooling and cultural upbringing in the US, they began to organize and demand redress of the ultimately limiting reach of Plyler v. Doe. These young people not only wished to seek higher education, a virtual impossibility for most of them, but also sought adjustment to their undocumented status, a result primarily of the actions of others, namely their parents. Of interest to this study, the undocumented youth movement of the early 2000s was a performative act through and through. All over the US undocumented youths began "coming out" with their status as undocumented, something that previous generations had not been able to do. Marches, political rallies, fasts, sit-

⁶⁴⁰ Nicholls, *DREAMers*, 3.

⁶⁴¹ Nicholls, *DREAMers*, 4.

ins, and vigils that sought to raise awareness regarding undocumented youth occurred nationwide.⁶⁴² Undocumented students organized local groups, produced and presented at academic and immigration conferences, and went as far staging acts of civil disobedience in the offices of the US Senators John McCain (R-Arizona) and Harry Reid (D-Nevada), sometimes dressed in their high school graduation caps and gowns.⁶⁴³ These performative, embodied, costumed efforts ultimately led to the bipartisan-introduced Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act in the US Senate in 2001, and its four subsequent versions through 2011. The proposed legislation, which sought to grant access to higher education to undocumented high school graduates, would also allow for the attainment of permanent residency status if several conditions were met. Among the criteria for eligibility were continual residency in the US for the five years prior to the law's passage, unauthorized entrance into the US at fifteen years of age or younger, and a lack of a criminal record and the possession of "good

⁶⁴² S.I.N. Collective, "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California Without Shame . . . SIN verguenza!" *Educational Foundations* 21 (1-2): 71-90. The S.I.N. Collective is typical example of organized undocumented student activism. Formed in 2006 amidst the controversy over US House Bill 4437, which would restrict the rights of undocumented immigrants, the S.I.N. Collective (UC Santa Cruz) prepared and toured a Power Point presentation titled "Diminished Human Rights To Education: An Educational Forum on Policies & Laws Impacting Immigrant Students" to undocumented youth across California. À la IDEPSCA and Casa Latina (see Chapters One and Two), the S.I.N. Collective's "consciousness-raising" methodology was that of Paulo Freire's popular education; See also Perez and Perez, "Factors that Impact Academic Success," (289).

⁶⁴³ Julia Preston, "Illegal Immigrant Students Protest at McCain Office," *New York Times*, May 17, 2010, accessed August 8, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/us/18dream.html? r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/us/18dream.html? r=0;); "United We Dream Leaders Arrested Outside of Sen. Harry Reid's Office, Demand He and Democratic Leaders Call on President to Go Big Now," United We Dream, September 9, 2014, accessed August 8, 2016. <http://unitedwedream.org/press-releases/united-dream-leaders-arrested-outside-sen-harry-reids-office-demand-democratic-leaders-call-president-go-big-now/>

moral character.”⁶⁴⁴ Despite a never-before-seen surge in activism from undocumented youth and immigrant rights groups, as well as bipartisan support in Congress, the DREAM Act, initially proposed in 2001, has never become law. Reintroduced into Congress four times between 2007 and 2009, with minor changes, it failed to pass every time.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century politicians and lawmakers at both the national and state level, sensing that Congress might never pass any version of the DREAM Act, began to take matters into their own hands. Once again, pushed into action by undocumented youth activists, many states began passing their own versions of the DREAM Act, as well as additional bills designed to increase accessibility to higher education for undocumented youth. In Washington State, for instance, the passage of House Bill 1079 (2003) made it possible for undocumented students to pay in-state-tuition for the first time, as opposed to the much higher rates paid by non-residents or international students.⁶⁴⁵ Further legislation that grants undocumented students even greater access to higher education in Washington State came more recently, in 2014, with the passage of the Realizing Educational Access; changing Lives (REAL) Hope Act, which made it possible for undocumented students to apply for state-funded financial aid, something they are unable to do through the federal student financial aid program FAFSA.⁶⁴⁶ As of this writing, seventeen other states in the US have passed similar legislation.⁶⁴⁷ Comments

⁶⁴⁴ Truax, Eileen, *Dreamers: An Immigrant Generation's Fight for Their American Dream*, (Boston: Beacon, 2015), 211.

⁶⁴⁵ “About HB 1079,” Latino/a Educational Achievement Project, 2013, accessed August 8, 2016. <http://www.leapwa.org/>

⁶⁴⁶ “SB6523 – The Real Hope Act,” *Real Hope WA*, 2014, accessed July 28, 2016. <http://realhopewa.org>.

⁶⁴⁷ States with similar “DREAM” Acts and in-state-tuition laws include California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Maryland, Connecticut, Colorado, Oregon, Minnesota, and New Jersey; See Perez and Perez, “Factors that Impact Academic Success,” 285. The three states that prohibit undocumented students from accessing certain institutions of higher education are Georgia,

made by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee at the time of the bill's passage reflect the same spirit as *Plyler v. Doe*: that protecting the rights of immigrant children and their place in US society as they transition into adulthood is paramount to meaningful immigration reform. Surrounded by student activists from across the state, some of whom would later stage the *Undocu-Graduation*,⁶⁴⁸ Inslee reaffirmed the law's rootedness in American senses of justice, saying "The young people who are here today are the ones who ultimately made this happen [. . .]. Looking into their eyes, so full of ambition and eagerness and energy, I thought, 'How can we possibly say no to these young people?'"⁶⁴⁹ Additionally, my interviews with the undocumented graduates revealed that the *Undocu-Graduation* itself was a performance specifically designed to demonstrate to the legislators that had passed the REAL Hope Act that the laws were having real impact. As related to me by Ray Corona, founding member of the Washington State DREAM Act Coalition, and producer of the *Undocu-Graduation*, the ceremony was "a symbolic event" in the sense that they "invit[ed] elected officials to *see* what the outcomes have been of such policies."⁶⁵⁰

But it is not only politicians at the state-level that attempted to make aspects of the failed DREAM Act law without the approval of Congress. Most recently (in 2012 and 2014), former President Barack Obama took it upon himself to initiate immigration reform for undocumented

Alabama, and South Carolina; See Matt Vasilogambros, "The Folly of Under-Educating the Undocumented," *The Atlantic*, March 16, 2016, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-folly-of-under-educating-the-undocumented/473877/>

⁶⁴⁸ Both Ray Corona and Alejandra Perez who produced the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* attended the event with Governor Inslee.

⁶⁴⁹ Venice Buhain, "DREAM Act becomes law in Washington," *The Capitol Record*, February 26, 2014, accessed July 26, 2016. <http://www.capitolrecord.org/2014/02/dream-act-becomes-law-in-washington-as-real-hope-act/>

⁶⁵⁰ Corona, conversation, 2016.

youth and their families. Obama's executive actions Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA - 2012) and the equally, if not more controversial, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA - 2014), attempted to sidestep the gridlock in Congress over immigration reform and to offer undocumented youth deportation relief if they meet requirements similar to the proposed DREAM Act. Framed initially by Obama as an economic, national security, and human rights argument,⁶⁵¹ the DACA program allows undocumented youth deportation relief if they meet a number of strict requirements. An undocumented immigrant may apply for DACA if they:

1. Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012; [the date of the executive action]
2. Came to the United States before reaching [their] 16th birthday;
3. Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making the request for consideration of deferred action;
5. Entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, or the immigrant's lawful immigration status expired as of June 15, 2012;

⁶⁵¹ "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals," Department of Homeland Security, July 17, 2015, accessed August 5, 2016. "Over the past three years, this [Obama] Administration has undertaken an unprecedented effort to transform the immigration enforcement system into one that focuses on public safety, border security and the integrity of the immigration system. As the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to focus its enforcement resources on the removal of individuals who pose a danger to national security or a risk to public safety, including individuals convicted of crimes with particular emphasis on violent criminals, felons, and repeat offenders, DHS will exercise prosecutorial discretion as appropriate to ensure that enforcement resources are not expended on low priority cases, such as individuals who came to the United States as children and meet other key guidelines." According to the DHS, DACA does "not provide lawful status."

6. Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
7. Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.⁶⁵²

Reveiled by its opponents as “executive amnesty,”⁶⁵³ Obama’s statement upon announcing the action aligned with most scholarship and/or ethnographic studies of undocumented youth: that such individuals are not only vital contributors to our economy and law abiding persons, but also are already “de facto Americans.”⁶⁵⁴ According to Obama at the time of the executive action:

It makes no sense to expel talented young people, who, for all intents and purposes, are Americans – they’ve been raised as Americans; understand themselves to be part of this country – to expel these young people who want to

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Despite the fact that a successful DACA application merely provides the immigrant with a temporary work permit and deferred deportation action for two years (subject to renewal), DACA opponents point out what they call the “gimmicks” imbedded in the executive action that (in certain cases) can allow for the immigrant to adjust their immigration status. One such “gimmick” is the ability for an undocumented youth to apply for “advanced parole” (the ability to leave and return to the US for educational, emergency, or humanitarian reasons). Upon reentry to the US, the immigrant may be able to apply to adjust their immigration status to permanent resident if they otherwise qualify for an existing visa category. Caroline May, “DACA Gimmick: Nearly 3,000 Illegal Immigrants on Track for Permanent Amnesty,” *Breitbart News*, August 3, 2016, accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/08/03/daca-gimmick-nearly-3000-illegal-immigrants-track-permanent-amnesty/>; See also David French, “The Supreme Court Challenge to Executive Amnesty,” *The National Review*, April 5, 2016, accessed September 20, 2016. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/433643/immigration-executive-amnesty-challenged-supreme-court>

⁶⁵⁴ William Perez, *We ARE Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), xi-xxxiv; see also Truax, *DREAMERS*, 1-6; Nicholls, *The DREAMers*, 168-181.

staff our labs, or start new businesses, or defend our country simply because of the actions of their parents – or because of the inaction of politicians [. . .]. And I believe that [DAPA is] the right thing to do because I’ve been with groups of young people who work so hard and speak with so much heart about what’s best in America, even though I knew some of them must have lived under the fear of deportation [. . .] [W]e are a better nation than one that expels innocent young kids.⁶⁵⁵

A direct echo of Obama’s statement is found in the reflection of one undocumented mother who came to see her son graduate at the second annual *Undocu-Graduation* in 2016. The mother, who came to Washington State from Arizona after conditions worsened there for undocumented immigrants after the 2010 passage of strict anti-immigration legislation (Arizona State Bill 1070), described her son to me:

[My son] already feels that he is part of this country. *He is part of this country already* because he came here as a baby [. . .] He knows nothing of Mexico. For him, he is completely American. The only thing that says he is Mexican is his birth certificate. To him, he is an American citizen, because he does everything that a citizen would do: he respects the law, respects others, does volunteer work, goes to school, respects the police. He doesn’t drive because he doesn’t have a license. *He is a citizen.*⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on Immigration,” *The White House*, June 15, 2012, accessed August 9, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>.

⁶⁵⁶ [Spanish Original]: “*Pero él ya se siente parte de este país. Él ya es parte de este país porque llegó siendo un bebé aquí [. . .] Él no sabe nada de México. Para él, él es completamente Americano. Lo único que dice que es Mexicano es su acta de nacimiento. Para él, él es un “American Citizen,” porque hace todo lo que un citizen: respeta las leyes, respeta a los demás,*

Her graduating son, like many of the undocumented youth involved in the *Undocu-Graduation* and the WDC, qualified for (and had received temporary deportation relief) through DACA.

And while the DACA program, as of this writing, is still in effect, Obama's 2014 executive action DAPA, which offers deportation relief for certain undocumented immigrants who have US citizen children who were born in the US, has been suspended due to a federal court order. Additionally, the fate of DAPA, and thus many of the parents of the undocumented teens I interviewed for this study, hangs in the balance due to the 2016 tie decision (4 to 4)⁶⁵⁷ of the US Supreme Court to either uphold or rescind the federal court order.⁶⁵⁸

And while both DAPA and DACA have yet to be resolved, the status of both programs has become more precarious than ever with the new presidential administration of Donald Trump. The outsider Republican, whose campaign for the White House was characterized, in part, by the open vilification, reductive homogenization, and rhetorical criminalization of undocumented immigrants, has yet to take action on either program. And while Trump has publicly stated recently that "DACA is a very, very difficult subject for [him]" because any changes will affect "these incredible kids," it may prove politically impossible for him to back

ayuda voluntaria, así se hace la escuela, respeta los policías. No maneja porque no tiene licencia. Él es un ciudadano," (Unnamed Mother/Spectator #1 of *Undocu-Graduation 2016*, conversation with the author, June 25, 2016).

⁶⁵⁷ At the time of the second annual *Undocu-Graduation 2016*, the US Supreme Court consisted of only eight justices. Following the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia on February 13, 2016, the Republican-controlled US Senate (Under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell) had refused to hold hearings on President Obama's Supreme Court Nominee Chief Judge Merrick Garland. Thus, the usual nine-member court had been reduced to eight. Notably, since the election of Donald Trump, Congress has approved a ninth justice, Neil M. Gorsuch, recently of the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, CO.

⁶⁵⁸ Adam Liptak and Michael D. Shear, "Supreme Court Tie Blocks Obama Immigration Plan," *New York Times*, June 23, 2016, accessed July 28, 2016; Notably, the Washington Dream Coalition staged its second annual *Undocu-Graduation (2016)* just two days after the Supreme Court's tie decision. This led to a decidedly more oppositional tone in rhetoric in the 2016 ceremony.

away from his divisive campaign promises of deporting all eleven million undocumented immigrants in the US.⁶⁵⁹ Regardless of the president's public statements, however, the executive actions he has signed since taking office make it clear to undocumented communities in general that the new administration is pushing aggressively on new detentions and deportations.⁶⁶⁰ Notably, recent actions by ICE (the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement) have resulted in the arrest of undocumented immigrants who are supposedly protected by their DACA status. Notably, one of these arrests took place in Seattle, the home city for the Washington Dream Coalition.⁶⁶¹

These three decades-worth of legislative decisions aimed at addressing issues regarding undocumented youth is clearly mappable as the first three phases of social drama vis-à-vis Turner: breach, crisis, redressive mechanism. What remains to be seen, however, is the fourth stage, either reintegration of "the disturbed social group," or the recognition of irreparable breach. In other words, the US's relationship to its undocumented youth population remains currently (and dramatically) unsettled, with lawmakers, pro and anti-immigrant activists, and the members of undocumented communities embroiled a social reality few seem able to "fix." And while the end results of this greater social drama remain to be seen, what my research on the *Undocu-Graduation* clearly shows is that its producer/participants approached the staging of their commencement ritual with hopeful intentions. For the participants I interviewed, their goals

⁶⁵⁹ Brian Bennett and Michael A. Memoli, "The White House has found ways to end protection for 'Dreamers' while shielding Trump from blowback," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 16, 2017, accessed March 2, 2017.

⁶⁶⁰ Philip Rucker, "Trump touts recent immigration raids, calls them a 'military operation'" *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2017, accessed March 1, 2017.

⁶⁶¹ Mike Carter, "Seattle 'Dreamer' sues over his detention under Trump's immigration actions," *The Seattle Times*, February 14, 2017, accessed March 2, 2017. See also Jamiel Lynch, "DREAMer speaks out on immigration, gets arrested by ICE," *CNN*, March 2, 2017, accessed March 2, 2017.

were clearly situated toward transformation, celebration, and the positive representation of undocumented students. The various reasons why the Washington Dream Act produced the ceremony are outlined in this chapter's next section.

SECTION THREE: THE GOALS, RESULTS, AND REFLECTIONS OF THE UNDOCUGRADUATION.

I think we're really trying to have both the participants and also the attendees experience something very unique and specific, a celebration, but also a passive message directed specifically towards elected officials: That whatever you do in your position as an elected official and whatever laws are being passed, this is how they affect these people, and this is *who these people are*. There's the graduates, highlighting the graduates. But there are also many other families that attend the event. So, this is who undocumented folks are. And it's about having that passive, indirect, non-confrontational conversation about who the laws are affecting.

Ray Corona,
Undocu-Graduation Coordinator,
Director, Washington DREAM Coalition⁶⁶²

The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations: a freedom to choose between various cultural orientations, and, above all, *the freedom to produce, criticize, change, and exchange culture and society*.

Anibal Quijano,
"Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality"⁶⁶³

⁶⁶² In addition to being the Director of the Washington Dream Coalition, Ray Corona, an undocumented graduate of the University of Washington, Bothell (who was brought to the US by his parents at the age of nine) was also appointed as the first undocumented immigrant commissioner to the Seattle City Council. On December 10, 2015 Corona was appointed to the City of Seattle's LGBT Commission, a body that reports directly to the city council concerning issues regarding the LGBT community. Corona, in his role on the commission has also dealt with issues regarding Seattle's homeless population, a considerable percentage of which is LGBT; "My expertise is not necessarily working with the homeless population, but rather it's doing community outreach, analyzing policy, and seeing its effects in specific communities. And being an undocumented person, seeing how laws that are being proposed affect us, or affect me directly. That's the skill set I'm bringing to the commission," (Corona, conversation, 2016).

⁶⁶³ Quijano, Anibal, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21.2-3 (2007), 178 [emphasis added].

It is hopefully clear at this point in this study that undocumented immigrants are not merely “colonial subjects” or passive victims in the US. On the contrary, they are active producers of culture. One goal of this study, of course, has been to investigate the precise conditions in which certain undocumented communities are truly able to produce culture, or, in the words of Anibal Quijano, have “the freedom” to do so.⁶⁶⁴ Notions of “freedom,” of course, suggest a high level of agency, one not necessarily granted to undocumented immigrants in the US. This chapter, in examining a public ceremony produced solely by undocumented young adults who were largely raised in the US, engages with individuals who (in some ways) experience a different level of agency than the undocumented immigrants from the previous chapters.⁶⁶⁵ For instance, in regards to undocumented immigrants who came to the US as young children, sociologist Walter J. Nicholls sees a particular “niche opening” from within which these “de facto Americans” can successfully craft a public voice, and thus contribute to the culture at large.⁶⁶⁶ Somewhat dissimilar to the undocumented immigrants who entered the US on their own volition (regarded as “criminals” by many), undocumented youth can (at times) position themselves as innocent victims whose quest for equality and/or deportation relief can appeal to “American” notions of “equality, fairness and justice.”⁶⁶⁷ This sense of justice toward

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁶⁵ Partly due to their current ability to apply for deportation relief through the DACA program, which—if they can meet the strict criteria—earns them a temporary US work permit, the individuals I interviewed tend to be somewhat open about their immigration status. “Undocumented and Unafraid” is a motto often employed by the undocumented youth movement, and one surely found in the rhetoric of the *Undocu-Graduation* and its producers. Additionally, unlike some of the undocumented individuals interviewed in the previous chapters, who often work in the informal (and precarious) economy of day labor, the members of the WDC I interviewed hold more official positions of employment. Such positions include: Emergency Medical Technician, Contract Lobbyist, and Internships with both the Service Employees International Union and the state government in Olympia, Washington.

⁶⁶⁶ Nicholls, *The DREAMers*, 170.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 171.

innocent young people (as this chapter's previous section has shown), runs through much of the rhetoric surrounding the legislative decisions in the US in respect to undocumented youth, from *Plyler v. Doe* to DACA.

Critical to this study is the fact that this niche opening described by Nicholls is constituted by several extremely performative factors. According to Nicholls, undocumented youth raised in the US are, at times, able to “demonstrate their humanity” and national identification in a “disciplined manner,” and are also able to “craft representations” that “cleanse the group of the polluting stigmas [commonly] attributed to undocumented immigrants.”⁶⁶⁸ These kinds of “believable representations,” Nicholls argues, are less possible for both recent immigrants and those who emigrated to the US well into adulthood, for they are not as fluidly able to wield the outward codes attributed to US culture.⁶⁶⁹ Undocumented youth raised in the US, however, especially those who came to the US prior to the age 14, experience a cultural identity-formation more similar to their US citizen counterparts, and are thus able to more successfully navigate the public sphere and its institutions, such as high school.⁶⁷⁰ Ultimately, Nicholls argues, the performative characteristics of the undocumented youth movement in the US have been paramount to their goals of social change:

If [the undocumented youth movement] was about gaining the legal right to stay in the country, it was now also about gaining recognition for themselves as political equals who could speak for themselves. Being able to speak in the public

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 169, 14, 11, 12.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷⁰ Goździak, “Dreams Deferred,” 156. Goździak reports that undocumented immigrant youth have a 72% chance of graduating high school if they arrived in the US under the age of fourteen. This is substantially higher than the national average of a 60% graduation rate for undocumented youth. All eleven of the students I interviewed for this study, on five different occasions, were brought to the US prior to the age thirteen.

sphere was viewed as a precondition of equality, so *the act of representing became not simply a means to an end [. . .] but rather an end in its own right.*⁶⁷¹

If Nicholls is correct in his assessment of the undocumented youth movement, that their message is most effective when it is crafted as a disciplined public “act” of representation that generates empathy evoked by notions of justice, I contend that the *Undocu-Graduation* fits precisely within this paradigm. Moreover, I would add to Nicholls criteria in that the *Undocu-Graduation* was not only a disciplined act, but a *dignified ritual*, relying on the common solemnity and formal tone of an annual educational commencement. It was, in other words, a ritual of citizenship (and self-legitimation) for an otherwise vilified population. Key to the idea of this public ceremony being an act of dignification and citizenship is the consideration on the part of the WDC of who was in the audience. Significantly, the *Undocu-Graduation* enjoyed the highest-profile audience members of any of the performances examined in this study, namely elected officials from the Washington State government.⁶⁷²

A “passive” statement for a high-powered audience

A central goal of the WDC was to have state lawmakers in the live audience. Although legislative and executive decisions such as The Real Hope and DACA were pushed primarily (and publicly) by the activism of the undocumented youth movement, those in elected positions were ultimately responsible for the passage of such laws. Accordingly, the WDC saw fit to symbolically “bridge together” undocumented students, their families, and the lawmakers who

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., [emphasis added], 17.

⁶⁷² The political officials in attendance at the *Undocu-Graduation 2015* were four in all: WA State Representative Zack Hudgins, Laura Espinoza (representing WA State Senator Barbara Bailey, WA State Senator Bob Hasegawa, and (then) WA State Senator Pramila Jayapal. Notably, Jayapal’s successful run for US Congress in 2017 made her the first Indian-American woman to serve in the US House of Representatives.

were influential in passing the legislation that helps facilitate education for undocumented youth in Washington State.⁶⁷³ In this way, the *Undocu-Graduation* was not only a celebration for the graduate/activists and their community, but a public act of representation that allowed the legislators to “see” that the laws they had been instrumental in passing were having a material effect. Nearly all the undocumented youth I spoke to, whether they were graduates walking at the ceremony or not, used performance-infused language that reflected a desire for public visibility when describing the ceremony’s significance.⁶⁷⁴ According to the WDC’s Director Ray Corona, having elected officials in the audience was central to the overall message of the performance. In Corona’s words:

⁶⁷³ Ray Corona related to me his moment of inspiration when he conceived of the *Undocu-Graduation*: “Honestly, I was just at the gym one time . . . no, I was at a bar . . . I guess the idea just came to me: just really wanting to celebrate anything related to undocumented students. Most of what we hear in regard to undocumented people as a whole, are like, you know, negative stereotypes, or just negative stuff about the community . . . we wanted to highlight the accomplishments of not only the students but also highlighting the fact that there is still this issue of undocumented folks, right? So for the graduation we opened it up. The intent was to get the community here in addition to elected officials in our state. For the purpose of showing that it’s not just about students, but it’s about the whole family, right? That was the whole purpose behind the [*Undocu-Graduation*]: to celebrate and to bring community together, in addition to decision makers within our state, to try to connect and bridge everybody together” (Ray Corona, conversation with the author, June 22, 2015).

⁶⁷⁴ Statements about “showing,” being “seen,” and being “recognized” pervade the student testimonies I recorded. The following two examples (recorded just after the ceremony) typify the overall sentiment that public visibility was key to the participants’ understanding of the event: “I feel [the *Undocu-Graduation*] is important so other undocumented students are also motivated to finish high school and pursue higher education. And I think because it’s better for these events to be open instead of it being hush hush. I think it’s good for people to know that undocumented students exist and that they’re going through the school system and that they’re making it, and they’re graduating,” (Alessandra Robatty Llerena, conversation with the author, June 20, 2015); “I feel like [the *Undocu-Graduation*] is important because we have to celebrate those who have graduated from high school or college because not a lot of us do, not a lot of us make it out. I feel like it’s a huge success, for both us and our families. We are paving the way for them and we are creating something that is inspiring to them. So, I feel that it’s really important to be here and show that you did it, so that other people can do it,” (Yuriana Garcia Tellez, conversation with the author, June 20, 2015).

Yes, it's a celebration of undocumented students to highlight their accomplishments in terms of education. But at the same time, we purposefully invited elected officials because we know that (one), the in-state tuition bill allows undocumented students to go to colleges and universities in our state, and (two), they [also] have the ability to apply for state financial aid. The graduation is a symbolic event in the sense that we are inviting elected officials to see what the outcomes of such policies have been . . . It's a way for us to say, again, *here's the proof* that what lobbyists and community organizations lobbied for – [legislation that is] seen as really controversial in the state legislature – is *actually working*.⁶⁷⁵

This is not to say, however, that all of the graduates who walked at the ceremony had benefitted significantly from any of the pro-undocumented student legislation in the US. Considering that the inaugural graduation took place in June of 2015 and that DACA and the REAL Hope Act had only been in effect for three and one years, respectively, several the graduates (especially those graduating from higher education), had made it through most of their public education with little or no help from these initiatives. Nevertheless, whether it was facing the burden of having to garner a full-ride scholarship to attend college, or dealing with the constant fear of deportation, the 2015 graduates had managed to succeed. The *Undocu-Graduation* marked that pivotal moment when the undocumented youth of the WDC were eager to publicly show their successes in lieu of the systematic barriers against them. Moses Chege, the undocumented student who served as co-Master of Ceremonies for the *Undocu-Graduation*, reiterated to me the coalition's

⁶⁷⁵ Corona, conversation, 2015.

desire to celebrate the students who had not necessarily benefitted from the legislation, in addition to celebrating the passage of the legislation itself.

The significance of the graduation was that it was one year since [the REAL Hope Act] was passed. It's also been one year since [undocumented] students have been eligible for funding through that bill. I think [Washington State has] something like one thousand undocumented students now finishing their first year of college. And so many people point to that as a huge success. But also, in contrast to that fact, the people who were graduating [at the *Undocu-Graduation*] *were never eligible for that funding*. When they started college, it was a very dark time for immigrant youth. They still could be deported, or still *were* being deported, or their families . . . So [the graduation] serves as contrast to what some of the folks didn't live through. But [those other people] were there. And some of the elected officials who had sponsored that recent legislation – *to see what these students had to go through to get there*. I thought it was great. And I was super excited about that. And the way we kept the narrative to be, “Yeah, these are exceptional students, but don't think that's the rule *at all*.”⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁶ Moses Chege, conversation with the author, June 22, 2015. It's worth noting that Chege is the only non-Latino undocumented immigrant interviewed for this study. Originally from Nairobi Kenya, Chege was brought to the US by his parents at the age of six. And while the opportunity did not arise during this study to engage with non-Latina/o undocumented communities and performance, members of the WDC related to me that even their own outreach efforts toward non-Latina/o undocumented students often come up short. One interviewee told me: “I think that you're trying to ask us if we made [the *Undocu-Graduation*] specifically targeting the Latino population that is undocumented, and we, honestly as the WDC, we try to reach out to other communities that are non-Latino, because we understand that not all of us are Latino, like obviously. And it just happens that we don't have as much communication with them that we all wish we did. Aside from Moses and a few other ones, I don't know other individuals who are non-Latino and undocumented. And you didn't have to be Latino to register for [the *Undocu-Graduation*]. You could have been API [Asian Pacific Islander]. You would have been able to

Chege's statement speaks to several factors that I see as critical to the event as a uniquely ritualistic performance. For one, the timing of the one-year anniversary of the passage of the REAL Hope act coincided with the June season of graduations in general, a time of cyclical celebration that ritualizes, for many families, a major milestone in the life of their young people. In fact, many of the graduates had already walked at their "other" institutional graduations, be it high school, community college, or the university. Notably, however, many did so without a sense of personal transformation.⁶⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the synchronicity between the law's passage and graduation season was exploited by the WDC to, in effect, double-down on what exactly was being celebrated: both the law and the students. This intertwining of what was being celebrated goes beyond the average commencement, in which the focus is primarily on the students and rarely, if at all, on any outside factor such as a specific piece of legislation. The ceremony was thus imbued with a deeper, extra-institutional meaning. Another key notion here is how the WDC intended the ceremony to be received by undocumented students who *have yet to graduate*. Those students in the audience (some of them younger siblings to the graduates who may be able to take more advantage of the recent changes in legislation) become active witnesses to a previous generation of undocumented students who have succeeded, in most cases, against "severe odds."⁶⁷⁸ This kind of public witnessing by a younger generation is often innate to the

participate, but we just don't have those connections. Or, we don't have those connections to the extent that we wish we could." (Guillermo Mogollan, conversation with the author, June 22, 2015).

⁶⁷⁷ This lack of transformational feeling is addressed later in this chapter as one of the main reasons the WDC staged the *Undocu-Graduation*.

⁶⁷⁸ The overcoming of the obstacles that undocumented students face was also one of the major sentiments that the graduates wanted to express. One WDC core member and 2015 "Undocu-grad" from South Seattle College reflected about the relationship between the event and the overcoming of obstacles that undocumented students face: "I think that, as undocumented students, we need to be recognized because it's such a big event for undocumented students to

communal context of ritual itself, which (according to performance scholar Jan Cohen-Cruz who draws multiple correlations between ritual and theatrical performance), often provides an “emotional and intellectual linkage between our individual lives [. . .] and those who will come after.”⁶⁷⁹ Ritual’s power to inspire a younger generation was not lost on the producers of the *Undocu-Graduation*, and many of the testimonies reflect a desire not only to “represent” for their community of peers, but also to “empower” undocumented students who may be struggling in their own education.⁶⁸⁰ Lastly here, Chege openly states that the event’s producers were particularly concentrated on creating and controlling a “narrative,” an aesthetic quality found in both ritual and (especially) theater. The narrative in this case included the invocation at the end of the ceremony of the existence of the undocumented youth who were *not* at the graduation: not necessarily those absent who had *yet* to graduate, but those who *never will*.⁶⁸¹ Chege pointedly

graduate. There are so many odds against us, and, you know, graduating is like a celebration of overcoming those odds,” (Diego Cortes, conversation with the author, June 20, 2015).

⁶⁷⁹ See Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 81-104. As opposed to more commercial (and subsequently hierarchical) theater, Cohen-Cruz sees many ritualistic aspects in community-based theater. Among these are inclusivity, the purpose to strengthen the collective, the serving of a spiritual function, a higher emphasis on personal or political change than on aesthetics, and “structured processes capable of taking people through real changes,” (101).

⁶⁸⁰ Speaking of her younger brother Mario, who was one of three high school graduates walking at the *Undocu-Graduation*, WDC member Karen Fierro spoke of the kind of personal empowerment that (she hoped) the ceremony would convey: “[Mario graduated from] Sumner, which is also the High School that I graduated from. It’s a very white school. Throughout his whole experience [Mario] didn’t really recognize himself as an undocumented student, so I thought it was very important for him to attend [the *Undocu-Graduation*]. I really wanted to celebrate the fact that it’s a huge obstacle that you’ve overcome. It’s so much bigger than what a lot of the students you graduated with—from the high school that you went to—have done. And I really wanted him to see that, because he did have a harder time getting through high school. He almost didn’t make it. So just making sure that he recognizes that, you know, you had all of this against you, and you still made it. You’re still an example for other people who are still in that situation. So, I really wanted him to be there and to see that and, to hopefully, find empowerment in that.” (Karen Fierro, conversation with the author, June 22, 2015).

⁶⁸¹ Notably, my research for this chapter deals strictly with undocumented students who have had *success* in education, for they have all (at least) graduated from high school. My research for this chapter centered specifically on the WDC and the *Undocu-Graduation* as a performative

reminded the audience of the troubling statistics regarding undocumented youth and graduation rates. His evocation, delivered at the end of the ceremony, was a further call to the lawmakers in the audience to carry on the “fight” for education reform and deportation relief.⁶⁸²

It was not, however, merely that elected officials were in the audience as passive witness to the ceremony. At the top of the event each lawmaker was called out by name and asked to stand and be recognized. Additionally, a round of applause for each of these political “champions” was called for by Chege as each lawmaker rose to their feet.⁶⁸³ The smiling politicians each stood briefly, waving to the crowd, and often applauding back to the graduates as if to say “the real focus is on your achievements, not on me.” Thus, the presence of these powerful individuals is an embodied aspect of the performance itself, one that not only

ceremony. Unfortunately, this pairs my study with much of the sociological research conducted on undocumented youth, that, due to the difficulties of recruiting research participants from this highly vulnerable population, remains extremely limited. Researchers William Perez and Iliana Perez note that “[a]lthough they account for the vast majority of undocumented young adults, [undocumented youth that neither graduated from high school nor pursued higher education] remain invisible because they are not academically successful.” About this population, state Perez and Perez, “we virtually know nothing.” See Perez and Perez, “Factors that Impact the Academic Success and Civic Engagement of Undocumented College Students,” 288; See also William Perez, *We ARE Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009) and Eileen Truax, *Dreamers: An Immigrant Generation's Fight for Their American Dream* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon, 2015).

⁶⁸² Chege: “Another thing to remember is that something like one in two, half of all undocumented students never finish high school across the country. Only about five percent ever make it to a college campus. And of that only one or two percent are actually able to earn college degrees. So even as we are celebrating them, we definitely want to keep in mind that even though immigrant youth have been able to win things like DACA and deportation protection and work permits, many of our families still don’t have those same protections today. *That’s a policy today*. We have great parents who are here, family members that are still in danger of deportation. That’s still a policy today, so there’s definitely a lot we need to get done, but looking out at this crowd, it looks like there’s great people who will take on that fight going forward,” (Moses Chege, “Closing Statement – *Undocu-Graduation*,” Washington Dream Coalition, El Centro de La Raza, Seattle, WA, June 20, 2015).

⁶⁸³ Moses Chege: “These are the advocates that fight every day in the legislature for immigrant youth and our families, and we want to give them our thanks here at our inaugural *Undocu-Graduation*,” (Ibid.).

“celebrates” those who have helped undocumented students achieve their goals, but also one that further legitimizes the claims of the undocumented students. For the *Undocu-Graduation* producers, the fact that the lawmakers showed up to witness the event (some of whom had been originally hesitant to support the legislation) was a “huge step forward.”⁶⁸⁴ Their presence as spectators marked not only a turning point for the WDC as a political organization, but for the promotion of visibility and justice toward undocumented students in general. This symbolic bridging together of the undocumented community and their allies is a clear manifestation of the “redressive mechanism” of public ritual in the third (crisis) phase of a social drama, vis-à-vis Turner. Moreover, I argue that it is an undeniably courageous act that implies that the fourth phase, that of reintegration for the “disturbed social group,” is not only possible, but, perhaps, near at hand.⁶⁸⁵ Interestingly, however, none of the elected officials spoke at the ceremony.⁶⁸⁶ Rather the ceremony served as a live platform for the *students* to speak, and to show the politicians the “real” people whose lives were influenced by the legislation.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ “We had elected officials [at the event], like State Senators who we never really had strong relationships with, although they know the work the [Washington DREAM] Coalition has done . . . And for those individuals to go from having the “I don’t want to do anything related to undocumented folks” sentiment in the State Legislature: we don’t want to introduce the state need grant, or any of that stuff – to these individuals actually coming to an event for undocumented graduates is *a huge step forward*. And I think it’s a huge win. Not only for us as a group, but also for the [undocumented] community to see that there are elected officials out there who care about this community, and who are beginning to understand the complexity and the contributions that this community has made to our state and the rest of the country,” (Corona, conversation, 2015).

⁶⁸⁵ Due to the uptick in anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential debate, as well as the Supreme Court’s tie-decision over DAPA, the *Undocu-Graduation 2016* incorporated a distinctly more oppositional rhetoric of its own.

⁶⁸⁶ Notably, the only “official” who spoke at the ceremony was a representative of a *foreign* government: Armando Soto of the Mexican Consulate in Seattle.

⁶⁸⁷ Interestingly, the WDC also saw the event as an opportunity to “rebrand” themselves as a political group. Having initially been formed in 2009 as the Washington DREAM Act Coalition (WDAC), the *Undocu-Graduation* gave the group the chance to officially drop the “Act” out of their title as a symbol of the passage of the “Washington DREAM Act” (The REAL Hope Act),

Similarly, Alejandra Perez, another undocumented student and key coordinator of the *Undocu-Graduation*, related to me that the ceremony was just as much about creating a performative public space in which to show the students' achievements to their political advocates as it was about celebrating the achievement itself.⁶⁸⁸ For Alejandra:

My college experience has been one hundred percent shaped by being an undocumented woman of color. All of my work has been driven by those identities that I hold [. . .]. The current education system that is in place in the US, really, is not to the advantage of undocumented folks, or people of color in general, which most undocumented folks are, either black or brown. I think that's really important to highlight [. . .]. It is important to know that 65,000 [undocumented students] graduate high school around the country [every year]. But another 65,000 *do not graduate*. This is what they don't tell you! . . . The reason to have an Undocu-Graduation is one, *we barely even make it to higher ed!* Five to ten percent of undocumented people make it to higher ed., and about one percent graduate. So, it's about that one percent, yes, but it's also about our high school students who want to pursue higher education: to give them that space to celebrate and honor their achievements [in] going against all the systematic

and thus rename themselves as the Washington DREAM Coalition. "The graduation was also an opportunity for us to rebrand ourselves and drop the "Act" out of the name. Because now, most of us have really shifted towards more long-term organizing, and more long-term change. Rather than pushing for an individual bill, especially since [The REAL Hope Act] is now law . . . And many of us had worked on that bill," (Chege, conversation, 2015).

⁶⁸⁸ Originally from Guatemala, Alejandra was brought to the US at the age of 12. Notably, DACA was announced by President Obama the day before she graduated high school. The DACA application process took her a total of nine months, a process which she completed on her own accord. Alejandra, a 2016 graduate of the University of Washington, Bothell, also sits on the National Advisory Board for United We Dream, an organization of immigrant youth working towards educational justice for immigrant students. See <http://unitedwedream.org/>

barriers and the narrative that *we're not even supposed to be in education*. You're not supposed to even make it all the way [. . .]. The *Undocu-Graduation* was really important for those reason, but also to give us space for the undocumented community, one, to come together, and two, for our allies and advocates to see the importance of creating such spaces for undocumented folks . . . to see how the narrative around education is being transformed and retold through an undocumented lens.⁶⁸⁹

As Perez' testimony illuminates, the *Undocu-Graduation* was conceived and performed not merely as a public testament to the slim percentage of undocumented students who *do* graduate, but that notions of "space," "narrative," and "retelling" were essential to the overall vision of the event. As the next section argues, the desire to tell one's own narrative (and indeed the need to create a decolonizing space apart from the ineffectualness of their prior graduations that year) was another driving factor behind the conceptualization of the event.

Anti-ritual: Into liminality.

Equally, if not more important than the presence of elected officials in the audience, the *Undocu-Graduation* constituted an efficacious rite of passage for its participants. Many of the graduates expressed their feelings that their "other" graduation was a hollow ceremony, one that did not manifest a feeling of accomplishment, let alone a personal "transformation."

Anthropologists since van Gennep generally agree that one primary function of a rite of passage (such as a graduation ceremony) is to ensure the individual's change of condition from one societal group to another (be it religious or secular), with minimal disturbance to the life of the

⁶⁸⁹ Alejandra Perez, conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.

society.⁶⁹⁰ This change in status is often publicly marked (and contained) by aesthetic ceremonies which follow a set pattern of both physical movement and spoken text, and with which both the participants and the witnesses are familiar (e.g., a marriage ceremony, a funeral, an oath of citizenship, etc.). Through the process of these codified, performed rituals, participants proceed through a “liminal” (or a “between” and/or “uncertain”) state, emerging then to the “other side,” transformed by the ritual into their new social status.⁶⁹¹ In other words, ritual and rites of passage are “performances” that *do* something. In the case of a high school and/or college graduation ceremony the student is (hypothetically) transformed through the culminating ritual into a new position in society, one marked by notions of adulthood, a learned class, and citizenship.

This feeling of passage into a new social order, however, was distinctly lacking for many members of the WDC in relation to their other institutional graduations. Notions of not feeling “a sense of community,” of “not belonging,” and experiencing a lack of “meaningfulness” pervade the statements I recorded among the undocumented graduates who had walked at their other graduations.⁶⁹² Additionally, and contrary to the sense of “realness” often attributed to rites of passage, the undocumented students to whom I spoke felt as if they were merely “acting” at their other graduations. In effect, it was not the (self-produced) *Undocu-Graduation* that was the

⁶⁹⁰ van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 1 – 13; Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 20 – 60.

⁶⁹¹ Liminality is etymologically tied to *limen*, Latin for “threshold.” Thus, in ritualistic performance, a border of some kind is crossed in (and facilitated by) the ritual; See Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 24.

⁶⁹² A representative example: “I didn’t see a lot of people at my [other] ceremony who were undocumented, or who were, I guess, “like me.” I didn’t feel like I belonged there. I didn’t feel at home. And, you know, I spent a lot of time at that institution. And, like Luís [another Undocu-Grad] I was really looking forward to the *Undocu-Graduation*, because this if my family. This is where I feel like I do belong.” (Mogollan, conversation, 2015).

“performance,” but the prior, institutional one. Diego Cortes, a 2015 graduate originally from Mexico, told me:

At the college or university, everybody’s happy and all that. But really, a lot of people don’t know that you just barely made it. You know, that it was hard and you had to do a lot of things in order to graduate. So, in a way, you feel like you’re just acting when you’re at the other graduation. Coming here, you know, you can feel the relationship with the other students that we all went through similar struggles. And that we overcame those. It makes you feel closer to them. You have a connection.⁶⁹³

Ray Corona, as if to suggest that his University of Washington, Bothell graduation was *nothing but theater* (replete with costumes and a stage) goes even farther than Cortes to describe the performativity of his official graduation:

Even the Latino graduation, and, obviously, I identify myself as Latino, wasn’t one that I really felt invested in.⁶⁹⁴ And, if anything, for me, graduation was a time that I definitely felt like I was acting. I was just trying to put on a happy face . . . for my family, for my friends, and for everybody who really wanted to see me walking down the stage with the cap and gown sort of thing. But the reality of it was, I felt like I was just glad to be done with school, and happy that that quote unquote “struggle” was over. It wasn’t a happy time, by any means.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹³ Diego Cortes Gonzalez, conversation with the author, June 22, 2015.

⁶⁹⁴ Like many colleges and universities, the University of Washington provides funding for culturally specific graduations. Through the University’s Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center funds are provided for Black, Latino, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and First Nations graduations apart from the general university commencement. <https://depts.washington.edu/ecc/admin-staff-resources/graduations/>

⁶⁹⁵ Corona, conversation, 2015.

Notably, Corona is the individual who originally conceived of the *Undocu-Graduation*. His testimony above reveals what is perhaps the core aspect of the ceremony: that in order to actually manifest the ritualistic effects of what their other graduations *should have* produced, the WDC needed to gift themselves their own ritual. This ritual, produced externally to any official institution, and with the WDC's own limited money and resources, provided the transformative results to which ritual aspires.⁶⁹⁶ The greatest irony may be that, as opposed to a rite of passage's supposed function to take a participant *through* a liminal state to another, well-defined social position (a process described by Turner as "permanent elevation")⁶⁹⁷ the *Undocu-Graduation*, in some ways, commemorates a move *into* permanent liminality. Current research regarding undocumented youth, as well as my own interviews with the students, has shown that the passage out of the "protected zone" of the education system marks the undocumented individual's possible passage into a permanently "disenfranchised underclass," at "the bottom end of the labor market."⁶⁹⁸ While *Plyler v. Doe* guarantees undocumented youth the right to a K-12 public education, in no way does it make undocumented graduates eligible for legal employment once they have finished high school. It seems clear that highlighting this move into liminality was yet another commemorative aspect of the *Undocu-Graduation*. If, according to Turner's model of social drama, ritual performance is an opportunity to redress the greater social crisis, and therefore instigate the "reintegration" of the "disturbed social group," the *Undocu-Graduation* could thus be viewed more accurately as *anti-ritual*; rather than facilitating the "disturbed social group's" reintegration into society, it is a ceremony that highlights the (current)

⁶⁹⁶ There are echoes here of the "gifted labor" associated with the religious tradition of the Mexican *Pastorela* examined in Chapter Two (See pages 140-142).

⁶⁹⁷ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 25; See also van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 3.

⁶⁹⁸ Gonzales, "Learning to Be Illegal," 603; Nicholls, *DREAMERS*, 3.

impossibility of reintegration for one of the US' most precarious populations. According to Ray Corona:

One main point, I think, for the grads themselves, is for them to think about, “OK, I am exiting the education system, and really the education system as a whole, so what is next for me?” And what other kind of group am I going to enter, which is the bigger group really, the workforce, and what kind of protections are there for me there? Or not? So, utilizing the space to celebrate them, but also having that realization, have them understand that once they enter the workforce, *their protections are gone*. And we’re back to square one, right? We’re back to that time when you first got into the country, when you were scared that people would find out that you were undocumented. You’re back to that same space, mentally. Because when you enter the workforce, if you have DACA, you know that your ability to stay in that workplace is limited. *Not only is it limited, there is an expiration date*. And for those who don’t have DACA, [the *Undocu-Graduation*] is about trying to mobilize them.⁶⁹⁹

And while the notion of “permanent liminality” is, perhaps, theoretically lucrative for my claim that the *Undocu-Graduation* constitutes an anti-ritual, there is also a danger in positioning its producers as having the singular intention of showcasing their “liminality.” For in addition to their realization that their “emergence” into the workforce would mean lesser protections, the students I interviewed did not seem to dwell on the fact, or to give it undue weight within the ceremony itself. To suggest as much would be misleading. Their grassroots rite of passage was, for most intents and purposes, a celebratory one. It was an occasion for undocumented parents to

⁶⁹⁹ Corona, conversation, 2016.

witness the academic success of the children they had brought to the US as either young children or infants, an accomplishment achieved against great odds. It was a ceremonial performance for high-powered political allies to witness the real effects of immigration reform in Washington State. It was an extremely-rare public media event demonstrating what a performance of undocumentedness can look like when the narrative is controlled by undocumented persons themselves and not those who would choose to either vilify them or paint them as victims. And it was an occasion that (in the formal act of walking across a stage in cap and gown and receiving their certificate) simply allowed the graduates to feel as if they had *really* graduated from something, from somewhere. Thus, in choosing to stage something as admittedly “non-confrontational,” and “passive” as an academic graduation ceremony—one of thousands across the US in the late Spring of 2015—the Undocu-Graduates revealed a desire on their part to present themselves as both politically unique and exceedingly ordinary. It was not a performance of “bare life,” the banished individual’s subjection to detention, destitution, and death as seen in *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*. There were no theatricalized villains à la Teatro Jornalero’s Lucifer cum Donald Trump, hell-bent on instigating militarized deportation forces. Nor was the state of undocumentedness elevated to sacredness via its (re)interpretation as Christian icon (The Virgin Mary). And absent was any sense of the “de-voiced” or “fractured linguistics” emergent in the untranslated K’iche’ of the day labor performers of *Pulpo*. It was, rather, an expression of gratitude, hope, and fearlessness on the part of undocumented immigrants, producing their own public self-representation. Moreover, these immigrants, despite their undocumentedness, see themselves as not entirely dissimilar to any other young person entering a new phase of life, and thus their graduation was, in many ways, like any other. For any graduate, undocumented or not,

commencement takes on its meaning from both fear of the unknown and hope for the future. As one Undocu-Grad casually put it:

I feel the same way as anyone else who's graduating now [with] the economy the way it is: scared of finding a job, you're not a student anymore, you have to start earning a living. So that all comes with it. I've been thinking about grad school since my sophomore year in college, so *I know I'm gonna go there*. And now the scary thing is I got to hustle harder to compete and to get into those programs. And with the [Emergency Medical Technician] job I'm at now, I have to get two years of paid work with actual patient care to get into a master's program to be a physician's assistant, because that's what I want to do. But realistically thinking, if I don't get into that, I can continue taking classes. I'm always hustling. I'm always thinking about the next step. I'm not gonna let anyone stop me. Or anything stop me. The only person that can stop me would be myself, but I'm not gonna let that happen.⁷⁰⁰

This Undocu-Graduate's testimony reveals a deep sense of self-assurance and determination. He clearly has a plan to move forward after his graduation, and those plans include taking the next step as a medical professional. He is precisely the kind of "talented" individual who understands himself to be "part of this country" that Obama invoked upon his 2012 executive action that created DACA in the face of Congressional inaction on immigration reform.⁷⁰¹ But the testimony also reveals the graduate's own knowledge that he himself must work further, must "hustle

⁷⁰⁰ Luís Arellano, conversation with the author, June 20, 2015.

⁷⁰¹ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Immigration," *The White House*, June 15, 2012, accessed August 9, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>.

harder” to accomplish his personal goals. In fact, he seems to believe that the only thing standing in his way is *himself*, not so much the legal or discriminating realities faced by undocumented immigrants in the US. And while this attitude was common among the graduates I interviewed in 2015, it may not be as such now with the arrival of President Trump, his anti-immigrant agenda, and his ability to undo DACA with the stroke of a pen. And yet regardless of the divisive political shift that marked 2016 and resulted in the victory of Trump over his rival Hillary Clinton, another *Undocu-Graduation* was staged that year, one with decidedly more heated rhetoric than the inaugural ceremony the year prior. Notably, Clinton (as mentioned in the introduction to this study) invited an immigrant mother and wife of a deportee to represent herself at a televised campaign event. Trump’s performative proxy for undocumented immigrants at the Republican National Convention, on other hand, was US citizens whose family members had been murdered by “illegal aliens.” And if performative representations wherein undocumented communities can speak for themselves are both rare and complex (as this study has tried to demonstrate), it is equally important to hear from those who are *not* on the stage proper, those who act as witness to the performative event, and thus complete its circuit of liveness. As a testament to the hopeful environment of resistance generated by the second annual *Undocu-Graduation 2016*, the words of one participant’s mother indicate the power of the ceremony. For her, the event was not only infused with the notions of visibility and pride, but perhaps most importantly, positivity in the face of uncertainty and hate. She told me:

For me, as a mother of an undocumented daughter, [the *Undocu-Graduation*] means a lot because I think [the Undocu-Grads] feel freer, more open to talking about their immigration status. They are not embarrassed to say who they are, from where they came, if they are rich, or if they are poor. We are here in this

country because we came to seek a better future. And I think that these young people are achieving that [. . .]. When I saw a photo in the news of the people who oppose this law [DACA], when they were laughing . . . *it hurts a lot to see them*. I think that they are mocking us. But at the same time, this give me a lot of strength, a lot of courage, and bravery. Because they are laughing out of evilness, and I laugh because of pleasure. And because I'm happy that my daughter and other young people are graduating, even being undocumented [. . .]. I am seeing in these kids that are here that they are not hateful, they are not bitter. They don't feel sad for anything. On the contrary – these kids are fighting, fighting, fighting for their rights, and they will succeed. And these other people, I think, have a fear of that – that our kids will be better than theirs [. . .]. [These graduates] will be recognized for the good things that they are doing, and not for so much hate, and all the horrible words that [those who mock us] use in their campaigns.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰² Spanish Original: “*Para mí, como madre de una niña indocumentada, [the Undocu-Graduation] significa mucho porque pienso que ellos se sienten más libres, más abiertos de hablar sobre su estatus migratorio. Ellos no tienen vergüenza de decir quienes son, de donde vienen, si son ricos, si son pobres. Estamos aquí en este país porque venimos buscando un futuro mejor. Y pienso que estos niños lo están logrando [. . .]. Cuando yo miré una foto en las noticias de las personas que se oponen aquella ley [DACA], cuando ellos están riendo . . . duele mucho de verlos. Pienso como que se están burlando de nosotros. Pero a la misma vez, eso a mí me da mucha fuerza, mucho valor, y mucho coraje, porque ellos se rien con maldad, y yo me río de gusto y de alegría de que mi hija y otros niños se están graduando y siendo indocumentados [. . .]. Yo estoy viendo en estos niños que están aquí que ellos no tienen odio, no tienen rencor. Ellos no se sienten tristes por nada. Al contrario – estos niños siguen luchando, luchando, luchando por sus derechos, y ellos lo van a lograr. Y esas personas, pienso, que a eso tienen miedo – De que nuestros hijos serán mejores que ellos [. . .]. Y van a ser reconocidos por las buenas cosas que están haciendo, y no por tanto odio, y por tantas malas palabras que dicen en sus campañas.*” (Unnamed Mother/Spectator #2 of *Undocu-Graduation 2016*, conversation with the author, June 25, 2016).

The above testimony from the undocumented mother bears clear witness to the idea that the *Undocu-Graduation*, as a liberating platform for collective knowledge making, is a performance of undocumentedness characterized by a sense of outward pride, positivity, citizenship, upstanding achievement, and political resistance in the face of mockery and hate. Moreover, the live ceremony, with its buoyant (if embattled) mood, instilled strength and courage in the spectator herself. And if I am correct in my assessment that the *Undocu-Graduation*, as a ritualistic rite of passage, provided a sense of personal transformation for the Undocu-Grads that their other institutional graduations did not supply them, it appears as if that sense of transformation was had by audience members as well. In relating to me what she felt were the shortcomings of her son's previous graduation from a large Seattle high school, another undocumented mother reflected on both the ceremony's inclusivity, as well as its capability of echoing of her own story. It would thus seem that as a transformative ceremony conceived, produced and performed *solely* by undocumented persons, the *Undocu-Graduation* brought its undocumented spectators into the ritual's fold. Notably, as evidenced in the mother's testimony, it is a ritual that derives its force from its visuality, its intimacy, its motivational aspects, and the authenticity of its personal narratives. The mother told me:

[H]aving seen the suffering of the other young people who did not have the opportunities [he had], like the young women who shined today—and they will continue to shine⁷⁰³ – [my son's] not going to allow himself the thought of not wanting to continuing [his education.] *This is a great motivation for him* [. . .].

The other graduation had beautiful moments, but it was enormous thing. There

⁷⁰³ Here the mother refers to the three keynote speakers at the *Undocu-Graduation* in 2016 who collectively decided to share the podium. All three of the women were, at the time of this writing, also members of the Washington Dream Coalition.

were four hundred students, all the nationalities together [. . .]. And the difference for me is that, for myself, as a mom, I didn't have the feeling of being included like I felt here just now. Maybe it's because as an adult I still have more of a connection to my country than him. [The ceremony] here was very moving. The stories . . . in hearing these stories, your own story is marked.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰⁴ Spanish Original: “Él haber visto el sufrimiento de otros niños que no tuvieron las oportunidades de las aquí que brillaron – y van a brillar – Omar no se va a permitir a él mismo el pensar en que ya no quiere continuar. Esto es una gran motivación para él [. . .]. La otra graduación tuvo momentos muy bonitos, pero fue una graduación enorme. Fueron cuatrocientos estudiantes. Todas las nacionalidades juntas [. . .]. Y la diferencia para mí es que, yo, como mamá, yo no me sentí incluida como lo sentí ahorita aquí. Quizá porque yo, como adulto, todavía tengo más conexión con mi país que él. Fue muy emotivo aquí. Las historias . . . escuchar esas historias marcan tu propia historia,” (Unnamed Mother/Spectator #1 of *Undocu-Graduation 2016*, conversation with the author, June 25, 2016).

CONCLUSION

An Uncertain Future

The performative “marking” of individual stories, especially those who existentially contend with the socially precarious nature of undocumentedness in the US, is one of the most prominent operations at work in the various performances I have examined in this study. The preceding chapters have served to elucidate several performance processes that attempted to mediate the social conditions and personal realities of undocumentedness in the US by collaborating directly with undocumented communities. My first-person interviews with participants and spectators, in which I attempted to ascertain the intentions, social conditions, funding structures, aesthetics, and discrete effects of these practices, have constituted the backbone of this study. And while these recent practices have emerged in the diverse mediums of theater, experimental video, and public ceremony, they all share certain characteristics which I have argued mark them as “decolonial.” These decolonial characteristics I have derived from several theorists of decolonial thought and include such notions of “altericity,” “decolonial epistemologies,” and “the coloniality of being.” These ideas have provided critical traction to this study namely because undocumented immigrants can be considered colonized subjects given that they constitute an “internal colony” of the United States.

As argued in the introduction, undocumented immigrants in the US constitute an internal colony due primarily to the economic benefits the US derives from this marginalized (and vilified) population, as well as the lack of citizenship rights afforded to it. Historically, the US has engaged globally in both military/interventionist and neoliberal economic policies that, on the one hand, have abetted violent governmental regimes (and their attendant social inequities) in countries from which immigrants flee, and which also have served to create economic incentives

to migrate to the US, on the other. These policies have been especially prominent in Latina America, the global region where all my interview subjects originated from, with the exception of one.⁷⁰⁵ However, and despite the physical and economic hardships that undocumented immigrants know they will encounter upon reaching the US, they continue to migrate anyway. Additionally, undocumented immigrants are subjected to symbolic, legal, and physical violence by the regimes of mainstream media, incarceration/deportation systems, and the mortal dangers associated with increasingly dangerous border crossings. Added to these elements are the common psychological experiences of a fractured sense of identity due to long-term family separation, economic precarity, and the anxiety related to the threat of deportation. These combined elements serve to constitute a colonized population in the US that contends daily with the “coloniality of being,” or the dehumanizing “lived experience of colonization,” marked by (1) permanent struggle, (2) reduced opportunities for broad intersubjective experiences outside their own group, and (3) the normalization of racialized violence directed toward the community.⁷⁰⁶ The various performance practices I’ve examined in this study all attempt to exorcise and/or resist the realities of the coloniality of being, often in similar ways. However, there are critical differences between the various projects as well.

While not every artist profiled in this research set out with the specific intention of collaborating with undocumented immigrants, the very nature of their projects were such that undocumented immigrants were necessarily involved. Many of the artists involved exhibited what Nelson Maldonado-Torres has termed “altericity,” or the feeling of solidarity towards “Sub-Others:” the fellow colonized subjects who occupy a lower rung on the dehumanizing

⁷⁰⁵ Moses Chege, of the Washington Dream Coalition’s *Undocu-Graduation*, does not identify as Latino. Chege is originally from Kenya.

⁷⁰⁶ Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being, 240-270.

hierarchies embedded in coloniality.⁷⁰⁷ For instance, Jose Carillo (Chapter One), Juan Parada (Chapter Two), and Rodrigo Valenzuela (Chapter Three) are all *formerly undocumented* Latino immigrant artists who sought to inter-subjectively connect with (and give back to) the individuals whose time and labor made the performances possible and worthwhile. Carillo, as noted in Chapter One, described his participation in eSe Teatro’s Dialogues with Dignity, as “one of the most meaningful experiences” he has had in over sixty years of theatrical work.⁷⁰⁸ For Parada, his intentions behind working with Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras reflect, in part, a desire to facilitate a performative “voice” for the *jornalero* (day laborer) community.⁷⁰⁹

A colonized position on the social ladder, however, was neither a prerequisite for these collaborations, nor the only position from where the performative voice of these collaborations originated. Indeed, the collaborators from the examined performances were a heterogeneous population, occupying diverse professional fields: medical and legal professionals, day laborers, domestic workers, professional artists, educators, university students, and individuals working in non-profit activist organizations. Likewise, their methods of creating the performance texts varied. Professional artists Yoshua Okón and Rodrigo Valenzuela, for example, culled their spoken performance texts directly from the input of the immigrants they worked with, applying their hand later in the editing of their videos which recorded the (guided) improvisational moments of their paid performers in somewhat controlled environments. For its part, Teatro Jornalero employed the participatory “story circle” method to generate material for a paid playwright. Alternately, in some scenarios, the performance text is a direct reflection of the collaborating artists’ professional experience with undocumented communities. For instance,

⁷⁰⁷ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 156-158.

⁷⁰⁸ Carillo, conversation, 2016.

⁷⁰⁹ Parada, conversation, 2015.

both Rose Cano and Margaret O'Donnell (Chapter One) drew on their experiences within the fields of medical interpretation and immigrant legal services, respectively, to draft early versions of their plays. Notably, these projects, in order to give undocumented communities a greater role in the creative process, sought out workshop audiences upon whose feedback the script could conceivably be changed to reflect a greater sense of realism and believability. A sense of aesthetic "realism" however, was seldom a concern among most collaborators. The "undocumentaries" examined in Chapter Four distinctly play with notions of ambiguity, pastiche, atemporality, homogenization, social liminality, and invisible immigrant labor, all within an unsettling parody of the verisimilitude of the more established genres of documentary filmmaking and Latin American *testimonio*. For their part, the decidedly more agit-prop style of plays like *Super Doméstica* (Chapter One) and *El Niños Dios Viene 'Pal Norte* (Chapter Two) purposefully eschew a fidelity to realism in their desire to create an energetic, ideological, and *live* (and thus intersubjective) experience for both their performers and audiences. However, while the theatrical work of Teatro Jornalero manifests as a *long-term* project (ten years as of this writing) that seeks to create and maintain social bonds within the notoriously precarious milieu of day labor, the videos of Okón and Valenzuela are *short-term* projects (three days) that, due to their reliance on *paid* immigrant workers, risk falling into the exploitive traps that performance scholars warn are "worse than colonialism."⁷¹⁰ My interviews with *Pulpo* and *Maria TV* participants, however, evidenced a positive, non-exploitive experience that the immigrants would be eager to have again if given the opportunity.

Given the fact that nearly all the interview subjects expressed that these collective processes created artistic environments in which the conditions of precarity (economic, legal,

⁷¹⁰ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 91.

social) were variously examined, challenged, thought through, scripted, improvised, rehearsed, performed, viewed, commented upon, altered, and (sometimes) performed again, I have argued that they thus constitute “decolonial epistemologies.” In other words, these collaborative practices broadly created liberating processes of collective knowledge formation built upon the sharing of stories and the collective crafting of those stories into a medium of embodied performance, whether theater, ceremony, or video. In addition to this “learning” process that many interviewees said marked the creative process, certain participants referred to their participation in the performances as “therapeutic” or “transformative.” Homeless spectators to eSe Teatro’s “Dialogues with Dignity” (Chapter One), for instance, expressed the notion that the performance of undocumented homelessness resulted in their compassionately “being seen.”⁷¹¹ One performer in *Maria TV* related that the in-studio performance process created a “safe space” where the “trauma” related to undocumentedness was temporarily exorcised.⁷¹² Multiple participants with Teatro Jornalero characterized the process as personally, and mentally “therapeutic.”⁷¹³ And for their part, numerous graduates at the 2015 *Undocu-Graduation*, clearly viewed their original, independent ceremony as a rite of passage that sought to *performatively* embody the overcoming of demoralizing obstacles that only they, as undocumented youth in the US education system, know deeply. The *Undocu-Graduation*, moreover, is the single performance in this study that most directly, and unambiguously, confronts the notions that undocumented individuals are criminals who need to be punished and purged. “Unapologetic” of its creators’ legal status, the *Undocu-Graduation* is, at its core, a public performance of

⁷¹¹ Meg Savlov, conversation, 2015.

⁷¹² Krutina, conversation, 2016.

⁷¹³ Unnamed Teatro Jornalero participant 2, conversation with the author, 2015.

undocumentedness. All these performances, regardless of medium, attempted, in their own ways, to humanize the participants, and, perhaps, the immigration debate as a whole.

Notions of liberating process of collective knowledge formation aside, these processes also have their shortcomings and pitfalls. Lack of funding, for instance (although a condition relatively endemic to independent theater) effected the processes in direct, and sometimes, aesthetic ways: eSe Teatro was ultimately incapable of the kind of expensive outreach that would have been required to bring large numbers of their original homeless workshop audiences to the final, professional production of *Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*. Day laborer participants to Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras faced severe challenges in maintaining their collaborative relationship with the group because (other than a small stipend) participants did not get paid. The *Undocu-Graduation* failed to meet some of the producer's material expectations because the group culled together its own small budget and, as the event date approached, "was running out of time."⁷¹⁴ And finally, regarding videos such as *Maria TV* and *Pulpo* (short-term projects that often enjoy a *larger* budget than their theatrical counterparts) the conceptual artists took away very little of their initial grant money to ensure that their immigrant participants were paid. It must be said, therefore, that while these projects often relied on collective, "gifted labor"⁷¹⁵ and/or the enthusiasm that certain participants had toward the process, financial gain was not the main concern of anyone involved. Paramount across the board, was the intersubjective experience in the creation (and presentation) of these performances.

Funding (or lack thereof) is not the only concern, however. If, as I have argued, these performance collaborations have all attempted to craft performances that are oppositional to the

⁷¹⁴ Corona, conversation, 2016.

⁷¹⁵ Flores, "'Los Pastores' and the Gifting of Performance," 270-285.

dehumanizing rhetoric wielded against undocumented persons, then issues surrounding the *qualities* of those representations cannot be left out of the final analysis. At times, these performances, whether due to an aesthetic ambiguity (*Maria TV*) or untrained, non-professional acting (Teatro Jornalero), created a sense of bewilderment on the part of the spectators that may, in the end, interrupt the larger socio-political goals of the artists. Both the experimental video *Pulpo* and the ritualistic *Undocu-Graduation*, for their part, risked alienating their potential audiences by foregoing the performance's translation, and thus, in some ways, merely reinforced the linguistic fracturedness that often attends the condition of undocumentedness.⁷¹⁶ Both Rose Cano (*Don Quixote: Homeless in Seattle*) and Margaret O'Donnell (*Undocumented*), in their attempts at dramatizing the personal stories they have heard in their professional (non-theatrical) work, presented audiences with dystopic, depressing representations of that condition; deathly visions of "bare life," albeit inspired by true events. And what, for many, may be the ultimate shortcoming, eSe Teatro, faced with the material realities of the Seattle theater community, was constrained to commit "undocumentedface," casting their play's main character of an undocumented Latino with a performer who was *neither*.⁷¹⁷ Despite shortcomings such as these, both the spectator and participant interviews I conducted generally reflect that the humanizing intentions of the artists were primarily understood, if not always completely achieved.

And while all processes of performance creation have their shortcomings (whether or not they collaborate with undocumented communities), the larger question regarding these practices

⁷¹⁶ While Okón purposefully did not include subtitles or translations to the K'iche' dialogue in his video, members of the Washington Dream Coalition expressed to me a regret that they did not have a Spanish interpreter for the *Undocu-Graduation*. This prevented the parents of some graduates from being able to understand everything that was said. Notably, and in response to the prior year's regret, the second annual *Undocu-Graduation* in 2016 provided more Spanish interpretation.

⁷¹⁷ Guterman, *A Theatre of Undocumentedness*, 91.

is whether or not (and to what extent) they will continue. Beyond the performance-world limitations of funding, rough aesthetics, undocumentedface, depressing onstage representations, linguistic fracturedness, or even accusations of “exploitation” directed at artists who pay immigrants to “perform their trauma,”⁷¹⁸ lie the material realities faced by undocumented immigrants in the *real* world. If the renewed atmosphere of hostility and intolerance toward undocumented immigrants ushered in by the rise of President Trump continues, practices such as this may become even more rare than they already are. This is not to say that government agencies will actively seek to raid and/or shut down artists working with undocumented communities, although in certain cases (such as the long-standing work of Teatro Jornalero) it is not inconceivable. It may be simply a matter of undocumented individuals losing the incentive to participate in such public practices, retreating to the so-called “shadows” that researchers have argued darken their lives.⁷¹⁹ Already, due to the current milieu of uncertainty, the producers of the *Undocu-Graduation* were initially undecided on whether or not to host their event in 2017, since it is openly advertised as an event at which undocumented persons will be gathered. At any rate, the ceremony is now planned for 2017, although it may very well be a “smaller event” than the ones held in the past two years.⁷²⁰ Thus, whether President Trump, challenged by the realities of congressional budgets, builds his border wall to keep undocumented immigrants out of the country may be irrelevant.⁷²¹ It may simply well be that the now heightened anxiety that attends undocumentedness will afford these kinds of practices less people willing to openly participate.

⁷¹⁸ Ortiz, conversation, 2015.

⁷¹⁹ See Chavez, *Shadowed Lives*; Lorentzen, *Hidden Lives and Human Rights*.

⁷²⁰ Ray Corona, Facebook message to the author, April 27, 2016.

⁷²¹ See Burgess Everett, Jennifer Scholtes, and Tara Palmeri, “Congress set to deny Trump wall money,” *Politico*, April 25, 2016, accessed April 28, 2016; See also Susan Cornwell and Richard Cowan, “Trump’s concession on wall funding removes obstacle from spending talks,” Reuters, April 25, 2016, accessed April 28, 2017.

It remains up to the participants in performance collaborations such as the ones I've examined here to continue the decolonial resistance to both the villainizing discourse and regressive media representations wielded against undocumented immigrants in the US. Only the future will show whether or not (and in what ways) these unique methodologies will last.

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APPENDIX ONE:

Research project title / Título del proyecto:

Experimental Performance Practices with Undocumented Communities

(Prácticas de Representación Experimental Con Comunidades Indocumentadas)

Purpose and description of research project:

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into experimental performance practices (theater, film, video, etc.) that utilize undocumented immigrants in the United States as either principle or minor performers; in particular, how these practices attempt to speak to and/or mediate the current U.S. political and cultural climate in regards to undocumented immigration.

Propósito y descripción del proyecto:

El propósito de este estudio es entender mejor las prácticas de representación experimental (teatro, cine, video, etc.) en las que colaboran personas indocumentadas en los Estados Unidos. Se enfocará particularmente en cómo estas prácticas reflejan y comentan el ambiente político y cultural actual en lo que respecta la inmigración indocumentada.

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS / PREGUNTAS PARA PARTICIPANTES:

Directors/Directores

1. Can you describe what inspired you to make this performance?
¿Qué le inspiró a realizar esta representación / este espectáculo?
2. What other art pieces, performances, and/or media are you responding to?
¿Hace referencia a otras obras artísticas, espectáculos o medios de información o comunicación?
3. Is this performance crafted to speak to certain trends in U.S. culture and/or politics?
¿Responde esta representación a ciertas tendencias en la cultura o la política de este país?
4. What do you feel to be the ultimate "theme" or "message" of the performance, if any?
¿Cuál es el tema o mensaje de esta representación?
5. How did you contact the individual performers?
¿Cómo contactó usted con los actores?
6. Did you pay them for their performances? How much did they get paid?
¿Les pagó por su colaboración? ¿Cuánto?
7. Did you discuss immigration status? Are some of the performers "undocumented"?

¿Comentó usted el estatus inmigratorio de los actores? ¿Son indocumentados algunos de sus actores?

8. What did their experience seem to be while being asked to do it?
¿Cuál fue, en su opinión, la experiencia de los actores al colaborar con su proyecto?
9. Did you notice or perceive a difference in the experience or attitude toward the project between the documented and the undocumented immigrants?
¿Notó usted alguna diferencia entre los actores documentados y los indocumentados con respecto a su experiencia o actitud hacia el proyecto?
10. Were there certain individuals that refused to take part in the performance?
¿Hubo alguno que rehusó participar?
11. Do you have an idea of how many people have seen this work?
¿Tiene usted idea de cuántas personas han visto este espectáculo/esta representación?
12. Have you shown the piece in a gallery type setting? If so, can you describe some of the spectators' reactions?
¿Ha mostrado esta representación en algún tipo de galería de arte? ¿Cuál fue la reacción del público?
13. Do you anticipate critiques of your method in using immigrants as performers?
¿Espera usted que lo/la critiquen por emplear inmigrantes como artistas o actores?
14. Do you see yourself as an advocate for the performers?
¿Se considera usted defensor o abogado de los actores/artistas?
15. Did you receive funding for this project? If so, how much did you receive and from what sources?
¿Recibió usted ayuda financiera para este proyecto? ¿Cuánto y de qué fuentes?
16. What is the most pointed critique you have ever received in regards to this piece?
¿Cuál ha sido la crítica más aguda que usted ha recibido con respecto a esta pieza?
17. How do you respond to critics who may be against these practices?
¿Cómo responde usted a los críticos de este tipo de práctica de representación?

Performers/Actores

1. How did you get involved with this performance?
¿Cómo llegó usted a participar en este proyecto?
2. Are you a trained actor?
¿Es usted actor profesional/ha recibido usted entrenamiento o formación de actor?

3. What is the extent of your experience as a performer in general?
¿Qué experiencia tiene usted como actor o artista teatral?
4. Had you ever heard or seen of similar performance practices?
¿Ha visto usted otros espectáculos o prácticas de representación similares?
5. What was your experience in making this performance?
¿Cuál ha sido su experiencia con este proyecto?
6. Did you know the others performers prior to the making of this performance?
¿Conocía usted a algunos de los demás actores antes de participar en este espectáculo?
7. Were you paid to be in this performance? If so, how much?
¿Le pagaron por participar? ¿Cuánto?
8. What were your hesitations about being in this performance, if any?
¿Tuvo usted algún reparo o alguna duda con respecto a su colaboración en este proyecto?
9. What do you feel to be the ultimate "theme" or "message" of the performance, if any?
¿Cuál cree usted que es el tema o mensaje más importante de este espectáculo?
10. Do you feel that this performance crafted to speak to certain trends in U.S. culture and/or politics?
¿Responde esta representación a ciertas tendencias en la cultura o la política de este país?
11. Did you learn something new in the process of participating in this performance?
¿Aprendió usted algo nuevo durante el proceso de preparar esta representación?
12. Do you feel that there are ethical boundaries regarding this kind of performance practice?
¿Piensa usted que hay límites éticos con respecto a este tipo de práctica de representación?
13. What was the most uncomfortable moment for you in making this performance?
¿Cuál fue el momento más desagradable durante la realización del proyecto?
14. Would you be willing to participate in a similar performance in the future?
¿Estaría usted dispuesto a participar en otro proyecto similar en el futuro?
15. Have you kept in contact with the other performers? If so, in what way? (email, telephone, social media, in-person)?
¿Ha mantenido el contacto con otros actores o colaboradores del proyecto? ¿Cómo? (correo electrónico, teléfono, medios social, en persona)

16. Upon seeing the finished product, how did this product differ from what you originally thought the performance might be like?

Al ver el proyecto final, ¿le pareció muy diferente de lo que usted esperaba?

17. How did your experience of the performance differ from what you were originally told by the creators?

¿En qué sentido fue diferente su propia experiencia con el proyecto de lo que le dijeron inicialmente sus creadores?