

**(Re-)framing *Testimonio* on YouTube:  
Multimodal Performances of Dispossession in Digital Narratives of  
Undocumented Youth**

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*(Dis-)Possessing America: Scene During Protest.* Painted by the Author.

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## PREFACE



### ***DREAMers Conference, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, 22 March 2014***

*Joining a panel on ‘community outreach’ at a College DREAMers Conference, an ‘undocumented student resource fair’ in Chicago in spring 2014, and running a little late, I squeeze myself into the circle of chairs in order to listen to some of the students’ ‘coming out’-stories. Luckily, there is some room for the chair I grab next to a young man, who helps me integrate into the circle. As the meeting proceeds, I cannot help but stare at the man’s profile. It seems incredibly familiar to me. At the sound of his voice, deep and distinct, I know it: I’m sitting next to Carlos Roa, the undocumented student from Miami; the activist who walked all the way from Miami to Washington D.C. on the ‘Trail of Dreams’; that student, who if he could, would have proudly joined the U.S. army and would probably be fighting battles for the U.S. – the country that doesn’t want his help – somewhere overseas by now. [...] Carlos Roa’s digital testimonio on YouTube is one of the eight digital narratives that I analyzed for this study. By the day of the conference, I had watched his video clip a few dozen times; I knew his biography by heart; I knew how he pronounced his words and formed his gestures, and how tears looked in his eyes.*

*When approaching to him after the panel, I am amazed to see that the person whose narrative I analyzed for so many hours, whose face, voice, body I studied under the powerful influence of coffee and sugar, was actually a real human being. His discomfort at my knowledge about him, my many questions, and my excitement grows steadily. Obviously, Carlos had not only changed visually; wearing glasses, less tan, looking a bit older. He also deferred what his digital testimonio depicted as his eternal dream: joining the military. By contrast, Carlos now attends IIT, majoring in architecture – all made possible through the Illinois DREAM Act and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.*

*What I realized that day at the conference was that – no matter how permanent and desperate things seem – there is always room for transformation. Indeed, Carlos Roa had changed. His post on the Internet, his video clip on YouTube, his testimonio to the world, however, had not.*



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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

#### **DIGITAL NARRATIVES OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT YOUTH**

### **1. The ‘Unauthorized’ Agent and the Legacy of Civil Rights Movements in the U.S.**

Today, more than ever, the public debate on undocumented immigration fuels countless discussions all over the world. While opinions are easily formed, statements quickly made, what it really *means* to be an undocumented immigrant appears less explicitly delineated in the debate. Manuel et al., editors of a film project about the lives of undocumented youth in the United States, summarize the implications that the immigration status holds for children growing up as undocumented as follows:

Approximately two million undocumented children live in the United States [...]. Sixty-five thousand undocumented youth graduate from high school every year [...] without ‘papers.’ In most states, they can’t get a driver’s license or state ID and in most cases it is against the law to work. It is difficult, if not impossible in some states, to attend college. [...] Universities have varying policies about whether they accept undocumented students. If they are accepted, undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid. (Manuel et al. iv-v)

The list of impediments does not end here. Far from worries about higher education are more immediate problems: discrimination, criminalization, poverty, and fear of deportation, enforcing a life in the shadows.

In December 2005, the ‘Sensenbrenner Bill’, officially named the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437), was “ratified by the U.S. House Representatives”. Among many other things, the bill turned “undocumented immigrants and anyone who assisted them into felons” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 5; see also Mauk and Oakland 73). That following spring, the Immigrant Rights Movement experienced a revival that successfully staged mega-marches and massive public protest against the introduction of the Sensenbrenner Bill. It was young people, in particular, who formed “identified undocumented student groups and statewide networks” in ever-growing numbers to speak out against this act of legislative criminalization (Pérez 83). Nevertheless, “attention to civic development and engagement has been missing in the immigrant

student literature”, Pérez notes, “despite the need for such studies given to the ongoing national political debate about immigration, citizenship, and what it means to be ‘American’” (69). In particular, “whereas the recent immigration policy reform debate in Congress has focused on economic, security, and legal issues, the debate has largely ignored the civic engagement of immigrant youth”, he adds (*ibid*).

Who, then, are ‘undocumented youth’? As Rusin observes, “over the past twenty five years, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has grown to about 11.1 million, and an estimated 65,000 undocumented students currently graduate from the nation’s high schools each year” (3; see also Abrego 213; Pérez 6). Further, “many of these children came here during the population boom in the 1990’s and are now teenagers or in their mid 20’s” (Rusin 2). Anguiano employs the term ‘1.5 generation’ to describe “a generation stuck between parents born and raised outside the United States and their younger siblings who were born and raised inside the United States” (6). By means of this definition, she highlights the identity conflict of this generation, an aspect that gains more attention when discussing the intersections of identities in the following chapters. “In a sense,” Rusin adds, “those who are part of the 1.5 generation straddle two worlds, having some association with their countries of birth, but primarily identify themselves through their experiences growing up in the United States” (4). These struggles, in addition to the impediments that undocumented status entails, would seem to defeat even the most determined attempt to find a political voice in U.S. American society that speaks against the criminalization of a whole population. Or maybe not? Is it possible for undocumented immigrant youth “to participate in American civic life, even as they remain ‘officially’ outside the polity as noncitizens” (Pérez 67)?

Seeking for alternative ways to engage, Bendit observes that “even if formal participation of young people in existing political structures and institutions is decreasing in almost all societies everywhere”, they nevertheless “play an important – sometimes even central – role in social movements aiming at societal change and transformation”, often “based on voluntary work and informal participation” (37). But how so? When I asked an undocumented youth leader from Chicago how he relates his political participation to his ‘unauthorized’, undocumented status, his response was the following:

It's saying like 'I'm not *allowed* to do something'. And that's how I see that word [...]. I feel like I can do whatever I want, because I'm still here and I'm still human. [...] We don't have to be citizens in this nation to have that right of...be able to speak and be able to organize ourselves and be able to wish for a better treatment. And I think when you're saying 'unauthorized', it's like putting you into this conversation, this box, of like, 'you're not allowed to do certain things' and I truly don't believe that. (Gutiérrez)

It is in this underlying conviction of the basic right to improve one's personal situation through personal activism by all means in which undocumented youth frequently ground their basic understanding of immigrant rights activism, as this extract from the interview shows. Personal activism underlies a movement that steps beyond the sphere of action that the human is assigned to act within and which authorizes the individual to adhere to social and cultural norms (and matrices) (cf. Butler, *Dispossession* 21). Both aspects – the wish to improve one's situation as well as activism outside of the assigned sphere – are not innovative but defining characteristics of any movement and/or activism. With this central connection, immigrant activism in the U.S. today builds upon the legacy of its predecessors, most notably the Chican@ Movement (CM).

The term 'Chican@', first of all, relates to "persons of Mexican ancestry residing in the U.S." (hence, *Mexicano*; short form *Shicano*) (Gutiérrez 25). Mexican-Americans frequently identified as 'Chican@' in the 1950s to 1980s, the time that the "social movement [...] occurred in the United States with increased activity in the southwest and midwest" (ibid; see also Curry 101). Further, the choice of the name 'Chican@'<sup>1</sup> for Mexican-Americans denotes a "sensibility" that connects an inherently re-evaluated understanding of socio-historic and cultural identity to a concrete geographical space, Curry explains: The term 'Chican@' connects the "focus on the rights of the poor and working-class members of the community" with a "specific geographic and historic space, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands" (101). Texan Chicano Activist Reis López Tijerina, for example, "organized a separatist movement called Alianza Federal de las Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) in 1963, which demanded the return of millions of acres originally owned by the Hispanic-Mexican community of the Southwest" (Novas 120). While remaining unfulfilled,

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<sup>1</sup> The at-sign at the end of the word denotes the incorporation of the male and female – Chicano and Chicana – into one word. From here on, it will be used consistently in this investigation (and be applied to other terms such as Latin@ as well), when not speaking of the Chican@ Movement (CM) directly.

Tijerina's claim highlights the "force, violence, and repression" that "had much to do with the making of colonial Mexico" (Gómez-Quiñones ix), a legacy carried far beyond Mexican independence from Spain on September 16, 1810.<sup>2</sup> Colonial violence found its immediate expression in the fact that "the United States border moved toward Mexico and incorporated not only land mass but also Mexican people" on as much as "three occasions" between 1836 – after the Texas revolt for independence from Mexico – and a real estate deal called the "Gadsden Purchase" in 1853 (Gutiérrez 25). Most significantly, "the United States acquired parts of what was then northern Mexico in 1848, through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War" (Bigler 109). The movement around Tijerina therefore reflects "cultural pride" in indigenous roots by connecting it to the historical and geographical space for Mexican-Americans whose demands at the time literally stepped out of the assigned sphere.

Counting as a major achievement of the Chican@ Movement in the Southwest of the 1960s and 1970s, a newly organized Mexican-American labor force successfully protested against inhumane working conditions in the fields. Inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, leader of the farmworkers and founder of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in California, César Chávez, amongst others, "utilized nonviolent tactics" and, according to Bigler, "made particularly effective use of a nationwide boycott of produce to press growers for union recognition" (110), after having joined a strike among Filipino American grape pickers who initiated the farm workers' mobilization (cf. Baca 19). While the regional focus of the farmers' mobilization again lies in the Southwest, it is not restricted to that area. According to Gutiérrez, "Texas, Ohio, Florida, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, and Wisconsin have also had local leaders engage in similar successful labor fights with owners" (26).

As the farm workers' strikes spread across the nation, urban Chican@ youth, however, became increasingly "frustrated by the slow pace of change" (Bigler 110). They "took to the streets to protest educational conditions in their high schools and universities" (ibid), organized by the Mexican American Youth Organization

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<sup>2</sup> Gonzalez and Fernandez go even further, describing the transformation of "Mexico from an economically sovereign nation into an economic colony of the United States" in the late 19th century (181). They understand legal and illegal "migration within Mexico to the border and the United States" as a natural result of these historical processes and a major contributor to the "eventual formation of the Chicano community in the United States in the early twentieth century" (ibid).



(MAYO), in particular (Gutiérrez 25). While they also used “the nonviolent weapons” such as “school boycotts, strikes, walkouts, and demonstrations” (ibid), “the later 1960s saw an increasing radicalization of urban Chicano youth and a greater willingness to confront directly the institutions that oppressed them”, according to Bigler (110). This aggression stems, in particular, from the immediate influence of the Black Power movement in Los Angeles (cf. ibid), which “rejected nonviolence and integration” – two “cornerstones” of the early black Civil Rights Movement<sup>3</sup> led by Martin Luther King up to his death in 1968 (Levy 200; see also Baca 22). This development further provides an important example for the influence that the African-American fight for freedom from oppression and for civil rights had on Chican@s in this period (cf. Nash 120). Immediate results of the African American liberation struggle for civil rights, such as the passage of the Civil Rights Act<sup>4</sup> in 1964, necessitated reforms such as the Immigration Act of 1965. The bill changed immigration to the U.S. “dramatically” (Briggs 61), as it “abolished longstanding national-origin quotas on immigration” (Baca 21). Not only did migration then become a possibility to many previously excluded Latin Americans and Asians, “over the course of the 1970s, the rise of dictatorial governments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala motivated waves of immigrants seeking political asylum”, de Baca explains (ibid). In addition to that, many Cubans “opposed to the socialist policies of Cuban leader Fidel Castro” started “rapidly rising rates” of “Cuban immigration into south Florida” early as in the year of 1959 while reservations towards communist countries generally persisted (19). A new immigration law hence came at the right time for a new wave of refugees.

As the political uproar of the 1960s and 1970s shows, the Chican@ Movement carries a pivotal position in the Latin@ fight for civil rights in the first half of the 20th century. Increased immigration from Latin American led to a development of activism among Latin@s of other national origins after 1965 as well. Oftentimes, movements saw their roots in (anticolonial) struggles led in their countries of origin, hence making mobilization in the United States a transnational matter. “Various Puerto Rican political movements that antedated the Cuban Revolution”, for example, “served as background for the political and academic assertions of Puerto Ricans

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<sup>3</sup> The capitalized spelling, from hereon, indicates this precise movement.

<sup>4</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited “racial or sexual discrimination against individuals by employers and in restaurants, lodgings, and other public accommodations” (Levy 200).

in the United States”, according to Vélez-Ibáñez and Sampaio (18). Developments in Latin@ movements further originated in the merger of activist organizations with different national affiliations, such as in case of The United Farm Workers (UFW) – the union that was the result of the merger of the Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) with Chávez’ National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in 1965 (cf. Baca 19). An increasing rejection of the bloody American involvement in the Vietnam War further accelerated the emerging protest and movements of the time, uniting in this cause (Novas 120).

An example that highlights the intersectionality of the struggle particularly well is the formation of the Brown Berets that not only “supported UFW labor struggles” but also “allied” with the Black Panthers in the African American community against racism while maintaining their ‘high-profile protest’ against the Vietnam War (Baca 22).<sup>5</sup> In all these struggles, the Chican@ Movement gained strength, in particular, from “the courage and aspirations of the African-American civil rights movement in the 1960s” (Novas 120) in their “fight for social justice, self-determination, and a more positive cultural and social identity” (Curry 101). Thus, among the Brown Berets greatest successes was the National Chican@ Moratorium against the war in August 1970, which “led 30,000 Chican@s and their supporters to the streets”, reminding one much of the great conventions and marches that Martin Luther King led and inspired up to his death (ibid).

Great unity during the conventions and marches, however, was not a matter of cause. Urban riots led by Chican@ and Latin@s of other national origins and riots in cities such as Chicago or New York, de Baca stresses, in particular, “reflected a larger problem”: the “lack of community togetherness”, which eventually “resulted in the establishment of several grassroots organizations” in the 1970s (Baca 21). Along the same lines, internal struggles in the Chican@ Movement involved female resistance to sexism and *machismo* that even “threatened to undermine Chicano cul-

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the organization, ‘Brown Berets’, further hints at the idea of ‘brown pride’ that Chican@s assumed. “Like African Americans who rejected the term ‘Negro’ and turned the meaning of black on its head to become a badge of pride, so Mexican Americans – La Raza – redefined themselves as Chicanos and celebrated ‘brown pride’”, Bigler explains (110). The connection to the struggle against racism and connected issues of multiracial poverty, as Martin Luther King embraced in his last years, is further located in a long history of “indentured work force” that was “somewhat similar to Blacks in the slave South” (Gómez-Quíñones xi). An event that expressed well the growing sense of ‘Chicanismo’ in its “nationalist sentiment and cultural affirmation” was the Chican@ Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, Colorado, in March 1969 (Zamarripa 104), where well-known Chicano leader Rodolfo ‘Corky’ González founded the Crusade for Justice (cf. Novas 121).

ture and El Movimiento” (Curry 101). Here, again, other movements such as ‘Anglo’ feminism served as an inspiration while it was generally rejected by Chican@s (cf. 102).

The changing migration pattern after 1965 made Mexico the country that supplied most immigrants, along with the Philippine Islands (cf. Briggs 79). A consistent number of illegal immigration, also mostly from Mexico, turned into “an especially controversial political and social topic in recent years as the foreign-born population of the United States increases and large Latin@ communities have emerged in areas where they previously did not exist” (García 249). In order to solve the problem, in 1986, comprehensive immigration reform (the Immigration Reform and Control Act) passed and legalized many undocumented immigrants (cf. Yoshikawa 32; Pallares, *Family Activism* 26; Pérez 120). The reform represented a basic success for immigrant communities. However, it remained ineffective in the restriction of (illegal) immigration, and in addition made “it a crime for employers to hire undocumented workers” (García 250).

Legal amendments that followed the Immigration Reform and Control Act were kindled by “restrictionist and nativist sentiments [...] at the state and national levels during the early 1990s” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 8). The IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) from 1996, for instance, restricted the availability of legalization processes (cf. Yoshikawa 34; Pallares, *Family Activism* 28) and facilitated more stringent immigration laws pertaining to admission and deportation, mostly executed by Border Patrol. In consequence, immigrant communities and organizations such as the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) shifted their agenda from “amnesty assistance to other kinds of support and integration services for the immigrant population” and later also mobilized “against national and local restrictive immigration bill proposals” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 8). OCAD (Organized Communities against Deportation), a recent state-based “network that focuses on Illinois cases working with immigrants of all ages”, for instance, “participated in campaigns to stop the deportation of immigrants” and the separation of families, in particular (Pallares, *Family Activism* 124).

Throughout the 1990s, restrictive ‘operations’ carried out by Border Patrol had also unraveled large protests in larger immigrant-populated cities such as Los

Angeles, Houston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Incited by restrictions and racism, local and national organizations “have become more diversified”, splitting into different local groups (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 16), although generally again embracing a “broader civil and human rights agenda” (13) and working towards immigrant rights in the “increasingly restrictive environment that followed the September 11 terrorist attacks” (16). This aspect also emerges as one of the central aspects on the agenda of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, which is in the focus of this investigation. However, Pallares reminds us that today’s movement “is very heterogeneous” and that “it is characterized by tensions that make it difficult sometimes to discern the position of ‘the movement’ or where the movement may be going” (*The Chicago Context* 54). One also needs to distinguish between the different organizations in the Movement:

While there are social movement organizations, an organization is not a movement, as movements rely on a set of set of networks, coalitions, and interactions. While organizations may overlap with movements, movements need not be tied to organizations. Chicago has a dense set of social service, community, grassroots, and policy organizations as well as informal groups that facilitate networking for the immigrant movement. (52-53)

In a similar line of argument, while a political party may have its roots in social movements, it is far from being synonymous to an entire movement (cf. Schwartz 42). “Within that more organized character” that is now attributed to social movements, however, “there may be an absence of most characteristics we associate with bureaucracy – hierarchy of authority, technical competence, separation of job from other roles, payment in money, impersonality” (ibid).

Stressing the local, organizational, and historical differences in this Movement is not the only aspect that calls for political tension within it. According to Pallares and Flores-González, “some of these activists were newcomers to the immigrant rights movement, while others had much longer trajectories and still others were shifting gears and creating new priorities”, which resulted in “concrete visions, goals, strategies, and tactics” (xxv). Positioning today’s Immigrant Rights Movement in social movement theory, social movements generally need to be understood as collective processes for change and affiliation – “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* 4). The understanding of the

collective identities<sup>6</sup> should not, however, indicate complete unity in agenda-setting and goal-making. A more general understanding of collectivity, as the spring marches since 2006 have shown, is the essential element in a political ‘struggle’. In his survey of the Movement’s history, Ramírez, for instance, points to collectivity as “the most powerful weapon that could be wielded by the oppressed against dominant social forces, especially to challenge institutional mechanisms of state control” (*Social Action* 178).

While in the U.S. civil rights movements, “collective identities were assumed and understood to be determined by one’s race, gender, and/or class”, after the 1990s, social movement scholarship understood collective identities as a source for mobilizing resources and challenging “the state to make legal and political changes” (Desai 422). What made social movements ‘new’ is the accomplishment of collective identities “via self-reflexive processes of articulation”, while social movements traditionally are rather “strategic and instrumental”, mobilizing resources for a collective purpose (ibid). Likewise, Munck stresses the difference in terminology (cf. 25). He finds that “while the problematic of the ‘new social movements’ may be limited if focused on the question of novelty, it might, however, direct our attention to an alternative vision of social movements” (27). He also locates the origin of new social movements after the second world war, when “movements would start anew and create a new society that rejected both consumer capitalism and bureaucratic socialism” (25). Further, “all forms of subordination were rejected, the imagination was in power and the future would be nothing like the past” (ibid).

In sum, contemporary new social movements are known to include “new social movements developed since the 1960s, around issues such as gender and sexual politics, race and ethnicity, peace and the environment [...]” and they “have also seen a return of protest on material issues of social justice”, according to Fenton (197-198). One of the greatest legacies of the diverse 20th century civil rights movements and their intersections, as the Chicana Movement (CM) exemplifies, is an erection of “self-image, instilling pride and a sense of common racial identity” (Bigler 111) – a “common spirit” that “acknowledges and supersedes the regional differences” across the United States (Zamarripa 104). Diverse and national activism

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<sup>6</sup> Desai defines “collective identity” as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection to a larger community (real or imagined), category, practice, or institution”, essentially leading “to positive feelings for other members of the group” (421).

now puts the rights of immigrants at the forefront, as well as it encourages Latin@ culture, art, and study programs at universities (Bigler 111). With reference to academia, Kymlicka, however, critically notes that

although the Anglo-American world has witnessed a much-celebrated ‘re-birth’ of normative political philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s – including important new theories of justice, freedom, rights, community, and democracy – the sorts of issues raised by minority cultures have rarely entered these discussions. (*The Rights of Minority Cultures* 1)

The sore point in our understanding of civil and immigrant rights movements that Kymlicka addresses invites an investigation that listens to dispossessed voices ‘in movement’. This perspective renders the frustration that the murder of Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar by the police on the day of the National Chicago Moratorium in 1970 unleashed in the Mexican-American community more understandable (Baca 22). Part of this resentment certainly emanated from the status that Salazar inhabited as one of the few Latin@ voices who represented the minority in mainstream media (he was a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*).

Speaking out for themselves, not waiting to be heard to be by journalists such as Salazar, “as in the 1960s, students are once again at the forefront of civil rights activism, only this time, the movement is *led* by undocumented students” (Pérez 86, *emphasis added*). In order to understand what being an undocumented immigrant really *means*, we should explore the ways that undocumented youth lead this revived Immigrant Rights Movement, and the devices that enable them to do that.

It is a particularly thought-provoking fact that “despite the dangers involved in speaking out publicly, many students have become frustrated by the limitations of their status and are finding strength and courage in numbers” to ‘out’ themselves as undocumented in public (Pérez 84). What is more, many of these ‘coming out’ narratives can also be found online, on New Media<sup>7</sup> platforms such as YouTube –

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<sup>7</sup> Chun reflects in detail on the term compound noun ‘New Media’. She concludes that it implies “not simply ‘digital media’”, such as digitized forms of other media such as pictures, video or text, “but rather an interactive medium or form of distribution as independent as the information it relayed” (Chun 1). The ‘new’ in ‘new media’ “is also surprisingly uninterrogated” (3), although it has been used since the 1960s (1). With regard to this, Chun remarks that the Internet, which incorporates digital media in many different ways, did not become ‘new’ and popular through “its ‘invention’ or its mass usage [...] but rather with a political move to deregulate it and with increased coverage of it in other mass media” (3). It is thus important to stress the *interactive, participatory, and democratization* of New Media, which also lies in the foreground of this study. I further reflect on this aspect in chapter 3.

the platform that this project uses as a source for accessing narratives of undocumented youth. Three crucial factors explain this move. First, YouTube essentially has “its roots in youth culture” (Kavoori 4). Secondly, YouTube further serves as an excellent example of the observation that “that storytelling is at the heart of all media” (2). Thirdly, while YouTube is widely famous for its role in entertainment culture, Jenkins stresses that “shifts in technical infrastructure, including the emergence of YouTube, have dramatically expanded the [...] capacity to respond to human rights abuses” (*Before YouTube* 121). Thus, in video clips posted on YouTube, undocumented youth come out as undocumented, refraining from any anonymity to protect their identity other than the enormous vastness of Web 2.0. They tell *their* stories of a life with undocumented status, connecting it to their undocumented peers, family and community, ethnic and gender identity and personal acts of resistance within the frame of a revived Immigrant Rights Movement.

As Pérez has documented, “in efforts to claim rights and a political voice”, undocumented youth have “spoken at press conferences, petitioned, educated others by ‘tabling’ at community events, and sent letters to elected officials with their personal stories. Students have also testified in favor in-state tuition laws and have asserted a political voice with the support of Latin@ elected officials, who often rely on these courageous young adults to humanize the plight of undocumented immigrants and challenge the stereotypes of the ‘illegal alien’” (83). Further, “the student organizations meet with chancellors, vice-chancellors, vice-provosts, school admissions and registrar’s offices, scholarship providers, legislators, community leaders, community organizers, counselors, parents, and other students to increase awareness of policies like in-state tuition laws that help improve access to resources and opportunities that exist” (ibid).

Having spent two months in such an organization, the Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL), in Chicago in spring 2014, I witnessed determined youth activism, manifested in, for instance, organization meetings and conferences, various acts of civil disobedience, emotional outbursts in personal interviews, and, most importantly, the National Coming Out of the Shadows Day that IYJL created. This unique event consisted of public speeches delivered annually by undocumented immigrants on Chicago’s federal plaza and in various other cities across the nation on

March 10. This act “not only would provide a distinct and different face to the undocumented for a broader public”, Pallares explains, “but also would encourage other undocumented youth to have hope in a shared future and become involved in the struggle” (*Family Activism* 113). Being a witness to such events, I can legitimately affirm that the Movement has gained momentum through its use of New Media that is unprecedented in the history of immigrant civil rights struggles.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, intertwining insights from cultural, media, and literary studies, this study addresses Kellner and Hammer’s request to “overcome divisions” in the field of media and cultural studies (xxxiv) by providing perspectives on “an open-ended project” that takes seriously “the ways that different forms or examples of media and culture function in our society and can be read to provide enlightenment and insight about the society” (xxxv). Mediatization theory will be used for these purposes. In addition to that, the (political) context of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, as the following section will show, is the main referent to interpret the narrative’s political messages in eight digital narratives of undocumented youth published on *YouTube*. This approach to understanding the narratives reduces, in part, the risk that videos “get decontextualized as they enter this hybrid media space” on YouTube and thus bear “progressive potential” when re-contextualized, as Jenkins emphasizes (*Before YouTube* 122). Likewise, while the space to do so is limited, by applying theory on New Media narrative and narratology, such as ‘intermediality’ and ‘multimodality’, this study will address Punday’s concern that “cybertexts [...] are like some new species recently discovered”, lacking in “cybertext theory” which consists of adequate categories and terms “that are fair to this new medium” (19). The Latin American narrative genre of the *testimonio* serves as a connection between media and cultural studies in the analysis of the narratives (see section 3 of this chapter).

## **2. Waking the ‘Sleeping Giant’: The Immigrant Rights Movement in 2006**

Records show that “in 2006, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest a congressional bill”, the “Sensenbrenner Bill” (Pallares and Flores-González xv). Soon after the ratification of the bill, “immigrant rights supporters knew that such a draconian proposal called for a drastic response” (ibid). Consequently, “the



idea of nationwide mobilization, in which marches would occur simultaneously in different cities and towns, was born at a February 11, 2006, meeting in Riverside, California”, and organizations and institutions of all kinds “converged and planned a National Day of Action on March 10” of that year (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 5). However, according to Flores-González and Gutiérrez “only Chicago delivered big, with a march that drew more than one hundred thousand people to the city center” (5). Nevertheless, Bada, Fox, and Selee counted “more than 250 massive marches, or megamarches, as they were popularly called, [that] were held throughout the country in cities large and small during March and April, culminating in simultaneous marches on May 1 that drew an estimated 3.5 to 5 million people” (in: Pallares and Flores-González xv). The spring of the same year, 2006, thus “became known as the Spring of the Immigrant”, as a mobilization of this kind contributed to “the largest immigrant rights activities in U.S. history” (ibid).

This study focuses geographically upon events in Chicago, Illinois, in order to define the development of the Immigrant Rights Movement. Next to the fact that the many personal conversations with activists<sup>8</sup> and leaders of IYJL during my research stay in Chicago heavily informed my understanding of the Movement, the choice of this city as a ‘base’ has multiple other empirical advantages. According to Pallares and Flores-González, “focusing on Chicago as a case study” provides “a more complete examination of the different types of organizations, institutions, and social actors that have shaped the contemporary immigrant rights movement” (xxi). Further,

Chicago has a long-standing and complex history of immigrant activism and has been at the forefront of contemporary activism: it was the second city to hold a massive march in 2006 [...] and it staged the largest immigrant rights marches in the country in 2007 and 2008. It is, therefore, a microcosm of the immigrant rights activism that has enveloped the nation and can provide important lessons for the study of the immigrant rights movement as a whole. (xxi-xxii)

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<sup>8</sup> In line with Elliott, the definition for ‘activism’ in this study connotes a broad understanding of activists as “those in a political group who want to take active steps towards the objectives of the group rather than merely to proclaim a programme” (7). Bradbury adds that an activist is usually “a volunteer”, in a sense “enjoy[ing] political activity for its own sake, or they have off-medium views”, “pull[ing] the party or interest group towards the position they favour, rather than the position it would take to maximize its vote or influence” (1-2). With regard to the potentially endangering consequences that public activism of undocumented youth entails, I argue that a personal ‘passion’ for the cause is vital.

What is more, “many of Chicago’s actors, institutions, and processes have parallels in other cities” (Pallares, *The Chicago Context* 37), which minimizes the risk of a one-sided argument. Along the same lines, Anguiano calls Chicago the “ground zero for the first day of actions”, not only during the “Coming out of the Shadows Week from March 15-21” in 2010 (152). With regard to its immigration history, the city not only counts as the “second-largest Mexican community (after Los Angeles)” (ibid), it can also safely be called a city of immigrants (Misra). Finally, the city of Chicago has been an established “site of Latino activism since the 1920s, when the newly arrived Mexican population organized mutual aid societies”, for instance (Pallares, *The Chicago Context* 38; see also Misra). Insights gained in more recently emerging Chicago immigrant youth activism thus serves as a rich basis for analyzing narratives of undocumented youth.

In the multiple attempts to pass a comprehensive immigration reform, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act failed in summer 2007, causing “great disappointment” among immigration activists (Pallares, *Family Activism* 41). Despite this failure, Pallares reports that “the process of mobilizing has resulted in a clear articulation of the shared goal of comprehensive immigration reform (CIR)” (*The Chicago Context* 53), which formulated as its general objective to halt the deportations of a majority of undocumented immigrants and provide them with a path to legalization (cf. Pallares, *Family Activism* 96 and 112-113). Even if this goal is not completely achieved, Pallares has found that many agents in the Movement would be willing to support “the best available option in an imperfect political context” (*The Chicago Context* 53).

In this mobilization for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, according to Pallares, “virtually all activists have supported the use of marches as the movement’s main muscle” (*The Chicago Context* 54). Pallares also shows that the “marches are not brief and isolated events but in fact the most dramatic expressions of a broader social movement” (ibid). Further, “the marches [...] led to the forming of new coalitions and networks, essentially consolidating the immigrant rights efforts that emerged after the 1986 reform” (5), making “immigrants visible on the national stage” and mobilizing “thousands of people more systematically to organize for immigrant rights” (xv). However, the marches are not the only legacy that characterizes the revived Immigrant Rights Movement: Most importantly, the marches and subse-

quent political actions showed to the public that the Movement possessed “political potential that both legislators and immigrants advocates had underestimated” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 7). Now, and for all, the metaphor that compares the Latin@ population of the United States to the body of a sleeping giant has been exposed as inadequate. Challenging this metaphor, Pallares argues that the Movement in this first public form depicted by the marches, has “unquestionably ushered in a new political period in which immigrant empowerment – and, more specifically, Latino immigrant empowerment – is no longer an oxymoron” (*The Chicago Context* 58). The goals of the Movement, further, “include not only legalization but a broader preoccupation with the human, social, and civil rights of a population that is collectively claiming its rights to have rights” (ibid).

Focusing upon strategies for publicity and an agenda as a means for defining politics, chapter 2 opens the discussion for the affordances and challenges that the New Media sphere brings upon young activists. In the analysis of the eight narratives<sup>9</sup> of undocumented youth in chapters 5 to 7, in particular, individual developments of the Movement during each year since 2006 will be addressed in the context of the political message that the narratives produce. Following a similar chronology to that of the theoretical chapters in this study – chapter 2, (the first half of) chapter 3, and chapter 4 – the subsequent sections of this introduction present key terminology for the study of testimonial narratives in the context of New Media. The last section summarizes the research questions that result from these theoretical perspectives and provides an outlook on the structure for analysis.

### **3. (Digital) *Testimonio* – A Literature of Combat**

“It is a literature of combat, because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons.”

(Fanon 193)

In the quote above, Fanon refers to notions of “national consciousness” in (national) literature and the changes he perceives in the example of Algeria (193). The most prominent change, to him, is the transformation in processes of literary reception and production. To Fanon, writers of national literature transformed from “the native

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<sup>9</sup> The narratives were produced in the time frame of 2007-2013.

intellectual”, who “used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor”, to the “native writer” who “progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people” (ibid). This aspect, which Fanon anticipated as early as the 1960s, assumes great relevance to this study’s general topic: Even in the digital age, the process described is still ongoing. There are noticeable shifts in literature production and reception, not only through transformations of the writers themselves but also through new communicative technologies. One also finds constant shifts of ideas of national consciousness in such narratives. Digital narratives of undocumented youth can be seen as one example for Fanon’s predictive mode of thought.

Personal narratives of undocumented youth, as already introduced, illustrate a central move in the fight for immigrant rights, youth activism, and the civil engagement of this generation. In these narratives, undocumented status intersects with issues in the family and community, as well as ethnic identity, gender, and mental health. When listing these fields of focus, we need to emphasize that due to the fluid and intersecting character of identities, the latter cannot be analyzed independently from each other. Rather, from an intersectional perspective, different identities serve as trajectories for “addressing the interlacing of different relations of dominance” (Kallenberg et al. 21), such as those evoked by the lack of ‘papers’ in the lives of undocumented youth. We further need to keep in mind that due to this fluid character “‘identity’ and ‘experience’ can never be fully grasped”, as Kallenberg et al. emphasize (23).

Detecting compliant thematic and formal structures, narrative strategies, visual techniques, and a dominant political message, this study demonstrates that the narratives of undocumented youth selected further show commonalities that serve as explicit reminders of the genre of the *testimonio*. To begin with an explanation of the term, the word used here refers to Beverley’s definition of the “narrative form called in Latin American Spanish *testimonio* (testimonial narrative would be the closest English equivalent)” (*Testimonio* iv). Throughout this study, I will consistently use italics to denote that particular genre, as it is done in much of the literature upon which this study relies. Further, I refer to the narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube as (testimonial) ‘narratives’ to refer to the actual literary form of the *narrative*.

As chapter 3 will explain in detail, scholars of the genre of *testimonio* emphasize that “any formal definition of it is bound to be too limiting” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555; see also Döring 69) and subject for frequent discussion (cf. Gugelberger 7). One broad definition for the *testimonio* summarizes it as a personal narrative, a form of ‘life writing’. The narrator of *testimonio* “gives his or her personal testimony ‘directly,’ addressing a specific interlocutor” (Yúdice 42). The narrative depicts the “‘life’ or a significant life experience” of its narrator (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555; see also Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 259) and connects it to the political struggle of “liberation movements and other social struggles” (Beverley, *Testimonio* x; see also Zimmermann 107). Most important for this investigation is the original purpose of this genre to “effect change” (Gugelberger 4; see also Roth 178) or “at least raise consciousness” (Gugelberger 4).

Connecting narrated life experience in *testimonio* to Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s recent work on ‘dispossession’ – the “heteronomic condition for autonomy” (Athanasiou 2) and inherent qualities of resistance through the performative of the body and the speech act of the narrator – offers a normative understanding of the hardships that undocumented youth experience. Understanding dispossession as ‘the performative in the political’, Butler and Athanasiou connect performance studies that demonstrates the potential to “interrogate and enrich our basic understanding of history, identity, community, nation, and politics” (Madison and Hamera xii). This perspective investigates “multiple operations of performance (performativity and the performative) within a written text, a life world, and in domains of cognitive and imaginary expressions” (xxiv). Performativity, a term coined by Butler, points to identity constructions as ‘speech acts’ that reiterate identity constructions through repetitive utterances and behavior and thus inhabit the potential to create a “moment of a counter-mobilization” (*Excitable Speech* 163). Undocumented youth narrate and perform this moment of ‘dispossession’ that they experience, which serves as a paradigm interconnecting the stories. The range of tragic stories of dispossession in the core of the digital narratives is vast: from having to work three jobs, not being able to attend university, to experiencing severe discrimination and de-humanization, suffering from depression, and even suicidal thoughts, to name just a few. But what is the reason for and the effect of publishing

such intimate detail in form of a digital testimonial narrative on YouTube with regard to the politics of the Immigrant Rights Movement?

Connecting and comparing the digital narratives of undocumented youth published online to the ‘traditional’ testimonial genre, requires a different approach than ‘traditional’ testimonial literature. The ‘digital *testimonio*’ is a *testimonio* in digital form, which can then be published online on websites and platforms such as YouTube. According to Rina Benmayor, who coined the term, the digital *testimonio* incorporates two practices: “The *testimonio* tradition of urgent narratives and the creative multimedia languages of digital storytelling” (*Digital Testimonio* 507). In line with Benmayor, I refer the written *testimonio* of Latin American origin as introduced above to the ‘traditional’ *testimonio* to set it off from the ‘digital *testimonio*’. This choice in terminology does not imply that all *testimonios* can be subsumed under the label of one genre or term but marks the changes that the digital sphere adds to the understanding of narrative as *testimonio*.

While Benmayor stresses the importance of a social purpose behind digital *testimonios* in her definition, she also reduces the ‘digital’ in *testimonio* to the form that applies to the digital ‘medium’. It follows that she emphasizes the medium’s function to *mediate* the *testimonio*, rather than to potentially produce an entirely new cultural product. Given the recent changes that the Immigrant Rights Movement has undergone, undocumented students as its leaders and new agents, as well as the use of New Media for political campaigns, the question, here, points to the appropriateness of an approach to the digital medium that merely emphasizes mediation. We need to think more critically about whether media merely reproduce or whether they re-frame the *testimonio* in its digital form online and in this way shape the content, form, and political message of digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth.

#### **4. Mediatizing Testimonial Storytelling: Towards a Mediatization of Politics**

A concept that helps us grasp the changes in *testimonios* in New Media is mediatization, a “theoretical perspective” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 4) that helps us form a “social theory of media and media changes” (Krotz 26). The basis for mediatization is the observation of “the increasing presence and importance of the

media in all parts of social and political life” (Schulz 9). In particular, according to Hjarvard, “media increasingly organize public and private communication in ways that are adjusted to the individual medium’s logic and market considerations” (*The Mediatization of Religion* 17), which results in a (political) society that becomes increasingly dependent on media (cf. Lundby, *Introduction: Mediatization* 12). With reference to this study, most importantly, as Schrott explains, “whenever actors communicate in public, the probability that they follow media logic is particularly high if they are under the pressure to conform due of mediatization” (52). Media logic, thus, defines the ‘engine’ of mediatization and “the process through which media present and transmit information” (Altheide and Snow 10) and which we perceive as “normalized” as we communicate (12). Media technology, a significant aspect of media logic (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 17), in turn, forms the ‘affordances’ of the medium. A new medium such as YouTube affords “networking, time-shifting, sharing content, co-creating media products, and mashing-up messages”, for instance (Schulz 62).

Determining the logic of a medium, first and foremost, requires a definition of the *medium* itself. Siegfried J. Schmidt’s popular ‘Medienkompaktbegriff’ (compound term) offers a multi-layered definition of the term ‘medium’ (cf. Schwanecke 13). This, “integrative model of modern mass media”, as Neumann and Zierold describe it (104), includes four substantial dimensions of a ‘medium’. According to the model, YouTube could be described as a medium that consists of, briefly summarized, the “Kommunikationsinstrumente” (semiotic systems that are used to communicate something, such as written language or images but also non-verbal communication devices), “technische Dispositive” (media technologies that are used to produce media products and their semiotic systems), and, finally, “institutionelle Einreichungen bzw. Organisationen” (institutions such as publishing houses that use and produce but also receive feedback for their “Medienangebote” – media products) (S. J. Schmidt 144-145).<sup>10</sup> This definition becomes important in the definition of media logic – the ‘engine’ of mediatization, as it defines (new) media not simply as ‘material’, the purpose of which it is to ‘mediate’ content, but as whole systems, carrying inherent “multi-layered ambiguities and implications of specific [...] textures” (Reinfandt 14). Further, “any given texture” determines a “potential message, loaded

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Medienangebot’ – the media product – comprises the fourth dimension of the ‘medium’.

with various registers of mediality which may in turn point to different potentialities of the texture as message” (18).

Thus, understanding YouTube as a system that produces meaning only within its cultural context and the medium’s system, positions digital narratives of undocumented youth as examples for the YouTube’s concrete media products, the ‘Medienangebot’ that uses the material channel (*Technisches Dispositiv*) of the video and thus incorporates distinct semiotic resources from other established media such as the still image or music to create and shape political meaning. Yet, in order to approach the creation of, in particular, political meaning, S. J. Schmidt’s model does not suffice. As Punday stated earlier, we need ‘new tools’ that ‘do justice’ to the blurring of theoretical lines that New Media products cause.

Grishakova and Ryan observe that “the concept of medium has become very prominent” in the field of narratology (3). They admit, however, that there are “so many candidates available to refer to the relations between narrative and media that terminology has become a true nightmare” (ibid). ‘Digital narrative’ is thus a broad term: it obtains a set of narrative functions that “includes virtually all transmissive media and a sizeable portion of the artistic ones” (Ryan, *Digital Media* 329). With reference to the digital *testimonio*, Benmayor proposes that “the digital multimedia story offer[s] a whole new level of creativity and power as a testimonial form in a digital age” (*Digital Testimonio* 508). The ‘mediatization’ of the storytelling tradition towards the tradition of ‘digital storytelling’ includes storytelling devices along the lines of, for instance, multimedia (a combination of different media systems according to S. J. Schmidt), intermedial and multimodal storytelling. Intermedial storytelling utilizes media combination, media transfer, and intermedial references (cf. Schwanecke 3; Rajewsky 12 and 18-21; Bock 255-256). Multimodality deals with the combination of modes. The latter describe as units within S. J. Schmidt’s system of the medium that are part of its semiotic resources, “the actions, materials and artefacts people communicate with” (Jewitt, *Introduction to Multimodality* 16).

“Multimodality”, in particular, “may foster changes in practices that are part of mediatization processes”, Lundby argues (*Introduction: Mediatization* 13). Ventola, Charles, and Kaltenbacher stress that serving as a ‘language’ for storytelling, “multimodality and multimediality, when seen as combinations of writing, speaking, visualisation, sounds, music, etc., have always been omnipresent



in most of the communicative contexts in which humans engaged” (1). However, they point out that

it is relatively recent that the developments of the various possibilities of combining communication modes in the ‘new’ media, like the computer and the Internet, have forced scholars to think about the particular characteristics of these modes and the way they semiotically function and combine in the modern discourse worlds. (ibid)

Investigating digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth, hence, as mediatized *testimonios*, offers a new perspective upon this ‘new language’ that New Media platforms such as YouTube utilize. Integrating into the media logic on YouTube, however, the narratives need to negotiate their own, political logic that the genre of the *testimonio* as a form of political communication in and for the purposes of the Immigrant Rights Movement inhabits. In order to understand the latter’s cultural output in the form of digital narratives, this study, hence, sets out to explore the negotiation of the respective media logic(s) with the political logic(s) of the narrators – a process that Esser and Strömbäck term ‘the mediatization of politics’.

## **5. The Conquest – Research Questions and Outline of Study**

In 2006, the Immigrant Rights Movement and its undocumented youth demonstrated the potential for actively resisting impending criminalizing legislative changes. That year, activists and allies, undocumented and ‘legal’ immigrants in the United States formed political resistance that presented “an attractive alternative to the frustrating impediments of legal marginality”, as Pérez observes (78). Is it possible then to argue that testimonial ‘storytelling’ online illustrates a mediatization of the *testimonio* that connects the logic of the medium with their political message, and hence, forms an inherently new type of political protest, responding to media changes? In short, do undocumented youth with their digital *testimonios* online serve as an example of the mediatization of politics that triggers major political protest?

The following chapter introduces, in detail, the politics of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement since the megamarches in 2006, including a definition for the use of ‘politics’ in this study. Significant aspects are the historical developments of the Movement with regard to public agenda, leadership, and communication. Section 1.4. of chapter 2 further presents personal interview data that reveals the significance of (new) media for the Movement from the perspective of four undocumented

immigrant activists from Chicago. Section 2 and 3 of that chapter elaborate on the mediatization of politics, media and political logic, and also present a focus for this study that originates in the concept proposed by Esser and Strömbäck. Finally, section 3 introduces media logic on YouTube and presents the selection of the corpus of digital narratives of undocumented youth for this investigation. That section also provides a chart to which the reader of this study can always refer to as an overview of the narratives.

Chapter 3 introduces the narratological toolbox for analysis in this study. It provides an understanding of ‘narrative’ and elaborates on the *testimonio* as a counter-discursive genre with inherent political significance that has frequently been debated. Narrowing down the definition of *testimonio* as far as possible, section 4 introduces the digital *testimonio* proposed by Benmayor in contrast both to the tradition of the *testimonio* and to digital storytelling on YouTube. Offering this framework, however, raises issues for understanding digital narratives on YouTube as *testimonios* due to the socio-technological format of the website – an inherent aspect of the latter’s media logic. The focus, as traced from the interviews, shall lie on the participation, personalization, and performance of the political communication in the narratives. Section 5 of this chapter narrows down which affordances and their semiotic resources the selection of video clips on YouTube choose, after introducing the major framework for ‘multimodality’ that will support the analysis of meaning making in chapters 5-7. This chapter, too, provides an overview of the digital *testimonios* selected for this study with reference to the theoretical framework established in the chapter.

As a chapter that both introduces a theoretical approach and applies it subsequently, chapter 4 narrows down the content of the digital *testimonios* as stories of dispossession, with reference to Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s theory and introduces the concept of the performative in dispossession as political protest. This chapter also introduces the basic content of each digital *testimonio* with regard to the narrator’s ‘dispossession’ in section 4.

Answering the basic question of how these narrators *perform* their dispossession in their digital *testimonios* by means of multimodal storytelling that the YouTube video affords, in order to shape their political meaning, the subsequent chapters are devoted to the analysis of the narratives. The chapters are structured

according to different modes, as the overview in chapter 4 suggests and interpret the different narratives interchangeably according to the different categories of that mode. According to the logic on YouTube, chapter 5 begins with the most literal type of performance – the corporeal performance – a performance which, in the digital *testimonios*, is mediatized as a motion image, filmed by a camera and ‘starring’ the narrator of each of the eight *testimonios*. As all analysis chapters, chapter 5 first introduces the basic categories for analysis that the analysis features. Chapter 5 thus narrows down the virtual corporeal, face-to-face performance of the narrator in moving image to the effect of gestures, facial expressions, space, and movement. It further introduces the use of an ‘other narrator’ through film editing – cutting and zoom, in particular, and the interplay between verbal spoken narrative and the visual moving image.

Chapter 6 investigates the use of voice, noises, and music in the narratives. It lays particular emphasis on the tradition of the *testimonio* as a form of oral storytelling (that is then transcribed by an interlocutor and edited into written text). Thus, the introduction of the narratives, in particular, bears close resemblance to *testimonios* such as that of Rigoberta Menchú, most famously. The chapter further connects this tradition to performativity as materialized performances and speech acts, in which one can locate inherent insurgent qualities to counter dispossession. Para-verbal features such as speech tempo, loudness, pitch, as well as the use of dramatic silences, acoustic space, and, finally, instrumental background music, reveal the richness of sound in the digital *testimonios* that this chapter sheds light upon.

The last chapter for analysis, chapter 7, explores the use of written language as well as static images and props as significant markers of space in the videos. The use of captions, in particular, illustrate new film-making techniques that the digital video adapts to and makes its own in the creation of meaning. Photos add another visual level that re-establishes the connection of the digital *testimonio* to its offline context: actions of protest and photo evidence of the immigration background upon which undocumented youth base their stories.

Shifting the current focus on entertainment, which is commonly understood as the major function of a website like YouTube, “to citizenship”, according to White and Whyn, “places the emphasis on the ways in which these technologies contribute to and shape community, belonging, and engagement with society” (212). As the

focus on mediatization in this investigation highlights, instead of simply accepting, we should *question* “the uses of YouTube by real people as part of everyday life” (Burgess and Green 8), rather than “thinking about YouTube as if it is a weightless depository of content” (9). If we indulge in this thought, indeed, digital narratives of undocumented youth enter spheres that might fulfill their *testimonio*’s promise to put “spoken word to social action” and transform an “oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Benmayor, Torruellas, and Juarbe 153).

## **Chapter 2**

### **TOWARDS A MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS:**

#### **THE MOVEMENT, POLITICS, AND MEDIA LOGIC IN YOUTUBE NARRATIVES OF UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH**

### **1. Politics of the Immigrant Rights Movement Since 2006**

#### **1.1. The Movement and the Public Sphere: Towards a Definition of Politics**

In the study of the current Immigrant Rights Movement, particular focus lies on ‘new’ concerns in social movements that call for ‘new’ strategies for entering public debate through the use of cultural products, of which digital narratives published on YouTube serve as an example. Paul Gilroy refers to social movements as “patterns of political action and organization, which have emerged”, challenging, in particular, “the mode of production and struggle for control of the ways in which a society appropriates scarce resources”, but also “struggling [...] for collective control over socio-economic development as a whole” (405). Gilroy explicitly stresses the role of “the rise of new technologies, and new communicative networks” that become central aspects in the growth of “these new movements” (ibid). This insight links the fact that “movements are created when political opportunities open up for social actors who usually lack them” to the agency that undocumented youth assume (Tarrow, *Power* 1). The latter are not only marginalized due to their status, they do not even possess basic civil and even human rights, leaving them ‘dispossessed’<sup>11</sup> by the rules of the state. These technically exclude them from any type of access to political organization and activism (as from any other form of civic engagement) due to the agents’ undocumented status. The ‘political opportunities’ that Tarrow further ascribes to such agents imply a public dimension of the term ‘political’. While the terms ‘political’ and ‘politics’ can be broadly defined, the analysis of YouTube videos as means of political expression requires a definition for ‘the political’ that stresses the public face of the Movement, because activists in the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006 gain greater media coverage than ever before (cf. Pérez 69).

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<sup>11</sup> A term coined by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, which will be discussed and applied in detail in chapter 4.

This aspect changed the Movement drastically. The public face of movements is now frequently mediated through *New Media*, resulting in new uses and products (cf. Bennett and Entman 1). Esser and Strömbäck correlate the public face of a movement to public support. They claim that politics necessarily has “a public face” as it focuses on a variety of tasks in the public sphere, such as “tactics and strategies for winning public support and publicity, symbolic politics, image projections and branding, and on the presentational side of politics” (*Mediatization* 15).<sup>12</sup> These processes of garnering support, in sum, have the ultimate goal to “increase public or political support in different processes of problem definition and framing, agenda-setting, policy formation and political negotiations” (ibid).

The most important aspect included in this definition of the political is the notion of a ‘public sphere’ as a negotiating space for “power- and publicity-gaining presentational politics” which Esser and Strömbäck propose (*Mediatization* 16). Habermas’ original<sup>13</sup> coining of the term stresses that political communication is grounded in a public sphere, which is an ideal space between the state and the private, where public opinions are discussed and formed and where citizens can participate on an equal basis (see, i.e. Bennett and Entman 3; Hands 99; Edgar 124). He argues, in particular, that the private and the public are negotiated in the public sphere (cf. Habermas 12).<sup>14</sup> Further, derived from inter alia Greek mythology, Habermas describes active communication in the public sphere as follows: In the ‘exchange among equals’, which he pictures an ideal dialogue, only the ‘best’ may win and gain credit for their superiority in the argument.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Habermas stresses the appreciation that the public sphere can grant to its participants.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The two concepts that Strömbäck and Esser define against this conceptualization of ‘politics’ is ‘polity’, “the system of rules regulating the political process” and “institutional structure” as well as ‘policy’ which “refers to the processes of defining problems and forming and implementing policies with a certain institutional framework” (*Mediatization* 15).

<sup>13</sup> According to Edgar, Habermas frequently “revised his views of the public sphere, and suggested that he was less pessimistic about the erosion of the public debate”, which he saw in “modern public relations and advertising” (127). Due to the lack of organizational interdependence of the individual narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube, Habermas’ concerns and subsequent reformulations of the concept are not of essential relevance for this study.

<sup>14</sup> “Die Öffentlichkeit selbst stellt sich als eine Sphäre dar – dem privaten steht der öffentliche Bereich gegenüber” (Habermas 12).

<sup>15</sup> “Im Gespräch der Bürger miteinander kommen die Dinge zur Sprache und gewinnen Gestalt; im Streit der Gleichen miteinander tun sich die Besten hervor und gewinnen ihr Wesen – die Unsterblichkeit des Ruhms” (Habermas 13).

<sup>16</sup> “Die Tugenden [...] bewähren sich einzig in der Öffentlichkeit, finden dort ihre Anerkennung” (Habermas 13).

Habermas echoes Esser and Strömbäck's emphasis of publicity and presentation of the political, further highlighting, however, the aspect of 'power', which Habermas seems to exclude in an attempt to make all his agents in the sphere equal (he talks of 'Ruhm' – glory – but not directly of 'power' that one interlocutor has over the other in the public sphere). To what extent do narratives of undocumented youth, in the tradition of the *testimonio*, hold a claim to political (or personal) empowerment, if any? An attempt to answer this question will be made in the following section of this chapter.

It is further crucial to mention the ideal character of Habermas' normative notion of the public space. Bennett and Entman, for instance, critically note that "in this sphere, individuals have the freedom to judge the quality of their governmental decisions independently of censorship" (2) – an ideal which "has never been achieved, and [...] probably never will", they argue (3). However, through this ideal model the scholars also expound Habermas' public sphere as "a construct against which different real-world approximations can be evaluated" (*ibid.*). For their purposes, they define it as "*any and all locations, physical or virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly*" (2-3, *emphasis given*). In a similarly open way, Edgar claims that "public sphere" denotes "those social institutions that allow for open and rational debate between citizens in order to form public opinion" (124), stressing the various forms of communication that can take place between the citizens. Not being citizens, undocumented youth are theoretically excluded from Habermas' concept, which directs attention to the precise uses that undocumented youth make of this public sphere. The major question that comes up from both definitions is whether the platform YouTube, which serves as the *space* where undocumented youth make their narratives *public* – where they *communicate* – could serve as such a public space for political processes as those defined above.<sup>17</sup> As Pallares suggests in her 2015 book,

While the movement has persevered in creative ways, there are no easy options. The greatest challenge for undocumented immigrant activists is the creation of a new world, a new politics in which their personhood takes precedence over their 'merit' in a context in which merit appears to be the only yardstick that matters. (*Family Activism* 140)

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter 3 narrows down a specific appliance of YouTube as a public sphere and/or political space with regard to the medium's own logic.

Pallares' words suggest the re-formulation of existing ideas through the very presence of their otherwise undocumented, non-existing personhood: Undocumented youth publish their digital narratives in a public sphere that might not live up to Habermas' ideal realm of equal citizens, but that still can be defined as a space for political communication. Through their participation in the political discourse about immigration on YouTube, they not only re-define the public sphere according to their purposes – those of an *undocumented* person, and *not* a citizen. Thereby, they actively claim a belonging to the public sphere and, in broader terms, the U.S. American public.<sup>18</sup> Applying these thoughts, the following sections document the activism that undocumented youth have initiated outside of YouTube, as well as the historical foundations for their activism, in order to claim the aforementioned public sphere in other public spaces such as YouTube.

## **1.2. Politics of the Movement: Historical Developments as Context**

The historical basis of the Latin@ immigrant rights movement in the United States is immense. As Pérez reminds us, “activism is a significant dimension of civic engagement and has been an important part of African American and Latino history and culture” (79). Any claim that the current political Movement of undocumented youth is an altogether new one would be false. Ramírez' work on the Chican@ Movement during the 1960s and 1970s shows that living conditions, legal situations and activism had an immediate and strong impact on Chican@s of that time. He argues that “it was by no means without consequence or sacrifice to be politically involved”, however, there was also a “growing social support for opposition among a small but increasing number of teachers, clergy, and certainly youth, participating college students” (Ramírez, *Social Action* 175). As we can see, youths and students from the start have constituted the majority of the Immigrant Rights Movement. The basis for social change and revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, however, was laid by the black Civil Rights Movement or antiwar movements, “countercultural rebellion, and worldwide opposition to United States domination” in the world (ibid). “Social unrest bred further resistance and inspired additional social movements, including those focused on women and gay liberation”, Ramírez adds (ibid). Just as the Movement might be described as a panethnic one, it could also be described as a transna-

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter 4 elaborates on ‘belonging’ theory in more detail.



tional type of work – even if this might sound ambiguous. Here, the connection between immigrant rights movements from the 1960s and 1970s plays a central role in keeping transnational strategies for activism up until today. Pallares explains:

While hometown associations are better known for their community development work in Mexico, they were active as participants and organizers in the marches. The roots of this activism lie in earlier struggles (directed at governments of both countries) for the rights of Mexican citizens in the United States. The marches have charted new terrain for these associations and provided them with political capital that offers new opportunities for them in U.S. national and local politics. (Pallares and Flores-González xxvi)

These roots, altogether, are an important criterion for defining the *revived* Immigrant Rights Movement. Much like blacks in their Civil Rights Movement, undocumented youth fight for ‘their rights’ *in* the United States. It is only on a societal level that undocumented youth speak openly against ‘mainstream’ U.S. society. They do this in the form of protest against prejudices or societal injustice done to undocumented immigrants, immigrants in general, as well as people of color or lower social status. Along these lines, it is important to stress that it is merely legal dominion of the U.S. that they fight (e.g. in form of anti-immigrant legislation), not the cultural. This implies that U.S. American values are not only embraced but also stressed in activists’ campaigns in order to claim common grounds with mainstream society and a right to remain in the country although having entered it ‘illegally’.

What is striking on a general level, however, is the parallel that undocumented youth activists since 2006 perceive between their Immigrant Rights Movement with civil rights movements from the 1960s and 1970s – an association which also Pérez makes (cf. 85): “Undocumented student activists have learned from the successes of the civil rights movement and have applied some of the same strategies in their struggle for equality”, he argues (88). “Several of the citizen-activists”, Pallares and Flores-González point out “connections between their civil rights struggle against what they perceive as their status as second-class citizens and the exclusion of the undocumented from formal citizenship” (xxiii). These parallels are echoed in situations of dispossession that define as ‘core moments’ in the ‘story’ of the narratives. These explain the inherent motivation for producing the digital narrative (featured in chapter 3). In this respect, Manuel et al. define ‘their’ Movement as follows: “As student activists, we are building on the tradition of the civil rights movement

and promoting the passage of legislation that will enable millions of undocumented students to not only dream but also start living a life without borders” (xiii). However, Pallares and Flores-González also stress one of three central distinctions that they establish to previous immigrant rights movements, especially from the Mexican and Puerto Rican civil rights movements of the 1970s: “While the previous movements had an explicit civil rights agenda, arguing for education, urban justice, and land rights and against police brutality and racism,” the authors claim, “immigrant rights were often included implicitly but not as a central platform” (xxii). In contrast, the current Movement now “is characterized by an agenda that centers on immigrant rights, civil rights, and workers’ rights that concern most Latinos and all working-class communities of color” (ibid). The shift away from *primarily* civil and human rights to immigrant rights with a focus on civil and human rights, thus signals the importance of the Movement’s activism and rights movements in immigrant communities.

What is also striking about the association with civil rights movements and, in particular, the black Civil Rights Movement in the United States is not only the implicit fight against discrimination on the basis of the color of the skin – racism – but also the change in definition that this latter movement brought about in the 1970s. As Munck reports, “prior to the 1960s, the dominant approach to social movements stressed their anomalous, practically irrational character” (20). But, he observes, “these attitudes were to change in the 1960s, particularly in North America, ‘when for the first time in history large numbers of privileged people ... had considerable sympathy for the efforts of those at the bottom of society to demand freedoms and material improvements’” (Goodwin and Jasper in: Munck 21). Association with this Movement, hence, is not only a cry for the cause of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement but also a cry for widespread acceptance of the Movement *itself*. It seems less striking then that issues concerning race in immigrant communities (such as racial profiling) are central in the political agenda of the Movement but also part of a set of strategies against worst-case scenarios such as deportation due to prior racial profiling. Protest against racial discrimination, hence, becomes important in forming a panethnic movement as well: As Pallares observes, the struggle is

intimately tied to existing racial structures in which nonimmigrant Latinos see the movement as belonging to them, too, not only because of their personal or

familial associations with immigrants but also because of a racial solidarity with immigrants as well as lived experiences such as racial profiling. (*The Chicago Context* 56)

As a consequence, this Movement is said to “also include[...] immigrants from other groups” and “those involved in the twenty-first-century movement describe it as a panethnic Latino mobilization” (Pallares and Flores-González xxiii). Further, ‘new’ is the attention to *undocumented* immigration/immigrants in the United States that can be seen in the Immigrant Rights Movement. Pallares and Flores-González explain: “The focus on the rights of the undocumented marks a second important characteristic of this movement” (ibid). In contrast, in earlier immigrant rights movements, “for many Mexican Americans trying to organize collectively to get ahead, integration into the United States required separating themselves from any association with undocumented immigrants and emphasizing ‘Americanness’” (xxii). The degree to which ‘Americanness’ again hits the top of the agenda, especially in the ‘early’ years of the ‘new’ movement, will be a central question when contextualizing the digital narratives of undocumented youth selected for this study. Suffice it to say at this point that, in the authors’ words, “unlike earlier Latino assimilationist views, the struggles of the undocumented do not impede the ascent of new Americans; rather, social justice and dignity for naturalized Latinos and their descendents rests on the inclusion of the undocumented” (ibid).<sup>19</sup>

The term ‘undocumented’, at this point, also requires further definition. While there are many other terms describing and naming people who are in the country without legal permission either by immigrating into the country or by overstaying a visa, for example, the term ‘undocumented’ remains the most-widely accepted one. Along with the ‘illegal’, the two terms present migration categories that have “a long history in the United States” even prior to official birth of the terms in the 1920s (Abrego 215). The term ‘illegal’ originates in the category of the ‘illegal alien’ which was established “through through laws excluding Chinese laborers and other marginalized groups” (ibid). More recently, it has undergone several phases of explicit political attack because it criminalizes and dehumanizes immigrants without making any further distinctions (cf. Rusin 3). The protest finally manifested itself in the ‘Drop I-Word’-campaign, launched by Colorlines.com in 2010, which succeeded in

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<sup>19</sup> Even among my four interview candidates, concepts of ‘Americanness’ were interpreted very differently, as was its strategic potential for activist organizations.

getting the Associated Press to drop the compound noun ‘illegal immigrant’ from its stylebook (Rivas). In a personal interview, Antonio Gutiérrez explains the background of the campaign against the term ‘illegal’ as follows:

Overall, we haven’t done anything wrong; we haven’t done any big crime, I mean, I know that, practically, or in a legal sense, yes, being here undocumented is an illegal form of being here, just because we *entered* ‘illegally’ or we stayed here ‘illegally’ and based on *their* laws, but overall, as human beings we haven’t done anything criminal, as far as I know, because we came here with the reason of bettering ourselves, of bettering our families. So, yeah, I mean, the term ‘illegal’ just doesn’t make any sense to me and I feel like the ‘Drop I-Word’, which was a campaign for dropping the word ‘illegal’, it did a very good sense of that; of, like, we’re a community that is not a *criminal* community; we’re just here to make a better life. And so we shouldn’t be named or represented with that word. (Gutiérrez)

In another interview, Gabriela Benítez further connects the campaign to the black Civil Rights Movement from the 60s and 70s:

To respect the African-American community I wouldn’t want to say that but I do say that it’s a [...] derogatory term that the community has really pushed against in a way that we have seen some sort of progress. But even in that, there’s a conversation around in the movement around, instead of not using the term to ‘owning’ the term. (*laughs*) But I feel like I wouldn’t wanna own a term that makes me cringe, you know? (Benítez)

As we can see from both statements, undocumented youth activists see the word indeed as derogatory; however, at least the term does provide an opportunity for activism against the status of being undocumented. Summing up, while the term does not have a history of discrimination as does the n-word for African Americans, as Gabriela Benítez says, its offending meaning is discussed within the Movement and the issues of discrimination and racism appear in many of the public narratives. Which terms are chosen to describe ‘undocumented immigrants’ in the narratives thus provides clues for the time in which the narrative was published in addition to the political standing of the individual narrator.

It is crucial to recognize the central focus of ‘undocumented’ immigration in this revived Immigrant Rights Movement. Orner, for instance, challenges the word ‘undocumented’ altogether: “An undocumented person is not undocumented at all. Of course they [undocumented immigrants] have documents: family photos, diplomas, driver’s licenses, love letters, emails, credit card bills, tax forms, homework,

child's drawings" (*Introduction* 12). And yet "the only thing that truly links them together is their lack of federal immigration status – in other words, certain pieces of paper" (*ibid.*).

Being an undocumented immigrant, however, embraces many more facades that are ultimately connected to the state of being 'dispossessed' in Butler's sense. Orner stresses that it is not only citizenship rights that the undocumented are lacking in their attempts to exercise from the underground, but also the most basic human rights.<sup>20</sup> "The lack of legal protection afforded to undocumented immigrants – as well as the capricious enforcement of laws", he argues, "has led to serious human rights abuses, both by the government and by those private individuals who would exploit the vulnerability of undocumented people" (*Introduction*, 10). Consequently, they are petrified by "the fear of deportation, of being separated from one's family, of losing one's job", which "frequently overrides any wish to go to authorities" (*ibid.*).

Given these intimidating circumstances, it may seem paradoxical that undocumented youth are 'coming out of the shadows'. However, fear can also be examined as a motivating agent generating *testimonios*, which are a well-known strategy to overcome psychological constraints, frequently used in psychological therapies. The initiative for 'coming out of the shadows', we should mention at this point, relates to the 'Coming out of the Shadows' – campaigns led by homosexuals within the greater civil rights movements of the 60s, 70s and 80s (cf. White 990). This association is not accidental. Many leading activists are also openly 'homosexual' and call themselves 'Undocu-queers': These activists acknowledge a shared history of discrimination and have moved from a single issue struggle towards a movement that often unites the struggle and movement against both types of discrimination and oppression (the sexual and the undocumented) (*ibid.*). Antonio Gutiérrez reports:

I came out as a homosexual to my friends and family when I was a senior in high school and it was a very, also very fearful time for me and I was very afraid that I wasn't gonna be accepted by my family [...]. But at the end of

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<sup>20</sup> Kymlicka adds that "minority rights cannot be subsumed under the category of human rights", either, because "traditional human rights standards are simply unable to resolve some of the most important and controversial questions relating to cultural minorities" (*Multicultural Citizenship*, 4). Different rights (and the lack thereof) therefore need to be negotiated for specific individuals and groups of a minority in the current cultural and political context. For further discussions of 'citizenship' (rights) see chapter 4.

the day I decided to do it and I had the best reaction that I could have thought of. They were very accepting. If anything, I became closer to them because now, I was able to have this other side of me be able to be shown to them. Unfortunately it wasn't the same thing for me coming out as being undocumented. I didn't come out as being undocumented maybe until I was a junior in college [...]. Coming out as being undocumented, it was even more nerve-wracking than coming out as being gay. I just remember being so afraid of getting myself into trouble and getting my family into trouble and I think it feels, just having both – being gay and also being undocumented – is double the oppression in individuals. And I know a lot of people that have to deal with that. But it just really adds on. (Gutiérrez)

As Gutiérrez explains, the struggle “adds on”; he teaches us that the line cannot be drawn neatly when it comes to who is included and who sees him-/herself as included in the Movement.

Two further important constituents/agents in the Immigrant Rights Movement are the working class and, in particular, labor unions, and religion. According to Fink, in the first revived protests in spring 2006, and “in the months leading up to the May 1 megamarch, Chicago’s labor movement forged a strong and enduring connection with the new tide of immigrant rights mobilization” (109). It “effectively provid[ed] the infrastructural funding for subsequent May Day rallies and generally lift[ed] their voices to demand legalization” (ibid). The ideological change in the Movement appeared to be even more drastic, as, seemingly, “labor shifted from opposing to supporting the legalization of undocumented immigrants” (Pallares and Flores-González xxv).<sup>21</sup> In a similar manner, religion, which was seen as “another of the old, even ‘pre-modern’ social movements” (Munck 27) gained ‘renewed’ importance in the Immigrant Rights Movement. “Encouraging immigrants (even those who may not have access to formal citizenship) to act as citizens by assuming new rights and responsibilities”, according to Pallares and Flores-González, “some Catholic parishes have carried out extensive work in politicizing immigrant communities so that members will exercise their economic, social, and political rights” (xxv). With particular focus on the megamarches in Chicago, Davis, Martínez and Warner argue, “the Catholic Church is an important – perhaps the most important – intuition- al vehicle for the mass mobilization of [...] Mexican Americans” (93).

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<sup>21</sup> Main reasons for this shift are the unions’ previously perceived “contradictions between the rights of the undocumented and workers’ rights” and a change in demographics (xxv).

### 1.3. The Public Face: Leadership and Movement

Gabriela Benítez formulates the origins of the Movement as follows:

It was the first, sort of core group of folks – and I remember we had this legislative training and all of the staff, and it was...I met *so* many other people that were going through the same thing that I was going through and it just became like the support system I didn't have. It was more than that [...]. It was with students like me, right? And students from other states, students from Massachusetts, students from just all over the place, Florida, New York, and yeah, so I continued to organize, I continued to do that. (Benítez)

As diverse as the origins of the different foci for the Movement might seem, just as many different interests are represented and united in the revived Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. Like the difficulty of delineation associated with the assimilationist concept of 'Americanness', and with undocumented identity, the Movement is similarly characterized by ambiguity when it comes to the notion of leadership. There does not seem to be "one great leader" in general, as Pallares and Flores-González observe:

The movement does not lack leadership but in fact is following a very different model based on a loose coalition of networks and an organizing style that privileges open deliberation and the inclusion of multiple voices. This leadership model enables joint coordination of the marches among very different groups, but it may also impede a more coherent agenda. (xxv-xxvi)

With regard to the 'united' political goal, Pallares concludes that "the movement has no single voice but rather a plethora of voices, all seeking a common goal but with very different ideas about how to get there" (*The Chicago Context* 54). In particular, the political and economic interests of the different campaigns in the various organizations also lead to different emphases on the discourse of undocumented immigrants. After all, "immigrant activism tapped into networks such as informal youth groups and hometown associations that had not previously been as active in local politics" and "many immigrant activist leaders have overlapping relationships" (57). Here, Pallares makes an essential differentiation between the grassroots versus the institutional organizations of undocumented immigrants, expressing an "institutional/grassroots divide" (ibid):

Grassroots' organizations lesser resources and access to national-level policymakers have led some activists to express concern about such groups' ability to get their perspectives included in high-level legislative policy negotia-

tions. Some grassroots activists even perceive a disconnection between themselves and Latino advocacy organizations and express a desire to play a more active role in policy creation. (ibid)

As a consequence, “many local and regional organizations are already working with national organizations such as the Center for Community Change to affect the immigration debate in Congress” (ibid). The movement in the city of Chicago, for instance, shows “ongoing debates regarding mobilization versus organization, grassroots versus national advocacy, and support for party politicians versus political independence, all of which have parallels in other parts of the country” (Pallares and Flores-González xxiv). The possible transfer of these continuing differences to the sector of New Media – and mediatization – is now an interesting component for the analysis of the Immigrant Rights Movement in the United States since 2006.

There is also disagreement regarding the eventual ‘goal’ or wish for ‘outcome’ of the Movement. The one point of agreement is that the immigration system is ‘broken’. Even within the two polar groups, one wishing for legalization of all undocumented immigrants, the other for further restriction on the influx of immigrants, “members of both groups call for comprehensive immigration reform” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 20). However, “supporters of immigrant rights seek to legalize all undocumented immigrants, while restrictionists argue for further limits and their strict enforcement both internally and at the border” (ibid). In sum, “in this battle, legalization and enforcement were positioned as polar opposites” (ibid). This polarity within the same movement is evident in the activists’ idea of a comprehensive immigration reform. Gabriela Benítez, one of the long-term activists I interviewed in spring 2014, expresses her frustration with the particular details in the CIR Bill proposed by Obama and passed in the Senate:

Especially after the Senate Bill was proposed [...] it’s a joke! It’s compromising so much of our community in order to pass this and relief to so little of it. Border militarization, and drones and just so many requirements and fines and lack of accessibility to our community, it’s a joke! *I don’t want it to pass, I don’t want it to pass.* (Benítez)

The topic of comprehensive immigration reform and immigration policy naturally influences the election choices of the former ‘sleeping giant’. Now, more than ever, immigration issues impact the “political and ideological forms of solidarity in a period of perceived persecution, cultural and transnational affinities in an increasing-



ly globalized world, and second-generation immigrant identification” (Pallares and Flores-González xxiii). However, as we have seen, political splits within the Movement have evolved throughout the long history of immigration activism. What seem to be evident boundaries separating activists also unite them into a hybrid movement. Pallares and Flores-González have found “this movement [to be] a hybrid one, in which the principal actors are both legal and undocumented”; the citizens “struggle for equal citizenship”, the undocumented “struggle for formal citizenship”, and, finally, these two struggles turn out to be “deeply intertwined” (xxiii). Topics such as ‘family separation’ become more important to all activists as the movement evolves with the years (cf. Pallares, *Family Activism* 1), and as deportation numbers increase to unprecedented levels (Preston, *Deportation*). López and Minushkin document “a majority of Latinos worry about deportation: 40 percent worry about it a lot, while an additional 17 percent worry about it some” (in: Pallares and Flores-González xxii-xxiii). The boundaries between undocumented and legal immigrants in the United States slowly dissolve as “many naturalized Latinos have undocumented immigrants in their immediate or extended families”, regarding it as their “responsibility to serve as the voice for those not recognized as legitimate spokespersons” for the causes of the undocumented (xxiii). In fact, the topic of family will gain increasing importance during the latest phase of the Movement.<sup>22</sup>

According to Gabriel Benítez, additional divisions within the Movement spring from disparate economic necessities, resulting in different strategies and goals, as well as emotionally charged fights over the particular goals that activists aspired to reach. She begins with her own experience in the movement as it deve-

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<sup>22</sup> As Pallares defines in her newest book, *Family Activism: Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship*, published in November 2014, “one immediate consequence of these state-led processes”, namely, “increased deportations” and an “increased visibility of these separations”, have led for the family to “become politicized in new ways and has acquired political meaning for undocumented immigrants and their families, legal immigrants, and the wider Latino communities in which they reside” (Pallares, *Representing ‘La Familia’* 215). This does not only make undocumented families but also mixed-status families into focal points within this problem. Hence, very current activism and campaigns in Chicago “rely on prevalent values of family preservation, continuity, and unity, arguing that these moral goals should supersede immigration laws” (219). In addition to that, “activists also challenge a liberal political framework based primarily on the notion of individual rights, arguing that the deportation of parents violates the right of citizen children to be raised by their parents in their country of birth” (ibid). With regard to the current focus on ‘re-entry’ – campaigns (against the system that marks immigrants with a previous deportation as a ‘high-priority’ case for a renewed deportation), the issue of ‘family (re-)union’ further gains central importance (cf. Pallares, *Representing ‘La Familia’* 220). The issue of ‘family’ and ‘family’ unity will be a focal point in the analysis of the earliest narrative, Stephanie’s, and the latest narrative, that of Luis, yet with quite different outcomes, as we shall see.

veloped in Tennessee and ends by referring to current strategies and focus of the Movement:

But at the same time [...] a movement, I wouldn't say 'split' but it 'grew'. *United We Dream*, which was the big organization, sort of leading it, had *NIYA* formed, the National Immigrant Youth Alliance. I wasn't fully part of all of that, because in Tennessee we didn't have all the resources to be fully involved and so wherever we could fundraise to go to, but at that point I was like, it was sort of depressing but at the same time, as time went through, I saw that it's a good way because we were providing off-voice in different strategies –even now you see with the 'Bring Them Home'-campaign, it's been very controversial but at the same time it has gardened a lot of support. That goes again to the big question of not just supporting the 'Dream Act' but supporting something bigger. The Comprehensive Immigration Reform, CIR, conversation isn't there anymore as much, I would say, it's not the only topic discussed on dinner tables and immigrant communities and meetings, now it's deportations. And that has been part of lots and lots of work. I was saying 'We're *tired of being tired* of fighting for this thing that's never gonna pass'. (Benítez)

In her account, Gabriela Benítez references the two key campaigns, the national DREAM Act<sup>23</sup> as well as Comprehensive Immigration Reform. As both legislation proposals have been debated frequently but never passed, Gabriela Benítez voices her frustrations with the system and a shift in focus: With the numbers of annual deportations as high as ever, she argues that fighting deportations is more important than the actual legislative component of the Immigrant Rights Movement – the CIR. Her statement shows that different strategies within the Movement are inextricably connected to personal aspirations, family situations and, also, the success of the previous strategies for a particular cause. Further, whenever we analyze personal narratives within the context of a social movement, we should be aware of the personal background and resulting subjectivity and frame the individual political stance in the Movement itself. Because of this, the situations of dispossession will be closely

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<sup>23</sup> The legislation that many of these students and other immigrant activists press for is the DREAM Act (acronym for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors); a path to citizenship for undocumented students if they succeed in graduating from college. It was first proposed in Congress in 2001 and has been furiously debated ever since (Pérez 8). Further, "the bill would benefit undocumented students who meet the following requirements" – requirements that after the introduction of the bill many undocumented youth then strove for, if possible: "-Entry into the United States before age 16; -Continuous presence in the United States for 5 years prior to the bill's enactment; - Receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent (i.e., a GED); and – Demonstration of good moral character" (ibid).

examined with a focus upon the connections between ‘the personal’ and ‘the political’ in chapter 4.

Further, glancing back at the history of the Immigrant Rights Movement, we see differences in opinions and political strategies evolving among activists united by the cause. While its historical roots are portrayed above as a consolidated basis for the revived Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, the movement of the 60s and 70s was indeed diverse and split into different, smaller interests. Ramírez recounts:

At the onset of the Movement, there was greater unity. Even when differences arose, it was often necessary to work in alliance with others in order to make progress. There was a moment when the powerful effects of racism and class marginalization created strong bonds of solidarity. Initially, the them-against-us perspective tied activists to one another despite political differences, personalities, and organizational allegiances. (*Preface* xiii)

This postcolonial mission to fight a form of oppression unifies the Movement despite its internal differences. When investigating undocumented youth and their personal narratives within the Immigrant Rights Movement, we must recognize that different interests and tensions exist between the many ideas, activists and non-activists, organizations, political and discursive trends all over the nation. In this sense, the revived Immigrant Rights Movement is not new but incorporates new dimensions, including its cultural output online. Further, these collisions of different viewpoints are processes in this social movement that, as Ramírez shows, are “not solely a question of personalities, ambitions, or a general tendency for all social movements to splinter and disintegrate over time” (*Preface* xiv). Rather, the ever-existing fractions in social movements should also be seen within their historical contexts:

Understanding the nature of divisions that arose during the 1960s and 1970s is important for contemporary political mobilization. Massive protests in support of immigrant rights in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the subsequent differences and rivalries that surfaced within the ranks of the immigrant-rights leadership are reminders of the continuous need to identify, clarify, and understand the roots of tension among leaders. (xiii)

As Pallares reminds us, while we analyze the digital narratives of undocumented youth in the context of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, we need to bear in mind that “differences in goals, strategies, and visions plague almost all movements” (*The Chicago Context* 52). “Moreover,” she argues, “most of the differences visible in Chicago are faced by immigrant activists throughout the coun-

try” (ibid), which is an essential condition for the interpretation of the political message, legislation requests, and organizational backgrounds of the narrators, producers, and distributors of the digital narratives. Naturally, these different goals also evoke the creation of different strategies. Uriel Sánchez, for instance, defines ‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ events as deliberate strategies of the Movement that, however, are not embraced equally by all activists in the Movement.

‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ came out in March, or at least what we know of it, in March of 2010 and ‘Shout it Out’ was in October of 2009. And I think if you saw a ‘Coming Out’, a lot of those discussions that we had were free-ranging; they were from, like, writing just something on the Internet, and spreading that out, or having something a little bit more private to actually having the whole full-on civil disobedience action in federal buildings. [...] So I think, while having that discussion of those different kinds of ideas for ‘Coming Out’ meant that there were different people with different ideas and there were in the movement or in the political sense of, like, where they were and personally at different stages. So not everybody was necessarily ready to do a civil disobedience action; not everybody wanted to just do like a little private event or online thing. People wanted to do *different* things. (Sánchez)

#### **1.4. The Movement’s Gone Online! On Personal Voices and Political Strategies in the Immigrant Youth Justice League, Chicago**

Much secondary literature on social movements and activism in the Internet age confirms the impressions gathered from interviews with undocumented youth in this study. Consistent with the answers youth activists gave in the interviews I conducted in Chicago, in spring 2014, research shows that “new media such as the Internet undoubtedly have the potential to affect the direction and outcomes of political activism at all levels” (White and Wyn 220; see section 2 for detail). White and Wyn find that “digital communications”, in particular, “enable young people, through digital sites, to use popular culture as resource for political struggle”, fostering “political organization and action” (217). Pérez confirms the significance of the Internet as a device in activism. He connects online activism to an explicit political agenda and, therefore, the aim to change legislation:

Social networking sites have nurtured the growth of these student activist groups and have become a powerful tool for undocumented youth activism. Compared with other media, the Internet is dispersed and decentralized, features that increase the ability of ordinary people to create and sustain social movements. [...] Over the last few years, these Internet resources have facili-

tated undocumented student efforts to promote legislation such as the DREAM Act. (83)

Approaching the changes that New Media triggered for the politics of the Immigrant Rights Movement, I focus this section upon a set of data that I gathered in interviews with undocumented youth activists from the Immigrant Youth Justice League in Chicago, in spring 2014. In the interviews, these young people were asked about the role of New Media in and for the Immigrant Rights Movement. Their answers will provide a foundation for the analysis of the digital narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube.

The answers that I got in the interviews mostly stress the positive effects of the changes that New Media and the Internet have had for political participation inside and outside the Movement. More specifically, Uriel Sánchez emphasizes the importance of New Media and particularly the Internet for the Movement as a means for organizing, because the Internet is “free, accessible” and exhibits no “preference for socio-economic standard”. He further highlights the speed and multiple applications that accelerate communication, which, according to him, helps a great deal to “keep this movement going”. Uriel also connects New Media and the Internet to the Movement’s gain in power, claiming that “information is power, now you don’t have only power holders that are monopolizing over that power which existed with traditional media. Now you have a new medium; people doing their own thing and being able to have autonomy with what they choose to spread”. What he stresses, in particular, is the choice and power that undocumented immigrants have over the content that is published on them, since they can choose to publish something *themselves*. His statement also makes clear that media has always been a topic for (undocumented) immigrants in the United States, clearly linking current media developments in the Movement and statuses of marginalization and criminalization within its history.

Marcela Hernandez’s answer to my question is very similar to Uriel’s, while she also stresses the role of undocumented youth as major agents in the New Media sphere:

And now, that we found this tool, called news stream, we were actually able to produce our media and record our own movement. And put it out there to anybody in the nation or the world that wanted to watch it. So, it has really allowed us to produce a, you know, to really record our own voices and put it out there, even if mainstream media is not gonna cover all of it. So, I think

that has been one of the most valuable things that we have used in recent, you know, in the last probably three, four years. That power of not relying on mainstream media and now creating our own media and put in our own stories out there. (Hernandez)

Marcela further includes in the description of the role of New Media for the Movement the ‘stories’ that activists in the revived Immigrant Rights Movement produce. Her word choice with regard to the output published in New Media is interesting, in so far as she does not explicitly refer to it as ‘information’ – like Uriel did – but as ‘stories’. Thereby she includes a degree of fictionality and subjectivity in the output, which apparently does not make a difference with regard to the representation of the Movement in the media. Choosing the words ‘stories’ and ‘own voices’, Marcela further highlights personal aspects (such as biographical elements, for instance) that flow into the production of the Movement’s output in New Media. Clearly, she validates a shared background and community. Marcela further argues that connecting with other activists via the Internet “let us know that we are not alone [...]. I mean, there was a bigger network of people who are working on this issue”. To Marcela, it does not seem to matter that this community exists, first and foremost, virtually, connecting real, personal feelings such as a boost in confidence to the virtual space. On the contrary, Uriel Sánchez also stresses that undocumented immigrant activism on New Media such as YouTube does not necessarily need to be connected to organizations that also exist offline. He argues that

that’s how a lot of people started organizing. And still, in a sense, organize. Or at least share their opinion on the issue is by not necessarily being affiliated with a group or an organization but just doing their own thing. I think that’s just as powerful because now you’re showing, again, contrary to – and, you know, it could be any global place, it could be somebody something very pro-immigrants, somebody posting something very anti-immigrant. (Sánchez)

Thus, YouTube, in Uriel’s view, is a basis for organizing via either personal or organizational means, but in any case highly subjective.

To this list of positive attributes and uses of New Media for the Movement, Antonio Gutiérrez adds the ease with which the Movement can reach its desired ‘audience’ to call for support. He argues that New Media on the Internet not only “help[...] communicate the movement”, in other words, represent it, but they also provide activists with “the opportunity to reach people” and “to approach people to really care about the subject”. In this statement, Antonio hints at the usage of com-

municative strategies in order to address people effectively and *convince* them of the necessity for their supporting the Movement. Clearly, Antonio refers to the prominence of New Media for the publicity and support gaining activities of the Movement, one prominent aspect of the definition of ‘politics’ used in this study (see section 1.1. or, for detail, Strömbäck and Esser, *Mediatization* 16). He elaborates this thought in the following quote, rating the Movement political strategies as generally successful:

We’re very good at messaging and knowing how to approach people to really care about the subject. [...] And we are reaching all of these audiences, the ones that are really visual or the ones that are a little more about *reading* and getting all the information or the ones that just really want to have it on their *iPhone* and they just wanna click one button and say ‘Yes, I support!’. (Gutiérrez)

Also emphasized here is the different media and modes that the Movement’s producers of output *know how to use* in order to communicate their messages to as many different and diverse people as possible in order to gain support.

Antonio’s conviction that his Movement is ‘very good’ at producing political strategies is also confirmed by Marcela Hernandez. She reports that the prominence of New Media has also proven to be helpful in so far as “you can share resources so it made us stronger, because we can share our strategies across states”. What was explicitly broached in the interviews is the complexity that this type of communication has assumed via the use of *social* media. Of my four interviewees, Uriel Sánchez and Marcela Hernandez, in particular, emphasize the merit of interaction with the audience and the consequential, immediate feedback that the Movement receives for its activism transmitted via social media through activities such as comments on websites or the act of ‘liking’ something on Facebook. Uriel Sánchez further connects interaction to the “participatory” character of the Movement’s media usage, while he describes ‘old media’ to be “one-way”. According to Antonio Gutiérrez, it is possible to “use[...] social media to really get to push our audiences and the people that support us”. Highlighted in this statement is the particular prominence of the political agenda in forms of New Media.

One of my interviewees explicitly names YouTube as a website which provides video content that *shows* offline organized activities such as civil disobediences or the annual *Coming Out of the Shadows* event in Chicago.

Actions that have happened and new types of, like, YouTube is from 2006. The marches happened in 2006. That's, like, I think that's huge! You know, what if YouTube wouldn't have existed? Would have been like an, I don't know, what existed before that? Videos or something like that? Like little videos. I mean, I don't think little videos existed yet. But *something* existed. Pretty sure. But it wouldn't have been the same, you know. In organizing, keeping that momentum going. (Sánchez)

As Uriel's example shows, the power for the Movement that lies in YouTube resides in the virtual performance of political activism for a potentially unlimited audience and the never-ending persistence of the event so long as the video is not removed. Thus, the action virtually 'takes place' over and over again. The 'visual' channel of the video hence serves as 'evidence' for offline political activism that, in turn, empowers the Movement in spheres far from the digital.

Yet another aspect that the undocumented youth activists from Chicago stress is the personalization of the content published online by the Movement. Personal voices, often in form of personal stories that incorporate intimate biographical events, render political output subjective and potentially even fictional. However, this subjectivity potentially raises the debate about what a 'personal story' connotes. The emphasis on the personal aspect extends the debate about authenticity and truth in online political texts and contexts. In turn, personal stories from 'ordinary' participants who may not even be involved in the 'offline' Movement, add another level of meaning to the stories that might be dismissed as 'merely personal, too subjective', and therefore politically useless. In addition to that, the interaction with an audience is an important trigger for audience-generated political output and feedback for the Movement. Also user-friendly is the storage of data on platforms online that offer the audience the possibility to re-visit activism online independently and frequently.

These generic observations call for a more detailed investigation of the specific uses that undocumented youth make of the Internet in order to communicate their politics. Due to the broadness of this endeavor, this study focuses upon the use of personal stories, one form of communication that integrates many of the features the interviewees mention. Personal stories published online are not only a form of political participation on the Web, they also illuminate issues of personalization and the positioning of the narrator in the offline Movement. Moreover, the narrators use New Media forms of multimedia/multimodal communication that the medium offers



through its technological affordances to tell their stories, shaping their content through the use of a specific medium.

This study employs a set of narratives published on YouTube, a channel that the Movement's activists explicitly refer to, produced between the revival of the Immigrant Rights Movement in 2006 and the end of my literature research, in December 2013, and published between 2009 and 2013 on YouTube. These narratives will serve as case studies for the use of the Internet in the Movement.

## 2. The Mediatization of Politics

Numerous scholars of New Media and social movement research have shown that New Media technologies, and the Internet in particular facilitated the move of marginalized or oppressed groups into the public eye. Hands, for instance, understands the “digital, networked age” as “amendable” to “horizontal, communicative action” that “lends itself to a horizon of dissent, resistance and rebellion” (18). Fuchs finds that “the Internet acts as a critical medium that enables information, co-ordination, communication and co-operation of protest movements” (291; see also Hands 68). The Internet's transition from a source of information into a major source of communication (cf. Hoffmann 12) that is described as particularly remarkable in the field. YouTube, in particular, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green point out, is “one of those “communities [that] have embraced new technologies as they emerged, particularly when such tools offered them new means of social and cultural interactions” (30). What is more, studies have shown that “digital communication technologies provide a medium through which *dispossessed* or *marginalised* groups of young people have traditionally made of popular culture to construct political identities and a sense of belonging” (White and Wyn 217, *emphasis added*; see also Nayar 206). Ginsburg notes that the crafting of digital film productions, published online by ‘indigenous’ producers, “has reduced the price of entry into a cultural field, creating openings for actors and organizations that were previously unable to get their work to the public” (*Rethinking Documentary* 131).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ginsburg, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for a “new language”, using other such terms than the ‘Digital Age’ to describe current mediatization processes “that better fit a more inclusive future” (*Rethinking Documentary* 133). By this, she stresses the drastic persistence of the digital divide (cf. 129). This divide finds immediate expression in class-based access to computers and the Internet and a regional inequality, such as between the South and the North in the Americas.

Acknowledging the democratic potential of these new communication technologies, Fuchs proclaims, “in such cases, we can speak of alternative media” (292).<sup>25</sup> Positioning the narratives of undocumented youth in the context of the Immigrant Rights Movement involves multiple processes that are subsumed under the term of ‘mediatization’.

## 2.1. Mediatization – “A Social Fact”?

As we have seen in the previous sections, the functions and roles of media in the Movement have gained increasing importance. Mediatization defines as “a theoretical perspective more than [...] a proper theory, and [...] more of a ‘sensitizing’ than a ‘definite’ concept”, according to Esser and Strömbäck (*Mediatization* 4) that helps us form a “social theory of media and media changes” (Krotz 26).<sup>26</sup> The original concept of mediatization derives from Scandinavian research, where it “refers to the meta process by which everyday practices and social relations are historically shaped by mediating technologies and media organizations” (Livingstone x).<sup>27</sup> It is on this level that we also find other current socio-historical processes such as “globalization, individualization, commercialization” that effectively shape the entire communication environment (iv). More precisely, Hjarvard’s coinage of the term ‘mediatization’ denotes “the long-term process of changing social institutions and modes of interactions in culture and society due to the growing importance of media in all strands of society” (*The Mediatization of Religion* 14; see also Lundby, *Introduction: Mediatization* 12).<sup>28</sup> Hjarvard argues that

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<sup>25</sup> Fuchs applies a very critical perspective to ‘participatory culture’ on the Web, reminding us to that “empirical data show that there are reasons to assume that web 2.0 in the current societal situation is predominately a web of extractive power that limits the realization and extension of human developmental powers” and that it hence “has only a *potential* to help advance participatory democracy” (291, *emphasis added*). Zollers frames Fuchs’ criticism by underlying that “as with any new technology, the rhetoric [...] is either utopian or dystopian in nature” (602): “The utopian rhetoric highlights the social and community aspects of the sites, whereas the dystopian view revolves around a moral panic over online predators”, the author claims (*ibid*). The analysis of narratives of undocumented youth, hence, allows for both perspectives.

<sup>26</sup> The title of this section refers to mediatization as a ‘social fact’, a reference to Andrea Schrott, who defines mediatization as a “process” that “exists as a social fact” (58).

<sup>27</sup> Livingstone concedes that ‘mediatization’ is “an awkward word in the English language” (iv) that has not yet quite acquired the same meaning as in the Germanic and Scandinavian languages. Since the original concept dominates the field of academic production, any uses of mediatization refer to this, original concept of the word.

<sup>28</sup> Hjarvard’s assumptions correspond to the Asp’s original concept on mediatization as “a social change process in which media have become increasingly influential in and deeply integrated into different spheres of society” (Strömbäck 4). However, what Asp could not integrate into his theory are, of course, the massive changes that have occurred in the New Media landscape since the publish-

mediatization is a process in which media transform into an independent institution as they become integrated into other social institutions. However, this process is multidirectional, as it “exceeds the idea that the media have potential power by distributing knowledge and includes the way in which knowledge – and also entertainment is communicated” (Schrott 58). It is through the institutionalization that society becomes increasingly dependent on media in turn, undergoing a “wider transformation of social and cultural life” (Lundby, *Introduction: Mediatization* 12). In this study, “the increasing presence and importance of the media in all parts of social and *political* life” (Schulz 9, *emphasis added*) shall be emphasized.

Currently, there are at least four “media-driven transformation” processes that bring “social change”, Esser and Strömbäck observe (*Mediatization* 9). As the interview data has already shown, first, “media *extend* human communication capabilities across time and space” (*ibid*, *emphasis added*). One conviction reiterated in the interviews was that the Internet and its media for communication facilitate reaching an audience and using the available technical affordances to perform multiple communication strategies in order to gather support for the political agenda. Information and communication, here, both play an important role.

Secondly, in communication with their members and audience, “activities that used to require face-to-face interaction or a physical presence can now be accomplished or experienced through media use”, a process that Esser and Strömbäck call “*substitution*” (*Mediatization* 9). Closely related, the third process is termed “amalgamation”, which highlights how mediated activities integrate with non-mediated interaction (*ibid*).

Fourthly, ‘accommodation’ refers to the tendency for people to depend upon the media and consequently adapt to it. Politicians, for instance, need recognition, so they adapt or tailor their campaigns to whichever messages the media needs. As the activists from Chicago have already stressed, “social and political actors” increasingly, according to Esser and Strömbäck, “want to communicate through the media or may find themselves in a spot where the media is interested in their activities to accommodate and adapt to the media and their logic” (*Mediatization* 10). This path bears consequences for both – political actors *and* the media.

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ing of his book in 1986. The scholars used for an approach in this study, like Hjarvard or Strömbäck and Esser, mostly base their theories on the existing trace of thoughts and develop them from there on to fit the current context of the media landscape.

All four processes further occur at different levels: the macro, meso, and micro-level of political culture. The particular merit that the mediatization perspective lies in is the “potential to integrate different theoretical strands within one framework, linking micro-level with meso- and macro-level processes and phenomena” in our culture (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 6). The investigation of the meso- and macro-level, in particular, discloses “how the media through their existence, formats and semi-structural properties as well as content shape, reshape and structure politics, culture and people’s way of life and sense-making” (11). In the analysis of the digital narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube as digital *testimonios*, the *relation* of the individual *to* or *within* the offline organization, Movement, and, in more general terms, society, proves particularly interesting. It provokes the following question:

- How do undocumented youth relate to these different levels in their narratives and where do they position themselves with/in their narratives?

## **2.2. Toward a Framework: Dimensions of Mediatization**

The previous sections have indicated that YouTube has become not only a site for entertainment but also a ‘site’ for political activism in the digital age, where politics and the logics of the medium establish a complex relationship. But how should we describe such a relationship in detail? This section constructs a frame for the ‘mediatization of politics’ that contextualizes the YouTube video clips of undocumented youth in order to make sense of their political output.

For political communication, Esser and Strömbäck see mediatization as a concept necessary for “understanding the role of the media in the transformation of established democracies” (*Mediatization* 3). The authors understand media not only “as a source of information for citizens” and “a channel of communication between policymakers and the citizenry and between different parts of the political system” but also as “the key to the public sphere” (4). This way, media potentially bear major impact “on public opinion formation” – to such a degree that “no political actor or institution can afford *not* to take the media into consideration” (4, *emphasis added*). Precisely due to this last effect the authors find that the media indeed take an active part in shaping “the structure and processes of political decision-making and political communication” (*ibid*). These powerful impacts show that we are far from being able to reduce the media to their purpose of ‘mediating’ (‘mediation’) or communicating

political content (cf. Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 12). Instead, “the media do more than mediate in the sense of ‘getting in between’” or *representing* certain content, as Livingstone stresses (x).

On the basis of general observations of social changes induced by media-driven transformation,<sup>29</sup> Esser and Strömbäck establish a more precise “four-dimensional conceptualization of the mediatization of **politics**” (*Mediatization* 7, **emphasis added**): The first dimension describes media as “the most important source of information about politics and society”, as we have already pointed out, while the second dimension is described as the growing autonomy of media as institutions (ibid). The third dimension points to “the degree to which media *content* and the coverage of politics and current affairs is guided by media logic or political logic” (ibid, *emphasis added*). The final dimension “refers to the extent to which political institutions, *organizations and actors* are guided by media logic or political logic” (6, *emphasis added*). In addition to that, the fourth dimension is described as “the very essence of the mediatization of politics, that is, the ripple effects of media in political processes and on political actors and institutions” (ibid). It “deals with the extent to which the media’s own needs and standards of newsworthiness, rather than those of political actors or institutions, are decisive for what the media cover and how they cover it” (ibid).

The information deduced from the interviews with undocumented youth from Chicago is consistent with Esser and Strömbäck’s construct in crucial respects. The Immigrant Rights Movement positions New Media, in particular, as its major source of information and device for communication (the first dimension of the construct). The media institution, YouTube, could indeed be regarded as autonomous, more recently even in economic terms. “YouTube might offer its web platform to users at no cost”, Jenkins, Ford, and Green remark, “but the efforts of users to create social value through the site generates page views and data which are the basis for YouTube’s advertising and licensing relationships” (75). Rather than those economic aspects, what is most relevant for our purposes is the extent to which “it becomes more important for political actors and institutions to use the media to reach out to larger groups in society” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 7), hence, the fourth and, to

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<sup>29</sup> The media-driven transformative processes implied here are extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation, and have been discussed earlier.

an extent, also the third dimension of the mediatization of politics. We need to consider how “important the media’s needs and standards of newsworthiness – in short, media logic – [...] become for what the media cover and how they cover it (third dimension)”, because “when this happens, political institutions and actors will successively realize that in order to influence the media, and through the media the public, they will have to adapt to the media and the media’s logic (fourth dimension)” (7-8). Part of this accommodating behavior is motivated by a means “to win the desired – or avoid undesirable – media coverage, and to use the media to their own advantage” (8). As we can see, this relationship is characterized by an ongoing, literally *forthpushing* process that is, by nature, difficult to grasp. An elaboration on the dynamics of media and political logic in the mediatization of politics serves as a valuable tool in further understanding these processes.

### **2.3. Media Logic and Political Logic: Dynamics**

In the description of the workings of mediatization, it is crucial to acknowledge the media as communicator but, more importantly, as an active transformer of the political decision-making. In their descriptions of the uses of the media, and especially *New Media*, undocumented youth demonstrate that *New Media* serve political purposes of the Movement. *New Media* technologies further provide them with their own sense of the agency and power that the mediatization of politics holds for its actors. The most prominent realization appearing in the interviews is that the Movement *uses* *New Media* technologies and the Internet for its purposes. Activist youth from Chicago stress the political participation taking place online and by potentially everyone who *wishes* to be involved in the Movement, but they also sense that an ordinary producer of content has access to enormous power for and within the Movement. Power further originates in the potential for resistance that the content online engenders. Direct, political participation by a member of the Movement online influences the data that is published, which can potentially counter the anti-immigrant discourses that find expression in public criminalization, discrimination, stigmatization, and/or marginalization. Channeling this participation and inherent power onto the media, thus, also signifies processes “whereby culture and society to an increasing degree become *dependent* on media and their logic”, Hjarvard notes (*The Mediatization of Culture* 17, *emphasis added*). As Schrott explains, “whenever

actors communicate in public, the probability that they follow media logic is particularly high if they are under the pressure to conform due of mediatization” (52).

Media logic is an integral part and the very basis of the concept of mediatization, often also embraced as the basis – the ‘engine’ – of mediatization (cf. Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 16; see also Lundby, *Media Logic* 101). Media logic should not be understood as ‘logic’ in the purest sense of the word but “only in the looser sense” which emphasizes “terms as agreement”, “reasoning”, and “necessity”, according to Lundby (*Media Logic*, 114). Krotz further shows that “there is no (technically based) media logic (26), even though Altheide and Snow define it in more technical terms than most other scholars of the field. To be more precise, Altheide and Snow understand media logic as “the process through which media present and transmit information”, embracing “various media and the formats used by these media” to communicate, including “how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication” (10). Thus, through media logic and the “‘mediacentric’ perspective” that it offers (12), the authors add, we may actually ‘see’ and interpret social and cultural phenomena (cf. 9) which we perceive as “normalized” at first glance (12).<sup>30</sup>

This definition is a solid base for our approach to ‘media logic’. In their concept of the mediatization of politics, Esser and Strömbäck refer to Altheide and Snow’s definition as one particular aspect of media logic which they define as “*media technology*”<sup>31</sup> (*Mediatization* 17) – despite the fact that they, too, understand media logic “as a particular way of *seeing*, covering, and interpreting social, cultural, and political phenomena” (*Shaping Politics* 212, *emphasis added*). Media technology “shape[s] content in production and reproduction processes”, thus establishing a “socio-technological format” that products adapt to (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 18). “Each media technology”, they highlight, enforces processes of

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<sup>30</sup> Faye Ginsburg positions herself very critically to the normalization or naturalization that we associate with New Media technologies in the ‘Digital Age’. She argues that the feeling is an exclusively Western one and “this naturalization seems even more remarkable given certain realities: only 12 percent of the world is currently wired [...] and only sixteen people in every one hundred of the world’s population are serviced with telephone land lines”, she points out (*Rethinking Documentary* 129).

<sup>31</sup> The other two dimensions that the authors list are “*professionalism*, [and] *commercialism*” (Strömbäck and Esser, *Mediatization* 17). Professionalism focuses on, in particular, journalism as being “differentiated as an occupation and institution from other social institutions, in particular politics” (ibid).

adaptation to and profiting from “the particular format of that medium”, as, for instance, “the emphasis on visuals” in television or “digital media with their emphasis on interactivity and instantaneousness” (ibid).

While experts debate the extent to which the logic of media is integrated in our lives, one should also allow the existence of multiple logics<sup>32</sup> that we interact with. Altheide and Snow argue, accordingly, that “it is not a case of media dictating terms to the rest of society, but an interaction between organized institutional behavior and media”, presenting a “perspective through which various institutional problems are interpreted and solved” (15).<sup>33</sup> What is more, Schulz stresses that “new media”, in particular, “call into question the idea of universal media logic resulting in all-embracing media dependence of politics” (61). With regard to New Media, a “coherent” media logic is “inapt”, due to their social influences and the shaping that takes place on the part of the user him-/herself (ibid). “Social shaping”, he further argues, “takes place in the process of interacting with media ‘affordances’” (62). In line with Altheide and Snow’s ‘media grammar’, in their most narrow sense, ‘affordances’ are “the potentials and limitations of material drawn into semiosis as mode”, necessarily applying “to all modes”, according to Kress (*What is Mode?* 58).

What follows from these definitions of the workings of (new) media logic(s) is that this study refers to the individual modes in the YouTube video clips as media ‘affordances’, a particular ‘format’ that undocumented youth select according to their (and the Movement’s?) ‘political logic’. This perspective serves as the basis for understanding digital narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube as examples of the mediatization of politics. My approach relies upon Esser and Strömbäck’s concepts of media logic and political logic. The authors claim that “media and politics constitute two different institutional systems that serve different purposes”, each

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<sup>32</sup> The approach to media logic is not uncontested and in parts responsible for the creation of the concept of mediatization. Nick Couldry finds this thinking to be too linear, as it is “based on a tendency to claim broad social and cultural transformations from one single type of media-based logic” (in: Lundby 11). Lundby agrees with Couldry, arguing that “digital technologies in Digital Storytelling”, for instance, “definitely do not obey just a single logic”, explaining that “the multimodality of digital media operates according to mixed logics”, as we will also see in chapter 2 (Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 11). I suggest to settle on a general understanding of ‘media logic’ as multiple logics in and as mediatization, and of which the approach to the mediatization of politics and storytelling is only a small range of aspects belonging to the overarching concept.

<sup>33</sup> Marcinkowski and Steiner, for instance, stress that it is false to “view mediatization as a developmental process that is, as it were, ‘imposed’ onto the political system from the outside” but rather that “it is politics itself that realizes its dependence on media more than ever and it is therefore reprogramming itself to appeal more attractive” (86).



having “its own set of actors, rules and procedures, as well as needs and interests” (*Mediatization* 14). Each also has a “logic of appropriateness” guiding the “routines and principles for thinking and acting within the political and media spheres respectively”, which is “based on each sphere’s purposes, interests, needs and institutional structures” (*ibid*).

‘Political logic’, which I narrowed down to ‘politics’ at the beginning of this chapter, then “ultimately is about collective and authoritative decision-making” and their “implementation” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 14; *Shaping Politics* 213). Most importantly for this chapter, politics also includes the “public face” that is closely related to “tactics and strategies for winning support and publicity, image projections and branding” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 15). Thus, it includes “the presentational side of politics”, as well as the implementation and distribution of political power connected to that (*ibid*).

As the interview data has already suggested, “media logic can be assumed to affect the front-stage part of political processes (*politics*) more easily and forcefully than the backstage part (*policy*) (and have less, if any, influence on the institutional framework” which is defined by ‘polity’) (16). This distinction explains the “situational character” enforced by the political logic of the Immigration Rights Movement, its messages “depending on, for example, closeness to an election” (*ibid*). In sum, as a consequence of the intertwinement, “when studying the behavior of political actors, organizations or institutions, there is a need to specify whether a particular behavior follows from political logic or whether it is adapted to accommodate the [...] media and the [...] media logic” (20). Due to the “likelihood of mediatization being greatest with respect to politics and processes of [...] winning public support” (*ibid*), narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube present a fascinating object of study within the frame of the mediatization of politics.

The central questions resulting from this elaboration on the mediatization of politics are the following:

- How do the digital narratives of undocumented youth produce their political messages within the frame of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006 and which logics influence their video clips?

- How do the stories of undocumented youth in the digital environment of YouTube adapt to media logic and how does the adaptation strategy shape their content and form?
- Do they “find themselves in a spot where the media is interested in their activities to accommodate and adapt to the media and their logic”, as Esser and Strömbäck would ask (*Mediatization* 10)? How do undocumented youth activists embed this logic into their videos and how does the narratives’ political logic embrace media logic?

### 3. Narratives on YouTube

Navigating the difficulty of finding a coherent corpus on YouTube is the “early stage of research” on it, according to Burgess and Green (7). Due to this challenge, they add, “each study of YouTube gives us a different understanding of what YouTube actually *is*” (ibid). Still, YouTube has not only managed to survive – an accomplishment which is remarkable considering the Internet’s fast-moving nature, but it has also grown quite mature for its age. In the past ten years, the platform [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), bought and further developed by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim in February 2005, developed as a solid “part of the mainstream media landscape” (vii). Due to this success and the fact that “social movement media represent a dizzying variety of formats and experiences, far greater than mainstream commercial, public, or state media” (Downing xxv), YouTube becomes an interesting field of research for investigating phenomena such as the mediatization of politics. As Kavoori stresses, YouTube is “much more than a website – it is a key element in the way we think about our on-line experience and (shared) digital culture” (3).

The following section provides a short introduction to the website’s format and social shaping, and basic assumptions of its media logic. This investigation is further developed in more detail in chapter 3, with particular focus on testimonial narratives of undocumented youth – the so-called digital *testimonios*. Section 3.2. explains the search process for the narratives posted by undocumented immigrants in the Immigrant Rights Movement that will be analyzed. Section 3.3., as the last section of this chapter, provides an overview of the most important information on the narratives selected.

### 3.1. Storytelling Format as Media Logic: Grounds for Selection

The name, YouTube, literally fuses the pronoun ‘you’ and a colloquial expression for ‘television’ into one word, symbolically connecting the individual user *and* producer with the filmic format. The motto, *Broadcast Yourself*, further emphasizes the relatedness of YouTube to television broadcasting. However, not only does YouTube publish many more individual video productions than television, the stories are also not “‘stories’ as traditionally understood”: YouTube videos contain “radically reduced timeframes” and “allow[...] everyone to perform” their stories themselves, showing “what a ‘bottom-up’ [...] model” of contributions “might look like in a technologically enabled culture” (Hartley 132-133). What is more, as Kavoori argues, YouTube videos “share an architectural similarity” (7). They are “short, readily accessible, and, most importantly, part of the *same* visual experience – appearing alongside the main video, but exchanging places with it should the viewer click on any of them” (ibid). Similarly, Jenkins, Ford, and Green observe that “spreadability emphasizes producing content in easy-to-share formats, such as the embed codes that YouTube provides, which make it easier to spread videos across the Internet, and encouraging access points to that content in a variety of places” (6). Likewise, Hands identifies YouTube as a space for “the proliferation of user-created content”, “for sharing information”, and “for social networking” (79). All of these features of YouTube reinforce its democratic potential. Equality of access is reinforced not only in ‘user-friendly’ distribution and reception processes, but, more significantly, in the processes of ‘output’ production. Namely, digital configurations use multiple modes and media of expression and communication in their videos and on the website which, as Kress points out, is “made easy, usual, ‘natural’ by these technologies” (*Literacy* 5).<sup>34</sup> Here Kress affirms Altheide and Snow’s understanding of our unconscious adaptation to the media in our everyday lives (cf. 9), which we simply perceive as “normalized” (12). But it is precisely this diverse format, the multimodality applied to produce the video clips and the forms of communication on the website itself, which “may foster changes in practices that are part of mediatization processes” (Lundby, *Introduction: Mediatization* 13).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that participating on YouTube – as on other websites and in social media – does *not* require any skills. Quite in contrast, Kress critically emphasizes ‘media literacy’ required to participate in digital culture. See chapter 3, section 4 for a discussion of the topic.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 3 introduces these terms in detail.

In view of mediatization processes, any selection of narratives for critical analysis requires a closer look at YouTube's 'grammar'. According to Kavoori, the website

is inherently polysemic in its textuality – ranging across a mediated universe that is only haltingly captured in the categories that the site uses; no genre analysis of YouTube videos can be complete; no narrative formula captures more than a handful of videos; not list of 'directors' can fully capture the idea of authorship (let alone 'auteurship') on YouTube. This semantic madness is self-organizing – through the digital sorting mechanisms (like postings, lists, [...]) an order of preferred texts emerges. (10)

Because YouTube is 'polysemic', the process of selecting narratives for analysis requires a definition of narrative that is characterized by use of multiple media and modes – different textualities attached to the text – in the narration of the story. It should be noted, at this point, that stories in different media naturally inhabit and depend on different forms of texture. These inhabit different forms of narrativity, mediality, and structures. It follows that meaning is added to the text by the meaning *traditionally* attached to (multi-)modal choices of a text, in addition to interpretive processes – the 'experientiality' – of a text (cf. Reinfandt 17-18). The *narration* of a story – "the process by which narrative is conveyed" – involves "complex combinations of cues in different channels (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.)" inherent to the structure of the text, Herman adds (Herman, *Introduction* 279). On the basis of this, Ryan emphasizes that, "as a mental representation, story is not tied to any particular medium" (*Definition of Narrative* 26). Herman further proposes a broad definition of narrative that is open for different media and modes, claiming that narrative is "a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change" (3).<sup>36</sup>

Recognizing the polysemic nature of the narratives of undocumented youth as a given, I propose a definition of 'narrative', which is inherently connected to the 'story' and the practice of 'storytelling' that one can find on YouTube, on which I ground the search of YouTube narratives of undocumented youth:

Narrative is a representation of (i) a structured time-course of particularized events that (ii) introduces conflict (disruption or disequilibrium) into a storyworld (whether that world is presented as actual, fictional, dreamed, etc.), conveying (iii) what it's like to live through that disruption, that is, the

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<sup>36</sup> What narrative can mean in our culture will be elaborated in the beginning of the next chapter in more detail.

‘qualia’<sup>37</sup> (or felt, subjective awareness) of real or imagined consciousness undergoing the disruptive experience. (Herman, *Introduction* 279-280)

In accordance with Herman’s emphasis on narrative as a successive presentation of events, Cassell and McNeill describe narratives as “events, human agents, a stretch of time, and a specific space”, which “all presuppose a macrostructure from which those elements are chosen and in which their role in the narration is specified as well as a discourse in which those roles are spelled out” (111). A precondition that follows for selecting YouTube narratives of undocumented youth for this study therefore is that there is ‘a story to tell’ (in the context of their undocumented status) and that undocumented youth are the narrators of these stories themselves. This becomes particularly important when interpreting the narratives as ‘coming out’ narratives, which, for this purpose, need to clearly identify the narrator as undocumented. The narrative situation, therefore, is first-person.<sup>38</sup> This combination of political context with narrative situation implies that within the stories that the undocumented youth narrators tell in their YouTube videos, the narrators are mostly also the protagonists in their ‘story’, forming an intradiegetic level of the story (cf. Kuhn 61).

The setting and other visual elements (such as props), as well as camera angle, movement, and montage, create further layers of meaning, which are not part of the ‘story’ the narrators tell. As such they could be termed the extradiegetic level (cf. Kuhn 60). On this level, we also find voice-overs, or the insertion of text in the visual, or music. As this level is peculiar to the narration in film, indeed, the use of editing programs and film-making techniques transforms many a video clip on YouTube into a short film, connecting all elements into one coherent production (cf. Mittell 160).

The fact that the narrators are recounting *their* stories, however, does not mean that their narratives were not also co-produced. Commonly, Kavoori maintains, “co-creators are engaged as collaborators as they upload, tag, organize, and categorize content on YouTube” (49). Consequently, in the narrative selection for analysis in this study, I choose narratives that seem co-produced and more ‘professionally’ edited as well as some which *seem* to have been produced exclusively by the narra-

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<sup>37</sup> Qualia is a strongly debated concept that broadly defines as the “intrinsic, ineffable properties of experience” (Caracciolo 105).

<sup>38</sup> Because the aspect of ‘coming out’ is significant to the investigation of undocumented youth online, I also chose to exclude co-authored/multiple narrators in one narrative.

tors themselves.<sup>39</sup> A comparison of sophisticated and amateur productions may uncover alternative strategies for negotiating political and media logic in the narratives of undocumented youth, advancing our understanding of the mediatization of politics. This type of analysis may indicate the extent to which the narratives are shaped by a campaign in the organization and Movement, given that whatever meaning is produced, it always – and necessarily – needs to be understood in its political context. We can expect a distinction between individual undocumented activist productions and productions of activists with explicit organizational or production-related background. With regard to political messaging, it is fruitful to look at different organizational backgrounds of the narrators as they denote the fine line of difference in agenda and ideology that makes the study of social movements so interesting and incredibly rich in detail. We can only see where a movement is going – and coming from – if we look at its agents.

On the basis of this introduction to media logic on YouTube and its storytelling, I created the following list of criteria for the selection of narratives according to their format – the ‘grammar’ of YouTube video clips (see Figure 2 at the end of this chapter for a summary of the individual data of the selected narratives):

- They have ‘radically reduced time frames’ (between 2 and 8 minutes).
- Undocumented youth are the narrators of their ‘stories’. For reasons of practicability, I selected only narratives that were technically produced in such a quality that they were clearly intelligible and narrated in the English language.<sup>40</sup>
- The narratives incorporate multiple modes and media of communication in their video clips, yet mostly freely spoken (as opposed to read, for instance). Accordingly, a majority of the narratives are edited by video editing programs (5 are edited; 3 are not).
- Some of the narratives are more ‘professionally’ created/ co-produced than the others (3 were created by professional producers; 5 were not).

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<sup>39</sup> I choose to spell ‘seem’ in italics here in order to emphasize that there is no way to determine this aspect as a fact.

<sup>40</sup> As the narratives that I was searching for were supposed to be narrated in the English language, during my search for digital narratives of undocumented youth, I chose “English (US)” as the language and “worldwide (all)” as the general settings on YouTube. Another language I frequently encountered was Spanish. One should bear in mind that choosing other languages in a selection of narratives might alter the results of analysis significantly, as language is a phenomenon that always carries great cultural meaning.

### 3.2. Narrative Selection: Conquering Limits

In addition to the format of digital narratives on YouTube, strongly determined by YouTube ‘grammar’, a more challenging question during my search for a corpus for this study was the selection among the content that the narratives I viewed provided. In their study of storytelling on YouTube, Burgess and Green found that

YouTube, even more than television, is a particularly unstable object of study, marked by dynamic change (both in terms of videos and organization), a diversity of content (which moves with a different rhythm to television but likewise flows through, and often disappears from, the service), and a similar quotidian frequency, or ‘everydayness’. (6)

Due to the ephemeral character of narratives on YouTube, I revisited the ones I selected frequently, and ensured that they were still online when last revisited (in August 2015).<sup>41</sup> Further, when searching for appropriate sources one typically stumbles upon, as Kavoori frames it, “the bewildering complexity of YouTube” (2), while on the other hand, YouTube imposes stark obstacles upon researchers who want to categorize its material according to the ‘*genre*’ of its entries. The users who upload their content must select from a limited number of categories for classification of their content, or apply their own (frequently misleading) tags. Thus, even though YouTube provides a “unique space for organizing materials” (La Rose 304), it is virtually impossible to retrieve the texts that match the desired content category. Burgess and Green summarize this problem of accountability as follows:

The limited choice of categories YouTube provides, with titles such as ‘Pets & Animals’ and ‘Cars & Visuals,’ at best offer a very general framework for organizing content across the website; and one that is imposed by design rather than emerging organically out of collective practice. [...] Similarly, the strategic use of the website’s tagging functionality – where uploaders apply popular but perhaps inaccurate tags and titles to content and mark videos as responses to popular but unrelated content in order to increase the chances of a video being seen – make analysis of YouTube based primarily on those data problematic. It is naïve simply to treat user-assigned tags, titles, and descriptions as matters of fact; indeed the *misuses* of tags may well turn out to be more interesting than their ‘proper’ uses. (8, *emphasis added*)

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<sup>41</sup> Although all important visual elements to comprehend the analysis will be portrayed by screenshots in the text, and important verbal statements will be cited, as well as the performance described, I suggest to have watched the videos by chapter 4 the latest. The study cannot fulfill the task to recapture the immense multitude of *all* elements that the eight digital *testimonios* selected provide.

As Tao et al. explain, since choosing stories according to filters is ineffective, the creation of a corpus for analysis must rely upon ‘free search’, typing keywords into the YouTube search engine, and leaving the ‘filter’ as it is – sorted according to “relevance” by default (1). Thus, search results must be “retrieved through the system matching these search terms to video descriptions, tags, comments” (ibid). As political logic (politics) denotes publicity- and attention-seeking strategies, heavy usage of relevance factors, as Tao et al. have shown, implies that the publishers (and narrators) of the videos perceived the successful publication as important; important; they wanted ‘their video’ to be viewed by many people, which is the key element of political logic (politics) and hence important for the analysis in this study. We see the persistence of political logic in YouTube videos in the fact that none of the narratives in my selection appeared when searching for them by using the term ‘illegal’, because, it is perceived as a derogative description among undocumented immigrants. As noted earlier, undocumented immigrants and allies pressed for a change in terminology within the frame of the Drop i-Word-campaign in 2010, which successfully led a number of media outlets to follow their request.

To make use of YouTube’s keyword function, I developed a list of key terms that I searched for systematically on 10 pages in a row, each with 20 entries:<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Due to reasons of practicability, a limit to the number of pages I was reviewing videos on was highly necessary.



<b>Keyword Search (Terms)</b>	
1	“undocumented immigrant”
2	“undocumented immigrant youth”
3	“undocumented immigrant student”
4	“undocumented students”
5	“undocumented student”
6	“undocumented activist”
7	“undocumented name activist”
8	“undocumented student activist”
9	“undocumented youth”
10	“undocumented youth movement”
11	“undocumented family”
12	“undocumented life”
13	“undocumented immigration story”
14	“undocumented story”
15	“undocumented Dream Act”
16	“undocumented Dreamer”
17	“undocumented unafraid” / “undocumented not afraid”/ “undocumented no longer afraid” / “undocumented student no longer afraid” / “undocumented, unafraid, unapologetic”
18	“undocumented not hiding” / “undocumented no longer hiding” / “undocumented student no longer hiding”
19	“undocumented coming out”
20	“undocumented queer”

Figure 1: Keyword Search. Created by the Author.

The search terms are, at first glance, very similar, as I employed the approach recommended in “Search Strategy Effectiveness and Relevance of YouTube Videos” that Tao et al. published recently: Namely, the authors explain that “videos which showed up in more search terms were more relevant” and hence “in a free text search, variations of search terms should be considered and used in order to retrieve as many results as possible [...] including different spellings, singular vs. plural, different names for the same concept” (3). As a result, all of the videos selected appeared more than once during the search with differing terms and spellings. What is more, these search terms change from a more general description of ‘undocumented youth’ to more specific terms or mottos that are used in the Movement and/or the news media and that also appear as a topic of the narratives.

I further reduced the scope of the narratives that appeared multiple times in this search according to my context: the politics of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. The selection includes narratives that establish a concrete connection to the youth-led Movement and their political agenda (such as the DREAM Act) or the

DACA,<sup>43</sup> but also discursive strategies such as the use of ‘unashamed’ and ‘unapologetic’ for their Movement, which are explicit references to the gay rights movement and community and which also show in the search term ‘undocu-queer’, for instance.<sup>44</sup> Resisting strategies of anonymity, I chose only narratives in which the narrators ‘came out’ as undocumented. Finally, my selection of eight narratives reflects no preference regarding nationality; consistent with national statistics, it mostly features undocumented youth of Mexican origin. In order to reflect the intersectionality of the struggle of being undocumented in the narratives, I deliberately chose males and females in equal number. However, I took care to include at least one gay and one lesbian undocumented youth to reflect the connections of the youth-led Immigrant Rights Movement to the gay rights movement and community.

It is important to note at this point that any selection of YouTube videos remains in a sense arbitrary and is by no means representative of all undocumented youth and their stories, despite the *attempt* to create an objective and representative selection process, and should therefore rather be understood as case studies. However, this ‘problem’ is inherent in the media logic of YouTube and therefore a normative variable in interpreting the results of this study. As the results of this investigation will show, “YouTube presents not just a more efficient and creative means by which individuals can connect and create, but also a movement towards a change in the process of storytelling” (Kavoori 4-5). “Storytelling”, after all, “is at the heart of all media” (2).

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<sup>43</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an executive order announced by President Obama on June 15, 2012, that created “a process by which undocumented youth can apply to get a work permit and avoid deportation for at least a two-year period” (Pallares, *Family Activism* 124).

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 6, for instance, for a detailed discussion of these latter aspects.

### 3.3. Selection of YouTube Narratives

No.	Narrator: Full Name (initials)	Country of Origin / Current State in U.S.	Title of Video Narrative (original spelling)	Production Features a- Participants in Production Process/ Sponsor b- (Offline) Organizational Affiliation c- YouTube Channel d- Other Information Retrieved from the Channel	Category	Format: Dura- tion of Video (hours)	Date of Publica- tion on YouTube	Search Terms / (listed according to) Number of Page of Appear- ance
1	<b>Stephanie Solis</b>  (S.S.)	Philippines / California	“Lost & Found (Story of a DREAM Act Student)”	<b>a-</b> produced with the help of a fellow student (activist in the movement, named Tam Tran): directed; cut; and shot; funded by the <i>James Irvine Foundation Visual Communication</i> ; produced two years before publication (2007) <b>c-</b> “UndergroundAtBrown”, joined: 2 Dec. 2008 <b>d-</b> Stephanie does not give her last name in the digital narrative itself, but “UndergroundAtBrown” posts a link in the description to this video that states Stephanie’s last name, “Solis”	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:05:22	12 May 2009	15- “undocumented Dream Act” (p. 1) 5- “undocumented student” (p. 2) 8- “undocumented student activist” (p. 4) 4- “undocumented students” (p. 6)
2	<b>Mohammad Abdollahi</b>  (M.A.)	Iran	“My name is Mohammad and I am undocumented”	<b>b-</b> DreamActivist.org <b>c-</b> “DreamActivist”, joined: 1 April 2008 <b>d-</b> Mohammad does not give her last name in the digital narrative itself, but “DreamActivist” writes in the description of the video that Mohammad is a member of DreamActivist.org and one can find his last name, Abdollahi, on the website of his organization	“Education”	00:05:34	19 March 2010	7- “undocumented name activist” (p. 1) 17- “undocumented student no longer afraid” (p. 2) 17- “undocumented, un-

								afraid, unapologetic” (p. 10)
<b>3</b>	<b>Carlos Roa</b> (C.R.)	Mexico / Florida	“Carlos: the story of an undocumented student”	<p><b>a-</b> Center for Community Change/ campaign project: “We Are America” (weareamericastories.org)</p> <p><b>b-</b> Center for Community Change</p> <p><b>c-</b> “cccvideovault”, joined: 24 Nov. 2009</p> <p><b>d-</b> Carlos’ video is part of a set of similar video clips created in the project “We Are America”</p>	“People & Blogs”	00:03:13	21 July 2010	<p>18- “undocumented student no longer hiding” (p. 1)</p> <p>11- “undocumented family” (p. 1)</p> <p>5- “undocumented student” (p. 2)</p> <p>3- “undocumented immigrant student” (p. 4)</p> <p>8- “undocumented student activist” (p. 4)</p> <p>13- “undocumented immigration story” (p. 5)</p> <p>4- “undocumented students” (p. 10)</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>David Ramirez</b> (D.R.)	Mexico / Illinois	“David Ramirez, Immigrant Youth Justice	<p><b>b-</b> Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL)</p> <p><b>c-</b> “thedreamiscoming2011”, joined: 28 March 2011</p> <p><b>d-</b> the video was shot as support of a civil disobedience campaign in Georgia (on the same day as the publishing of David’s video), fighting against the</p>	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:02:06	5 April 2011	<p>6- “undocumented activist” (p. 1)</p> <p>7- “undocumented name</p>

			League”	ban of undocumented students from the state’s top five public universities, as the description of the video reads. In this, David, in written language, explains his solidarity with the movement in Georgia (TheDreamisComing2011).				<p>activist” (p. 1)</p> <p>14- “undocumented story” (p. 1)</p> <p>9- “undocumented youth” (p. 4)</p> <p>19- “undocumented coming out” (p. 4)</p> <p>16- “undocumented Dreamer” (p. 5)</p> <p>17- “undocumented unafraid” (p. 7)</p> <p>8- “undocumented student activist” (p. 8)</p>
5	<b>Angelica Velaz-quillo</b>  (A.V.)	Mexico	“An undocumented immigrant, Angelica, tells her story”	<p><b>b-</b> Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas</p> <p><b>c-</b> “Mercy Sister”, joined: 5 Jan. 2011</p>	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:03:57	2 March 2012	<p>1- “undocumented immigrant” (p. 1)</p> <p>13- “undocumented immigration story” (p. 1)</p> <p>11- “undocumented family” (p. 4)</p> <p>3- “undocumented immigrant student”</p>

								(p. 6)
6	<b>Mitzzy Calderón</b> (M.C.)	Mexico / Georgia	“I am no longer hiding! I am no longer afraid !”	<b>b-</b> Freedom University, Georgia <b>c-</b> “SUDDENmovementDotOrg”, joined 22 March 2012	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:07:13	13 Nov. 2012	17- “undocumented no longer afraid”(p. 1) 17- “undocumented student no longer afraid” (p. 1) 18- “undocumented no longer hiding” (p. 1) 18- “undocumented student no longer hiding” (p. 1)
7	<b>Ivette Roman</b> (I.R.)	Peru / Maryland	“Maryland’s Undocumented Immigrant Students – Ivette”	<b>a-</b> Kubla Khan Productions, LLC (Director, Writer, Producer and Editor) <b>b-</b> Equality Maryland <b>c-</b> “MsKYYoung”, joined 26 March 2011 <b>d-</b> Ivette does not give her last name in the digital narrative itself, but googling the producer that “MsKYYoung” identifies, the website of Kubla Khan Productions comes up that states that the video is “a campaign video supporting the 2012 Maryland Dream Act featuring Undocumented LGBT Youth” (Young and Hyde). Googling the organization and Ivette further soon leads to a website providing her full name and a photo.	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:04:42	5 Jan. 2013	3- “undocumented immigrant student” (p. 1) 18- “undocumented no longer hiding” (p. 2) 20- “undocumented queer” (p. 6) 18- “undocumented student no longer hiding” (p. 7) 1- “undocu-

								mented immi- grant” (p. 8)
<b>8</b>	<b>Luis Maldonado</b>  (L.M.)	Mexico / Texas	“Luis Maldonado - A Brief Look Into the Life of an Undocumented American”	<b>a-</b> the video was created by Luis Maldonado and Sheridan Lagunas for the Cortos Y Fuertes/Short and Strong Film Competition <b>b-</b> Minority Affairs Council <b>c-</b> “Sheridan Lagunas-Aguirre”, joined 28 Nov. 2012	“Nonprofits & Activism”	00:02:59	20 Sept. 2013	12- “undocumented life” (p. 1) 17- “undocumented student no longer afraid” (p. 1) 17- “undocumented not afraid” (p. 7) 18- “undocumented student no longer hiding” (p. 9)

Figure 2: Overview of Narrative Selection. Created By the Author.

### Chapter 3

#### **RE-FRAMING *TESTIMONIO*:**

#### **MEDIATIZING POLITICAL STORYTELLING ON YOUTUBE**

### **1. The Magic ‘Window’: Narratives as Cultural Tools for Meaning-Making**

Any analysis of the ‘output’ of the Immigrant Rights Movement in the United States must initially acknowledge the postcolonial frame of such a study. Migration and the debate on national boundaries, for instance, lead to Nayar’s observation that “newer concerns for the postcolonial have emerged in the age of economic globalization, neocolonialism and cultural imperialism (often coded as ‘Westernization’ or even ‘Americanization’) in postcolonial societies” (191). When defining new concerns for postcolonial investigations of migration issues, the “volume of [the latter] and the *consequent demands*” should be a central focus as they “have been severe, testing humanitarian organizations, legal systems, health authorities and nation-states as never before” (197, *emphasis added*). As early as in 1996, Gugelberger prognosticated that

the end of this century and years into the next will be characterized by migrations unforeseen in the past [...]. Then it might be proper to ask how this scenario bears on literature and theory, not so much how it is reflected in literature but rather how literature and theory can function in a responsible and perhaps even rehumanizing way. (7)

Gugelberger highlights the role of literature in the human challenges that (im-)migration poses for our culture. Galisky, who collected stories of undocumented youth for her study, also describes the role of stories in the Immigrant Rights Movement as humanizing. She hypothesizes that by bringing “to life some of the stories of undocumented youth people”, the Movement “could persuade the American public to care about them and think about this situation in a more nuanced and compassionate manner” (x). Mathay adds that “testimonials, interviews, and family histories”, in particular, possess the power to “reflect the struggles” of undocumented youth and their families (xiii). All of these commentators stress ‘humanness’ inherent in personal stories. Understanding ‘humanness’ as the most important component of these stories, this section elaborates a concept for the testimonial narrative that is used



throughout the study. As we know, the use of personal stories in the Immigrant Rights Movement is not new. A student of migration populations and immigrant rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Ramírez stresses that the output that best characterizes those initiatives are, in fact, personal *narratives*, and especially those that address opposition to directly felt political ills affecting that community. Reflecting upon immigrant rights movements in the 1960s and 70s, he explains the role of narrative as follows:

The construction of oppositional narratives provided them [activists in the movement] with alternative ways to reflect and make sense of their lives. Their accounts highlight the elements that prevented their stories from being absorbed into the narrative mainstream. Their stories suggest how opposition can be sustained when linked to values that are anchored in one's location in history, specific legacies of resistance, spiritual inspiration, and cultural maintenance. They demonstrate the power of counterstories to inspire opposition when activated by memory and a search for truth beyond dominant ideological frameworks. (*Social Action* 176)

Ramírez stresses the importance of personal narratives in their connection of the personal and the public and/or the political. Not only can narratives provide an aspect of 'humanness' and opposition against 'unhuman' behavior, storytelling also becomes a "cultural performance" (Madison and Hamera xvii) that can potentially cause change – not only in others but also in the self. What narratives offer is not only a "clear window" that makes us think we "are looking onto reality directly" (Erstad and Wertsch 30). Narrative "power" also lies in the potential "to shape thinking and speaking" in others (ibid). With regard to undocumented youth, Galisky explains,

telling stories changes people, both the teller and the listener. Even as undocumented youth put themselves at risk by going public about their lives, I believe that the telling of their stories has lessened their depression and their isolation, brought them untold numbers of allies and gained the attention of Congress, the media, the American public and the President. (xii)

While the use of narratives in a counter-movement per se does not seem to have changed, the radically transformed medium for the production, performance, and distribution of such narratives now shape the production of their meaning. Since this study argues that new types of political protest develop their own narrative forms, a generic, narratological approach to the analysis of contemporary narratives' form and content does not do justice to any socio-political context. Sophia McClennen reminds

us of the importance of critical cultural studies for understanding *testimonios* and her insights are crucial for this study. According to McClennen, many scholars, “both adherents of Beverley’s theories and the author himself seem to be unable to truly incorporate cultural studies theory when actually formulating a praxis for the study of such ‘new’ additions to the canon as testimonial and film” (63). Therefore, digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth and their cultural context should be examined with appropriate theoretic tools. The social movement which provides the most immediate context for these *testimonios* is as important as the devices that undocumented youth use to tell and shape their stories.

Like Ramírez, Erstad and Wertsch stress that narratives are “part of our living, bridging past, present and future” (29). Narratives are “part of the repertoire of means we use in our everyday lives, ‘telling lives’” (ibid). They serve as “a way of understanding characters in our environment” and an “important equipment for the formation of the collective and individual identity” (ibid). It is through storytelling and narratives that “people in general create a version of the world in which they can envisage a place for themselves, a personal world” (28-29). Likewise, in what she calls the ‘existential type’ of narrative, Ryan defines narrative as an “act of narrating [that] enables humans to deal with time, destiny, and mortality; to create and project identities; and to situate themselves as embodied individuals in a world populated by similarly embodied subjects” (*Introduction 2*). Underlying both views is the broad definition of “narrative as a central mode of human thought and as a vehicle of meaning making” (Erstad and Wertsch 28). This definition implies that narratives are “cultural tools” in this process of meaning-making which “give us a structured way of accessing knowledge in a culture and a way of expressing intentions and how we relate to others” (ibid).<sup>45</sup> Regardless of how extensive the dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in a story, “narrative has always dealt with the other, with alterity”, because, as Fludernik argues, “the construction of identity psychologically depends on a differentiation of self and other, and perhaps even an imaging of the self *as* other” (263-264). Therefore, when regarding narratives as windows to an individual, we do

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<sup>45</sup> Emphasizing the acute awareness of the narrative as a cultural tool for meaning-making as stressed here, these observations further rely on the premise of the ‘narrative turn’ that recently has shaped the humanities (cf. Chamberlain 142). Chamberlain explicitly links this turn “to biographical methods or the renewal of interest in autobiography” (ibid) that forms the basis for the *testimonio*, as the following sections show.

not only get to see the individual and his/her performance of an identity but also those of ‘others’, against which the former is negotiated.

## 2. Power and Counter-Discourse in the ‘Move-ment’: Grounds for *Testimonio*

The formation of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006 finds its expressions in frequent, great marches led by undocumented immigrants since the year of 2006. However, the output produced by the different divisions of the Movement is particularly interesting with regard to New Media. Pallares and Flores-González even go a step further in arguing that there is an urgent need for providing “a more complete understanding of the modes and types of Latino resistance that include but go beyond electoral engagement” (xxviii). Cultural products like narratives come to the fore that circulate this particular discourse (cf. Abrams 110).<sup>46</sup>

The quality that particularly distinguishes and at the same time largely defines literature in a postcolonial context from other types of literatures is its oppositional power that narratives originating in the midst of a counter-movement can assume. Postcolonial writing, as Döring argues, assumes “power, in the very process of establishing and propagating itself, at the same time [as it] produces the conditions for resisting and, potentially overturning its effects”, which he calls “**counter-discourse**” (Döring 25, **emphasis given**). The digital *testimonios* selected for this study are pieces of cultural output in which, from a postcolonial perspective, the narrators not only speak about and *against* the conditions of being undocumented but also gain power in two ways: The narrators empower themselves over their status by pronouncing that they are ‘undocumented’, and the narratives assume political power by calling for and themselves providing public support of immigration reform in the United States.

A more specific example for counter-discursive writing is the act of naming, describing, interpreting and performing vital elements of oppression and/or margina-

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<sup>46</sup> Abrams further defines discourse as “a message which may be delivered and circulated by all kinds of modes of communications (the broadcast and print media, government organs, everyday conversation) and which often contains injunctions to act (such as those contained within the discourse on female respectability for instance). A discourse is thus quite complex and multilayered and may be contained within the narrative” (110). Stressing the social context, discourse can be defined as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of reality)” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 4), which will eventually “include and exclude other participants and events, link their versions of what actually goes on [...] with other interpretations, judgments, arguments etc., and serve other interests” (5).

lization. These acts are key strategies of postcolonial writing, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, and can be subsumed under acts of appropriation – “an exploration of the ways in which the dominated or colonized culture can use the tools of the dominant discourse to resist its political or cultural control” (*Key Concepts* 15). When seeing narratives as expressive acts of oppressive conditions, the postcolonial lens reminds us that all key strategies of appropriation are “never natural but always imposed” and thus define “an act of power” (Döring 15). As Tarrow notes, “power in movement grows when ordinary people join forces in contentious confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents. Mounting, coordinating and sustaining this interaction is the *peculiar contribution* of the social movement” (*Power* 1, *emphasis added*). Through the appropriation of narrative for their purposes, undocumented youth potentially produce moments in which they create power, as they produce versions of truth for their ‘others’ to act upon, because, as Tarrow explains further, “power is at work in all the situations, texts and contexts that are to be named” in postcolonial discourse (20).

Counter-discourse is the underlying principle and device for the ‘political’ action in the life of undocumented youth, satisfying Allison’s definition of a highly functionalized interest, organized thought, and political agenda to affect change (422-423). Counter-discourse thus becomes an immensely important tool in movements and their politics, which attempts to affect change on the basis of activism and activist imaginations in the Immigrant Rights Movement. It requires a comprehensive analysis of the political logic in the current political context (in the sense of development of event-ness and legislation) that allows a consideration of a possible assumption of power by the narrators and their Movement through telling narratives the way they tell them on YouTube. The postcolonial lens that considers the history of colonization and the postcolonial condition – especially with regard to discussions on creation and performance of Spivak’s notions of ‘subaltern-ness’ and Butler’s and Athanasiou’s theory of ‘dispossession’ in new appliances of the genre of *testimonio* called the ‘digital *testimonio*’ – shall “challenge us to place our engagements with literary and aesthetic products in frameworks of power” (Döring 20).

Abrams further argues that “it might be helpful to think of the narrative as the structure and of the discourse as the message within it” (110). Consequently, we need to ask how the narrative styles are used to effectively deliver particular discourses

against – and thus *counter* – mainstream political discourse on immigration that undocumented youth position their narratives in. Which frame do these narratives assume in order to formulate counter-discourse as a form of political action, integrated in narrative? The following sections explain why narratives of undocumented youth should be understood as *testimonios* in order to do justice to the underlying political context of the Immigrant Rights Movement.

Pallares sets the agenda for the analysis of political output and strategies of the Movement slightly differently. She reminds us that “scholars of social movements must now focus on the specific agency of the undocumented – that is, on the relationship between exclusion from citizenship and the forms of political representation, strategies, and identities that undocumented people can deploy and on the impact of these movements on formal and substantive practices of liberal citizenship” (*Representing ‘La Familia’* 233). From interviews with undocumented youth activists in Chicago, I also gathered a strong consciousness of mounting power through a sense of collectivity through the Movement. When momentum builds, as it has in recent years, it might revive the *testimonio* in its now digital form, away from the sole discourse in academia as Gugelberger argues. Uriel Sánchez explains this sense of counter-discursive power:

Like, you’re full-on, I don’t know, all your secrets or force that you use is short-lived and then after that you have *nothing*, so it’s building momentum, it’s building excitement, and energy. It’s for that movement, for that community, and it’s not called movement for no reason, it’s called movement for a reason, ‘cuz you wanna *move* people, you wanna *move* the community, and you wanna have that mo-ment-um.

In contrast, Antonio Gutiérrez focuses on the internal aspects of the Movement that give personal empowerment through the being in a group:

I really wanted to join IYJL and be more of an active member just to building a community in the sense of more understanding about what I was going through and others were going through and it was about collaboration and I think that’s what the movement is all about: it’s about collaborating and letting other people know that they’re not really alone and that we can support each other and help each other. [...] in order to finalize this oppression that keeps going, year by year. (Gutiérrez)

Counter-discourse implies this type of power-gaining that the two activists describe through a counter-movement which is, at least in (postcolonial) literary

studies, often connected to cultural output such as *testimonios*. The digital *testimonios* proposed for analysis in this study shall therefore be observed along the lines of power constantly. The counter-discursive quality becomes visible also in Pallares' work on the revived Immigrant Rights Movement and establishes a clear link to postcolonial investigation: Fighting "the dominant discourse of undocumented immigrants as unlawful and therefore morally suspect", she argues, undocumented activists "are viewed as the excludable Other who help to define and delimit the nation" (*Representing 'La Familia'* 219). Martínez-Vázquez adds that cultural products of movements have the potential to open up the system towards "new perspectives" in order to "develop more just systems of analysis and understanding, which can then help in the construction of a decolonial imaginary" (10). Not only construction, but a 'writing back' paradigm is visible in counter-discursive narratives. Döring explains that 'writing back' "means to move against the dominant direction in this former one-way street of writing" (namely that of the colonizers) (18). He further argues that it undermines "its conceptual foundation – a process which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin described as 'subversion' and saw as an 'inevitable tendency' in postcolonial literatures" (ibid). The following section introduces the *testimonio* as one form of counter-discursive output for the Movement.

### **3. *Testimonio***

"Any formal definition of it is bound to be too limiting"

(Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555).

Opening the section on *testimonio* with this quote shall provide a point of reference throughout the study: Not only is any formal definition of the *testimonio* a limitation, the *testimonio* also finds itself "at the crossroads of all the discourses of institutional battles in recent years", as Gugelberger states (7). Further, *testimonio* could be described as "a threshold genre", "trac[ing] and cross[ing] boundaries between fact and fiction, memory and history, selves and others, homes and exile – sometimes drawing these distinctions but more often blurring them", according to Döring (69). Therefore, those seeking a concrete definition of *testimonio* shall be disappointed. Consequently, the following introduction to *testimonio* will not provide an exclusive definition of genre of *testimonio* but will attempt to negotiate the oftentimes

controversial characteristics that scholars in testimonial discourse have established, in order to correlate them to the digital *testimonio* and a possible change in the context, content, and form. We will locate the digital *testimonio* in a few selected paths that *testimonio* took in its formation to the point where it makes sense to position new developments.

Gugelberger supports this approach. “While the literary/formal ‘value’ of the genre may be negligible”, he argues, “its tremendous implicit trajectories continue to deserve attention” (7). His claim suggests that a re-formation of the *testimonio* is possible, at least in terms of its form. What seems more difficult to assess are the subtle nuances in meaning that its content produces, which, however, represents its most important features. I will define *testimonio* for the purposes of this study as a narrative which produces political meaning and I will structure the investigation of the digital *testimonio* accordingly.

### 3.1. Testimonial Narrative

One, broad definition for the *testimonio* denotes the latter as a form of ‘life writing’, depicting the “‘life’ or a significant life experience” of its narrator (*Narrative Authority* 555). As Döring argues, “the term ‘life writing’ refers to various forms of autobiographical texts, such as memoirs, diaries, journals, testimonials or letters” (65; see also Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555). Because of this blurring of boundaries and the personal elements that come to the fore in the genre, life writing offers “a powerful medium for postcolonial projects: it is a way to move from self-mutilation to self-mending, perhaps self-creation or -recreation and, at any rate, to self-assertion” (66).

Like other life writing genres, “the *testimonialista* gives his or her personal testimony ‘directly,’ addressing a specific interlocutor” (Yúdice; see also Randall 61; Roth 194). Thus, the final narrative is first produced in an interview(-like) situation. As in oral history, the production process includes “the different phases of listening, recording, and transmitting others’ voices” (Randall 64). The status of the narrator, however, is a central distinction from other genres, as he/she rises in status over the interlocutor. The *testimonio* “is not exactly commensurable with the category of life history (or oral history)”, precisely *because* the “intention of the direct narrator” is more important than that of the interlocutor, as he/she “uses (in a pragmatic sense)

the possibility the ethnographic interlocutor offers to bring his or her situation to the attention of the audience” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556; see also Beverley, *Testimonio* 38).<sup>47</sup> The central distinction from oral history, hence, is this production process and status attached to it. “Historians”, too, “seem to be most comfortable with ‘oral history’ as an umbrella term that incorporates *both the practice* and the output” (Abrams 2, *emphasis added*). “The bourgeois public sphere” is too remote for the testimonial narrator to publish his account in, as he/she would “normally not have access” to the latter due to “the very conditions of subalternity to which the *testimonio* bears witness” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556). The testimonial narrator finds him-/herself in some kind of oppression – “politically and socially marginalized, voiceless and submissive” (Logan 200).<sup>48</sup>

What is more, the *testimonio* appears to negotiate autobiographical elements; an impression conditioned by the fact that the *testimonio* is “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555; Yúdice 42). Accordingly, the line between *testimonio* and autobiography is thin. According to Beverley, “testimonio may include, but is *not subsumed* under [...] autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history” (*Testimonio* 31, *emphasis added*). Although we need to make a clear distinction between the two genres, autobiographical elements in *testimonio* are not less important than in traditional autobiography. The ‘core stories of dispossession’ that will be traced in chapter 4 are largely autobiographical. The aspect that leads to a semantic approximation of both genres, autobiography and *testimonio*, is the use as a cultural tool that can mediate cultural identities. Alfred Hornung, for instance, postulates that “autobiographical stories may mediate between individual positions

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<sup>47</sup> As in the famous case of the *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchú, the latter’s interlocutor and anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray describes the move from oral history to *testimonio*. She recounts how at first, like an editor of film, she arranged the transcripts of the interviews, “first identifying major themes (father, mother, childhood, education) and then those which occurred most frequently (work, relations with *ladinos*, linguistic problems)” and “soon reached the decision to give the manuscript the form of a monologue”, deleting all her questions (Burgos-Debray xx). “By doing so”, she argues, “[she] became what [she] really was: Rigoberta’s listener”, “allowed her to speak and then became her instrument, her double by allowing her to make the transition from the spoken to the written word”, “so as to make the text more accessible to the reader” (ibid). The development of the anthropologist or historian as an interview partner to a less and less important element, thus merely an *instrument*, of the final *testimonio* becomes especially clear.

<sup>48</sup> The following section deals with the question of subalternity and the debate that was unleashed around it in more detail.



and choices taken in life, in the sense of the critical concept of relational selves” and, thus, “the conception of auto/biography as mediation also refers to the bridging of different cultures” (xii). The thin distinction between autobiography and *testimonio* could be formulated as follows

Like autobiography, *testimonio* is an affirmation of the authority of personal experience, but, unlike autobiography, *it cannot affirm a self-identity that is separate from the subaltern group or class situation that it narrates. Testimonio* involves an erasure of the function and thus also of the textual presence of the ‘author’ that is so powerfully present in all major forms of Western literary and academic writing. (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556, *emphasis added*)

Clearly and forcefully distinguishing the *testimonio* from the autobiographical genre is, thus, the mediation of identity between the self and the communal identity for whom the narrator speaks. Despite the fact that autobiography, too, “provides powerful means for marginalized or subjugated people to turn from ‘subjects of discourse’ to ‘subjects in discourse’” (Swindells in: Döring 66-67), the position of the narrator differs noticeably in *testimonio*. As Roth explains, the main commonality that *testimonio* shares with autobiography is the “repetition of the form”, but “with a difference”: *Testimonio* combines elements from the narrator’s own “cultural context with foreign elements” and performs “an articulation, namely, a contribution to the struggle in the face of adversity” (177). The opportunity to write one’s life, in *testimonio*, “implies necessarily that the narrator is no longer in the situation of marginality and subalternity that his or her narrative describes, but has now attained the cultural status of an author (and, generally speaking, middle- or upper-class economic status)” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556). In order for them to be called ‘*testimonios*’ and not, simply, autobiographical ‘stories’, the narrators of those narratives chosen for this study must form a collective identity that speaks for their Movement.

### **3.2. ‘A New Form of Politics’: *Testimonios* and Resistance**

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the testimonial narrative itself is not new; rather, “*testimonio*-like texts have existed for a long time (though without that name) at the margins of literature in many postcolonial cultures” (*Concepts* 259; see

also Zimmerman 102). The revived urgency to study the *testimonio*, according to Beverley, signals that

today the context in which *testimonio* is read and debated is not the Cold War but globalization, not a bipolar world but one dominated by U.S. military and geopolitical hegemony, not national liberation movements or big Communist parties but the so-called new social movements, often operating at sub-or supranational levels. (*Testimonio* x)

Here, Beverley describes, in particular, the need to assess *testimonios* in this postcolonial context of the U.S. This fact establishes an intimate link of the narrative to political opposition and activism. Beverley understands the origin of the *testimonio* in “liberation movements and other social struggles inspired by Marxism” (Beverley, *Testimonio* x; see also Zimmermann 107). Gugelberger introduces the *testimonio* and testimonial discourse in the academic field as less counter-discursive as when it still counted as a “Latin American ‘thing’” during the 70s and 80s (5). In Western academia, the *testimonio* itself became popular due to activists like Rigoberta Menchú.<sup>49</sup> As Roth explains, the more recent testimonial text “aims to raise attention and inspire solidarity and political action” for oppressed communities and “to counteract the widespread ignorance” of oppression “in the mainstream media” (174). This aspect is main motive for using the genre as a category to ‘frame’ digital narratives of undocumented youth with.

The debate around the *testimonio* began with “Menchú’s receiving the Nobel Peace Prize [...] numbed to a certain degree the counterdiscursivity of the genre”, Gugelberger claims (5). Posing the question of “what happens if we use such a text?” in institutional education and research, and what happens when we expose it to literary critical debates such as “oral versus literary [...]; autobiography versus demography [...]; the battle of representationality [...]" (10-11), Gugelberger argues that “whatever literature is not, we (in the institution) can make it into literature and by doing so destroy its essence” (10).<sup>50</sup> However, Gugelberger also stresses the institutional dilemma: “If we accept, that is, integrate, the outside work into the home

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<sup>49</sup> See: *I, Rigoberta Menchú* – the *testimonio* of indigenous Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú against organized crimes committed against the indigenous population that she experienced on a personal basis (1984).

<sup>50</sup> Aware of these issues, this investigation only shortly delineates the paths that the *testimonio* has taken in the debate, such as the debates on representationality or subalterneity, and compares the digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth to these latter.

of the canon, we violate the authenticity of the genre” and “yet, if we do not integrate such genres, we are forced to continue policing the canon with the most conservative policies” (11). The problem, Gugelberger argues, is that “when the margin moves to the center and loses its counter-hegemonic quality” (2; Do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 77), which it had when first identified as a genre.<sup>51</sup> Thus, testimonial literature emerged “as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin America” (Beverley in: Maier 3), and “ethnographic and anthropological methods developed in the 1950s and 60s” that “contributed to the genre’s formation” (Maier 3).

The “battle of representationality” (cf. Gugelberger 10-11) determines much of the critical debate. Maier, for instance, finds that most scholars of *testimonio* “attach importance to questions of representation and representativeness, the status of the testimonial narrator as related to subaltern agency, [...] and mediated discourse” (7). What has been debated furiously in *testimonio* is the narrator’s (alleged) ‘subaltern’<sup>52</sup> identity, especially within the context of Subaltern Studies<sup>53</sup> within which Gayatri Spivak’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” originates.<sup>54</sup> As noted earlier, it is “the very conditions of subalternity to which the *testimonio* bears witness” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556). Likewise, Roth explains that “the

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<sup>51</sup> “The genre came into existence due to the Cuban Revolution, more specifically due to Miguel Barnet’s recording of the life story of Esteban Montejo under the title *Biografía de un cimarrón/ The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1966)”, Gugelberger reminds us, upon which “numerous testimonios were published” (8).

<sup>52</sup> The term, concept, and studies thereof originate in Marxism, although revising the latter fundamentally (cf. Beverley, *Testimonio* xii). In current discourse, “adopted by Antonio Gramsci”, the term is used “to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the **hegemony** of the ruling classes”, “groups denied access to ‘hegemonic power’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 198). Gramsci himself suggested in a detailed plan that the “history of the subaltern classes” should be canvassed for “new formations within the old framework that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes” (in: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 198-199).

<sup>53</sup> The Subaltern Studies group is dedicated to writing “essays relating to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalterneity ‘as well as the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems – in short, the culture informing that condition’” particularly with focus on the so-called ‘Third World’ (Guha in: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 199). They suggest “that the development of a nationalist consciousness [in the case of India, for instance] was an exclusively élite achievement” and that “such writing cannot acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by people *on their own*, that is, independently of the élite” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 199).

<sup>54</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak conceptualizes the ‘subaltern’ in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Nelson and Grossberg’s *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988). Spivak’s argument proposes that the subaltern cannot speak “because if the subaltern could speak in a way that really mattered to us, that we could feel compelled to listen to and act upon, then it would not be subaltern” (Beverley *Testimonio* xvi). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* thus sharply criticizes Western academia which attempts to speak *for* the subaltern only to conceal their own claim to power, which, in effect, does not make the subaltern voices heard (cf. Do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 68).

genre of the *testimonio* seeks the recognition and legitimation of other, subalternized positions, paradigms and representations *as other*” (178).

In order to comprehend the ‘voice for the subaltern’ in *testimonios*, Beverley suggests “it is [...] important to understand that the testimonial narrator is not the subaltern as such” (*Narrative Authority* 557). Rather, Beverley finds that the narrator in *testimonio* “functions as an organic intellectual (in Antonio Gramsci’s sense of this term) of the subaltern, who speaks to the hegemony by means of a metonymy of self in the name and in the place of the subaltern” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that *testimonios* do, in fact, “represent[...] in particular those subjects – the child, the ‘native’, the woman, the insane, the criminal, the proletarian – excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking or writing for themselves” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 259). Thus, the *testimonio* implies an act of *giving voice* to the subaltern, although not being subaltern him-/herself. However, “the subaltern, by definition, is a social position that is not, and cannot be, adequately represented in the human sciences or the university” and maybe only because it may be “among the institutional constellations of power/ knowledge that create and sustain subalternity” itself (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 562). With reference to Spivak, Do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan define the “‘subaltern’ als einen Raum, der innerhalb eines kolonialisierten Territoriums von allen Mobilitätsformen abgeschnitten ist” – ‘a space cut off from all forms of mobilization’ a (57-58; Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education* 430). Therefore, seeing subalternness as a present *metaphoric* or *situational* construction for the experiences captured in the narratives helps establish crucial yet less restricted links between the different kinds of oppressed identities enunciated in the narratives and their connection to the political logic of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. It also allows for a less pre-determined search for the intertwinement between the political and media logic with regard of subaltern elements. Dube emphasizes, for instance, the heterogeneity with which subaltern moments can be characterized, arguing that subalternness is a “*metaphor* for the general attribute of subordination in South Asia – whether such subordination was expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, race or office” (127, *emphasis added*).

The metaphoric status of the narrator raises questions about the role of the testimonial narrator and his/her narrated, significant life episode – the *story*. An

attempt to ‘solve the debate’ for our purposes would be futile; nor would any determined proposition on this issue provide a satisfying solution to all. Nevertheless, Stuart Hall proposes that “we should think [...] of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (392). Further, by claiming that “what we say is always ‘in context’, *positioned*” (ibid, *emphasis given*), Hall provides an approach to the inclusion of the media context – which is an essential aspect of mediatization itself – in the production of media content. The production of an identity in *testimonios* should be considered as in context – the political context that *testimonio* requires for its narrator to assume as a ‘voice for all’ – but also the media logic (the socio-technological frames and affordances), which publishing of content on YouTube embraces. The production of identity in the *testimonio* must be negotiated in a medium-specific context. Therefore, section 4 introduces this aspect with specific focus on YouTube as the medium and digital *testimonios* as its content.

The issues of ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ in *testimonio* appear equally unsolvable as those revolving around the subaltern, because measuring the degree of authenticity and truth is equally problematic in the scholarship of New Media. Burgess and Green report that experiences trigger “tensions between ‘expression’ and ‘exhibitionism,’ performance and surveillance” (27). Jenkins argues that “in a hybrid space like YouTube, it is often very difficult to determine what regimes of truth govern different genres of user-generated content”, since “the goals of communicators can no longer be simply read off the channels of communication” (*Before YouTube* 122). Connecting the indeterminability of the medium’s content to its logic, he observes: “There seems to be a fascination with blurry categories at moments of media in transition – it is one of the ways we apply our evolving skills in a context where the categories that organize our culture are in flux” (Jenkins, *Before YouTube* 123). Likewise, Hoffman and Eisenlauer argue that “the degree of narrative authenticity of weblogs [...] is difficult to determine for bloggers can deliberately suspend the tension between biographic details of their life and episodic make-believe” (84).

Therefore, I suggest seeing all digital *testimonios* telling stories of varying degrees of truths instead of trying to establish categories that measure these degrees of truth. Taking a step further, Benmayor simply *personalizes* those degrees of truth expressed in *testimonio*. She states that it is the specific place and moment when the

narrators decide to “speak *their* truth” that makes up a central part of the creation of meaning itself (*Digital Testimonio* 512, *emphasis added*). For the digital *testimonio*, Benmayor argues, just like Craft, that there is no *single* truth, yet that when watching the digital *testimonio*, it is possible to “find points of connection with or divergence from” the “own experience” (511). Stressing the experientiality<sup>55</sup> the way she does here, Benmayor relies on the aspect of “a community audience to share or understand the experience”, which she thus describes as essential for the *testimonio*’s creation of meaning and, therefore, as an inherently mutual process between viewer and narrator (510). Maier stresses that political voices in *testimonios*, after all, do not portray reality *itself* but an impression of reality which could be called a ‘reality effect’, proposing the existence of different “degrees of truth” (cf. 7).

More recently, in what could be called a ‘post-debate’, the “*testimonio* is by contrast a new form of narrative literature”, argues Beverley, “in which we can at the same time witness and be a part of the emerging culture of an international proletarian/popular-democratic subject in its period of ascendancy” (*Testimonio* x). Along with this new subject for *testimonio* – agents in new social movements – goes a new ‘usage’ for the genre. Rating the placement of Menchú’s *testimonio* in the scholarly debate introduced by Gugelberger as more stimulating than destructive, while the ascribed political ‘forcefulness’, underlying struggle, and involvement in other political actions of resistance, protest and rebellion (violent or non-violent) is surely different from *testimonio* to *testimonio*,<sup>56</sup> Beverley argues that Menchú’s *testimonio* is an example of what happens in societies that call themselves ‘multicultural’ such as the United States. “In its affirmation of Mayan indigenous culture and society, and its attention to women’s empowerment”, Menchú’s *testimonio* “looked forward to the emerging ‘identity politics’ of the new social movements that came to occupy the place of the revolutionary left in the 1980s”, thus becoming “one of the centerpieces of the ‘culture wars’ around the issue of multiculturalism in the United States” (Beverley, *Testimonio* x-xi). More recently,

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<sup>55</sup> From the perspective of narrative analysis, this sense of ‘experientiality’ defines as, on the one hand, drawing “attention to the fact that stories are always accounts of experiences”, but also “raises the question of the relation of narrativity to general considerations relating to the perception and representation of reality”, according to Nünning (103).

<sup>56</sup> There are *testimonios* which are “harked back to the genre of guerrilla *testimonio*” (Beverley, *Testimonio* x), which is its own genre and “predominantly male-centered” (xi) and which are to be differentiated from *testimonios* like Menchú’s.

Beverley has emphasized the great potential for the *testimonio* to be appropriated by new social movements, as the following quote illustrates:

New social movements [...] create local and global circuits of consciousness-raising, resistance, and empowerment in civil society. But there is at least a moment in which, in the pursuit of their particularized or highly local demands, they must also begin to project alternative models of government, community, and economic life. That is the moment in which, individually or as a bloc, they must bid for, in Gramsci's phrase, 'moral and intellectual leadership of the nation' – that is, hegemony. It seems to me that the continuing force of *testimonio* is linked to this moment – which is a political one – more than to the ethical-legal problematic of human rights [...]. I continue to see in *testimonio*, in other words, a model for a *new form of politics*, which also means a new way of imagining the identity of the nation. (*Testimonio* xvii, *emphasis added*)

Beverley's observations are crucial for assessing the role of undocumented youth in the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006: Undocumented youth, by positioning their *testimonios* in the movement, assume an agency that Beverley associates with the 'leadership' of the nation and Gramsci's understanding of the 'organic intellectual'. Further, this innate, 'new form of politics' reinforces the definition of the 'political' for the sake of this investigation: Laing shows that "until the middle of last century, the "political" was understood as "the macropower structures of national government, the exercise of social authority and the conflicts caused by the unequal distribution of wealth" (18). However, he also argues that since then, "a quite different type of relationship has emerged", namely, an "application of the term 'politics' to what was previously understood as the private sphere of sexual and personal relationships, and which was later to be applied to wider issues of individual identity" (*ibid.*). Testimonial writing, Maier points out, serves as a "site of nexus" between different identities that meld spheres of the personal and the political (7). Roth adds that there are multiple systems of oppression that a *testimonio* necessarily highlights (*cf.* 202).

Considering the fact that the narrator necessarily negotiates these different identities in the performance of his/her digital *testimonio*, an understanding of oppression seems to work only from a perspective that recognizes the intersectional workings of identity positioned in systems of oppression. Intersectionality, here, "stands as a *pars pro toto* for a more general approach towards the analysis of complex constellations of inequality and difference" (Kallenberg, Müller, and Meyer

16) and a key device for “understanding social hierarchy” (Anthias 122). Understanding the workings of different identities and their performance in (digital) *testimonios* thus requires an “integrated analysis of a plurality of objects with a focus on their interaction and co-constitution” (18). Locating the political messages of digital *testimonios* in their performance of ‘marginalized’ or dispossessed identities, an intersectional approach highlights the most central outcome of the narratives: the ways of “resisting oppression” (ibid).

With regard to the intersections of different identities<sup>57</sup> in these narratives, thus, the analysis will locate these in the political discourse in which the narrators/authors and their distributors position them, and in the medial context in which they are published, the temporal and legislative moment of the Movement, and their very own ‘core stories’, which depict and perform moments of subalternness/dispossession by the use of multimodal affordances. The ‘political’ and the ‘personal’ struggle as defined by Laing, hence, are inextricably linked in digital *testimonios*.

As we have seen in this section, the *testimonio* surely “wants to effect change” (Gugelberger 4; see also Roth 178). Even more urgently, “the *testimonio* came into being in order to raise the readers’ attention and consciousness, end exploitation and violence, and claim basic human rights for those who had been excluded from them” (Roth 199). This relates to a heightened sense of ‘agency’ in the Movement that Pallares points to, that is an important dimension in analyzing narratives of undocumented youth. In addition to that, it “definitely lives from the hope and will to effect change or at least raise consciousness” (Gugelberger 4). ‘Hope’ and ‘consciousness’, hence, count as forms of political power that contain immediate radical and perhaps violent color. In an interview, community organizer Marcela Hernandez argues that “it has really meant for a way to fight for my own rights. [...] to realize my dreams and also, to know that I could change the situation I was in, and it wasn’t hopeless, so hopeless” (Hernandez). Likewise, according to Cedillo, undocumented students coming out of the shadows, “also hope that the personal stories [...] will help shift some of the stereotypes and hateful rhetoric that have become so prevalent in the dialogue on immigration” (in: Manuel et al. viii).

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<sup>57</sup> such as (homo-)sexual, gender, racial, ethnic, national, immigration/family roots and status, activist, or professional identities.



Power, thus, can simply mean ‘breaking silences’, crossing imaginary and real borders and simply “making new sense out of [...] commonalities and differences of experience” (Benmayor, *Digital Testimonio* 507-508). Logically, it takes power and personal strength to enunciate this very intimate detail. The therapeutic implications of the *testimonio* hereby cannot be underestimated – it does not necessarily involve immediate legislative change to evoke change in the psychological state and well-being of a person. This, too, can mean personal power (or ‘empowerment’).

The key question now is how we can understand the digital *testimonio* as an expression of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement if the subaltern voice is merely an ‘illusion’ or, at best, a random representation of individuality in a political struggle. Understanding the subaltern as a metaphor in digital *testimonios* is an attempt to contextualize moments of ‘subalternness’ recounted in the narratives of undocumented youth. When examining the narratives more closely, the viewer sees one particular, coherent sequence narrating and strongly highlighting an experience with oppression and/or discrimination that could indeed be categorized as ‘subaltern’ in the narrator’s life story that tells ‘their’ story of oppression or discrimination. Further, the production of identity includes the concept of ‘performativity’ to which the last section of chapter 4 is explicitly devoted. Also, for the digital *testimonio*, this problem that *testimonio* faces with regard to the subaltern is diminished by seeing the subaltern as a metaphor. Next, it is crucial to negotiate this understanding of the subaltern with the media logic that is implied by the publication of the digital *testimonios* on YouTube. This leads us to the introduction of the digital *testimonio* and the media logic of YouTube that follows.

#### **4. Re-Framing *Testimonio*: The Mediatization of Storytelling and the Digital *Testimonio* on YouTube**

##### **4.1. Claiming the *Testimonio*’s Ground: Digital Storytelling and Political Logic**

In the article “Digital *Testimonio* as a Signature Pedagogy for Latin@ Studies”, published in 2012, Rina Benmayor introduces a compound term of central importance for this investigation: the ‘digital *testimonio*’. In her article, Benmayor emphasizes her understanding of the ‘**digital *testimonio***’ as an amalgamation of “the

*testimonio* tradition of urgent narratives and the creative multimedia languages of digital storytelling” (507). Framing the usage of the term this way, Benmayor stresses the tight integration of the logic of the *testimonio* into this new form. She argues that, for instance, “as with *testimonio*, our individual stories also expressed collective experiences of marginalization, resistance, and strength” (508). Therefore, the digital *testimonio* “contains both a contestatory, oppositional dimension, and a propositional one” (520-521). Further defining the term, Benmayor notes that the digital *testimonio*, “in contrast to the wider category of ‘digital story,’ gives urgent and powerful voice to individual and collective Latin@ experiences and allows for broader, more democratic authorship, dissemination, and reception” (508). While positioning the digital *testimonio* in the tradition of the *testimonio* from Latin American and Latin@ literary and cultural spheres, Benmayor negotiates between the two on the basis of her expertise in both subjects. She explains:

When I use digital *testimonio*, [...] I am being specific, keeping in mind the particulars of the genre. To *testimoniar* (testify) involves an urgent voice of resistance to social injustices, an urgency to speak out, a collective interlocutor, and a collaborative process of production and interpretation. Whereas digital storytelling might be used to emphasize the medium, using digital technologies to tell stories, digital *testimonios* place the emphasis on the story and its social purpose, in a medium that is digital. Thus, in my usage I try to retain the original political and liberatory impulse of the *testimonio* genre. (510)

As already implied in the differentiation given above, the use of the term “digital *testimonio*” hence stresses the same urgency to raise one’s voice against oppression that also accompanies traditional *testimonios*. Even more, she argues, digital *testimonios* offer an opportunity to “re-enact a tradition of Latin American *testimonio*, in emphasizing the urgency to speak out and make visible the acts of oppression and injustice that subjugate, marginalize, and silence communities” (523). This close association with the genre of *testimonio* in the work on digital *testimonios* confirms Benmayor’s prediction that authors of the latter “will take digital *testimonio* [...] and reproduce the process that Anzaldúa, Moraga, and all the Latina writers of that generation have unleashed” (522). Here, too, it is not the single voice that counts. Rather, “at each stage, the individual voice signifies a collective referent” (511).

Her definition of the digital *testimonio* places Benmayor in a wide range of scholars who are attempting to delineate the meaning of digital storytelling practices. Couldry similarly defines digital storytelling as “the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources” (42). “Digital storytelling”, therefore, “is a loose term used to define a variety of digital media products, some of which have little to do with storytelling in the more traditional sense” (Benmayor, *Digital Testimonio* 510; see also Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 1). Erstad and Silseth also point to the diversity of form for digital storytelling, but define it as a genre: “Digital storytelling, in our context”, the authors argue, “is characterised as a genre of audio-visual stories consisting of still pictures, voice-over and music/sound, that are composed on the basis of a personal narrative storyline” (215). This statement provides a definition for the format of the digital story – which is, notably, largely identical with Benmayor’s digital *testimonio*. A digital story can be described as “a two- to four-minute movie in which the narrator tells a story in her or his own voice with addition of images and sound” (*Digital Testimonio* 508; Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 2; see also McWilliam 145). Lundby make a distinction, however, to other types of digital stories, by naming this form the ‘specific digital storytelling’, positioning it as the “now classic model of Digital Storytelling developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling in California from the first half of the 1990s” (*Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 2).<sup>58</sup> Lundby defines “digital storytelling” as stories that “are usually short, just a few minutes long”, “made with off-the-shelf equipment and techniques”, rather than requiring “expensive and expansive production processes” (ibid). The difference between Lundby’s and Benmayor’s understanding of digital storytelling and *testimonio* lies in the production process and setting: Rather than at home, by oneself, in Benmayor’s form of the digital *testimonio*, the institutional setting has an inevitable influence on the final products – the *testimonios* – that are produced and published there. In this setting, Benmayor explains, “undergraduate students script, record, produce, publish, and theorize their own *testimonios*, building new knowledge from personal and collective experience” (*Digital Testimonio* 507). Not

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<sup>58</sup> It needs to be noted, at this point, that this “classic model” of digital storytelling incorporates still ‘images’ rather than moving pictures. Naturally, the technological affordances of YouTube allow short films, including moving images, however, and all digital *testimonios* selected for this study consist of filmic material to the most part. Which effect this transformation of the ‘digital story’ has for the *testimonio* will be addressed, in particular, in the analysis of the visual mode in chapter 5.

only does the Center for Digital Storytelling offer the equipment, it also provides a professor to teach students how to produce and theorize their *testimonios*, involving “a collaborative process of production and creation” (510). Through this, Benmayor legitimizes the “integration of digital *testimonio* as ‘signature’ pedagogy in Latin@ Studies” which she proposes (*ibid.*).<sup>59</sup>

#### **4.2. Socio-Technological Affordances on YouTube: Negotiating Media Logic and *Testimonio***

Problematic with Benmayor’s definition of the digital *testimonio* as a *testimonio* “in a medium that is digital” (510) is the de-emphasis of mediatization processes: Benmayor regards the digital medium merely as a *device* for “mediation”, which she defines as “the use of the media for the communication of meaning” (Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture* 2). She leaves out what S. J. Schmidt’s model of the medium would term the ‘Social Factors’, aspect three of the model, which describes “conventionalized ways of producing (e.g., authorship), distributing (e.g., publishers [...]), and receiving media (e.g., reading books, photographs in museum)” (Schwanecke 15). Further, Benmayor’s understanding overlooks processes of mediatization, which integrates the *testimonio* with digital storytelling, as this section will show. The choice of YouTube as the medium, containing its own socio-technological affordances that shape its content (cf. Schulz 62), dictates that digital *testimonios* must more carefully be renegotiated as *testimonios*. The users *themselves* interact with these affordances and exert ‘social shaping’ of the medium, which essentially results from the “need for public attention and the various ways to meet that demand” (*ibid.*). As our definition for ‘politics’ includes such ways, namely, “power- and publicity-gaining presentational politics” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 16), social-shaping or ‘self-mediatization’ on YouTube needs to be negotiated for the digital *testimonio*, before one can analyze the actual use of the semiotic resources that YouTube offers to undocumented youth as narrators.

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<sup>59</sup> Shulman defines signature pedagogies as the “types of teaching and learning that [...] organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions” (52). The activities that ideally constitute this type of education are, according to Shulman, the three dimensions of thinking, performing, and acting. In her article, Benmayor argues for understanding and using the digital *testimonio* as a signature pedagogy “because it engages students first hand in reproducing the processes of (1) situated knowledge production, (2) embodied theorizing, and (3) collective practice that are foundational to the field” (509).

### 4.2.1. Transcending into Public Space: Political Participation and Personal Performance on YouTube

The oldest known function of social media such as YouTube is “the creation of a public space for issues and opinions on the other” (Marcinkowski and Steiner 75; see also J.-H. Schmidt 10).<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, YouTube integrates major social and interactive functions into the platform, located at the intersection of mass media and interpersonal communication (J.-H. Schmidt 11). From its very beginnings it “offered basic community functions such as the opportunity to link to other users as friends” (Burgess and Green 1) and, a function integrated more recently, the opportunity to ‘like’ a video, share it with others or comment on it. More specifically, however, YouTube belongs in a class of multimedia platforms that, by definition, are structured according to their individual content; the social functions transpire primarily *after* uploading of content (12; see also Kim 10).<sup>61</sup> However, this multi-path communication is what makes digital (social) media *social*, and accounts for its “emphasis on interactivity and instantaneousness” (Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 18).

As we have seen, for testimonial narratives in the revived Immigrant Rights Movement, the ‘political’ lies in the foreground of understanding YouTube narratives. Political conflict, generally over the distribution of resources and power, can easily be initiated in many different locations in society, and New Media platforms such as YouTube seem to be one of them. But how so? Does YouTube have the means to be a political platform?

There are many theoretical grounds for validating the claim that YouTube is equipped to be a site for participatory culture. According to Nyboe and Drotner, there are many “diverse forms of participatory content creation that digital media facilitate” (173). Likewise, Page stresses that “the array of tools” used to produce narratives in Web 2.0 contexts “enable collaboration between multiple users”, clearly embedding storytelling “in a participatory culture” (208). All these texts, she argues, “are shaped significantly by the participatory qualities of their surrounding discourse context” (*ibid*). It is useful to understand YouTube as such a “site of participatory

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<sup>60</sup> Three further functions that Marcinkowski and Steiner propose are “*universality*” (77), “*exclusivity*”, and “*autonomy*” (78, *emphasis given*).

<sup>61</sup> This aspect builds a contrast to, for example, network platforms such as Facebook, where interpersonal networking is much more important; or blogs, where the diary-like recounting of individual experiences is predominant (Kim 12).

culture”, as Burgess and Green have done (7). When analyzing digital narratives of undocumented youth as contributions to “the critical discourse of democracy and citizenship”, as Nyboe and Drotner suggest (173). Burgess and Green understand participatory culture on YouTube as “the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user-generated content, and some kind of shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers” (10). Along the same lines, Jenkins, Ford, and Green consider “platforms such as YouTube” to be ‘new’ precisely because they offer “multiple existing forms of participatory culture – each with its own historical trajectory, some over a century old” (30).

While technological determinism posits this participatory potential as a complete democratization of the platform in favor of the every-day user, Burgess and Green caution that “in practice the economic and cultural rearrangements that ‘participatory culture’ stands for are as disruptive and uncomfortable as they might be potentially liberating” (10).<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Jenkins, Ford, and Green crucially remind us that marketers on YouTube capitalize it, promoting a YouTube aesthetic (cf. 83). They argue that

the flaws in Web 2.0, at their core, can be reduced to a simple formulation: the concept transforms the social ‘goods’ generated through interpersonal exchanges into ‘user-generated content’ which can be monetized and commodified. In actuality, though, audiences often use the commodified and monetized content of commercial producers as raw material for their social interactions with each other. (ibid)

Aware of this criticism, nevertheless, Burgess and Green stress that “YouTube may have produced the possibility of participation in online video culture for a much broader range of participants than before” (76). YouTube thus becomes a site for popular culture, in which “bottom-up participation and ‘the popular’ [...] can be understood as part of a political project of emancipation and democracy, tied to the politics of class, race, and gender” (11). Conditioned by the space and (relative) freedom to negotiate the latter, Burgess and Green define YouTube as a “cultural public sphere” (77) that represents, according to Kim, “a more open, diverse condition of media spectacles” that serves as “an updated version of Habermas’ public sphere on

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<sup>62</sup> Görig, for instance, is one of the scholars more critical to the freedom of the Web as a precursor for participatory culture. He argues, most prominently: “Das freie Internet war schon immer eine Illusion” (10-11) – freedom on the Internet has always been an illusion, he argues, as companies regulate its contents (cf. 10); a phenomenon which the user is not necessarily aware of (cf. 11).

the Internet” (10). With reference to Meyrowitz’s work on New Media, YouTube could thus be described as an electronic medium that mingles “previously distinct social settings” and consequently “moved the dividing line between private and public behavior in a print-oriented society” (308).

The blurring of boundaries between the private and the public sphere through the multiple uses of New Media has several implications for the YouTube video clip of an undocumented youth: First, it suggests that the visual appearance of an undocumented youth as the narrator in the visual space of the video itself is ‘out of place’, since in the offline life, he/she is less present, reduced to being ‘undocumented’ and, in a sense, socially marked as ‘non-existing’. Secondly, as Marcela Hernandez and Antonio Gutiérrez have stressed in personal interviews (see chapter 2), through publishing personal information and/or a ‘story’ that serves as a form of political activism, the individual acquires a public face in name of the cause and agenda of the Movement. Undocumented youth thereby transgress the dividing line between private and public behavior, engaging the personal in the public (cf. Thumim 101). Their private activism becomes public and vice versa.<sup>63</sup>

The most visible result of social shaping on YouTube is the performance of ‘the personal’ in this public sphere, the “performative and productive engagement in participatory culture” (Burgess and Green 74). Platforms such as YouTube have been described as “new performance spaces”, a place “where young people in particular take advantage of these new meditational means to engage themselves in digital storytelling”, according to Erstad and Wertsch (36; see also White and Wyn 212). Going a step further, Hjarvard argues that the activity is “performed through an interaction with a medium”, which eventually results in users becoming “gradually [...] more dependent” on the ways to perform on the platform (*The Mediatization of Religion* 13). “The subjectivity of the ‘self’”, they argue, “is one of the most important characteristics of this medium” (35), making “the personal voice more apparent” than in other media (ibid). Digital storytelling, like “much of the blogging and social networking on the web are ‘personal media practices’” (Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 3). “The narratives [...] are usually highly personal. They are *self-*

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<sup>63</sup> Allison reminds us that “there is considerable disagreement on which aspects of social life are to be considered ‘political’” (422). It is, hence, generally difficult to ‘draw the line’ that separates Habermas’ public from the private sphere.

representations. So are many postings on the web, in blogs as well as on social networking sites”, Lundby further claims (4, *emphasis added*).

Along the same lines, Nick Couldry defines digital storytelling as “the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources” (42). For podcasting Jones, too, points to a space for the user to assume a voice or even another role (cf. 80). She argues that users can more easily “enact an authoritative voice” compared to “the performance of writing” (81), for instance. In sum, she finds that “performance allows one to pass through a variety of roles”, “inhabiting new spaces” and ‘trying on’ “authority in a productive way” (82). Hübler, here, stresses the ‘life as a show’ metaphor, arguing that it is one of the most salient effects allowing “the ‘theatricalization’ of ordinary life” through “the possibility of participating in all sorts of video activities” (39). Nevertheless, this ‘show’ – the performance of personal narrative – remains political, according to Langellier and Peterson, “because it does something; and in doing something in and with discourse that is neither uniform nor stable, performing may reinscribe or resist the bodily practices and material conditions in which they are embedded” (164). YouTube, one can conclude, yields “encounters with cultural differences and the development of political ‘listening’ across belief systems and identities” (Burgess and Green 77) and “although these spaces are virtual, they nonetheless become part of everyday practices that are used by significant numbers of young people to construct identities” (White and Wyn 213).

If, as Ryan claims, each medium has its “particular affinities for certain themes and types of plot” (*Will New Media Produce* 356), then one could conclude from this discussion that performative spaces on YouTube are also highly personalized spaces for storytelling as well. “Sites such as YouTube”, according to Lange, “enable children and families to broadcast their message in ways that yield both opportunities and complications for their personhood, technical identities, and self-actualization” (9). More precisely, the “stories are small-scale, centering the narrator’s own, personal life and experiences and usually told in his or her own voice” (Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 2). Along the same lines, Kavoori observes that the stories are “fundamentally informed by their identities, their attempts at self-definition through digital means” (4). Esser and Strömbäck describe this phenomenon as ‘personalization’, confirming that “media increasingly permeate



all aspects of private, social, political, cultural and economic life, from the micro (individual) to the meso (organizational) and the macro (societal) level of analysis” (*Mediatization* 10). Hjarvard, for instance, observes that public figures, when communicating their political agenda, personalize their messages in order to get access to media coverage and “bestow” their careers “in politics with a personal narrative”, performing their public personas (*The Mediatization of Culture* 67). Hands similarly finds that people contribute to this space in order to enhance their reputation (cf. 128), which transforms individuality and personalization into a fetish. Wetherell claims that individualization is fundamentally shaped through “the emergences of a new range of technologies and imperatives for managing, narrating and working on the self” (19). Therefore, since there is a “limited frame for issues of context, intent and, more critically, identity and culture” (Kavoori 12), users must engage with “the *idea* of celebrity, of being/becoming famous”, which is “an important element of why people put up their videos”, according to Kavoori (13). In the production of a storytelling identity, he thus locates a “*tactics of representation*, around a dizzying range of contexts”, which attempts to “give it agency” (14).

The fetishization of identity, as portrayed above, questions the role that ‘community’ plays on platforms such as YouTube.<sup>64</sup> With regard to the production of identity, Baym finds that “the individual self is inseparable from the group in which it is situated” (157), as people in online communities “define themselves not just in relation to their offline selves or the medium but also in relation to one another and to the group as a whole” (158). This overlapping of self and community can be explained by the ways in which individual identity is shaped by interaction with others, namely, by how “speakers position themselves relative to other voices in their communities” by, for example, commenting directly on others’ posts (ibid) but also how users manage to find “a voice” – the “process of making oneself distinct from the others through the creative use of existing discourse” (159). Kavoori thus summarizes storytelling ‘affordances’ on the Internet to “include linking, instant distribution, indexing and searching, and above all, interactivity” (12). While direct interaction is not possible in YouTube videos, except in the form of feedback posted

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<sup>64</sup> Zappavigna notes that “no stable definition of online community has prevailed” since “there has been a debate surrounding which criteria establish the bounds of an online community and the structure of such community and how communities are built or emerge” (11), which, thus, makes finding a solid definition difficult at this point.

beneath the video by the YouTube audience, storytelling itself is interactive because it is performative. “When taking all of the communicative modes into consideration that people use in their everyday lives to *perform the actions* that they perform”, Norris explains, “suddenly the connections between actions and belongings, between individual and society, and between the hidden and the overt begin to make sense” (xiii). Viewing the individual videos as performances within the revived Immigrant Rights Movement, modes for communicating and performing, in particular, gain relevance.

An important socio-technological condition on YouTube is the difficulty of ascertaining the extent to which the video was created professionally and who/how many people were involved in the production process, if not explicitly noted.<sup>65</sup> Here, “it is more helpful to shift from thinking about media production, distribution and consumption to thinking about YouTube in terms of a continuum of cultural participation” (Burgess and Green 57). Yet, calling YouTube a medium for political participation through storytelling carries further implications for the production of digital *testimonios*: The technological format of the medium for stories – the YouTube video – offers new challenges to literacy in the digital age. The fact that most of the narrators of the narratives chosen are at least co-producers of their videos presupposes the ability to work with the digital storytelling and film-making technology. Burgess and Green conclude that “being ‘literate’ in the context of YouTube, then, means not only being able to create and consume video content, but also being able to comprehend the way YouTube works as a set of technologies and as a social network” (72). Further, Burgess and Green understand “new media literacy [...] not [as] a property of individuals – something a given human agent either possesses or lacks – but a *system* that both enables and shapes participation” (ibid; see also Thumim 102).<sup>66</sup> Although “individual competencies” as well as “pre-existing familiarity with digital technologies and online culture of YouTube itself”

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<sup>65</sup> Often, companies even pile into production processes on YouTube: Multi-channel networks are established who aid YouTubers to professionally create their videos (and thus get more ‘clicks’). It is through this process that YouTube has undergone a noticeable shift: From amateur television to professionalization. Along the same lines, YouTube’s commercialization poses the “fundamental question [...] whether YouTube’s domination of online video distribution, and the market logic behind it, represents a [...] threat to the viability of alternative or community media spaces” (Burgess and Green 75).

<sup>66</sup> “Traditionally, literacy refers to the ability to read and write with printed and written materials associated with varying contexts”, a notion which drastically changes in the twenty-first century, according to Tan and Tan (105).

are “required to participate effectively in this system”, competencies are clearly “not in-born natural attributes of the so-called digital natives” (Burgess and Green 72).<sup>67</sup>

Mansell points to the processes of social inclusion and exclusion that New Media also promote, proposing that “if media literacies are being encouraged that are consistent with capabilities for critical reflection then there is the potential deliberation and action that may be empowering” (119; see also La Rose 303; Drotner 77). If not, platforms such as YouTube open up a “participation gap” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 258), “which often exhibit familiar socio-cultural inequities based on sex, gender, ethnicity, and class” (Lange 12). The important question then becomes, according to Hartley, what people exactly “need (to have, to know, to do) in order to participate in YouTube” (128). Hartley maintains that users do not “necessarily learn what they need to express what they want” (ibid), nor have schools and universities “proven to be adept at enabling demand-driven and distributed learning networks for imaginative rather than instrumental purposes” (131).<sup>68</sup>

This discussion indicates that we need to question the producer (and narrator) of the digital *testimonio* on YouTube, as the latter demand a new understanding of participation, personalization, and performance that seems incommensurate, at first glance, with testimonial narratives. Those narrators who are not ‘literate’ in this sense of the word would not appear, or require somebody to publish their narrative *for* them. The group of undocumented youth might have one day the chance to be considered elite, well-aware of the fact that with every step, they are moving further and further away from the ‘real’ undocumented – the ‘real’ subaltern. This stark move away from the ‘subaltern’ in Spivak’s sense, defining it as those that cannot be seen or heard because they ‘cannot speak’, illustrates the premise that “any analysis of testimonial literature entails its concurrence with basic postmodern premises: collapse of the distinction between elite and mass cultures, collapse of master narratives, fragmentation and decentering of the subject, and affirmation of alterity” (Maier 7). The *testimonio*, as Beverley shows, “involve[s] a new way of articulating these oppositions [between intellectual/manual, elite/popular etc.] and a new,

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<sup>67</sup> The term “digital natives” denotes that “younger people do not regard digital technologies as new” and take “for granted the use of digital technology for communication in their personal, leisure, and commercial life” (White and Wyn 210; see also Ginsburg, *Re-thinking Documentary*).

<sup>68</sup> Adding to this discourse, Lange emphasizes that “knowing what to share is an important aspect of media literacy” (9).

collaborative model for the relationship between the intelligentsia and the popular classes” (*Narrative Authority* 562). Being a central aspect of the socio-technological literacy that producers of video stories on YouTube need to address, media literacy is one of the workings of mediatization that renegotiates the tradition of the *testimonio*.

#### **4.2.2. Towards a Medium-Conscious Narratology: Multi-, Intermediality, and Multimodality**

To begin with a restriction, Esser and Strömbäck’s third dimension of media technology is not synonymous with the narratological understanding of the ‘technical dimension’, ‘material channel’ or S. J. Schmidt’s ‘Technisches Dispositiv’. The definition should rather include the functions that technical ‘affordances’ of a medium have for the shaping and design of content (cf. Esser and Strömbäck, *Mediatization* 6-7; 18). The particular format that “media technology thus pressures” its producers “to adapt to and take advantage of” (18), as it is used here, always has semiotic implications.

Hjarvard observes that media do not serve exclusively as “conduits” that transport “symbols and messages across distances from senders to receivers” any longer (Meyrowitz in: Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Religion* 12). Textuality has shifted from the classical use of the media as distributors of political text, for instance, to transmitting most content through newspapers and news announcements, documentaries, comedy or entertainment. The actual ‘mediation’ function of the media is therefore outdated. Media do not merely ‘transport’, they actually ‘provide’. Instead, media serve as “languages” that format the messages and frame the relationship between sender, content and receiver” (ibid). On a fundamental level, media as language can “influence important features like the narrative construction, reality status and the mode of reception of particular messages” (Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Religion* 12). When embarking on the search for such a ‘language’, media logic can be narrowed down to the socio-technological format that YouTube provides and through which it forms the narratives selected for this study. However, there is no one, single, or homogenous media logic that works for all types of media. Schulz shows that “most new media [...] operate on organizational principles, content production and distribution procedures which have little in common with conventional mass media” and, due to their distinctness, require specification of an

approach to their logic also (61). Likewise, one should refrain from generalizing the workings of media logic for all types of New Media. Schulz, for instance, highlights the diversity of New Media as “new communication means varying with respect to their modes of production, distribution, reception and utilization” (57). As a consequence, any approach to media logic on YouTube needs to be inherently distinct to do justice to its individual media products.

Media, in light of a “medium-conscious narratology”, as Marie-Laure Ryan refers to the field in her latest book, have been associated with at least seven commonly held distinctions: “channels of mass communication”, “technologies of communication”, “specific applications of digital technology”, “ways of encoding signs”, “semiotic forms of expression”, “forms of art” and, lastly, “the material substance” (*Story/World/Media* 26). What all of these definitions have in common is their emphasis on the purpose of the medium to ‘communicate’, holding inherent “narratological relevance”.<sup>69</sup> Assessing the narrative power that a single medium obtains as a narrative device and means for communication, Ryan further argues that “what counts for us as a medium is a category that truly makes a difference about what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented, why they are communicated, and how they are experienced” (*Introduction* 18). Because a single medium obtains several different devices for storytelling, she concludes that “we select media for their affordances, and we work around their limitations” (19). Thus, the medial devices that Ryan refers to do not only determine the possibility but also to the constraints that the choice of a particular medium for storytelling contains. With the arrival of New Media in storytelling, “the question of how the intrinsic properties of the medium shape the form of narrative and affect the narrative experience can no longer be ignored” (1).

From a positivist viewpoint, the combination of distinct media offers increased *options* and an additional level for the creation of meaning(s) in narrative. The study of intermediality, “launched in the 1990s” (Gibbons 285), has answered

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<sup>69</sup> This is a generalization: Grishakova and Ryan caution us that technology only assumes meaning when “channel-type media [...] give rise to a distinct type of narrative that takes advantage of their distinct affordances” (3). It is merely in this case that the “distinction between medium as semiotic phenomenon and medium as channel of transmission disappears, and technology acquires genuine narratological significance” (ibid).

this demand for investigating the results of media combination,<sup>70</sup> media transfer, and intermedial references (see, e.g. Schwanecke 3; Rajewsky 12 and 18-21; Bock 255-256). Based on media as independent systems, Irina O. Rajewsky, for instance, defines intermediality as an umbrella term that she associates with multiple interpretations (cf. 12). Along the same lines, many scholars of intermediality studies define the concept according to its different uses and functions for the object of study. According to Schwanecke, for instance, intermediality generally refers to the “relations between (at least) two conventionally distinct media” (18). Grishakova and Ryan suggest a narrower focus for the concept, namely, “the participation of more than one medium – or *sensory channel* – in a given work” (3, *emphasis added*). Their definition includes a further essential distinction in the terminology of ‘media’: The difference between a ‘medium’ and a ‘mode’. Understanding the concept of ‘medium’ as the complex system that S. J. Schmidt outlines with his ‘Medienkompaktbegriff’ and which Ryan playfully describes as “a large family” (*Story/World/Media* 27), the term ‘mode’ could be described as a much smaller unit *within* this system, despite the fact that for some, medium and mode are synonymous in that they both “refer to the manner and the means by which textual material is presented and conducted” (Doloughan 6). Finding a solid distinction becomes even more complicated when multiple modes or media – multimodality and multimedia – are involved in the object of study.

Perhaps the simplest way to differentiate mode and medium can be found in the intermedial category of ‘media combinations’, which, according to Schwanecke, describes the amalgamation of at least two media into one cultural object. Thinking back to S. J. Schmidt’s compact term ‘medium’, this process naturally includes two or more semiotic systems (category one) which “work together in the constitution of meaning”, “contributing to this meaning with their inherent medial particularities and by the distinct way in which they are combined” (Schwanecke 21). Media combination, or *multimedia*, hence, denotes the combination of the two media systems into a whole, while multimodality can be found outside of media combination but in one of the semiotic systems already. According to Punday,

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<sup>70</sup> This aspect highlights the similarity between the concepts of multimedia and intermediality. Hickethier, in particular, challenges this common perception of multimedia and intermediality as synonymous, proposing to understand intermediality in terms of processes of adaptation and change of the media product, not merely their combination. This distinction, however, is not relevant for the approach to New Media narratives in this study.

multimodality is “the way that communicational structures can invoke different senses (hearing, sight, touch), using different semiotic channels (text, image, audio recording, video)” within one medium, while it, phrased more polemically, “generally strip[s] out cultural and material history to construct their models of the fundamental elements of human perception” (20). Punday emphasizes that multimediality is pertinent to showing how the relationships between several forms of already-existing media can change in the digital work, while multimodality is not able to do the same (cf. *ibid.*). Stöckl, on the other hand, emphasizes the crucial understanding of “almost all forms of communication” through the lens of multimodality. Accordingly, he defines the multimodal as “communicative artefacts and processes which combine various sign systems (modes)” and stresses that the latter’s “production and reception calls upon the communicators to semantically and formally interrelate all sign repertoires present” (9).

Following Punday’s argument, one could suggest that the study of multimediality on YouTube is more inclusive than the study of multimodality. However, the subject for this analysis consists of the individual video clips of undocumented youth and not the concrete (intermedial) embedding mechanisms of the individual videos into the multimedia website.<sup>71</sup> Rather, the video is the medium for undocumented youth as producers and narrators on YouTube. The merit of a multimodal approach to the individual video clips, in contrast to a multimedia one, can be ascribed to the simultaneousness with which the audience is able to decipher the multiple sensory streams combined in the videos (cf. Punday 20). By implication, the focus of this study lies on videos *as narratives* with regard to the production of cultural and political meaning. Analyzing the use of media logic of YouTube – those affordances that the modes in video clips on YouTube offer – in order to produce concrete political messages and meaning for their audience, as one important aspect of the *testimonio*, hence calls for a more detailed analysis of the individual signs that the narrators generate in order to get their message across. In this investigation, thus, technological affordances of modes in YouTube videos and their social shaping on

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<sup>71</sup> An aspect worth mentioning at this point is Punday’s observation that YouTube, despite being viewed as the perfect example for a multimedia installation, uses text as its primary medium, according to which all other media are structured. It is only through text that the clips can be found, sorted, or embedded in the context of their publication (cf. 24-25).

the website as a whole are assessed by the videos' constellation of possible semiotic resources<sup>72</sup> that are chosen to create meaning in the narratives.

Hoffman provides a simple definition for multimodality in storytelling when he summarizes the distinction Punday makes between communicational structures and their respective semiotic channels to 'semiotic resources'. He defines multimodality as "the various semiotic resources authors (or tellers) may choose from in order to create their stories" (1). The stress in his study lies on multimodal *narrative*. While Hoffmann notes that "multimodal narratives exist in both old and new media contexts", he stresses the fact that New Media particularly "encourage (and enable on a technological plane) authors and users to co-deploy a complex web of semiotic moves in their online stories" (ibid). Due to these moves, as Lundby observes, "multimodality may foster changes in practices that are part of mediatization processes" (*Introduction: Mediatization* 13). Consistent with mediatization theory, we should stress here that affordances that New Media offer seem to have a vital influence on the form and content of online narratives and make the study of the resources used in the narratives even more important. Thus, Lundby characterizes multimodality as a "key characteristic of digital media" (*Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 9). Nevertheless, while multimediality always includes multimodality, one cannot necessarily always relate multimodality *to* multimediality, since one single medium can have multiple modes but multiple modes do not require another medium in order to exist. For this reason I occasionally use the term multimedia in this study, to indicate the use of multiple media or intermedial relations.

Storytelling in video form on YouTube naturally employs multimodality. "The new media capacity of prime significance in the production of Digital Storytelling", Lundby explains, "is the multimodality offered by digitalization" (*Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 8). One important property of digital media, Ryan likewise emphasizes, is the "multiple sensory and semiotic channels" (*Will New Media Produce* 338). This leads to the necessity "for narrative scholars, in particular," to re-model "existing methods of analysis" of "the multimodal extension of texts" (Hoffmann 2). In contrast to early work on *the* media logic in New Media (cf.

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<sup>72</sup> Semiotic resources can broadly be defined as "the actions, materials and artefacts people communicate with" (Jewitt, *Introduction to Multimodality* 16).



Altheide and Snow), current research proposes that digital technologies such as those employed in digital storytelling “definitely do not obey just a single logic”, but rather that “the multimodality of digital media operates according to mixed logics” (Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 11).

With reference to the definition of narrative provided in the beginning of this chapter, the embedding of personal narratives into their context needs to be stressed. First, I have defined personal narrative as the central *mode* of human thought, which provides a window to our thoughts. As the emphasis on ‘mode’ implies, narrative is constructed of a constellation of multiple modes that produce meaning. In the age of New Media, narratives, however, are not “constrained by the use of any particular mode”, as they “can come in any kind of semiotic shape” (Hoffmann 2). Yet, when these possibilities are extended – through the development of the Internet,<sup>73</sup> for example – “the multimodal extension of texts makes necessary the re-modelling of existing methods of analysis” (ibid). Assessing the uses of multimodality in Internet storytelling, hence, aids in the exploration of new types of meaning production in different contexts. Erstad and Silseth, for instance, show that the analysis of multimodality “implies more complexity in the ways texts are made and how we ‘read’ them” (216). Thus, multimodality, according to Jewitt, offers rich possibilities “to describe semiotic resources for meaning-making and inter-semiotic relations” (*Introduction to Multimodality* 16). Multimodality, she finds, often has “successful application across a range of topics or contexts including”, for instance, “technology-mediated interaction, questions of knowledge, pedagogic practices and literacy, as well as the production of identity” (ibid).

Clearly we cannot merely examine possible meanings of the modes that are used in the narratives of undocumented youth. We need to relate them to the individual cultural context in which they create meaning. The multimodal analysis of digital stories, according to La Rose, considers “separate and yet connected elements that remain a part of a whole story” and hence construe layers of meaning-making (302).

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<sup>73</sup> Hoffmann does not upgrade the role of the Internet and ‘new possibilities for storytelling’, stressing the frequent “generic loan” between ‘new’ media and ‘old’ media. He merely emphasizes the Internet’s ongoing development from a source of information towards a major source of communication (cf. 12). Further, he postulates that this type of “Internet change reflects the change narratives have undergone both in form and function” (9). The most striking development is those ‘new ways’ of “allowing Internet users to voice their opinion” (11) and the opening up of “new writing spaces” such as YouTube or Facebook (12). It is because of this aspect that he describes the Internet as “a helpful social tool” for diverse “affairs and practices” (ibid).

The analysis of these layers is, she argues, crucially “informed by relevant disciplinary knowledge, as well as epistemological and ideological understandings as active by the content(s) and context(s) of the text” (ibid).<sup>74</sup> Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen have investigated this (socio-)cultural aspect of meaning production through multimodality in narrative, emphasizing that the study of multimodality is, most prominently, about “how [...] people use the variety of semiotic resources to make signs in concrete social contexts” (vii). Jewitt also points out that the “primary focus of social semiotic multimodal analysis”, as she terms Kress and Van Leeuwen’s approach, “is on mapping how modal resources are used by people in a given community/social context, in other words sign-making as a social process” (Jewitt, *Different Approaches* 30). Consequently, “the emphasis is on the sign-maker and their situated use of modal resources” (ibid).<sup>75</sup> For this, she draws a particular connection to “interactional socio-linguists” such as Goffman (Jewitt, *Different Approaches* 29) and concludes that Kress and Van Leeuwen’s approach “goes beyond the traditional linguistic foundations of multimodality” (Jewitt, *Different Approaches* 30).

Kress has affirmed, “socially, a mode is what a community takes to be a mode and demonstrates that in its practices” and therefore “a matter for a community and its representational needs” (*What is mode?* 56). This definition goes in hand with Stöckl’s cautioning that although “signs belonging to one mode are seen to be governed by a common set of rules that state how these signs can be combined to make meaning in particular situations”, “in practice, [...] things turn out to be less straightforward than this” (11). He implies that there is much subjective interpretation of modes and their signs, which we need to keep in mind for the interpretation of the multimodal meaning-making in digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth. Cross-

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<sup>74</sup> La Rose further characterizes digital stories as “polycontextual texts”, suggesting that there are “multiple readings and interpretations based on the standpoints from which they are read” (302). This meaning, however, need not be restricted but “may also have broader cultural meanings, linking us into new systems of contextualization nested within wider sociocultural and political meanings” (303). Likewise, Mussil stresses the “interpretative choices” that “the issues to be interpreted depend[...] on” (2).

<sup>75</sup> The other two approaches that Jewitt describes are ‘multimodal discourse analysis’ associated with Halliday and ‘multimodal interaction analysis’ (cf. Jewitt, *Different Approaches* 31-33). As the interest for this study lies in the cultural meaning that the digital *testimonios* create in a specific social context, the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006 and a specific social location, the YouTube platform, aspects from Kress and Van Leeuwen’s approach are more expedient for this study.

culturally, in particular, modes “are both similar to and different from culture to culture in their potentials for representation” (*What is mode?* 55).<sup>76</sup>

The interactional approach to multimodality determines that we count as modes those devices that have communication and representation as their “primary function” (Kress, *What is mode?* 54). Additional functions, so-called meta-functions, can further be divided into three categories: As Stöckl explains, “any mode is – to varying degrees – able to depict states-of-affairs (ideational), design some social interaction between the communicators (inter-personal) and contribute to organizing and structuring the text (textual)”, mostly “distributed across the modes present (25; see also Kress, *What is Mode?* 59). The type of meaning created by the individual modes can also be categorized. According to Stöckl, “meaning in texts comes on three interrelated planes”: “signs can refer to concepts (*denotations*), they can convey concomitant, socially shared emotive or evaluative meaning (*connotation*), and signs can also activate and tap into purely individually valid facets of meaning (*association*)” (26). In sum, the “deployment of modes in a multimodal text will seek” what Stöckl calls a “semantic equilibrium” (*ibid*). However, the text’s “structure will reflect the adherence to this inter-modal principle”, he argues (*ibid*). Further, while the design – the “(uses of) semiotic resources, in all semiotic modes and combinations of semiotic modes” – are means “to realise discourses in the context of a given communication situation” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 5), the production of multimodal output “refers to the organisation of expression, to the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or [...] artefact” (6), which is of particular relevance in this investigation. In videos on YouTube, performance is a major part of the social shaping, and hence of the socio-technological affordances of the medium. It plays a central role in the analysis of the interplay among different modes and the “cultural work performed with the different materials” chosen by the undocumented narrators (cf. Kress, *What is mode?* 67).

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<sup>76</sup> Kress and Van Leeuwen, however, also show that “given a social-cultural domain, the ‘same’ meanings can often be expressed in different semiotic codes” (1). What is more, the authors find that “we move away from the idea that the different modes in multimodal texts have strictly bounded and framed specialist tasks” (2). Therefore, an individual assessment of the meaning in context is particularly relevant for the analysis of narratives in form of video clips, such as those on YouTube.

### 4.2.3. The ‘Language’ on YouTube: Designing Multimodal Video Clips

Due to the close relationship of YouTube video clips to film, parallels in narrativity and narration of the different media highlight similar ways of producing meaning. As Ryan observes, in order to study film, we need to examine how the “idiosyncratic resources of the medium are applied to [...] narrative goals” (*Moving Pictures* 197). She stresses that this is always a highly individual endeavor, since the spectator’s experience with other movies matters significantly (cf. *ibid*). As film is intermedial and multimodal by nature, it offers open-ended repertoires. According to Wildfeuer, film’s “semiotic resources interact and operate according to various principles and in order to create the film’s overall meaning potential” (2). In order to narrow down the use of semiotic resources for this study, the following section provides an overview that defines the multimodal design in the video clips selected for analysis. However, as implied by the instances of social shaping on YouTube already introduced in the preceding section, it is also important to understand that “a beginning point for a genre analysis of YouTube is to distinguish Internet genres from those of mainstream media like Television and Films” (Kavoori 11), as storytelling genres on YouTube “represent the relation or interaction between media texts and their environment, which include linking, instant distribution, indexing and searching, and above all, interactivity” (12).<sup>77</sup>

The digital stories selected on YouTube generally are characterized by filming exclusively the narrator and hence are highly personalized. Burgess and Green further point to the “residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication” (54). It “provides an important point of difference between online video and television” (*ibid*). Digital videos are “technically easy to produce, generally requiring little more than a webcam and basic editing skills” (*ibid*). Their “persistent direct address to the viewer inherently invites feedback” (*ibid*).<sup>78</sup>

In the political context, the potential for attention and reaction on part of the audience is of immense importance. The YouTube video’s capacity for eliciting

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<sup>77</sup> These characteristics fall into the categories that Hoffman and Eisenlauer establish for weblogs: “interactivity, fragmentation, multi-linearity and multimodality” (79).

<sup>78</sup> In contrast, television content “may draw people to the service for a catch-up, traditional media content doesn’t explicitly invite conversational and inter-creative [...] participation, as might be measured by the numbers the comments and video responses”, and, as we noticed before, “direct response, through comment and via video, is central to this mode of engagement” (*ibid*).

attentive audience response will be evident in our analysis of the interpersonal function in the different modes employed in the samples used for this study. Which meaning does the incorporation of links into the video, for instance, create? For hypertext applications such as YouTube, how do narratives create (political) meaning through the use of semiotic codes/modes/sensory channels *other* than *exclusively* language? YouTube videos deliberately focus on the visual – moving images that form really short films, as the reference to television in the name of the website, *YouTube*, already indicates.

While the digital *testimonios* chosen are unique short films which create new hybrids of pictures (static and moving), music, verbal and non-verbal, and background sounds, for the most part, the visual image (moving) and verbal sounds (spoken language) dominate. According to Doloughan, “the emphasis has been on a move away from the primacy of the verbal towards an interest in exploring the impact of other modalities on verbal or written communication, most notably, though not exclusively, the influence of the visual” (127). Likewise, Kress emphasizes the revolutionary character of this shift from “the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen” (*Literacy* 1). Thus, the analysis of the narrative’s meaning production also begins with the moving image and face-to-face narrative effect created by the narrators in chapter 5.

Realized through the combination of “the logics of time and space”, moving image, however, is not only visual but also “realized by a succession of frames of images, each of which is itself organized by the logic of space and simultaneity” (Kress, *What is mode?* 56).<sup>79</sup> Visual means of communication such as gestures or facial expressions play an important role for this analysis, because the digital *testimonios* chosen mostly employ an eye-level medium shot or medium close-up, showing the narrator as if in an interview. In this performance, Hübler explains, the presence of a camera has an “impact on the narrative performance”, as nonverbal modes of narration are visible, such as the “prosodic and kinesic/gestural” modes (40). Therefore, with regard to the visual, there is a stronger emphasis on the “narra-

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<sup>79</sup> I refer to it, here, as logics in the plural form because in these different modes lies a combination of the two greater “logics of space and time” (Kress, *What is mode?* 67).

tor as actor (rather than on technical possibilities that the medium offers and the repercussions on the narrative format)” (ibid). This observation resonates with current performance studies, which focus upon the speech act, addressing the question, in Butler’s words, of “what [...] it mean[s] for a word not only to name, but also in some sense to perform and, in particular, to perform what it names?” (*Excitable Speech* 43). This view purports, in particular, that “words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions” (44).<sup>80</sup> It follows that, “despite the existence of myriad other communication resources and choices, language is more consequential than ever”, as “language provides a relatively predictable, formally arbitrary core of meaning upon which elaborate multimodal constructions of meaning” can be “configured and reconfigured” (Malinowski and Nelson 65). The production of spoken language works according to a very different logic, compared to image. While “speech happens in time; one sound, one word, one sentence follows another, so that sequence in time is a fundamental organizing principle and major means for making meaning in this mode” (Kress, *What is mode?* 55).

Still “image”, as it is used in some of the digital narratives, in contrast to speech and moving image, “is ‘displayed’ in a (usually) frame *space* on a surface” (55). As Kress explains, “its elements are simultaneously present” and it is “the arrangement of elements in relation to each other in that space [that] is a major means for making meaning” (55-56). Based on the logic of space more strictly than moving image (as the latter incorporates sound), “it uses the affordances of a (framed) space: whether page or canvas, a piece of wall or a T-shirt” (Kress, *What is mode?* 56). In particular, “meaning is made by the arrangement of entities in the framed space; by the *kinds* of relations between the depicted entities” (ibid). The question, at which point (logic of time) the moving picture combines the audiovisual narrative with the medium of the still image, such as pictures or photos, is particularly relevant for this study. Which ‘story’ does the still image add to the narration of the moving image?

There has been a noticeable move from the written language to the image in digital text. However, writing assumes a prominent role in the creation of meaning in digital text by the use of hyperlinks or captions.<sup>81</sup> The choice of written captions or filming written text illustrates an important semiotic source in the narratives chosen

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<sup>80</sup> For a more detailed introduction to performance studies theory (as used in this study), please see the last section of the following chapter.

<sup>81</sup> The hyperlinks are not links *per se* but written website addresses and references.

for this study. Potential for creating meaning through written language, however, is less easy to define according to the logics of time and space: “Alphabetic writing [...] is spatially displayed, yet it ‘leans on’ speech in its logic of sequence in time, which is ‘mimicked’ in writing by the spatial sequence to the sense that it works in some ways at least like an image” (Kress, *What is mode?* 56). As the use of written language in the digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth is fairly restricted – sound, however, is used in *all* of the narratives – I chose to separate modes, both spoken and written language, into different chapters.<sup>82</sup>

As the multimodal ensemble just introduced shows, “multimodal capacity is a key to understanding Digital Storytelling” (Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 8). Central in this understanding is the “semiotic power of multimodality” that lies “in the blending of new and old textual forms” (*ibid*), which, through digital media, have become more available to the average user to employ and reshape according to his/her communication needs (cf. Lundby, *Introduction: Digital Storytelling* 9; Ryan, *Will New Media Produce* 354; Hedberg vii). However, we also need to emphasize that “multimodal composing depends on computer technologies” (*ibid*). While Burgess and Green have observed a “noticeable focus on video as a technology” and “fascination with the technological capabilities of digital video editing” in video stories on YouTube (52), this affordance also presupposes a necessary knowledge of how to use the different semiotic resources that produce a multimodal ensemble. The production process, as Beach observes, forces users to learn “how best to combine texts, images, audio, and/or video designed to craft a visual argument” (209). Participating on YouTube via consuming or producing multimodal videos, in sum, requires media literacy. Here, “technology plays an increasing role in changing media into modes, and hence in controlling how meanings can be made”, Kress and Van Leeuwen observe (79).

“Being literate”, in this context, “means more than just being able to read and write the printed word” (Ho, Anderson, and Leong 2), if we wish to “participate in meaning-making communities as producers and not just consumers – to shape the landscapes in which we participate” (1). Producing digital *testimonios* becomes a

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<sup>82</sup> It should be noted at this point that a detailed multimodal analysis of *all* sub-modes and their meaning production of written language (such as type size, font, colors/shadings, ornaments, spacing, paragraphing, margins) and static images (such as elements, vectors, colors, size) (cf. Stöckl 12-13) in all eight narratives is not possible within the limited frame of this study. Therefore, the focus for analysis lies on the meaning they produce *in combination* with the other modes in the digital videos.

“literacy practice” – “the knowledge, experience, feelings, values and capabilities that play a role in the reading and writing of [multimodal] texts” (Jewitt, *Glossary* 299). While “human cognition is multimodal” by nature (Grishakova 329; see also La Rose 301), clues on digital sites such as YouTube need to be learned, which transforms its use into a “cultural practice” (Street, Pahl, and Rowsell 200). The turn to the use of the visual (moving) image, as in digital *testimonios* on YouTube, as a concluding thought, “will have profound effects on human, cognitive/affective, cultural and bodily engagement with the world, and on the forms and shapes of knowledge” (Kress, *Literacy* 1). This, predicts Ryan, creates “new forms of narrativity, [...] presentational strategies (that is, discourse) and, above all, pragmatic factors: new modes of user involvement; new types of interface; and new relations between the author (or, rather, system designer), the plot (or plots), and users” (*Digital Media* 333).

The analyses will deduce the political meaning produced by the different modes and media, and examine the specific resources of film montage with regard to the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-function of modes. They also assess the socio-technological affordances of YouTube’s media logic and their socio-cultural context in terms of participation, personalization and performance within the tradition of the *testimonio*.

### **4.3. Multimodal Design in Digital *Testimonios* of Undocumented Youth: An Overview**

With reference to S. J. Schmidt’s model, the medium for all digital *testimonios* is the video clip which combines visual and auditory media types and modes. Figure 3 provides a collection of (selective) designs – defined earlier as “the conceptualisations of the form of semiotic products” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 21) – provided in the digital *testimonios* chosen for analysis in this study. The categories for this chart are deduced from Hartmut Stöckl’s collection of “network of modes, sub-modes and features in TV-and film media” (see pages 12-13).



The chart presents, first of all, a focus on visual and verbal modes that produce essential political meaning.<sup>83</sup> The specific modes, or ‘sub modes’ (cf. Stöckl 12) of communication and representation used in the narratives can be found in Category 2. They represent subcategories of more general modes and media listed in Category 1. The latter includes, first of all, the sensory channel (visual or auditory), the core mode (image, language, sound, or music), and, lastly, the medial variants (moving, speech, noise, performed, static). The number in brackets/*italics* indicates the number of narratives that utilize the particular mode/medium listed. The names of the undocumented youth narrators are indicated by their acronyms and chronological number of publication.

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<sup>83</sup> In the following chapters, not every mode and multimodal constellation will be analyzed in detail for every narrative. However, the chapters provide a close reading of the political messages that are specifically created by the use of different single and combined modes.

<b>MULTIMODAL DESIGN</b> in digital <i>testimonios</i> of undocumented youth									
<b>Category 1:</b> (Sensory Channel) <b>Core Modes</b> (Medial Variants) (Total No. Used)	<b>Category 2</b>  <b>Sub Modes</b>	<b>1.</b> <b>S.S.</b>	<b>2.</b> <b>M.A.</b>	<b>3.</b> <b>C.R.</b>	<b>4.</b> <b>D.R.</b>	<b>5.</b> <b>A.V.</b>	<b>6.</b> <b>M.C.</b>	<b>7.</b> <b>I.R.</b>	<b>8.</b> <b>L.M.</b>
(Visual) <b>Image</b> (Moving) (8)	<b>A</b> <b>Non-verbal means:</b> <b>gestures</b> (movement of arms, hands, head); <b>posture;</b> <b>facial expressions</b> (movement of facial features and gaze: ‘eye contact’)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(6)	<b>B</b> <b>Montage:</b> <b>cuts, zoom, fading in &amp; out</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(5)	<b>C</b> <b>More than one setting and/or distinct objects/ ‘props’</b> (mise-en-scène)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(Auditory) <b>Language</b> (Speech) (8)	<b>D</b> <b>Voice quality:</b> <b>pitch, volume</b> (dynamics), <b>intonation, rhythm, speed, pausing</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(3)	<b>E</b> <b>Voice editing:</b> <b>voice-over/ off-</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<b>stage commentary</b>								
(Auditory) <b>Sound</b> (Noise) (3)	<b>F</b> <b>Non-verbal sounds</b> <b>(background)</b> <b>in original soundtrack</b> <b>and their quality</b>	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	-
(Auditory) <b>Music</b> (Performed) (2)	<b>G</b> <b>Instrumental music in</b> <b>soundtrack:</b> <b>provenance,</b> <b>melody/theme,</b> <b>rhythm</b>	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-	✓
(Visual) <b>Language</b> (Static Writing) (5)	<b>H</b> <b>On props/ in</b> <b>background</b> <b>(e.g. signs,</b> <b>posters, clothes)</b>	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓
(4)	<b>I</b> <b>Captions</b>	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓
(3)	<b>J</b> <b>(Hyper-)links</b>	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	✓	-
(Visual) <b>Image</b> (Static) (4)	<b>K</b> <b>Photographs</b>	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	✓
<b>Category 1:</b> (Sensory Channel) <b>Core Modes</b> (Medial Variants) (Total No. Used)	<b>Category 2</b> <b>Sub Modes</b>	<b>1.</b> <b>S.S.</b>	<b>2.</b> <b>M.A.</b>	<b>3.</b> <b>C.R.</b>	<b>4.</b> <b>D.R.</b>	<b>5.</b> <b>A.V.</b>	<b>6.</b> <b>M.C.</b>	<b>7.</b> <b>I.R.</b>	<b>8.</b> <b>L.M.</b>

Figure 3: Multimodal Design in Digital *Testimonios*. Created by the Author.

## Chapter 4

### STORIES OF THE DISPOSSESSED

#### 1. Introduction

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the powerful fusion of digital storytelling and *testimonio* affects the digital *testimonio*, as the latter employs – in their mediatization – multimodal affordances and the socio-technological format of YouTube. Despite this predominant connection to the mediatization of storytelling, Baym cautions us that “the topics and purposes around which online communities organize are at least as important as the medium in shaping a group’s communication patterns” (200). Subjecting the political logic, the history of marginalization and exclusion, as well as current political goals of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006 to the mediatization of storytelling, and, in particular, the genre of the *testimonio*, calls for new terms to refer to the politics of digital *testimonios*. The personalization and performative aspect of stories on YouTube, and the melding of the *testimonio* with digital storytelling (affordances), in particular, employ a distinct understanding of a *testimonio* and its narrator for the political purposes of undocumented youth in the Movement. This chapter offers an approach to framing the political logic of testimonial narratives produced by marginalized and/or oppressed identities that are *not* excluded from participating in public discourse through websites such as YouTube, an approach that does not “abstract[...] *testimonio* from its real and painful”, as Bartow cautions (47). The theoretical framework of Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s ‘dispossession’, in contrast, offers a new understanding of ‘the human’ in circumstances of oppression and/or marginalization and his/her agency and activism in the public sphere through understanding spaces of appearance as general constructs that enable ‘the human’ to *perform* his dispossession and thereby resist it. This agency need not to be bound to a specific medium but materializes dispossession *through* the bodily performance. It is precisely this literal visibility, and a central socio-technological affordance on YouTube, that gives undocumented youth a ‘face’ in the public sphere.

The following section formulates a common structure in the YouTube narratives of undocumented youth – the *stories* of oppression that the narrators tell – and relates them to the genre of the *testimonio*. Section 3 links this structure to Butler

and Athanasiou's dispossession. The greater part of this chapter introduces these core stories of dispossession for each of the eight digital *testimonios*, analyzing their political message and content in detail. The last section of this chapter formulates a scheme that will serve as the grounds for analyzing the performance in the context of the political.

## **2. Framing Experience of Dispossession: The Core Story in Digital *Testimonios***

Story-oriented narratology reminds us of the assumption that "narrative texts (in contrast to descriptive, discursive and other types of texts) are characterized by a chronologically organized sequence of events, in which an event brings about a change in the situation" (Nünning and Nünning 103). Although this investigation focuses on the mediality and performance of the stories and their use of multimodality to get their political message across, when viewing the digital *testimonios*, a pattern of chronological events embedded, integrated, yet separate and distinct in each of the narratives becomes visible. All digital narratives seem to be composed of a central story that the narrator introduces with variants of the claim that 'this is my story'. The **core story**, as I term this orderly structured unit, is a tight sequence of events and the most central element in the digital narrative. It seems that often, precisely *because* of the core story's centrality, the whole narrative is referred to as 'the story', 'my story', or 'a student's story' on the Web not only by the narrator him-/herself but also in the very title of the digital narrative. It tells a sequence of events that constitutes an important moment in the narrator's biography in the narrative and often even signals a turning point for the narrator. The *core* story is the densest unit of content in the form of events. Core story events are narrated in much length and detail, while the narrator rapidly and casually narrates introductory matters, 'additional information' such as the announcement and outing of the undocumented status of the narrator, potential political messages and conclusions, and a forecast of current and potential future activism. Further, it seems as if the events that make up the core story are more actively *performed*, as the narrator visibly and audibly re-lives the moments that seem to be so crucial. The rest of the narrative is, by contrast, dispassionately reportorial.

Pointing to these core stories in the digital narratives shows that digital *testimonios* are composed of ‘life experiences’, ‘emergency situations’, or ‘significant episodes’, just as traditional *testimonios*. What is more, the core stories in digital *testimonios* incorporate much more than a simple chain of autobiographical events. The content structure of the stories shows that they are summoned to recount in detail a situation of ‘dispossession’ and/or ‘exclusion’ in the narrators’ lives that they regard as crucial, due to their lack of citizenship status and attached rights. In other words, the core stories are accounts of the core moments of powerful negative experiences that highlight this dispossession of citizenship and reinforced exclusion. Each narrator uses this core story as a basis or an apparent reason for producing his/her *testimonio*. However, the core story itself does not formulate any specific political actions to follow. It is rather the grounds for their digital *testimonios* to *perform* dispossession in Judith Butler and Athena Athansiou’s sense, not ‘on the streets’ but in digital form with YouTube being the public space for this action.

The most salient aspect with regard to narrative structure and content of *testimonios*, one might argue, is their depiction of an important event or sequence of events in the life of the narrator. In the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the *testimonio* can thus be described as a “unit of narration [that] is usually a life or a significant life episode” (*Concepts* 259; Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555). The genre imposes clear boundaries upon the nature of this experience, as it is “a story that *needs* to be told – involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalterneity, exploitation or simply struggle for survival, which is implicated in the act of narration itself” (Vidal and Jara in: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 260, *emphasis added*). Hence, without this bleak condition in which the narrator finds him-/herself, there would not be the *testimonio*. This leads Beverley to describe the *testimonio* as “an ‘emergency’ narrative” (*Narrative Authority* 556). The term – *testimonio* – further implies that the narrator “bear[s] witness in a legal or religious sense” to this significant life episode and problem, “distinguishing it from simple recorded participant narrative” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 260).

### 3. A Claim to Butler and Athanasiou's "Dispossession"

#### 3.1. "Dispossession"

In their most recent book, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Butler and Athanasiou<sup>84</sup> seek to gain a normative understanding of political or economic dispossession that marginalizes different people worldwide through, for instance, the loss of citizenship, property or land. Athanasiou, in particular, stresses that "dispossession persists beyond the colony and the postcolony" (29). It exists "in the context of neoliberal forms of capital – combined with tightened migration policies and the abjection of stateless people, *sans papiers*, 'illegal' immigrants – bodies (that is, human capital) are becoming increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for" (ibid). But why would Athanasiou and Butler's approach to this kind of marginalization be more useful for the analysis of digital *testimonios* by undocumented youth on YouTube than other theories similar to the subaltern/organic intellectual that the traditional *testimonio* proposes?

A useful definition of dispossession that highlights the immense range of processes at work is articulated by Athena Athanasiou in her dialogue with Judith Butler:

We are dispossessed by others, moved toward others and by others, affected by others and able to affect others. We are dispossessed by norms, prohibitions, self-policing guilt, and shame, but also by love and desire. At the same time, we are dispossessed by normative powers that arrange the uneven distribution of freedoms: territorial displacement, evisceration of means of livelihood, racism, poverty, misogyny, homophobia, military violence. (55)

As implied in this definition, Athanasiou and Butler's discussion works out two senses of 'dispossession'. In the first sense, the two scholars define dispossession as a fundamental relationality to others. As Butler maintains, "dispossession can be a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings" (*Dispossession* 3). Similarly, Athanasiou argues that

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<sup>84</sup> Since the book consists of a dialogic correspondence between the two authors, I quote the individual authors' statements with the respective name of the author of the statement rather than with both names. Since this study quotes several works of Judith Butler, I additionally mark the Butler's quotes with "*Dispossession*" (I do not for Athanasiou). The Works Cited List refers the book with both authors' names, beginning with Butler. Since the two authors wrote the preface to their book together, I quote the preface of the book separately.

“dispossession stands as a heteronomic condition for autonomy” (2), leading to a sense of agency implied in the concept of ‘autonomy’ and a sense of condition imposed by others that leads to this autonomy. According to the scholar, this sense “rises from, or, perhaps more accurately, as a limit to the autonomous and impermeable self-sufficiency of the liberal subject through its injurious yet enabling fundamental dependency and relationality” (ibid). Butler adds emphatically that without this peculiar dependency there would not be dispossession and vice versa, as the following quote shows: “We are dispossessed of ourselves”, she claims, “by virtue of some kind of contact with another, by virtue of being moved and even surprised or disconcerted by that encounter with alterity” (*Dispossession* 3).

This situation, in sum, “reveal[s] one basis of relationality – we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves moved by what is outside us, by others” (Butler, *Dispossession* 3). Applied to digital *testimonios*, we find that the core story events also recount precisely this dependency and ‘being moved’ by others: They depict what undocumented youth feel (which they, hence, *perform* – as we will see later – for the viewer) when they learn they are undocumented in particular life situations that they recount, in which they are *dispossessed* by a higher normative and policing power. This dispossession transpires either formally, through institutions such as schools or universities or informally through, for instance, bullying in school upon their ‘outing’ or social exclusion and lack of empathy for their situation. These core stories are, really, *stories of dispossession* as recounted in this first, more internal sense of dispossession understood by Athanasiou and Butler and portrayed above.

The second, more direct sense of dispossession that the authors define points to the concrete violations inherent in the dispossession: In Butler’s words, “dispossession is precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship [...]” (*Dispossession* 3). Athanasiou adds that “being dispossessed refers to processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility and that regulate the distribution of vulnerability” (2). While this study has no room to attempt an analysis of these ideologies per se, it certainly seeks to carve out the ideological traces that undocumented youth themselves ascribe to their dispossession in the succeeding analysis. Because Athanasiou points to the underlying ideologies, one could argue that any analysis of dispossession demands this postcolonial endeavor.



Nevertheless, what unites both senses of dispossession is that it “involves the subject’s relation to norms, its mode of becoming by means of assuming and resignifying injurious interpellations and impossible passions” (2) that lead “to the performative in the political” (3).

Both senses of dispossession – that by normative forces as well as the dispossession that highlights our relationality to others and robs us of our autonomy – need to be understood in multiple complex socio-political and historical contexts. According to Athanasiou, we need to pose the question of how “ongoing (post)colonial subjection and dispossession are [...] legitimized, normalized, and regulated through, and in the name of, discourse of reconciliation” (26). I understand ‘reconciliation’ in one particular way: While it often also takes material forms, for me, it especially highlights the negotiation of changing legal situations for those who are dispossessed. In this concrete legal context we need to ask what kind of statement current and changing policies on undocumented immigrant make and how they influence processes of dispossession. As Athanasiou implied in her quote above, postcolonial subjection and dispossession are *ongoing*, which means that the policies that are changed never come from scratch – they are always based upon another, discriminating, subjectifying and dispossessing context. Therefore, policies that ‘reconcile’ undocumented students, for instance, with exceptional high school records by granting them a work permit after graduation (in order to finance their college or university education) – the DACA – may result in other processes of dispossession: Many legislative changes are still not all-embracing, and by making them available to only some, others are again dispossessed as legal changes neither reach nor actively exclude their relatives or friends, or even themselves. This leads to an ongoing dispossession within the context of prior dispossessions.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Langellier and Peterson argue that “no one element” in the personal narratives “ – a canonical story or a counternarrative, a performer’s intention or identity’s body, a liberatory or ritualized

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<sup>85</sup> As of November 2014, dispossession is further reformulated by newer legislations on deportation relief. Thus, current campaigns of the Movement also focus on those *who are excluded* after Obama’s announcement of a second executive order on undocumented immigration. While “Obama will grant deportation reprieves to undocumented parents whose children are American citizens and legal permanent residents if they have lived in the country for five years and have not committed serious crimes”, the “claim for relief” of those parents whose children are included in the DACA, having “deportation deferrals and work permits but no green cards or any other visa or formal immigration status”, “is weaker” (Preston, *Deportation Reprieve*). In a personal conversation with Uriel Sánchez from Chicago, who also has DACA, he once jokingly called himself ‘un-DACA-mented’ with regard to his ‘non-status’.

setting – can anchor normativity or guarantee transgression outside the multiple and meshed workings of context” and therefore, the authors declare “performing personal narrative as a radically contextualized practice” (166).

One concrete dimension crucial to the effect of dispossession that can also be found in all of the digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth online is the “very complicated affective, psychic, and political dynamic involved in the multiple nuances of ‘becoming dispossessed’” (Athanasίου 6). The effect that Butler ascribes to this sense is that “we sometimes no longer know precisely who we are, or by what we are driven” (*Dispossession* 3). It is “these forms of experience [that] call into question whether we are, as bounded and deliberate individuals, self-propelling and self-driven” (4). Butler reminds us what dispossession feels like due to its consequences. It is a “lived feeling of precariousness, which can be articulated with a damaged sense of future and a heightened sense of anxiety about issues like illness and mortality, especially when there is no health insurance or when conditions of labor and accelerated anxiety converge to debilitate the body. This is just one example of how a condition crosses the economic and cultural spheres, suggesting that what we need precisely are a new set of transversal categories and forms of thought that elude both dualism and determinism” (43). The affective dimension of dispossession is an aspect that asks for a multimodal analysis, since emotions can be particularly well portrayed through a combination of different modes.

Viewing dispossession “as a way of separating people from means of survival, is not only a problem of land deprivation but also a problem of subjective and epistemic violence; or, put another way, a problem of discursive and affective appropriation, with”, for instance, “crucially gendered and sexualized implications”, according to Athanasίου (26). The example of sexual dispossession by normative powers proves very useful in the context of undocumented youth as well, if dispossession is viewed as working on many levels and hence reinforcing an intersectional perspective on dispossessed bodies and identities. Homosexuality, for instance, may serve as an outlet for dispossession processes, as Athanasίου explains:

One of our many dispossessions is by the *norms* of sex and gender, which precede and exceed our reach, despite the normalizing claims to original and stable proprietary bodily schemas. When I articulate *my* gender or *my* sexuality, when I pronounce the gender or the sexuality that I have, I inscribe myself

in a matrix of dispossession, expropriability, and relational affectability. (56, *emphasis added*)

Dispossession also is at work at the intersections of homosexual and immigrant identities in the homo- and/or transsexual immigrant community. This intersection triggers mutual conflict evidenced by the frequent “misrecognition of gay rights against immigrant rights”, for instance (Athanasidou 166). Tension might, on the other hand, inspire the countering of such constellations by the sometimes “allied constellation of anti-racist, immigrant, and queer communities against the violence of precarity and abjection in both national and transnational frames” (ibid). For our analysis, the workings of dispossession at different intersections and in critical conflict with each other therefore need to be considered.

### **3.2. Dispossession of Citizenship Rights: Exclusion vs. Belonging**

Dispossession manifests itself in undocumented youth as the feeling of legally *not belonging* any-where.<sup>86</sup> The strong political goal of finally ‘belonging’ to a nation – the U.S. – is the central motive of the Movement, after all. More concretely, Butler describes two central modalities of colonial power according to which undocumented youth are dispossessed: “restricting a population to a land of which they have been dispossessed and refusing entry into the [...] metropole of those who are presumed to belong to another land” (*Dispossession* 24). These “work together to produce the situation in which the targeted population belongs, finally, to no land, a situation that embodies one clear impasse of dispossession” (ibid). While many more individuals and groups of people might be dispossessed in the same way, I argue that undocumented youth offer unique political resistance to dispossession via their narratives on YouTube. Namely, as Athanasidou points out, “political resistance to the violence of dispossession [...] can also be viewed productively through the prisms of colonially embedded notions of belonging and unbelonging” (24-25). By actively claiming a belonging (to the U.S.), undocumented youth counter precisely this type of dispossession.

Understanding ‘dispossession’ as outside the logic of actual, material ‘possession’, Butler claims that it also denotes other “forms of human deprivation and exploitation”, which are rooted in the “possessive individualism that belong[s] to capi-

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<sup>86</sup> The following section deals with belonging theory in more detail.

talism” (*Dispossession* 7). In fact, undocumented youth have not been dispossessed of their U.S. American citizenship, because they have never actually *possessed* it. Further, they are not dispossessed of their citizenship of their country of origin. According to Butler’s and Athanasiou’s understanding of ‘dispossession’ outside the logic of ‘possession’, undocumented youth are dispossessed in *not having* citizenship *rights*. This type of “dis-possession carries the presumption that someone has been deprived of something that *rightfully* belongs to them” (Athanasiou 6, *emphasis added*).<sup>87</sup> As the call for an actual claim to citizenship is not very loud in undocumented communities, it is, instead, the dispossession of the *rights* granted with citizenship that undocumented decry. The deprivation of rights distinguishes two groups of people, those who possess rights attached to citizenship and those who do not. This distinction, as we can see, brings the discussion to a more elementary, human level: Who is included, who is excluded? Who is ‘of more worth’?

These speculations about the workings and effect of citizenship<sup>88</sup> and its rights need to be explained from a sociological standpoint to gain a full understanding of the workings of dispossession: As Isin and Turner explain, “modern citizenship rights that draw from the nation-state typically include civil (free speech and movement, the rule of law), political (voting, seeking electoral office) and social (welfare, unemployment insurance and health care) rights” (Isin and Turner in: Albiez et al. 19). Citizenship, in this sense, “captures the formal status of an individual within a state” (20). The concept further “derives from the underlying idea that only the state can confer and define citizenship”, “which is why the rights of migrants are a point in question for this definition of citizenship” (ibid). The dispossession of immigrants of all citizenship rights once they are of ‘undocu-

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<sup>87</sup> Athanasiou draws the line to Marxism at this point, claiming that just in the sense of the Marxist concept of alienation, “subjects are deprived of the ability to have control over their life, but they are also denied the consciousness of their subjugation” (6).

<sup>88</sup> According to the sociologists Albiez et al., the current debate about the concept of citizenship, as we can also see in the current immigration debate in Congress, questions “the restructuring of sociopolitical spaces; globalisation and the increased bypassing of the state, and the extension of rights of non-citizens, in particular those of migrants”, as well as a “reassignment” in “an age of growing globalisation, deterritorialisation and post-nationalisation” (21). In addition, scholars such as Saskia Sassen “acknowledge that citizenship is a process that can be enacted through people” (ibid). The latter is aware of the concept as being impacted by globalized and transnational trends (such as the “human rights regime”) and the increase in impact on states all over the world and approaches the discussion in a theoretical manner not of immediate ‘use’ to undocumented youth, calling for postnational concept of citizenship as alternative to the traditional, nationally defined one (cf. 288), even if undocumented youth certainly call for a redefinition of the concept in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

mented status' is further problematic in the sense that many of these citizenship rights arguably overlap with civil and even human rights – a topic which undocumented youth also engage in with their core stories. Machado Pais, too, reminds us that “the concept of citizenship establishes boundaries and margins between societies and groups” and that “some fall within the framework (the ‘included’), whilst others lie outside (the excluded, the marginal)” (231). The access to these definitions is limited to few people in that “the margins are defined from the centre, in other words, on the basis of values which belong to ‘us’ (the included), as opposed to ‘them’ (the excluded)” (ibid). The inner workings of inherent exclusion and active dispossession of those at the margin could not be clearer. To the sense of dependency on and relationality to the state that Butler and Athanasiou stress, Bendit adds the need for the state “to recognize young people as full citizens, who are entitled to individual and direct allowances from the state” (35-36). In other words, for youths to develop as adults, they need to be citizens.

When contemplating the idea of citizenship rights, one needs to bear in mind that these rights “also have responsibilities or obligations attached to them, as has been the case with military service” or the “citizen’s obligation to pay taxes” (Albiez et al. 19). Although mandatory, obligation is also a ‘right’ of citizenship ‘responsibilities’ as it still provides the possibility of exclusion. The lack of both – the rights and privileges as well as the responsibilities – show that, as Albiez et al. have argued, citizenship is a social category that can be understood as a criterion for “expressions of collective belongings, [...] be they imagined or assigned, [they] undeniably convey processes of inclusion and exclusion in order to distinguish between in-groups and out-groups” (13).

Butler forcefully articulates how the lack of citizenship rights evokes a feeling of ‘non-belonging’ that establishes an immutable and conflicting condition in the dispossessed person:<sup>89</sup>

The state signifies the legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory [...]. Hence, the state is supposed to service the matrix for the obligations and prerogatives of citizenship. It is that which forms the conditions under which we are juridically bound. We might expect that the

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<sup>89</sup> *Who Sings the Nation-State* is co-authored by postcolonial and feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak, highlighting the postcolonial context of the concept of dispossession and marginalization through normative powers such as the state. As I only quote Butler’s words here, I do not mention Spivak in the in-text quotations.

state presupposes modes of juridical belonging, at least minimally, but since the state can be precisely what expels and suspends modes of legal protection and suspends modes of legal protection and obligation, the state can put us, some of us, in quite a state. It can signify the source of non-belonging, even produce that non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state [...]. This ‘state’ – that signifies both juridical and dispositional dimensions of life – is a certain tension produced between modes of being or mental states, temporary or provisional constellations of mind of one kind or another, and juridical and military complexes that govern how and where we may move, associate, work and speak. (*Who Sings* 4)

Altogether, this sense of ‘exclusion’ and consequential expression of ‘non-belonging’ is a severe consequence of the dispossession, as the introduction of the core stories will show in the following section: Undocumented youth enact this sense of non-belonging that Butler proposes, defining core moments in which this immediate consequence of dispossession comes to the fore.

As we have seen, Butler connects dispossession immediately to internal processes and effects. The immediate issue raised by the core stories in the narratives of undocumented youth is ‘belonging’ as a structure of feeling<sup>90</sup> that is affected by dispossession of citizenship rights. ‘Belonging’ can be “prone to effecting social exclusion, but also the opposite – widening borders, incorporating, defining common grounds” which is “why the notion of belonging currently enjoys growing popularity in migration research” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 203). Hannah Arendt, we recall, similarly described the right to have a home as the *ne plus ultra* human right (cf. Schlink 40).<sup>91</sup> Author Bernhard Schlink argues along the lines of undocumented youth in their narratives – not for direct citizenship – but for the rights and privileges that come along with citizenship. He calls the right to be protected, live, and work in a country one can call home a fundamental human right.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Pfaff-Czarnecka defines ‘belonging’ as “an emotionally-charged social location” which combines “perceptions and performance of *commonality*”, “a sense of mutuality and more or less formalised modalities of collective *allegiance*” and “material and immaterial *attachments* that often result in a sense of *entitlement*” (201). The scholar further explicitly argues that “both, social inclusion and social exclusion underlie regimes of belonging [...] buttressing commonality, mutuality, and attachments, while simultaneously excluding outsiders” (205-206). For more detail, see the three definition of ‘belonging’ that Albiez et al. establish in their book.

<sup>91</sup> The argument for basic human rights supports the intersectional approach to the dispossession of bodies and identities with regard to sexual discrimination, as indicated before. Like Arendt, Butler and Athanasiou, with view on sexual dispossession, argue that “the human rights discourse that establishes sexuality as a kind of right that is borne by a subject” (Butler, *Dispossession* 48).

<sup>92</sup> “Das Recht auf Heimat als elementares Menschenrecht ist das Recht darauf, an einem Ort rechtlich anerkannt und rechtlich geschützt zu leben und nicht nur zu leben, sondern zu wohnen und zu arbeiten” (Schlink 47).

‘Belonging to’ the broader U.S. American people, to American societies/communities, and to ‘humanity’, are central issues involved in the core stories of the narratives. Adding to the sense of ‘belonging to’, translated in German as ‘Zugehörigkeit’, Pfaff-Czarnecka narrows down a broader sense of the ‘belonging with’, meaning ‘Zusammengehörigkeit’. The former “denotes an individual’s belonging to a collective” but also stresses “a tension inherent in belonging, namely a distance between the self and a we-collective” (201-202). ‘Belonging *with*, on the other hand, “stands for togetherness” and “ideally combines commonality, mutuality and attachment” (202). The reason for bringing up this distinction is, when viewing the digital narratives, we find that while all of these digital *testimonios* express belonging with, to say, the ‘whole undocumented community’, we also acknowledge and at times express the different political interests that develop in the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006.

The intersections at which dispossession is at work also find expression in the second sense of belonging, the concept of ‘belonging to’. Pfaff-Czarnecka argues that “this distinction becomes of interest when we shift our perspective from group dynamics geared at maintaining the collective status quo to a consideration of an individual’s embeddedness in a collective, its seeking access to it ... or trying to abandon it” (202). For three of the undocumented youth narrators in this study, for example, it is not enough to ‘come out of the shadows’ with regard to their undocumented status. They frequently also express the need to align themselves with other communities, such as the ‘gay’ one, and establishing a distinct connection between undocumented immigrants and homosexual identities and a very personalized logic within the general, greater logic of YouTube as a channel for communicating the political logic of the Movement. Within the frame of protest against dispossession, Manuel et al., publishers of a set of (written) stories by undocumented youth, “believe that if only they [the narrators of the stories published] were known and understood by their neighbors, their request for legal inclusion into American society could not be denied” (xi). A step into precisely this direction is what is taken by the undocumented youth narrators of digital *testimonios* selected for this investigation.

## 4. Core Stories of Dispossession in Digital *Testimonios* of Undocumented Youth

### 4.1. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Stephanie Solis, “Lost & Found (Story of a DREAM Act Student)”.<sup>93</sup> Published: 12 May 2009

The core story of Stephanie’s digital *testimonio* is divided in two sequences (narrated in minute 00:00:11-00:01:10 and 00:01:47-00:02:57). Both parts recount specific situations that are highly important to her. The situations she describes are experiences with dispossession that are already indicated by the title of the digital *testimonio*, “Lost & Found”. First, she recounts how all her childhood pictures taken in her country of origin, the Philippines, got *lost* in a public storage place, where her mother deposited family belongings. Her family “moved around so frequently” that the place apparently lost track of them and got rid of all of her family’s belongings (00:00:17-00:00:26). *Finding* a few baby photos again in a book she had loaned to a friend and just gotten back, she tells us that she finally could picture herself as a baby again and this way retrieve part of her memories. What follows this sequence is one that provides the viewer with information on Stephanie and her family’s ‘immigration story’.

The second moment of dispossession that she recounts in lively detail is the moment when she learns that she is undocumented. Stephanie tells the audience that, prior to the event, she found herself feeling at home in the U.S., just like any other American with an immigration background (as the sequences that recount her father’s immigration story highlight). Finding out that she is undocumented and hence living in the U.S. illegally shortly before her 18th birthday, she not only feels robbed of her U.S. American identity but also realizes what her status does to her life – *dispossessing* her of vital elements of adulthood. She recounts that she now has no official national identity – neither a Philippine nor an American one, losing safe home at the same time. In more literal terms, Stephanie does not have access to in-state tuition, to a passport, or to activities for which a form of government identification is needed for. It is this *loss* – a literal and symbolic dispossession – according to Stephanie, that ‘delays’ her transition to adulthood. In sum, her narrative recounts dispos-

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<sup>93</sup> I use the titles’ original spelling as published on YouTube (and mark them as quotations).



session induced by the undocumented status, and the impacts on the inner workings, relationships, and national identity of the multigenerational, immigrant family.

The following aspects distinguish Stephanie's dispossession. "Literally, at the age of twenty," she says, "I did not remember what I looked like as a kid anymore" (00:01:06). In connection to her legal situation, I argue, it is apparent that in those early years of adulthood, Stephanie has not only lost the link to her Philippine cultural identity but her identity development is further 'on hold'. This is primarily caused by the fact that she is denied all rights that are automatically granted to adult citizens once they turn 18.

The state's legal system becomes, in this story, the main normative policing power that causes Stephanie's suffering. Her dispossession highlights her dependency on the state to *grant* her these rights and de-emphasizes the undocumented immigrant family's responsibility for the situation. "For undocumented students, the end of high school represents a crucial transition in their lives, when they realize [...] that they are, in fact, different from their peers", Pérez explains (24). The bitterness and, hence, affective dimensions of this situation, which Stephanie performs with the help of multiple modes, lie in the sudden exclusion experienced by undocumented children who grew up in the U.S. Gonzalez finds in his study that "these young men and women describe moving from an early adolescence in which they had important inclusionary access, to an adulthood in which they are denied daily participation in most institutions of mainstream life" (615). Inclusion and exclusion, defining markers of the construct of 'belonging' to a culture or group, turn into momentous mechanisms in these youths' lives. As Machado Pais explains:

Traditionally, the concept of citizenship establishes boundaries and margins between societies and groups. [...] But the margins are defined from the centre [...] on the basis of values which belong to 'us' (the included), as opposed to 'them' (the excluded). (231)

Determined to become an 'other' in U.S. society, Stephanie has, as we have seen, also been turned into a 'them' through the literal loss of her original cultural identity. Losing access to her Philippine culture and identity as well puts her in a double state of loss, as she is denied, literally, other memory repertoire.

The second sense of dispossession that connects to this dilemma is induced by the first part of the story. Stephanie describes how her family moved around so

frequently that nobody was able to track them down. They were living a life in the shadows, of course. However, the effect of her life in the shadows influences Stephanie's relation to her mother, whom the narrator accuses of having put her childhood photos in the storage place in the first place, and hence, who is at least partly responsible for the subsequent loss as well. Further, she tells us that she only learned of her undocumented status after she directly and forcefully confronted her mother to tell her the truth. Stephanie's struggle shows how dispossession is further fortified in relations to 'others'. In this case, she is dispossessed in an interaction with her own mother, putting a strain on inner-family harmony. In this situation, Stephanie's multiple states of dependency become especially clear.

#### **4.2. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Mohammad Abdollahi, “My name is Mohammad and I am undocumented”. Published: 19 March 2010**

'Mo', as the narrator of the succeeding digital narrative in our selection introduces himself, starts his personal story by introducing the fact that his parents migrated from Iran and stayed in the U.S. illegally, depicting his undocumented status as something that always was a known and 'given' to him, although he “never really understood what it meant until it was that time when everybody was applying for colleges” (00:00:37-00:00:42).

His core story then revolves around not being able to go to university because of his undocumented status, or, more precisely, because he was “not a citizen” and ‘not born in the U.S.’ Mohammad tells a detailed story of how he sat in the admission office at Eastern Michigan University in September 2007 and got handed his acceptance letter, yet how it was taken away from him after the registrar realized that he was undocumented. Consequently, he lost the right to a university education that, for a brief moment, had been his.

In contrast to many other undocumented students, Mohammad claims that he first was “personally fine” with community college (00:00:57-00:01:02). This is distinctive considering that his narrative was published in 2010, and when many other narratives at that time – just as Stephanie's – aimed at illustrating educational excellence and personal qualification for a legislative path to citizenship. Mohammad, too, emphasizes his parents' faith in the American Dream. He recounts that his mother, in

particular, had high hopes for her son's education and future, identifying her dreams as one of the reasons why his family migrated (illegally). This depiction reminds us of the mythical American Dream that apparently many of the undocumented DREAM Act students had and still claim. Unlike many other students in the Movement, he was not worried about his future in early high school. Mo powerfully juxtaposes his high school tranquility regarding the future to the humiliation he experienced in the counselor's office at Eastern Michigan University, how he was devastated and thus dispossessed.

The dispossession of Mohammad, as he recounts it in his story, works in multiple ways. It is important to mention that the official profusely compliments him for his strong academic qualifications. It seems as if this raises not only Mohammad's hopes and pride, it also positions him slightly above or at least on the same level as the counselor, an 'elevation' presumably new for Mohammad, a recent high school graduate who had not assumed he would be attending university. He was aware that his undocumented status could limit his options. The circumstance that Mohammad's hopes for his future were *created* by the university counselor and *taken away* from him in the same moment, highlights the normative powers at work in that moment of dispossession, Mohammad's dependence on the institution's policing power, and his limit to function autonomously in the university system and the dependency thereon. The 'loss of citizenship' that Butler and Athanasiou describe as one condition of and for dispossession is not a 'given' to Mohammad prior to that experience. Rather, it is created in this moment, as the institution – the university – actively *dispossesses* Mohammad, albeit the citizenship never really existed in the first place. This situation, depicted in slowed discourse time, results in Mohammad's thinking that, in his words: "because of I wasn't born here, I wasn't good enough for the university" (00:02:58-00:03:01). Mohammad's status and his place of birth become the all-decisive reason(s) to *exclude* him.

Distinct, again, from many other undocumented students is Mohammad's deliberations over what to do after being denied access to American universities. He argues that, because there was no legal option at that time – the DREAM Act failed in congress a month later – he considered "going back to Iran" first neutrally, then thought, that this was not "a reality" for him because he "was also gay...and so going back to Iran was just not a reality for me" (00:03:25-00:03:45). In contrast to many

other producers of ‘coming out’ narratives, who use their sexual identity at the *beginning* of their digital narrative as a major identity marker in the introduction of themselves, Mohammad ‘drops the bomb’ about such a crucial point in his identity fairly late in his narrative, subordinating his sexual identity to his U.S. American identity and future plans.

At the same time, Mo uses the U.S.’s obsession with stereotyping Muslim, Middle Eastern countries in order to argue for his stay in the U.S., because, surely, every scared U.S. American had the worst pictures in his head about how Iran treated gay people. This makes Mo, automatically, almost a case for political asylum and makes the rejection he received at university seem even more cruel. Further, due to these circumstances, Mohammad highlights that an access to higher education *rightfully* belongs to him, as there is ‘no option’ for him to obtain education in his ‘home country’ Iran, where the state’s powers would, as he argues, dispossess him of even more basic human rights due to his homosexuality. Mohammad draws a concrete link to the political exclusion at work in both countries that can be understood “through the prisms of colonially embedded notions of belonging and unbelonging” (Athanasidou 24-25). By actively claiming this belonging (to the U.S.) through highlighting basic human rights violations (his homosexuality and his right to education), Mohammad makes us alert to this type of dispossession by means of the core story.

### **4.3. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Carlos Roa, “the story of an undocumented student”. Published: 21 July 2010**

Carlos’ core story connects his undocumented status and immigration background to the topic of the American Dream, Manifest Destiny, and patriotism to the United States. Through this manifold connection, Carlos reinstates the myth of the ‘autonomous’ self with inherent dreams to strive for a better life through immigration to the United States. In sum, he tells us of the situation he found himself in after his high school graduation in 2005. Namely, Carlos “*wanted* to get into college”, “*wanted* to join the military” but due to his undocumented status, he had to realize that “those options...like...weren’t...couldn’t do any of that” (00:00:58-00:01:09).

Carlos recounts in detail how this denial and lack of ‘options’ makes him feel. His state of mind illustrates well Butler’s claim that the dispossessed person feels a heightened sense of “a damaged sense of future” (*Dispossession* 43). He further em-

phasizes this feeling as follows: “And so, it’s frustrating, you know, the fact that I wanna give back, you know, I’m willing to serve this country...ehm...in the military service...and I don’t even have the option to do so” (00:01:10-00:01:20). On a symbolic level, Carlos’ sense of frustration causes self-dispossession: he lacks any understanding of why he is being denied the chance to live up to his dreams. Dramatically, Carlos expresses a deep sense of patriotism and loyalty to the United States that he cannot live up to because he is not ‘allowed’ to ‘give back’, as he is not accepted as a citizen in the country. His exasperation with the policing forces dispossessing him of his sense of belonging to the United States builds in intensity during this sequence. His future plans in the military, to him, earn him a *rightful* belonging to the United States, as he is not only wishing to belong and obtain the rights that a U.S. citizen ‘enjoys’ but also to perform obligations and duties, such as military service. Carlos feels he is a victim of injustice, carried out by a personified ‘state’, which he in the same moment turns into something in-between “modes of being or mental states [...] and juridical and military complexes that govern how and where you move” (cf. Butler, *Who Sings* 4). What Carlos’ story shows, ultimately, is that “we are dispossessed of ourselves” through the interdependency that immigrants (and others) simply do not have the power to eradicate in a country like the United States (*Dispossession* 3).

Carlos particularly emphasizes his dispossession when he connects his situation to similar struggles that immigrants experienced in the history of the country. He incorporates the immigration background of his parents, reciting how his parents were denied citizenship, although his grandfather was a “U.S. citizen for over forty years” and it was the sole purpose of, especially, his mother to ‘give back’ to the country in the form of her three children as ‘professionals’. It is this aspect that Carlos highlights in particular. Within the anger that Carlos apparently feels with regard to his family not being granted legalization, he concludes that this denial is “bad for *everyone*, not just immigrants” (00:01:27). This is the first time that Carlos explicitly mentions ‘immigrants’, arguing for equal status of both citizens and non-citizens by claiming that denying immigrants citizenship has negative effects for “everyone”, which includes and, in fact, defines ‘everyone’ as *Americans* without the distinction between citizens and non-citizens.

Likewise, Carlos determines that ‘everyone’, including undocumented immigrants, are *all humans* and at this point connects the myth of the American Dream as an all-incorporating potential inhabited by immigrants without exception. Carlos argues that “this country has prided itself on” the possibility to “change this country for the better”, that “we’ve seen that at the turn of this century we saw how immigrants...em...you know, changed this nation for the better of Irish, of Polish, of Italian descent”. Then providing the connecting link to himself and his family, he argues that “we are no different than the immigrants from the past” (00:02:35-00:03:01). It is the human ‘merit’ which immigrants have ‘contributed’ to the nation that Carlos emphasizes with this statement. On the next level, when denying current undocumented immigrants the opportunity to work or join the military – as rights and obligations included in the construct of ‘citizenship’ – Carlos talks about the fact that he feels that this is, in fact, “shooting down people’s dreams” (00:01:21), dehumanizing them – the most gruesome agenda of dispossession. However, Carlos does not specifically say *who* is doing that, using the pronoun “you” as a generalization of the ‘other’. It is apparent, nevertheless, that Carlos is actually accusing the U.S. for excluding him and his family – a country he would, technically, ‘kill for’.

#### **4.4. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of David Ramirez, “David Ramirez, Immigrant Youth Justice League”. Published: 05 April 2011**

David’s core story of dispossession is less easy to distinguish from the rest of the narrative than the core stories of the other seven digital narratives, perhaps because his narrative is comparatively short, slow speech tempo, and full of pauses. Further, instead of performing the affective dimension of his dispossession, he presents to the viewer the current situation he finds himself in, arguing that he has “spent the last decade realizing, struggling through and really recently coming to terms with being undocumented” (00:00:12-00:00:22). In his story, David reports that his undocumented status transformed into a psychological burden, which accompanied him throughout most of his teenage years. We see that David’s state of dispossession is an affective one that influenced him on a long-term basis rather than in one concrete situation or event that he experienced.

David expresses the precariousness of his status in more explicit terms than the previous three narrators. He explains that in his teenage years, being undocumented made him feel “absolutely alone” (00:01:07-00:01:08) and that he was constantly confronted with “all this hate that’s been shot at [him]” (00:00:39-00:00:41). The *precarious* life he led up to this point forms a particularly literal mental image through this choice of his words. David further reports that whenever he tried to “reconcile” hateful confrontations with his undocumented identity, he felt even more lost. The fact that David felt the need to ‘reconcile’ his identity with the reactions of others implies that he is dispossessed of the ‘belonging to’ a group in society. However, the attempts to reconcile the ‘hate’ he perceives from others with his undocumented ‘identity’ failed. “Every time that I compromised with the hate; every time that I tried to reconcile with it, ehm, I felt that I was digging myself further into a hole”, he claims (00:00:45-00:00:57).

David’s claim stands for the impossibility of fighting the hate on his own, suggesting the need for a plural resistance against dispossession and a united movement against the forces of dispossession that agonize him. As the first of these four narratives, David explicitly mentions the *need* for activism through his personal story, which bears immediate consequences for the performance of personalized activism that David displays in form of his YouTube *testimonio*.

#### **4.5. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Angelica Velazquillo, “An undocumented immigrant, Angelica, tells her story”. Published: 02 March 2012**

After introducing herself and her undocumented status, as well as several consequential impediments in her everyday life that are due to her undocumented status, Angelica begins to tell the core story: She recounts the night of her brother’s arrest and subsequent detainment, as well as the emotional consequences this incident has for her and her mother. Angelica narrates this event in a more structured way than the previous core stories we have discussed.

Angelica’s core story begins with a precise date (October 2010), thus marking her dispossession as a clear and separable event in her life to which she is witness as in the tradition of the *testimonio*. The core story is further marked by the fact that that digital *testimonios* apparently have a solid integral part; a personal story within the

greater narrative account of the dispossession that is felt by each of the narrators and can be referred back to the life they are leading as undocumented immigrants in the United States. This ‘core story’ includes a series of events that are emotionally laden, major happenings in the lives of undocumented youths.

Angelica recites the events that happened in the night that distinctly marked her dispossession in clear and logical order. As hinted in several of the other stories, the topics of ‘family’ and ‘community’ become a central one in this digital *testimonio*: Angelica’s core story revolves around her (also undocumented) brother’s arrest “for driving with his high beams on” (00:00:33-00:00:36). She also tells us that because the officers learned that her brother was undocumented, “ICE took a hold of him” (00:00:41-00:00:42), and after that spending three days in jail, his family could save him from being brought to a detention center in a different state only by paying “a 5,000 immigration bond” (00:00:46-00:00:48).<sup>94</sup> While it is inherently her brother’s dispossession, Angelica becomes dispossessed as she is affected emotionally. Here, family unity and community becomes an important aspect. As Athanasiou stresses, dispossession “rises from [...] a limit to the autonomous and impermeable self-sufficiency” (2). Angelica’s brother’s arrest becomes the event in the story that builds the structural basis for the whole narrative. In this particular instance, dispossession becomes a community issue, in which all the other (remaining) family members become dispossessed at the same time. The police officers who arrest the brother symbolize the institutional, regulating and *policing* forces of the state, which seemingly work randomly to dispossess whole communities. Thereby, it is seemingly not even important who her brother really is – the viewer is not even told a name, which altogether highlights the arbitrariness of the event. The arrest, we conclude, could have happened to any other member of Angelica’s family or even community. For the digital *testimonio*, much more crucial for the narrative outcome and means of protest is the actual effect his arrest – and the family’s consequential dispossession – has on Angelica herself, as the following quote shows:

This was a turning point for me, ehm, up to now I had faced challenges because of being undocumented but nothing compares to...to that night.

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<sup>94</sup> ICE is the acronym for “Immigration and Customs Enforcement”, which was “created in March 2003” and “is the largest investigative branch of the Department of Homeland Security” (Orner, *Glossary* 376). It “is charged with enforcing deportation orders, investigating employers of illegal workers, targeting smugglers of counterfeit products, and various counterterrorism responsibilities” (376-377).



Ehm...coming to my brother's empty room and realizing that he was spending the night in jail. And to see my mom falling apart because we didn't know when we were gonna see him again or if we were gonna see my brother again. (00:00:53-00:01:18)

#### **4.6. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Mitzy Calderón, “I am no longer hiding! I am no longer afraid!” Published: 13 November 2012**

The digital *testimonio* of Mitzy, a college student in Georgia, utilizes a moment in her senior year at high school as the major situation of dispossession for the core of her story. For this, an additional character appears in Mitzy's core story: The nice but 'not helpful' high school counselor whom Mitzy meets to inquire about college options at some point in her last high school year. Mitzy's finds the latter, however, inexperienced with undocumented students, which raises her level of frustration and, simultaneously, builds a stronger awareness of her undocumented status, which, she finds, stands in her way to obtain a proper secondary education.

Before Mitzy re-tells the moment of dispossession (unconsciously) triggered by the institutional representative, she explains how she feels towards her undocumented status throughout her high school years. In detail, Mitzy argues that she kept her status a secret, not comfortable with “sharing” it, because she was afraid of deliberately getting turned in by her 'peers' and then detained (and eventually deported) by *la migra* (00:00:50-00:00:59). While these circumstances show how Mitzy already feels and *is* dispossessed – restricted in living out her life freely and utterly afraid of policing consequences – in 00:01:28, she explicitly begins narrating a strictly secluded sequence that describes the core of this dispossession: Her experience in the counselor's office.

Mitzy recounts this changing sequence of events, the core story of her digital *testimonio*, in much detail. This leads to a slowing down in narrative time, allowing much room to all emotions and thoughts that Mitzy connects with that situation. However, this makes Mitzy's digital narrative the longest in this selection. Dispossession, here, again, is depicted as a process, unfolding in the order that Mitzy tells us 'her story': First, Mitzy highlights her hopes and dreams for the future, in her talk with the counselor as well in her re-telling of the story to 'us'. Then, however, she narrates the experience of indirect rejection by her favorite educational institution, Young Harris College, which at that time only accepted undocumented

students who would pay out-of-state tuition. In consequence, Mitzy is dispossessed of her dreams much more than of a real, tangible and graspable college education. Implying that “the American experience”, as she calls it (00:01:36-00:01:42), is not meant for her, Mitzy feels that she is being excluded from the experience that seemingly all other students at that school, and perhaps even all other immigrants, in her mind, are granted. On a deeper level, the right to that dream and to even have the option to have that dream, excludes Mitzy from a sense of ‘belonging with’ American culture. Being identified as an international student (at least in a financial sense), to Mitzy feels like an immense insult and “definitely not an option” to her, since she identifies as an American (00:02:45-00:03:18).

The fact that this rejection is mediated and indirectly carried out by the high school counselor points to the policing instances that the state employs in order to regulate and punish those that it dispossesses. However, the dependency of the counselor on the institution also shows that dispossession works with multiple dependencies: Mitzy interprets the counselor’s lack of knowledge of “how to help” undocumented students like her as an institutional ill that is based on racism. Although allegedly 95 percent of the school’s students are white, Mitzy feels that the other five percent should also be shown options by the counselor. The lack of educational options, such as attending her college of choice, and the fact that she does not have “legal status” or “a social”, to Mitzy, is “a modern way of segregation” (00:04:20-00:04:21).

In sum, the moment that Mitzy is denied the “American experience” that she claims to appreciate so much (00:01:40-00:1:41), not only dispossesses her of belonging with and to American society but also dispossesses her altogether of being American at all. The racism she connects with this experience could be explained in terms of dispossession, which Athanasiou explicitly reconnects to colonial and imperial histories of racism. She argues that in order to approach the dispossessed subject properly, “we have to turn to the structure of dispossession that organizes contemporaneous forms of colonialism, slavery, racial and gender violence” (26). The dispossessing violence, as in case of racism, works by “desubjectifying others, rendering them usable, employable, but then eventually into waste matter, or of no use”, causing a state of “disposability” which lies “at the heart of ongoing colonially and postcolonially embedded notions of the self-contained, proper(tied), liberal

subject” (27). While one can clearly see the connections to this form of dispossession with regard to the immigrant worker, Mitzy herself does not epitomize the latter *per se*. However, she aligns herself with the American Dream, which commends hard work in order to achieve the best and thus identifies with the immigrant worker in the U.S. at least in a symbolic way. The result, after all, remains the same: Mitzy feels ‘useless’, robbed of all ideas for her future, and discriminated against.

#### **4.7. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Ivette Roman, “Marylands Undocumented Immigrant Students”. Published: 05 January 2013**

The core story of this digital *testimonio* relies on the intersection of homosexual identity and dispossession as determined earlier. It is important to note that in contrast to Mohammad’s core story, undocumented narrator Ivette directly centers her story of dispossession on the intersections of her undocumented status, her homosexual identity and the period of transnational motherhood that she experienced when her mother went to the United States to find work, as well as struggles of cultural adjustment in the United States. This difference is noticeable when Ivette introduces herself as undocumented and gay in two consecutive sentences, “I’m an undocumented immigrant. And I’m a lesbian” (00:00:10-00:00:14). This is even before she begins to talk about her family’s immigration story and the hardships that she encountered in the first years of living in the United States, including bullying in school, initial language problems as well as being forced to reject a scholarship and placement in a college she would have liked to attend because her family was too poor to pay the rest of the tuition. The strongest hardship and core story, however, depicts her ‘coming out’ as a lesbian to her mother.

Ivette tells her ‘coming out’ story in more detail than the rest of her biographical events depicted in the narrative. She recounts sitting on the couch next to her mother one evening, when she comes out to her mother. More precisely, Ivette takes a news report on television about somebody being beaten for ‘coming out’ as the impetus to come out to her mother as well, in that very moment of watching. Upon this, her mother rejects her for several months, not speaking to her and treating her very coldly, “she wouldn’t even look [Ivette] in the eye” (00:03:05-00:03:08). Her mother’s rejection dispossesses her of her will to life, inducing inherent suicidal thoughts, as she reports: “I didn’t even wanna live anymore”, because she “thought

[she] had lost her [mother]" (00:03:09-00:03:15). In multiple ways, Ivette's sense of herself is precarious, as she identifies most strongly with 'non-being' (cf. Athanasiou 19).

Athanasiou's comments on sexual dispossession help us understand Ivette's dispossession. First of all, one has to determine the "multilayered traumas of subjection and the foreclosures that structure our 'passionate attachments,' the foreclosures that produce melancholia in determining which passionate attachments are possible and viable, and which are not", for which she names the "the disavowal of same-sex desire" as an instance (6). We learn of Ivette's trauma(s) prior to this incident in the core story as well – informal ways to dispossess her by discriminating her for her 'insufficient' language skills as well as the abandonment of her mother in early childhood.<sup>95</sup> Deciding to be homosexual, in Ivette's case, hence puts a complicated burden on the relationship to her mother due to the latter's particular conservatism that needs to be understood in the general framework of dispossession, as Athanasiou has stressed above. Telling the viewer immediately after narrating this traumatizing incident about the impediments of undocumented status on her future plans – inherently dispossessed of the rights to go to college or university – Ivette connects the mechanism of being an (undocumented) immigrant to her personal crisis. Both have put a tremendous strain on the relationship to her mother, which follows her throughout her whole life – from the beginning of her first high school years to the (current) wish to enter university as an undocumented student. In the face of all of her intersecting and similarly traumatizing events in life, Ivette exclaims towards the end of her story: "I want the same...I want the same rights as they do. I'm still just like them" (00:04:12-00:04:21). However, she does not specify to whom "they" refers, experiencing the workings of dispossession at the multiple intersections of her selves.

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<sup>95</sup> It is important to point to research carried out on transnational motherhood: As Gjokaj et al. stress, for instance, "like other social practices and relations, families are always in motion, continuously transforming and being transformed by transnational spaces" (283). Transnational motherhood is one example of these transnational transformations that change the relationship between individual family members eternally. In their study, Bacallao and Smokowski, for instance, found problems appear especially at reunification and the following "adjustment period in which structural changes created new configurations of roles, boundaries, and communication processes, as well as a stormy period after reuniting" (57).

#### **4.8. Core Story: Digital *Testimonio* of Luis Maldonado, “A Brief Look Into the Life of an Undocumented American”. Published: 20 September 2013**

Luis’ core story of dispossession differs slightly from the core stories in the previous digital *testimonios*. Similar to Ivette’s story, the first hint of dispossession is Luis’ statement that he is “queer” (00:00:04). While Luis does recount his experiences within the undocumented immigrant community and identifies, in particular, the widespread discrimination of homosexuals to be his motivation to ‘fight’ for legal changes for undocumented (and undocumented homosexuals), his core story does not refer to himself. Like Angelica’s core story, Luis’ story relates to the topic of family and an experience with family separation. And again, it is the separation from a sibling. However, while Angelica is dispossessed in the moment of learning of her brother’s detention, the situation for Luis’ family has already escalated: His sister got deported a few years prior to the recording of his *testimonio* and while this seems indeed painful, it is not the major dispossession that Luis’ family experiences. Rather, as he tells us from minute 01:34 on, it is the story of his nephew, the son of his sister, which occupies him: While the mother got deported back to Mexico, Luis’ nephew is a U.S.-born child and therefore a U.S. citizen who is now separated from his mother.

In detail, Luis explains that he feels emotional distress and responsibility to fight for his nephew. This complicated situation characterizes Luis’ own situation of dispossession and emphasizes the responsibility and connectedness within his undocumented community that transforms his family’s problem into his own: “The separation of families that are constantly happening...on a day-to-day basis...is affecting me”, he claims, explaining the cause in more detail: “It affects me because my nephew, his parent is not with him, and I see the pain that he has, and how much that hurts him, and not only him, but also his mother” (00:01:48-00:02:08). Directly confronted with his family’s constant pain, Luis’ *testimonio* emphasizes the fact that immigrant stories, and especially those by undocumented immigrants, are stories that *need* to be told, because they involve the dispossession of children’s rights. This type of loss, in the first sense of dispossession, “is a condition painfully imposed by the normative [...] violence that determines the terms of subjectivity, survival, and

livability” (Athanasiou 2). As this quote implies, not only does his sister’s deportation affect Luis in his role as her brother but their dispossession also makes Luis’ nephew completely dependent on him. Luis has been thrust into the life of an adult caring for a child because the state deported the child’s mother. Any type of self-sufficient and autonomous family life, as Athanasiou emphasizes, is put to an end (3). In addition, the state took a policing role, ‘punishing’ not ‘only’ Luis’s sister and nephew but the whole family. Luis’ core story thus highlights that ‘the state’ does not even ‘spare’ its own *citizen* children, therefore dispossessing them of their (human) right to protection (cf. Schlink 47).

Since Luis describes himself as an undocumented “American” in the very title of his narrative, he implies that this experience might be real for potentially many more (undocumented) *Americans*, while he personifies the state, the U.S., as the predominant perpetrator of their dispossessed state. Simultaneously, Luis explains that this situation is the major trigger for his activism in the revived Immigrant Rights Movement. At this point, Luis explicitly connects his activism against deportation to his identity, claiming that these causes inspire him to fight against them. Particularly striking in Luis’ core story is the fact that he highlights the intersections of his multiple identities at which dispossession takes place. However, dispossession, to him, is a unifying cause to spur activism. He emphasizes these intersections, first of all, by introducing himself as follows: “I’m undocumented and unafraid, queer and unashamed. My name is Luis Maldonado” (00:00:00-00:00:07). The order in which Luis makes claims about his identity suggests that his undocumented identity comes first, and the queer second (even before his first name). With regard to the debate on immigration in the United States, and his “immigration story” (as the narrative is named), both identities, however, are the ones that dispossess him (and his family) of the right to ‘live a normal life’. Luis’ activism thus stresses that he is convinced that the undocumented status is accentuated as it intersects with the queer one. He expresses this relation by arguing, for instance, that “what some people might take for granted [...]...are actually the dreams of other people, especially the dreams of people in *my* community” (00:02:20-00:02:30, *emphasis added*). Through this, Luis actively claims a belonging *with* the undocumented immigrant community but, at the same time, also resists the exclusion from *American* society, despite his status.

On the other hand, Luis also shows how this queer identity, in contrast to his undocumented identity, is a very solid part of his complete. To illustrate this, he gives the term ‘unashamed’ an additional meaning: In the current Movement, ‘unashamed’ is used by undocumented youth (now most likely to have DACA) for referring to their parents – taking away the blame and guilt that was thrust upon them in an early phase of the Movement that focused on a national ‘DREAM Act’. However, Luis now actively uses shamelessness to refer to his homosexual identity. Still, he does explicitly detail the emotional impacts of coming out as gay. Instead of telling us how coming out as homosexual was a major event in his life, he tells us that “it was a very nerve-wracking moment prior and during me coming out as an *undocumented person*” (00:00:47-00:00:57, *emphasis added*). Here, too, Luis ascribes his immigration status a greater power of his well-being than his sexual identity. LGBT community rights, however, in part depend on the undocumented status and vice versa. One important interface between the two is that before its repeal in July 2013, it was not possible for a U.S. citizen to get immigration benefits for his undocumented partner due to the DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act) (Pallares, *Family Activism* 141). While Luis’ personal family struggle (that of his nephew and sister, in particular), becomes the trigger for his *testimonio*, Luis underscores the ongoing nature of this struggle that he is engaged in, which includes the rights of undocumented gay people: “I still feel that that’s another battle of my identity, of my immigrant story” (00:01:28-00:01:33), he exclaims.

## **5. The Performative in Dispossession: Dispossessed Bodies in the Digital Sphere**

Dispossession in digital *testimonios* is openly performative, meaning that it connects the performative of the political (as defined in chapter 2) to those groups who are dispossessed as a possible strategy for counter-movement. By framing dispossession as they do, Butler and Athanasiou seek for the “performative occasion in an ongoing process of socially regulatory self-formation, whereby under different circumstances the self struggles within and against the norms through which it is constituted” (68). Butler and Athanasiou are both “calling for – struggling for – a conception of reflexivity in which the self acts upon the terms of its formation precisely in order to open in some way to a sociality that exceeds (and possibly precedes) social regulation”

(70), thus, as it is a type of performativity, it is “initiating or originating agency” through “re-crafting one’s crafted condition” (71).

The logic of YouTube narratives is strongly connected to the performative. As a part of its political logics, this Movement poses interesting dynamics of the logic of media – YouTube – and the intertwining of both as an expression of the mediatization of politics. How the performative becomes a logic of the Movement, Butler and Athanasiou explain through performativity and dispossession. Specifically, Judith Butler’s theory connects performativity to the Movement and its claim to exercise the right to public protest. Butler illustrates the relation as follows: “Performativity does take place when the uncaptured prove to be reflexive and start to count themselves, not only enumerating who they are, but ‘appearing’ in some way, exercising in that way a ‘right’ (extralegal, to be sure) to existence”, this way “producing a political subject” and “the exercise of the right is something that happens within the context of precarity and takes form as a precarious exercise that seeks to overcome its own precarity” (101).<sup>96</sup> Applied to the context of undocumented narrators, this means that by the exercise of their right through the narratives, undocumented youth narrators seek to overcome their fear. “And even if it is not supported by existing law (laws that deny citizenship, for instance)”, Butler continues,

it is still supported by extralegal cultural, political, and discursive conditions, translations from other struggles, and modes of organizing that are neither state-supported nor state-centered. In this way performativity works within precarity and against its differential allocation. Or, rather, performativity names that unauthorized exercise of a right to existence that propels the precarious into political life. (ibid)

Inherent in the concept of dispossession lies the performative that constitutes the individual experience as the author/narrator re-lives, re-tells it in his/her digital *testimonio*. This lens is crucial to the dispossession that undocumented youth inhabit, since Butler and Athanasiou “approach dispossession inasmuch as it encompasses ways we are *performatively* constituted and de-constituted by and through our rela-

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<sup>96</sup> In connection to the postcolonial discourse and counter-discursive potential of narrative introduced in the beginning of this chapter, Athanasiou reminds us that “a performative is necessarily implicated in the paleonymy of propriation, appropriation, reappropriation, misappropriation, or expropriation that authorizes it and, at the same time, is capable of exposing or even shifting its prescribed limitations” (126-127). Further, “the politics of performativity entails an avowal of the power relations it contests and depends on” (104). Locating the performative in dispossession, therefore, necessarily includes a sense of activism and resistance.



tions to the others among whom we live, as well as by and through particular regulatory norms that secure cultural intelligibility” (Athanasίου 92, *emphasis added*). Here, “the critical project of thinking about dispossession beyond the logic of possession as a resource for a reorientation of politics takes us back to the question pertaining to the appropriate and expropriate action of the performative”, they argue (126).

The performance studies perspective that the authors stress, according to Madison and Hamera, can “interrogate and enrich our basic understanding of history, identity, community, nation, and politics” (xii) and is “radically interdisciplinary” (xiii). It is further “employed across disciplines to decipher the multiple operations of performance (performativity and the performative) within a written text, a life world, and in domains of cognitive and imaginary expressions”, of which “the *performance turn*” is a major part “in western academic theory” (xxiv). Performativity refers to identity construction through repetitions in utterances and behavior. Judith Butler’s work has been considered as ground-breaking in the field in the sense that she shifted “the focus from identity and history to performativity”, which had major effects on research in feminist and queer studies, in particular (cf. Chinn 105).<sup>97</sup>

According to Butler’s basic argument, all identities are constructed in discourse (cf. Chinn 106), “while making room for repetition, reiteration, durability and stability, and the psychoanalytic”, as Wetherell claims (17). Essentially, performativity “is the argument that an identity based on gender, for instance, is nothing other than persistent regulatory performances materialized over time” and “not biologically given” (ibid). More importantly, performativity materializes as performances in stories, according to Madison and Hamera, like those selected for this study (cf. Madison and Hamera xix). Inherent in this definition is the difference between performance and performativity – while the latter focuses on speech acts, which contributed actively in negotiating meaning, the former denotes bodily actions and inherent perceptions (cf. Velten 549; see also Fischer-Lichte 220).

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<sup>97</sup> It is important to “point out the intimate links between gender, race and class”, according to Chinn, “and that certain gendered performatives require specific racial or class identities to go along with them” (113) as well as that “what those genders mean, particularly in the context of histories of white supremacy and European and US colonization and imperialism, varies significantly depending upon the context” (113-114). Likewise, Butler and Athanasίου stress the intersectionality at work in the reinforcement of norms that dispossess persons: “What is important in the scene of subjectivation is that desire and the law are inextricably intertwined. In this performative intertwinement, gender and sexual categories, identities, and fantasies are reconstituted and reinvented in unforeseen ways as the law ‘strives’ [...] to produce, affirm, consolidate, thwart, commodify, or render them proper” (45-46).

According to Chinn, “the first person to use the term ‘performativity’ in a sustained study was the philosopher of language J.L. Austin”, exploring “the role of what he called ‘performative language’” (106). He distinguished between, primarily, “constative language [which is] merely descriptive; it tells us about the world around us [...] but does not affect the world or the things it describes” and “performative language [which] is language [that] makes something happen – just by saying something we do something” (ibid). Erving Goffman adds the integration of performance into everyday life. One of his central theoretical assumptions refers to performances as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (22) – basically declaring most behaviour and thought a performance. According to Wetherell, Goffman thus “made social roles and normative reference groups mobile and brought them to life” (10). Further, Goffman declares that “performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer” (77). This implies that political performances as well are mainly framed to address their audience in some way or another, not to express the ‘true self’, as the introduction to narrative as a ‘window’ to thought and life emphasized. In a theoretical approach to performativity and performance nowadays, according to Hamera, “we move beyond Ervin Goffman’s [...] notion of the presentation of self in everyday life to examine how performance illuminates the deep structures of community in/and [...] practice” (47). Butler, most famously, revises both theoretical trains of thought thoroughly, applying them to, most famously, gender as “an embodied act in the same way that performative language is a speech act”, according to Chinn (110). Thus, it is mainly the cultural context – the Movement – and forms of resistance and potential role-playing that is of importance in the analysis. The central question becomes how performativity is materialized as performance in concrete terms. Does multimodality have an effect on the production of meaning through differently materialized, multimodal performances?

The performative in dispossession is the fashion in which dispossession can be countered. Athanasiou observes, for instance, the “radical potential that emerges from the losses, repudiations, foreclosures, and normative acknowledgements through which human intelligibility is constituted”, which “expose[s] or challenge[s]

those regulative fictions that produce the unintelligible, albeit not in totalizing and teleological ways”, envisioning “the stranger, the *sans papiers*, the unemployed, the queer” (36-37). What is most radical about it is the questioning of the allocation of humanness and the resignification – the reclaiming – of humanness on part of the dispossessed. Because “colonially inscribed forms of power involved in the property-propriety economies of the modern subject [...] produce incommensurate onto-epistemologies of humanness and non-humanness, possession and dispossession”, Athanasiou explains (31), the question of humanness is constantly inscribed in processes of resisting dispossession. Thus, “when it comes to ‘the human,’ the matter that must be addressed is the differential allocation of humanness: the perpetually shifting and variably positioned boundary between those who are rendered properly human and those who are not” (ibid). For the purposes of this investigation, we need to pose the question of how undocumented youth address and express the allocation of humanness in their stories of dispossession. Do they choose multimodal forms to express humanness? As a result, “if ‘the human’ can ever take place [...] in terms of radical and subversive resignification, this taking place might happen through the human refusing to stay in its proper place” (33-34) and thus “the political potential of this critique, if there is any, would be to subvert those norms and open the human to radical rearticulations of humanness” (34).

In sum, narrating dispossession provides new forms of resistance, enabled by the performative in dispossession itself. Although Butler and Athanasiou refer to public protest ‘on the streets’ more than to other forms of resistance, “sometimes a performative politics seeks to bring a new situation into being, or to mobilize a certain set of effects”, Butler ascertains, “through language or through other forms of media” (*Dispossession* 102). The main question to be addressed in the chapters to follow is:

- How do the narrators perform their dispossession in *testimonio* via the means of other multimodal affordances of the YouTube video to give political meaning and give shape to resistance to their narrative?

## Chapter 5

### VISUAL DISPOSSESSION(S) AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE PERFORMATIVE:

#### MOVING IMAGE

#### **1. Introduction: Face-to-Face *Testimonio* – on Screen!**

I would like to begin this chapter with the most literal type of performance – the corporeal performance – a performance which, in digital *testimonios*, is mediatized as a motion image, filmed by a camera and ‘starring’ the narrator of each of the eight *testimonios*. Quite literally, as Benmayor claims for the digital *testimonio*, in motion image, “the invisible becomes visible” (*Digital Testimonio* 523). The sheer visibility and presence of the undocumented ‘body’ enabled and mediated through film gives a literal sense to the act of ‘coming out of the shadows’ that the undocumented narrators undertake. The undocumented body – narrator and ‘actor’ in one – *performs* his/her dispossession on the screen.

As the major focus of socio-technological affordances on YouTube lies on the moving image of the video clip; this aspect also represents the first body of analysis.<sup>98</sup> At the same time, this part of the analysis is also the primary one, as moving images are used most of the time in all digital *testimonios*, in combination with their original soundtrack (actual voice and but also voiceover). The subsequent two chapters narrow down the film analysis to the elements that further constitute the individual narrators’ performances. While in all narratives, the creation of meaning in speech is prominent, chapter 7 also addresses static pictures and written language in their multimodal and intermedial combination. With reference to this, Wildfeuer defines any film’s textuality as the “textual logic operating within the film”, made visible through “structural composition and the resulting coherence” (6). The moving image, though, is the tissue that connects all other modes. For this, “the pattern of *time* plays a central role in film, since the filmic content unfolds in temporal succession and, at the same time, the film as a medium is played linearly in *narrative time*”, according to Wildfeuer (12), and “spatial information” is rather “often additionally provided, for example visually described in the depiction of the setting or as inserts giving concrete locations” (ibid).

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<sup>98</sup> It needs to be stressed that the analysis follows the media logic of YouTube videos and their socio-technological, hence, semiotic idiosyncrasies and hence not ‘classical’ film analysis.

In the narratives chosen for this study, the focus of the visual (moving image) lies on the body of the narrator, which is mostly filmed in an eye-level medium shot or a (medium) close-up. It is the *movement* and positioning of the narrator's body in the video's framed space which creates much of the meaning. This movement needs to be evaluated with regard to the sound to which the body moves – or does *not* move. Thus, meaning is created in accordance with the logic of time and its verbal sound: the original soundtrack or a 'voice from the off' and non-verbal expressions of sound (noise and music). In very few instances does orality stand by itself, in combination with a simple black screen. There is an urgent need for the visual image to literally *fill* every second of the video clip, a condition crucial to the textual logic of film that seems to be transferrable to video clips on YouTube as well.

There are great differences with regard to form and content of meaning making in the different genres in which moving images are used. The difference between television and cinema is only one example.<sup>99</sup> The "visual dimension of moving images", to name a commonality, adds "layers of expression and evidence as it captures human interaction and settings" (Sipe 379). If we consider this a valid argument, how is truth created through the visual? Do the moving pictures capture events "that take place independently of the camera", implying a sense of truth, or fictional in the sense that they are "staged to be filmed" (*ibid*)?

Considering these questions, Hübler reminds us that "the presence of a TV camera will have an impact on the narrative performance", as "the narrative will show particular features of entertainment and specific rhetorical elements as regards not only the verbal, but also the nonverbal, i.e., the prosodic and kinesic/gestural, modes" (40). Since the distinction between 'staged' and 'not staged' moving image material is not assessable, the performative lens views all performances of the self as either 'learned' (performativity) or explicitly staged (performance), uniting the unconscious with the conscious performances. Personal narrative, as Langellier and Peterson confirm, has become the site for performance (cf. 152). Likewise, due to the exclusive focus upon the narrator's body and speech in the videos, digital *testimonios* create their meaning in corporeal and vocal performance. To Benmayor, the production of a *testimonio* incorporates a revised and performed process of creation: "We

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<sup>99</sup> The greatest difference is, perhaps, that "film [moves] toward fantasy, television toward reality", Ryan argues (*Moving Pictures* 199).

understood our stories”, she explains, “to be *testimonios* because they were the result of an oral process of telling, recording, and bearing witness to each other’s life stories” (*Digital Testimonio* 507). Thus, the performances of dispossession connected to undocumented status gain their major focus in the creation of meaning in these narratives that can constitute acts of resistance. Faye Ginsburg sees great potential in the development of “indigenous” film productions,<sup>100</sup> as she points out that “the camera might be put in the hands of those who had historically been objects of the anthropological gaze” (*Indigenous* 566).

Gestures, for instance, play an important part in this performance through the movement of the narrator’s body in the moving image of the video. Like the moving image, gestures generally combine the logics of time and space. As Kress explains, a gesture is “realized as a sequence in time of the movement of arms, hands, head, and facial features, as well as of their simultaneous display against the stable *spatial* frame of the upper part of the torso” (*What is mode?* 56). According to Mittell, “watching a narrative is an active ongoing process of comprehension, as views make and revise cognitive hypotheses and assumptions to create their own version of the storyworld” (170). A great contribution to the creation of personal views is the way the narrators use their hands, first of all, which “may convey where they are standing vis-à-vis the event they are narrating”, Cassell and McNeill argue. Quite in contrast to speech, “the identification of kinesic gestures does not usually cause serious problems”, Hübler points out. Vocal features are less easy to interpret, he further argues, “because man’s auditory capacities lag behind the visual, at least in our Western culture” (47).

Herman identifies different “functions of speech-accompanying gestures used in narrative discourse”, differentiating between “*gesticulations*” and “*emblems*”, for instance (*Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 87-88, *emphasis given*). While all modes, as we have seen, essentially bear three key meta-functions – the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual – Hübler adds that gestures, in particular, either add a “supportive” function to the “corresponding verbal expression”, or a “complementary” one (46). Gestures have been classified into two types. First, there are those gestures

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<sup>100</sup> I understand ‘indigenous’, here, as a more incorporating term that defines as not exclusively the ‘First Peoples’ – “original inhabitants of areas later colonized by settler states” (Ginsburg, *Indigenous* 582) – but also as peoples in dispossession, as undocumented immigrants. I ascribe this freedom to the legal ‘homelessness’ that the latter experience in the United States, which questions decisions of the ‘right to a home’ (cf. Arendt) altogether.

that imitate verbal speech items or rhythm, such as emblems, which “have fixed meanings, similar to words” (Hübler 45) or beats, which are “gestures that index discourse structures” (Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 45).<sup>101</sup> The second type of gestures derives its meaning from its interaction with verbal means – the “interactional gesture space”, as Herman names it (*Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 89). Among this category we find iconics, metaphors, and abstract pointing.

Iconics are “gestures that depict narrative action” (Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 45), or highlight “pictorially some selected aspect of a concrete content item (verbally expressed)” (Hübler 45; see also Herman, *Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 89; Cassell and McNeill 114-115). An important aspect of iconics is that they not only reveal the “speakers’ memory image of an event but also their point of view toward it – whether they are participating as a character or observing the actions of another” (Cassell and McNeill 115). Iconics, therefore, address the issue of who is speaking or who is being mimicked. Metaphorics, in contrast, are “gestures that display the vehicle of a metaphor inherent to language, such as mimicking the transfer of a solid object to announce the transmission of a story” (Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 45). Moreover, they pictorially highlight abstract concepts, “metaphorizing some aspect of such a concept in concrete terms” (Hübler 45; see also Herman, *Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 89). In the multiple forms of metaphoric gestures, “space, shape, and movement all take on metaphoric value” (Cassell and McNeill 116). Finally, ‘abstract pointing’ or ‘deictics’ is a type of gesture referring to the narrator’s pointing to an object that is part of the story in the room. By means of abstract pointing, narrative “crucially mediate[s] between spaces and places”, “saturating with lived experience what would otherwise remain an abstract spatial network of objects, sites, zones, and regions” (*Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 88). As indicated by this definition, abstract pointing can also locate entities in an “imaginary space” (Hübler 46).

However, Sipe stresses that verbally narrated content gains a primary status in the construction of the meaning of the visual image. The moving image that uses spoken language therefore sets the stage for orality: If used, “the spoken word will inevitably have primacy” (385). In contrast to Sipe, Kim argues that “compared to

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<sup>101</sup> Beats are known to be looking rather insignificant: The hand moves with the rhythmical pulsations of speech, accentuating “single propositional elements and mark them as important” (Hübler 46; see also Cassell and McNeill 117-118).

other communication modes, the visual is highly powerful in its communicative competence. As the cliché goes, seeing is believing” (9). In a combination of the two channels, the visual and the auditory, we thus need to note that “orality, at its core, is not purely a concept grounded in sound” but rather that “spoken word is embedded in a setting, a situation, a context”, as they “respond to and refer to their setting and to objects” and “people speak with body language, expression, and tone” (379). Therefore, the analysis of the multimodal use of these core categories in the moving image of the digital *testimonios* sheds light on the different layers of meaning that the stories produce. Accordingly, “if language is a window into the mind, we find that it is not the only one”, Cassell and McNeill stress; “gesture is a second window, or, better, a second eye, and gesture and language together provide something like binocular vision and a new dimension of seeing” (110). Likewise, Grishakova and Ryan explain:

Though narrative most certainly originated in oral storytelling – verbal language remaining by far the most powerful mode of signification for the representation of what makes a story a story, namely interactions between humans and between humans and the world – it is safe to assume that it has always relied on the many resources of face-to-face communication: sound, gestures, and facial expressions. From its very beginning, then, narrative performance has been a multimodal phenomenon. (4)

Specific about this type of narration in YouTube videos is, in particular, the fact that the audience, upon which the narrators center his/her gaze – materialized by the camera – becomes the interlocutor, since there is no other partner in this simulated oral storytelling setting. This is an important aspect for oral storytelling, as Cassell and McNeill argue. “There really is, and must be, a listener, since this is also an essential role in the storytelling ‘script’”, they claim (109). Thus, in simulated interaction with a simulated interlocutor that is represented by the camera, performance plays a major role. According to Ryan, “the dynamic construction of face-to-face oral narrative [...] may be called its ‘performantial dimension’” (42). In this dimension, a sense of simulated interaction with the imagined audience comes to the fore in digital media, in particular (cf. Ryan *Digital Media* 330).<sup>102</sup> “Speech”, according to Stöckl, “is accompanied and crucially shaped by what has come to be called the non-

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<sup>102</sup> See section 4.3. of this chapter for a detailed example for simulated communication: Mohammad Abdollahi (2) communicates explicitly with his imagined online audience via the use of props.



verbal mode, i.e. gesture, posture and body language” (11). This distinctive property is reinforced by the corporeal performance visualized through gestures and facial expressions, and intonation, in particular (cf. Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 41).

An idiosyncrasy of the medium of film, as a last aspect in this introduction, is montage – the film’s editing devices. According to Wildfeuer, for instance, “filmic specificities such as montage, or continuity editing”, in addition to the multimodal ensemble, “play a role and affect meaning-making constructions” (3). “These principles”, according to Wildfeuer, “operate not only on the level of one single mode, but in particular across different modes”, which the author calls “*intersemiosis*” (ibid). Due to this, montage will play a role in the analysis of meaning production throughout chapter 5 to 7, but not be analyzed holistically in either of the three chapters. With the advance of the digital video, editing software is easily available (and often free) for users of a computer. Digital video editing devices produce yet another instance of narration in the videos. As they can reduce or stress the film’s message by reducing/ cutting (hence, de-emphasizing) or stressing (through visual effects, montage, or slow-motion) the originally taped material. As the focus of this study lies on the actual performances of the narrators – undocumented youth – the elaboration on film montage is kept to a minimum. However, prominent ‘intrusions’ into the production of meaning by the narrative are further highlighted throughout all chapters of analysis.

In the subsequent chapter, the body and its visualization become central devices for the creation of political meaning. I examine how the face-to-face oral storytelling might be imitated, action and resistance are implied, and dispossession is performed through the bodily and vocal enactment of the core story. The general question posed in all of the chapters of analysis, thus is:

- When do multiple levels of meaning-making occur and what is their semiotic outcome/ the resulting political message communicated in context of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006? Which (multi-)modal affordances do the narrators use and how do they contribute to the performance of the digital *testimonio*?

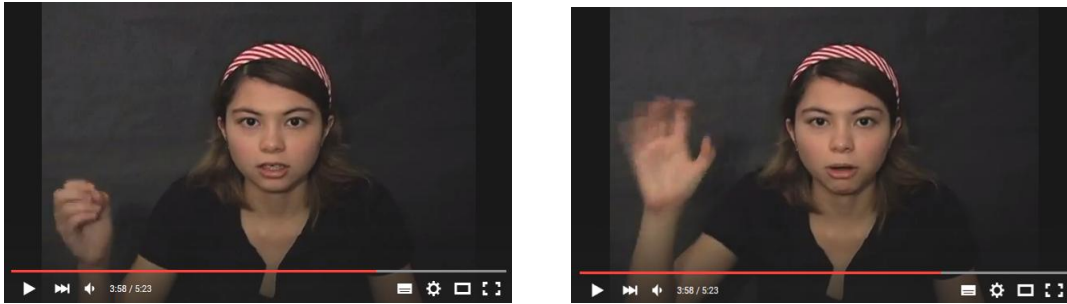
## 2. Visualizing Dispossession

### 2.1. Gestures for Resistance

This section contributes a major element to visual culture that is part of the media logic on YouTube. “Gestural repertory”, in particular, Ryan argues, “enables storytellers to perform an astonishing variety of narrative functions” (*Face-to-Face Narration* 45). One of these is, for instance, that the speaker can move “in and out of the taleworld” easily (ibid). In the digital *testimonios* selected for this investigation, the narrators do this by explicitly using his hands or arms to illustrate (iconics) or represent (metaphorics) a certain action and object or “mimicking action” and “remediating” an abstract action or visual aspect (ibid), or they rely on mimicking speech (emblems).

#### **Stephanie Solis (1): Path to Legalization via Iconics**

Like Angelica Velazquillo (5), Ivette Roman (7), and Luis Maldonado’s (8), Stephanie Solis uses only a small number of gestures in her digital *testimonio*. This is mostly due to the choice of a (medium) close-up to shoot the moving images, rather than representing Stephanie’s personal preferences regarding the use of gestures to support or complement her speech. However, the use of those few gestures in the narrative is highly meaningful. In total, there are three instances in which Stephanie uses gestures. One of them, in particular, highlights the performance of dispossession and frames its rejection through a shift in roles. This happens in a very literal understanding of dispossession: Telling the viewer that she cannot participate in activities for which one needs a form of government identification (which she, of course, does not possess), she uses iconics to represent the imaginary ‘post-it’ she understands to be in all such places that, in some activity or another, require a form of identification to participate, such as banks or travel posters. As the function of a post-it is to remind oneself of something, Stephanie tells us that she is reminded of her undocumented status whenever she passes such as place or signs. Imitating the action of putting a post-it onto the wall, as illustrated in the two figures below, Stephanie performs the dispossession herself.



From left to right:

Figure 4: “S.S. (1)\_Post-it\_1.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 12 July 2015.

Figure 5: “S.S. (1)\_Post-it\_2.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 12 July 2015.

The act of performance carried out by herself re-defines Stephanie’s agency in the matter, as she assumes the role of the one who dispossesses (the role of the post-it in a literal sense, and that of the state who would not hand her government identification). At the same time, from the perspective in which the viewer finds him-/herself, Stephanie expresses a sense of forcefulness as she directs the post-it to ‘us’, facing the camera and her imagined audience directly. By this act, Stephanie passes on the dispossession to somebody else – her audience – inherently becoming the dispossessor herself and hence rejecting the role of the dispossessed that she finds herself in through verbal descriptions.

The second instance in which Stephanie uses iconic gestures in her digital *testimonio* expresses a similar rejection of dispossession. Recounting the paths she went to get legalized and describing how she imagined steps to legalization look like, Stephanie performs the pledge of allegiance (only the gesture, not the text) and the waving a tiny American flag, which she imagines to be those symbolic acts that she would also have to perform in a formal legalization process. Recalling that Butler understands “the construal of the visual image as illocutionary speech” (*Excitable Speech* 65), *performing* legalization this way highlights not only Stephanie’s rightful claim to legalization in the *moment* of the narration but also provides the viewer with an image that reduces the power of this formal process by ‘suggesting’ to the viewer what Stephanie’s legalization might look like.



Figure 6: “S.S. (1)\_Pledge.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 12 July 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 7: “S.S. (1)\_Waving Flag.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 13 July 2015.



Figure 8: “S.S. (1)\_Tiny Flag.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 13 July 2015.

Presumably having internalized how to wave a flag and do the pledge of allegiance from an early age on, Stephanie’s American identity constitutes the production of this identity that seems “‘natural’ through reiterative individual and cultural performances” (Jewitt, *Glossary* 302). Performativity, then, is materialized in this performance. In the massive public protests of undocumented immigrants in 2006-2007, in expression of their alignment with the United States and their sense of national solidarity despite their lack of citizenship, “marchers wore white shirts as a symbol for peace, [...] and carried U.S. flags as a symbol of patriotism and loyalty to this country” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 4) to express their American identity and the home they found in the country. Legalization, early in the year of 2009, also still assumes a greater part of the agenda. Obama’s election had caused a “new push for comprehensive immigration reform”, yet not directly guaranteeing “the passing of legislation” (25). However, legalization was included in the agenda (cf. Pallares, *The Chicago Context* 58) and activists were optimistic that a path to legalization would pass, “arguing that the legalization issue should not be diluted” (51). Consequently, Stephanie’s use of these iconic gestures marks the persistence of a path to legalization predominant in the Movement at that time.

### **Mohammad Abdollahi (2): Coming Out of the Shadows**

Similar to the setting in which Stephanie Solis' (1) digital *testimonio* is recorded, Mohammad Abdollahi's video is also taped in a medium shot that, during one episode of his story of dispossession, most notably changes to a medium close-up. The angle of the camera is a little below eye-level, as if the person taping the video was sitting. The setting and lighting of the video visualizes Mohammad's life 'in the shadows' in very literal terms: The room is dark and contains only few recognizable objects.<sup>103</sup> There is only weak lighting compared to that in Stephanie Solis' video, which makes it impossible to discern Mohammad's gaze and the more refined facial features or expressions.



Figure 9: "M.A. (2)\_Shadows." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 19 July 2015.

The dim lighting and the drawn blinds in the window further denote the time of the day that Mohammad has his digital *testimonio* taped: Nighttime. He verbally confirms this fact when he explains that "it's about Thursday night or Friday morning" (00:00:11-00:00:13). The fact that there is darkness, combined with the awareness that it is 'nighttime' when the video was shot, creates a sense of urgency and emphasizes timing. Indeed, time and day plays an important role for Mohammad's digital *testimonio*. In words, Mohammad confirms this impression, introducing his video with the words that "for the past week-and-a-half or so" the *DreamActivist* had been asking other undocumented youth "to share [their] stories and share [their] videos about 'coming out'". As the organization had been doing that, Mohammad reasons, he "thought it was about time to step up and actually do one" himself (00:00:04-00:00:11). The act of posting his video around this time becomes highly meaningful to the general message of the digital *testimonio*, making use of YouTube's direct distribution affordances. The publishing date on March 19, 2010, together with the timeline for posting coming-out stories 'within the past week-and-

<sup>103</sup> Note the white words on his t-shirt, saying 'I am undocumented'. This 'coming out' in written word is discussed in detail in chapter 7.

a-half” hint at an important day in the Movement’s history: March 10, 2010; the first National Coming Out of the Shadows Event that took place in Chicago, Illinois.

The eventful spring of 2010 was the immediate result of the immigrant spring that had formed in the recent years prior to 2010. Drawing “inspiration from the tactics previously used by gay and lesbian activists”, according to Pérez, “on March 10, 2010, a group of eight undocumented students held a press conference at the Federal Plaza in Chicago to publicly announce their undocumented status” (87). Coming out of the shadows, of course, increased the risk of “deportation and potential separation from their families” but did not hinder undocumented youth from “organizing a series of ‘coming out’ activities across the country to highlight the urgent need for the DREAM Act” in that spring (ibid). In a personal interview, Uriel Sánchez, an undocumented student activist who frequently attended the famous Coming out of the Shadows events in Chicago that would continue during the years after 2010, explains:

2010 certainly had a sense of urgency. 2011 didn’t have...or 2012...no! 2013 and in late 2012 didn’t have that large sense of urgency. I think, fundamentally, that’s what it is. That urgency; or that sense of urgency or pressure on ourselves. You know, like, almost being, I think, pushed to the wall to decide and choose. Like, you’re being pushed to a wall and somebody is making you decide.

Uriel describes the move out of the shadows as a counter reaction to internal and external pressure that undocumented status causes in immigrants. In a different interview, Marcela Hernandez, who came to Chicago from California, adds that she observed many youths taking center stage in the coming out events, but not that many older undocumented immigrants: “We see that in the ‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ in Chicago, right? The first one that they had was in 2010 – most of us youth, you know, they were all youth. Most of them had or were in college, were educated, or had their degrees”. Pérez confirms in his book that the nation observed a special role that youth assumed in these events, arguing that “increasingly, undocumented student activists have moved to the forefront of these efforts” (85). He further summarizes the overall political goal of these events: “In an unprecedented demonstration of their leadership, political savvy, and organizational skills,” he finds, “undocumented student activists and their allies responded with a well-coordinated

youth-led national movement to pressure Congress and the president to pass the DREAM Act” (ibid).

By requesting his audience to post coming-out videos – implying that they are undocumented immigrant youths as well – Mohammad emphasizes the importance of activism in the offline Movement and explicitly connects his digital *testimonio* to other acts of coming out of the shadows, such as those in March of 2010.

### The ‘Beat’ of the Movement



From left to right:

Figure 10: “M.A. (2)\_Beat.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 18 July 2015.

Figure 11: “M.A. (2)\_No Beat.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 18 July 2015.

A central feature that distinguishes Mohammad’s narrative from Stephanie’s, however, is the use of gestures. While Stephanie’s video displays a few selective iconics, Mohammad frequently uses very large beats that also produce a clapping sound. The span of his arms is so large that the cameraman<sup>104</sup> needs to zoom out in order to capture the whole movement of Mohammad’s body, instead of simply cutting the hands off from the picture. Because of a rapid zooming *out*, the viewer is actually signaled to ‘keep a distance’, in striking contrast to the other video narratives, which primarily zoom in on people’s faces, mostly at times when they would get very emotional and wrought up in their personal conflict. This move attributes a sense of power to Mohammad, reinforced further by his slightly higher angle over the camera. Also, the frequently moving beats give Mohammad’s rather rapid and de-emphasized words more emphasis, connoting a sense of urgency and forcefulness. The beats dominate the whole video more than the setting or words he pronounces, establishing a hierarchy between the two modes that emphasize visual movement.

The power inscribed in Mohammad’s visual performance enhances the leading role he seems to enjoy in his offline organization, *DreamActivist*. After introducing himself, Mohammad ‘cheers’ to another member of the organization, for posting

<sup>104</sup> We hear the cameraman laugh a little towards the end of the video, revealing him as a man.

a video online that deals with explicit detail discussed in the organization.<sup>105</sup> In this moment, as the following screenshot shows, his gesture performs the ‘act of cheering’ in combination with an additional verbal exclamation (“wohoo!”). The iconic gesture fully exploits its potential to express the speaker’s point of view (cf. Cassell and McNeill 115), as well as his power.



Figure 12: “M.A. (2)\_Cheering.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 18 July 2015.

Cheering for another member’s efforts in the name of the whole organization puts Mohammad in an executive position. Likewise, towards the end of the narrative he thanks people, especially those in the organization, for helping him and supporting him, claiming that this was what helped him “get through it the whole time”, speaking *for* the other organizational members as well (00:04:42). The consequential effect of this performance of leadership in his offline organization leads to an empowerment over his imagined audience.

### **The Acceptance Letter**

At the beginning of Mohammad Abdollahi’s performance of his story of dispossession, the camera zooms in on him for the first time, emphasizing that the story of dispossession needs to be told in ‘another frame’ than the details that embed this narrative episode. Further, one could argue that the zoom is a meaningful instance indicating that affective dimensions need to be shown and telling the viewer that the cameraman is aware of the effects that dispossession has on an undocumented youth. It is very likely, thus, that Mohammad had his video recorded by another undocumented youth and/or youth activist.

Mohammad’s (2) story of dispossession takes place in the registrar’s office at Eastern Michigan University. He performs this story in the most literal sense possible: He uses his left hand to illustrate the acceptance letter of the university, keeping this hand up most of the time during this performance. With his other hand and his

<sup>105</sup> More specific detail is discussed in chapter 6.



glances, he performs the actions happening to that letter. This way, he shows to us how he got rejected at the university because they had not noticed he was undocumented at first, and literally took his acceptance letter away from him. Mohammad enacts his thoughts verbally and the situation literally, with the help of his hands.



Figure 13: “M.A. (2)\_Acceptance Letter.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 19 July 2015.

This performative act symbolizes the happenings in the office, giving the viewer a visual of Mohammad holding an acceptance letter from a university in his hands. As Mohammad is undocumented, the situation he performs is unreal, yet, becomes a reality through his performance. Moreover, the viewer becomes witness to the injustice that Mohammad experienced, which closely speaks to the tradition of the *testimonio*, which we recall is “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555). Through the vivid reenactment of the moment his acceptance letter was taken away from him, Mohammad stresses the injustice with which he was treated as an undocumented student, appealing to the viewer’s moral understanding, who is, through the performance, turned into a witness of the crime. Becoming a witness, the viewer, stirred by Mohammed’s storytelling technique, feels the imperative to act in defense of the victim. The inherent message, thus, is to help Mohammad get into university.

A gesture that bears important meaning with regard to Mohammad’s identity is metaphoric arm movement towards the beginning of his digital *testimonio*. The introduction of Mohammad’s immigration background seems to be of less importance in the beginning of Mohammad’s story of dispossession. “My parents emigrated here from Iran...which is on the other side of the world” (00:00:29-00:00:34), he claims, visually describing the location of his country of origin through a metaphoric gesture: He elevates his right arm and quickly moves it far to his right – out of the camera frame and thus the viewer’s vision, as if portraying an airplane or other

really fast object just to cross the ocean. This move implies that it does not really matter where Iran lies on the world's map, as Mohammad neither takes the time to explain it nor show it to the audience in any way.



Figure 14: “M.A. (2)\_Iran.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 20 July 2015.

The insignificance that Mohammad ascribes to his origins is reflected throughout the narrative. Towards the end of the narrative, Mohammad explains that he has no idea where to get the education that was denied to him in the United States through the failing of the DREAM Act. Without changing his vocal or non-verbal features of narration, he claims that he realized: “The ‘DREAM Act’ wasn’t a reality and so ‘What do I do? Do I leave?’. Ehm, and so I realized that, you know, I couldn’t...I couldn’t go back to Iran because I’m also gay. And so going back to Iran was just not a reality for me” (00:03:25-00:03:44). Mohammad subordinates his homosexuality to a sub-clause, spoken off-handedly. Given the fact that homosexuality is treated differently in Iran, and that he is finding himself in multiple discriminatory statuses, this monotonous style of narration is remarkable.

The most likely reason for this performance lies in the format of YouTube videos: According to Kavoori, YouTube only provides a “limited frame for issues of context, intent and, more critically, identity and culture” (12), as YouTube viewers, for instance, are ‘used’ to watching only short videos. “Watching YouTube”, he explains, “is akin to scanning and sorting through a magazine catalog: [...] the stories [...] are skimmed through, with attention resting briefly on one or more items” (8). According to the logic of YouTube, therefore, it might be difficult for Mohammad to elaborate on his double state of oppression – being gay and undocumented – due to the strict time frame that he must stick to in order to keep the viewer’s attention. A second reason lies in the organizational background itself. According to Wetherell, what it means to be, for instance, homosexual and Latin@ (or Arab) strongly “depends on how these social categorizations are worked through some of the other di-

chotomous identities dominating local situations and institutions” (18-19). It is possible, then, that being homosexual is an identity category that is widely accepted and positively attributed within the Immigrant Rights youth Movement. Being dispossessed by others due to one’s homosexuality would then seem to be less pressing than the dispossession that undocumented status causes.

I personally posed the question of how undocumented status and homosexual identity are connected for an undocumented and homosexual youth activist from Chicago, Antonio Gutiérrez. The fact that he found that both identities are a “double the oppression in individuals” verbalizes “intersectional thinking”, which offers “a critique of monolithic analyses in terms of social categories” (Wetherell 18). Intersectionality is “grounded”, primarily in the understanding that “experiences and political struggles” are “not neatly contained or defined by [...] singular identities” (ibid). However, Antonio also remarks that coming out as undocumented is “even more nerve-wracking than coming out as being gay”, which indicates that although both identities are potentially triggers to dispossession by others, undocumented status weighs more in the process of coming out within a digital *testimonio*. In Mohammad’s case, the situation is even more complicated, as he reasons his stay in the U.S. with the identity that he ascribes less room to in his digital *testimonio*; his gay identity. “Although the exclusion of gay foreigners was officially dropped in 1990,” Patton argues, “subsequent legal activism was required to include homosexual persecution as a rationale for asylum” (364). Having this possibility, hence, of requesting asylum due to his homosexuality, Mohammad’s *testimonio* instead focuses on fighting for the DREAM Act, emphasizing his identity as an undocumented student in the Movement. Although obtaining less weight in this *testimonio*, nevertheless, “in the scene of subjectivation”, Athanasiou reminds us, “desire and the law are inextricably intertwined” and, thus, “in this performative intertwinement, gender and sexual categories, identities, and fantasies are reconstituted and reinvented in unforeseen ways” (45).

### **Carlos Roa (3): ‘Shooting Down’ Dreams**

After introducing himself and recounting his family’s immigration history (see chapter 7 for detail), Carlos Roa (3) narrates his story of dispossession (00:00:56-00:01:27). Due to his undocumented status, Carlos Roa is dispossessed of the right to

get a higher education or start a military career.<sup>106</sup> The fact that Carlos is not admitted to the military due to his undocumented status shows how undocumented youth are dispossessed of not only citizenship benefits and rights but also excluded from the whole concept of citizenship including the citizen's duties. Since joining the military is optional in the United States, Carlos offers a deep sense of patriotism which underlines his sense of belonging to the United States as a home. Carlos talks about the fact that he feels there is a "shooting down people's dreams", not specifically saying *who* is doing that, using the pronoun "you" as a generalization of the 'other' (00:01:21). It is apparent, however, that Carlos is actually accusing the U.S. legislation of excluding him – those, he would, technically, 'kill for'.

The first half of this roughly 30 second-long episode is filmed in a medium close-up. Then, the episode is cut and what follows is a sequence filmed in the close-up. More drastic is the change from the close-up to the medium shot, which enables the viewer to see Carlos' gestures. The hand gesture he makes translates how his dreams are 'shot down' – destroyed – into a metaphoric gesture: Carlos lifts his right arm, forms a fist and lets his fist dash into his left hand, causing a loud clapping noise.



From left to right:

Figure 15: "C.R. (3)\_Shooting Down 1." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 16: "C.R. (3)\_Shooting Down 2." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.

This gesture (combined with the sound it creates) becomes very meaningful, as its performance expresses the violence of the dispossession which Carlos (and other

<sup>106</sup> The legal situation changed remarkably since the publication of Carlos' digital *testimonio*. Not only might Carlos be eligible for the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) but also might the DACA open up a path to the military for him. Since 25 September 2015, "undocumented young people who have been granted deportation deferrals by the Obama administration" are "eligible to apply for the military under a recruitment program for immigrants with special language and medial skills", according to Preston (*Military Path*). Carlos does not specify the state he is from in his narrative. However, the fact that on a picture that he uses in his digital narrative, his father wears a 'Florida' sweater and in the description it says that Carlos, by now, attends a college in Miami, one can assume that he lived in the state of Florida during the time of the publication of his digital *testimonio*. A state-level DREAM Act for Florida was signed into law on 9 June 2014 (Lee).

undocumented youth in his situation) experience by this exclusion from the military and ultimately from the nation. Thus, Carlos metaphorically assumes the ‘forcefulness’ with which he is dispossessed and transforms it into his own means of power.

What follows is a moral judgment by means of which Carlos actively fights against his dispossession. Again, Carlos uses his bodily presence and the explicitness of gesture to support his spoken utterance. Through the following emblem, however, Carlos produces an additional meaning that conveys very clear cultural meaning:



Figure 17: “C.R. (3)\_That’s Bad.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Lifting the index finger and moving his hand while keeping his finger lifted connotes a sense of rejection and denial, as well as powerful resentment. This meaning supports his verbal exclamation that the destruction of people’s dreams is “bad” (00:01:24). The media logic of YouTube is not of little importance in this act, as ‘vlogging’ (video blogging) on YouTube is also part of the production of moral judgment and values in our culture. “The media hold the key to the public sphere and can have a major influence on public opinion formation”, Esser and Strömbäck argue (*Mediatization* 4). Since Carlos does not name his offenders, the scolding symbolized by the finger assumes a function similar to the inter-personal in personal interaction – particularly because Carlos directly looks into the camera when he performs this gesture. Using emblems that convey value judgment, in this case, directly addresses viewers and urges them to respond to Carlos’ testimony.

The connection of dispossession to Carlos’ personal ‘dreams’ and to the American Dream is particularly apparent in the last of the episodes, which is introduced with a gray title screen, posing the written question: “What about the American Dream?” (00:02:20). “For all its faults as a concept”, Campbell and Kean argue, the American Dream “does, however, express a dominant American national myth, a fundamental and long-held belief” which confirms “certain qualities and attributes that function to define an ‘American spirit’” (11). The myths that inform the Ameri-

can Dream are highly ideological and subject to change. One constant, however, is “the purpose of the myth [...] to make the world explicable, to magically resolve its problems and contradictions” (ibid). Being posed the question of how he relates to the American Dream, Carlos defines the latter not only in verbal but also in visual terms. His undocumented status – and the undocumented status of his family and ‘all immigrants’ – dispossesses him especially because it prevents him from being a “contributing member to society” (00:02:29-00:02:31). Carlos chooses to express this definition by means of a metaphoric gesture, which creates powerful meaning for his digital *testimonio*. He moves his right arm up to his chest and grabs an imaginary object with his hand to then carry this content in his hand away from his body.



From left to right:

Figure 18: “C.R. (3)\_Contributing Member.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 19: “C.R. (3)\_Contributing Member 2.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 22 July 2015.

Metaphoric gestures highlight abstract concepts, in which “space, shape, and movement all take on metaphoric value” (Cassell and McNeill 116). Through this gestures the viewer understands that Carlos does not specify any concrete contribution but shows that he wants to *personally* contribute to the society, offering ‘content’ that is very ‘close to his heart’. Carlos’ body, thus, becomes a highly performative occasion. Since the logic of dispossession is “interminably mapped onto our bodies”, as Athanasiou has shown (18), Carlos performs how an undocumented immigrant like himself can easily ‘give back’ to society.

### **Mitzy Calderón (6): Insiders and Others**

Mitzy Calderón’s digital *testimonio* is the first (in this selection) that is published after the announcement of the DACA – the Deferred Act for Childhood Arrivals – which creates “a process by which undocumented youth can apply to get a work permit and avoid deportation for at least a two-year period” (Pallares, *Family Activism* 124). Through massive youth activism and campaigns around ‘papers’ (see, for instance, Manuel et al.), by that time, not having ‘papers’ and becoming aware of

that fact through the last high school years – as Mitzy did – is a situation well-known to insiders and followers of the Movement. Manuel et al. even postulate that this was what affected a change in legislation: “The social activism and political organizing led by youth activists”, the authors argue, “added to the pressure that brought the DREAM Act to a vote in 2010 and to President Obama’s June 15, 2012 announcement of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)” (xi).

Although Mitzy’s video is shot in a close-up and the viewer generally cannot see her hands (if not lifted), when Mitzy describes her life with undocumented status, she forms virtual quotation marks with her hands to frame the word ‘papers’ when articulating that she “kinda always knew she didn’t have [her] papers” (00:00:27-00:00:30).



Figure 20: “M.C. (6)\_Papers.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

This emblem imitates written language as it frames the word in space. Through the use of these imaginary quotation marks Mitzy visualizes that the term is politically laden and does not simply mean a couple of sheets of papers but official pieces of identification which become very significant to a person who does not possess them. However, this emblem also marks perspective: Mitzy specifically addresses those who do not know what ‘papers’ mean for an undocumented person and this way saves time to explain the meaning of the term in words. One could argue that this way, she attempts reach out to a wide range of possible viewers. One could also argue, however, that the imaginary quotation marks add a sense of sarcasm to her statement, ridiculing how a ‘piece of paper’ can become so important in one’s life. This reinforces Mitzy’s story of dispossession, which revolves around the aporia she feels due to her status in the last year of high school.

While the announcement of the DACA certainly is a success for undocumented youth, having a work permit does not help much to finance out-of-state tuition all by oneself. Further, in states such as Georgia, as Mitzy shows, the top five universi-

ties of the country even refuse to accept undocumented students altogether (cf. Lozano). Given the nation-wide differences, undocumented students from Georgia like Mitzy are enraged at this exclusion, dispossessing them of options to build a future after high school.

After the introduction to her narrative, Mitzy noticeably leans back, signaling that a new episode in her narrative is about to follow. She then performs her process of self-dispossession – understanding “what it meant to be undocumented” (00:00:37), which led to her feeling that she needed to make her undocumented status as invisible as possible. Therefore, one could argue that by disguising her status and practically lying about it, Mitzy enforces a mutual distrust in people and, thus, cannot sustain close friendships. She recounts that her peers did ask about her personal life, such as, for instance, when she was getting her driver’s license, and that then, she would have to make up excuses, and give them “whatever reason” for fending off the question (00:01:14). In these situations, she was dispossessed by others, stressing the relationality of the dispossessed subject and the ‘other’. The ‘other’, here, “is important in defining the identity of the subject”, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue (*The Key Concepts* 155): In Mitzy’s view, ‘others’ are those who have ‘papers’ and are not like her, undocumented. The moment of telling this experience causes visible annoyance to Mitzy, since in her narrative, she needs to define herself as an ‘other’, differing from the (documented) center and hence re-living her own ‘marginalization’ (cf. *ibid*). Her hand gestures grow wilder, by primarily, on a visible level, fending off the questions of her peers, literally, with her left hand (see Figure 21).



From left to right:

Figure 21: “M.C. (6)\_Fending off Questions *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

Figure 22: “M.C. (6)\_Covering Up Lies.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

At the same time, the viewer is put into the position in which those peers were earlier, when asking these questions that disturbed her. This means, clearly, that



Mitzy is choosing her audience, be it consciously or subconsciously, namely, an audience which raises questions about her identity and against whom Mitzy has to defend herself. The second screenshot shows an even further developed visual gesture of ‘protection’: Mitzy explains that she “always had to cover up her life with lies” (00:01:19-00:01:22). The movement of this metaphoric gesture is the most important contributor to the production of meaning in this sentence: Not only does Mitzy cover up her chest with her hands, she also interchangeably places one hand in front of the other, causing quick up-and-down movements of her hands in front of her chest. Through this, the viewer understands that Mitzy had to ‘cover up’ her undocumented identity frequently in her past. At the same time as performing the past, Mitzy also covers up her identity once more – this time, in the eye of the viewer, shielding herself from and simultaneously othering him/her as ‘documented’. Therefore, not only does the visual enactment of this part of the ‘core story’ emphasize *what* she is saying but also *to whom* she is saying it. As we have seen, Mitzy transforms the viewer of the online video into the people with whom she has had these uncomfortable experiences in the past and hence is given the chance, through the new medium, to vent her emotions and explain herself in retrospect, without running the risk of actually confronting them (her former peers could just as well be among the viewers).

Thirdly, through the use of gestures, Mitzy performs her anger about how she had to hide her undocumented status and cover up her identity with lies. The moving image of her digital *testimonio* allows the narrator, even if in retrospect, to perform her feelings through the use of beats that give her words emphasis, exclaiming repeatedly that she “hated it” (00:01:22-00:01:24).



Figure 23: “M.C. (6)\_Hates Lies.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

The use of beats and a change in facial expressions express vividly the resentment she feels towards covering up her identity. Notably the para-verbal features of the words she articulates do not change significantly, reinforcing the impression that her

voice mismatches the visuals she performs in this scene and thus signal that these feelings are not affecting her *just now*.

## 2.2. Marking the Dispossessed: Abstract Pointing

Abstract Pointing crucially mediate[s] between spaces and places”, “saturating with lived experience what would otherwise remain an abstract spatial network of objects, sites, zones, and regions”, according to Herman (*Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture* 88). Abstract pointing, I argue, metaphorically translates into performative naming that constitutes Butler’s performative dimension of the speech act. For the speaker, this creates a way to perform non-verbal naming while being able express additional information in the act of storytelling.

### Mohammad Abdollahi (2):

Through abstract pointing, Mohammad translates the virtual space of the YouTube video – the “imaginary space” (Hübler 46) – into an abstract space in which he interacts with his audience. Through his slightly elevated position, he establishes a clear hierarchy between himself and his ‘wider’ audience, as the second screenshot shows.



From left to right:

Figure 24: “M.A. (2)\_Me.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 18 July 2015.

Figure 25: “M.A. (2)\_You.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 18 July 2015.

Introducing the DREAM Act that again was up for a vote shortly after his experience of dispossession in 2007 (having been around for at least six years at that time), Mohammad directly addresses his imagined audience (see Figure 25) by gesturing towards the camera and saying: “And I’m sure that all of you guys are familiar with the ‘DREAM Act’ or else you wouldn’t be looking at this video right now” (00:03:11-00:03:15). This statement not only saves him time to explain the meaning of the DREAM Act once more, the viewer also feels directly ‘pointed at’ and, literally, ‘put on the spot’, if he/she does not know about the political implications of the DREAM Act.

By pointing at himself, Mohammad victimizes his body; a process for which those politicians rejecting the DREAM Act could be accountable. By pointing at himself, he connects his personal story of dispossession to the DREAM Act, personalizing this political decision by accusing the “44 senators [who] decided that [he] didn’t deserve a chance to go to college” of personally rejecting him (00:03:17-00:03:22). While saying this, his fingers *repeatedly* point to himself (see Figure 24). Through this motion, Mohammed stresses the active and repeated denial of his apparently only chance to receive college education (the DREAM Act), which had been debated since 2001 and repeatedly failed.

### **Carlos Roa (3): Speaking for the All**

Returning to the myth of the American Dream that Carlos refers to in the last episode, he argues that the United States “has prided itself on” the possibility to “change this country for the better” and that “at the turn of this century we saw how immigrants...em...you know, changed this nation for the better of Irish, of Polish, of Italian descent”, then providing the connecting link to himself and his family, arguing that “we are no different than the immigrants from the past” (00:02:35-00:03:01). It is the human ‘merit’ which immigrants have ‘contributed’ to the nation that Carlos underlines heavily with this statement. While the verbal content of this episode is dominant, Carlos actively *names* ‘undocumented immigrants’ as ‘those like him’ with abstract pointing to himself.



Figure 26: “C.R. (3)\_We.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Since the viewer has been introduced to Carlos’ ideals and dreams, he/she associates his story with that of ‘all other immigrants’. Through Carlos’ performance of ‘the’ undocumented immigrant identity which, as he stresses, has been the same for centuries, he proposes a homogenized idea of immigrants – undocumented and legal alike. This way, Carlos’ *testimonio* assumes a ‘voice for all’, one could argue. However, the audiovisual format complicates the understanding of the ‘voice for all’ dra-

matically: Carlos' digital *testimonio* on YouTube personalizes his 'voice for all' by not only 'speaking' for other immigrants but also by performing visual associations with identity categories. Most prominent is Carlos' performance of gender in the combination of the verbal and the visual. While Judith Butler strictly disconnects corporeality and cultural frameworks (cf. Jagger 78; Butler, *Gender Trouble* 140), "denaturalizing gender" and avoiding "biological determinism" (Jagger 2), Carlos' verbal performances of masculinity appear quite gendered: As seen above, Carlos performs a version of masculinity that is based on the understanding of the desire of the patriotic male American to go to the army and serve his country; contributing to society. His verbal performance of strength and devotion is confirmed by his outer looks. Further, the shortly trimmed hair in particular visualizes this image of masculinity. Abstract pointing, thus, not only speaks for all other immigrants but also visualizes them, laying the grounds for stereotypes and generalizations.

### **Mitzy Calderón (6): Racial Exclusion and Abstract Pointing**

Mitzy Calderón performs her story of dispossession by performing to us, the viewer, what the counselor said to her. She raises her left hand and displays her whole palm to illustrate that the latter could offer only 'limited help' with applying to colleges which do not require for students to provide social security numbers in order to be accepted.<sup>107</sup>



Figure 27: "M.C. (6)\_Performing Counselor." *YouTube*. 2012. Author's screenshot. 28 July 2015.

Through this performance, the viewer experiences Mitzy's dispossession through her eyes, enabling viewers to understand her political statements. Realizing that she would have to pay out-of-state-tuition in order to attend college at all, Mitzy shakes her head, folds her arms in protest, and explains that it "was definitely not an option for [her]". Without explaining to whom she actually exactly refers, she then gives the

<sup>107</sup> Other types of gestures are included in this discussion of abstract pointing in order to correctly grasp the context in which Mitzy uses the latter.

following reason for her rejection of paying that tuition: “We are treated as international students” (00:02:46-00:02:49).



From left to right:

Figure 28: “M.C. (6)\_International Students.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

Figure 29: “M.C. (6)\_We.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

As one can see in the Figure 28, Mitzy frames the words ‘international students’ with two slow, strong beats. Like typographical tools for written language, these beats underline the verbal utterance and give it emphasis; even while transmitting her disapproval. Secondly, Mitzy marks herself with abstract pointing as she talks about herself and undocumented students as ‘we’. This gesture illustrates to the viewer that the ways she looks, acts, behaves, thinks and talks resemble ways of all other undocumented students. The visuals therefore draw a representative picture for the viewer of what an undocumented student really is, instead of leaving it up to the viewer’s imagination. This performance is automatically transferred to that of all other immigrants in her situation. This might eliminate, on the one hand, prejudices and stereotypes that unaffiliated viewers could have, but it also might create new ones. At the same time, her performance establishes a binary between herself (as representative of undocumented students) and ‘internationals’. As Mitzy rebuffs the ‘option’ of attending university as an ‘international’, she distances herself from her immigrant background and does this not only for herself, but for all other undocumented students.

In a second step, Mitzy connects this visual performance of ‘the undocumented immigrant’, signified through abstract pointing, to racial discrimination. She exclaims angrily that she should be allowed to attend an American university, as she considers herself no different from any other American, except for the fact that she is “not white”, does not have “blue eyes” and does not have “a damn social” (00:03:19-00:03:23). Here, as Paul Gilroy stresses, race is “an analytical category” that “refers investigation to the power that collective identities acquire by means of their roots in tradition” (418). Accordingly, Mitzy connects racial discrimination (as a woman of

Mexican origin) with her dispossession (in Butler and Athanasiou's second, literal sense) as an undocumented immigrant who does not possess a social security number and is hence excluded from citizenship rights, highlighting the intersectional character inherent in her performance – and hence protest – of dispossession.

As Elam and Elam point out, race “must always be considered as a shifting variable among many” (191), highlighting its intersectional character. Therefore, “race is salient at different moments in relation to class privilege, social position, gender, sexual orientation, nation, and so on” (ibid). Athanasiou, too, argues that “we have to turn to the structure of dispossession that organizes contemporaneous forms of colonialism, slavery, racial and gender violence” (26). To Mitzy, the exclusion from Georgia universities connects to racial discrimination, equating it with – in Athanasiou's words – “subjectifying and simultaneously desubjectifying and dispossessing violence” (27). Mitzy's equation makes sense since quite literally, “the logic of dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place, through normative matrices but also through situated practices of raciality, gender, sexuality, intimacy, able-bodiedness, economy, and citizenship” (18).

Within this understanding of the performance of racial dispossession through the use of verbal utterances and gestures such as abstract pointing in Mitzy's digital *testimonio*, we should also turn to another instance in which she explicitly performs racial exclusion for the audience. She establishes this connection verbally through reasoning that she could expect only little help from her supervisor due to the fact that “most of them [the other students] were white” (00:02:22). Here she not only reduces undocumented students to a ‘non-white’ race but depicts United States citizens as whites exclusively. Thus, she excludes white undocumented immigrants from continents such as Europe or Oceania. This equation, therefore, produces a racial binary which she visually performs to the viewer, narrowing down the representative character of her digital *testimonio* significantly as she defines herself as belonging to the racially dispossessed and dominated group. According to Gianettoni and Roux, Mitzy thus performs “the hierarchy” between the “dominant individuals” (“men, Whites, nationals”) who control the process of inventing ‘Others’ and “the dominated groups generated by this process” (“women, Blacks, non-nationals”) (375). Seeing herself belonging to that latter group, she – in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's words – “gains a sense of [...] her identity as somehow ‘other’, dependent” (*Key Concepts*

156) but at the same time refutes this being by claiming that she is “not less of an American than anybody else” (00:03:23-00:03:26). At this thought, she smiles and glances up to the ceiling, which creates the impression of her being at a remote place, which calls upon the viewer to re-consider his mindset on Mitzy’s identity.



Figure 30: “M.C. (6)\_Far Away.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

Indeed, the moving image portrays Mitzy as liberated when making her claim. Through this, Mitzy *addresses* and *responds* (cf. Athanasiou 133) to the violence of dispossession in her performance – an act which Athanasiou refers to as “mediated as it may be by the unfixable and incalculable performative forces of language” (ibid). However, when criticizing the need for a social security number as the prerequisite for attending university, it is not merely language that constitutes the performance of her resistance.



Figure 31: “M.C. (6)\_Magic Number.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

The ‘social’, as she terms it, becomes a human characteristic, far from its material essence, but rather something that you either possess or not, just as ‘blue eyes’ determined by a human body’s genetic code. Forming a small object in her left hand, Mitzy belittles the social security number visually, reminding us of a ‘gene’ or function that a human being either possesses or does not, but at the same time carries it in her hand metaphorically, thus, *possesses* it. Her eyes are squeezed together, her mouth slightly opened, and her head moved in the direction of the camera as she exclaims that “we might have everything that they’re asking for, but, you know, we don’t have that magic number” (00:04:59-00:05:05). The ‘automatic denial’ on the

basis of this number, to Mitzy, is “a modern way of segregation” (00:05:11). Here, she enters a civil rights discourse that highlighted discrimination as materialized and ‘mapped’ onto the body of the discriminated (cf. Athanasiou 18). The preceding abstract pointing, in this context, fortifies her concluding statement that not having a social security number “does not make [her] less of an American as anybody else” (00:03:22-00:03:26), speaking for all undocumented immigrants at the same time. In combination with the visualization of the number through her metaphoric gesture, Mitzy exposes the arbitrary nature of the number and projects racist dispossession on those universities in Georgia that ban undocumented students from attending altogether *merely* due to their status. Mitzy repeats the gesture whenever she speaks about ‘legal status’ or the ‘social security number’, as we see in the final screenshots, which serves a textual function that reinforces her logic.



From left to right:

Figure 32: “M.C. (6)\_Legal Status.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

Figure 33: “M.C. (6)\_Little Box.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 28 July 2015.

### 3. Facial Expressions: Personal Affect and Resistance to Dispossession

This section explores what happens when the body, which becomes, in Butler’s terms, ‘a turbulent performative occasion’ and, at the same time, the visual frame of the narrative, is reduced to no more than the narrator’s face. In the following sequences, the narrators are shown in an eye-level medium-close-up shot, focusing on the narrators’ faces, not even showing any other expressive body parts such as the hands. Dispossession, here, can be performed particularly well as a structure of feeling, expressed through the change in facial features. This feature reinforces the personalization that YouTube video clips integrate into their logic. As seen earlier, in Western culture, we tend to interpret non-verbal expressions and the emotions behind them more easily than those same expressions produced by voice; facial expressions are simple devices for making meaning. Therefore, emotions and the expression

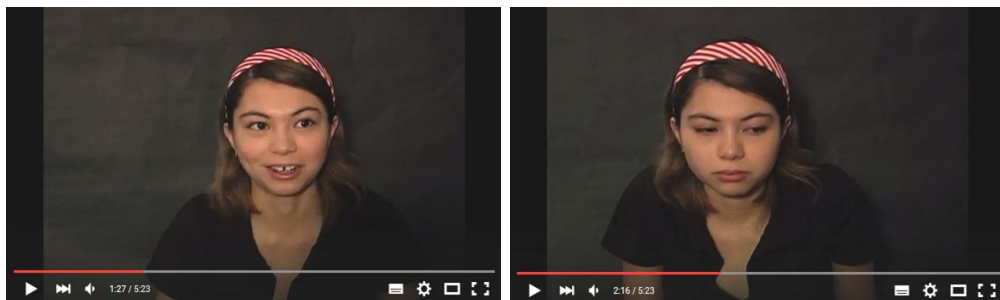


thereof are used to mark the affect of dispossession moments on undocumented youth. This is not to say, however, that all facial expressions are deliberately performed. Natural facial expressions occur with the words we say, and hence create a trigger for interaction, as we are usually prone to react to changes in emotions.

### 3.1. Narrative Time and Personal Affect

#### **Stephanie Solis (1): Blame and Shame**

Stephanie's *testimonio*, narrated in her quiet voice, illustrates particularly well the emotional affect that dispossession causes and makes visible in moving images. In her digital *testimonio*, emotions are expressed through facial structures at particular points in the narrative: The second part of her story of dispossession, like the first, is told in an interview-like (staged) setting with a simple dark background. The color of the background sets the mood for both of these narrative episodes: The darkness underscores the seriousness and tragedy of the situation in which Stephanie finds herself. Her facial expressions, however, mark her emotions in only a few of the scenes, and become visible through the passing of narrative time.



From left to right:

Figure 34: "S.S. (1)\_About Father." *YouTube*. 2009. Author's screenshot. 11 July 2015.

Figure 35: "S.S. (1)\_Recounts Talk With Mom\_2." *YouTube*. 2009. Author's screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

As the screenshots above demonstrate, the verbal narrative changed its topic and the emotions attached. In the first image, we can see Stephanie narrating her father's immigration story (elements which are full of mythical images such as the American Dream and, hence, optimism),<sup>108</sup> while in the second screenshot shows Stephanie's narration of the moment she was dispossessed of her assumed, American citizenship by her very own mother, and, on a macro level, by the state, realizing that she is denied all the plans she had for her then soon approaching adulthood. The inability to transition into adulthood seems to have been denied solely by the mother, which

<sup>108</sup> See chapter 7 for an elaboration on the use of still images to portray the American Dream.

causes a mother-daughter struggle. Stephanie indicates that her father offered her 18 years of education and relative well-being, while her mother, symbolically, takes all this away in one single moment. Her wording, “cannot do that” reduces Stephanie back to a ‘petulant’ child, rather than the grown adult she would like to be. The two narrative events are only separated by a cut, accentuating this transition. “For most students,” Pérez confirms in his study, “learning about their undocumented status and the limitations they would face [i]s devastating” (24). This indeed proves to be so, as we can see in Stephanie’s body language when recounting this experience. Accordingly, her body is less rested, moving constantly. She shakes her head frequently, rolls and blinks her eyes hectically, as if searching for words.

These two screenshots seem to reflect the contrast between Stephanie’s immigrant experiences associated with her mother and her father. This is particularly noticeable in the way she talks about this experience in relation to her mother and the way she talks about her father’s decision to come to the United States illegally, which is, after all, one of the main causes of her struggle. The mother turns out to be the decision-making unit in the household after immigration, while it is the father who decides to move his family away from their homeland in the first place. Yet, the mother seems to feel responsible for the decision and also for revealing this decision to her child. The irony that Stephanie seems to perceive in this situation could also lie in the fact that it is the mother who does the “hemming and hauling...and dodging the question”, not Stephanie herself.

In the very beginning and end of the narrative, we learn that ‘shame’ triggers the behavioral patterns of Stephanie’s mother. In those passages, Stephanie recounts that her family was too shamed to tell her about her status earlier. This feeling is visualized by Stephanie’s gaze in this scene, which is directed towards the floor rather than towards the audience. Hence, without verbally emphasizing the shame that some undocumented families feel, Stephanie conveys the emotion by adapting her facial expressions (consciously or unconsciously) to an expression of shame. The visual image in this scene further contributes to Athanasiou’s claim that “dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies” (18). Shame, as the visuals show, is one of the most painful emotions that undocumented youth have to experience in 2009. Only after the repeated denial of a legislation such as the DREAM Act undocumented youth would appropriate the motto of ‘undocumented, unashamed’ into their political

rhetoric. “Although the label ‘undocumented’ or ‘illegal’ continues to be a source of shame for most students”, more recent legislation has “provided new, more neutral, and non-stigmatized social labels” such as “DREAMers”, Pérez argues (82). It is “these new labels [that] help students not only conceal their stigmatized status but also reinforce their merits as students” (ibid), as some of the narratives published later than Stephanie’s show.<sup>109</sup>

#### **David Ramirez (4): Performing Precariousness**

David Ramirez, who identifies as an undocumented immigrant from Chicago, Illinois, posts his digital *testimonio* only roughly four months before the Illinois DREAM Act passed in August of 2011 (cf. Rusin 6).<sup>110</sup> Clearly identifying with the struggle for the DREAM Act, as it says on his t-shirt (see chapter 7 for a detailed discussion), David’s digital *testimonio* highlights the precarity and urgency that his undocumented status imposes on him. Highlighting this urgency has an important political background, too. Towards the end of 2010, the federal DREAM Act is put up for a vote but fails (Sánchez). In a personal interview, Marcela Hernandez recounts the events of 2010:

And also, you know, a lot of them fought to pass a national ‘DREAM Act’, which would actually allow a pathway to legalization, residency and citizenship. That didn’t pass in 2010, so a lot of states just decided to work on their own ‘DREAM Acts’, which wouldn’t give a pathway to legalization but would allow, you know, to have funding for students that the state would manage. And you know students could apply for that financial aid and actually be able to go to college.

Most important is the general frustration with the failure of the DREAM Act, which dashed the hopes of many people that a federal DREAM Act would ever be passed (cf. Pérez 85). David expresses the difficulty of his situation that becomes the central

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<sup>109</sup> Anguiano distributes the Movement into three phases, of which Stephanie’s digital *testimonio* belongs to the first. “The first phase [...] is characterized by *the exemplar student identity*, which features collective identity formation among DREAMers and early efforts at identifying with the opposition through appeals of hard work. The second phase, *undocumented unafraid*, traces the self-defining efforts and public disclosure efforts featured in efforts to get national visibility for the Movement. The third phase, *unapologetic DREAMer*, features the effrontery of activists who escalate the mobilization efforts by modeling civil disobedience tactic of previous civil rights movements” (77-78). The other two phases are presented by some of the later narratives, as the analysis will show.

<sup>110</sup> Similar to other state DREAM Acts, Rusin reports that the “Illinois Dream Act [...] qualifies eligible, undocumented youth to pay in-state tuition when attending public universities in Illinois, provides trained counselors on college options and resources for undocumented youth, and gives them access to savings programs so that parents can invest and save for their children’s education” (6).

element of his digital *testimonio* visually in different ways. Constantly shifting and moving, David rarely gazes directly into the camera. His eyes are constantly down-cast or wandering through the room. The first shot of the video even shows David staring at the floor (see Figure 36).



From left to right:

Figure 36: “D.R. (4)\_Beginning.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

Figure 37: “D.R. (4)\_Gaze.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

David’s absent gaze makes the viewer feel that the camera is observing David rather than interacting with him. He performs a distant and uneasy self, clearly troubled by some issue and not quite present in the virtual space that the video creates. His stance contrasts starkly with those of the other seven narrators, who seem very alert and eager to give their *testimonio*, wanting “to effect change” quickly and directly in their addressing of their interlocutor (Gugelberger 4). David’s wandering gaze signals a disrupted inter-personal communication, which further breaks with the media logic of YouTube that stresses the direct attention-seeking interaction – enabled through the moving image and sound – with the audience, in order to increase the likeability of the video clip.

Another impression, which the second screenshot conveys, is constant direct or repressed smiling. This is particularly visible in the first episode of the digital narrative until the first cut (00:00:23), in which David introduces biographical data and his undocumented status. The introduction of himself is kept short, however. David is cut off, right after saying that he had just recently come to terms with being “undocumented” – a word after which follows a short pause – and David looks up and smiles at the camera. The video is blended out and captions appear.



Figure 38: “D.R. (4)\_Undocumented.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

The smiling conveys a postmodern, playful awareness on David’s part that his digital *testimonio* is published and viewed by many people on YouTube. The smiling, here, through the stark contrast, performs the uncertainty of what to say exactly about his status. Given the dramatic failing of the federal DREAM Act half a year prior to the production of his video, David might question the effectiveness of fighting for it and coming out of the shadows. David’s smile and distracted gaze appear to be his way of alleviating his anxiety over the precariousness of his status and his unsettling doubts about the value of posting a digital *testimonio* in the cause of the DREAM Act. The second episode (00:00:24-00:01:03), which begins with David brushing over his head as if in thought, confirms this interpretation.



Figure 39: “D.R. (4)\_Beginning 2nd Episode.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

Running his hand through his hair while glancing down to the floor, David expresses his discomfort in telling his personal story for the sake of the campaign he is involved in (see chapter 7 for details).

### **Angelica Velazquillo (5):**

Angelica Velazquillo’s digital *testimonio* is one of those narratives that were published shortly *before* President Obama’s announcement of an executive action on immigration in June 2012: the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals; a success for those students that many trace back to their relentless fight for undocumented students’ rights. Published on 2 March 2012, around major actions of activism such as

nationwide Coming out of the Shadows events around March 10, Angelica's narrative needs to be contextualized in a heated debate and fierce fight among undocumented students. In a personal interview, Antonio Gutiérrez summarizes how he perceived the time before the announcement of DACA:

At that point, the 'DREAM Act' failed, and I was still going through school. [...] Again, it was upsetting. [...] We had been fighting for this for *years* and for them to just not pass it, it was kinda insulting. It was: 'It doesn't matter what all you all do, we're still not gonna do this. You still don't deserve this.' So, I mean, I was very upset, but then the DACA – deferred action – policy passed.

Angelica's digital *testimonio* highlights the intersections of the student-led Movement with a focus on the "own exceptionalism as DREAMers" and a renewed focus on families and the "potential deportability of all the undocumented" which Pallares calls the beginning of "a new relational strategy" (*Family Activism* 123). Angelica does this by using no other core modes than spoken language and the moving image, which are produced together without any further montage devices. This strategy impacts the use of voice, posture, and facial expressions depicted in the moving image, especially since the camera frames the image through close-up shot that excludes the use of Angelica's hands from the sight of the viewer.

In the introduction to her digital *testimonio*, one can perceive subtle differences in attitude through altering facial expressions that mark the sentence about Angelica's received college degree on the one hand and the sentence in which she outs herself as undocumented on the other. As shown in the following screenshots, Angelica smiles and emphatically closes her eyes at the announcement of her degree.



From left to right:

Figure 40: "A.V. (5)\_Education 1." *YouTube*. 2012. Author's screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Figure 41: "A.V. (5)\_Education 2." *YouTube*. 2012. Author's screenshot. 26 July 2015.

The closing of the eyes illustrates as the imaginary 'closing of the chapter of education', implying that she has managed to get her degree without the federal DREAM

Act ever having been passed. Her facial expressions convey the impression that she is very satisfied with what she has achieved. There is no such affirmation in her gaze or a smile when she talks about her undocumented status.



Figure 42: “A.V. (5)\_Status.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

The strong contrast between her facial expressions highlights Angelica’s self-determination as a professional and sets this identity off against the undocumented status. In the first case, then, Angelica enacts the performatively constituted ‘self-determination’ that Athena Athanasiou describes as “the normative discourse of abjected and adjudicated exception [that] is performatively recast into exceptional self-poetics” (65). By claiming that she obtained her degree with a “magna cum laude” in the early introduction to herself, she marks herself as a highly educated and ambitious person. It is clear that the money she must have invested and the trouble she went through to obtain that education actually paid off. Through the emphasis on education, Angelica transmits a sense of *legitimization* of the self and justification for why she is in the country illegally. Generally, her emphasis on immigrating in order to strive and obtain an education speaks to the commonly held emphasis of American exceptionalism, which could be defined as the belief in the U.S.A.’s “unique mission in the world, idealism, high aspirations and sense of destiny” (Mauk and Oakland 2). Emphasizing the ‘worthiness’ of undocumented immigrant students in their campaigns and basing them on exceptionalism is something which is unique to the Movement’s pro-DREAM Act students, in particular. Within the context of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, thus, Angelica’s self-determinism creates a sense of exceptionalism that had already circulated around undocumented youth for a while by the time of the publication of her *testimonio*. Pro-DREAM Act students around the year of 2012 call themselves DREAMers, in particular, and express that they qualify for higher education in every sense. By highlighting that she had already been through that educative towards which so many yet aspire, Angelica now stress-

es that she “cannot work in [her] field” (00:00:22) – a problem that the DACA would solve a few months later (see the analysis of Mitzy Calderón (6), for instance, for further details).

### **Ivette Roman (7):**

The introduction to Ivette Roman’s digital *testimonio* provides the most self-confident image of the whole narrative. Pronouncing that she is undocumented and homosexual, Ivette smiles and nods into the camera, expressing a confidence that these are precisely the categories by which she *wishes* to introduce herself.



Figure 43: “I.R. (7)\_Intro.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Her smile after expressing that she is a lesbian is an act of gender performance confirming an ‘other’ type of identity (outside the norm) – an act that Judith Butler describes as “suggest[ing] that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of ‘the real’ and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization” (*Gender Trouble* 33). We need to consider, however, as Chinn argues with reference to Foucauldian thought, that “sexual identities as we inhabit them today [...] are a product of the interlocking systems of power that form subjectivity” (109). Since performance is crucial to the establishment of gender identity, as we have seen, digital *testimonios* such as Ivette’s provide the grounds for performing the intersectional workings of identity in the youths’ dispossession, which is materialized in the act of narration itself. With reference to Athanasiou, thus, digital *testimonios* counter as they perform “dispossession”, which “as a way of separating people from means of survival, is not only a problem of land deprivation but also a problem of subjective and epistemic violence; or, put another way, a problem of discursive and affective appropriation, with crucially gendered and sexualized implications” (Athanasiou 26). Ivette’s facial expressions change drastically throughout the video, emphasizing the impact of these gendered and sexualized implications inherent in her dispossession.



First, her facial expression changes from confident to sad, as she starts talking about her immigration story and the hardship(s) that she encountered before and upon arrival in the U.S. Her countenance is sad, her mouth downcast and her eyes are diverted away from the camera as she explains that her mother left her and her three brothers in Peru in order to work in the United States.



Figure 44: “I.R. (7)\_Mother Left.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Framing the beginning of the narrative like this, sets the tone for the upcoming story elements and moves the topic of family struggle into the foreground. The viewer immediately apprehends that the relation to her mother is one of the most important topics in Ivette’s life and her narrative. Her physical ability to verbally tell the narrative is, as an effect that fortifies this impression, impeded by emotions – noticeable in hard swallowing, pausing, and an audible clearing of her voice. Since the captions explain indirectly that Ivette had not seen her mother for at least three years – until Ivette’s arrival in the United States – the latter’s childhood must have been powerfully affected by the consequences of transnational motherhood. The latter is a pattern that has occurred more frequently in recent years. Transnational motherhood entails, amongst many other things, leaving the family on its own in the home country, sending money back, and sending for the whole family to migrate to, in this case, the U.S. at a later point (Segal 333). This typical procedure exposes the family to precarious states of separation.

In the United States, mothers from Mexico, as Bacallao and Smokowski demonstrate, enter the labor force, oftentimes, for the first time in their lives, reconfiguring their families into dual-earner households (cf. 62). According to the authors, most families in their study report that “this change took a toll on both the marital relationship and parent-child relationships” (59). Further, the study showed that “family stress seemed to be worsened by the nature of the parents’ work, which was physically exhausting and emotionally stressful” (Bacallao and Smokowski 59; see

also Yoshikawa). Emotional stress, in Ivette's narrative, can be related to her experience of transnational motherhood in her family that directly affected her and might have permanently altered the relationship to her mother. Her sadness, which the facial expressions communicate in this part of the narrative, likely is connected to Ivette's conflict with her mother with regard to 'other' and 'new' forms of identity (such as Ivette's sexual identity), which Ivette performs in the second half of the narrative.

Secondly, her facial expressions change from sad to irritated as she recounts the problems that she faced due to her immigration background as a child in school. She explains that she had language problems and faced cultural differences in the American school system, making her feel "like an outsider" (00:00:42). Shrugging her shoulders, Ivette says that she does not exactly know *why* she did not feel like she belonged, as the following screenshot shows:



Figure 45: "I.R. (7)\_Cheating." *YouTube*. 2013. Author's screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Ivette continues discussing her bullying experiences at school. The emphasis on this part of her personal story signals to the viewer that they are indeed a problem from the past that still affects her, although it is not directly connected to her *undocumented* immigration background.

These experiences were the first experiences of struggle in the new 'home' country that she encountered and had to fight off – just as she is *in this moment* of her digital *testimonio* – fighting for the education of undocumented youths like herself and against discrimination on the basis of her sexuality. This fight forms into an intersectional struggle that combines immigration background and lesbian identity, as Ivette has to claim her multiple ways to 'belong' not only in the new country but also in the inner circles of her family. The financial hardship that additionally lies on her shoulders, in this struggle, occupies a comparatively small part of the narrative. However, it again connects to Ivette's mother's wishes for "a better future"

(00:00:25) for her children as a major reason for emigrating and Ivette's current struggle performed in the *testimonio*.

As her narrative was published in January 2013, the undocumented youth Movement had already experienced a relief from deportation for many undocumented youth who graduated from high school or obtained a GED, like Ivette, through the announcement of the DACA seven months before. Secondly, the Maryland DREAM Act, which "allows Maryland high school graduates who are undocumented immigrants the opportunity to qualify for the lowest tuition rates at their public colleges and universities upon meeting certain eligibility requirements and submitting required documentation", "became law on December 6, 2012" ("Maryland Dream Act"). While we cannot, of course, fully determine whether Ivette really qualifies for the DREAM Act in Maryland or the DACA, the captions and her verbal reference to currently attending Montgomery College in Maryland, suggest that Ivette is also a resident in the state. Nevertheless, these two legislative changes indicate a de-emphasis of the urgency for political activism by undocumented students and a re-emphasis on the effects of immigration on the family, as well as the oftentimes unspoken issues of dispossession that penetrate the family unit. In digital *testimonios* like Ivette's, published shortly before or after major changes in U.S. immigration laws, narrative time becomes an indicator for the 'urgency' with which political campaigns have to be led. As YouTube videos generally are very short, the structure and narrative time in which issues are addressed expands and contracts in relation to their political context. Since Ivette's discussion of her struggle to pay tuition fees is brief compared to the discussion of her coming-out as homosexual, which assumes the whole second part of her narrative, she stresses the intersectionality in her dispossession, as discussed earlier, but clearly de-emphasizes the role of political urgency as an undocumented *student*.

What is more, the performance of emotions displayed by the change in facial expressions serves as an indicator of the current status with which the narrator negotiates his/her dispossession. In the end of the video clip, Ivette resolves the conflict with her mother for her audience by means of hand movement and a smile (thus, the covering of her initial, emotional composition).



From left to right:

Figure 46: "I.R. (7)\_Removing Tears." *YouTube*. 2013. Author's screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Figure 47: "I.R. (7)\_Resolution." *YouTube*. 2013. Author's screenshot. 30 July 2015.



The slow and careful removing of tears in her face towards the end of her narrative is the first time that the viewer gets to see Ivette's hands (between minute 00:03:33-00:03:45). This movement – in which most of her speech comes to a halt, in connection to the strong zoom on the face – implies a sense of an *active* ending. Just as the hands suggest, within these seconds, the story comes to a resolution: Ivette has reconciled with her mother. Yet, without any further introduction, Ivette also announces that her mother and she are “now working together” (00:03:39-00:03:41) and that her mother is “proud of her for doing all of it” (00:03:46-00:03:48). The close connection between ‘work’ – by which she presumably means immigrant rights activism, and the reconciliation with her mother, visually produces an important statement in the context of her dispossession and the Movement: Dispossession is an inherently intersectional phenomenon, as Ivette recovers from her sadness, melding a smile into her sad face (see Figure 47). The viewer receives the political message that for dispossession to be countered, it takes an *active* resolution, requiring hard work and a sense of family unity – no matter how diverse other aspects of identities are between family members.

### 3.2. Irony and Resistance

Pérez found in his study that undocumented youth also used humor “as a way to cope with illegality collectively with others” (33). Baym shows that users on YouTube, too, can distinguish themselves from the other posts by embedding humor, irony, or cynicism as specific aspects of communication into their narratives. By this strategy, she argues, users might assume “more power to shape the perceived group consensus than do the other participants” (162). La Rose adds that acts of resistance “may be demonstrated through performances of tensions and contradictions, as well as

through the use of irony, parody, wit, and humor, methods recognized as particularly effective in challenging taboos and abject subjectivities” (301).

For this reason, we need to address humor, irony, and cynicism in the digital *testimonios* chosen for this study as a communication and empowerment strategy that addresses the viewer more directly than other communication strategies (humor works, here, in ‘collectivity’, as Pérez has shown). For digital narratives, however, this also means that we need to view humor from the perspective of multimodality, as Kaindl does in his study. He shows, most importantly, that “non-verbal elements in multimodal texts not only perform the function of illustrating the linguistic part of the text, but also play an integral role in the constitution of the meaning, whether through interaction with the linguistic elements or as an independent semiotic system” (176). Three of the eight narratives in this selection express irony through a combination of the verbal dimension with non-verbal signs, depending “on a semiotic combination for their effect” (178).

### **Carlos Roa (3):**

Carlos uses irony to express his disbelief that his grandfather was a citizen for over forty years but his own father could not get legalized, even after spending high sums of money on legal assistance. Irony, in his digital narrative, works through contradictions. The visual channel shows a smiling Carlos, however, with arched eyebrows which symbolize alertness.



Figure 48: “C.R. (3)\_Irony.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

The bizarreness of this looks reinforces resistance. Given the dramatic content of his words, smiling is, in Chinn’s words, an “inappropriate performative act[...].” (115), which shows that Carlos is struggling with the current legal situation which requires children of immigrants to have been born in the United States in order to get U.S. citizenship as well. In contrast, the reverse case is a common subject in many campaigns in the recent Immigrant Rights Movement: The organizations’ “key strategies

for gaining public support has been to highlight children, who have become local, national, and international spokespersons for the cause”, Pallares argues (*Representing 'La Familia'*, 222-223). Likewise, the movement criticizes, as Yoshikawa finds, that “the undocumented are viewed in current policy debates as lawbreakers, laborers, or victims – seldom as parents raising citizen children” (Yoshikawa 2; see also Pallares, *Representing 'La Familia'* 223). The other side of this discourse, however, subsumes the strategy that emphasizes that “children are citizens and future potential voters” and therefore need their parents to stay legally with them in the United States under the term “*anchor baby*”, as Pallares reports (*Representing 'La Familia'* 224). The latter quote, in particular, illustrates well the complicated status of a mixed-status immigrant family living in the United States.<sup>111</sup>

In view of this context, Carlos performs mockery of a situation which he frames verbally to fit the discourse of the Movement just presented, even though his personal claim to legalization envisions a reverse situation: It is not his father who is a citizen and wishes his parents to become citizens as well, but vice versa. The use of irony – depicted in his digital *testimonio* by the connotative contradiction between the verbal and the visual channel of communication – distracts from his unique claim, through which Carlos further assumes potential power, effectively challenging the legal situation with the performance of the what he perceives as an ironic situation.

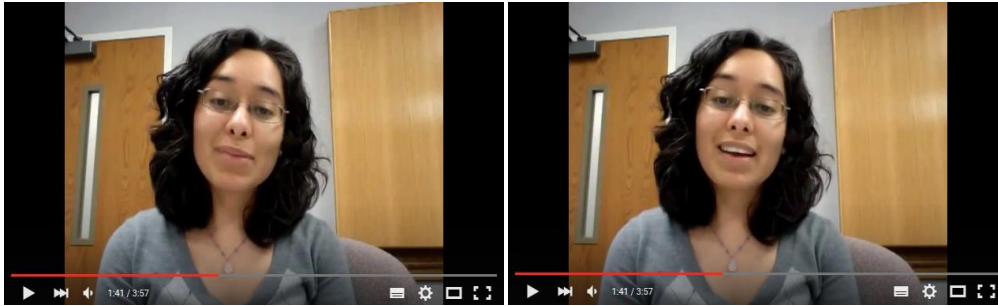
### **Angelica Velazquillo (5):**

In one instance Angelica uses multimodal irony to express her dispossession connected to the detention and deportation proceedings of her brother. Recounting that immigration officials ‘offered’ a ‘voluntary departure’<sup>112</sup> to Mexico to her brother instead of direct deportation, Angelica smiles as she refers to Mexico as “a place we don’t remember and where he hasn’t been to in 21 years” (00:01:41-00:01:42), as Figure 50 shows.

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<sup>111</sup> Yet, change has come. Recent executive action in November 2014 grants about four million undocumented parents with citizen children relief from deportation if they “pass background checks and pay taxes” (Shear), “have lived in the United States for at least five years” (Shear and Pear) “and allow many to work legally, although it offers no path to citizenship” (Shear).

<sup>112</sup> Through a request for voluntary departure, if “facing deportation (removal) from the United States”, one may leave the country on one’s own “without receiving an order of deportation on your immigration record” (Gearty).



From left to right:

Figure 49: “A.V. (5)\_Irony 1.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Figure 50: “A.V. (5)\_Irony 2.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Further, the timing of this utterance (a longer pause precedes it) and a change in breathing, tone, and facial expressions indicates that she had to search for a way to express her criticism at this ‘proposal’, which points to the absurdity that Angelica feels with regard to voluntarily returning to Mexico. What seems striking, though, is the fact that Angelica grew up at least bilingually, which she revealed when she code-switched to a Spanish pronunciation of ‘Mexico’ in the beginning of the narrative. There she implied that her resistance to the idea of moving back to Mexico is absurd despite the fact that she and her brother might have grown up biculturally. As this example shows, irony can be employed in digital narratives to express personal criticism, disbelief, and resistance via adding a facial expression contrary to the internal attitude to the verbal statement. Further, the interactive aspect of this strategy is greater than a direct, linguistic expression of a critical attitude, as the viewer needs to interpret the combination of those multiple signs, leading to the effect that the focus on Angelica’s political statement is sharpened.

#### 4. Occupying Space

Through the performative in dispossession, Butler and Athanasiou single out a sense of solidarity and collectivity that open new possibilities for politics. Both authors see current protest movements of dispossessed people as “forms of plural performativity” (Athanasiou 157). The role of the individual and his/her story is important in this process, as in *testimonio*. They explain:

One has one’s own story and claim, but it is linked with the stories and claims of others, and the collective demand emerges from those singular histories, becomes something plural, but does not in the course of that transformation efface the personal and the singular. This means shifting from a view of rights that calls upon and re-enforces forms of individualism (and sees social action

as nothing more than a collection of individuals), to a social form of agency, or performativity in plurality. (ibid)

The form of social agency that Butler and Athanasiou describe here assumes, at other times, a very literal form, in which the body of the dispossessed becomes a performative act of agency itself. Plural performativity, therefore, takes place, most commonly, in groups and in physical gatherings and protest. It then functions in a twofold way, “as performativity *of* plurality and performativity *in* plurality” (Athanasiou 176). Further, “the public gatherings enable and enact a performativity of embodied agency, in which we own our bodies and struggles for the right to claim our bodies as ‘ours’” (178). At last, “the body becomes a turbulent performative occasion” (ibid). Dispossession, therefore, connects to the visual by means of visual performance, as “the logic of dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place, through normative matrices but also through situated practices of raciality, gender, sexuality, intimacy, able-bodiedness, economy, and citizenship” (18). The undocumented status that shapes the core of these stories is thus inscribed onto the bodies of the narrators, as this section will show.

The emphasis on the dispossessed body poses the question whether social media itself can be a ‘space for appearance’, as Butler and Athanasiou call this space in which the bodies appear. As argued in chapters 2 and 3, YouTube becomes a ‘site’ for many possibilities for public/ political protest. Does a video on the Internet also serve as a public space, in which dispossession can be countered by means of virtual plural performativity? To answer this question, it is helpful to point out that in addition to what they call “conventional conceptions of the ‘public space,’ or polis, understood as the particular spatial location of political life”, Athanasiou and Butler add Arendt’s theory of ‘space as appearance’ and mold the latter into “*spacing appearance*” to describe spaces for plural performativity (194, *emphasis given*). This space opens up plural performativity to other forms and spaces for appearance. Accordingly, Athanasiou and Butler stress that “the notion of space should by no means be taken as synonymous with fixity, but rather stresses a performative plane of ‘taking place’” and thus “‘appearance’ [that] is not reducible to a surface phenomenality; rather it opens up to concern what is performed in ways that avow the unperformable” (Athanasiou 194).



Further, Butler reminds us that “the political significance [...] as a social movement of some kind [...] does not have to be organized from high [...], and it does not need to have a single message [...] for assembled bodies to exercise a certain performative force in the public domain” (*Dispossession* 196). Rather, entering a space, being in a space, actively pronouncing this presence in a space in forms of ‘we are here’, she continues, means that “we have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life: we have not become the glaring absence that structures [...] public life” (ibid). In *New Media*, Butler assures us that if there is a “media event that forms across time and space”, then there is also “a crowd” (197).

#### **4.1. Bodily Movement and Posture**

‘Coming out of the shadows’ is an activity which is tightly connected to the multimodal event of a combined public ‘showing of the body’ and declaration of status. This act, itself, is highly performative. It implies that “the body” is understood “as the foundation”, as well as a site and “product of regimes of power/knowledge” (51). Since the term ‘undocumented’ bears a sense of immateriality, or even a lack of corporeality and personality, opposition to such derogative and even stigmatized understanding of an ‘undocumented’ person can only be guaranteed by showing and thus re-framing this understanding of the ‘undocumented’. Performativity challenges this perception through the act of performing ‘undocumented’ identities and re-iterating this aspect in plurality.

Displaying their face and undocumented identity online is a form of challenging their dispossession by means of their own bodies in multi-faceted and multimodal fashion. Not only do gestures become “turbulent performative” acts but also the body itself becomes a “performative occasion” (Athanasίου 179). Further, the setting of the videos is the most obvious means for expressing and re-framing space. This section thus focuses on the making of a ‘public space’ for the undocumented body – and materializing it in its most literal sense. We will identify the setting (and changes thereof) as well as the concrete bodily movement and posture as an occupation of this public space inhabited by digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth.

##### **David Ramirez (4): ‘Pushed to the Wall’**

In a quote from a personal interview with undocumented university student Uriel Sánchez, the latter pointed to the “sense of urgency or pressure on ourselves” that

activism in the Movement in the year of 2010 meant to undocumented youth. He further stressed the impression that he and other youth “still were, like, kind of being pushed to the wall” after the failing of the federal DREAM Act in the end of 2010.

The setting and David’s movement in his digital *testimonio* performs exactly this metaphor. As the video is shot in front of a room’s wall and David sits on the floor (at times, his knees are visible), David indeed is physically ‘trapped’ in a corner-like space (a right angle formed by the floor and the wall), from which he cannot escape quickly without moving past the camera. The frequent movement of his head, upper body, and arms, and hands in this space,<sup>113</sup> however, signal an *attempt* to escape the situation.



From left to right:

Figure 51: “D.R. (4)\_Movement 1.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.



Figure 52: “D.R. (4)\_Movement 2.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 53: “D.R. (4)\_Movement 3.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.



Figure 54: “D.R. (4)\_Movement 4.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

On a verbal level, David struggles to express the affective experience of dispossession that, for all of his teenage years, influenced him greatly, as he claims: “I spent the last 10 years...ehm...trying to reconcile...like...all this hate that has been shot at me...with my identity” (00:00:31-00:00:43). Movement, in accordance with his in-

<sup>113</sup> Apart from a few occasional beats and one instance of pointing (referring to a far-away state in the U.S. upon the pronouncing of the word ‘Georgia’), David does not use clearly recognizable and gestures that produce significant meaning for the narrative.

errupted verbal performances, expresses the discomfort that he felt with his status and the resulting dispossessing reactions of others during most of his teenage years.

In a literal sense, here, David performs the relationality to others that Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou have called a fundamental aspect to dispossession. “Dispossession”, as Butler reminds us, “can be a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings” (*Dispossession* 3). Athanasiou points out that “the very process of giving an account of one’s self” has an inherent quality: “the narration of the self [...] assumes the norm and at the same time potentially deconstructs it” (93). In this self-narration, however, the self does not stand by itself. According to Butler and Athanasiou, moments of dispossession relate to the ‘self’

not as an auto-logical and self-contained individuality, but rather to responsive dispositions toward becoming-with-one-another, as they are manifested, for example, in the various affects that throw us ‘out of joint’ and ‘beside ourselves,’ such as indignation, despair, desire, outrage, and hope. (71)

David is dependent upon others because it does not suffice, for him, to accept his (undocumented) identity without negotiating it with the perception of others. The result of this negotiation process is visible in the performance of this process: David moves in a rectangular-shaped space within the camera’s frame but cannot escape this frame in the end; having to ‘face’ the camera once more. One could argue, then, that the visual space that a video on YouTube provides is actively used by undocumented youth to symbolically portray relationality between individuals in the offline political sphere. The movement becomes particularly visible to the viewer’s eye when it is presented in contrast to a prior stillness of the body in the moving image, as in the case in David’s narrative: Shortly before discussing the identity struggle of the ‘past ten years’, David sits very still and glances directly in the camera as he recounts that he does not have any memories of his home country, Mexico.

Separated by another cut, in the third episode (00:01:04-end), David describes his negative feelings during his teenage years when he realized that being undocumented was (and is) preconditioned by ever-lasting stigma in the anti-immigrant parts of society. During this episode, he lifts his head and tilts it up and down, as he counts each single year all the way from the age of 13 to the age of 20 to emphasize how *many* years he was struggling.



From left to right:

Figure 55: “D.R. (4)\_Head Tilting 1.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

Figure 56: “D.R. (4)\_Head Tilting 2.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

Again, David’s smiling increases in this performance, which one could, as before, associate with the awareness of and insecurity of the being watched by potentially thousands of people as he recounts such intimate details as an identity crisis. The movement of the head further indicates a passing of story time and thus prolongs the dramatic effect that he creates to express the affective dimension of his dispossession.

Towards the end of this episode, David more explicitly connects his personal story to the campaign in which he places his narrative,<sup>114</sup> explaining that he can imagine many other ‘13-year-olds’ (denoting the age in which his struggle with dispossession began) who might be in the same situation. Here, David assumes a ‘voice’ for other undocumented youth without explicitly saying so. Explaining that he is “doing this in hopes that he [the imaginary other undocumented boy] will hear about me doing it” (00:01:54), David settles his hands on his knees, and directs his gaze upwards, which makes him look much younger, helpless, and innocent than before.



Figure 57: “D.R. (4)\_Innocence.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

Given the fact that a civil disobedience action followed the publication of this video (the title of this shirt links his ‘body’ to a ‘The Dream is Coming’-campaign), David decriminalizes himself through this posture. His resistance in this performance lies in

<sup>114</sup> As chapter 7 will explain in more detail, David’s digital *testimonio* was published within the frame of a civil disobedience action that fought against the incident that “the Georgia Board of Regents recently voted to ban undocumented youth from the state’s top five public universities” (Lozano).

the re-negotiation of the common visual image of a ‘criminal’. Through the visual image, there is no need to specifically *say* that he is ‘not a criminal’, as a traditional *testimonio* would have needed to do. Consequently, David’s narrative serves as an example of the implicit workings of the visual logic in moving image that YouTube automatically imposes upon its viewers.

### **Angelica Velazquillo (5): Self-Determination through Posture**

In the seconds following the basic introduction of herself, Angelica tells us that there “is no way for [her] to change her immigration status” (00:00:25-00:00:28). This statement might, at first glance, end with an address to or a call on the viewer to help or even change her situation if possible. At a closer look, there is a noticeable change in posture between the previous introduction of herself and her claim that she cannot change her immigration status.



From left to right:

Figure 58: “A.V. (5)\_Posture 1.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Figure 59: “A.V. (5)\_Posture 2.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

As the two screenshots above show, Angelica’s head angle changes as she postulates the ‘immutability’ of her status as an irreversible circumstance with severe consequences for her life.

As Figure 58 shows, the camera is located at a much lower point than Angelica’s face. This causes the effect that Angelica *looks down* at the camera. She seems empowered through that angle – not necessarily ‘bigger than she naturally is’. Rather, her eyes are always focused on the camera, which causes the effect that we can never clearly look into her eyes. Angelica thus empowers herself over the device that is filming her, as if retaining complete control over the intimate detail she publishes on YouTube.

The second screenshot illustrates a change in posture. Instead of lifting her head slightly, *looking down* at the camera, Angelica now bows her head slightly, giving ‘us’ – the viewer – an eye-level ‘glance’ into the camera – the eye of the in-

tended viewer. I propose that by this move, Angelica expresses a sense of personal agency. While lifting the head visually expresses a sense of keeping ‘one’s head above the water’ by one’s own power, the act of leveling the head down towards the addressee, reducing the virtual space between them, in a face-to-face digital *testimonio* like this translates into the performance of a call for mutual agency and a statement of dependency. Angelica thus includes the viewer in her activism, appealing directly to him/her through the reduction of distance between them. She, as Beverley stresses for the traditional *testimonio*, “uses (in a pragmatic sense) the possibility the ethnographic interlocutor offers to bring his or her situation to the attention of the audience” (*Narrative Authority* 556). Going a step farther, Angelica’s digital *testimonio* appeals to the viewer as if in an actual conversation, “demand[ing] on our attention and capacity for judgment” and imposing on the viewer “an obligation to respond in some way or another” (558). In the end, as Beverley summarizes, “we can act or not on that obligation, but we cannot ignore it” (*ibid*).

Angelica again uses posture and movement to produce meaning in her *testimonio* when she connects her own activism to that of the Movement’s organizations and activists. Posture, in this case, articulates, in Athanasiou’s terms, “aspirations to self-determination” (99): On a verbal level, she exclaims: “When I was invited to participate in the civil disobedience, I accepted” (00:02:05-00:02:09), while at the same time her body leans towards the camera and she lowers the head, as if she wanted to be on the same level as the viewer, and smiles at the camera, as Figure 60 shows.



Figure 60: “A.V. (5)\_Accepting Civil Disobedience.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Here, Angelica determines her move to participate in a civil disobedience to protest against her brother’s detention as a natural and self-evident act. The positive affirmation that this posture transmits, further, performs her ‘agreement’ (to the civil disobedience action) once more to her viewer, establishing a public space online for a

revival of past offline activism. “Because of the public pressure”, she then argues, “they dropped the case against us” (00:02:48-00:02:52). The reasoning and her asserting smile performs an awareness of what the pressure is causing and how effective this public strategy, publishing protest and resistance in multiple forms online like she does, really can be.<sup>115</sup> Confirming the pressure by her own video, Angelica opens up a new public sphere for the negotiation of political pressure.

In a second, yet similar, example, Angelica stresses that when she “realized” that ‘unjust’ arrests like that of her brothers were “gonna continue to happen” (00:02:11-00:02:13), she shrugs her shoulders (see Figure 61) as if she actually had no choice but to act and protest against “the injustices [her] community is..ehm..is facing” (00:02:29-00:02:34).



Figure 61: “A.V. (5)\_Shrug at Deadlock.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

Most notably, through this claim and bodily enactment, Angelica, in the moment of her narration, builds “new knowledge from personal and collective experience” (Benmayor 507). Specifically, Angelica makes her individual dispossession a collective one and thus transforms her narrative into a collective one, too. The shrug of the shoulders, in particular, denotes the arbitrariness of who exactly is being dispossessed in her community. Having generalized the experience, what follows is an interpersonal call to her undocumented audience: In the fashion of a guardian, activist, and speaker for her community, Angelica pronounces that it is now “time to speak out and drop our fear” (00:02:18-00:02:22).

<sup>115</sup> When I asked Uriel Sánchez in a personal interview in Chicago how he thought the year (2014) was going to end, he confirmed the enforcement of political pressure by the Movement: “We’ve been escalating through our own means” but “they’re gonna be escalating in response to the pressure that they’re feeling”, he answers.

## 4.2. The Everyday Struggle: From the Private to the Public Setting

### Stephanie Solis (1): Being a Tourist

The first part of Stephanie's digital *testimonio* (00:00:00-00:02:58), as we have seen, mainly consists of moving images that convey a sense of a face-to-face conversation or interview – effects which are mostly realized through the editing of film sequences and which we discuss in a later section. Those sequences show her in, mostly, a frontal medium close-up. The second part of the digital *testimonio*, however, works with less-frequently edited instances of intermediality and consists of moving images that 'show' Stephanie *in action*. Due to the moving camera and the physical closeness to the narrator Stephanie, these images closely resemble those of a documentary film, taking the audience on a (virtual) bus and tram ride to her university campus. The destination of this ride is connected to offline activism on the university's campus, as the viewer learns, where a "mock graduation event" is held in which Stephanie, herself, participates as a speaker (00:04:05-00:04:09).

The change in setting produces significant meaning for Stephanie's digital *testimonio*. First, the 'virtual ride' to Stephanie's college campus inscribes a sense of normality and daily routine to the narrator's life, offering the viewer a feeling of what she endures on a daily basis due to her undocumented status: As she explains earlier in the video, she cannot get a driver's license and has to take bus and train, which "takes between an hour-an-a-half to, usually, more like two hours" (00:03:02-00:03:09). What we *see* in this half of the digital narrative, thus, enacts the Stephanie's dispossession in very literal terms. Stephanie wanders through difference urban spaces, which are yet real, recognizable space. We see, for instance, a sign in the Los Angeles Union Station or the entrance to the LA Chinatown.



Figure 62: "S.S. (1)\_Chinatown." YouTube. 2009. Author's screenshot. 14 July 2015.

These spaces become 'real' to us as we can 'see' them, and as a consequence, the construction of Stephanie's world as 'true' follows immediately. Knowing which



places she has to *pass* – as she does in the video – her complaint about the long time it takes her to get to university with public transportation becomes more real in the same step. The significant political context of this situation is that as of 2009, when undocumented immigrants did not have access to applying for a driver’s license in California.<sup>116</sup>

With the core story in mind, the moving in literal (and even widely-known) public spaces, shown in the moving image, Stephanie’s body is marked by dispossession, because the way she moves (via public transport) is determined by her lack of a driver’s license. She, literally, performs her lack of options. Further, in this sequence, Stephanie performs what she expresses verbally in the face-to-face narration of her core story. While she verbally narrates that she feels like a child that never gets the chance to grow up (00:03:38-00:03:41), the visuals perform this image of a child very literally.



From left to right:

Figure 63: “S.S. (1)\_Animal Bag.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

Figure 64: “S.S. (1)\_Public Transportation\_1.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.



Figure 65: “S.S. (1)\_Public Transportation\_2.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

As you can see above, Stephanie directly performs and thus emphasizes that her development in every sense of the word, is ‘on hold’. Wearing a bag shaped like a stuffed animal and riding the bus, ducked, worried and looking like a little child who

<sup>116</sup> By the beginning of 2015, California is one of the eleven states (and Washington, D.C.) which grant driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants. Students granted DACA can also apply for a driver’s license nation-wide (“Access to Driver’s Licenses”).

has been *displaced* and *forgotten*, Stephanie performs the child that she claims to feel like. This effect is further reinforced by the use of camera angles that deviate from the eye-level. In all of the three screenshots above, for instance, Stephanie is filmed from a slightly lower angle which emphasizes the largeness of the room and de-emphasizes Stephanie's. In the tram scene, the angle causes a focus on Stephanie's head, which is bent upward. Her gaze is directed away from us and seems alert, as if wondering at her immediate surroundings. As Stephanie does not focus on the camera or interact with it at all, the viewer gets the impression that she is all by herself and hence assumes the position of observer. This builds a strong contrast to the face-to-face *testimonio*, in which the viewer is seemingly addressed directly and, at times, even challenged and called upon to 'get active' (see, for instance Mohammad Abdollahi's (2) direct addressing of the audience).

In sum, the visual performances of both parts of Stephanie's core story of dispossession (her identity 'on hold' and material dispossession of options to improve her living standards through, e.g., a driver's license), emphasize that performance is "the living tissue that connects story and event in tenuous processes of meaning-making" (Pollock 121). Through performing the troublesome situations that Stephanie deals with every day, she emphasizes the immutability of her status as she performs her dispossession previously negotiated verbally in her core story. The meaning created by visual (moving) images further complements her verbal narration of the story. Her digital *testimonio* provides a glance of 'what can really happen' and hence induces a glimpse of truth into the narrative world. The visuals shown in this YouTube clip also add a space for action to the narrator's storyworld that allows them to physically move in the world that, by norm, excludes 'illegal' immigrants by naming their being in the United States 'illegal' in the first place – train stations, buses and university campuses. Further, the undocumented narrator's movement in this space adds to the viewer's common awareness that undocumented people are present in high numbers in all public spaces. Stephanie thereby gives undocumented status her personal name and identity (as portrayed in the video). This move acquires a postcolonial sense of subversion: Stephanie is, bluntly put, not *writing* back but '*showing* back' instead.

In this sequence of moving images, there is one instance which highlights a discrepancy between the verbal narration of the core story and the visual image.

Stephanie claims that because of her undocumented status, she oftentimes feels “like a tourist” (00:03:33-00:03:36) on her very own university campus, because at times she cannot attend university for months due to the many jobs that she needs to finance her tuition. Instead of visualizing the emotional affect that this dispossession exerts, the visuals of this scene show Stephanie standing at a sun-lit train station, waiting for her train to pick her up to go to university, smiling, resembling the cognitive image that the viewer most likely construes of a tourist.



Figure 66: “S.S. (1)\_Being A Tourist” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

The contrast between the preceding verbal account of her dispossession and the performance of dispossession in this part of the narrative disrupts the serious tone that the digital *testimonio* maintains in most other parts, which could be interpreted as a form of sarcasm. Claiming that she is “pretending to have like the college experience” (00:03:33-00:03:36), while the viewer knows that Stephanie is working three jobs next to studying, it is apparent that Stephanie means the opposite of what she says. However, since the ride to campus, indeed, is a ‘performance’ that inhabits a pretending character, the most important indicators of this form of sarcasm are, indeed, the visual images as depicted in the screenshot. Sarcasm expresses that Stephanie has no other choice but to deal with it in a humorous way. Towards the end of 2009, hopelessness was predominantly spread in the Movement with regard to Comprehensive Immigration Reform, as it became “clear that it would not be introduced in Congress” (Pallares, *Family Activism* 113). Re-directing immigration reform towards undocumented students, “a *partial* solution” rather than a wholesome one, became a source of hope especially among undocumented youth of that time (Pérez 149).

### **Performing Offline Activism: Mock Graduation Ceremony (00:04:20-00:05:07)**

The digital *testimonio* of Stephanie Solis, to begin with, embraces the most literal meaning of plural performativity which describes physical gatherings and protest.

Towards the end her narrative, she has not only told her story of dispossession to us, the viewer, in multiple modes and media, she also moves through different settings ‘on her way to UCLA campus’, letting the camera (and hence the viewer) ‘accompany her’. What follows is scenes depicting Stephanie telling her story to other participants of the event within the frame of a mock graduation event.<sup>117</sup> She introduces this event to us verbally on our (virtual) tour across campus, having the viewer head ‘with her’ to the event. While the camera in this scene becomes an observer that knows about Stephanie’s state of dispossession caused by her undocumented status, during the event, the narrative places the audience virtually among the other audience members who are physically part of the audience on campus, listening to Stephanie’s speech, not only showing her but also the audience in short scenes.



From left to right:

Figure 67: “S.S. (1)\_Mock Graduation Event.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

Figure 68: “S.S. (1)\_Text and Audience.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

Through this double mode of performance, however, the viewers feel they know the narrator better than the audience, as we have been exposed to Stephanie’s immigration background earlier in the video. In contrast to the audience in the scene, the YouTube viewer has automatically become involved in the Movement as an ‘insider’ to the story of an undocumented immigrant. The ingenuity of this technical twist greatly affects the viewer’s initial state of passivity.

What is more, filming the narrator speak to the audience – one, that is real and restricted, in contrast to the potentially unrestricted audience on the Web – creates yet another set of interesting effects. Calling it a ‘twofold modus of performance’ here denotes the materialized performativity (Stephanie’s enactment of the

<sup>117</sup> One strategy of political campaigns in the Movement are “mock graduation ceremonies” which are “designed to show that DREAMers across the country valued education and wanted equal access to higher education and its benefits and that they shared this value with their legislators”, according to Anguiano (106).

college graduate that she wishes to be) as it is materialized through a second instance of performance for the camera, and thus the YouTube audience. Hence, she realizes both instances of plural performativity, the “performativity *of* plurality and performativity *in* plurality” (Athanasiou 176), to protest against her dispossession, which naturally fortifies the need to change her undocumented status. The close connection to the DREAM Act movement becomes further apparent in these scenes.<sup>118</sup> Positioning the narrative in the public political agenda of the Movement of that time (2007-2009), Stephanie is one of those undocumented students fighting for the DREAM Act (as indicated in the title of the YouTube video). The year of 2007 had “not been a successful effort to arrive at a compromise bill”, although it was invigorated by the massive protests in the year of 2006 against the Sensenbrenner Bill (Pallares, *Family Activism* 112). However, “between 2007 and 2010 [...] the immigrant movement continued to pursue a relatively unified strategy for CIR”<sup>119</sup> (ibid) and “fall 2009” – close to the time of the narrative’s publication on YouTube – “and all of 2010 were a time of resurgence of youth activism within the movement” (113). Thus, at the time of production as well as publication of Stephanie’s narrative, the DREAM Act was the major goal to fight for as an undocumented immigrant young adult and teenager, because it was seen as the only way to provide at least some kind of future to all those high school graduates every year. The preoccupation with this piece of legislative attempt is clearly evident in the title of Stephanie’s digital story.<sup>120</sup>

Although the scenes shown do not record all of the story of dispossession as the YouTube viewer has learned it, a repetition of scenes from the very beginning of the narrative indicates a repetitive ‘telling of the story’. Further, the first words the camera records for the viewer confirm that Stephanie has just told her (real) audience about the moment that her mother informed her daughter of their illegal immigration to the U.S. (Stephanie talks about her feelings up to that moment and the conflict arising from that). The scenes repeated from the first eight seconds of the video already show Stephanie at a ‘mock graduation event’ at her college, speaking to an audience through a microphone. From this speech, one sentence is used to introduce

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<sup>118</sup> See also: Chapter 7 on the written language of the signs in the creation of political meaning.

<sup>119</sup> Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

<sup>120</sup> In California, the DREAM Act passed in 2011, allowing for in-state tuition to those students that go to Californian universities. It seems to be fitting that Stephanie is one of the earliest narratives published on YouTube with regard to the issue and, obviously, with the rewarding ‘success’ politically (cf. McGreevy and York).

the video narrative as a whole: “And they never told me, because my family was, you know, ashamed and...and they didn’t really know what to say” (00:00 – 00:08). This without even having been introduced to Stephanie as a person at that point, editing reveals the powerful impact that ‘family’ plays in Stephanie’s decision to tell her story to the video team, the audience on campus, as well as the online audience. The final scene in this digital narrative, also, ends with the first sentence. However, this filmed graduation event reinforces a different rhetoric. To the postcolonial ear, the ‘othering’ in this statement is unmistakable: The first sentence contains a word, “they”, which indicates estrangement from Stephanie’s own family. During the second half of the narrative, these words make more sense, as the viewer knows about Stephanie’s dispossession. In this speech, however, Stephanie further highlights her exceptionalism as an undocumented student, responding to the current discourse in the Movement of that time. As Pallares explains,

one of the most prevalent claims used by politicians and other civil society supporters, and to some extent by some youth advocates during the first years of lobbying for the bill, is the idea that DREAM-eligible youth are innocent because they were brought here when they were very young and did not knowingly break the law. (*Family Activism* 109)

Accordingly, Stephanie declares to her audience that “this is not a decision that [she] made” and that she feels like she is held “hostage” by dispossessing forces (as, for instance, the legislation) (00:04:46-00:04:50). The verbal component of this message clearly is greater than the visual, as Stephanie is merely performing a graduation ceremony rather than any of the visual implications that her statements might have. However, see chapter 7 for the meaning that writing and the use of a common street sign adds to the former.

### **Angelica Velazquillo (5): Community Center**

The filming device that Angelica uses in her digital *testimonio* clearly is a fixed camera, perhaps a webcam on the computer. The quality of the video itself is very good, clear, and audible. However, it is also noticeable that it is not a professional camera as used by a professional filming crew. The background setting in which the video is produced could be an educational institution, or even a community center. The fact that Angelica might record her video in a community center – and hence a space for

offline activism – is illustrated by the gap in the door through which one can see people walk by occasionally, as the following screenshot shows.



Figure 69: “A.V. (5)\_Community Center.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 26 July 2015.

It is not a homely place, but clean and simple. There is no extra detail in the background place, only what looks like a door and a wooden cupboard hanging on the wall. Its simplicity and functionality, however, also supports the impression that the video builds up: This type of personal visual narrative is produced for a specific purpose. There is, in contrast to many other videos one finds on YouTube (and also in this selection) and other participatory online networks, little staging around Angelica’s personality or life, apart from her ‘activist’ identity. The narrative thus frames a strong political message that implies an urgent agency to act against ‘the injustices’ that dispossesses her, her brother, and her community.

### **Luis Maldonado (8): Occupying Space, Fighting Borders**

In this section, Athanasiou’s claim that “the body becomes a turbulent performative occasion” (179) assumes a very literal dimension, as undocumented narrators in digital *testimonios* renegotiate real and imagined spaces by means of their visual account. Accordingly, Luis Maldonado’s digital *testimonio* addresses his dispossession, which is initiated by the deportation of his sister and discrimination that his LGBT community is facing under current immigration law. Luis employs a creative constellation of an interview-like situation, moving images as well as multiple static images in combination with his voice from the off. In comparison to the previous digital narratives, Luis more actively performs his dispossession by conquering ‘real’ space: Throughout the digital narrative, the moving image depicts the U.S.-Mexican border in Texas (Hidalgo) and Luis moving along it or looking at it while the viewer hears his voice narrating from the off.



From left to right:

Figure 70: “L.M. (8)\_Border.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 71: “L.M. (8)\_Border Walk 1.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

The camera depicts the border and Luis’ movement along it in a medium close-up that leaves more space to incorporate the border into the picture than there is for Luis himself, insinuating that Luis cannot ‘overcome’ it but that he is being ‘dominated’ by its presence. However, his movement along it symbolizes, most importantly, Luis’ overcoming of his “own precarity” that his undocumented status causes (Butler, *Dispossession* 101). He appears along it, “exercising in that way a ‘right’ (extralegal, to be sure) to existence” (ibid) along the side of the border that *he* ascribes a sense of belonging to – the U.S. – and actively legitimates his undocumented status.

On a verbal level, Luis explains that his coming out as an ‘undocumented person’ made him feel empowered even though it was a ‘nerve-wracking moment’. While he speaks, the moving image shows the footsteps that Luis takes presumably walking alongside of the border.



Figure 72: “L.M. (8)\_Border Walk 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

The associative quality of this image lies in the metaphor of an *ongoing* and *active* struggle that is translated into visuals. At the same time, the combination of two independent ‘topics’ – the separation by the border transmitted via the visuals and the coming out as undocumented told verbally – are connected into one image. ‘Coming out’, here, could also be read as literally ‘coming out’: Luis shows that he is *unafraid* to leave the house and move into the public despite his precarious status.



Also in visual performances alongside the border fences, he connects his undocumented and homosexual identity to the topic of the ongoing separation of undocumented and mixed-status families. His narrative is published in September 2013 – a time when undocumented *students* had won some relief. This new narrative context becomes, literally, visible in Luis’ digital *testimonio*: Luis includes his nephew in the visual image and moves along the border fence with him.



From left to right:

Figure 73: “L.M. (8)\_Sibling 1.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 74: “L.M. (8)\_Sibling 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.



Figure 75: “L.M. (8)\_Border Scene.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

The fact that Luis’ nephew does not interact with the camera, does not show much of his facial expressions and does not speak a word combined with the fact that the viewer does not know anything about the boy besides the deportation of his mother (Luis’ sister) several years prior to the recording of the video, transforms this child into a representative for a family member who is immediately affected by deportation, even though he is *not* an active ‘character’ in Luis’ *testimonio*. Thus, incorporating his nephew into his digital *testimonio* bears important meaning for Luis’ narrative when glancing at its political context: “Since 2011”, Pallares observed, undocumented youth “have been staging actions and coming out events in which they emphasize their relationship with their parents, have parents or siblings together speak at events, and are developing their relationship to the familial frame” (*Family Activism* 122). This incorporation of immediate family into undocumented youth activism that Pallares observed was partly caused by numerous personal experiences

among the Movement's activists whose family members had been detained or deported, as Gaby Benítez, one of the undocumented youth that I interviewed during my research stay in Chicago in spring 2014, explains:

It's not just about the youth. It's about the families. We can see that now in the movement, right? And we have seen that change and shift. And I don't know if it's because it's happened to a lot of individuals, like it happened to me, but at least on a personal level, that's what made that shift for me.

Statistics show that there was a rise in deportation numbers during the Obama administration. "Deportation in the 2013 fiscal year increased by more than 20,000 over 2012 and by more than 51,000 over 2011", according to Preston (*Deportation*).<sup>121</sup> Further, recent changes in immigration legislation such as "the creation of the DACA only justified even further the focus on parents and other older immigrants" (Pallares, *Family Activism* 125), an aspect which Gabriela Benítez describes as follows:

And it's a very complex situation and I've spoken to other folks who have either adjusted through their visas, or have adjusted through and have LPR status and even to folks who have DACA at the moment, which is very temporary and it's not at all the same thing but it's still like saying 'Now I have this' and I will never forget while we were doing DACA, helping people apply for it, and after they got it, people were like 'I'm really excited, but I feel like I'm in a very cold room with my family. And I'm the only one who has a blanket.'

Even if youths eligible for DACA can now 'wear a blanket', this blanket is ominously thin, as Ellis and Chen stress, because the youth's "long-term opportunities in the United States remain limited" (252).

Connecting his nephew's lot to his own digital *testimonio*, thus, transforms the personal character of his 'immigrant story' on the Web into a collective one which links the Movement's politics to the media logic on YouTube, as it significantly moves away from personal issues discussed in the narrative. Indirectly, the combination of border images and himself and his nephew provide yet another political theme that his *testimonio* addresses: 'Re-entry' – the process of "returning after a deportation" which is a federal crime that makes those returning to the United States "ineligible for any form of relief and most likely ineligible for any form of legaliza-

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<sup>121</sup> There is need to contextualize this quote further. According to Preston, these figures also show "a continuing and pronounced shift away from removals of immigrants living in the interior of the country, toward a focus on swift expulsion of those caught crossing the border illegally, particularly along the border with Mexico" (*Deportation*).

tion in the future” (Pallares, *Family Activism* 31; see also Wright). Along the same lines, “a great majority of convictions that have eventually resulted in deportations are for unlawful reentry” (Wright). These basic dictate that Luis’ sister – if she returned illegally a second time – would be exempt even from any type of relief due to ‘re-entry’ and banished forever from the life of her son, who is a U.S. citizen. Due to this ‘crime’, she would not even qualify for President Obama’s recent deportation reprieve from 20 November 2014, whose “centerpiece [...] is a new program for unauthorized immigrant who are the parents of United States citizens” (Shear), as she would have “committed a significant crime”, which is a disqualifier for this reprieve (cf. Badger and Elliott).

How this situation affects many and leads to a new focus in the political agenda, Antonio Gutiérrez further explains in an interview:

S.Q.: And [...] how do you think ‘re-entry’ is going to develop, the topic of ‘re-entry’?

A.G.: [...] As far as the organization that I’m part of, OCAD – Organized Communities Against Deportation, we have seen *many*, many cases. And a lot of the cases that are very, that they can go very public because they don’t have any criminal record, except for the re-entry, which ICE considers a [...] felony, criminal record, it is becoming something that we’re seeing that they’re [...] putting priority on these people and that is *unfair* because they don’t have any other criminal, a natural criminal record, so we’re really trying to focus on that campaign of ‘re-entry’. Overall, we want to stop *all* deportations, but we want to, at least, begin with that aspect, because it is very unfair, that somebody that has...they got caught when they were trying to enter the United States for the first time, and then they got sent back and eventually they were able to get in or whether [...] they were already here and then they got deported, they got sent back and then they came back because their family was here. I just, we don’t feel that the need of ‘re-entry’ just because you already have family here or because you’re still looking for a better opportunity – that should be considered a crime. And that’s where the big campaign right now, that is happening with these ‘re-entry’-cases that we’re building up, here in Chicago, and we’re starting to move nationally in another level with the ‘Not One More’-campaign. But it really comes to play, that aspect, that we really, I mean, we’re hoping that within time, within the next six months or something, we can really build up that momentum and really get that re-entry policy to really change as far as how ICE treats it.

While Antonio connects activism around re-entry mainly to the incommensurability of re-entry that the Movement perceives to ‘other crimes’, Marcela Hernandez focuses on the human struggle that deportations, in general, hold, arguing that “it’s not fair” that those deported are used “as something that is disposable”. High-

lighting the “pain” that his nephew experiences through his mother’s deportation and its consequential legal implications, Luis’ speaks out against the treatment of family members (and others) as ‘disposable’ through performing his and his nephew’s dispossession on YouTube. Athanasiou calls “socially assigned disposability” one part crucial part of dispossession that comes in “various modalities of valuelessness” which also includes “homophobia”, for instance (19).

Connecting the two ‘modalities’ of dispossession most immediate in his life, Luis’ digital *testimonio* emphasizes the intersectionality of oppression at work in his life and further contextualizes his feeling that “there will always be a cause that [he] will feel attached to” and that “there will always be an injustice that [he] will need to fight for (00:02:41-00:02:46). The intersections, including the struggle for his family’s future (that of his nephew and sister, in particular), clarify why Luis talks about the ongoing struggle in which he is engaged. It is a struggle that includes the rights of undocumented gay people, such as the right to make your gay or lesbian partner a permanent resident or citizen, if you, yourself, are one. “I still feel that that’s another battle of my identity, of my immigrant story” (00:01:28-00:01:33), he argues. Further, a university education, as he stresses by means of the visual pictures along the border with his nephew, is not enough to counter the inherent disposability that is imposed on whole populations (cf. Athanasiou 40) – populations like “his” community.

### **4.3. Performing the Prop: Symbolic Objects in Moving Images**

#### **Stephanie Solis (1):**

In the second half of her digital *testimonio*, Stephanie Solis attends a mock graduation ceremony, which highlights her activism in favor of the DREAM Act. In addition to the double modus of performance that we have detected earlier, the film’s ability to fade another set of moving images into the current picture adds a property towards the end of the narrative that fortifies the political message of the digital *testimonio*:



Figure 76: “S.S. (1)\_Double Visual.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

As we can see in this screenshot, in addition to Stephanie’s visually and verbally synchronous speech, wondering “what happens” to undocumented children when they grow up (00:05:04), a set of moving images first shown when she recounts the first part of her story of dispossession is blended in. This double visual is displayed until she has finished her sentence and is then blackened out. The combination of these modes and performances leads to her generalized speaking about an undocumented ‘little girl’ with Stephanie’s own experience of dispossession (the loss of her baby pictures and the finding of them in a book). This, in turn, evokes the generalization that there are many more stories *like* Stephanie’s, reinforcing the appeal to plurality that the narrative has made already by the performance of materialized performativity during the event.

The blending in of a book – the primary symbol for education – in addition to moving images of the mock graduation ceremony emphasizes the ‘elite’ status of undocumented students, which has not been uncontested in the Movement. Pérez, for instance, explains that “stories of high-achieving undocumented students” have been used to portray them “as the poster kids for legalization”, which “forces the debate into a question of deservedness that pits superstar students against their lesser-achieving peers” (149). By emphasizing that books were not only common in Stephanie’s household but that they were also appreciated *and* used, which is explicitly performed in the reenactment scenes showing a person skimming through the books, Stephanie’s narrative aligns with this claim for excellence. However, her narrative also acts against the stigma of the ‘uneducated’ and ‘working-class’ immigrant’ *per se*. In her story of dispossession, further, the books have symbolically turned into the savior of Stephanie’s only childhood memories, as the DREAM Act would turn into the savior of undocumented immigrant students. If she felt the need to emphasize the symbolic quality of books in her family’s household in the film-making process, *per-*

*forming* the scene once more is an adequate way of giving the narrative a strong voice endorsing higher education of undocumented students. One of the four criteria that Baumann has established for performances as “site-specific interactions” is the “changing structures of social relations” that are evoked by the performance (in: Pollock 120). Her parents and she, herself, would then discredit the anti-immigrant, discriminatory reduction of the immigrant family as uneducated and illiterate. This perspective, thus, calls for a legislative change, and for a final passage of the DREAM Act.

The second instance in which Stephanie performs with a ‘prop’ is established through the frame of the moving image: Locking the door of what we assume to be her apartment, a sign reading ‘bones’ with an arrow pointing to the lock of the door and, through Stephanie’s posture, to herself, creates an ironic picture.



Figure 77: “S.S. (1)\_Bones Sign.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

The humor lies in the fact that Stephanie’s situation is indeed fatal – but not fatal in the lethal sense. She is not condemned to be ‘bones’ just yet. This humorous visual play with the written word and the moving image lightens up the serious situation portrayed in the narrative of dispossession that preceded the virtual ride to UCLA campus in Stephanie’s digital *testimonio*. The frame of the moving image makes this possible, without the need for Stephanie to explicitly integrate a source for humor herself. Stephanie’s ‘comic relief’ lightens up the tone of her video and might trigger the audience to watch the second half of the digital narrative as well. As Baym shows, the use of humor increases general likability in online communities (cf. 162), which might promise Stephanie more online support for her video on YouTube. In the performance of dispossession, mockery accentuates severe criticism of the situation that triggered the humor, as Chinn showed earlier (cf. 115). The performance with the bones sign criticizes those who dispossess Stephanie – those, who reduce her to her undocumented status and hinder her to *live* up to her fullest.

### **Mohammad Abdollahi (2): A Setting for Coming Out: Online Participation in the Movement**

Throughout his video, Mohammad Abdollahi emphasizes the importance of activism in the offline Immigrant Rights Movement and explicitly connects his digital *testimonio* to other acts of coming out of the shadows, such as those in March of 2010. In the interplay of interacting with his cameraman, the setting, and to his words toward the end of his video, Mohammad further defines what coming out of the shadows may mean for the Web 2.0 generation and the audience of undocumented youths that he addresses directly. The setting incorporated in the frame of the moving images plays a major role in this re-definition of online activism, a form of participation that Mohammad explicitly projects to vlogging on YouTube. With reference to the many Coming Out of the Shadows events taking place in different states of the U.S.A., during the publication of his video Mohammad reminds his audience: “And, so, if you have some videos to share, if you have some stories to share, as you can see, you know, ‘coming out’ is not about ‘coming out’ in front of a press conference or ‘coming out’ in front of a big audience” (00:05:01-00:05:09). Instead, he changes his posture for the first time in the video, bends sideways and addresses his cameraman directly (see Figure 78), whom we then hear laughing at this sudden shift in his stance. Making the audience aware of the production processes, as if confiding that “the only thing around me is just some weird people that are taping this video right now”, Mohammad downplays the potentially huge audience for his video online. We sense he wants to embolden other youths who are too afraid to publish their coming outs online.



From left to right:

Figure 78: “M.A. (2)\_Interaction Cameraman.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 19 July 2015.

Figure 79: “M.A. (2)\_Office.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 19 July 2015.

Mohammad adds humor to his digital *testimonio*, countering the peril produced in outing himself by explicitly performing that triviality and normality are also

part of his every-day life. Turning away from his audience (and the camera) for the very first time, as Figure 79 shows, Mohammad points to a poster on the wall of his room that portrays major characters from the popular TV series *The Office*. Since these characters have no connection whatever to his bleak story of dispossession, their uncanny appearance here evokes humor that loosens up the serious political context in which Mohammad's digital *testimonio* is produced and published. Through this move, the end of Mohammad's video accommodates the media logic of YouTube. As Baym finds in her study of cognitive functions in online communities, a "strong emphasis on humor" in online communities shows the great extent "to which emotive elements can be essential to shaping and negotiating a community's core values" (217). Through humor, Mohammad attempts to trigger not only sympathy and popularity on part of his audience but also to revalue the political message he wants his audience to understand, which might entice them to publishing their coming out videos online as he has done. His humorous performances, hence, evoke the sense of "power to shape the perceived group consensus" – a strategy which Baym finds to work well in online communities (162).

### **Luis Maldonado (8): A DREAMer's Props and Belonging**

Since the state of Texas was the "first state to offer in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants in 2001" (Foley), Luis' *testimonio*, published in September 2013, does not directly fight for a state DREAM Act like many of these narratives. However, he recounts at the beginning of his narrative that he joined the "DREAM movement" during his early years of college (00:00:24-00:00:29). Anguiano claims that "the first phase of the DREAM movement is characterized by *exemplar* student identity, which features collective identity formation among DREAMers and early efforts at identifying with the opposition through appeals to the value of hard work" (77). Through the quick filming of medals, report cards and certification, which are artistically spread on a table and pinned onto the walls of what we assume is Luis' room, he establishes and reinforces a connection to undocumented students who are still "phase one" DREAMers and 'illustrates' his seemingly extraordinary achievements by letting the camera sway over the carefully spread out and, for this occasion 'prepared' school and college records.





Figure 80: “L.M. (8)\_College.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

The moving image visually documents Luis’ success and eligibility for the DREAM Act. Filming the medals and certificates that Luis has earned in an educational institution visually validates being a ‘DREAMer’. This aspect does not highlight his undocumented status but rather the path that he could still take in his life towards legalization, and the qualifications he has earned. Since this image is far from depicting dispossession, the moving image as shown in the screenshot performs a sense of belonging to this part of the movement without having to repeat the Movement’s early rhetoric in words by, for instance, blaming his parents for migrating to the U.S. Thus, in contrast to narratives such as Stephanie Solis’, Luis’ establishes ‘student excellence’ but also shows that he is not ‘apologetic’ – which Anguiano describes as the third phase of the Movement: The “unapologetic DREAMer”, who features “the effrontery of activists who escalate the mobilization efforts by modeling civil disobedience tactic of previous civil rights movements” (78). This, newest phase of the Movement is depicted through pictures and sound, as the succeeding chapter of this investigation will show.

A second set of ‘props’ appears at the very ending of the video. Through montage, two separate moving images are blended – a big close-up shot of Luis’ head and a row of international flags, presumably filmed at the Hidalgo border as they represent Texas, Mexico, and the U.S., as the following screenshot shows:



Figure 81: “L.M. (8)\_Who Will Be Our Voice?” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Through the blending in of the images, the ‘new’ image plays with spatial metaphors of belonging as well. The new image distributes the three flags over Luis’ face and, for the first time, we see Luis laughing. His smile serves as a device to lighten the mood of his *testimonio*, providing the note of entertainment that YouTube narratives incorporate in their logic. The sound of his voice, however, is muted. This strategy connects his narrative to beginning of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement as it reminds us of the massive marches in 2006 when marchers waved “Mexican flags to express ethnic pride, and carried U.S. flags as a symbol of patriotism and loyalty to this country” (Flores-González and Gutiérrez 4). Luis’ smile expresses confidence and happiness, which is an open sign for belonging. It shows that he is fighting against dispossession but, as the core story showed, is not the only one dispossessed in his *testimonio*. Rather, his smile shows that dispossession can take more tragic turns than his and that he needs to fight for his community and *their* dispossession as well, which thus becomes *his*.

### **5. The Other Narrator: Framing Narrative through Montage and Zooming**

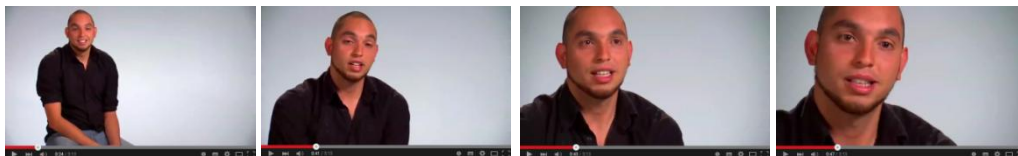
Although there are great differences between oral and written narrative, one can compare “literary texts to [...] ‘natural discourse’” (Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 42). Characteristics of natural discourse are “omniscient narration, stream of consciousness, jumping back and forth between different plot lines, collage techniques, jumbling of chronological sequence, or elliptical representation of events” (43). While all these techniques can be used in recorded speech as well, the recording frames and finishes off the narrative. It then becomes unalterable once it is on the Web, resulting in the same product to be listened to/viewed many times. As Ryan shows, “it is only in conversation that narrative must be isolated from a steady stream of signs that belong to the same medium, and it is only in conversation that frames are constructed in the real time of the narrative performance” (44).

Another significant feature of oral storytelling is the fact that undocumented youth, when using recorded speech narrative, cannot be interrupted – only by cutting and deleting parts of their recording. This ‘interruption’ into the narrative is voluntary and enables the producer to focus on the things that are most important to be communicated to the listeners/viewers. The affordances of video editing, thus, have a

major impact on the narration in the digital form of the oral *testimonio*: “Camera angle and movements, transitions, montage, as well as the particular repertoires of the nonvisual tracks”, according to Ryan, can create “the ghostly figure of the cinematic narrator” (*Moving Pictures* 196), as the final section of this chapter shows.

### **Carlos Roa (3):**

Throughout his roughly 3-minute-long digital *testimonio*, Carlos does not allow for much negative emotion to be expressed visually (through, for instance, crying or changes in posture). The combination of cutting the moving image and proceeding with camera shots closer to the narrator in a relatively short period of time symbolizes how ‘close’ the viewer can get to Carlos’ emotions. The following screenshots originate from an episode in which he briefly recounts the year his family immigrated to the United States and his grandfather’s immigration background. Carlos cannot understand how his grandfather could be a citizen for “over 40 years” while his own father could not, although the latter apparently tried “year after year to get [the family] legalized” and spent “tens of thousands of dollars for lawyers” (00:00:34-00:00:43). The shots that are used while Carlos is narrating can be seen in the screenshots below:<sup>122</sup>



From left to right:

Figure 82: “C.R. (3)\_Medium Shot.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 83: “C.R. (3)\_Medium Close-up.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 84: “C.R. (3)\_Close-up.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 85: “C.R. (3)\_ (Big) Close-up.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Shortly before the family’s struggle for legalization comes up, the moving image is cut and Carlos is filmed in a medium close-up, signaling that he is going to recount more intimate detail than before. After a second cut, a close-up follows in which he dispels what he finds to be a common misbelief about undocumented immigrants: He rejects the notion that in order to get legalized, “people think it’s as easy as getting behind a line” (00:00:43-00:00:45). The final shot (Figure 85) is introduced with Carlos’ recount of how he feels about the legalization struggle of his family. The close-up makes him look very sad, especially compared to the first

<sup>122</sup> I combined all (and smaller) screenshots in a row in order to illustrate the changing camera shots best.

screenshot, in which Carlos smiles as he tells us how long his family has been in the United States, in effect decriminalizing their unlawful immigration to the country. This effect, however, is produced primarily by our closeness to his face, enabling us to study his sad look in more detail. Due to the plain background and Carlos' plain black shirt, there is also no other visual 'distraction'. Therefore, the viewer almost *has* to look into Carlos' face. 'Looking somebody in the eyes', in personal conversations, is also a way to deduce candor.

This is particularly important for what Carlos says, as some people in the debates on undocumented immigration reinforce the belief that undocumented immigrants receive social services but do not pay taxes (and therefore do not 'contribute'). Performing their protests against this perception, many undocumented immigrants in the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006, like Carlos, "frequently describe themselves as model citizens", emphasizing that they are "law-abiding, paid their taxes, worked to support their families, did not receive welfare, and were not a burden to the state", and this way contribute to "discourse of morality and responsibility" (Pallares, *Representing 'La Familia'* 226). The visual reinforcement of candor and sincerity, in this instance, thus also conveys a political message. A candid performance implies that Carlos, in fact, materialized this part about his undocumented immigrant identity and shows how Carlos had to deal with stigma attached to the label of the 'undocumented'. Through this naming of the stigma attached to his identity, he has the chance to counter it by the means of audiovisual narration. In sum, this narrative intervention through montage just introduced conveys that the affective level of dispossession is particularly relevant. The zoom here shows how the production processes of videos on YouTube tend to respond to the publication of intimate details such as Carlos' struggle for legalization and personalize them in visual terms as well. The zoom diminishes literal and symbolical 'distance' between the viewer and the dispossessed.

**Ivette Roman (7): Cutting Down to the 'Gist' (00:00:00-00:02:05)**

The most significant difference between Ivette's digital *testimonio*, and the other *testimonios* in this selection, is its separation of two narrative foci: The first revolves around her undocumented status (00:00:00-00:02:05), while the second recounts the moment she came out to her mother as gay (00:02:06-end). While both parts are

strictly separated, the first part shows frequent cuts of the moving image that essentially shape what is being said, and, more importantly, *how long* this utterance is going to be. In detail, the cuts occur at the following passages:

1. (00:00:14): The video is cut after the introduction to her name, country of origin, age, immigration status, and sexual orientation.
2. (00:00:51): The video is cut after introduction to her arrival in the United States and the process of settling-in.
3. (00:01:04): The video is cut after reporting the bullying she experienced in school due to language problems.
4. (00:01:19): The video is cut after summarizing that school was “just really hard”.
5. (00:01:47): The video is cut after introducing the financial demands imposed by her college of choice.

All these cuts signal changes in the topic of the story. Cut 2, for instance, marks the transition from the story of immigration and announces the beginning of an entirely new scene in which Ivette recounts how she was bullied in school. Cut 5 moves the narrative away from the financial and other demands confronting Ivette and transits to Ivette’s hard working and studying. However, as most cuts are blended in and thus become almost invisible, they are designed to cause as little disruption as possible, as if trying to vanish as a narrative intervention in the narrative completely, thus setting together a puzzle of narrative pieces to form a *testimonio*.

The first part of the narrative introduces us to her family’s immigration history, and most importantly, her migration from Peru to the United States at the age of nine. Ivette likely experienced a great deal of responsibility in her childhood years and the topic of ‘illegal border crossing’ must have been very present to her at a young age already. In addition to that, travelling without papers all the way from Peru to the United States also meant crossing all of Central America first, which is a long and dangerous journey. By means of shortening this set of data with frequent cuts, all topics that Ivette addresses in the short pieces of moving image gain as much attention and narrative time as the border-crossing itself – or the period of transnational motherhood that Ivette experienced – which leads to a de-emphasis on the individual situations of dispossession connected to undocumented status in this first half of the narrative – and certainly to a de-emphasis of Ivette’s immigration back-

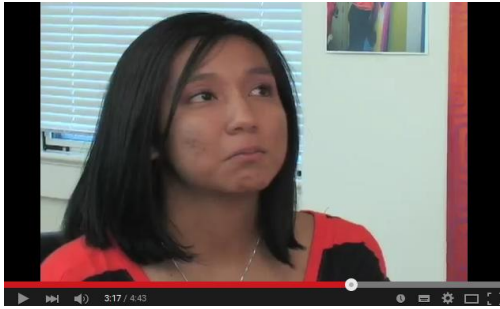
ground. The original video material seems cut into little pieces to produce a narrative the editor desired to be told. Further, the cuts that occur in this section do not only keep the narrative short – in accordance with many other videos YouTube – but also set the tone for the following parts of the narrative: Since there is not much room for elaboration, the narrative conveys the impression that there are yet more ‘relevant’ issues to follow, which is a paradox because the situations that Ivette describes in the first part already show the major implications that illegal immigration has for the family. The dominance of the producer in determining the tone and topic for the narrative thus stands out as unique in this section of the narrative.

### **Zoom: Framing the Dispossessed Body (00:02:06-end)**

The second half of Ivette’s digital *testimonio* – in contrast to the first – is framed by zooming rather than by cuts. Most notably, the first zooming-in occurs right at the beginning of this sequence and films Ivette’s body from there on not in a medium close-up but in a close-up shot. In contrast to the cuts in Carlos Roa’s digital *testimonio*, for instance, the camera zooms in significantly during Ivette’s narration *without* making further cuts. Through this, the image moves repeatedly during the recording process, making the viewer more aware of the fact that he/she is getting to know more intimate details of Ivette’s life than before. This is a paradox as Ivette has experienced many potentially traumatic events in her young life already. Finally, through this type of camera movement, Ivette’s face is positioned as the most important element of the visual picture and the sole focus of the narrative. Through the zoom, the viewer is not able to see her use of gestures but rather the moving elements in her face, conveying performances of affective influence of dispossession on her, which she communicates through a change in facial expression.

The core story, which dominates the second half of the narrative, is introduced by another page with captions, posing a question about Ivette’s coming out as a lesbian to her mother (see chapter 7 for an elaboration on the captions). The zoomed-in camera frame signals that an important and emotional part is following and that the audience should pay closer attention. This emphasis is a direct intervention into Ivette’s digital *testimonio* that she does not make by herself but that the *other* narrator imposes freely on the digital *testimonio*. The coming out story is not interrupted as much as the first part of the narrative, yet the frequent zooming between

the cuts causes movement. While Ivette recounts the situation in which she comes out to her mother at home, the camera films her in a close-up shot, zooming out to a medium close-up once that scene is over and Ivette reports how she and her mother dealt with the new situation. The following cut interrupts the narrative as Ivette recounts that her mother would not even look her in the eye for months (00:03:09), signaling a stagnation in their relationship. A second cut (00:03:15), however, introduces a more emotional narrative episode, shortly after Ivette recounts that the rejection by her own mother made her consider suicide.



From left to right:

Figure 86: “I.R. (7)\_Thought of Having Lost her Mother.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Figure 87: “I.R. (7)\_Tears.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

As the screenshots show, Ivette turns her gaze away from the ‘eye’ of the viewer, while the camera undertakes a second major zoom on her face, displaying the emotional impact of her mother’s rejection. The zoom, most significantly, focuses on Ivette’s sexual dispossession; her tears signaling that “the logic of dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place” (Athanasίου 18): The place Ivette finds herself in when her mother rejects her for being homosexual, is a place of non-being (cf. Butler, *Dispossession* 19; Athanasίου 19) and desubjectification (cf. Athanasίου 27): Ivette’s closing of her eyes shows her sadness and her earlier confirmation that she wished to ‘not live’ anymore reinforces the impression that she felt a “socially assigned disposability” (Athanasίου 19). In the eyes of her mother, who would not “speak” to her “in months” and did not “even look” her “in the eye”, she did not exist anymore (00:03:05-00:03:08). In the narrative performance of her dispossession, the camera approaches Ivette’s face – *looks* directly at her – through a stark zoom, which is the zoom closest to her face in the whole narrative. Through this device, the digital narrative breaks Ivette’s ‘proper place of non-being’ ascribed to her by the multiple workings of dispossession (cf. Butler, *Dispossession* 19; Athanasίου 19) by performing the opposite – her physical *being* –

online and allowing her audience to acknowledge her being by watching her video clip. Here, the visual becomes the most important site of the resistance of dispossession.



## Chapter 6

### ACTIVISM IN SOUNDSCAPE:

#### VOICE, NOISES, AND MUSIC IN DIGITAL NARRATIVES

### 1. Introduction: Orality, Sound, and the Performance of Resistance in Digital *Testimonios*

The production of a ‘traditional’ *testimonio* “generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, ethnographer, [...] literary author” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 555-556). Crucial to the political context is the fact the interlocutor could also be called a “social activist” (Beverley and Zimmerman in: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 259). The digital *testimonio*, too, is created by the recording of the narrator’s voice (Benmayor, *Digital Testimonio* 510). Benmayor claims that “this may be a one-on-one conversation between narrator and facilitator, a larger story circle, or a classroom of students where shared experiences interpellate the personal and spark the particular story” (ibid). Thus, apart from the greater audience, the production process of the digital *testimonio* is similar to that of the traditional *testimonio*, yet moves a step further away from other forms of ‘oral history’. This genre is often linked to the *testimonio* but relies strictly on the “research methodology” that the researcher defines for his/her purposes (Abrams 2). In the production of *testimonio*, the interlocutor’s role in the production is diminished. In addition to the verbal narrative of the undocumented narrator, other possible participants, or voices and noises from the immediate surroundings need to be recognized as important constituents of meaning in the narratives. The analysis of this aspect in one narrative, that of Ivette, demonstrates the role that other ‘voices’ play in the videos and the meaning they might play in digital *testimonios*.

A central distinction between the two *testimonios* is the retention of the actual, physical voice in the final story. Apart from the dominance of the visual moving image, the digital *testimonio* generally produces a spoken account – not a written (published by the interlocutor).<sup>123</sup> The digital *testimonio* thus re-establishes

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<sup>123</sup> Beverley explains that in *testimonio*, “the narrator is someone who requires an interlocutor [...] in order first to elicit the oral account, then to give it textual form as a *testimonio*, and finally to see to its publication and distribution” (*Testimonio* 36).

the connection to the original form of oral history, as the latter “deals with the spoken word” and rigorously defines itself by this “character of orality” (Abrams 19). Digital *testimonios*, too, relate the spoken word “to social action” and represent “oral narrative[s] of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Benmayor, Torruellas, and Juarbe 153). The following sections investigate the effect of ‘orality’ and voice and which role they play in the creation of political meaning in the selected digital *testimonios*. Yet, which effect does digital editing, including the combination of voice and music, have on the orality of a *testimonio*?

While the narrator of the traditional *testimonio*, as also in other forms of oral history, is excluded from ‘crafting’ and publishing the final version of the *testimonio*, the narrator of the digital one is not as strictly excluded from the ‘crafting’ process, as his/her spoken voice *literally* always *remains* in the final product. There is no (language) transcription and editing process on part of the interlocutor. In the digital *testimonio*, the spoken voice enters into a production process prior to the recording of the video, which includes practicing, editing, and performing ‘the story’ of dispossession. Benmayor, a member of the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, reports: “We work the scripts, give oral and written feedback to find the dramatic arc of the story and, in preparation for recording, insure that the syntax of the story follows oral speech patterns” (*Digital Testimonio* 512-513). While the production steps she traces are parallel to those of the traditional *testimonio*, her account also rekindles one of the most heated debates in testimonial discourse: How are truth, authenticity, and reliability of historical fact ‘guaranteed’ in a production process characterized by so many performative elements? Instead of falling back into this interminable debate, one that vexes all online narrative genres, the question for this chapter will be posed in reverse: How do vocal features, sounds, and music add a level of performative meaning to the spoken account and what conclusions can be made about an explicit political agenda?

Regarding digital *testimonios* as performances that consist of materialized (performative) utterances emphasizes the unique semantic functions of verbal modes of communication in the creation of political meaning and power through the medium of voice. According to Pollock, performance studies theory distinguishes, in particular, “between the narrated event (what is *told* of the past) and the narrating

event (the *telling* of it in the present)” (120). She further stresses that performance is “the living tissue that connects story and event in tenuous processes of meaning-making” (121), instead of reading the distinction between narrated and narrating event “as a conventional distinction between content and form, text and performance” (120). Theory from the field of Sound Studies on the effects of music and sounds in narratives similarly asserts that power dynamics lie in orality itself, assigning political value to the narrator’s physical voice. Sterne explains that “voice has long been conflated with ideas of agency” (9), underlining the idea that performative verbal utterances actually *do* something, shifting the generic understanding from narrative as descriptive to performative. “More than the images”, Benmayor concludes, “the voice is what gives the digital *testimonios* their power” (*Digital Testimonio* 513).

Benmayor describes voice as the most “emotionally challenging [...] dimension of the *testimonio*”, “the *testimonio* is now in the voice of the subject, speaking directly to the viewers, and asking us to listen” (513). Likewise, Portelli finds that spoken narrative voice more emphatically “reveal[s] the narrators’ emotions, their participation in the story, and the way the story affected them” (65). He argues that “this often involves attitudes which speakers may not be able (or willing) to express otherwise, or elements which are not fully within their control” (65-66). He says of oral narrative transcriptions, “by abolishing these traits, we flatten the emotional content of the speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document” (66). Thus, “in the search for a distinguishing factor, we must [...] turn in the first place to form” (65).

In her analysis of accounts of oral history, Pollock finds that “what is said is inseparable from the saying of it”; “indeed, understanding ‘what is said’ would be sorely compromised without understanding the complexities and complicities entailed in saying it” (127). As West shows, “sound”, in particular, “has an ability to bypass the linguistic system of awareness and stimulate emotions in ways that we are less verbally conscious of” (285). In the analysis of the meaning of voice in spoken (testimonial) narrative, Abrams, however, demands “close attention to orality” – *how* something is said – such as “the shape and rhythm of the speech act, because these are taken to be capable of revealing important attributes of the story, the contents, the practice of telling and the culture which produces it” (19). Further, “orality

comprises the rhythms and cadences, repetitions and intonations, the use of particular speech forms such as anecdote or reported speech, the use of dialect, as well as the volume, tone and speed” that are crucial for the interpretation of the oral tradition of narrative (ibid). “Besides being linguistic”, according to Stöckl, “volume, intonation, timbre, rhythm, speed or pausing, [...] are design features of language in its spoken form and are often termed para-verbal” (11) or “vocal gestures” (Hübler 46). As with all gestures, “meaning potentials” are also “metaphor potentials”, according to Van Leeuwen, which are “very broad” in their interpretation (70).

In two of the eight *testimonios*, music is part of the multimodal ensemble.<sup>124</sup> Current findings in brain research on the effects of emotion on voice and music indicate that “similar mechanisms support emotional inferences from vocalizations and music and that these mechanisms tap on a general system involved in social cognition” (Escoffier et al. 1796). Klüppelholz also stresses the inherent kinship of the sound of voice and music in its interpretation, calling not only for a similar but also inclusive method for interpretation that incorporates both – the sound of music and that of the voice – in one, coherent analysis.<sup>125</sup> Stöckl adds to this perspective that language “has its strength in the domain of the denotative [...] layers of meaning” while “music, for instance, seems weak on denotative meaning, but strong on associative meaning” (26; see also Lexman 55). In the two narratives, for instance, music takes the shape of a ‘leitmotif’. The latter, according to West, defines as a “distinct musical theme[...] associated with characters, places or ideas within a particular work of music”, which “is usually a short melody, a certain chord progression, or a rhythmic pattern”, and which can “supplement or extend the plot” (286).

Lastly, because of ‘synchresis’, which Pinto describes as the automatic forging and mental fusion between sound and visual images when being played at the same time, it is mostly impossible to separate the sound level from the visual level in any type of film (cf. 284). In this context we must stress that in digital *testimonios*, meanings created by the “multimodal ensemble” are “corresponding, complementary and dissonant as they harmonize in an integrated whole” (Jewitt, *Glossary* 301).

<sup>124</sup> The two narratives are those of Carlos Roa (3) and Luis Maldonado (8).

<sup>125</sup> Neben den Geräuschen ist eine andere wichtige Quelle für die Wirkung von Musik die Sprache. Gesprochene Sprache besteht aus Melodik, Tonhöhenbereich, Lautstärke, Rhythmus, Tempo, ganz wie die Musik. Eine Kombination dieser Eigenschaften kommuniziert über die sprachliche Semantik hinausgehend emotionale Bedeutungen. (Klüppelholz 61; see also Bullerjahn 188)

Therefore, this chapter mostly presents “interrelationships between co-present modes” – the sound *in combination* to the visual images – rather than the solitary creation of meaning of individual modes. In the narratives, voice and visual recording are mostly congruent (although voice-overs and thus the exclusive recording of the voice of the narrator also take place). Along the same lines, the socio-technological format of YouTube video clips affords the montage of the moving image and its original soundtrack. It offers multiple ways of adding or subtracting original verbal language and sound, as well as sounds from the off, to the video. Benmayor considers the montage of image and sound to be crucial for producing meaning in digital *testimonios*. She stresses that,

not confined by the printed page, the medium also encourages a synergy of creative talents, combining spoken word performance with visual esthetics and music. The dramatic dimensions of the personal voice, the play of images, and the musical soundtrack increase the intensity of the experience and produce other forms of meaning. (*Digital Testimonio* 521)

Taking these attributes into consideration, analyzing the creation of political meaning in the use of voice in the soundscape of the digital *testimonios* on YouTube appears particularly promising in the assessment of the mediatization of politics. This analysis will focus upon the mediatization of voice, its ‘power’ and its potential to ‘protest’, and the individual voice as a sense of signature, ritual, and personalization of the Movement given to the dispossessed.

## **2. Connecting Traditions: Collective Ritual in Digital *Testimonios***

Despite the fact that “each individual *testimonio* evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences” (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 557), the narrative voice in traditional *testimonios* assumes the form of “the voice of a singular subject” (*Testimonio* xii). This voice is meant to be experienced by the reader as that

of a *real* rather than fictional person, is the mark of the desire not to be silenced or defeated, to impose oneself on an institution of power or privilege from the position of the excluded, the marginal, the subaltern. Hence the insistence on the importance of a personal name or identity evident sometimes in titles of *testimonios*, such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. (*Narrative Authority* 556)

This personal pattern of introduction like Menchú's can be found in six of the eight digital *testimonios*. This introduction, however, does not take the form of a word-for-word imitation. Rather, the emphasis lies on the positioning of the name to the undocumented status. The connection to the *testimonio*'s introductory pattern, in particular, lies in the 'coming outs' of undocumented youth. Here, the synthesis of the original, physical voice with the narrative voice in digital *testimonios* is made possible precisely through the mediatization of the physical voice. Just like Menchú who, according to Yúdice, "clearly conceives of her testimonial as [...] a performative speech" (55),

On a content level, Menchú not only communicates her name and 'age', she also classifies her account as a testimony of her life as well as that of a whole nation of people, as the quote from her book shows:

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. [...] I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimonio of my people. [...] My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (1)

The introduction to her *testimonio* fuses personal, autobiographical detail with the political representation of her community *through* the act of telling the narrative, which makes it, inherently, a testimonial statement. It requires, on the one hand, "that these writers *stage* themselves" (Hunsaker 8). With regard to *testimonio*, Menchú, however, embeds her narrative "in the life of the community, just as her 'I' is embedded and absolutely tied to a 'we'" (Zimmerman 113). Thus, if understanding digital narratives of undocumented youth as *testimonios*, it is necessary to stress that the stories of dispossession play with the blending of "the *personal self*", and "individuated self-concept", with the "*collective self*, which corresponds to the concept of social identity", according to Brewer and Gardner's distinction (84).

Further, the oral form of narrative voice in digital *testimonios* adds perceived authenticity to the narrative's outing of 'undocumented status' to an unknown audience because, as Sterne argues, "voices are among the most personalized and most naturalized forms of subjective self-expression" (491). Hearing "embodied, sonorous" voices, "belonging to real people", confirms "for us, in vital ways, who we are, where we are, and what it is we are going about doing", Kimbrough adds (264). As undocumented youth rise from the despised underground – the shadow that is

illuminated through this very act – the combination of the physical and narrative voice represents a “humanising element”, as Murphet explains, an “aspect of narration that seems to proceed directly from a human consciousness” (*Narrative Voice* 76). The digital *testimonio* humanizes its narrator through the use of the narrator’s *own*, unique voice. In combination with the visuals, the voice, the name, autobiographical data, and the declaration of the undocumented status serves as an individual signature: a ritual that all undocumented youth can re-produce yet completely individualize in the spirit of individual output on platforms such as YouTube.

Undocumented youth transform a reference to tradition or ritual, one could claim, through the performative use of their voice, which ascertains their recognition as a coherent movement by means of their digital *testimonios*. This ‘ritual’ is, as indicated above, performative in nature. Through the pattern, undocumented youth ascribe a sense of collective identity (within and outside of the Movement), belonging *to each other*. As Albiez et al. explain, “the performative dimension of *belonging* [...] raises the issue of social representations that result from repetitive practices”. (15). Likewise, in *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler wrote:

The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious way in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. (160)

Linking their story to a common practice, thus, forms their identity *in* and belonging *to* the Movement that then results in the reformulation of their dispossessed identity, as it becomes ‘recognizable’. Forming a common ‘body’ of dispossession through this introductory pattern, undocumented youth produce a common grounds for recognition, which “discursively produces subjects as human”, according to Athanasiou (90). This practice is crucial, as those who are not figured as “normative-human” eventually remain “unrecognized, misrecognized, or recognized in an injurious way, through terms that enable derealizing violence” (ibid).

Athanasίου explains that “recognition” is “a process which is predicated upon [...] the operation of particular norms: norms that determine whether and how I can recognize the other or whether and how I can be recognized by the other” (64). Butler adds that recognition is “defined by identity categories” and “is potentially decentered in moments of self-recognition and self-determination” by those who are dispossessed (*Dispossession* 64). In order to be recognized, however, “the demand to comply with the norm that governs the acceptability and intelligibility of the subject” needs to be satisfied, otherwise it “can and does lead to the deconstitution of the subject by the law itself” (77).

The logic of YouTube fortifies the struggle for recognition led by undocumented youth through the personalization in online communities. As Baym found, users in autobiographical online forums “generally use real names, which create congruence between on-and offline identities” and “a good deal of self-disclosure, which is one of the main ways in which they let other people know who they are” (152).<sup>126</sup> Having a ‘ritual’ to establish a sense of community, further, assumes “a highly social integrative function” (Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Religion* 18). Through performing common affiliation, in sum, undocumented youth shift the “contexts of bodies, situations, and discursive forces” (Langellier and Peterson 166).

As stated before, six of the eight narratives employ an introduction resembling Menchú’s. Six of the eight narrators state their name as the first aspect in their narrative (all but Stephanie Solis (1) and Luis Maldonado (8)); the following sentences introduce the “undocumented” status (again in six of the narratives; not in Stephanie Solis (1) and Carlos Roa’s (3) narratives).<sup>127</sup> Frequently, age (in three of the narratives), country of origin (in six of the narratives), age at migration (in six of the narratives) and sexual identity (in two of the narratives) are also revealed within the closely following sentences. During this performance, all narrators focus on the camera and do not use any other intermedial storytelling devices besides their voice, underlining the importance of this act of ‘outing oneself’. The idiosyncrasies of the individual performances add further levels of meaning to the performance of the

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<sup>126</sup> “This stands in contrast to the dominant discourse on online identity”, Baym nevertheless concedes, “which emphasizes how anonymous users switch genders, appearances, sexual orientation, and countless other usually integral aspects of the public self as well as taking on multiple identities” (154).

<sup>127</sup> In these two narratives, the status and further information is revealed clearly within the stories of dispossession.



testimonial introduction, which the following section shows in detail by means of four of the narratives. The ‘double’ sense of outing – disclosing their sexuality in addition to the undocumented status – that can be found in Ivette Roman (7) and Luis Maldonado’s (8) narratives will be discussed in section 3 of this chapter.

### **Mohammad Abdollahi (2): Guidelines for Coming Out Online**

Among the eight digital *testimonios*, Mohammad Abdollahi’s (2) performance of the ‘meta-level’ of offline and online organizing is unique. Right at the beginning of his video, he announces that there are guidelines in the *DreamActivist* online network for other undocumented youth to follow when creating a personal ‘coming-out’ video, claiming that “the most important thing for [them] to say is ‘my name is’ and ‘I’m undocumented’” (00:00:22-00:00:25). These guidelines subordinate individual freedom in producing and publishing narratives of undocumented youth on YouTube. However, the performative act of ‘coming out’ itself necessitates mentioning the name and the undocumented status together at some point in the narrative.

Setting up these guidelines puts Mohammad in a leading position in the undocumented online community (whom he imagines watching his video and whom he addresses frequently). This is possible, as Baym explains, because “any group can take new directions at any time because of the influence of a single contributor” (201). This aspect forms a strong parallel between Mohammad’s envisioning and addressing of his audience and Menchú’s *testimonio*: As Menchú addresses her reader with ‘you’ occasionally (cf. 20), according to Sommer, “she implies both the existing relationship to other representative selves in the community and the potential relationships that extend her community through the text” (152). The effect of this address is that ‘we readers’ “identify with the narrator’s project and, by extension, with the political community to which she belongs” (ibid). Mohammad, too, stresses that the community that watches his video is like-minded and supportive of the cause, idealizing YouTube as a public space for their political output and participation. This, Baym reminds us, essentially locates “the romance of Internet community in a nostalgia for the homogenous small town” (206).

Moreover, after explicitly repeating the guidelines for online storytelling, Mohammad repeats his introduction, explaining that he intended to not only give the

guidelines but also that this was “how [he] was gonna start off [his] video” (00:00:27). Performing his story according to the guidelines emphasizes that undocumented youth like him, dispossessed by their undocumented status, can come out online and be actually *recognized* as belonging to the Movement, which, in turn, triggers a nation-wide support as Mohammad stresses towards the end of his *testimonio*. Applying Athanasiou and Butler’s concept at this point, ‘recognition’ is based on established identity categories. By building essential elements for a new, *recognized* identity – that of undocumented youth – Mohammad counters the “potentially decentered [...] moments of self-recognition and self-determination” (Butler, *Dispossession* 64). At the same time, Mohammad also performs according to these ‘new rules’ to secure the association with this identity. Further, Mohammad individualizes digital coming out narratives on YouTube by marking them as belonging to the newly found activism that he is part of.

A further important political move that Mohammad performs through spoken word describes the work he did in activism as a realization that there were so many other undocumented students in his situation, stressing the inter-state cooperation and the “amazing” work of this organization. By presenting himself as one of the founders of this organization, he, again, empowers himself over the other undocumented students, although, a few seconds earlier, he had just told his audience how he felt like there were many like him ‘out there’. This impression is rendered, in particular, by naming the names and states of other who started organizing in the year of 2010. Selecting particular states that are far away from each other, his list of names and states conveys a sense of nation-wide support just by naming them (00:04:12-00:04:20). His speech act, hence, is performative. By locating the activism of undocumented youth across the whole United States on an imaginary map, Mohammad stresses unity and mutual support of each other across all boundaries. His online *testimonio* is, after all, a prominent example for organizing via social (and new) media and for *naming* this support.

### **Carlos Roa (3): A Voice from the Off**

Carlos Roa’s narrative is one of those two *digital testimonios* in this selection that does not perform the collective testimonial introductory tradition introduced above.

Instead, a voiceover introduces *his* spoken narrative,<sup>128</sup> saying: “My name is Carlos Roa and I am America” (00:00:16-00:00:19), while a black-and-white moving image appears on the screen, as the screenshot shows below:



Figure 88: “C.R. (3)\_Black and White Moving Image.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Since the viewer is introduced to Carlos via the voice from the off, the visual, which shows Carlos smiling and only slightly nodding but otherwise not producing any further narrative action, creates the effect that the spoken word is much more important than the visual image in this sequence. Through the black-and-white image, the voice seems much closer and more full of life than the visual. While Carlos does not state that he is undocumented until later in the narrative, this technique connects his narrative to the oral tradition of the *testimonio* and thus de-emphasizes the visual turn that YouTube reinforced.<sup>129</sup>

#### **David Ramirez (4): The Ritual**

While introducing his digital *testimonio*, David’s voice makes notable changes, compared to the rest of this speech. Towards the end of the short sentence, his intonation rises significantly and a pronounced break follows. The features indicate that David lists these individual elements and is careful not to forget any of them, as they represent and determine the ‘emergency’ state that he finds himself in. Further, ‘listing’ these elements denotes that many an undocumented student has ‘come out’

<sup>128</sup> For a detailed account on the image- and sound-collage added to the beginning and end of Carlos’ digital *testimonio*, see chapter 7.

<sup>129</sup> The voice from the off could also be understood more metaphorically. Associating the black-and-white image as something that ‘is past’, Carlos’ voice stands for a ‘voice in the Movement’ that *has* been significant in the process of *becoming* America. Indeed, Carlos is well-known in the Movement for having participated in the so-called Trail of Dreams as one of the “four undocumented students [who] embarked on a journey from Miami to Washington, DC, to advocate for the passage of the DREAM Act. Walking 18 miles per day, they arrived at the nation’s capital in May 2010. [...] In addition to bringing increased media coverage to the plight of undocumented students, along the way they also picked up support from various religious and civic groups”, according to Pérez (86). Since this detail is something he does not state in his narrative but that I learned in a personal conversation – and by googling Carlos – I decided to include this interpretation in a footnote only.

this way to the public prior to his own *testimonio*. Repeating these words, hence, in form of a ‘sonic’ list symbolizes yet another act of plural performativity in the digital *testimonio*.

### **Mitzy Calderón (6): Outing Oneself**

Mitzy’s greeting of the viewer is cheerful. Her head is bent slightly towards one side and she smiles, appearing as a self-confident narrator with an upbeat beginning of her video, as the following screenshot shows.

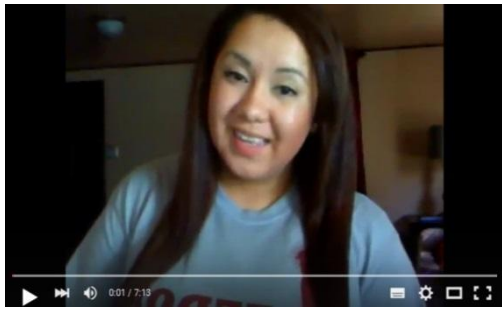


Figure 89: “M.C. (6)\_Introduction.” *YouTube*. 2012. Author’s screenshot. 10 Aug. 2015.

Most notably, the paralinguistic features of her voice do not change, nor do her facial expressions, when she introduces herself and her immigration story. After introducing her name, age and undocumented status (00:00:00-00:00:04) in the familiar structure that we have already established, she nods her head in confirmation as she claims that “a lot of people can relate to [her] situation” (00:00:08-00:00:11). As we can see in the screenshot, there is a slight smile in her face when she enunciates this sentence; however, she moves on very quickly, signaling that the focus in her video does not lie on her family and immigration background and history. The introduction seems rehearsed, as it leaves out many natural pauses, sounding dispassionate. Considering that within the first four seconds, Mitzy has ‘outed’ herself to millions of potential viewers, she indeed seems to feel self-confident and ‘unafraid’. We assume that this personal online narrative is not Mitzy’s first disclosure of her status. In any case, the viewer senses that this introduction represses emotional events in Mitzy’s life, perhaps her immigration story and introduces another focus of the story to follow.

### 3. A Voice for All?

#### 3.1. The Appropriation of Voice: Naming

Undocumented youth narrators humanize the struggle of ‘the dispossessed’ with their personal narrative, while they, at the same time, form a performative ritual that serves collective identification and recognition processes. Undocumented youth narrators further establish connections to the Movement and their ‘community’ via the spoken word by means of ‘naming’, one aspect of the “politics of performativity” (Athanasίου 99).

Due to the multiplicity of different struggles nowadays, the process of naming connects dispossession back to identity politics. “In the face of the proliferation of modes, names, occasions, or social ontologies of dispossession (of refugees, immigrants, exiles, expatriates, LGBTQ persons)”, Athanasίου explains, “we are venturing a return to identity politics, through precisely performative forms of naming” (134). “If we are always named by others” – a condition that Butler and Athanasίου advocate – “then the name signifies a certain dispossession from the start. If we seek to name ourselves, it is still within a language that we never made” (Butler, *Dispossession* 137).

According to Butler’s earlier work on the performative, “name-calling may be the initiating moment of a counter-mobilization”, because “the name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call” (*Excitable Speech* 163).<sup>130</sup> Since “it is impossible to address current modes of political dissent without invoking, or ‘naming’ [...] their harbinger”, according to Athanasίου, “frames of dispossession”, likewise, “become a performative occasion for various contingencies of individual or concerted actions of political despair and dissent” (143). Through the politics of performative, “recalls, norms, names, signs, practices, and regulatory fictions can be invoked, cited anew, and challenged at once” (99). According to Athanasίου, “this is the whole point of the performative in the political: the struggle with the

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<sup>130</sup> Originally, Butler insists on the idea of the performative as a tool for opposition, as it can appropriate the contexts in which speech acts are produced and create (potentially political) meaning. She argues that “the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking” (*Excitable Speech* 161).

norm, a struggle implicated in that which it seeks to contest” (ibid). Because of the provocative power of performative acts, as Chin notes, they often elicit severe criticism as “inappropriate” forms of mockery (115).

In conclusion, Athanasiou argues, “naming is not only a site of trauma, but also potentially a strategy of subversive mimesis. At the site of the name, tragedy cannot be willed away, but it can certainly be embodied differently” (139). When struggling against dispossession, “we no longer know exactly how we are to be named”, because the struggle is oftentimes connected to the struggle against “regimes of ontology” that “we struggle against or seek to displace” (Butler, *Dispossession* 67). Thus, undocumented youth engage in “a mode of self-making or self-poiesis that involves”, nevertheless, “risking intelligibility” (ibid). The potential of the testimonial tradition here lies in the resistant self-determination that does not seek “recourse to the grand narrative of the self-contained, self-sufficient individual” but rather “within and against this normative narrative” (99). Likewise, Yúdice argues that *testimonio* “gives a personal specificity to those marginalized and oppressed elements of which she [Menchú] herself is one” (57). “Self-naming”, thus, “is important” when “people struggle with what to name themselves, how to change the name, how to petition that others use the name that they wish” (Butler, *Dispossession* 137). The examples in this section will show not only how undocumented youth narrators name themselves in their digital *testimonios* but also how they name ‘others’ within and outside of the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. The narratives of Ivette Roman (7) and Luis Maldonado (8) serve as examples for the connection of the Movement to the gay rights movement in the United States.

### **Stephanie Solis (1): Materializing Voices for the Undocumented**

The most significant contribution that sound makes to Stephanie Solis’ (1) otherwise very visually animated digital *testimonio* is the moment in which the visual space portrayed in the video is completely empty (all we see is a black screen). One can only hear Stephanie’s voice from the off saying: “Stephanie is eighteen years old and I don’t exist” (00:00:33-00:00:36). This statement of course is a contradiction. More contradictory, however, is the combination of the existence of a voice with the lack of any type of corporeality and materiality visible in these seconds of the clip. Other than explicitly pronouncing the materiality and existence of the dispossessed body,

this moment portrays Stephanie's dispossession as no other medium could. Written or face-to-face *testimonios* would not be able to show a 'non-existing' body as well as a dark screen and a voice from the off could. The voice itself denotes an existence of the undocumented that is very 'close' to the viewer – an impression created by the sole focus on the auditory channel. The lack of the visual channel, however, creates even more effectively a non-existence that relates to the meaning of being 'undocumented' or 'in the shadows'. The technological affordances of video-making, hence, are crucial to the expression of dispossession among undocumented immigrants like Stephanie, while the media logic itself stresses visual culture and the visualization of the personal. Therefore, this emphasis on the voice distinguishes her *testimonio* from other YouTube clips, in which the visual performance and meaning is always most prominent.

**Angelica Velazquillo (5): Emphasizing Political Logic**

Angelica Velazquillo's digital *testimonio*, most notably, does not use any interactive linguistic features (such as the pronoun 'you') to address her audience. However, the narrative ends with a short "thank you". The impression that this ending creates is that Angelica was indeed a 'witness' who would not be interrupted during her speech, requesting undivided attention from her viewer. In this respect, Angelica actively breaks with the media logic of YouTube, which uses its video and text functions on the website to "include a notion of an interactive audience" (Lange 23). By not 'speaking' to the audience throughout her video, Angelica does not invite response either. Further, thanking her audience for listening to her purports a voice – as in the traditional *testimonio* – that is "not to be silenced or defeated" throughout her speech (Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556). At the same time, Angelia, however, ensures to establish "narrative contract with the reader" (557).

**Mitzy Calderón (6): "Our" Movement: Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic**

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Mitzy's outing as 'undocumented' and her consistent use of vocal features, in particular, reveal that her core story of dispossession is not being undocumented but rather the dispossession she experiences as she is being 'moved by others', highlighting her dependency on a social security number as that criterion which determines whether she is considered an American in the eyes of the Other.

Towards the end of her narrative, Mitzy establishes a link to Freedom University in Georgia, which she describes as an alternative college that accepts students “no matter of [their] sexual orientation, you know, [their] race, [their] status” (00:05:33-00:05:37). In this speech act, Mitzy positions all other universities (at least in Georgia) as discriminatory of all these groups and confirms, as we have seen in chapter 5, that to her, the intersections between race and undocumented status are very tight. Also towards the end of her digital *testimonio*, Mitzy performs the motto of that year in very clear words, as she claims: “I can actually now sit here and tell you that I am no longer ashamed, I am no longer living in the shadows, I am no longer hiding. And I can tell you I am undocumented and I am proud to say it” (00:05:44-00:05:57). The confidence displayed in these sentences performs the message of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement in very clear terms. What is clearly recognizable in this narrative is the change in confidence with which undocumented youth around 2012 came out as undocumented. With reference to the California DREAM Act, Pérez observes an increased likelihood for students to come out of the shadows with “high confidence” and “in stark contrast to the stigma they all felt prior to the law” (82). Moreover, “these findings suggest”, according to Pérez, “that laws have the potential to transform social identities and encourage political mobilization” (ibid).

Likewise, I suggest here, Mitzy performs not only her current confidence but also the affective dimension of her dispossession that she felt prior to her coming out of the shadows and, possibly, the announcement of the DACA (roughly five months before the publication of her digital *testimonio* on YouTube). She argues not only that she is not afraid or hiding but also that she is not doing that *anymore*, implying that up to that point, she had been afraid and hiding her whole life. With her statement, Mitzy refers to other *testimonios* of undocumented youth and establishes a solid link to the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. By 2011, “the motto of this new undocumented youth movement ha[d] become ‘Undocumented & Unafraid’”, according to (Pérez 88; Aguiano xi) and in the year of 2012 would further develop into “unapologetic” (Pallares: David’s quote?). Since both of these phrases originated from members of the Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) (cf. Pallares, *Family Activism* page?), I personally asked Antonio Gutiérrez, one of the active organizers, about the origin of those words:



A.G.: [...] The ‘undocumented – unafraid – unapologetic’ is a symbol, or the phrase that IYJL got known for nation-wide. And now, it’s like a *national* thing. I mean, I just remember, one of the first trips that I was able to be part of is, I went to a conference in D.C. where I was part. NDLO was organizing it. [...] It was really the first conference to really unite all the best organizations, all the organizations that wanted to come and be part of the discussion to really talk about these deportation issues. [...] And I just remember, after we had our conferences and discussions and stuff, we also wanted to go out and we went to a bar, a couple of us and stuff, and I just remember, there was some other group there that was also undocumented and it was odd. I think at one point, we started chanting like “undocumented – unafraid!” and *everybody* in that bar, whether it was maybe four of us that were from IYJL, everybody in that bar starting chanting with us. Because it became something that is well-known nationally. And that’s how we re-connect with other people and so the movement becomes national, I believe.

S.Q.: And the ‘unapologetic’ – that came a bit later, right?

A.G.: Yes. So, that came a little later and that’s when we were really just frustrated with the situation, I think. I think it was, really that was when the ‘DREAM Act’, the national ‘DREAM Act’ failed. And that’s when people started getting really kinda upset about the whole situation. It wasn’t about, anymore, about saying that you were undocumented, and you were also not scared to put yourself on the line, or to show yourself, so to come out of the shadows but it was also to this point of like they really wanted us to say that we were sorry and that it was our fault that we were here. And that was not the case.

What Antonio’s account shows particularly well is the level of frustration that played into the formation of those performative motto words for the Movement. Re-iterating the words “undocumented” and “unashamed” in her narrative strongly connects her *testimonio* to a common cause, a common identity within the Movement, and thus transforms it into a counter-discursive strategy against the dispossession of undocumented youth due to their status not only in Georgia, but nation-wide.

### 3.2. ‘Undocu-Queer’ Performances

Patton reports that the 1970’s “gay rights movement would argue that ‘gay’ identity was not necessarily born of a common essence but rather – or equally – of a shared history of oppression” and “a specific instance of the border oppression – variously, patriarchy, capitalism, or colonial status – that affected other groups in their own specific way” (368). Stressing the intersectionality of dispossessed identities, with reference to Patton’s observation, what really unites the gay liberation movement with Luis Maldonado, Ivette Roman, and Mohammad Abdollahi’s *testimonio* is the shared history of oppression that their community has encountered through

identifying as gay/lesbian. Outing themselves as undocumented and gay<sup>131</sup> in their *testimonios*, thus, transforms the latter into a performative act that unites both struggles against dispossession.

Frequently observing the intertwining of the gay and the Immigrant Rights Movement, Pallares highlights that undocumented “youth have openly articulated the ways in which their coming out strategy was inspired by Harvey Milk and the gay liberation movement, and the civil disobedience strategy from the civil rights movement”, realizing “their relationship to these traditions” (*Family Activism* 123; see also Pallares, *Representing ‘La Familia’* 225). As briefly introduced in chapter 2, with the Coming Out of the Shadows Day, the Immigrant Youth Justice League “clearly drew on the rhetorical strategies of gay and lesbian politics in calling on undocumented migrants to ‘come out’ about their migration status and march for legalization” (White 990).

This, first reference is connected to the performative speech act of ‘coming out of the closet’. Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) defines “‘closetedness’” as “a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (3). Further, coming out of the closet also counters ‘shame’, although, as Sedgwick shows, “there are psychological operations of shame, denial, projection around ‘ignorance’ that make it an especially galvanizing category” (7-8). Thus, a great number of undocumented students are actually ‘coming out’ in a twofold sense: They do not only ‘come out of the closet’ with regard to their status but also testify to potentially everybody who has access to the Internet or print media that they are also gay/lesbian. These narrators seem to bring themselves in a dual danger: that of deportation in addition to processes of moralization on the part of mostly conservative individuals in our society. This ‘dual danger’, inherently at work at the intersection of identities, has only more recently, according to Pallares, become more popular in the Movement. The author finds that “the ‘undocuqueer’ identity becomes increasingly politicized and becomes a larger presence in the movement, a more open inclusion of

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<sup>131</sup> The term ‘undocu-queer’ is used by undocumented Chicago youth leader Antonio Gutiérrez in a personal interview in which he highlights the intersections of dispossession, and of undocumented and the homosexual identities.

undocuqueer voices within the larger movement [...] and the related expansion and transformation of the ‘worthy’ family seem imminent” (*Family Activism* 127).

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* called for queer theorists “to expose the linguistic mobility, or performativity, of both sexed bodies and gender categories”, meaning that “the human body was seen as acquiring its sexed makings through the range of discourses available” (Segal 329). The “active/passive binary (or ‘heterosexual matrix’) for distinguishing male from female performance” was disrupted. An important discourse parallel between the political struggle of undocumented youth and that in the queer movement, hence, is that both movements disrupt established notions of binaries on the part of the queer rights movement and American/not American as paradigms of protest in the immigrant rights movement. One could argue that the ‘national matrix’ is disrupted in the latter. In Ivette Roman and Luis Maldonado’s narratives, the ‘coming outs’ break ‘the norm’ in similar ways. The contrast between both is that for Ivette, the coming out as a lesbian was many times more traumatic than the undocumented ‘coming out’, making the former the core story of dispossession in her narrative. To Luis, in contrast, the coming out as ‘undocumented’ was a lot more “nerve-racking moment” (00:00:49-00:00:53). Both narrators, however, actively connect their homosexual identity to the undocumented Immigrant Rights Movement.

**Ivette Roman (7): A Voice for Acceptance:**

In the end of her narrative, Ivette Roman explicitly triggers a connection to the gay rights movement, claiming: “I’m just here, trying to get a future. I want the same...I want the same rights as they do. I’m still just like them. Looking for something better to do with my life. And...so my mother could be proud of me” (00:04:09-00:04:30).

In this statement, Ivette positions her *coming out as undocumented*-narrative into her *coming out as homosexual*-narrative, by combining her mother’s sense of pride for her daughter (and Ivette’s work in activism) with a general fight for ‘a better future’ – an endeavor that necessarily needs to be connected to the context of undocumented immigrant student activism, in which Ivette clearly positions herself. As Ivette narrates her story of dispossession, revealing her coming out to her mother, with strong, visible emotional impact, she emphasizes the fact that she belongs to “more vulnerable groups” in the Movement, which, according to Pallares

include undocumented families with no citizen children; LGBT immigrants who are not married or whose marriage is not recognized by the federal government for immigration purposes; immigrants not eligible for the military, immigrants not able to study; and adults who have aged out of DREAM. (*Family Activism* 130).

Offering the viewer a resolution that stresses how she and her mother are now “working together”, highlights the intersections of and unites Ivette’s struggle in undocumented youth rights activism with her lesbian identity. Yet, the viewer does not know whether the two are now working together professionally, on a personal relationship basis, or for the ‘undocu-queer’ movement. Nevertheless, this resolution in form of the mother’s accepting of her daughter is necessary for the viewer to understand that Ivette’s resistance against the sexual dispossession and the dispossession caused by her undocumented status, is a struggle that works only on the basis of its intersections. However, the ‘resolution’ of the mother-daughter conflict also signals that the social acceptance of homosexuality can be ‘resolved’, while undocumented immigration status cannot. Thus, Ivette highlights the need for a collective and united struggle against the norms that dispossess undocumented immigrants in the United States. Antonio Gutiérrez, an undocu-queer leader in the Immigrant Youth Justice league, describes the crucial need to continue this struggle:

I feel like, in both situations, in both groups, I have found myself in situations where one of my identities is not well-taken in that space. Or that they don’t wanna support that side of me. [...] They’re definitely connecting a little more now and interconnecting and working together a little more but I feel that there’s still a big distinction between the immigration movement and the human rights movement and that’s unfortunate because we could be *so* much stronger if we just unite them both at the same time.

### **Luis Maldonado (8): Verbal Naming: Positioning and Resistance**

Within the frame of the introductory testimonial pattern that we have established for the digital *testimonio* in the previous section, Luis introduces his video and himself by affirming: “I’m undocumented and unafraid, queer and unashamed. My name is Luis Maldonado” (00:00-00:07). The order in which Luis makes claims about his identity suggests that among his multiple identities, the undocumented identity comes first, and his queer identity comes second (even before his first name). With regard to immigration, and his *immigration* story, as the narrative is named, it makes sense that the undocumented identity comes first. But why, then, did Luis not name

any other parts of his identity? To answer that question, it is evident that these two parts of his identities are the ones that ‘struggle with the norm’ in Luis’ fight against dispossession. Further, the political connection between the two emphasizes the united struggle between the gay and the Immigrant Rights Movement, as explained earlier.

Luis shows, first of all, how his queer identity is a solid part of himself, giving the term ‘unashamed’ an additional meaning: In the current Movement, ‘unashamed’ is used by undocumented youth (now most likely to have DACA) to refer to their parents – taking away the blame and guilt that was thrust upon them in an early phase of the Movement in order to demand a national or federal legalization of the DREAM Act. Luis now actively uses this term to establish the link between his two identities: his homosexuality and his undocumented status. Through its history of oppression and discrimination, homosexuality is connected to ‘shame’, as Sedgwick has shown earlier, much more than ‘shame’ can be connected to Luis’ parents’ decision to migrate to the United States illegally.

In turn, Luis also appropriates the discourse strategy of being ‘unashamed’ from the gay rights movement to his undocumented immigrant rights activism. As Athanasiou explains, “naming is not only a site of trauma, but also potentially a strategy of subversive mimesis” (139). Using naming to counter dispossession “implies a performative which is necessarily interwoven in the fabric of appropriation that authorizes it, while at the same time it remains somehow capable of exposing and exceeding its prescribed limits” (138). Appropriation is, in particular, also performed in Luis’ definition of the ‘undocumented person’. Talking to the viewer about first coming out as an “undocumented person”, he repeats this term three times in a short sequence of roughly 20 seconds (00:00:43-00:01:07). In this speech act, he not only re-names the major agents of the Movement from ‘immigrant’ to ‘student’ but he also does so repetitively, materializing the creation of himself – and his Movement – as *another* identity in his performance.

Compared to initial years of youths ‘outing themselves’ as undocumented (and some, gay), online and offline, the 2013 Movement had already gained immense momentum. Because of the legislative shift implicated by the DACA in 2012 from undocumented students to a focus on families, many undocumented youth today are moving away from the DREAMer’s Movement focusing on undocumented students’

access to college and university, to a more unified Movement claiming for the rights of undocumented immigrants. There is a noticeable change in narratives published in the ‘early’ years of the Movement around 2007 and those published from 2012 until today. José Manuel, the editor of *PAPERS: Stories by Undocumented Youth*, observes:

As we listened to these stories over the last five years, we have noticed the tone and content change. Several years ago, undocumented youth were much more isolated. Some of those who were the most ‘out’ only knew each other by first names or aliases on social media. Now these activists have begun to deliberately use methods and language from the civil rights, women’s rights and gay rights movements. (x-xi)

Manuel et al. see the effects of this change in “the social activism and political organizing led by youth activists”, as it apparently “added to the pressure that brought the DREAM Act to a vote in 2010 and to President Obama’s June 15, 2012 announcement of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)” (xi). Nonetheless, these benefits are still not available to most of undocumented youth, which leads the editors to “believe that if only they [the narrators of the stories published] were known and understood by their neighbors, their request for legal inclusion into American society could not be denied” (Manuel et al. xi). This shift, from a very desperate situation of dispossession for undocumented youth to at least some limited options for undocumented students with certain qualification leads to a shift of focus in the Movement to anti-deportation campaigns that Luis also serves in his core story, which emphasizes the effect of deportation on family members.

Considering this political context, Luis’ synthesis of both the physical and the narrative voice, serves as an important device for identification and personification. For instance, the soaring numbers of deportations, which narratives of the past two years increasing address, are impalpable to the viewer. Being an afflicted ‘witness’ to family separation himself, Luis’ core moments of dispossession, exclusion and marginalization are humanized through his act of outing himself as ‘undocumented’. At this point, the fact that ‘undocumented’ immigrants are often called ‘illegals’, or even ‘illegal aliens’, as well as many other derogative terms, his attempt to ‘humanize’ the immigration debate seems to make great sense. Judith Butler’s and Athena Athanasiou’s discussion of this form of ‘dispossession’ captures the need that is central to the undocumented narrators: “The human”, they argue, “is always the

event of its multiple exposures – both within its relatedness to others and within its exposure to the normative forces that arrange the social, political, and cultural matrices of humanness” (Athanasidou 32). Because undocumented youth understood their relation to the public debate, part of the campaign they led within the frame of the Drop i-word campaign stands up against derogative terminology to which they are subjected and which de-humanizes them.<sup>132</sup> In this context, Luis connects the activism of undocumented youth to the very literal understanding of ‘voice’. He construes a meta-level, in which he consciously ‘signs’ his name, his identity, his story and his voice to the collective Movement, justifying this by asking: “If we don’t speak up, who will be our voice?” His voice and the use of drum beats that inspire political activism serves what has been determined as a crucial device for the projection of (socio-political) attitudes (cf. Klüppelholz 57).

#### **4. Para-Verbal Features: Identities in Change**

##### **4.1. Speech Tempo, Loudness, and Pitch**

###### **Mohammad Abdollahi (2): De-Emotionalizing Narration in Monotonous Language**

Just as para-verbal features of the voice such as rhythm or volume might create the impression that digital *testimonios* can have an activating effect in the viewer, para-verbal features that do not change can create the impression that the story ‘has been told before’ or the video is merely an imitation of others. In two of the eight narratives, this feature is especially distinct. Monotony and similarity in phrasing the verbal output, first of all, conveys the impression that the production of digital *testimonios* grows steadily and, hence, makes the issue seem important. Secondly, while personalizing the video with biographical data, a similar style and order of narrating it, at the same time, de-personalizes the accounts.

Mohammad Abdollahi uses monotony in his speech for his narrative. His speech tempo, to begin with, is much higher than that of the other undocumented narrators. Making the ‘guidelines’ for testimonial storytelling explicit, he professes that digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth contain similarities in their

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<sup>132</sup> This leads to an effect of decriminalization that all of the narratives embed into their narrative strategies as I will show in a later section.

production and are not produced completely independently. Mohammad is the only narrator of those chosen for this study who adds this meta-perspective to his narration. At the same time, he hints at the universality in processes of dispossession, which incorporate, as he claims, “the same thing that we hear from everybody” (00:00:57). The introductions to the digital *testimonios* thus become repetitive speech acts that secure a sense of recognition by the viewer. Within this act, as Madison and Hamera describe, words “are reiterative in [...] speech, meaning, intent, and custom” and thus “become communicative and comprehensible because they are recognizable in their repetition” (xvi). I maintain that Mohammad monotonously performs his *testimonio* in order to enhance recognition and to de-emphasize the personal. By doing so, he counters the media logic of YouTube, which generally fetishizes “the idea of celebrity, of being/becoming famous” and illustrates an “important element of why people put up their videos” on YouTube (Kavoori 13).

#### **Angelica Velazquillo (5): Setting the ‘Tone’**

The narrative of Angelica Velazquillo provides an excellent example of how “in speech, the somatic and the semiotic intertwine”, as Van Leeuwen would argue (69). While pitch is individual (cf. Klüppelholz 56), a change in pitch and other prosodic features such as speech tempo or loudness (cf. Hübler 46) create meaning (cf. Klüppelholz 56-57; Van Leeuwen 70-71).

When Angelica finishes recounting the arrest of her brother and the emotional struggle that Angelica and her mother went through during that night he spent in jail, she signals by a change in intonation that she drew her conclusions from this event and decided to ‘fight’ from that moment. “This was a turning point for me” (00:00:53-00:00:55) she says after a short break, and in a clearly, audibly raised pitch of the voice. Instead of going down with intonation, her voice now sounds unnaturally high, almost incongruous with the negative implications of the event that are really in play. Indeed, Angelica does not seem very emotional about the turning point itself, nor the history of ‘problems’ that her undocumented status had brought her all her life, but rather about the moment she realized that her brother was gone. In similar manner, Angelica also confirms her growing role in undocumented youth activism: Half way through the narrative, Angelica explains that an offline organization helped to save her brother from deportation. She recounts that she “got in touch with a group



of young advocates”, who, again “recommended making his case public” (00:01:52-00:01:57). “And we did”, Angelica says with a very high pitched voice. This pitch also stresses that the only solution was to keep her brother with her, and removes, one could argue, negative associations that anti-immigrant viewers have with the term ‘advocate’, which conservatives often associate with revolutionary ‘troublemaking’. Moreover, her voice in that sentence is so high that it does not seem possible that it could go any higher, symbolizing that her family had no alternative to activism in order to defend the brother.

What is striking in this narrative about her brother is that although we do not know that the brother that Angelica is talking about is her younger brother, we always have the impression of this teenage boy, just about able to drive a car, forgetting to leave his high beams on. This effect is created, in parts, by Angelica’s high-pitched voice. When recounting ‘that night he spent in jail’, she is barely able to fully pronounce ‘jail’ – a term that is usually associated with ‘criminals’. The sound that Angelica makes when she pronounces ‘jail’ is so high-pitched that it sounds like a different word (a phonetic transcription of the sound could look something like: “djil”). This disassociation with the original term, ‘jail’, further paints the picture of a law-abiding little brother who should, in turn, be disassociated with crime. Through pitch, thus, Angelica counters “views that posit teens as politically passive or potential criminals, a dichotomy that these students’ activism directly refutes”, as Pallares and Flores-González summarize (xxvi).

## 4.2. Dramatic Silences

One of the distinct affordances of audiovisual videos on YouTube, in contrast to, for instance, radio, is the possibility to add silence and pauses to the narrative without making silence a threat to ‘destroy’ narrative integrity (cf. Dunn 193-194). However, as with radio, “there is an important distinction between the use of dramatic silence and ‘dead air’” (195). Technically, also, these moments are also “not silence at all” but “atmospheric or ambient noise” and is “whatever sound is left in the recording environment when people stop talking” (ibid). Dramatic silence, to sum up, is “the silence of a pause for thought, of reaction, of an action that interrupts the flow of sound”, which “can be filled with anticipation, expectation, wonder” (ibid). In the construction of meaning Portelli reminds us that in interpretation of spoken voice, the

“velocity of speech” is not universal (65). He shows that “slowing down may mean greater emphasis as well as greater difficulty, and acceleration may show a wish to glide over certain points, as well as a greater familiarity or ease” (ibid).

#### **David Ramirez (4): Dispossession as Silence**

David Ramirez uses silence in combination with a cut of the moving image as a stylistic device that breaks with the style that Benmayor described for digital *testimonios*. In the middle of the narrative (00:01:04), the recording is openly disrupted, as David discontinues his narration, glances away and exhales a long and clearly audible sigh. As if it had been, literally, ‘strenuous’ for him to having to ‘dig that hole’, as if all this had taken away his strength, he exhales a big, clearly audible amount of air from his mouth, looks in another direction, and shakes his head. David is exhausted, we understand immediately, without his having to say so. All it takes to convey this impression is to contextualize the sounds and the metaphor he gives verbally.



Figure 90: “D.R. (4)\_Silence.” *YouTube*. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

This narrative silence simulates the natural process of interpersonal communication. The meaning that this performance of silence expresses is that either the person does not know what else to say or that he/she feels a sense of boredom, exhaustion or emptiness. By not cutting this scene from the final version of David’s digital story, he distinguishes his narrative from those personalized video accounts on YouTube that seem rehearsed and staged to gain a bigger audience. Benmayor, for instance, regards *testimonio* as stories which are revised and performed, at the same time as they are the “the result of an oral process of telling, recording, and bearing witness to each other’s life stories” (*Digital Testimonio* 507). Through performing that he does not have the means to continue with his narration, David shows us that he does not seem to be interested in what the viewer thinks about his wordlessness and performs a stark contrast to the “ideal poster children” in other

campaigns (Pallares, *Family Activism* 124). Further, the verbal context that this silence appears in is important for understanding it. Previously, David argued that he felt like he was “digging himself further into a hole” (00:00:53-00:00:55) whenever he tried to ‘reconcile’ his undocumented identity with stigmatization, prejudice, and hate (see chapter 5 of a discussion of this aspect). Using silence here performs exactly this moment of dispossession – the feeling of aporia described in the metaphor of ‘digging oneself further into a hole’. David performs how dispossession “marks the limits of self-sufficiency” (Butler, *Dispossession* 3). Since David overcomes this aporia through his activism (which the YouTube video is a part of), his performance of silence materializes his core moment of dispossession.

### **Angelica Velazquillo (5): Dramatic Silence, Increasing Awareness**

In the introduction to herself, Angelica Velazquillo pauses clearly after giving her name. Then after claiming she has a university degree, she pauses again, before telling us that she is “also undocumented” (00:00:21). With the most clearly audible sigh, a gasp for air, and a gulp, she informs her audience that she “cannot work in [her] field” or “renew [her] drivers license” (00:00:21-00:00:24). The ‘dramatic pauses’ and sighing that continue throughout the whole narrative serve as audible devices to express distress or sorrow about a certain situation or circumstance. The affective dimension of dispossession can, thus, be transmitted through para-verbal means and do not have to be transcribed by an interlocutor, as with the traditional *testimonio*. This makes the moment of dispossession narrated in digital *testimonios* more lively accounts. Further, Angelica’s pauses and sighs work on a sub-conscious level, producing meaning by themselves that lies, like an imaginary frame, on the whole narrative: Her sighing and pauses communicate that Angelica conscious that she is telling intimate details about likely the most distressing problem in her life – undocumented status – to a large audience online.

### **Mitzy Calderón (6): Pausing**

One of the most significant aspects of Mitzy Calderón’s digital *testimonio* is that she seems to have recorded it all by herself. This assumption originates the fact that there is no form of montage, hence, no zoom, and not even cutting of the moving image prior to posting the video online. Mitzy further confirms this impression by addressing the camera as her sole ‘audience’ whenever she talks. The fact that the camera

does not move except for when she moves the table where she sits further away shows that there is no interlocutor with Mitzy but rather that the narrator uses a camera that is connected to or integrated into her computer (perhaps a webcam). We can see this in 00:01:00, when she moves her hands strongly, letting them drop to the table, which the camera records as a faint banging sound at the same time as the recorded moving image jolts a little. The elementary production style conveys the message that Mitzy does *not need* to perform a high technical knowledge in order to participate in the Movement with an online story. This relates her narrative to Burgess and Green's understanding of participatory culture on YouTube as "the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user-generated content, and some kind of shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers" (10). Mitzy demonstrates that all she needs is a webcam – and while this is connected, of course, to material means and the possession of a computer – the use of her voice and her face are the only narrative devices needed for her digital *testimonio*.

The 'amateur production' of content on YouTube is further emphasized by narrative time: Instead of cutting her narrative significantly in moments in which she pauses as she searches for words, Mitzy looks at the notes that she seems to have lying next to her computer (see Figure 92) or straightens her hair (see Figure 91).



From left to right:

Figure 91: "M.C. (6)\_Pause 1 *YouTube*. 2012. Author's screenshot. 9 Aug. 2015.

Figure 92: "M.C. (6)\_Pause 2." *YouTube*. 2012. Author's screenshot. 9. Aug. 2015.

During these pauses she hence lets narrative time pass until she has found a 'right' way to proceed, expressing, at the same time, narrative authority that the *testimonio* purports (cf. Beverley, *Narrative Authority* 556). Further, as Lundby and Hertzberg argue,

Digital Stories, as a genre, is a strictly defined form of multimodal expression which is *up to the individual narrator* to fill with content connected to an authentic personal experience. This means that the authenticity inherent in this genre will depend more on how, and under what circumstances, the story is

told than on the references to the life story of the narrator, that is the autobiographical evidences. (119, *emphasis added*)

Assuming this authority to fill the narrative time as she pleases, pausing, Mitzy demonstrates her understanding of the intertwinement of the media logic with the political logic of the *testimonio*.

The fact that Mitzy stops to read from what seems to be a piece of paper underlines the fact that in traditional *testimonio*, “the voice is the centerpiece of the story, what gives it its authenticity” (Benmayor, *Digital Testimonio* 521) and “no matter how many times students practice, the performance into the microphone becomes the ‘real’ telling, the moment of disclosure” (513). Mitzy’s narrative, thus, becomes one example for digital *testimonios* in the Movement which center the speech act, the ‘voice’ in combination with the ‘face’, as the most important element of the whole narrative. Mitzy and Angelica Velazquillo (5), who do not use any additional media devices, understand the video as a ‘space for appearance’ and transform it into a “media event that forms across time and space” (Butler, *Dispossession* 197), as they *speak*. Both narrators show that they do not need to use any other modes to communicate their messages, adding a sense of authenticity in spite of the fact that both accounts seem to have been ‘prepared’ prior to the recording. It is the voice that is most important, bearing witness to ills that happen in the communities of the dispossessed.

### 4.3. Acoustic Space

#### **Ivette Roman (7):**

Ivette Roman includes background noise in her digital *testimonio* that displays the production context, recalling the traditional context of production of the *testimonio*.

Background noise, to begin with, produces another dimension in the space that the video displays. West explains that “aural space, also known as auditory space or acoustic space, is a term used by soundscape designers to describe a lack of noticeable sound” (286). However, he notes that “moments of aural space are used to redirect the attention of the listener, to build tension or to simply let the ear rest from sound” (*ibid*). The ‘surrounding sound’ thus, according to Dunn, creates space “acoustically” (196).

The appearance of background sound in Ivette's narrative has a strong effect on the frame of her digital *testimonio*. At about minute 00:01:09, one can hear a woman's voice responding with an affirmative, non-verbal sound to Ivette's narration (at this moment, she recounts that some kids in her school spread lies about her). The sound comes from the direction into which Ivette is looking, which tells us that there must be at least one other person (besides the camera) in the room, having an interview-like conversation with Ivette. This sound thus serves as a confirmation of what the bodily posture that Ivette displays, as she does not look directly into the camera but instead centers her eye on an abstract point to her left. The background sound gives the viewer an idea of what (or whom) Ivette is focusing on: a woman who must be Ivette's interlocutor. At the same time, through the creation of acoustic space, as explained above, the woman is closer to *us*, the viewer, which establishes an interview-like situation.<sup>133</sup> The fact that a woman is interviewing Ivette exemplifies the opening up of the testimonial tradition to females in the current Latin American literature after the 1970s (cf. Maier; Logan 199). The inclusion of women gives topics of gender and sexual difference more significance (cf. Maier 2), as Ivette's digital *testimonio* shows.

Further, through this acoustic space, Ivette's agency is reduced and transferred to at least two other people involved in the production of her *testimonio* – the female interlocutor and camera (wo/)man. Since Ivette's posture does not 'face' the audience directly, she emphasizes that there is a some distance between the narrator, herself, and the receiver, the audience on YouTube. Along these lines, the audience further assumes the role of a witness *to* the digital *testimonio* that Ivette gives. (Interaction in form of comments, hence, would probably not directly address Ivette, but rather the producers of the *testimonio*.) By means of this active distancing, there is a focus on the interest that others might have in Ivette's story of dispossession, implying a general demand for the story and its implications. The vocal intervention by another person in the *testimonio* thus becomes immediately associated with a caption that contains the organizational logo of *Equality Maryland* at the end of Ivette's video clip. The cause that Ivette speaks for becomes a resistance to multiple, intersec-

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<sup>133</sup> This effect is fortified by the use of written captions in the format of a question, which Ivette 'answers' and which introduce the topic of the subsequent narrative episode. For a detailed discussion, see chapter 7.

tional instances of dispossession framed by an organization in which Ivette is only *one* in many affected individuals.

### **5. The Sound of Music: Extra-Diegetic Instrumental Music**

As already noted in the introduction to this chapter, only two of the eight digital *testimonios* appropriate the meaning potential of music for their narratives. In both narratives, the music is instrumental and extra-diegetic – “that is, music that does not originate in the fictional world”, as Ryan explains (*Music* 267).<sup>134</sup>

#### **Carlos Roa (3):**

Carlos’ digital *testimonio* was created within the frame of the WeareAmerica-campaign (see chapter 7 for more details). The more professional filming is evident in the official campaign ad that introduces the narrative, consisting of an audiovisual collage of voices and photographs which symbolize different stories to be told within the same campaign. While the voices exclaiming ‘I am America’ at the beginning of the introduction are audibly very different, the background music remains the same throughout the whole narrative, thus symbolically uniting Carlos’ narrative with all the other narratives taking part in the campaign. Thus this music, in Kalinak’s words, has an ‘additive function’ in the creation of meaning rather than serving in “the construction of the narrative” itself (21). Additive music, she explains, lends “coherence or unity to a film”, bridging “a sequence to smooth over gaps in time”, for instance (*ibid*). As Carlos’ narrative revolves around different aspects in his life – his father’s immigration background, his plans for the future, and his mother’s fight against cancer – this function creates the impression of a narrative that unites its topics into one, coherent story that, one could argue, also serves one, coherent political goal: the fight against the dispossession of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

The background music in Carlos’ digital *testimonio* could be termed as ‘classical’, instrumental music, consisting of piano and flute sounds that are consistently repeated. According to Klüppelholz, the use of classical music serves an associative function in the creation of meaning, as it has its origins in church, aristocracy, and the upper class, and it remains that cultural symbol up to today (cf.

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<sup>134</sup> “Intradiegetic music”, in contrast to the latter, “can be heard by the members of the fictional world” (Ryan, *Music* 272).

62). Applied to Carlos' narrative, the use of classical background music elevates the status of his family and likewise *all* immigrant Americans (included in the audiovisual introduction of the 'WeareAmerica'-campaign), without the use of words. It introduces a deep sense of narrativity as a "metaphorical phenomenon", possessing "narrativity without being a narrative" (Ryan, *Music* 267), as it implicitly refers to the discourse of 'worthiness' proclaimed by pro-DREAM Act students, especially in the earlier personal narratives originating in the Immigrant Rights Movement since 2006. Since the piano (and later the flute) repeats the musical theme frequently throughout the narrative, the theme serves as a 'leitmotif', a "distinguishing characteristic of tonal music" that plays "a series of notes [...] in a memorable and recognizable order" (Kalinak 11). However, since the theme is simple, it does not distract the viewer from the verbal and visual input (cf. Bullerjahn 169) – a choice which thus eventually bestows more meaning potential upon all other modes in the narrative.

What is more, the leitmotif is harmonious, meaning that the music does not create tensions or frictions. "*Harmony* has to do with the coordination of notes playing simultaneously", Kalinak explains, which is "often less immediately recognizable than melody, but its effects are powerful and discernible even by those without the language to describe them" (12).<sup>135</sup> The theme in Carlos' background music essentially *reminds* the listener/viewer constantly of the political message that the associative function of the theme forms (as explained above), and adds, through its harmonious sound, an effect that symbolically reduces the potential stress or irritation that Carlos' narrative could cause in the viewer.

In sequence (00:01:28-00:02:17), when Carlos recounts the death of his mother, a different flute-like instrument (which sounds like an oboe or clarinet) is added to the piano music. The instrument also plays the leitmotif, though the theme sounds darker through the change from the piano music to the flute, more muffled and sad.<sup>136</sup> The flute, then, adds an emotional level to the moving image that "can also create and resonate emotion between the screen and the audience", which even-

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<sup>135</sup> Harmony is created, in detail, by "stress points built upon dissonance and resolutions that dissipate dissonance. The farther harmony moves from the tonal center, the more associations of disorder and instability will be activated; the closer to the tonal center, the more associations of order and stability" (Kalinak 12).

<sup>136</sup> Kalinak shows that "associations of happiness and brightness are often attached to the major mode while associations of melancholy and ominous are attached to the minor" (11).



tually leads to the viewer to “become more invested” in the “characters or events” (Kalinak 4), no matter whether the listener enjoys that music or not, according to Klüppelholz (cf. 60).

### **Luis Maldonado (8): Rhythm and Loudness**

Luis Maldonado’s digital *testimonio*, in difference to Carlos’ narrative, is a valuable example of how the narrator uses rhythmic musical sounds to accompany his rhythmic use of voice and, by doing so, calls attention to his narrative and promises an ‘ongoing’ struggle against the dispassion that he experiences as an undocu-queer whose immediate family got deported.

The rhythmic sounds provide an additional layer of meaning to the verbal elements in the digital narrative, as, according to Lexmann, it is “one of principal attributes of music *per se* and [...] shapes up its meaning” (29). In Luis’ initial words of his *testimonio*, his outing as “undocumented” is accompanied by the sound of regular rhythmic drum beats consisting of two components: Three slow drum beats and three maraca sounds in seven successive rows. The drum beats are high in volume and low in pitch compared to the rattle sounds. However, Luis’ voice is even higher in volume. This causes his voice to drown the drum beats, or for the drum beats to merely ‘accompany’ the voice. This renders a supportive effect for his voice in the sense that the musical sounds summon the viewer’s attention upon the words the narrator is articulating. In view of the message that Luis sends in his first words – ‘outing’ himself as undocumented and gay, “unashamed” and “unafraid”, it is crucial that the musical sound does not drown the voice of the narrator. This would cause a hiding of the voice, and hence, a hiding also of the undocumented narrator. Further, the choice of the instrument – producing simple, non-synthetic drum beats – implies a naturalness and historical reference associated with the stereotypical yet not unrealistic picture of indigenous activism in the fight against colonial powers. In Luis’ digital *testimonio*, it thus mediates the spirit of ongoing activism once associated with Chicanismo in the United States.

According to Klüppelholz, changes in prosodic features<sup>137</sup> such as the rhythm or loudness of voice and music are patterns which human beings instinctively

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<sup>137</sup> Prosodic features “include lexical and rhythmic stress, lexical tone and intonation” (Ashby and Maidment 154).

interpret on the basis of ancient experiences with threat:<sup>138</sup> Anything unexpected would or could potentially create a source of danger (cf. Klüppelholz 61). Kalinak adds that especially “Western music is characterized by a high degree of regularity in terms of rhythm, and deviations from established patterns [which] can be very potent” (Kalinak 13). For audiovisual narrative, Lexmann anchors this feature in the “sensitivity of audition to the perception of rhythm [which] is many times higher than sensitivity of vision” (29). In music and sounds today, changes such as a sudden high volume still create a sense of ‘tension’, ‘suspense’, ‘excitement’ or threat (cf. Klüppelholz 61). For spoken narrative, this theoretical basis implies that changes in rhythm and volume can cause perceived threat as a reaction in the listener, such as the release of emotions that, potentially, could lead to an action on part of the listener. Sudden sounds at least provide a call for undivided attention to the subsequent sounds, no matter what the consequential ‘action’ outcome might be (cf. Klüppelholz 55). Due to this activating effect caused by changes in rhythm, Portelli ascribes a greater sense of power to the narrator of oral accounts over the narrator *and* the reader of written accounts, because it is for the narrator to decide who implements changes in, for instance, duration and rhythm in the narrative account. Theory on the effects of rhythmic music and sounds in audiovisual narrative asserts these power dynamics that lie inherently in orality itself. The power of the narrator is further connected to agency. Sterne argues that “voice has long been conflated with ideas of agency in political theory” (9) and lately, “not only [has] the metaphor of voice become the sine qua non of ‘being’ online, but it has been charged with all the political currents of democratic practice” (Crawford in: Sterne 9).

What does this mean for the shift of textuality from the written testimonial narrative voice to the oral one? The option to create changes in rhythm, duration, intonation or volume of voice, sounds and music illustrates an inherently powerful tool reserved only for the digital *testimonio*, not the traditional, as these performative features of the narrator’s voice can only be partly translated into written text – a process by which much of the original rhythm gets lost. Certainly, there are many ways of creating rhythm in written narrative, too. Yet, the task of ‘editor’ of the

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<sup>138</sup> “Eine spezifische emotionale Wirkung von Musik, die über eine allgemeine Aktivierung hinausgeht, dürfte vor allem in den Erfahrungen liegen, die die Menschheit mit Bewegung, mit Größenverhältnissen und der Lage im Raum gemacht und in einem kollektiven Gedächtnis gespeichert hat“ (Klüppelholz 61).

spoken account in the traditional *testimonio* is precisely *not* to create but to ‘record’ the account of the interviewee. The beat of the drums, in sum, does not only indicate a clear beginning and end of the narrative itself; the highly regular beats also suggest a stringent sequence that is likely to continue, thus indicating ongoing activism on a symbolic level. Moreover, the sound of the drums again gets louder only when Luis is finished speaking, as we can see in the following oscillogram below.<sup>139</sup> These attributes, in sum, reflect the importance of the narrative context: the increased loudness of his voice and the digital addition of the drum beats serve as physical and literal amplifiers of a political voice and resistance. They become the “*leitmotif*” of Luis’ *testimonio* through the “identifiable and recurring musical pattern” (Kalinak 11).<sup>140</sup>

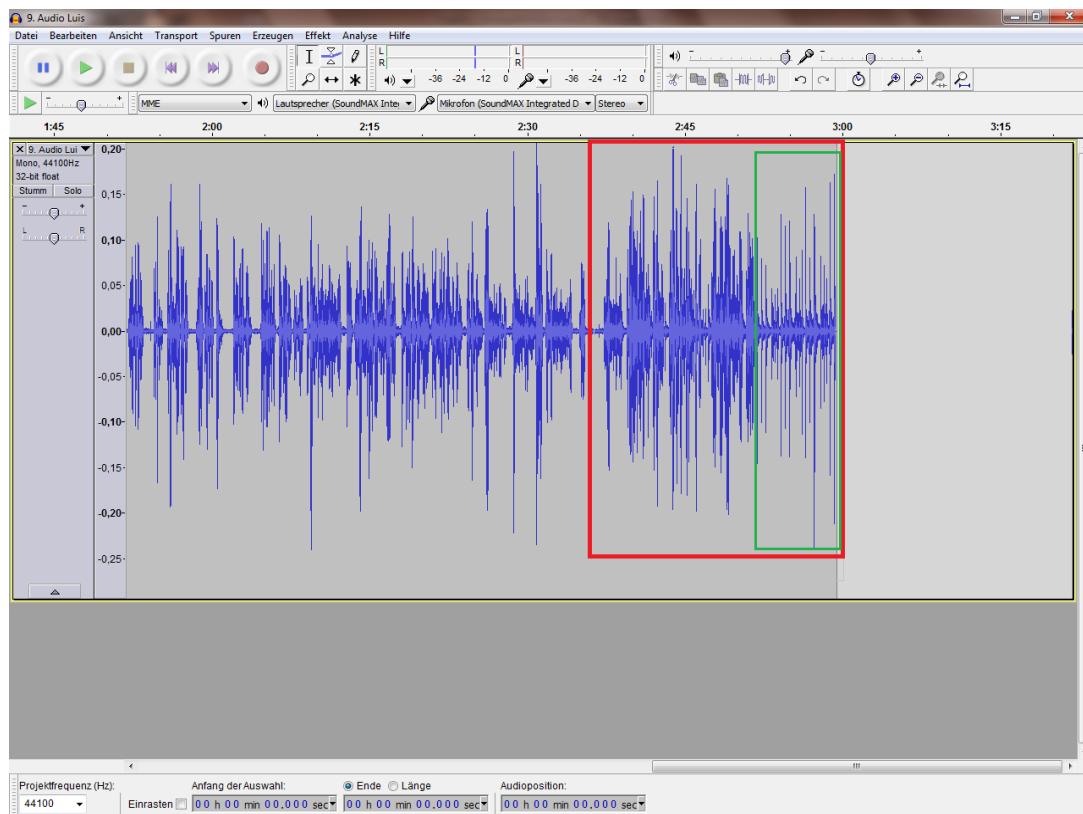


Figure 93: “Oscillogram: Rhythm and Loudness Luis.” Designed by the Author.

The rhythm of the drum music, that becomes even louder when Luis has finished speaking, accompany, in the same composition as detected before, Luis’ verbal

<sup>139</sup> The red frame marks the final sentences of Luis’ *testimonio* and the beginning of the drum music. The green frame marks the final and slowly in loudness increasing drum beats after Luis is finished speaking.

<sup>140</sup> Although Luis’ *testimonio* does not use a specific melody, the drum beats can be called a leitmotif, as the latter “can consist of any kind of musical material – a distinctive rhythm, for instance”, Kalinak explains (11).

declaration of his ongoing fight for his idea of justice (00:02:37-00:02:59) framed as follows:

So, to me that means take action, and through that there will always be a cause that I will feel attached to. There will always be an injustice that I will need to fight for, because if we don't speak out against these issues, then, who will be our voice? (00:02:37-00:02:59).

The rhythm not only announces activism, it also gives a temporal dimension to the narrative. As Kalinak argues, “through rhythm, music’s ordered articulation of time is transferred to film itself” (24). She explains further: “Rhythm refers to the organization of music through time; its basic unit is the beat, a discernible pulse that marks out the passage of time” (12-13; cf. Bullerjahn 185). Thus, the music metaphorically and literally *prolongs* Luis’ announced, ever-continuing activism. The drum beats, hence, symbolize a “forward movement” and a “desire-for-something-to-come” (Ryan, *Music* 268).

## Chapter 7

### INTERMEDIAL SPACES:

#### WRITTEN LANGUAGE, STATIC IMAGE, AND PROPS

### 1. Introduction: Commonalities

From an intermedial and multimodal perspective, this chapter investigates the combination of the logics of space and time on the basis of two core modes, static written language and static image (photographs). This fusion is motivated by the analogy of the two in their creation of meaning and interpretation through the logics of space. In contrast to writing and image, Kress points out, “the differences between speech and writing may be as or more significant than the similarities” (*What is mode?* 56). Kress finds, for instance, “the distinctly different material potentials for meaning of sound and of graphic ‘stuff’” (ibid), as sound is received in form of “hearing” and not “sight” (55). Writing utilizes different modes to visually express ‘emphasis’, too. Size, spacing, and “bolding in writing and loudness in speech are means of producing emphasis” (ibid). Most importantly, the author finds general “socially shaped” differences between the production and reception of two core modes (cf. 56).

One focus of this chapter, “alphabetic writing”, to begin with, “is spatially displayed, yet it ‘leans on’ speech in its logic of sequence in time, which is ‘mimicked’ in writing by the spatial sequence to the sense that it works in some ways at least like an image” (Kress, *What is mode?* 56). Even more than Kress, Stöckl stresses that “written language [...] wields strong pictorial powers” (9). On the other, just like written language, “visual images are also abstractions” that rely on a grammar, only that they “are realized through a visual grammar network” and “expressed through visual systems of *graphics*, such as *form*, *perspective*, *layout* and *strokes*” (Lim 55; see also Kress, *What is mode?* 55). These aspects compose the “display stratum” (Lim 55) that stands in contrast to the “expression plane”, in which “the system of *colour* and *form* [are] used to make meaning” (56). In particular, “meaning”, again, “is made by the arrangement of entities in the framed space; by the *kinds* of relations between the depicted entities” (Kress, *What is mode?* 56). Thus, both planes are subject to ‘graphic rhythm’ which – in addition to the content plane (the elements and persons depicted) and the combination of photos with other media of

narration (intermediality) – is a focus in the analysis of static images and written language in this chapter. “Graphic rhythm” has been defined as “a virtual category”, relating to “a distribution of expressive elements in space or on surface, a distribution of the segments of spatial artefacts, lines, colours, etc.” that includes “the regular or irregular repetition of the elements in space” or “the symmetry of the elements” (Lexman 86; see also Hickethier 106).

In the interpretation of written language and static images (photographs) with regard to the aspects listed above, the context of the moving image is nevertheless prominent, because often, “the verbal and the visual version blend in the mind of the reader-spectator into one powerful image, each version filling the gaps of the other” (Ryan, *Moving Pictures* 139). The analysis of the different modes in their combination in the context of the multimodal *ensemble* in the videos, hence, shall provide an answer to the question of how political meaning is created in the digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth.

## 2. Captions

The first section of the chapter focuses on written language in form of captions, which are digitally implemented into the videos. This means, most importantly, that all the videos in this section needed to have been edited by a video editing program. This, in turn, poses important questions concerning the agency of undocumented youth in the production of their digital *testimonios*, as the viewer cannot tell who edited the video in the first place. As Benmayor proposes, the production of digital *testimonios* takes form of a “collaborative practice[...]” (*Digital Testimonio* 523). Through the use of this ‘perspective’ in written text, the captions provide a glimpse of ‘who is speaking’. Indeed, in all of the videos, the captions signify another person speaking, essentially de-personalizing the content portrayed in these episodes of the digital *testimonios* but also offering ‘perspectives’ that assert the production of the video in communality, and in the (undocumented) immigrant community.

### 2.1. Written Interpellations: Digital *Testimonio* as Interview

As introduced in chapter 3, the *testimonio* directly addresses an interlocutor, whom the narrator “exploit[s] in order to have her [or his] story reach and influence an international audience, something that, as an activist for her [or his] community, she

[or he] sees in quite utilitarian terms as a political task” (Beverly, *Testimonio* 38). For the digital *testimonio*, too, Benmayor understands the storytelling setting potentially as “a one-to-one conversation between narrator and facilitator” (*Digital Testimonio* 510). She further claims that

different from traditional autobiography or conventional storytelling, where the author works individually and independently to produce the narrative, digital *testimonios* involve various dimensions of collectivity. Just as the *testimonio* requires an interlocutor to generate the story and a community audience to share or understand the experience, digital *testimonios* emerge from a storytelling setting. (ibid)

In such a setting, the narrative is interrupted frequently by conversational attributes such as questions from the interlocutor, to which the narrator responds (cf. Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 44).<sup>141</sup> As the *testimonios* in this selection are digital, Ryan reminds us that “no amount of hyperlinking can match the oral narrator’s freedom to adapt his tale to the particular needs of the audience” (41). Therefore, we can conclude that although some of the narratives might seem like ‘face-to-face narrations’, we cannot view them as such in their final product, although during the production process they might well be. This means that the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee has been cut out of the narrative. While some of the narratives seem to be produced by the narrator herself (Angelica Velazquillo (5) and Mitzy Calderón (6)), interaction in this analysis shows in the written captions that formulate the questions that are posed to Carlos Roa (3), for instance, simulating the interview situation in which the production of his digital *testimonio* presumably originates.

### **Carlos Roa (3): The Interview**

While the four narratives<sup>142</sup> that integrate captions into their video clip, only one of them, Carlos Roa (3), integrates a caption that forms a question directly addressing Carlos, which he answers immediately.

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<sup>141</sup> Further markers of conversational storytelling are, Ryan summarizes, for instance, “interruptions, requests for explanations, laughter, supportive vocalizations, and facial expression” (*Face-to-Face Narration* 41).

<sup>142</sup> Stephanie Solis (1), Carlos Roa (3), Ivette Roman (7), and Luis Maldonado (8).



From left to right:

Figure 94: "C.R. (3)\_Caption 3." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 11 Aug. 2015.

Figure 95: "C.R. (3)\_Thinking." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 11 Aug. 2015.

At minute 00:02:21 of Carlos' *testimonio*, the editor of the video poses, in written language, the questions: "What about the American Dream?", as Figure 94 shows. More than the actual graphic rhythm or typographical specifications of this caption, Carlos' reaction moves into the foreground, showing that he had just been asked this precise question. After a reflecting pause he redefines the American Dream, although he already did this in the prior episodes of his narrative, verbally having explained what the American Dream means to his family. Using an impersonal, written interview question eliminates any impression that he is actually repeating himself, because the question is there to be 'blamed' for any type of repetition or renewed emphasis on the 'American Dream'. Carlos, for his part, is just dutifully answering that he was posed. His facial expressions show that he is taking this question seriously and that he is thinking hard to express himself correctly, due to which the viewer assumes that Carlos really has something to say about the topic. Through these visual devices, the otherwise *invisible* part of thinking and knowing and 'having something to say' is, indeed, emphasized by the simulation of the interview situation, the visuals portraying Carlos' countenance, body posture, hand gestures. Because viewers can 'witness' all of these 'natural' components of a one-to-one interview, they become part of the original interview-situation.

## 2.2. Meta-Functions in Captions and Links

In addition to Carlos Roa's (3) digital *testimonio*, the narratives of Stephanie Solis (1), Ivette Roman (7), and Luis Maldonado (8) utilize written captions on (black) title screens that are edited into and interrupt the moving image. As the semantic production and functions of the captions are very similar in the latter three digital *testimonios*, dividing the different captions according to their structures emphasizes the meta-functions of the written language used in all three narratives.



**Stephanie Solis (1), Ivette Roman (7), and Luis Maldonado (8): Textual Functions**

As Stöckl reminds us, “any mode is – to varying degrees – able to depict states-of-affairs (ideational), design some social interaction between the communicators (interpersonal) and contribute to organizing and structuring the text (textual)”, mostly “distributed across the modes present (25). All three narratives begin with a black title screen depicting the title of the narrative (that is also given on the YouTube website in the written description of the videos), as the following screenshots show:



From left to right:

Figure 96: “S.S. (1)\_Caption 2.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 12 July 2015.

Figure 97: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 3.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.



Figure 98: “L.M. (8)\_Caption 1.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

It is noticeable that in these narratives, the blending in of the titles at the beginning of the videos establishes a textual connection of the *testimonios* to more professionally produced videos on YouTube. This additional artistic dimension positions the narrative closer to the ‘short film’ or the ‘documentary film’ than to the political dimension of the *testimonio*. This, however, this is not the only meaning: The blending in of the title after an episode of moving images, in Stephanie Solis’ (1) narrative, for instance, marks everything played before as introductory, and thus central to understanding the meaning of the entire narrative. As the episode before shows Stephanie speaking at a mock graduation ceremony, this structure gives further importance to mock graduation events and other offline protest actions, which, reinforcing the importance of such action in the ‘real’ world of the Immigrant

Rights Movement. This move illustrates that offline actions such as marches, for instance, depict “the movement’s main muscle” (Pallares, *The Chicago Context* 54).

Likewise, the corresponding closing credits of these three digital narratives document the artistic production of the videos but, what is more, also stress the cooperative production process, giving the sponsors and/or professional producers and supporters of the production process of the YouTube videos a name:



From left to right:

Figure 99: “S.S. (1)\_Caption 1.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 Aug. 2015.

Figure 100: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 6.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 101: “L.M. (8)\_Caption 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 102: “L.M. (8)\_Caption 3.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

However, there is a crucial difference between the closing captions and the introductory ones. While the ‘style’ – color and form, for instance – remains the same, Stephanie Solis (1) and Ivette Roman’s (7) title screen de-centers the captions from the middle of the screen to the outer bottom on the right. Luis Maldonado’s ‘credits’ appear in non-bold, less capitalized and less colorful letters. In accordance with the traditional *testimonio*, the act of de-centering and de-emphasizing the ‘other’ participants in the production process, on the one hand, shows that all narrators assume the prominent role in their *testimonios* – even more prominent than those who essentially produce and publish the videos. However, all *testimonios* take care to include these participants in their videos and thus point to the importance of community in a *united* struggle against the dispossession of undocumented immigrants (youth).

### **Stephanie Solis (1) and Ivette Roman (7): Inter-Personal: The Narrator and ‘Othering’**

Burgos-Debray notes in the introduction to Menchú’s *testimonio*, “projects depend to a large extent on the quality of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee” (Burgos-Debray xiv). While the viewer knows potentially very little of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee in digital *testimonios*, written captions reveal a perspective to the content. As the following screenshots show, in both Stephanie and Ivette’s video, the written text implies the additional presence of a narrator who aligns him/her-self with the two undocumented youth and their cause:



From left to right:

Figure 103: “S.S. (1)\_Text 3.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 11 July 2015.

Figure 104: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 4.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

At the same time, however, this narrator also ‘others’ the two youths, as he/she marks their situation of dispossession in difference to his/her own. This step indicates that the narrator is not directly involved in the Movement and even establishes a ‘dependency’ of undocumented students on the viewer. Dependency, we know, is a major part of dispossession described as the “heteronomic condition for autonomy, or, perhaps more accurately, as a limit to the autonomous and impermeable self-sufficiency of the liberal subject” (Athanasίου 2).

Towards the end of her *testimonio*, Ivette confirms her dependent and thus dispossessed position by answering, indirectly, to the question posed in the caption. She claims that she is just “trying to get a future”, stressing that she is “just like them”, *deserving* of this future (00:04:07-00:04:22). In combination with this caption, the viewer is, once again, prompted to act upon Ivette’s dependency. It is apparent that Ivette feels less privileged than ‘other’ people, such as the viewer, for instance. Thus, it is the viewer who is being ‘othered’ this time. The crucial difference is that this time, othering originates in Ivette’s spoken word instead of that of the

other narrator, leaving her the ‘final word’ in her *testimonio* after all, to speak for “Maryland’s LGBT Undocumented Students”.

**Stephanie (1), Carlos Roa (3), and Ivette Roman (7): Political (Inter-)Action: ‘Inter-Personal’ Links**

Three of the narratives selected for this study further provide links at the end of the video clip. These incorporate the links (inactivated) to the organization that the undocumented narrator is part of and the emblem of the sponsor/producer of the video clip.



From left to right:

Figure 105: “S.S. (1)\_Caption 5.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 13 July 2015.

Figure 106: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 5.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.



Figure 107: “C.R. (3)\_End 4.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Instead of viewing their layout as meaningful, for our purposes, the link itself conveys an important message: Electronic (though inactivated) links prompt the viewer to become active in the Immigrant Rights Movement. The viewer’s activity will be triggered by viewing *more* stories like Carlos’ or by comprehending the organizations’ political goals and undertakings. This gives an additional layer of ‘activist agenda’ to the individual *testimonios*, implying that the Movement is united in the struggle (which it not always is, as we have seen in chapter 2). Further, through the interactive function of the captions that is established through the links, the digital *testimonios* connect to the tradition by describing, in Gugelberger’s words, a “genre with the hope for solidarity and community” (11).

### 2.3. The Other Narrator: Ideational Functions and Framing

Like an editor of film, Burgos-Debray describes how she edited the transcripts of the interviews she conducted with Rigoberta Menchú, essentially becoming “Rigoberta’s listener”: “I allowed her to speak and then became her instrument, her double by allowing her to make the transition from the spoken to the written word”, she explains (Burgos-Debray xx). While some of the narrators, including Angelica, Mitzy, and Mohammad, seem to make the decisions of what to explain themselves, the narrators of the stories in this section indeed must have had a listener such as Burgos-Debray, who was making changes with them, proposing topics to talk about, and even asking questions. In most cases, written captions *during* the video clip *describe* information on the narrators’ diverse backgrounds and dispossessed identities. These reveal information that the undocumented narrator must have recounted in the process of “in-depth interviewing”, as Randall terms the production process of *testimonios* (61). In form of ‘explanations’, then, the interviewer assumes the role of an ‘other’ “potential storyteller” in the stories (cf. Ryan, *Face-to-Face Narration* 41).

The use of captions that are ideational, giving details about her ‘story’, is particularly prominent in **Ivette Roman’s (7)** digital *testimonio*:



From left to right:

Figure 108: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

Figure 109: “I.R. (7)\_Caption 3.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 30 July 2015.

When recounting her family’s immigration story, the moving image of Ivette’s narration is cut frequently, as we saw in chapter 5. This process of cutting is particularly evident at one point: Shortly prior to the caption depicted in Figure 108, Ivette takes in another breath, as if wanting to say something more; however, she is then cut off from what she is about to say. The captions take over, providing the viewer with further, condensed information about Ivette’s family history. This editing procedure signifies that the emotional details about this immigration background are not as im-

portant as ‘carrying on’ with the narrative of dispossession connected to Ivette’s coming out to her mother as a lesbian. The difference between Ivette’s captions and that of the other narratives, then, is that they co-narrate the story. Without them, the viewer would not be able to understand what she is saying. Thus, they serve a contextualizing function but at the same time de-personalize Ivette’s ‘voice’, reducing it to the ‘most important’ parts – her dispossession.

This voice reappears in the caption depicted in Figure 108, as the constellation of the sentences expresses the shocking conditions of unaccompanied child migration – an aspect which taps into a very recent discussion within the Movement but appearing also in more general and international media coverage. As of spring 2014, countless newspaper articles reported on the “surge of young illegal migrants traveling by themselves” from the Central American countries of “El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras”, which “has been building since 2011” (Preston, *U.S. Setting Up Emergency Shelter*; see also Hennessy-Fiske 14). The trends posed a major humanitarian crisis, because it “has been so rapid that U.S. officials have been scrambling to find housing and medical care for the young immigrants” (Hennessy-Fiske 14). This situation triggered a major uproar in immigrant communities, who saw their task in ensuring that the children have access to legal services “because they won’t know what they’re entitled to” (Mackler in: Mueller). It is possible that “one might object here that the interlocutor is manipulating the material the informant provides to suit her [or his] own metropolitan political, intellectual, and aesthetic predilections”, as Beverley formulates the critical concern directed at Menchú’s editor (*Testimonio* 57). I argue, however, that through the connection to inherently prominent topics in the Undocumented Immigrant Rights Movement, the ‘other’ narrator’s ‘voice’ in the captions essentially unites with Ivette’s in her political activism against her *multiple* dispossessions.

### **Carlos Roa (3): De-Emotionalization**

The captions in Carlos Roa’s narrative assume a textual and ideational function, not only providing information on his immigration background but also creating a structure, framing the narrative in different episodes. In contrast to the captions in Ivette’s video, the captions in Carlos’ video are preoccupied with informational content that is highly emotional: Two of the three captions used in his narrative inform the viewer

of the ‘fight’ that Carlos’ mother led against cancer, framing (through opening and closing) Carlos’ descriptions and associations with the topic in narrative time (00:01:28-00:02:17).



From left to right:

Figure 110: “C.R. (3)\_Caption 1.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 11 Aug. 2015.

Figure 111: “C.R. (3)\_Caption 2.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 11 Aug. 2015.

Subtitles also inform the viewer that Carlos does not only have a sister but also that his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1993. Carlos’ mother had cancer for several years but died before the recording of the narrative, as the viewer learns by means of the captions. At this point, the music becomes louder and, employing stringed instruments, suggests emotional meaning. It is, however, the subtitles that tell us of his mother’s death in 2006, not Carlos himself. Leaving this piece of information to an ‘outsider’ (the ‘other’ narrator), suggests two possible meanings: Either Carlos is still grieving too much to talk about his mother’s death, or the other narrator *wants* us to assume that Carlos feels this way, ‘taking over’ this task for him, leaving the viewer wondering. As a major function of the multimodal ensemble, the music evokes emotion, filling possible ‘gaps’ in the narrative.

#### **David Ramirez (4): Undocumented, Unafraid**

The use of written language in David’s digital *testimonio* reveals the closeness between the oral and the written form of a *testimonio* not only in structure but also in content. As David already introduced himself in the tradition of the *testimonio* (see chapter 6 for detail), he uses only one written caption, seemingly for the purpose of adding to the repetitive character that a ritual on the web assumes in order to be noticed by the fast-clicking audience. Hence, the caption would assume a ‘textual function’, contributing to the emphasis on certain information in the ‘text’.



Figure 112: “D.R. (4)\_Captions.” YouTube. 2011. Author’s screenshot. 25 July 2015.

However, this particular caption adds another piece of information to David’s biographical data: “Undocumented and Unafraid” – two capitalized adjectives – that appear right beneath his name. As the two words are included in the list of biographical data on David, they assume an implied importance for David, more so than the fact that he is from Illinois or his age. I discovered during my research with the Immigrant Youth Justice League in Chicago that it was David who originated the slogan “Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic”. The phrase “undocumented and unafraid”, according to Pérez, became “the motto of this new undocumented youth movement” in that year (88). Adding the motto of the Movement literally *onto* David’s narrative thus contextualizes his digital ‘coming out’ into the Immigrant Rights Movement, connecting it to campaigns and actions taking place during that time and after. The motto itself is also highly performative in nature: In spatial combination with ‘undocumented’, the adjective ‘unafraid’ – a mental state and feeling – the phrase acquires an attitudinal character which describes an important part of the identity of an undocumented youth in the Movement. However, since David does not pronounce the words himself, the motto is de-personified and adds another narrator to the narrative. In connection to the motto of the Movement, the viewer thus assumes that other members of the Movement have added the written words to David’s narrative, making the latter’s *testimonio* an act of plural performativity that expresses a mental state which is ready for further acts of resistance.

### **3. Re-arranging Space: Written Language on Props and Static Images**

#### **Stephanie Solis (1): Visual (De-)Criminalization**

As we have learned prior to this section, Stephanie belongs to those undocumented students who learn of their status in late adolescence, right before transferring into adulthood. With regard to her identity development, she is then faced with what Pé-



rez describes a “not being able to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their professional and educational experiences” (27). Further, this is also the time that she learns that she is different from most other students, a difficult challenge which Pérez succinctly articulates: “Undocumented students are forced to reconcile their deep belief in a meritocracy with the limitations they faced in sharp contrast to their U.S.-born classmates” (28). In her story of dispossession, hence, Stephanie defines herself as being “a child forever” and being a “tourist, pretending to have...like...the college experience” (00:03:32-00:03:36).

The following paragraph shows how Stephanie manages to ‘decriminalize’ herself in order to fit the qualifications for the proposed version of the DREAM Act, which would essentially “allow individuals to apply for legal permanent resident status” (King and Puntí 236). The most important eligibility criterion of the DREAM Act is that youths must not have any criminal record. As discussed before, Stephanie connects blame and shame to her parents and in the same moment determines the idea of her dispossessed self as innocent; claiming the wrongfulness of the dispossession that conflicts with her plans for the future.

The technical devices of video-making, at this point, open up a second plane of meaning production that underlines the undisguised political message of the video. This message is emphasized more strongly than ever before in the narrative, impressing the viewer with the powerful association of personal memories and the story that the narrative has told up to this point. While the soundtrack of the mock graduation ceremony is played, the visuals are replaced by a photo of a famous street sign, as the screenshot below shows:



Figure 113: “S.S. (1)\_Sign.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

The warning sign in the foreground of the photo illustrates a family running in one direction together, symbolizing an illegal migrant family’s crossing of a freeway close to the Mexican-American border. The border as well as the freeway is included

in the background of the photo, which serves this particular construction of meaning. We hear Stephanie's voice from the off reminding us that:

Nobody remembers the children whenever they see the sign. You know, the famous sign that you see around San Diego of, you know, the mother and the father and they're pulling their little girl along. Nobody looks at the little girl and thinks 'What happens to her when she grows up?' (minute 00:04:49-00:05:24)

The combination of Stephanie's voice and photo establishes a sense of personal identification with the girl in the photo. Thus, she visually underlines her feelings of how "it was not [her] decision" to immigrate to the United States illegally and simultaneously places the blame on her parents. Through this visual, also, Stephanie implies that she was *dragged* to the United States without her consent. However, as her background is a Filipina and not Mexican, this sign is clearly used as a symbolic device, not a literal depiction of the migration to the U.S. This relation becomes more explicit when she cries out: "This is not a decision I made. You're holding children hostage!" (00:04:46-00:04:49). By blaming her parents for 'dragging' her into the United States on the one hand, and blaming the U.S. American legal system for denying her possibilities to do something with her life on the other, Stephanie manages to *decriminalize* herself. This is necessary because in order to address U.S. legislative powers who are in charge of passing the DREAM Act, Stephanie needs to free herself from any charges against her so that she can call for protection from the law.

As Pallares explains, the "quest to demonstrate the 'worthiness' of youth" caused to "put aside and play[...] a minimal role in the formal advocacy for the DREAM Act carried out by politicians, civic leaders, and youth themselves in 2010 as well as in earlier campaigns" (*Family Activism* 98). Making the DREAM Act one of the narrative's main political goals leads to a de-emphasis of the family and ascribes a special, *deserving* role to Stephanie. This understanding of youth was, further, inherently inscribed in the version of the DREAM Act in 2009 and 2010 – the time Stephanie's narrative was published: "Three main points used to support the DREAM Act have remained consistent: the youth are exceptional; they are innocent; and they are already American," Pallares summarizes (*Family Activism* 105). Logically, underlining innocence is only possible by actually denying any active part-

taking in the ‘illegal’ migration to the U.S. Thus, Stephanie places the blame on her parents for having put her in this situation.

Through the criminalizing/decriminalizing rhetoric that Stephanie applies, she has “actively found ways of challenging the anti-immigrant rhetoric that frames them as ‘lawbreakers’” and to depict herself as a “law-abiding” yet unauthorized resident (Pérez 32). Stephanie’s self-decriminalization helps her cope with societal perception of the criminality of undocumented immigrants like her family, without ever explicitly – meaning *verbally* – blaming her parents in the first place. This is crucial because ‘blaming’ becomes an injurious speech act, as Judith Butler shows: “When the injurious term injures [...], it works its injury precisely through the accumulation and dissimulation of its force” (*Excitable Speech* 52). In contrast to the current campaigns of the Immigrant Rights Movement, through this type of visualization and verbal narration, the blame remains within the undocumented family and community.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the tendency to blame the parents in public campaigns has diminished in the recent years. In a personal interview, Chicago activist Marcela Hernandez summarizes how she perceived this change in the Movement. Her words shall serve, at this point, to contextualize the shift perceived in the stories since 2006, which re-discovered, in particular, the role of the family and family unity in the Movement:

But then we realized that a lot of the messaging was actually hurting the immigrant community because one of the big issues was that it was blaming parents for bringing youth here [...]. So, for a lot of youth, sharing their stories meant also being able to control their own messaging and putting their family first, instead of, you know, putting where a lot of politicians were just trying to keep their jobs or were trying to appeal to mainstream media. (Hernandez)

Clearly, Stephanie Solis’ digital *testimonio* does not embrace this political logic – a fact that strongly highlights the meaning of ‘political’ as defined for this investigation: The stories are political in the sense that they offer a public face of the group they ‘speak for’ that attempts to gain attention but that is also sensitive to quick and strategic change in order to do so.

### **Other Voices: Plural Performativity**

The following two screenshots, one enlarged to make the written language on the posters more easily readable, combine two important core semiotic resources: mov-

ing image and written language on props. As noted in chapter 5, through the recording of Stephanie’s ‘mock graduation speech’, she realizes both instances of plural performativity, the “performativity *of* plurality and performativity *in* plurality” (Athanasidou 176), to protest against her dispossession that is caused by her undocumented status. The audience becomes a party in the Movement that not only ‘also’ listens to Stephanie’s speech, as the viewer does in this moment of the narrative. Now the audience also has ‘a voice of its own’ – enabled through the use of written language:



Figure 114: “S.S. (1)\_Text and Audience.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 13 July 2015.



Figure 115: “S.S. (1)\_Poster Text 1.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 13 July 2015.

As one can see in Figure 114, the fact that the woman in the foreground of the visual frame holds a poster with her own hands symbolizes that she is also the creator of the poster. The message that the poster sends can be interpreted by the meaning of the words but also the capitalization of one word in the sentence, which reads ‘Education NOW’. Thus, through typographical idiosyncrasies and the combination of a voice from the off and, at first glance, ‘voiceless’ participants in the video clip, the poster

embeds Stephanie's fight for the DREAM Act in a context that emphasizes urgency, as the capitalized 'NOW' expresses. It also transforms Stephanie's struggle into a collective one, enabled through "the public gatherings" and enacting "a performativity of embodied agency, in which we own our bodies and struggles for the right to claim our bodies as 'ours'" (Athanasidou 178), yet marking them with a postulation, as it is written on the poster. Although the second image works in the same way as the first, it is important that it follows, as this order reveals an important semantic implication: Through the preceding image, the viewer associates the smaller written posters with members of the Movement that take part in the mock graduation event as well. The difference in color and handwriting on the posters also indicates multiple agencies. The postulations on the posters – calling for driver's licenses of undocumented immigrants and for the DREAM Act – again support Stephanie's cause.

### **Mohammad Abdollahi (2): Coming Out in Written Word**

One of the most significant aspects about Mohammad Abdollahi's (2) digital *testimonio* is the fact that he 'comes out' as undocumented not only in spoken word but even earlier, in written form: The words 'I am undocumented' are printed on his t-shirt in big, white letters. While the t-shirt is black and the rest of the room and Mohammad himself are poorly lit, the letters are clearly visible. Further, because Mohammad faces the camera during most of the taping process, the viewer can see the words constantly. Through this, Mohammad performs his 'coming out' as undocumented throughout the whole narrative time, without explicitly (verbally) having to express it.

Further, the closeness of written language and spoken language becomes literally visible, since the words 'I am undocumented' are phonetically transcribed right beneath them. Phonetics as well as the stress-marker (in form of dots between the syllables), as Stöckl reminds us, are attributes of typography which is to writing "what intonation, speed and rhythm are to speech" (11).<sup>143</sup> This linguistic play highlights the tight relation that the viewer is to understand between a spoken 'coming out' and a written one, as the use of para-verbal means explains. The crucial difference between the person who wears the shirt and the person who speaks his 'coming

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<sup>143</sup> Writing, as Kress summarizes, needs completely different modes to visually express 'emphasis' such as bolding, size or spacing. So, for instance, "bolding in writing and loudness in speech are means of producing emphasis" (*What is mode?* 55).

out' is that the former cannot escape his/her dispossession by others, since he/she marked his/her body as 'undocumented' in a permanent and clearly visible way. The written words on Mohammad's t-shirt are not merely constative language, but they actually *do* something, constantly marking his body as undocumented, and highlight their active character through the link to spoken language. His t-shirt thus also symbolizes a continuous state of resistance to his dispossession; by means of the performance of his 'undocumented status' that the (written) performative speech act in-scribes 'on' his dispossessed body. A second interpretation implied by this performative speech act is that of 'naming'. Instead of having *others* call him names that are derogatory, Mohammad shows that he can choose what to call *himself*. As Athanasiou showed, "naming is not only a site of trauma, but also potentially a strategy of subversive mimesis" (139). Mohammad rejects the naming of others, making the originally official term 'undocumented' something personal and, hence, his *own*.

#### **David Ramirez (4): "The DREAM is coming": Plural Performativity on T-Shirts**

When trying to understand the narrative within the political logic of David's digital *testimonio*, the written words on his t-shirt provide the most reliable link to the campaign for which David performs his narrative. As his t-shirt reveals, David participated in "the DREAM is coming"-campaign that performed an offline civil disobedience action with a group of seven undocumented youth in Georgia, fighting against "the Georgia Board of Regents" vote "to ban undocumented youth from the state's top five public universities" in early 2011 (Lozano). All seven participants eventually got "arrested" and had "prepared videos and testimonies on The Dream is Coming project website", a "national student and immigrant advocacy network that organized the action" (Lozano). It thus seems as if this online video is an important part of the civil disobedience. This aspect highlights the 'new' political strategy – or media-informed strategy – that follows and is a major part of the creation of his online video. The fact that David talks about 'his' situation shortly before taking part in an offline, civil disobedience action, and that his online narrative is not the only one seemingly spontaneously created at that time, suggests that offline activism, in

fact, is the solution to his personal struggle in search of a community, against being de-humanized, and for the DREAM Act.<sup>144</sup>

As a result of this activism, David does not seem to feel alone anymore, as he claims: “I feel like I’ve finally made it. I have a community” (00:01:22-00:01:25). This sentence stands out as he is part of a collective civil disobedience action. Finding undocumented youth to fight ‘the hate’ together with, gives David support. Likewise, having this offline (and online) community back-up, publishing his coming out to a potentially even wider audience seems to be no further problem. The best protection against criminalization and threatening detention after a failed civil disobedience seems to be precisely the accumulation of community support and collective belonging. As David waited until this particular moment to publish his video, it is obviously part of the action, which will, if watched by other undocumented youth, collect even further community support, only in ‘online’ form. David Ramirez understood that undocumented students need to ‘come out’, get active – both online and offline – to get protective support from their community.

Hence, using language in a mode other than the dominant one (the dominant social shaping of affordances on YouTube has formed spoken language rather than written) can also provide a significant link to the contextualization of the video. The written words on David’s t-shirt reveal much information on his offline activism and popularity in the Movement. One could argue, here, that David inscribed his activism on his very own body. The body thus becomes “the occasion of situated acts of resistance, resilience, and confrontation with the matrices of dispossession, through appropriating the ownership of one’s body from these oppressive matrices” (Athanasίου 22). Aware of this, the precariousness described earlier, assumes even more weight and makes us read David’s constant smiling and playfulness as a clear outlet for the likely pressure that he experienced in the production process of the video. Not only does his t-shirt provide a link to an important campaign in the Movement (in Georgia), in connection with David’s personalized core story and the fact that at least the other six participants in the campaign probably wear a similar

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<sup>144</sup> The other personal stories recorded within that same action in Georgia that day and unloaded on a personal the YouTube account (not by him personally) do address the possibility of arrest in more detail, or even say that their story was to be put online in case they were arrested in the civil disobedience (which is likely to happen). This, David’s video might just have been shortly before the act of civil disobedience was actually carried out on April 5, 2011, the same day that the video was also uploaded.

shirt in their *testimonios*, the written words on his t-shirt also serve as a sight for plural performativity of resistance against dispossession, in the offline *as well as* the online context.

The performative context further invokes the danger of getting arrested and perhaps even deported at offline civil disobedience actions. Performing this danger online in YouTube videos like David's, makes explicit use of the medium's fast distribution channel with potentially unlimited audience as a means of protection and resistance to this danger. Pallares heralds the liberating benefits of this type of defensive disobedience:

Since the acts of civil disobedience started, no youth who has participated in these actions has been deported, even when deportation proceedings haven been initiated. This led one youth to comment shortly after the Georgia arrests in spring 2011 that it seemed like the best protection against being deported was to engage in civil disobedience. (*Family Activism* 123)

### **Ivette Roman (7): Spatial Prominence**

Once Ivette Roman's narrative is filmed in a medium close-up shot, the background setting reveals one and a half words written on a poster of the wall as well as half of a photo depicting a woman with long hair reaching up her arm in front of a wall to write something on a surface attached to the latter.



Figure 116: "I.R. (7)\_Background." *YouTube*. 2013. Author's screenshot. 30 July 2015.

The constellation of the moving image's frame points out, through the use of color, the relation between Ivette's body, the woman in the photograph, and the poster on the wall of Ivette's film setting. All three 'media' consist of a heavy use of red in combination with very dark color or a strong contrast of the red color. The similarities in color constellation indicate a connection between Ivette and the woman on the photo, even possibly depicting herself. Since the photo shows a woman painting a big object which could be a poster, the poster in Ivette's film setting establishes a mutual relation with the photo. What is more, the photo could



unite Ivette's body and the poster by depicting the act of painting the very poster on the wall of the video's setting. To be clear, this connection exists merely by color, not by spoken word. The 'additional' narrative that this act creates, hence, emphasizes Ivette's offline activism in the unification of the undocumented immigrant with the gay and lesbian movement, as the words on the poster presumably say 'no more abuse' in Spanish. The word 'más' connects to campaigns such as the 'Not One More Campaign', a campaign by OCAD (Organized Communities against Deportation), which organized multiple "acts of civil disobedience against deportations" in addition to "civil disobedience against [...] state laws in Arizona (2010) and Alabama (2012), and educational policies in Georgia (2011)" – the latter of which David Ramirez (4) also participated in (Pallares, *Family Activism* 124). This aspect further highlights the current trend in the Movement to distance itself from exclusively youth to incorporate entire families. In a 2014 interview, Antonio Gutiérrez explains:

Right, so, I mean I think IYJL has changed within the year-and-a-half that I've been part of it. We used to be very oriented as far as just working with youth, and dealing with youth as far as the development. Now we're really focusing on this whole aspect of families and working with the whole community, whether that means stopping individuals' deportations or saying 'Not One More' or saying 'stop deportations' in general.

Thus, while Ivette's digital *testimonio* at first glance seems to focus on Maryland's undocumented gay and lesbian students, through her use of an office-like setting and a poster, she non-verbally manages to include the current campaigns that the Movement leads.

The word 'abuso' can refer to the abuse of the rights of undocumented immigrants but also imply sexual abuse. 'No more abuse' is a performative expression thus actively *resisting* abuse. This performative is materialized through the co-presence of the photo in the video's setting space which presumably depicts Ivette painting the words on the poster herself. This example shows how performative speech acts need not be speech acts at all but can be articulated through other media and modes – as it is color and visual image in Ivette's digital *testimonio*. The association with poster-painting has its origin in the extensive craftsmanship that I experienced during my research stay in Chicago in preparation for the National Coming Out of the Shadows Day in March 2014, as the photo below shows. I,

myself, participated in many of these ‘art days’, as also in the creation of the banner for that day in March.



Figure 117: “Creating Banner for the National Coming Out of the Shadows Day.” © March 2014, Stefanie Quakernack.

### **Luis Maldonado (8): Online Participation in Offline Activism**

In his narrative, Luis Maldonado uses photos to demonstrate his previous activism and affiliations. The photos illustrate his offline activism, often involving banners and posters which depict written language – names of organizations, mottos, but also longer texts that resemble political ‘manifestos’ (cf. “Photo 6” and “Photo 7”), as the following screenshots show:



From left to right:

Figure 118: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 1.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 119: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 120: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 3.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 121: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 4.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 122: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 5.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

Figure 123: “L.M. (8)\_Photo 6.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.



Figure 124: “L.M. (7)\_Photo 2.” *YouTube*. 2013. Author’s screenshot. 2 Aug. 2015.

All these photos are integrated into the video, yet Luis’ voice from the off still continues narrating, making the digital *testimonio* the ne plus ultra intermedial narrative. Most notably, all the photos’ content plane shows Luis, literally, ‘in action’ with or in front of a crowd of people. In “Photo 5” and “Photo 6”, the crowd is symbolized through the technological devices – a recording device/microphone and a megaphone – that can provide an even larger audience for his messages than the crowds captured on the photos. Hence, the photos enhance the value and status of Luis as a leader of the ‘Dream Movement’, as he calls it, claiming an active belonging to it without having to verbally elaborate on his activism.

The “multiple frame technique”, which the constellation of successive photos in the digital video resembles, “allows the representation of more complex stories

and projects a clearer narrative intent than single-frame pictures”, Ryan claims (*Still Pictures* 142). It is due to this technique that the viewer perceives an image of Luis as active in the Immigrant Rights Movement. Further, through the different ‘real’ people clearly depicted in each photo, the sum of people in the end forms a small yet visible community in the viewer’s mind. We are made to feel that no matter what the outcome of Luis’ undocumented status and his public activism, and no matter how much more active he would become, the community would be there to support and protect him. As Pallares observed,

Since the acts of civil disobedience started, no youth who has participated in these actions has been deported, even when deportation proceedings have been initiated. This led one youth to comment [...] that it seemed like the best protection against being deported was to engage in civil disobedience. (*Family Activism*, 123)

The people in the photo seem to provide a protective shield over the activist. The mere use of photos, hence, mitigates the precariousness that Luis’ dispossessed state positions him in.

Further, the people depicted in the photos who carry t-shirts and posters spelling out the Movement’s motto of that year, ‘undocumented, unafraid, unapologetic’, engage in a process of plural performativity in and of the Movement’s political campaigns. Here, the “dynamic moments” in images, which suggest “a new departure” (Baetens and Bleyen 168) particularly comes to the fore through the activism performed in the photos. Static images in digital *testimonio*, hence, are much more than simply ‘static’. The role of the verbal narration, in combination with the photos has only one important function: It contextualizes Luis’ story of dispossession *in* the resistance against this dispossession depicted in the photos. Verbally, Luis recounts “how much” he is fighting for his nephew’s and his sister’s reunification, ever since the latter got deported (00:02:18-00:02:22), while the “Photo 5” illustrates Luis giving an interview. Thus, the photo provides the viewer with the information that ‘fighting’ automatically means ‘going public’ with the problems that he and his community face due to undocumented status.

#### **4. Photos: Personalizing Dispossession**

Because of ‘synchresis’, which Pinto describes as the automatic forging and mental fusion between sound and visual when being played at the same time, it is almost

impossible to separate the sound level from the visual level in any type of filmic material (cf. 284). Consequently, meaning in digital *testimonios* is created not only through its various media representations, but with regard to the visual and auditory level, through the fusion of the images and sounds. However, multimodal elements penetrate the purely visual and auditory distinction, including the use of photos in narration. In the examples chosen for this section, not only do we continue to hear the narrator's words relating to the content of the photo but we also see the narrator relating to the photo in some way, as Stephanie Solis' (1) narrative shows, creating at least three media streams that unite in the moment of meaning-making.

When there is no written language to contextualize and create political meaning, only spoken language supports the potential meaning-creation of images that are used. This section explores the use of static images, digitally integrated into the narrative by a video editing software, in "semiotic combination" with verbal language (*Still Pictures* 143). Pictures, "left by themselves, lack the ability to articulate specific propositions and to explicitate causal relations" (*Moving Pictures* 139). Thus, the level of meaning that sound adds to the narration, according to Ryan, is, in the first place, "vastly superior in narrative versatility" to the combination of static images by themselves (*Still Pictures* 143), always and necessarily 'manipulating' the interpretations of the viewer, giving them, literally, another perspective (cf. Hickethier 103). Pointing to the multidimensionality of narration that combines verbal language and static or moving image (cf. Hickethier 96), most visual signs are symbolic, iconic, or index signs, while the visual image brings the sound to life (cf. 97).

On the other hand, Dunn argues that "sound is epistemologically unreliable", since "we cannot know the true nature of things as reliably through our hearing as we can through sight" (193). Of course, she adds, our eyes can deceive us too, but not quite to the same degree as our ears" (ibid). This aspect challenges the voiceover (or 'voice from the off') that the three narratives<sup>145</sup> avail in their video clips. Thus, all narratives add a visual component to the video clip, either in moving or static form, in order to validate the element of sound. This visual component is the focus of this section.

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<sup>145</sup> Stephanie Solis (1), Carlos Roa (3), and Luis Maldonado (8).

This dependence on the visual prompts us to ask whether the producers' distrust in the narrative potential of sound *alone* comes from what one can term the 'pictorial turn', which has fully integrated into the visual dominance of YouTube material. The 'pictorial turn' confronts "the rise of the image in today's society and communication" with such questions as the one posed above (Baetens 181; see also Jewitt, *Introduction* 3). This perspective questions "the changes of visual culture in terms of old and new" media and the reinterpretation of "the image in terms of *imageness*", "hovering not only between the representable and the unrepresentable, but also between the sayable and the unsayable" (182). The following analysis of photographs in digital *testimonios* proposes that "the selection of formal devices and thematic subjects does not reflect a world view but literally reshapes the world", carrying inherent "political power" (183). Thus, in the creation of meaning, in combination with voiceovers, photographs enliven the sound, while sound lends the images their credibility. Another narrative level is added to the multimodal ensemble when visual images are "amorphous and ambiguous", thus "open to multiple interpretations" (Kalinak 17). Due to these effects, Steiner summarizes, "the narrative potential of the visual arts is an enormously revealing topic" (146).

#### **4.1. The Immigrant Story in Photographs**

##### **Stephanie Solis (1): Humanizing Immigration**

The sequence of the video clip which shows photographs from the past creates a time frame in Stephanie Solis' story of dispossession. By introducing an explanation of her family's immigration background, Stephanie interrupts her story of dispossession. This is clearly noticeable as her tone lightens up, making voice the primary marker of this change in topic. However, the photos have another function in her narrative: Stephanie recounts that her father initiated the family's move to the United States in the 1990's. Apparently, he could not earn enough money by "installing and maintaining the sounds system for all discos" in her hometown in the Philippines (00:01:39). The photo blended in at this point shows a party photo of young Filipino men in front of a discotheque (see Figure 125).



From left to right:

Figure 125: “S.S. (1)\_Father Disco Philippines.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

Figure 126: “S.S. (1)\_Mercedes Benz.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

As, according to Lehtimäki, “we need to acknowledge that what distinguishes the photo-image from other forms of representation is its material link to reality” (188), the viewer immediately understands the connection between the father, Stephanie, and the photographs. The choice of the photo is ambiguous, however, and if unaccompanied by the verbal narrative, the viewer would not understand that the family was getting so poor that it had to emigrate from the Philippines. Thus, it serves a different function: Through the choice of this photograph, Stephanie reveals her father’s ‘love of life’, as it depicts him partying with his friends, and internal wish for success – revealed by the ‘celebration’. Thus, the first photograph mainly serves the purposes of “visualizations, emotional coloring”, in Ryan’s words (*Moving Pictures* 139).

The second photo shows a little girl in front of a shiny Mercedes. The story Stephanie tells at this moment identifies the little girl as herself and frames the time in which the photograph was taken. Further, Stephanie reveals that it was her father who took the photograph. This piece of information triggers the viewer to identify with the father, assuming the latter’s perspective during the moment of taking the picture. The fact that the viewer sees ‘through the eyes of the father’ instantly humanizes him, as all the viewer gets to see is the laughing daughter and a shiny car that unite in a moment which seems to have been precious enough to document. Again, instead of showing the economic hardship that Stephanie’s family must have experienced before and upon immigration, the photograph plays with bright and happy emotions that connect the viewer’s understanding of the father’s decision to migrate (unlawfully) to the ‘will’ to strive for happiness, peace, and family well-being.

Through their additional meaning, the photographs become a literal illustration of a core feature of the American Dream in Stephanie Solis’ digital *testimonio*.

There is no trace of the problems that she encounters upon her 18th birthday visible in the photographs. They rely on the verbal narrative to be revealed. In connection to the latter, the photographs add Stephanie's judgment to the multimodal narrative. The father's 'good intentions' which the photographs reveal are, in combination, playfully challenged by Stephanie's amusement over the naïve faith that a Mercedes Benz car parking on the street proves that there are "millionaires everywhere" in the United States. The contrast between photographs and verbal narration further shows that the father's intentions – which so impact his daughter's happiness – have not been fulfilled: It is Stephanie who needs to live with the consequences of her father's move and who has no other option but to fight them, if she wishes to be happy. Through the photographs, in sum, the viewer learns about intimate wishes of Stephanie's father for a good life in the United States, assuming a performative dimension of the family's version of the 'American Dream'.

### **Carlos Roa (3): Mediatized Melting Pot**

Carlos Roa's video is the least self-produced of all the videos in this selection, as evidenced by the use of multiple editing devices such as black-and-white images, captions, and pictures. The video is further shot in a professional studio with a 'seat' for the narrator. Further, the video is edited several times and, in contrast to most other digital *testimonios* in this selection, music is a continuous part of the soundtrack. Carlos' story also follows a clear topic line: It is about defining what being an (undocumented immigrant) means to his understanding of the myth of the American Dream.

The production quality is most clearly evident in the introductory ad to Carlos' digital *testimonio*. Apparently produced within a campaign called "I am America", this ad includes small photos of ethnically diverse people, which digitally dissolve into one, large U.S. American flag. It appears as if Carlos is one of those people chosen to present 'his story' within this campaign, as his voice is one of the voices that the soundtrack plays while the photos create the flag, repeating the name of the campaign, "I am America".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> As an exemption, the formatting of the screenshots of the introduction and the ending of the narrative is slightly smaller than for all other screenshots in order to illustrate the sequence in which they come more clearly.





From left to right:

Figure 127: "C.R. (3)\_Intro 1." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 128: "C.R. (3)\_Intro 2." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 129: "C.R. (3)\_Intro 3." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



From left to right:

Figure 130: "C.R. (3)\_Intro 4." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 131: "C.R. (3)\_Intro 5." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.

The ending of the video clip is similar to the introduction ad, professionally produced within the campaign and also including voices and images. However, the running moving image of Carlos is digitally edited to 'join' the other photos 'in' the flag.



From left to right:

Figure 132: "C.R. (3)\_End 1." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 133: "C.R. (3)\_End 2." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 134: "C.R. (3)\_End 3." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.



Figure 135: "C.R. (3)\_End 4." *YouTube*. 2010. Author's screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Without getting into much detail on the multimodal constellations at this point,<sup>147</sup> the meaning of the collage can easily be deduced from the first impression that the multimedia ensemble creates: Without the images and the voices, there would be no flag. But the images are not visible in this flag: rather, they blend into the colors and shape of the United States flag. In addition to that, the ethnic diversity of the people in the photos, implies, as Pallares and Flores-González state, that the current Movement is a

<sup>147</sup> Since it can be said with certainty that this ad was not produced by Carlos, the analysis will of it will only go so far as it contextualizes Carlos' narrative in the Immigrant Rights Movement.

“panethnic and pan-Latino movement” (xxiii). However, since they all become elements of the flag, they symbolize the assimilationist idea of the ‘melting pot’. Mauk and Oakland explain: “In recent decades, debates on national identity have centered on questions of unity as against diversity (ethnic pluralism)” (10). The debate, here, includes the metaphors of the melting pot or the salad bowl, the former generally referring to “assimilation” and the latter to “integration” of immigrants in the United States (ibid). Therefore, the contrast between “absolute national unity” and “levels of partial blending” is frequently up for debate (ibid). Critical questions that arise from this context are, in particular, which of the two metaphors “captures the character of American society” and “who is to decide who is included or excluded from these mixtures” (55). Likewise, Campbell and Kean stress that consensus on the idea of the melting pot “in reality [...] never existed”, however, there is “a persistent emphasis upon the ‘melting pot’ as a way of bringing people together into the American nation” (26). Essentially, “the model of the melting pot assumed that everyone could better themselves in American society, despite any ethnic distinctiveness, and improve their position through economic opportunity” (61).

Campbell and Kean’s claim, in particular, points to the ideological frame in which the ‘Weareamerica’ campaign’s ad places Carlos’ digital *testimonio*. It not only brushes over ethnic differences but also shapes Carlos’ words to work within the melting pot metaphor. In connection to the American Dream, Carlos argues that “this country has prided itself on” the possibility to “change this country for the better”, that “we’ve seen that at the turn of this century we saw how immigrants...em...you know, changed this nation for the better of Irish, of Polish, of Italian descent”. Then he provides the connecting link to himself and his family, arguing that he and his family “are no different than the immigrants from the past” (00:02:35-00:03:01). Consistent with the ‘WeareAmerica’ campaign, these are Carlos’ final words in the narrative, before the image diminishes among very other little thumbnails of, presumably, digital narratives into a visual mix that creates the American flag – the mediatized American melting pot.

It is difficult to assess the exact meaning and message that this campaign intended to spread. When a local organizer from Chicago, Marcela Hernandez, was asked about the difference between more ‘official’ campaigns and autonomous productions, she answered that it was important to youth in the beginning of the Immi-

grant Rights Movement since 2006 to adhere to official campaigns because they had the resources to produce young people's *testimonios* in mainstream media. She explained her point as follows:

I think a lot of the youth started organizing as part of the bigger immigration movement. But then we saw how, you know, non-profits or elected officials were shaping the story to what was gonna get them votes, to what was gonna get them, you know, what was gonna *appeal* to the mainstream of who you would call the mainstream folk, like the mainstream 'American'. (Hernandez)

Perhaps Carlos' story had to be adjusted to the campaign's political logic which, as the introduction ad tells, followed assimilationist views rather than views favoring ethnic plurality. In any case, one needs to consider Carlos' narrative as a digital *testimonio* following a political logic that favored the legalization of undocumented immigrants in the United States and used New Media affordances to shape crucial parts of this political message.

## 4.2. Illustrating Dispossession, and the Performative of Static Images

### **Stephanie Solis (1): Illustrating Dispossessed Identity**

Stephanie Solis' digital *testimonio* is among those two digital narratives which use the most pictures of all eight narratives,<sup>148</sup> demonstrating the techniques taught in the Center for Digital Storytelling. Storytellers are encouraged to use "the multiple creative languages of digital storytelling – writing, voice, image, and sound" including verbal language from the off in combination with an animated picture show and music (Benmayor, *Digital Storytelling* 200). During the narration of her core story of dispossession, Stephanie's use of photographs is most prominent. They perform the representational or illustrative function of photographs that Ryan stresses. The scholar identifies pictures' "principal narrative option" as the "illustrative mode", forming a "symbiotic relation with the verbal version" (*Moving Pictures* 139). To stress this symbiosis, the narrative generally uses a voice from the off when illustrative photographs are introduced. The narrating voice and the photographs engage in intermedial narration that produces meaning. The most prominent example can be found at the beginning of the narrative: Explaining in a

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<sup>148</sup> (along with Luis Maldonado's (8) narrative)

voice from the off how her family lost many of their belongings, two representative images are blended in:



From left to right:

Figure 136: “S.S. (1)\_Full Storage Room.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

Figure 137: “S.S. (1)\_Empty Storage Room.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

We hear Stephanie’s voice from the off, recounting memories that seem to date from a few years back. The visual component supports this impression.

Instead of moving pictures, the viewer gets to see a picture slowly blended in, of many stacked boxes in a bright and tidy storage place. This is the first picture zoomed in by the video editing program. The second picture shows a storage room with nothing at all in it. There is also very little light in this room. Daylight does not even reach all of the corners of the generally ill-conditioned room. The photo is darkened out really slowly when Stephanie talks about all of her baby photos being gone, and how that made her feel she didn’t exist. The darkening of an already barely-lit room emphasizes the feeling of loss, particularly the loss of childhood. Both pictures are used as an illustration of what the storage room must have looked like, displayed in order to have the audience follow, and probably, connect to the narrative told by Stephanie’s voice.

The order in which these two static images are blended in does more than represent the Solis family’s loss of their belongings, however. Folded into the moving images of the video clip, they create an order of events that produces a small story of its own. As Schwanecke explains, “the successive organisation of pictures leads the recipient to make distinct conclusions”, which “are based on the actual blending of spatial and temporal relations with presumed causal ones” (54). Montage, here, serves as a device to connect the different visual actions in pictures (the filling and the emptying of the room) and thus creates a storyline through the passing of story time (order) (cf. Hickethier 103). According to Steiner, “the insistence on temporality is part of every definition of *narrativity*, regardless of its philosophical orienta-

tion” (149). In this storyline, thus, the visual coherence is most important for the interpretation (ibid). Along the same lines, Ryan stresses the order established by the narrative timeline that essentially shapes the viewer’s interpretation of the pictures. “A story line”, according to Ryan, is created “by assuming that similar shapes on different frames represent common referents (objects, characters, or setting)” and “inferring causal relations” (*Moving Pictures* 141). Thus, as the image in Figure 137 comes second, the storage room metaphorically ‘empties’ – while a reverse order would also mean the opposite: the storage room would ‘fill’.

This, first sequence of the digital narrative (00:00:11 – 00:01:10) also introduces the core story as a whole that Stephanie chooses to publish about herself in order to advocate for the DREAM Act. The pictorial narrative created through the order in which these photos are shown, further, represents the literal act of dispossessing somebody. This small episode within Stephanie’s narrative is further blended in a second time towards the middle of the digital *testimonio* in order to remind the viewer of this type of dispossession when Stephanie talks about her family’s undocumented status and her perceived aporia (see: 00:02:23-00:02:30).

The digital *testimonio* utilizes a third photo to create a visual anchor for the story of dispossession. As Stephanie explains the impact that the loss of her baby photos have had for her identity formation, she uses a form of multimodal narration, holding a photo into the visual frame of the camera, as if ‘showing’ it her imagined audience. Baetens and Bleyen call this function an “index”, essentially “carving out a single moment of time in the real flux of life” (166). This function is very well known and explored. However, the social and cultural context of the photograph is important for this narrative function (ibid; see also Wolf 136). The context is supplied not only through Stephanie’s verbal narration but also her looks portrayed by the moving image. She shows us how she looked as a child, visually showing through facial expressions the emotional impact that this part of the narration has on her, looking sad and alert. Further, Stephanie directly involves her audience, as we feel personally addressed by this indexical value of the image.



Figure 138: “S.S. (1)\_Shows Baby Picture.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

Cultural identity is made up of identification with specific groups, which generally transmit “thoughts and behaviors from birth in the family and schools over the course of generations” (Jandt 7). Further, these groups provide a “shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms for conduct” (ibid). Since Stephanie and her family moved to the United States when she was still an infant, as she explains to the viewer, those material things seem to have constantly served as reminders of her Philippine childhood; symbols that are innately connected to Stephanie’s existence. The fact that the family was constantly on the move within the first years of building an existence in the U.S., implies a sense of restlessness that Stephanie was very likely to have perceived during her childhood years. Apart from the geographic displacement, which was probably linked to the economic hardship of the family, being ‘restless’ can also impact identity formation, as the only symbolic reminders of Stephanie’s Philippine roots were literally discarded. This struggle was clearly initiated by the parents. She describes her family also as being forever out of reach, just as Stephanie’s identity in the United States may have been constantly ‘on hold’.

The moving images are then replaced by the still image that Stephanie held in her hands seconds before and combined with her narration from the off. This shift in perspective brings her voice closer to the viewer, who is told that Stephanie did not remember what she looked like as a kid for a long time until this very image reminded her again. Through this move, the viewer him-/herself gets to have the visual ‘experience’ of ‘remembering’ what Stephanie looked like as a child. Since we do not know what she looked like before, the digital *testimonio* lets us take part in this ‘epiphany’.



Figure 139: “S.S. (1)\_Baby Picture Zoom.” *YouTube*. 2009. Author’s screenshot. 5 Nov. 2013.

“Depending on the way in which photographs and literary language are combined, they illustrate, contextualise or contradict each other”, according to Schwanecke (55). “The combination’s effects”, she adds, “may range from self-reference and metareference to various other forms of connotations and associations” (ibid). Likewise, Hickethier emphasizes that voice and image can be combined and contrastive – hence, create meaning (cf. 98). He points out that visual image always keeps an own meaning (cf. 104), expressing a sense of “Körperlichkeit” (corporeality) (cf. 105). Accordingly, as the image of a smiling, happy baby establishes a contrast to the serious background of the story that the viewer learned, the question comes up why such a happy baby was taken away from home to a nation that would likely dispossess her of her identity. The question is much more fundamental. How and why were Stephanie’s parents convinced that it would be better for the family to move to the United States? In sum, while the digital *testimonio* does not offer a ready answer to this question, autobiographical story elements such as this photo open up a perspective to the story of undocumented immigrants that goes further than most the general knowledge of the immigration issue. First and foremost, they enable a personalized understanding for the matter.

### **Carlos Roa (3): Plural Performativity from the Past**

The use of photographs in Carlos’ digital *testimonio* differs from Stephanie’s in their narrative function. First of all, his pictures are left to ‘tell a story’ entirely on their own. Carlos does not explain, like Stephanie, what is depicted in the photos. The only reference that Carlos provides verbally are facts about his father and the legalization problem (discussed in chapter 5) when a photo of a family foregrounding a middle-aged man appears, and that he talks about his mother when the photo of her is blended in.



From left to right:

Figure 140: “C.R. (3)\_Father.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

Figure 141: “C.R. (3)\_Mother.” *YouTube*. 2010. Author’s screenshot. 21 July 2015.

According to Ryan, Carlos’ reticence to comment on the photos has an important consequence: Pictures, “left by themselves, lack the ability to articulate specific propositions and to explicitate causal relations” (Ryan, *Moving Pictures* 139). Therefore, the viewer understands that it is not important to understand what is happening in the photos. Rather, the photo’s black-and-white mode signals that the memories associated with the photos are long passed. This fact is confirmed in case of Carlos’ mother, who, as the viewer learns through written captions and in spoken word (hence, verbally and visually), died of breast cancer in 2006.

The use of the photos in Carlos’ narrative, thus, performs another function. Not only do they personalize Carlos’ account – providing visual proof for Carlos’ immigration story – but they also add an emotive and humanizing dimension. Both parents are photographed not by themselves but in a group of people. The photograph of the father shows him at the end of a table with many small children and women (one of whom could be Carlos as a little boy). Playing with the heterosexual ideal of a ‘family’, this associative dimension of meaning, left by itself, relates to an ideational state of affairs: From this moment on, the photo of Carlos’ father allows him to perform the caring family father who feeds many hungry children rather than the undocumented immigrant who crossed the Mexican-American border illegally. The photo hence constructs a gender performance that supports Carlos’ verbal narrative in that he wishes to go to the military. His father thus implicitly unites with Carlos in his quest – his undocumented youth rights activism.

The photo of Carlos’ mother works differently, emphasizing the emotive dimension of communication. For this, verbal contextualization, as implied earlier, is necessary. In 00:01:53-00:02:07, Carlos recounts that “all she [his mother] wanted to do was to provide for [them], you know, provide for her family, as any other family



in this country...ehm... and be able... and she wanted us to realize, you know, our American Dream. She wanted to see her kids become professionals”. The latter sentence, in particular, connects his mother’s dream to the concept of the *American Dream* that runs through the digital *testimonio* as a narrative red thread, therefore serving a textual function of the narrative, yet adding an emotional element: Carlos further recounts that his mother did not only strive for legalization of her children (and thus, what Carlos defines as the American Dream), but “fought *two* battles, you know – one of the being...having breast cancer and the other, eehm...you know, the fact that she was...you know...that her family was undocumented” (00:01:30-00:01:42). Being informed by the written captions that Carlos’ mother ‘lost her fight’ against the cancer, the following logical connection to the struggle still left to fight in is that of legalization, which justifies Carlos’ final words to fight in her memory. His activism (such as the Trail of Dreams, as introduced earlier) is, thus, legitimized by the death of his mother, meaning that all the action he takes as an activist are, from there on, done in ‘somebody’s honor’ and to ‘fulfill somebody’s last wishes’.

The image, to sum up, triggers the textual connection to an emotional story and, at the same time, leads to Carlos’ final words. Further, through the integration of photos of his parents, Carlos integrates other undocumented immigrants into his ‘struggle’ against dispossession: In combination with his words, the meaning of both of his parents’ photos engages him in a sense of plural performativity; a story, says Athanasiou, that is “linked with the stories and claim of others” and a “collective demand [that] emerges from those singular histories” (157).

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 1. Multimodal Performances of Dispossession

In his foreword to Peter Orner's *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, Luis Urrea wrote:

“Undocumented immigrants have no way to tell you what they have experienced, or why, or who they are, or what they think.” (1)

While he, too, eventually used this provocative statement to conclude that personal narratives are the key to understanding the lives of undocumented immigrants in the United States, I use this claim here in order to contrast it with the results gathered in this study: Particularly striking is the fact that each and every aspect in Urrea's claim seems inaccurate with regard to the eight digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth published on YouTube and selected for this study. Not only can their videos potentially be viewed by people from all over the world who have access to the Internet, the video format also provides multiple *ways* to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

In particular, the core story of dispossession, which consists of a central experience with dispossession in the narrators' lives caused by undocumented status, enables an understanding of situations of marginalization, oppression, and criminalization. Butler's and Athanasiou's concept further establishes undocumented youth as relational beings who, in their inability to be self-sufficient, independent beings, are dispossessed of themselves through dispossessing powers – be it normative understandings of who can call him-/herself an ‘American’, who can go to college, to the military, or which family members may stay in the United States and which cannot.

Through the performance of this sometimes traumatizing experience, however, other paths open up. As Butler stresses dispossession materializes the ‘political’ when narrators retell it in their performance, which enacts the experience. Corporeal performances of dispossession in the digital *testimonios* have shown acts of injustice and powerlessness of those that, in the moment of the recording of the video, and whenever it is played again, dispossess themselves. The digital *testimonios* employ multimodality in their videos in order to perform dispossession according to different logics, as the following sections will summarize.

### 1.1. Enacting Dispossession

First, undocumented youth narrators **imitate and perform dispossession**<sup>149</sup> by, for instance, metaphorically enacting the process of putting a ‘post-it’ onto the wall that reminds Stephanie Solis (1) of her inability to fully participate in activities that require a form of government identification; by **enacting the moment** Mohammad Abdollahi’s (2) college acceptance letter was taken away from him by means of his own hand; or by using a metaphoric gesture that combined with the sound it creates, expresses the forcefulness of ‘shooting down’ Carlos Roa’s dreams to go to college or the military. The enactment transfers the dispossessing power of that moment to the undocumented youth narrators themselves and at the same time appeals to the viewer’s moral understanding and sense of agency ‘for the cause’, since the viewer is, through the performance in the visual moving image, turned into a witness of dispossession processes.

As the frame of the visual image focuses on the undocumented narrators’ bodies, the youths further enact criminalization, for instance, through abstract pointing. Mitzy Calderón (6) sets herself off against ‘others’ – those who possess papers. The mostly plain background of the videos’ settings eliminates other visual distractions. The setting and lighting of Mohammad Abdollahi’s (2) video symbolically visualize his life ‘in the shadows’, reinforcing his own act of actively victimizing his body by pointing at it and claiming that he, as a human being, and an undocumented immigrant, ‘is not good enough’ to be accepted at a U.S. American university, literally and symbolically pointing to a de-humanizing state of being. The audience on YouTube becomes a **witness** when it sees Luis’ family’s dispossession in very ‘human’ terms: Appearing in the video as a silent participant, Luis’ nephew appears in the moving image along with Luis in scenes filmed outside of the apartment. Thus, Luis turns the viewer’s attention to the recent rise in the numbers of undocumented immigrants deported in 2013 and the current campaigns against the criminalization of ‘re-entry’.

Through the visual moving image, particularly as it tracks changes in facial expression and bodily movement, undocumented youth perform dispossession as the narrative time of the video proceeds. Constant movement of his arms and upper body while sitting on the ground, in David Ramirez’ (4) narrative, highlights the precarity

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<sup>149</sup> All relevant concluding material will be highlighted in bold letters.

and urgency that his undocumented status imposes on him, expressing the difficulty of his situation. This way, moving image illustrates dispossession as interminably mapped onto the bodies, as it catches ‘changes’ performed through the body. Stephanie Solis’ (1) facial expressions, for instance, change from confident to sad as she begins to talk about her immigration status. The performance of visible emotions **displayed by the change** in facial expressions thus serves as an indicator of the current immigration status in the narratives. Dispossession, here, can be performed particularly well as a structure of feeling, expressed through the change in facial features.

Other medial variants of the visual channel, the ‘visual static image’, enacts dispossession through the logics of time as well: Through the blending-in of two photos that depict the same room but the first *with* items stored in it and the second *without* them, Stephanie Solis’ (1), for instance, uses the ‘illustrative mode’ of photos to *illustrate dispossession* in Butler and Athanasiou’s second sense of dispossession as a direct, material and non-material expression of loss.

Written language that is used only in some of the narratives as a variant to the spoken, contributes to **informing** the viewer of the narrator’s dispossession. In two of the narratives, written language thus serves as a constant reminder of the dispossession through undocumented status by means of, for instance, the written words ‘I am undocumented’ printed on Mohammad Abdollahi’s (2) t-shirt, or similar captions that appear in the visual moving image which depicts David Ramirez’ (thus dispossessed) body (4).

The auditory channel in the eight digital *testimonios* likewise is able to enact dispossession, however, in a less direct sense. Speech, or rather the *absence* of it, is a means of performing the moment of dispossession and, in particular, the aporia described in David Ramirez’ verbal metaphor of the feeling that undocumented status causes him to feel as if he was ‘digging himself further into a hole’. David performs his dispossession, in this sense, as a **marker** of the limits of self-sufficiency that he expresses through explicit exhaling, pausing, and then stopping the recording altogether. Again not directly expressed through speech but by means of the core mode of (non-diegetic) music, Carlos Roa’s digital *testimonio* utilizes classical instrumental music (piano and flute) to play a theme that serves as a harmonious ‘leitmotif’ for his deceased mother. The sadness of the music contrasts to his composed counte-

nance while speaking of his mother. In turn, this contrast ‘announces’ a change in emotions and thus **highlights** Carlos’ dispossession of fulfilling his mother’s ‘American Dream’.

Finally, film editing and montage is employed to enact and illustrate dispossession in the eight narratives. ‘Zoom’ primarily focuses on the narrators’ faces as they recount or perform their dispossession through a **visible display of emotions**. Zooming *out*, in contrast, signaled to ‘keep a distance’, frames dispossession by de-emphasizing the narrators’ centrality of the dispossessed body, and ends the narrative episode of the core story. The producers’ freedom to determine narrative tone and topic advances the digital *testimonio*’s function as a political device in the Movement. Video editing through cuts, for instance, determines what the narrative is ‘supposed to be about’, cutting the moving image where ‘everything *important* has been said’, such as in Ivette Roman’s (7) digital *testimonio*. Moving away from the undocumented status as a major force of dispossession, the video by means of cutting highlights the intersections of undocumented status with other forms of identity for which the narrator is dispossessed (in Ivette’s case, sexual dispossession). This move de-emphasizes the dispossession of undocumented *students* at the time of the narrative’s publishing in 2013, as the students, by then, have legal access to options such as the DACA or state versions of the DREAM Act, shifting the focus on other ‘**urgent**’ issues in their narratives instead.

## 1.2. From Dispossession to ‘Possession’: Performance as Resistance

Performing dispossession, as the section above highlights, is not restricted to illustrating or enacting moments and states of dispossession. Rather, Butler and Athanasiou’s understanding of dispossession as a form of political protest incorporates the possibility for undocumented youth to voice their **opposition and resistance** to the dispossession to which their families and communities are subjected. Their digital *testimonios* demonstrate an assumption of power that works beyond dominant ideological frameworks.

First, the narratives actively claim their belonging to American citizenry and perform the ‘possession’ thereof. Stephanie Solis (1), for instance, by means of gesture shortly performs the pledge of allegiance and the waving of an American flag which constitutes a symbolic act **performing her legalization**; Carlos Roa’s (3)

metaphoric gestures perform an act of *personally* ‘**contributing**’ to society; Angelica Velazquillo (5) shrugs her shoulders to illustrate that she has ‘no choice’ but to act and protest against the ‘injustices her community is facing’; Mitzy Calderón (7), by means of an iconic gesture that connotes ‘smallness’, belittles the importance of a social security number as the precondition for ‘**belonging**’. While she does not belong legally, she expresses that she *does* belong by smiling and glancing up to the ceiling when she pronounces that at her alternative university, Freedom University in Georgia, all those excluded *belong*. Similarly, Angelica smiles and emphatically closes her eyes at the announcement of her degree in the introduction to her narrative. Through this, she expresses a sense of *legitimization* of the self and justification for why she is in the country illegally, emphasizing the ‘worthiness’ of undocumented immigrant students in the Movement.

Further, in Carlos Roa’s (3) narrative, he induces **moral judgment** through a metaphoric gesture that visualizes the act of ‘scolding’ somebody. The difference that lies in the function of this gesture is not only an ideational one, however, but an interpersonal as well, since Carlos directly looks into the camera during this performance and thus expresses criticism at the ‘general public’ represented by the audience of YouTube for denying him his ‘dreams’. The use of photos in the introduction to his narrative symbolizes the assimilationist idea of the ‘melting pot’, as images and voices of different ethnicities melt into a United States flag by means of digital editing of the moving image, following a political logic that favors the legalization of all undocumented immigrants in the United States, which Pallares stressed as a central underlying goal of the Movement and its marches since 2006.

The body of the dispossession, visualized by the moving image, further indicates resistances through posture, for instance. Through the spatial proportions of the framed visual image, undocumented youth establish a clear **hierarchy** between themselves and their wider audience, expressing a sense of personal agency through **elevated positions**, for instance. Likewise, facial expressions connote attitudes. While smiles are usually associated with happiness, in the digital narratives, smiles in combination with verbal language that expresses a contrasting sorrow or anger can become ‘inappropriate’ performative acts. Carlos Roa (3) performs this way when he **mocks** which immigrants in the course of immigration history of the United States obtain a personal claim to legalization. Narrating with humor and/or irony, in turn,

creates power in online communities, transforming media logic and social shaping on YouTube into acts of political resistance.

Gestures and body movement further perform attitudes and opinions that interrogate the public treatment of undocumented immigrants in the United States, enacting to ‘cheer’ for the organization with a **triumphant hand gesture**; or, as Ivette Roman (7) does, emphasizing the intersectional struggle of her dispossession, being undocumented and a lesbian, while she **confirms her pronounced resistance** to fight against the discrimination she experiences by smiling and nodding at the sentence that she is ‘a lesbian’. Judith Butler maintains that such a performance “suggests that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of ‘the real’ and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization” (*Gender Trouble* 33).

In addition to the visual channel, the verbal speech act constitutes a crucial aspect to the ability of undocumented youth to express resistance and protest. Through the politics of the performative, “recalls, norms, names, signs, practices, and regulatory fictions can be invoked, cited anew, and challenged at once”, Athanasiou summarizes (99). Consequently, undocumented youth assume the option of “**self-naming**” in their digital *testimonios*, ‘outing’ themselves to millions of potential viewers and exclaiming to be self-confident, ‘unafraid’, and ‘unashamed’ about this status (see, for instance, Mitzy Calderón (7) or Luis Maldonado (8)) – assuming the ‘mottos’ that the Movement produced in recent years to ‘name’ their campaigns and their struggle. Additionally, Carlos exclaims: ‘I am America’ in the introduction to his *testimonio*, expressing a crucial claim to legalization. This ‘re-naming’ function of the speech act is predominantly, yet not confined to vocal speech: David Ramirez (4) uses written language (captions) to inscribe the motto of his campaign and Movement ‘onto’ his body.

The different modes of the voice further add an **activating effect** through the meaning that changes in the prosodic elements of rhythm, pitch, and volume produce. Undocumented youth narrators can **de-criminalize** family members and actions of civil disobedience through a sharp rise in pitch; or express a sense of power through the use of rhythmic language and music. Luis Maldonado (8), for instance, metaphorically and literally prolongs his announced and **ever-continuing activism**. The drum beats, hence, symbolize ongoing acts of resistance.

### 1.3. Testimonial Storytelling and Collectivity on YouTube

Closely connected to the self-naming strategies mentioned in the section above, ‘outing’ as undocumented is the resistance to ‘closetedness’ that implies silences, not ‘having a voice’, and essentially being a voiceless ‘subaltern’ in Spivak’s sense of the word. Undocumented youth, thus, actively put an end to their silences by literally **speaking their truth** in performative speech acts. Undocumented youth thus, through their literal speaking out, become witnesses to their cause. It is the voice that is most important, bearing **witness** to ills that happen in the communities of the dispossessed. In fact, for two of the narratives in this selection, speech and moving image are the only devices the narrators require for their storytelling.

Through their oral storytelling, undocumented youth challenge ideas of truth and authenticity, as they blend their voice, visuals, name, biographical data, and photos. These strategies for performing the ‘personal’ through oral storytelling transform their digital *testimonios* into personalized accounts on YouTube. Yet, despite the personal detail and subjectivity, through this act of storytelling they lay claim to ‘a **voice for all**’ immigrants dispossessed by their status. This claim works, in particular, through the close relation between their narratives and the genre of the *testimonio*, which becomes most discernible in the introductory sequences to their narratives that resemble *testimonios* such as that of Rigoberta Menchú. In these speech patterns, the narrators self-confidently perform a ‘**ritual**’, stating their status, name, and age, and, at times, organizational affiliation.<sup>150</sup> This pattern, as it connects the youths across the widespread and diverse YouTube community, highlights a sense of belonging to the Movement, and a **collectiveness in the struggle** for the rights of the undocumented. It follows that the voice in combination with the visuals, the name, autobiographical data and the declaration of undocumented status serve as an emphasis on community but as an **individual signature** at the same time: a ritual that all undocumented youth can re-produce yet completely individualize in the spirit of individual output on platforms such as YouTube

Adding an **interpersonal statement** in the form of “thank you” at the end of her narrative, Angelica, for instance, also transforms the viewer into a ‘witness’ to

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<sup>150</sup> They do this consistently throughout the selection of narratives in this study, however, not every narrative mentions all aspects. Least conforming to this pattern are the narratives of Stephanie Solis (1) and Carlos Roa (3).



her cause, implying that she does not leave anyone else room to speak *for her* or interrupt her, while she establishes narrative contract with her viewer nevertheless. In contrast, captions, and a voice from the background in one of the narratives, show that the **production process** also may be a **communal** one. The **vocal intervention** by another person in Ivette Roman's *testimonio*, for instance, associates her with the caption in her video that contains the organizational logo of *Equality Maryland* – a campaign supporting undocumented youth LGBT immigrants. Likewise, written captions add another narrative perspective. In most cases, written captions *during* the video clip *describe* information on the narrators' diverse backgrounds and dispossessed identities. These reveal information that the undocumented narrator must have recounted in the process of 'in-depth interviewing' as one also encounters in the production of the traditional *testimonio*. In one case, a written caption also formulates the original interview question, which the narrator then answers. Using other perspectives contributes to the **simulation of a face-to-face *testimonio*** – an interaction and conversation with an interlocutor, which is, in most digital *testimonios*, replaced by the camera.

#### 1.4. Mediatizing Public Space for YouTube: 'New Form of Politics'

The visual moving image in a clip on YouTube is certainly restricted in its actual space. The space depicted, however, does not have any limits. A few of the narratives in this selection have understood the device to 'occupy' spaces in their offline life that, through the performance of **resistant activities in that space**, serve as a form of political protest. In particular, the occupation of space offers options for **plural performativity**, in Butler and Athanasiou's sense of the word.

Therefore, some of the narratives form a '**public space**' for their undocumented body, materializing the dispossession in the performance and resisting it in the most literal sense. For this, the changes in setting as well as the concrete bodily movement and posture depict an **occupation** of public spaces. The **background settings** in which some of the videos are produced depict educational institutions, or community centers that hint at the existence of a **space for offline activism**. Moving images show Stephanie Solis (1), for instance, *in action*, giving a 'mock graduation speech' and thus inhabiting the space of her college campus, which, in the year of her publication, points to the need for a DREAM Act to enable

undocumented youth to get higher education. In addition, having her viewer ‘follow’ her on public transportation and on campus has a similar effect in the narrative. Likewise, Luis Maldonado (8) performs his dispossession by **conquering ‘real’ spaces** as well: Throughout the digital narrative, the moving image depicts him walking at or sitting in front of the U.S.-Mexican border in Hidalgo, being ‘contained’ and ‘restricted’ by the presence of the border. As the camera depicts his feet, walking, the movement along the border symbolizes an **ongoing and active struggle**.

What is more, the still images (photographs) portray offline action, as the photo on Ivette Roman’s (7) office wall explains. Luis Maldonado (8) uses photographs to portray himself, literally, ‘in action’ with or in front of a crowd of people that holds up posters or wears t-shirts that, through the use of written language, proclaim a ‘belonging to’ the Movement. Luis claims an active sense of belonging without having to verbally express it. Instead, the photos narrate this activism by themselves. In them, Luis unites with the crowd of activists and protesters in the performativity of resistance through the photos’ **performativity of plurality** and **performativity in plurality**. Despite the fact that still images are said to be ‘static’ on all levels, Luis’ photos depict the **dynamics** of the Movement – a movement in plurality.

## 2. Mediatization of Politics – A Voice to Undocumented Youth

Rina Benmayor coined the term ‘digital *testimonio*’ as a mediated *testimonio* that amalgamates the tradition of the *testimonio* with digital storytelling on YouTube. “The digital medium”, she argues, “offers many more possibilities for authorship than the traditional publication format that Latin@s found, and still do find, so hard to break into” (*Digital Testimonio* 521). This analysis of YouTube narratives of undocumented youth documents that digital *testimonios* **are mediatized** and thus an expression of the mediatization of politics that Esser and Strömbäck, most famously, proposed.

The mediatization of the storytelling through the use of multimodality as a major storytelling device has proven capable of transforming such a long-lasting tradition as that of the *testimonio*, fostering changes in practices that are part of mediatization processes. The mediatization of storytelling bears great potential for

many more studies of such ‘new’ cultural phenomena that arose within the first decades of the new millennium. The frame of mediatization as a tool for understanding New Media content such as digital *testimonios* of undocumented youth *within* and outside of their Movement, renegotiates issues such as personalization, participation, and agency.

With reference to mediatization theory, as the figure below shows, the *testimonio* is an ‘open-ended’ basis upon which the digital *testimonio* solidly forms. Like a sand glass, however, the media logic of YouTube ‘raises’ the digital *testimonio*, which gives it its own ‘shape’ – different from that of the *testimonio* (not an open-ended rectangle but a triangle), yet again different from the media logic (arrow):

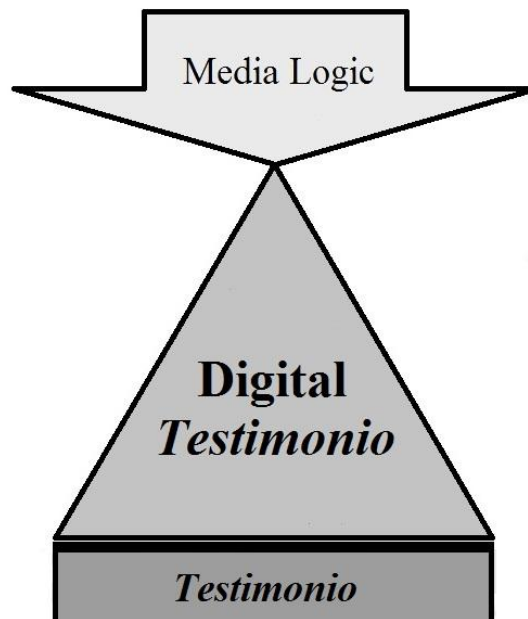


Figure 142: “Digital Testimonio”. Created by the Author, 2015.

One of the most basic implications that follows from this investigation is that, as Jäger, Linz, and Schneider explain,

with the pervasive expansion of computer technology and the development of networked communication towards the end of the 20th century, renewed shifts in cultural structures could be experienced leading to transformations in the various communicative cultures. (9)

The ‘mediatization of politics’, in this investigation, offered an understanding of the logic of the revived Immigrant Rights Movement as a unique vocalization of political protest led by undocumented youth. This voice inherently connects to the tradition of

the *testimonio*, yet replaces its interlocutor and audience with the digital medium and community, while the visual space of the video serves as a major device for performing resistance. This resistance, however, is not confined to the public offline space but transforms the online ‘space’ to a site for activism as well. The integration of the Immigrant Rights Movement’s politics into the spaces of the new medium, YouTube has proven that resistance against dispossession gains new perspectives that cannot only be confined to the offline sphere for activism. The resistance of undocumented youth manifests in the digital telling of their story, showing that it is not only in actual, physical revolutions that cultural weapons can be used. After all, storytelling of undocumented youth *is* politics. Thus, let us always be reminded of the fact that undocumented youth *possess* an agenda, and, with reference to ‘his’ Movement, in David Ramirez’ words,

“We’re not cute. We’re organized.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> David Ramirez made this statement during his civil disobedience action in 2011, from which the *digital testimonio* analyzed in this study arose (in: Pallares, *Family Activism* 127).

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**Personal Interviews (Chicago, Illinois, March 2014)**

Benítez, Gabriela. Personal interview. 13 March 2014.

Gutiérrez, Antonio. Personal interview. 25 March 2014.

Hernandez, Marcela. Personal interview. 27 March 2014.

Sánchez, Uriel. Personal interview. 24 March 2014.

**Digital Testimonios 1.-8.****(1) Stephanie Solis (S.S.)**

UndergroundAtBrown. "Lost & Found (Story of a DREAM Act Student)." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 12 May 2009. Web. 5 Nov. 2013.

**(2) Mohammad Abdollahi (M.A.)**

DreamActivist. "My name is Mohammad and I am undocumented." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 19 Mar. 2010. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

**(3) Carlos Roa (C.R.)**

Cccvideovault. "Carlos: the story of an undocumented student." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 21 July 2010. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

**(4) David Ramirez (D.R.)**

Thedreamiscoming2011. "David Ramirez, Immigrant Youth Justice League." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 5 Apr. 2011. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

**(5) Angelica Velazquillo (A.V.)**

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**(6) Mitzy Calderón (M.C.)**

SUDDENmovementDotOrg. "I am no longer hiding! I am no longer afraid!" Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 13 Nov. 2010. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

**(7) Ivette Roman (I.R.)**

MsKYYoung. "Maryland's Undocumented Immigrant Students – Ivette." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 5 Jan. 2013. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

**(8) Luis Maldonado (L.M.)**

Lagunas-Aguirre, Sheridan. "Luis Maldonado: A Brief Look into the Life of an Undocumented Immigrant." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 20 Sept. 2013. Web. 9 Sept. 2014.

## APPENDICES

### 1. Transcriptions: Digital Testimonios 1.-8. (YouTube)

#### 1.1. Stephanie Solis (S.S.)

And they never told me, because my family was, you know, ashamed and...and they didn't really know what to say. When I was 18, my mom put everything we owned into a public storage, but, because we were moving around so frequently, they lost track of us and eventually sold to strangers everything that we owned, which included all my baby photos, so when all that was gone I felt like 'Stephanie is 18 years old and I don't exist'. A couple of years later, I was over at a friend's house and I found, on the shelf, a book that I had lent them. And stuck within the pages were just a few pictures of me as a kid. I found this one, which, as far as I know, is the only picture of me in the Philippines. I, literally, at the age of 20, did not remember what I looked like when I was a kid anymore. And then I was able to see that. This one, it's me, posing in front of somebody's Mercedes Benz. You know, my dad said: "Go, stand next to the car, oh my God, it's a Mercedes Benz! There are millionaires everywhere! Put your face right next to the hood for a minute!" I'm in America because the disco died. It took until 1989 for disco to finally die in the Philippines. My dad's job was installing and maintaining the sound systems for all of the discos in Manila. He said, you know, "I can't, like, support us. We're gonna try to move and I'm gonna find work!" Eh, I started talking to my mom, when I said: "Oh, wow, this is really exciting, you know! My 18th birthday. I'm gonna be, you know, a legal adult, like, I never did get around getting a driver's license, I should do that. I wanna apply for a passport and, you know, go on a trip maybe. And I wanna...wanna register to vote. And, you know, with a lot of hemming and hauling and, you know, dodging the question, you know, she, ehm, eventually just told me that, ehm, I...I can't do that! That we're not here legally. We don't have documentation. I can't get...I can't get any of these things. I just thought, "O.k. I can go down to City Hall, take a test, and this test will make you American instantly. And you'll do the Pledge of Allegiance, and you'll get a tiny American flag. I met with an immigration attorney and then I found out that there is, you know, no path to citizenship for people who are here illegally. I can't take the test. I'm just, sort of,

here. Here we are, where I live, in the beautiful Helen Park and to get from here to UCLA by bus and train it takes between an hour-an-a-half to, usually, more like two hours. I haven't been in school for the past quarter since I'm not eligible for financial aid. It's really hit-and-miss in terms of when I can and can't be in school. At one point it took me about three months to save up, you know, I was working three jobs. Sometimes it'll take me a year. There is, you know, the first years, the second years, the third years and the fourth years and then there's me. It's like being a tourist, you know, I'm pretending to have, like, the college experience. Being undocumented feels like you're, ehm, a kid forever, because right now, I can't get any form of real government id that would prove my age. There're all of these constant reminders; every store, in the bank and transaction with an id, and every place of work, every travel poster, everything is a little post-it that says, you know, "Not yours". Right now, we're on UCLA campus and, ehm, I'm walking down to where a mock graduation event is being held. I'm gonna be giving a short speech and just discussing how important it is that the DREAM Act or...or something similar would pass. And I lived my entire life, ehm, up until that point thinking that I was just, you know, a regular American student. When I turned 18 I thought, wow, this is the exciting birthday. Then you're legal adult. All of the sudden you have this power in your hand. And I mentioned this to my mom. And she said: 'Well, there's a big problem with that'. And they never told me, because my family was, you know, ashamed and they didn't really know what to say. This is not a decision I made. You're holding children hostage and nobody remembers the children, whenever they see the sign, you know, the famous sign that you see around San Diego of, you know, the mother and the father and they're pulling their little girl along. Nobody looks at the little girl and thinks: 'What happens to her when she grows up?'"

## **1.2. Mohammad Abdollahi (M.A.)**

Hey, everybody, this is Mo from *DreamActivist*. Ehm, for the past week-and-a-half or so we've been asking for all you guys to share your stories and share your videos about 'coming out'. Ehm, and so I thought it was about time to step up and actually do one since it's about Thursday night or Friday morning. Ehm, so, a little bit about (*unintelligible*) posted his video, (*unintelligible*) from GIR 2010, wohoo!, and he posted his video and, ehm, he said, you know, the most important thing for us to say

is 'My name is... and I'm undocumented'. And so that's how I was gonna start of my video. Ehm, my name is Mohammad and I'm undocumented. My parents immigrated here from Iran, which is on, like, the other side of the world, ehm, when I was just three years old. And, you know, going to high school, I always knew I was undocumented but I never really understood what it meant until it was that time when everybody was applying for colleges. And I was watching all my friends and, you know, they were applying to these schools and colleges and I had dreams of going there as well. But I knew because of my status I wasn't gonna be able to go there. Ehm, and I know that rings true for lots of you guys. And when we hear your stories and you e-mail us, it's the same thing that we hear from everybody. Ehm, and so after high school, I was...I was perfectly fine with, you know, saving my money, going to a community college, saving up my credits so that eventually one day I would be able to go to a university. Ehm, and I remember it was in...it was in the summer of 2007 when that day came. And I applied to the school, I applied to Eastern Michigan University, ehm, and I remember I went there and I was, ehm, sitting in the admissions counselor's office and he came to me and he said, you know, "Mohammad, you're the kind of student that we want at this university. You meet all the grades, you've done all this stuff, you're amazing. We're glad you came here". Ehm, and so I remember he gave me this piece of paper. And he said, you know, "This is your acceptance letter". I was looking at this piece of paper and I had my nine-digit-number that was on there. It was my student id number. Ehm, and I remember I was looking at this piece of paper he handed me and I was thinking to myself as he was talking about something, about, you know, financial aid and things that I knew I wouldn't qualify for because of my status. And I was looking at this piece of paper and I was thinking that, you know, when my parents came here twenty years ago, this is the same kind of hopes and this is the same kind of dreams that they had in mind when they came here. And I had that in my hands. And I remember as I was think...looking at this piece of paper, that I was thinking, you know "There's been so many nights that my mom has been sitting at home crying; thinking about, you know, 'What have I put my kids through? What have I made them suffer through?'" And as I was looking at this piece of paper I was thinking about, you know, "I might finally be able to call my mom and say: 'Hey, mom, guess what? All those dreams and all those things that you had there finally came true and it was all

worth it'. And so as I was sitting there, looking at this piece of paper, ehm, this counselor, I remember he was talking about, you know, 'You're gonna be able to qualify for this financial aid and all this other stuff' and as he was talking, I was just kinda like drawing him up and I was looking at my amazing piece of paper and my new nine-digit number and so then he walked out of the room and he came back like five minutes later and he came back and he said: "You know what, Mohammad, we made a mistake. As we were looking at your application, we for...we, we missed a box that you clearly marked that you're not a citizen". And so, he said, "Because of that mistake, we're gonna have to take your acceptance letter away". And so, he took my acceptance letter away from me. And he said because of I wasn't born here, I wasn't good enough for the university. So, this was around September of 2007. Ehm, and in October of 2007, ehm, there's this thing called the DREAM Act that was up for a vote. And I'm sure that all of you guys are familiar with the DREAM Act or else you wouldn't be looking at this video right now. Ehm, and so the DREAM Act came up for a vote and at that time there was 44 Senators that decided that we didn't deserve a change to go to college. And so the DREAM Act failed. Ehm, around that same time I was, you know, thinking to myself like 'O.k. This is where somehow I've grown up in; this is where somehow I thought I was always gonna live, I was gonna give back to my community. But at this point, the DREAM Act wasn't a reality and so 'What do I do? Do I leave?'. Ehm, and so I realized that, you know, I couldn't...I couldn't go back to Iran because I'm also gay. And so going back to Iran was just not a reality for me. And so then I started talking with other undocumented students who around the country and started meeting other undocumented students and I started realizing that my situation was not unique just to me. I was not the only undocumented student out there. There were so many other undocumented students that were going through the same, exact thing that I was going through. Ehm, and so what we decided to do was, all these other students, we decided to come together and start an organization that would actually work for our rights. And so we started *DreamActivist.org*, we started with Prenna in California, with Maria in Pennsylvania, with Huong in Florida, with Marc in California, with Camy in Texas and all these students, we came together and we started *DreamActivist.org*, which is this amazing organization that all of you guys are now all part of and we consider all you guys a family, too. Ehm, and so, it's been an amazing experience so far and we've all been

fighting for the DREAM Act together and so I wanted to thank each and every one of you guys for all of your support and for everything that you have been doing; sharing your stories and sharing your videos and that's really what's been helping us get through it this whole time, ehm, as undocumented students all of us working together to make sure that nobody can get in the way of our dreams and that if we wanna get the DREAM Act, it's onto us. And it's up to us to make sure that that happens. And so, again, I want to just thank all of you guys for sharing everything with us and that, you know, if we...if we really put in everything that we've been putting in, we're definitely gonna make this happen. And, so, if you have some videos to share, if you have some stories to share, as you can see, you know, 'coming out' is not about 'coming out' in front of a press conference or 'coming out' in front of a big audience. The only thing around me is just some weird people that are taping this video right now and this beautiful (*unintelligible*) video from *The Office* which I'm sure you guys are all familiar with. And if you're not, this is, this is my inspiration for passing the DREAM Act, this is what gets me through the day. So, definitely check it out, *Office*. Ehm, but I want to again thank you guys all for just sharing your videos and your stories and so, ehm, yeah. We're gonna...we're gonna make sure that the DREAM Act happens this year, ehm, thanks a lot.

### **1.3. Carlos Roa (C.R.)**

(*"WeareAmerica"-ad*)

My name is Carlos Roa and I am America. My family and myself came to the United States when...back in 1989; I was only two years old. My grandfather came to this country when it was, in 1948, U.S. citizen since 1958 and he...he had the opportunity to realize his American Dream. My dad tried year after year to get...get us legalized and he spent tens of thousands of dollars for lawyers and still nothing. It's been twenty years. People think it's as easy as getting behind a line, it's not like that. I feel bad about it because it's like 'How is it possible?' like, you know, that people like my father are still undocumented, you know, having a father that was a U.S. citizen for over 40 years. I graduated in 2005 from high school and I...and I wanted to get into college, I wanted to join the military and those options, like, weren't, I couldn't do any of that. And so it's frustrating, you know, the fact that I wanna give back, you know, I'm willing to serve this country, eh, in the military



service and it's...I, I don't even have the option to do so. When you're shooting down people's dreams, it's, that's bad. And it's bad for everyone. Not just immigrants. It was very difficult for her, you know, she fought two battles, you know, one of them being...having breast cancer and the other, eh, you know, the fact that she was, you know, that her family was undocumented. It was really tough for her as a mother, you know, raising, eh, three kids and not having, eh, not being able to get legalized in this country. You know, all she wanted to do was provide of us, you know, provide for her family, as any other family in this country, eh, be able to, and she wanted us to realize, you know, our American Dream. Eh, she wanted to see her kids become professionals. The fact that she was such a fighter, you know, that has influenced me throughout, eh, my life and it has... everything I do, I do it in her memory. If you work hard, and if you try, and then you strive, you can realize your potential. You could be a contributing member to society, eh, that's...it's something that this country has prided itself on. And, you know, we've seen that, you know, with the...at the turn of the century, you know, we saw how, eh, immigrants, ehm, you know, changed this nation, you know, for the better, you know, of Irish, of Polish, of Italian descent. How, eh, they were able to shape for most, very much changed this nation for the better. And made this country better. You know, we are no different than the immigrants of the past.

#### **1.4. David Ramirez (D.R.)**

My name is David, I'm from Chicago but I was born in Mexico. I've been here since I was a year old. I'm 21 now. And, ehm, I've spent the last decade realizing, struggling through and as of really recently coming to terms with being undocumented. I've been here since I was a year old, which means that I was undocumented before I was even able to start making memories. Ehm...I spent the last ten years...ehm ...trying to reconcile, like, all this hate that's been shot at me with my identity. Ehm, every time that I compromised with the hate; every time that I tried to reconcile with it, ehm, I felt that I was digging myself further into a hole. I remember how absolutely alone I felt; I was 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, I'm 21 now and I feel like I've finally made it; I have a community. And I know that right now there's a 13-year-old kid that feels absolutely alone, somewhere, most likely in a place like Atlanta, Georgia, for there's this ban that is completely closing off all those options

of going to college. I'm doing this in hopes that he'll hear about me doing it and that it'll inspire him to not give up and to stand up and fight.

### **1.5. Angelica Velazquillo (A.V.)**

Hi, my name is Angelica Velazquillo. I'm from Mexico and I came to the U.S. when I was four years old. I graduated *magna cum laude* from Belmont Abbey college. And I obtained my Bachelor of Arts in psychology. I'm also undocumented, which means I do not have an immigration status or social security number. I cannot work in my field or renew my driver's license, ehm, and there's no way for me to change my immigration status. On October 2010, my brother was coming home from the gym, when he was stopped for driving with his high beams on. Because of this, my brother was arrested and when they learned that he was undocumented, ICE took a hold of him. And he spent three days in jail and my family had to pay a 5,000 dollar immigration bond, otherwise he was going to be sent to a detention center in a different state. This was a turning point for me, ehm, up to now I had faced challenges because of being undocumented but nothing compares to...to that night. Ehm...coming to my brother's empty room and realizing that he was spending the night in jail. And to see my mom falling apart because we didn't know when we were gonna see him again or if we were gonna see my brother again. After my brother's release we sought legal counsel to see what we could do. And it was very frustrating to hear that regardless of the fact that my brother came into the country when he was two years old, that he is a college student, has no prior criminal record, the only recommendation was for my brother to take a voluntary departure; for him to leave the country and go to Mexico – a place we don't remember – ehm...where he hasn't been to in 21 years. And this was what he was...he was gonna do! Until we got in touch with a group of young advocates who recommended making his case public. And we did! As a result of the public pressure, immigration has temporarily closed his case. And when I was invited to participate in a civil disobedience, ehm, I accepted. I, ehm, I realized that this was gonna continue to happen. That this is happening every day. And that it's time to speak out and to drop our fear, because if my brother was arrested for driving with high beams on then I was willing to be arrested for speaking out against the injustices, ehm, my brother and my community is...ehm...is facing. And I was arrested and spent three days in jail. I was gonna be

sent to a detention center until the National Immigration office decided to intervene, because of the public pressure and they dropped the case against us. So, according to the records it's as if nothing ever happened. And the grim reality is that this is gonna continue to happen until there's a change in policy. And this is why I...ehm...I'm advocating and I'm sharing my story with others; to make people aware of what is happening and how people like me, eh, young adults who have lived their whole life in the U.S., ehm, are being treated like criminals. And so my...my hopes are for a change. I would like to come home without worrying if I'm gonna see my parents, if they're gonna be there, or if I will be coming home that day. I want to live a normal life and have the same opportunities as everyone else does. Ehm...to be able to...to continue my studies, to work...eh...and to contribute to...to a place that I...that I call home. And to live without these worries. Thank you.

### **1.6. Mitzy Calderón (M.C.)**

Hello, my name is Mitzy, I'm 20 years old and I am undocumented. And I am making this video, because I want to share my story and I know that a lot of people can relate to my situation. Well, I came here from Mexico City when I was nine years old and I've been living in Georgia for the past eleven years. Ehm, you know, I finished elementary, middle school and high school here. I graduated from Florida Branch High School in 2010. And I kind of always knew that I didn't have my papers, you know, all through middle school and...but I never really understood what it meant to be undocumented. I never really knew the consequences and, you know, how much it was actually going to affect me in the future until, ehm...and also, during high school, I never really talked to people about my status. It was that I just...I wasn't comfortable with, you know, sharing. I was...I would always think to myself: "What if they call La Migra?" or something, you know. I was always very afraid and I was just always kinda, I never really wanted to tell people. You know, whenever they ask me: "Why don't you have your license yet?" You know, I would always come up with something. Eh, you know, "My license got suspended" for whatever reason, you know, I always had to come up with something and I always had to have a story. And I felt like I always had to cover up, you know, my life with lies. And I hated it. I hated it. And, ehm, well, my senior year came along and I was looking into different colleges and different, ehm, scholarships. And I went to my

counselor and I told her “I really wanna go to Young Harris College, you know, it has a beautiful campus; I wanted to have the American experience; I wanted to have, ehm, you know, that college experience and she looked at me and she was like: “Well, I don’t know how to help you”. I told her I don’t have a social, you know, “What can I do?”. She pretty much, ehm, you know, printed out a list of websites. And she said: “Here you go. These websites have a couple of scholarships that don’t require your social. Fill them out. Good luck to you”. And that was pretty much all the help that I received from my counselor. And I can’t blame her just because she really didn’t know how to help me. She wanted to. But, I mean, I guess she didn’t encounter many undocumented students at my high school just because most of them were white, like 95 per cent of the kids I went to school with were white. So, I guess she never really, you know, had experienced, ehm, dealing with undocumented students. So, well, ehm, I knew that I had to pay out-of-state tuition because I didn’t have a social but I really didn’t know how much I had to pay until I actually looked into it and it was definitely not an option for me because, you know, we are treated as international students, even though we’ve been living here most of our lives, I’ve been living here eleven years, like I said, but I’ve met other people who’ve been living here 19, 20 years, who came here when they were a month old, a year old, two years old. I mean, these people really...know no other home than the United States. And to be treated like an international student, to me, eh, kinda makes no sense, because, well, I grew up here, I consider myself an American. You know, just because I’m not white and I don’t have blue eyes or I don’t have a damn social, does not make me less of an American than anybody else. And, you know, to me the definition of being American has nothing to do with the legal status or a social. And, you know, we are trying to, you know, pretty much to change the system to where when you apply for school you have, you know, a little box that you can click on that says “undocumented American student” instead of “international student”, instead of “out-of-state student”, because we have to pay three times more than the regular student. Why? Just because we weren’t born here, and, you know, we grew up here. To me, that’s ridiculous. You know, there are so many doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, teachers, social workers that could be in the making and yet we’re not given that option. You know, here in Georgia, this is, to me, this is another way of segregation. You know, we are banned, completely banned, from the top five

universities in Georgia. Ehm, some of the include, ehm, UGA and George State, and, you know, no...even if you have the money, if you live in Georgia, and you're undocumented you can't attend those universities and their excuse was; "Well, we want every possible, you know, ehm, empty seat to be filled by a citizen", even though we might have the money, we might have the grades, the SAT scores, the GPAs. We might, you know, have everything that they're asking for but, you know, we don't have that magic number so we are automatically denied. And to me that's just a modern way of segregation. There's...nothing, you know, there's not another word that could, ehm, explain what that is. And so, you know, we're trying to change that system. And I am also part of Freedom University in Georgia. And, ehm, it's a free college-based class/course that, ehm, you know, you were accepted no matter of your sexual orientation, you know, your race, your status and, ehm, you know, they have been great, you know, supporters of this cause. And, ehm, I can actually now sit here and tell you that I am no longer ashamed, I am no longer living in the shadows, I am no longer hiding. And I can tell you I am undocumented and I am proud to say it. And I really would like for more people to come out and share their stories and, you know, share their experiences and how they feel, you know, because we have to change the system, you know, we have to do the dirty work. We're not gonna sit around and wait for somebody else to do it for us. If we want change, we have to make it ourselves. And we're not gonna stop until either the system has changed or the DREAM Act goes through. That is something that I, that I am a firm believer of. I mean, we're not gonna stop. This movement is...this is just the beginning of something great and I really would like for a lot more people to come out, you know, and just say it. Just be proud of who you are, embrace yours...embrace who you are. Don't ever let anybody, you know, bring you down just because you're not an American or just because in their eyes you're not an American. You know, an...being an American comes from the heart. And I can tell you, I love where I'm from, I love my country but, you know, definitely I am...I consider myself an American. So, like I said, I am...my name is Mitzy, I am undocumented, I am unafraid, and I am here today telling you to come out of the shadows. Thank you.

### 1.7. Ivette Roman (I.R.)

Hi, I'm Ivette, I'm from Peru and I'm 20 years old. I am an undocumented immigrant and I'm a lesbian. When I was in Peru, six years old, my mother left. Left me and my brothers. To come here, looking for a better future for us. In school, first of all, I didn't speak the language at all. And the culture was very different from what I was used to. I just felt like an outsider, like everyone just looking at you, you know. You didn't...I felt like I didn't belong to them. It was really hard those first months. Since kids were, you know, kids, they didn't know anything how it felt. They were like, when I tried to say something, (*unintelligible*) they would, like, laugh at me 'cause I didn't know how to say it or pronounce it. Some of them even said I was cheating school for some reason. Like in Math class. Math – you don't need English, obviously, so, they said I would be cheating because I got good grades. It was just really hard. My last year in high school I had applied for college, to Mary Bowman, it's in Virginia. And I got accepted; they even offered me a 50,000 scholarship. But I couldn't attend for other reasons. I found out that I couldn't receive any other financial aid. So it was gonna be hard paying the rest of it. It was around 10,000 more, Dollars. I'm working full time and going to school was still hard because I have to pay other...my rent, bills. It's really hard to save up and go to MC as well. Just waiting to for a job that pays better so I can at least attend Montgomery College. I was just thinking, watching T.V. Someone was coming out, like, to their parents or in the news or something and something had happened to them (*unintelligible*). Gotten beaten up by someone in their community, because they didn't like gay people. So, I just gathered all the guts I had, and I just told my mom one night. I was like "Mom. So what if that girl was me?" And she was like: "You wouldn't do this to me." And I was like: "But what if I was?" And then she started crying, 'cause she knew already. And I told her, I remember, "well, I can't change who I am". And I just left the room, to my room. And we didn't speak for months. She wouldn't even look me in the eye. I didn't even wanna live anymore. I thought I had lost her. I guess she realized that I was still her daughter. And she couldn't change who I was. She finally accepted me and now we're working together. And she's proud of me for doing all this. It feels great. It's the best feeling you can ever have. Your mother accepting who you are. I'm just here, trying to get a future. I want

the same...I want the same rights as they do. I'm still just like them. Looking for something better to do with my life. And...so my mother could be proud of me.

### **1.8. Luis Maldonado (L.M.)**

I'm undocumented and unafraid, queer and unashamed. My name is Luis Maldonado, and this is my immigrant story. I was born to (*unintelligible*) Mexico. And, eh, when I was a kid, my family decided to migrate over to the United States. At the end of my second year of college, and going into my third year of college, I started getting more involved with the DREAM-movement. Myself and other students then, eh, founded *Minority Affairs Council*. We started educating more than anything our university and our community on what the DREAM-Act-movement was and also 'immigration'. The first time that I came out as an undocumented person, ehm, it was a very nerve-wracking moment prior and during me coming out as an undocumented person. But after I came out as an undocumented person, it was a very relief and empowering moment that I felt. And being part of the LGBT community also fixed my immigration, ehm, status because prior to the repeal of DOMA, same-sex couples wherever they were allowed, weren't allowed to petition for their partners, for immigration status. So, ehm, I still feel that that's another battle of my identity, of my immigrant story. A few years ago, one of my siblings was deported back to Mexico. And my sibling has a U.S.-born child. He only gets to see his mom during summer vacations. The separation of families that are constantly happening on a day-to-day basis is affecting me. It affects me because my nephew, his parent, is not with him and I see the pain that he has. And how much that hurts him and not only him but also his mother. Ehm, I also explained to him the situation with his mom and, you know, what I'm doing, the kinda work that I'm doing and how I advocate and how much I'm fighting for them to reunite. What some people might take for granted perhaps traveling, perhaps driving, it's...are actually the dreams of other people, especially the dreams of people in my community. I live by Gandhi's quote, "be the change that you want to see in the world". So, to me that means take action, and through that there will always be a cause that I will feel attached to. There will always be an injustice that I will need to fight for, because if we don't speak out against these issues, then, who will be our voice?

## 2. Transcriptions: Personal Interviews (1.-4.)

### 2.1. Interview with Gaby Benítez, Chicago, Illinois, 13 March 2014

G.B.: Let me give you a quick, brief-through of my story. And from there you can tell me what you would like to hear a little more about.

S.Q.: Ok, sounds good.

G.B.: My name is Gaby Benítez. I came to the U.S. – I’m originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, which is about six hours from the El Paso border. And I am the oldest of four. I came to the U.S. first when I was six years old, to Memphis, TN. And I – we – came to Memphis because my dad’s sister, my aunt, had moved here and she’d been there for, for about a year-and-a-half. She’d moved there from Texas. She’d already been in the U.S. for a much longer time than my dad and at that point we needed money, it was in 1994, it was in 94, a lot of the (*unintelligible*) were coming in, and I remember my dad saying “Hey, we, we’re gonna go visit your tía” and I don’t remember exactly every detail from the first trip to the U.S., I just remember how my little sister had crossed, so, I guess, before that, let me just say that, when we first crossed, X, myself, my sister and my parents, right? My little sister was born in El Paso, Texas, so my mom had crossed the border to have her. She tried to do that with me, but she was too afraid. I was her first child, first-born. And it wasn’t...she didn’t feel comfortable with it but my little sister three years later – when she was born – my mom crossed to El Paso to have her there. And I remember my mom, you know, till this day, still talks about while she was giving labor the nurses would tell her: “You can still walk across the border. You cannot have your baby here”. And they tried to refuse giving her service, as she was delivering her baby. Right? So, even then, the reason why she was here was because she wanted to give my sister a better life, right? And she knew that at least giving birth in the U.S. would be much more – that would be one privilege that she would be able to give to her, right?

So, after she was born, she went back to Chihuahua. And when I was six was when we first came to the U.S. to officially move there. So, it was in the summer and my first year of first grade was in the U.S. And to this point, I



still remember my teacher, Mrs. X at X Elementary,<sup>152</sup> I remember walking into the room with my mom and my cousin holding my hand, and getting dropped off, and I remember sitting down in a desk in a school that looked so big compared to the school that I was in, in Mexico, and I remember sitting in the room, in the front, and I remember the teacher going “bla bla bla bla”, ‘cuz I could not understand *one*<sup>153</sup> word that was coming out of her mouth. (*Laughs*).

I remember when she would yell, I thought she was yelling at *me* and I would go home crying to mom and my cousin, saying, “my teacher is yelling at me, mom!” and I remember my cousin and my mom visiting my teacher to see what was going on, and the teacher would say, “I’m not yelling at her. She’s great. It’s the kids. I’m just telling them to be quiet”. And, so, that was my first experience of going to school in the public school system in Memphis. And as time moved on, I absorbed the language, and I learned, I guess, through school and through t.v. (*laughs*) and through my cousins, who were all born here, so, when I would speak to my cousins I would speak in English but every time I spoke to the elders, to my aunts, my aunt, my uncle, my parents, it would always be in Spanish. And to this day I’m really thankful because I have kept my language, because of those kinds of things.

And I guess – just fast-forwarding over to what... brought me into the movement was...going to, moving from Memphis, TN, which is a majority of African-American city, you know, I always grew up being the only Latina in the classroom, and... (*laughs*)...it was fine! I never had a bad experience until I moved to Southaven, MS, which is not more than 15 minutes away from Memphis, yet, when I told my teachers that I was moving to Southaven, nobody knew where Southaven, MS, was. It was a little town with one-way roads; very little development, but a great school system. And, when I moved there, I was in the seventh grade. And I was using the bus system for the first time to get dropped off to my house. We lived in a trailer park. And the whole

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<sup>152</sup> X substitutes for the real name of the teacher and the school for reasons of anonymity. This is done likewise throughout the transcription of the interview will all names and names of places that Gaby does not directly relate to.

<sup>153</sup> Italics are used to indicate when a word was particularly stressed by Gaby. This is handled likewise in all other interviews.

trailer park was almost all Caucasian and only two Latina families lived there, primarily from Mexico. And I remember getting dropped off at home, in my first couple of months, and people – the students, my classmates – would yell at me to go back to Mexico, and that I was a ‘wetback’, and a lot of really bad (*laughs*) racial slurrings that I had not really experienced that until I moved to Southaven. I experienced a couple of things in Memphis but it wasn’t as traumatic as it was when I moved to Southaven.

S.Q.: So, would you say that ‘ethnicity’ or ‘race’ and ‘racism’ was one of the major reasons why you got involved?

G.B.: I would say...I didn’t know at the time, right? I just..I didn’t really, at that point, I just knew that I was moved to a new place, because of safety reasons, because the area that I was living in in Southaven, was pretty much, very high-crime and my parents wanted a better area for us to live in. We were living with my aunts still, so, my parents wanted to...they bought their own little mobile home park. And that was the beginning of their American Dream, right? And to say that they had something that they owned. Like a mobile home. [...] <sup>154</sup> But I wouldn’t say that that’s what made me get involved. It just made me take off that blindfold, of, what discrimination really looked like. And even whether I was a student or whether it was the school administration, when I first registered to school, I remember I was in the school choir in Memphis and when I made it to Southaven they told me that the choir class was full and it wasn’t! (*laughs*). You know, I think, weeks later more students registered and they were in the choir class. And I feel like a lot of those opportunities were taken away. And I think it was not...I don’t wanna say it was racially motivated but I do wanna say that it was a shock of having a student that wasn’t the *status quo* in the, of the student body. So, when I got to high school, the questions, when I was a junior, the questions of like “Where are you going to school?”, “Where are you going to college?” started popping up. Folks started studying for the ACTs and people started wearing their college apparel of what school you wanted to go to. And

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<sup>154</sup> [...] indicates that Gaby was trying to start a sentence but changed the verbal beginning completely. As common conversational changes in a sentence, I left the original beginnings out of the script, as I do not ascribe semantic value to them, just a conversational flexibility. This is handed likewise in all other interviews.

throughout that time, I was just really heavily involved in extracurricular activities, there was always something that I was involved in, because my parents were the...embedded that in me, right? But it wasn't until my junior year that I tried to take the ACT for the first time and I wasn't able to because I didn't have a government-issued ID. Right, so, I'd spent all this time trying to study for the ACT and the day of, I was not really...that door was shut. And (*laughs*) as I was walking out, I was almost in tears. I told the team that they were administrating for the ACT at my school. So, but the administrator wasn't a teacher there. So, one of the teachers saw me and she said, "What's going on?" and I told her "I can't take the test, 'cuz I don't have a government-issued ID" and she said "no, come on" and grabs me by arm and takes me back to the classroom where the test was gonna be administrated. And she says: "Why are you not letting her in?", "Well, she doesn't have a picture ID", "Well, I can testify. She is Gabriela Márquez". And she was like: "Well, we need a picture ID." I remember, the teacher went to the library to look for the yearbook, found my picture in it to say "this is she", "let her in". And it was so crazy! At the end of the day, I could take the ACT for the first time. And I think that was when I was like "why me?", "what's going on?", "why is this such a big deal?" and the same thing happened again when I tried to apply for colleges. Then I started getting letters saying, "Hey, you know that little line that says 'social security' number? It's blank. You should fill it out." Once I would tell them that I didn't have one, I started getting those rejection letters and throughout the time, I wouldn't tell my classmates anything of it but I remember telling close teachers of mine. And they, the same teacher who helped me get that ACT test, and many of the other teachers said: "We're gonna get you into college". And so, my little underground X of teachers and family friends formed and while that was going on I heard about this thing called the DREAM Act that could help students. And I just remember going to a community meeting about it because I had been very depressed and my mom said "Let's go here. Let's find out, maybe they can help you go to school." Learned about the DREAM Act and I think the 'homework', what came out of that meeting, was: "We need petition

signatures. Go get as many signatures as you can. And we're gonna pass the DREAM Act". And I said: "Wow, this is easy!"

S.Q.: When was that?

G.B.: This was in 2005, (*re-thinking*) 2004.

S.Q.: So, the DREAM Act had been around for a couple of years.

G.B.: Yes. But I had not heard about it until then. And that wasn't like a big community organization or anything, working on it in Memphis at the time. It was just a group. It was through TIRRC, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, but they didn't have an organizer there. They were just kinda doing quick meetings throughout the state, and I was able to catch that one. And I remember seeing, if all we need is signatures – "*I can get signatures!*" – and because of the signatures I started telling my classmates, I'm like "Hey, I need the..." – in the cafeteria during lunches and stuff like that – I would say: "Hey, can you sign this petition", - "What's that for?", "Well, it's for me to be able to go to college." - "Why can't you go?", "Well, 'cuz I don't have a social security number, because I wasn't born here, but..." - my class mates would be like: "I know you since the seventh grade! I'm gonna sign this for you", and so that was the first time that I was organizing but I didn't know that I was organizing (*laughs*). And I remember, I took stacks and stacks of petition signatures and I said: "This is gonna pass the DREAM Act!" (*laughs even louder*).

I remember in the meetings – we started having more and more meetings in the community around there, and I plugged into TIRRC. Then the lobby visits came. I remember going all the way to D.C. I remember, in Memphis, it was only two people that were totally devoted and wanted to organize and it was myself and it was this guy, X. I remember that, X, if you look at him, he was much older, he was probably like three years older, four years older than me. Had a beard and this and that. He was like "Let's go to D.C.! I'll drive". And I said, "I don't think my parents are gonna let me go. It's really *machista*, overly protective, I couldn't even have a boyfriend at that point in my life". And I said, "Do you wanna go to my house and ask for permission?" and he was like: "Yeah, yeah!" and I remember, he went, he spoke to my parents and

I was really into it, and my parents had seen I was really into it, and for *some* reason, they let me go...

S.Q.: Why? What's your family's position?

G.B.: I think, they had seen me very depressed, not being able to go to school, I think my dad just got over that over-protective father kind of thing. And I don't know until this day, I do not know, and I've asked him: "What made you let me go?". And they were like, "I don't know, it just seemed like the right thing to do." So, that was my first drive to D.C. And it was before *United We Dream* formed – it was the first, sort of core group of folks – and I remember we had this legislative training and all of the staff, and it was...I met *so* many other people that were going through the same thing that I was going through and it just became like the support system I didn't have. It was more that that underground *X* with my teachers and my family friends. It was with students like me, right? And students from other states, students from Massachusetts, students from just all over the place, Florida, New York, and yeah, so I continued to organize, I continued to do that.

I heard, one of my underground (*unintelligible*) folks got me a meeting with the honors college at Southwest Tennessee Community college and I was able to go to school through the honors program. That was a whole other experience, because I sort of was open about my status, but the honors program got me in...under the table.

S.Q.: So, when did you first 'come out of the shadows' and how is that to you? I mean, how did it feel to you? And how does it feel to you now?

G.B.: The first time that I 'came out' *publicly* was totally unplanned. I was already at Southwest and I would say, a couple of months later, there was this event of some Swede girl, I don't even remember who this Swede girl was, but I remember they were talking about, and of the topics was, they brought up the DREAM Act, very, very little, very little, but the DREAM Act came up. And, again, this goes back to "Who is this person? This person is not even undocumented but this person is talking about the DREAM Act and had a picture of one of the folks that I knew. A guy was showing a slide show. After the presentation I got up and I raised my hand, and the guys said: "Yeah, what's going on?", and I said: "I just wanted to point out to something

that you had mentioned very briefly about the DREAM Act”. And I said: “I’m one of the students whom the DREAM Act would help” (*laughs loudly*). And at that point, I kinda stopped myself. And I was like: “Oh, shit”. Yeah, I just said it. And then... I kept going. And I shared my story and I turned around and everybody was in tears. I was in tears. That ended the event. As I was walking out – I went to that event with one of my friends and she hugged me and this and that – and as we were walking out, one of the deans approached me, and she said: “Hey, do you know who I am?” And she was like: “I work for the school, and I heard your story.” And I was like: “Oh my God, I’m gonna get kicked out of the school”. And she said: “Thank you for sharing that. I did not know that that was an issue. And so let’s see what we can do to help.” (*laughs loudly*).

S.Q.: When was that?

G.B.: This was in 2006, because in the fall of 2006, I had already graduated high school, I was in Southwest. So that was in the fall of 2006. And so, from that, it led to having conversations with the international student program, and figuring that out, I had to pay out-of-state tuition and they could not really help with that but the honors program was providing us with a very small private scholarship that, for a moment, I thought I was gonna lose (*laughs*) but I didn’t. Yeah, so that was the first time that I came out. And I think after that I went home and told my mom, and she was like: “Ahh! Mia, qué pasó?” And I told her: “Ma, don’t worry. They’re gonna help, they’re gonna help”. And so, yeah, that was the first time. And, ever since then, in May of 2006, we had just had the big, first rallies, right? And since that May 2006 rally, a couple of months still around that same time, community members got together and said: “Hey, we just had this amazing rally. It was in front of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. Folks were on top of the balcony where Martin Luther King Junior had been shot. It was a great turn-out. It was a beautiful event, I helped – that was one of the first big events that I helped organize. I was a team-leader, with my little walky-talky, helping folks. And I couldn’t believe it. And at one point, I remember, one of the lead organizers was saying: “No, I don’t think she’s old enough for this.” [...] I was 17. And I remember, the guy was like: “I think she’s too young for this”.

And other people there: “No, she can do it. She can do it”. And I was the youngest person (*laughs*) helping organize this big, my first, rally. And it happened.

After that rally, we didn’t have an actual community organization. This was, sort of, organized by the state, like TIRRC, which was based in Nashville, and folks said: “Well, we have to do something here”. And so this group formed, called *Our Communities United In One Voice*, and we started having meetings every week and from that we had a youth group formed, called *Youth for Youth*, and so I helped co-found that group and it was particularly undocumented students and we started seeing how we could get further involved and so we started doing really simple stuff, like education, how to fill out your passport form or if you were born here but your parents were undocumented or how to apply for college if you were undocumented and stuff like that. And then we became affiliated with TIRRC and got more involved in state-wide legislative stuff. So, by 2010, after Arizona’s SB1070 passed, we started getting a lot of copycat laws in the state, and so, I guess, let me rewind really quick:

So, in 2009 – in March 2009 – I was working three jobs, I had already graduated from Southwest. But I needed to go to the University of Memphis. And, paying out-of-state tuition in a four-year college was *way* more expensive than paying out-of-state tuition in a community college. So, I was working three jobs, so I could be able to pay for my first semester. I got a call on one of these three jobs that I worked with my sister, selling cell-phones, and my sister got a call and it was my dad. He had been detained on his way to work by a police officer and the police officer called Immigration. He asked him if he was ‘illegal’ and he asked him about his license which he showed, a license, it was just an expired license from Texas. And this officer decided to call Immigration. So my dad called my sister and said: “Mia, I’m waiting for Immigration to come and pick me up. Tell you mom I’m o.k. and I’ll let you guys know what happens”.

S.Q.: I have a question. You just said: ‘illegal’. How do you feel about that term?

G.B.: I don’t know if you noticed but I used the quotes, right? And this is what this particular agent, this police officer, said. I...I hate the term! And I was also

really involved in the ‘Drop I-Word’-campaign. And to this day, even when I hear it in the media or anyone in the streets say it, it makes me crunch. Because it’s what creates this very harmful environment, violent environment. Because no human being is ‘illegal’ and so I feel like it’s part of politicians, the political move to dehumanize individuals and for it to be “o.k.”, to separate these individuals from their families because when you use terms like those then they’re considered inferior.

S.Q.: Which terms would you, do you have terms that you would put on a similar level?

G.B.: On a similar level as ‘hateful’?

S.Q.: Mhm-mhm.

G.B.: Anything like ‘criminal alien’, or, yeah, all of those kind of terms, just like those terms that I was called when I was on the school bus; saying, called a ‘wetback’?

S.Q.: So you feel personally discriminated against when you hear ‘illegal’?

G.B.: Yeah, whether it’s personally or just a row. Just like, I wouldn’t want for anyone to say the ‘n’-word, I wouldn’t want anybody to say that i-word.

S.Q.: Ah, o.k., that was what I was getting at. So to you it feels like the n-word?

G.B.: Just because to respect the African-American community I wouldn’t want to say that but I do say that it’s a derogatory term that the community has really pushed against in a way that we have seen some sort of progress. But even in that, there’s a conversation around in the Movement around, instead of not using the term to ‘owning’ the term. (*laughs*) But I feel like I wouldn’t wanna own a term that makes me cringe, you know? So, yeah.

So, we got that call and this whole time since 2005 I’d been organizing around youth rights and for the DREAM Act and when I got that call, my world fell into pieces. I was organizing to be able to go to college and I was organizing to be able to follow what I wanted to do and follow the opportunity to go to school. But it was much, much bigger than that and I never expected to be until, unfortunately, my dad got detained. My world fell into pieces.

S.Q.: Did you feel like you had to become even more engaged? Or what changed after that?



G.B.: Yeah, so, it shifted, my organizing. From youth organizing to a broader community immigrant rights organizing. [...] That was in 2009 and it shifted it. It's not just about the youth. It's about the families. We can see that now in the Movement, right? And we have seen that change and shift. And I don't know if it's because it's happened to a lot of individuals, like it happened to me, but at least on a personal level, that's what made that shift for me. And having my dad be detained in a private prison, where people were profiting off of my dad and seeing him suffering and my family suffering pissed me off even more than having that wall of not being able to go to school. [...] So the roles shifted in our home. That money that I was saving up to pay to be able to go to school was used to pay the bills because my dad wasn't there anymore.

S.Q.: Was your father deported?

G.B.: No. Ok, maybe. (*laughs*) Let me go back to that. When my dad was detained, a lot of big things happened in my house. One thing was the economic change where that money was used for that, one thing was the emotional crisis, where my mom would try to hold herself together when she was around my little brothers and sisters but as soon as somebody came to house to help she would break down. [...] And even so, the effect that it had on my little brothers and sisters was there! My little brother got really depressed. We had a call from his teacher. He was, I believe, in second grade. At that time – in third grade. And the teacher said: "What's going on with X?" He's not paying attention in school anymore, he's not talking to his friends and we told the teacher what was happening. Why our dad's not home. And even then my little brother didn't know that my dad was in detention. We were telling him that he was working far from home. But he *knew* what was going on. And I had this conversation with my mom and I said: "Mom, we need to tell him what's going on. Look at how it's affecting him." And she said: "No, *mía*. We're not gonna tell him, because you turned out fine when it happened when you were little". And I said: "What? What do you mean?" And she said: "Well, remember that time when we went back to Mexico to visit your grandpa?" and I said: "Yeah." She's like: "Well, your dad had been deported. And I had been deported". So, I had no idea until that happened that this was a second time, the third time, technically, that it had happened in our household. In

1996, two years after we had just arrived in the U.S., I jumped on an airplane for the first time ever with my mom and my two sisters. And I was told that it was ‘cuz my grandpa was sick – which he was – and we were gonna go visit our family. And so we went back to Mexico, and my dad was gonna meet us up in Mexico days later. So he drove with a truck full of stuff, sold everything that we had and we moved back to our old house in Mexico. And we lived there for three years. So we came back to the U.S. in ’99 to come visit Disney World (*laughs*). And, again, we moved in with my aunt.

But I thought that that trip was to see my grandpa and we just stayed a couple of years later. But the reality of it was...

S.Q.: Do you remember the trip?

G.B.: Yeah. I remember the trip there and I remember the trip *back*. The trip back, I remember, and we crossed...So I wanna say that with permission (*unintelligible*) with a visa, a tourist visa. So, I did not... So, the first time that we crossed I remember I was in the car and it was just through the check. And my little sister was being carried by my uncle crossing the bridge because she had papers, ‘cuz she was born here. And the second time I went into the office with the Immigration agent to get our tourist visa permit. And I was wearing a shirt with the Rugrats, with Tommy Pickles, I don’t know if you ever watched these cartoons, but the Rugrats. It was a Nickelodeon cartoon back in the day (*laughs*). And I remember my mom saying: “Don’t speak English in there. Don’t speak English in there”. And I said: “O.k. mom”. So we go up to the Immigration agent and he asked us: “Why are you coming in? What’s the visit?” And the agent looks at my shirt and he was like “Hey! You like that cartoon?” And I said: “Yeah, Tommy Pickles is my favorite”. (*laughs*) And my mom pinched me *so* hard. And she was like: “Mía!” They almost found out, you know what I mean? That was crazy! But we were able to come back.

But yeah, so I never thought about it until my mom said it. I did not know what happened and what happened was in that ’96 – that was when all of these employment, workplace raids were going on. My dad was working in construction on the Memphis Bridge, and he was raided. [...] So he signed ‘voluntary departure’ and my mom was raided at her, she worked at a

warehouse, because there was a dispute among two workers – one of them was documented, the other one was not. The one that was documented called Immigration as a way to revenge this other co-worker. And the raid happened and all of these other families were placed in deportation proceedings, including my mom. And she signed ‘voluntary departure’, too. So, my dad was banned or three years from the country. At that point, you were banned three to five years. Now, you’re banned five to ten years, I mean, ten to twenty years. Which is why three years later we came back.

S.Q.: Did your parents ever think about getting involved or were they involved in the Movement?

G.B.: They were not involved in the Movement until my dad was detained. They were sort of, they were involved around the DREAM Act. They were totally supported of me. When I would speak at events, they would take me to these meetings, very supportive, but it was more around education, right? But in overall, like I said, that was because there was not a *space* for them to be involved, because in the space that I was, was youth organizing.

S.Q.: When did that change? I mean, for you, personally, it changed in 2009, you said that, but when did that change officially, with the DREAM Act?

G.B.: Well, I mean, remember that group that started organizing after the 2006 rallies? They would sort of do that, but it wasn’t, like, be fully there. Because there was no resources. We didn’t have a space to meet, they wouldn’t have, the information wasn’t really related, we didn’t really have access to all that what was going on at a *national* level. We sort of knew what was going on at a state level but there weren’t fully, fully involved. They knew what was going on and they attended some of those meetings. But it wasn’t until 2009 that my dad was detained and the community knew of my dad, because of the work that I had been doing and so my family got a lot of support. And a month and a half after he was detained, he was released on a bond and through that time, through that month and a half, my boyfriend – my partner – whom I’d been dating for – we started dating in 2007 – and in 2009, just two years later, he saw what was happening, and I have heart problems, so when that was happening I wasn’t doing very well health-wise. And I didn’t have access to – going to a cardiologist is super expensive, especially if you don’t

have insurance, so I had not gone to my cardiologist. So, my partner, who is a U.S. citizen from Ecuador, saw what was happening, so to him, that had been the last straw – he knew I'd been organizing around the DREAM Act, he knew my barriers around health insurance, and then he saw what happened to my dad. So, we would drive all the way to Louisiana to go visit my dad but my mom and I couldn't go in there. And my sister who was sixteen at the time, or seventeen, and my boyfriend, would go in there and let him know what was going on. And my mom and I would wait at a local Walmart and just go in circles at the isles in this very super-tiny town, where people knew *why* we were there. And while they were visiting my dad because we couldn't go in there.

S.Q.: Why couldn't you go?

G.B.: Because I was undocumented.

S.Q.: So you had to show your I.D. to them?

G.B.: Or you could take the risk, like we told the families here at Broadview. Or when their families are in detention, where you can go but we can't guarantee that nothing's gonna happen. So, yeah, those trips would happen and I remember one trip, after we came back from Louisiana, we came back to Mississippi and he proposed. And I said: "What?" And my sister told me that...No, I asked him. I was like: "My dad...he's still in detention". And he's like: "Don't worry. I spoke to your dad". He literally asked for my hand (*laughs*) while my dad was on the other side of the glass wall. I wasn't even part of that conversation because I couldn't be there. Because, so, that moment in our life, it happened and it was just very rush. We never even talked about marrying until after we finished college and stuff like that. But the circumstances were tough. And so my dad was released a month-and-a-half later, and in June 2009, we got married. As soon as my dad, like months later, and my dad was able to be there. And again, that's because we did not know what was going on with my dad. I didn't know if he was gonna get be deported. But if he was then he didn't get to see that happening. And that year was also the year that my sister graduated high school, and it was the thing of while my dad was being detained, 'Is he gonna see my sister walk across that stage and get her diploma?'. Those very important life moments are on hold

when stuff like that happens. And that's what people don't realize many times and that's why it's so important to get those stories out there for people to know, right? (*cries*) I'm sorry. So. That happened. And ever since then, that shift happened and my family was part of organizing and it wasn't just me trying to see what I could do about going to college but it was about my family trying to see what we could do to stay together. And I feel like that story it's gonna be repeated so many times, which is, what's like the Movement to be, where it's happening.

So, that's what I can give you. (*laughs*) Do you have any questions?

S.Q.: So, let's pause for a moment. [...pause...] Ok, so I have another question. How, would you say, how 'American' are you? How, do you think, being American is one, a strategy in the narratives or something that you like to stress in order to address people?

G.B.: I guess, just to finalize that other part that I was talking about. I was gonna adjust my status. So, I am now an LPR and I have that privilege. Even now I'm going through a stage. And connecting it to this question, being called an 'American', I've never referred myself as an 'American'. [...] Not because I'm not patriotic. But terms like 'American' and terms like 'Aspiring Citizen', are terms that are *definitely* used as a strategy. But they don't come from the community. They come from those large non-profit foundations that are in D.C. that have millions of dollars and their consultants are strategists, decided 'This is what could help the super-right-wing sort of identify with us.' But connecting it to saying, at that point, of 'I'm undocumented and I'm not afraid' and it's not saying 'I am an American'. (*laughs*) It's really holding on to that identity and saying that it *is* our home, right? And this is what we know and this is where our families are. I don't think that having to sympathize to a particular perspective of 'how American you are' should define whether your human rights are being violated and stripped away from you or not. [...] So, when I first started organizing it *was* through these big national, big D.C. groups.

S.Q.: Do you think that changed a little bit?

G.B.: I feel like it *has* changed and I feel like when people say 'No papers, no fear', it's a way of saying 'This is who I am'...

S.Q.: ...and you don't *have* to be...

G.B.: -Exactly. It's more of like...I was taking ownership...and again, this is *me*, it's hard for me to speak from – I wanted to share my story from before I adjusted status because now that I *have* this privilege, it's very hard for me to *speak* in those terms because I was a very critical voice around having undocumented folks lead the Movement, and I *still* am. But then it leads me, now that this change is going on, I don't know where I'm at. I have one foot here, because I *have* that experience and nobody is gonna take that experience away from me and it's traumatic and it's sort of – I don't wanna say it's my identity, it's not! – but it's what I lived and I have this other foot into it. *Now*, I have a driver's license. Now, I'm able to travel in my country of origin. Now, I'm able to sign a bond for somebody to get out of an immigration detention center. You know, those privileges are there and I recognize it and I don't know where I am. And it's a very complex situation and I've spoken to other folks who have either adjusted through their visas, or have adjusted through and have LPR status and even to folks who have DACA at the moment, which is very temporary and it's not at all the same thing but it's still like saying 'Now I have this' and I will never forget while we were doing DACA, helping people apply for it, and after they got it, people were like 'I'm really excited, but I feel like I'm in a very cold room with my family. And I'm the only one who has a blanket.'

And that's really weird because, what do you do? And what *is* our role? It is our people. It's something that happened like a lot more lately and the Movement is still trying to figure that out because at one point I'm trying to be respectful of the Movement in itself and taking a step back as much as I can but at the same time, I kind of want to ask for 'what space am I supposed to be in?'. But even asking that feels like...even bringing that question up feels very...selfish...because we fought so much for that space of being undocumented and *being* in the Movement that even asking 'What do I do in this space?', 'Is that taking away space for folks that we have fought for so long?'. So, it's *really* complex. And I feel like that's also a part of a story – of stories that aren't necessarily out there. And I'm not saying that they *should* be out there again because of that complexity of it but I think that it's real and

it's affecting people psychologically but also especially folks that have been really active leaders in the Movement as 'undocumented' and then change that status. We need to step back but 'To what point?' and part of the Movement is to create and develop leadership and continue that leadership, because I'm not saying that now that I've adjusted my status I should still take up that same amount of space, no!, because there's millions of people who are undocumented and those people should own that space. But it's also kind of like 'having to learn to let go' but at the same time 'How can I use the skills that I've learned to be able to pass them on?' and how, while recognizing that my foot was there and that I have that experience and that I live through those traumas, too. So, I would say that's, particularly I'm at that crossroads and a lot of individuals are also part of, are also in that crossroads with me. And I'm not sure if you've thought about that or not. (*laughs*)

S.Q.: Ah, no, no problem! It's good to get that perspective of who should be out there. But I, I mean, do you think about 'solidarity' at all? Do you think about 'That's, sort of, *my* people, my ethnicity, my identity *also*'?

G.B.: Yeah, yeah, of course! But I thought about that, you can't, I *don't* wanna say that I'm an ally. Because I'm not. Because I live through it. You know what I mean? So it's that space in-between. That gray space. But we just haven't had conversations or spaces to really talk about what that is like. And I don't know, we *should* have that spaces, or not, or do we just get over the shit and keep moving? So, it's a big thing. And I've had conversations with several folks that have, or are in the same situation, and kind of feel the same feelings of 'Well, yeah, I don't know where I'm at! But do I *ask* for space?'

S.Q.: Is that maybe why in the past, say, two or three years, the topic of 'family' is more important, because you always *know* somebody who is undocumented? Or do you think that's not really 'the motto' of the past years?

G.B.: I mean, yeah, family, but I don't think it's because of that. I think it's just the reality that affects your family whether your family is 'undocumented' or whether they're 'mixed-status'. And so now we talk about the DREAM Act or whatever and now we'd share my story, I remember my sister would cry and say 'I feel like shit because I *have* this and I wanna give it to you but I can't, because I *have* this and I don't know what to do!' and now I'm like

‘Shit! (laughs) That’s what it’s like!’ So, I would say family – the perspective of families – is because families are affected whether they’re all undocumented or whether they’re mixed-status.

The course of the Movement now? It’s been more than a decade that we’ve been fighting for the DREAM Act and it hasn’t gotten bearing. In 2010, I felt like it was another super-depressing year for me and for a lot of people who were organizing for the DREAM Act, because it *almost* passed, right?

S.Q.: In Chicago it passed in 2011, in Illinois...?

G.B.: But I was in Tennessee.

S.Q.: You were in Tennessee, (*G. laughs*) yeah, and it’s not there yet.

G.B.: It’s not. And right now, actually, that’s a big campaign in Tennessee right now, called ‘Tuition Equality Now’. So, to take campaign, and they’re moving for it. But at a national level, for the DREAM Act, when it didn’t pass, it was very depressing. And then there’s a case of even youth committing suicide because of not being able to find anything, right? When I graduated from the University of Memphis I walked across the stage, my robe was dedicated, to a person that had committed suicide around that. But at the same time, so that happened, and there was also a movement, I wouldn’t say ‘split’ but it ‘grew’. *United We Dream*, which was the big organization, sort of leading it, had *NIYA* formed, the National Immigrant Youth Alliance. I wasn’t fully part of all of that, because in Tennessee we didn’t have all the resources to be fully involved and so wherever we could fundraise to go to, but at that point I was like, it was sort of depressing but at the same time, as time went through, I saw that it’s a good way because we were providing off-voice in different strategies –even know you see with the ‘Bring Them Home’-campaign, it’s been very controversial but at the same time it has garnered a lot of support. That goes again to the big question of not just supporting the DREAM Act but supporting something bigger. The Comprehensive Immigration Reform, CIR, conversation isn’t there anymore as much, I would say, it’s not the only topic discussed on dinner tables and immigrant communities and meetings, now it’s deportations. And that has been part of lots and lots of work. I was saying ‘We’re *tired of being tired of fighting for this thing that’s never gonna pass*’, so...



- S.Q.: So, you're saying the Comprehensive Immigration Reform that Obama started promising in his campaign in 2008 and 2009, so you can stop believing in that, that it's ever gonna get through, because of the...
- G.B.: Yeah, and even especially after the Senate Bill was proposed because it's a joke! It's compromising so much of our community in order to pass this and relief to so little of it. Border militarization, and drones and just so many requirements and fines and lack of accessibility to our community, it's a joke! *I don't want it to pass, I don't want it to pass.*
- S.Q.: So you think it's too much of a compromise with, say, border enforcement, as you said, Obama then promises, in order to get it through at all.
- G.B.: Yeah! And I think one of it is the piece of legislation that's a joke and continues to be a joke, especially now in the House, right? But it's also which has led to us leading or holding those folks accountable for those hypocrisies especially in the Obama administration of saying 'Yes! I am a supporter of the immigrant community' and 'Yes, family should remain together'. And even using the motto of 'Yes, we can' to be able to run his election, and win, too, and garnering the support of a lot of big Latino leaders like Dolores Huerta and a lot of stuff like that. But when it comes to what's going on at the other side of the doorway, as he's saying this stuff, what's happening is that more than two million people have now been deported under his administration. What kind of a person is that? What side are you taking on? You cannot be on both sides. One of them is just *talking* and the other one is *doing*. And the part that you are doing is a wrong part. So right now you're showing us that you're on the wrong side of history. And so, for us, it's holding *him* accountable and *his* administration and not for, when we do that, those Latino leaders and those immigrant leaders and those big organizations that have funded his campaign and that used to fund the CRI type, do not totally disassociate from us. But now, *years* later, and seeing *no* change, those folks are trickling over to say 'hey, this isn't necessarily working! Can we be a part of *this*?'
- S.Q.: Do you think that the DACA is some kind of success? [...] How would you think about the DACA? Because it is something that he did file without...

G.B.: The DACA, and there's also another form for families of military members and all of this other stuff – I see it as all of this *steam* building up in a pot and *him* opening up the lid just a little bit to let a little bit of the steam out. You know, to say, 'Hey, I did this!' but at the same time it's nothing concrete and, again, you cannot continue to say 'Hey, I did this' while you still have this big deportation machine ruled and running. So, that's one thing. And that little steam kind of says for people 'Oh, wow! He gave us this!' but it's not that he *gave* to us, it's that we were part of that pressure to make it happen. Which is why we continue to be the pressure because we know that there's more that he can do. And whether it's secure communities not to be continued being expended and to be taken away ... communities, and all of this sort of association of police and ICE collaboration, and these hyper arties like 're-entry' which are ridiculous right now which you see with Anibal's case. There's so much that you can do! And those groups, right now the Movement is in a space where we're like 'Wow, what can we do about it?' or 'Can we join you all a little bit?' And there have been folks who have kind of tried to stay from this as well, because they use these terms of 'aspiring citizen' and stuff like that but we're kind of in a stage right now, which is really big and crucial to the Movement so we let them in. And we recognize that we *do* need more resources and we *do* need more voices and we *do* need more people on the floor. But how can we let them in, saying, 'Look, this is our message and you cannot take ownership over our message because it's a message going from *the* community and not from a consultant that you paid thousands of dollars for it.

S.Q.: So, are you afraid that it would make your Movement less 'authentic', when other people come in for different reasons?

G.B.: I think it's risky, but I feel like the community is strong to continue to take the lead. And to not fall into this. And I feel like, because not only are we holding President Obama's administration accountable but we're holding those big organizations accountable, too, like the *Fast for Families* folks that have millions of dollars to set up a tent outside of the White House to put people in fast, right, and people are fasting that are not even undocumented, you know what I mean. But when, for example – I don't know if you saw

when President Obama spoke and Ju Hong interrupted him and said, like, ‘You can stop deportations’. The day after he goes and visits this tent of the *Fast for Families* in front of the White House, Obama, and (*unintelligible*) they rolled down a red carpet for him and said “Yes, you’re gonna hold...You’re gonna keep our families together”, while instead, I feel if we need to let those big organizations know: “This is a message of our community, and if you really are wanting to create change, this is a message that you should push out. Or what could have happened is the day after the Hong-interruption. He could have come into that tent and they would have said: “What about Ju Hong? Why did you not respond to Ju Hong? We need you to stop those deportations! We need to...” and so I feel like it *can* happen, it’s just the risk is there. And being real about that risk and being very careful and cautious about it. And I feel like the community are tired and they’re not gonna allow any big organizations take over their messaging and do whatever they have in their availability. But tight now it’s realizing that that’s the point of time right now. And that we continue to go after it.

*(interview pauses. Gaby then picks up one other question I had asked.)*

G.B.: In the media [...] you used to see a lot about...you used to see before, the media talk about immigration and what they would talk about was immigration reform. And what’s going on in the legislature. And now, the media is not talking necessarily about immigration reform, they’re talking about deportations. And *that’s* because we have part of that, and *we* pushed for it. Even reporters like Roche Ramos have questioned legislators like Luis Gutiérrez and Mario Díaz-Balart saying “Stop lying to the people! There’s not gonna be an immigration reform because the House isn’t gonna allow it, why don’t you just move on about it?” And that’s what the media is...we’re also trying to get as much of that out in the media as possible. We’ve seen that sort of happen...!

## **2.2. Interview with Uriel Sánchez, Chicago, Illinois, 24 March 2014**

S.Q.: [...] Do you just wanna, sort of, talk about your immigration background for just a really short period of time? And [...] say what’s majorly important in this new Immigrant Rights Movement to *you*.

U.S.: You mean, my immigration...

S.Q.: ...family background or history?

U.S.: Yeah, my background or in terms of my actual migration story or history or do you mean, like, organizing?

S.Q.: Both! Maybe just a few sentences of where you, you know, where you're at.

U.S.: O.k. Well, [...] go a little poetic:

I'm sitting on the fifth floor of a building in Uptown, north side of Chicago.

I'm 23 years old...

S.Q.: (*whispers*)...ninth...

U.S.: (*laughs*) Ninth floor! Not fifth floor. I get confused, a lot (*laughs*). Sun's going down, but it's sunny outside and it's – not sure if it's in a big contrast with Puebla a Mexico, which is where I was born and where, I guess, I'm from. Since I moved from Puebla when I was two years old – I moved with my mom, my dad, my younger brother was about a year-and-a-half younger and my older brother was like two years older than me. So there was like a month-old baby, two-year-old toddler and a four-year-old kid, or still a toddler, you know. Moved from Puebla, Mexico, to Chicago, Illinois. And I say, I don't know whether it's a big contrast, because it *might* also be sunny over there, it might also be cloudy, who knows? But since I was two years old, I don't, it's very difficult for me to distinguish what are made-up memories or dreams and what is or was, actually, reality. My dad was *not* from Puebla, and neither was my mom. My mom was from Guerrero. The state of Guerrero. My dad was from Mexico City. They met in Mexico City. They got married and they went looking for work. They found work in the state of Puebla, in the city of Puebla – Puebla, Puebla. (*laughs*) And that's where my older brother, that's where I and my younger brother were born. We moved to Chicago, as I said, when I was two. So, I was born in 1991. So, if you do the Math, it was 1993 and it was, the actual date was August 7, 1993. So, it was like a hot summer. Moved in with relatives in an apartment building on Kimball Avenue. It was shared by many families and then after about a little bit under a year afterwards my parents found a place just for us a few blocks away on St. Louis. And three years later my youngest brother was born, in 1996. And the only not undocumented person from my family. Went

to...it was uneventful! [...] Climax was reached *pretty* early on in life and then, I mean, there were other eventful things, too, but for the most part, nothing as eventful as moving from one country hundreds of miles to another city with a completely different culture and really no links other than my own direct family, culture-wise at least, language-wise, you know, history-wise. And, yeah, attended, grew up in Humboldt Park, then moved to Portage Park in the northwest Side of Chicago, went to elementary school there and in Wicker Park. And then went to high school at Walter Payton, in the Near North Side. And attended shortly thereafter community college at Harold Washington, downtown; transferred to UIC, which is where I am now, studying pre-med. And still undocumented! Thanks a lot, Obama! (*laughs*) And I have DACA now, which is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which gave me a work permit to essentially work, paying to tax system of the U.S. and be denied benefits in the future, essentially. (*laughs*) And *currently*, also. (*unintelligible*) Except for working, I guess. Although I don't know if that's much of a, it should be more of a *right*, actually, *if* you want to work. But anyhow. I have a job as an EMT for the university and shortly after my high school, I guess, 'career', or like track, life, four years, I had applied to DePaul University, and my older brother had gotten in. He had transferred by the time, I was already gonna apply, or he was *transferring* to go down to UFI...(*unintelligible*). It was just, I don't know. Never really talked to him about why he transferred. But he ended up transferring, he ended up graduating from there eventually. But I was applying to DePaul because I thought "Hey, it's in the city, I wanna stay in the city. If my older brother can get in, then I definitely could get in". (*laughs*) And I *did* get in, I got in, I was like, and that was the only school that I applied to (*laughs*) – that was kind of a little bit stupid though. And should've applied to other schools. But I got in so I was like "whatever". And I wasn't thinking much about money, I mean, I *thought* about it, I wasn't oblivious to it, I wasn't ignorant about it. I knew – college – thousands of dollars, DePaul University, private university, eventually gonna have to pay. And they gave me a DePaul scholarship award, which was, now looking back, it's kind of ironic: You have to do certain amounts of community service, every semester or DePaul *quarter* and they'll

give you that grant. And I mean, it was a grant for 5,000 dollars per semester. And if you look at DePaul, I think it's like, it's definitely not 5,000 dollars per quarter, it's way, way more. But I mean, would have gotten toward something. I mean, I'd just figure out the rest later on.

Flash forward – August, I, again, very smartly, signed up for one of the very last orientation days – days of orientation – or the very last one, so it was like late August, almost when school was about to start; went to orientation, I guess, could say I had the ‘college experience’...or...whatever, DePaul experience; met great people, (*laughs*) had tons of fun, it's all blurred now though. Short-lived! ‘Cause later on – a few, like, days later, the financial aid office started calling me, and it was like: “So, we oughta make sure we've got everything down, you don't seem like to have everything down; we need your social security number” and I kept trying to juggle it around and, like, tried to talk around them, you know, tried to stall, basically, and say: “what do you mean, social security number?”

S.Q.: Were you aware of the fact that you were undocumented?

U.S.: That never really came up because when applying for DePaul, or applying for any university, they don't ask you for your status and even when I apply, I mean, [...] there's, you know, forms, there's a social security, like, little line where you fill in your social security number, it's not required, it's optional. And eventually the university will give you a national ID number, which is the nine-digit number, which is, *all* of that is just really for them, for, like, record-keeping. And maybe even [...] grant money or, like, state money or federal money that they could receive from that as well.

S.Q.: And, still, DePaul wanted your social security number?

U.S.: Yeah, they still wanted it. I tried to use my national ID number because that's what my older brother had used, but it must have been like somebody that, I don't know, just somebody in the financial aid office that was...they didn't pay attention to it, or just slipped through the cracks or they were sympathetic. And they just, you know, didn't really care and they were like: “Ok, let's just let it slide” or whatever. Whatever the reason they kept insisting that ‘No’, they needed a social security number and, you know, that was all cool. I didn't, I could have kept going and not *had* a social security

number. The social security number was for the *grant*. And I thought about it and I was like: “Well, class is about to start in a week and I have no way to pay for it. Now, I could go for this quarter, hope that me or my parents win the lottery or somehow came with thousands of dollars by the end of, like, the start of September, and the end of December so I could register for the next quarter, for the next classes – *or*, and, you know, be potentially in debt – or *not* do *any* of that. So I ended up withdrawing from the school, which is very easy. You’d think it would be really hard, but it’s really easy. You just go online and you withdraw and then you go all through, like, two times of aid asking you “Are you sure?” and then you just click (*breathes in and out heavily, performing the moment*) “yes”, “yes” and you withdraw! And that’s it. And then you think to yourself, like, “wait, wait, wait! Never mind! I changed my mind!” (*laughs*) [...]

S.Q.: What did you do then?

U.S.: So, I was working over the summer, using a fake social security number at a CVS, at a CVS pharmacy. And I’d been working there since I was a junior, but also because I was, like, a junior and I was like seventeen years old, kinda like closer to sixteen, just barely seventeen, I knew I would have needed like a work permit because I wasn’t eighteen yet, so I had my fake license, or fake ID. It had that I was one year older, which is eighteen, which is weird, because I was like a junior. And my managers knew I was in high school, this is like near the  $X^{155}$ , so it’s like a mile, just a little bit under a mile from my school. But they knew I was in high school, you know, but here’s like this eighteen-year-old, looks like a sixteen-year-old kid. But o.k., he’s about to be nineteen years old and (*laughs*) in high school!

S.Q.: So, did that ever affect your getting the DACA, you know, having had a fake social ID before?

U.S.: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. That came...Oh, yeah, that’s a requirement, right? Yeah, I just never disclosed that to the government, right? I don’t see why I should...

S.Q.: ...so this is off the record..?

U.S.: No, you can say it. I don’t care.

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<sup>155</sup> I am disguising the location at this point.

S.Q.: O.k.

U.S.: Yeah, I've said this story, several other times. Plus, I feel like, I don't know, I mean I ended up paying taxes. The taxes that I worked. And, yeah, I don't really care. I'm in a position where I am, I don't know, how should I say this? I'm not going out of my way to [...] break the law. You know, I'm not, when it's a civil disobedience action, in which case sign me up! (*laughs*) – if I have no classes that day! I have no classes, or exams, finals that day. Or work! You know? But I don't, like, I'm not going, like, out of my way to break the law. I'm not...my intention is not to, none of it is coming out to, I think, at the very fundamental level, to ask anybody as to hurt myself or to hurt anybody else. And, on the contrary, I'm a junior, senior in high school, mind you, I should say this, hopefully this goes *on record*, *along* with my previous statement of using a fake social, and not disclosing that, at the top high school in the state of Illinois, Walter Payton College Prep, I am an undocumented immigrant at the top high school, which is (*unintelligible*), you know, it's not a lottery system, it's ahead to like pass a test, you know, compete against other kids in the city. This kid from not just Puebla, but from Portage Park, Logan Square and Humboldt Park. You know this kid from there. First generation Latino who was working because his dad was, is the only one that worked, or worked at the time, you know, it's some, I was what? Sixteen, seventeen, my older brother was probably like nineteen, my younger brother was like fourteen, fifteen, the youngest is like five years away from me so he's like ten years old and so not a lot of us necessarily, you know, have careers out there, making thousands of dollars and, you know, to help out my dad. And I mostly gotta think about college, you know, I'm almost nearly nineteen. So there's a lot of things that you're thinking about. And I never, I'm at a point where I won't go out of the way to break the law or do something but I *will* do what is necessary to take care of myself and take care of my family and I think, you know, later on, like with the DePaul thing, I ended up dropping out one semester but then I started community college in that spring, in January, the next semester, so in 2010. And then I started at UIC last fall, so not 2013, 2012, and so like in two years I got my last, 2 years, one semester less, had my associates and, you know, I...none of it I



think is, yeah, why didn't I disclosed this? Well, for the obvious, of course. I don't only, didn't only want a work permit, even though they were, I think, there were a lot of, like, things I could say about DACA, but they didn't necessarily apply for it, thinking "Oh, thank you, Obama, for DACA" or "I really need this", you know? But more so, I applied more so and didn't disclose that because I thought or I said to myself: "I deserve this." And if that's gonna be a thing that's gonna flat out denied then, I mean not flat out denied, but just take a longer process, 'cuz mine was like really quick, actually, compared to other people. I, like, applied, like, in October 2012, got it a month later in November 2012, so that went really quickly.

S.Q.: Oh, yeah. That's right.

U.S.: Most people that applied have been waiting for like almost a year or so, yeah, I got it like really quickly. So, whatever the cause, at the end I thought, "You know what? I deserve it". Which is kind of the same way about citizenship. Like, there're a lot of things about citizenship, which, you know, has its disadvantages, but also, you know, doesn't necessarily guarantee you more rights than somebody or more opportunities than somebody. There is still a lot of inequality and inequity within even U.S. citizens, right? *But* I think I deserve it. And also because I think a lot of these programs and a lot of these things, historically in the U.S., have been traced back to people, including like the Immigration Movement, people who have aimed to deny, you know, actually actively go out there to try to deny or block those things, so like DACA, actively try to deny people that. Or actively try to deny people of color or minorities 'citizenship', you know, historically. Is it to me, it's like, whether I think, [...] you can make a big change whether you're a citizen or not, you know, I think everybody *deserves* that, because the opposite, of *not* giving people at least the opportunity for that, is going down to the same level as those people who have historically in the U.S. aimed to disenfranchise other groups of people. But yeah. I mean, I didn't have any [...] eventually, like that summer, because I thought "I'm going to DePaul. I need to focus to college, wanna graduate in four years (*laughs*), when I'm 22". I'm 23 now and still an undergrad. (*laughs*) Thanks a lot, Obama! And Bush. And Congress.

S.Q.: What do you think was Obama's motivation for passing the DACA?

U.S.: Two main points. One was clearly: gain more votes from the Latino population and also perhaps, like, the Asian community as well. Or just like other groups, immigrant-heavy groups. It's definitely a gamble. I think, I think in 2008 when McCain lost, and because like there was an ad in the McCain-campaign, that had him at the border and then he said: "Build the damn fence!" And I think the fact that he, Obama, won by a landslide and, at the end, the poll showed that it wasn't just, you know, white people and it wasn't just black people; it was also other groups that also voted heavily *for* Obama and that included Latinos. And I think, you know, in 2008, Obama did speak about, like, immigration and immigration reform. He did speak, you know, when he was Senator, about the DREAM Act. And, you know, family reunion, family separations; like this was something he talked about when he was a Senator, when he was a candidate. And, I think, the fact that he still spoke about that *during* his campaign and then, at the end, the poll showed, you know, all these groups for that, or at least for him, and by the fact all for the issues he talked about that, in the next election in 2012, four years later, it would still hold true. And so I think, his campaign going in in 2012, he knew: "I need to get those same people onto my side" and his thinking was, is, or probably still is that immigration is the main issue and that would draw people to the Democratic party. And, so, votes, basically.

The other thing, I think, is, he is a community organizer – or was – from the Roseland neighborhood – the hundreds down in the South Side, that's where he, I mean, he was president of the Harvard Law Review, you know, he was a very self-accomplished, young black adult, in these institutions that were mostly white, but [...] I don't think the *Harvard Law Review* necessarily shaped him into wanting to become a president. I don't think, you know, him being an undergrad, necessarily, you know, in high school, necessarily made him want to work at the grassroots level or work with people, I think. I think when most people (*unintelligible*) was being actually involved *with* the community, and being organizing along *with* the community that actually made him want to be into politics, and saying that, he also learned how to play politics; that's where politics were learned, or at least, you know, politics

outside of academia. Because I'm sure the *Harvard Law Review* also has, like, its own internal politics, but you know, politics from outside.

And I think he used that for votes and I think he used that also to alleviate pressure from himself or at least pass that pressure on to somebody else. So he could show people, "Here, *I* did something. The executive branch of the U.S. government did something". But you also have members of Congress who are also up for re-election, some of them, in that [...] same year who haven't done anything, so now passing on that pressure to them or "I am now longer", you know, "the pressure, the urgency", the sense of urgency on people who now have DACA is not as huge as it was without DACA. And so now, you are working without – now you have DACA, and so you're, maybe you're still committed, [...] you're obviously still committed to getting everybody on board *with* you and for you getting more rights but now you have a job or several other jobs recognized by the U.S. government; more opportunities obviously even through like places that would use e-verifies. Now you can apply even to *those* places. And so now you're pre-occupied. I think that happens to a lot of people. Not only undocumented people but people in general, you know? As time progresses, people wanna do certain things but we get busy, we pick up the load from – in this case the load that Obama handed us and people fought for – and so I mean, it's no mistake, you know, I have, I honestly do not doubt it that it was for votes and also he strategically thought about this in an organizing way. His campaign offices, just a few weeks later, and even *on* the day of DACA and even a few days after were being occupied by the *National Immigrant Youth Alliance*. They were being occupied. There was one office, forgot *what* state it was, but it was for over a week that staff members heading on it, and so the Romney and Obama race, which was much closer than the McCain and Obama campaign, I mean that wasn't – Obama wasn't even – the Democratic party wasn't even saying, necessarily: "This is a landslide", because the country was still, is still facing a lot of the issues that it was facing back in 2008. So it was a tough cell. And for any little cell of the whole body of the operation of the campaign office that is not operating properly, is *being* occupied, is *being* obstructed. He wanted to stop that. And, you know, other actions as well that

were going on that year. He has advisors that, you know, talk to the bigger, larger immigrant organizations, coalitions of the country. And those advisors and staffers, don't just have those meetings with those organizations and not report back to anybody; they compile something and they report it back to the President, to their boss, you know, to their boss. Who knows how it gets, you know, spinned to him, I don't know, maybe it's, like, 'Oh, they were doing some march', when it was actually, like, a blockade in front of his house or something, or 'Oh, they were doing some protest' – or who knows how they spin it. But it gets spinned to him.

S.Q.: What is the meaning of 'to escalate' for you?

U.S.: [...] 'To escalate'. It means to...take it a step further. It means to, I don't know, how should I say this? Take it a step further, go a little bit more. (*long pause*) I always think of diplomacy first, when I think of 'escalate'. I think 'diplomacy' first. And, for example like, 'sit down with the politician' or 'sit down with the other organizations or the groups' and try talk it out. I think, when we think of escalation, or 'to escalate', I think, first step, or step number one is discussion. Maybe there are other steps but that's like the big step, discussions with those other groups. And then, depending on how that conversation goes, kind of like a business deal, trying to bargain, depending on how the bargain goes, you're not getting what you want and you find other means to put a little bit more pressure on the person you're bargaining with. So in this case, it might be, I don't know, doing something to out-compete them. And are out-competing them. Because you're out-competing them [...] behind closed doors where else meetings are happening *with* them and *without* them, when also you're competing for that public opinion, for that community support because when you're escalating the other side is actively trying to deceive or disseminate their own information to the community and you're trying to do the same or the opposite and so you're kind of like in a little, tough battle of like two businesses next to each other trying to, you know, sell, sell, sell. With escalation you're trying to outdo yourself. I don't know why I'm using the 'business model' but, you know, you're trying to – you build a neon sign and, you know, build like a mocker sign, and the competition next to you, the business next to you builds a neon sign and then

you build an LED sign, and then the person next to you builds a, I don't know, a laser sign – I'm thinking futuristic here right now – you know, and so, with escalation, you're trying to once those discussions are about cooperating with that person, like, 'Hey, why don't we instead, like, try to work something out? So we could both be in the community' or offer what *I* think is actually good for the community and once those things fall through, you're essentially trying to put the pressure as you go. And it's very much like a board game, like a Checkers game or a chess game. You don't wanna do, like, you don't wanna go *all* out. And end up first try and then, I don't know, they have another suitor out there. Like, you're full-on, I don't know, all your secrets or force that you use is short-lived and then after that you have *nothing*, so it's building momentum, it's building excitement, and energy. It's for that movement, for that community, and it's not called Movement for no reason, it's called move-ment for a reason, 'cuz you wanna *move* people, you wanna *move* the community, and you wanna have that movement-um.

S.Q.: Talking of 'momentum', do you think there's a difference, I mean, I've picked up people saying things like 'Oh, there's another shout-out at', you know, 'here and there'. People don't seem to use 'Coming Outs' anymore. Do you know what I mean?

U.S.: You mean, like in everyday conversation or...?

S.Q.: No, like a 'Coming Out', actually, like an event. They say, there's another 'Shout-Out' at Melrose Park...or. Instead of saying 'It's a Coming Out', maybe, 'event'.

U.S.: I think by saying 'Shout it Out', no, actually I think it goes back to, like, kind of like IYJL. 'Coming Out of the Shadows' came out in March, or at least what we know of it, in March of 2010 and 'Shout it Out' was in October of 2009. And I think if you saw a 'Coming Out', a lot of those discussions that we had were free-ranging; they were from, like, writing just something on the Internet, and spreading that out, or having something a little bit more private to actually having the whole full-on civil disobedience action in federal buildings. [...] So I think, while having that discussion of those different kinds of ideas for 'Coming Out' meant that there were different people with

different ideas and there were in the Movement or in the political sense of, like, where they were and personally at different stages. So not everybody was necessarily ready to do a civil disobedience action; not everybody wanted to just do like a little private event or online thing. People wanted to do *different* things.

And I think with ‘Shout it Out’ – at the *Whole-house* in 2009 – we saw people just show up and just share their story. And some of them were allies; some of them were U.S. citizens, they were legal permanent residents; some of them were undocumented; some of them were formerly undocumented; some of them were in limbos; some of them were in deportation proceedings and that wasn’t pitched as ‘Coming Out’, it was pitched as ‘You share what you wanna share’. Actually, I think, the original ‘Shout it Out’ was actually, the idea of it was supposed to create a group and they actually ended up in sharing your story only briefly, like in introductions, and actually follow more the actual title of the name; and people actually started sharing their actual names. So like ‘shout it’. It went on for like two hours and it was just like around a table of people and they actually did end up just sharing their stories. You know, people crying. And I think by doing that again, now, you saying ‘Shout it Out’, you’re opening it up in not necessarily ‘coming out’; by saying ‘Shout it Out’, to people who *wanna* come out, you’re already kind of in their heads saying ‘Oh, that means, for me, to ‘shout it out’ or for me to ‘come out’’. Because I’ve been following this, I don’t know, I wanna like, have like, you know, ‘coming out’. And, but, to other people who are not ready or who are not necessarily undocumented, it opens it up to them so you’re opening up this idea to a whole bunch of other people. To the whole community.

S.Q.: And ‘opening things up’ – what do you think is the role of New Media in this whole thing?

U.S.: Good question.

I think it could work both ways. You could have information. So I go back to [...] 2006. So when there was a lot of...the Sensenbrenner Bill. And there were the big marches, nation-wide. And also in the early 2000s and you had a full-on almost, like, media blitz. [...] You have people like Bill Riley who is still around, essentially saying very anti-things. Flinging it up, you know, the

debate, stereotyping and instigating and trying to demonize, and also, create like a witch-hunt, you know, create a...they're *invaders* or something like that. And I think for like the early 2000s, you turn a channel to like Telemundo or Univision. They're not gonna be talking about that; they're gonna be talking about something different; but other form of media, traditional media, like the TV or newspaper, weren't necessarily going out and asking the immigrant their opinion or saying, or fact-checking, 'Hey, is this what this person's actually saying true?' and I think, I think the development of *New Media* in the mid-2000s to late-2000s, helped change that a lot. And organize communities a lot, because you had, like in the marches, you *had* people show up. And people showed up to like television or, you know, people went on radio and talked about it, like 'it's coming up', or I mean newspapers or word of mouth. It's kind of like the 'old school' way, right? Of like trying bring out people to march. But you also had – afterwards you didn't have a way to connect those people; you can't [...] connect people through television or through radio or through a newspaper – that would be so cool if you could – but after the event you cannot connect those people. You can't be like 'Alright, let's keep this momentum going', 'let's keep this Movement growing' and 'this is where we're gonna meet' or 'this is what we're gonna do' or 'these are the discussions we're gonna have', like it's not participatory, it's one-way. TV, radio, newspapers, is like one-way. And with *New Media*, now you had a way for people to spread that information two ways. And so you had people sharing contrary information to what people like Lou Dobbs were saying. Or what an editorial newspaper, I don't know, like the *Templebase* or Tuscon, Arizona, were writing. Or, you know, there's a Senator here in Illinois, that is running against...he's the Republican candidate, running against U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, and his name is Oberweis, he owns like an ice-cream, milk company here in Illinois and a big thing that the Senator is hitting him on, is on an add from 2004, when he was, *again*, running for Senator. And Oberweis ran an ad where he's in a helicopter – TV ad, I should mention, it's not like *Twitter* or *Facebook*, TV ad, and he's flying over Soldier Field and he's giving all these statistics. He saying: "We have 10,000" or "7,000" or he was like, "*thousands* of", he

says, “illegal invaders coming into the country every single day” and then he gives like a certain number, “that’s enough to fill Solider Field for” like blah blah blah blah, and, you know, this is like his, it’s like...(*unintelligible*) and he’s like flying. And this is, you know, like a TV ad, TV political ad, and he’s like: “Vote for *me* because...”, blah blah blah, “America”. And I don’t know. He ended up losing, which was a sign of changing times, when you like, now, like try to run that ad! And not only will you be called out by other politicians, those politicians are really calling *them* out because they have the support of other people. But you’re gonna be called out by the same people you’re calling ‘invaders’ or ‘alliens’ or ‘illegal’. By those same people who you’re calling them that. And they’re gonna call you out through those same traditional means but they’re also gonna call you out by supporting other politicians, by supporting other groups and by social media, new media. And they’re gonna organize and they’re gonna form groups. So now, like, this ad that I just mentioned, it’s on *Youtube*, right? Actions that have happened and new types of, like, *Youtube* is from 2006. The marches happened in 2006. That’s, like, I think that’s huge! You know, what if *Youtube* wouldn’t have existed? Would have been like an, I don’t know, what existed before that? Videos or something like that? Like little videos. I mean, I don’t think little videos existed yet. But *something* existed. Pretty sure. But it wouldn’t have been the same, you know. In organizing, keeping that momentum going, with like *Twitter* and *Facebook*, it wouldn’t have been the same. I wouldn’t be able to...like ‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ – that wouldn’t be able to spread to other being formed by a group of no more than ten people. And mention and talked about by no more than thirty people at a field meeting in Minnesota. And no more than ten people within this small group in Chicago. And also discussions, ‘How did that spread to other parts in the country?’ That didn’t spread through, like, foot-messenger and pigeon- and dove messenger or newspaper and TV; that spread through New Media. And that’s because it is free, it is accessible, it is equal in that it doesn’t give preference to somebody based on their status or socio-economic standing. So, you know, like I can’t run an ad on the TV or the newspaper or the radio, necessarily – I might be invited but I might not necessarily have the money to pull that off. But I do



have *Facebook* and I do have *Twitter* and everybody and everybody's grandma is on it. And so that is my way to tapping into that.

And kinda like when I mentioned like how I think everybody, not only undocumented immigrants, *want* to do something. But people just get busy, and busy and busy. I think, with New Media that is a way of staying in touch, even when you are busy. And it's very easy to just go on to *Facebook* or just go on *Twitter* or go on *Youtube* or click an app, you know, just to stay up to date. Every year we consume more and more information and I think information, more than money, is truly power. And how your story is told, who tells your story, is all important and it's not gonna, it's all eventually gonna lead to New Media. That's kind of like, it's weird, you know, it's kind of like a building block.

S.Q.: But do you think that, you know, many of the people actually posting something on *Youtube* are associated with one, particular organization and thus, one particular ideology? Do you think there's actually somebody out there, all by himself posting something on *Youtube* that is not associated with any other networks?

U.S.: I think so! I mean, that's how a lot of people started organizing. And still, in a sense, organize. Or at least share their opinion on the issue is by not necessarily being affiliated with a group or an organization but just doing their own thing. I think that's just as powerful because now you're showing, again, contrary to – and, you know, it could be any global place, it could be somebody something very pro-immigrants, somebody posting something very anti-immigrant. But now you have, like I said 'information is power', now you don't have only power holders that are monopolizing over that power which existed with traditional media. Now you have a new medium; people doing their own thing and being able to have autonomy with what they choose to spread.

S.Q.: [...] Maybe one last question. How do you think has the motto of the past recent years changed? I mean, we know about 2006, and, you know, the changes, and then, the DREAM Act and – how has it changed maybe since 2011?

U.S.: Let me think about what 2011 looked like.

S.Q.: Or '10.

U.S.: Or 2010.

S.Q.: ...or now...

U.S.: It's very dramatic, I think. It's very different. I mean, it's not very different. In some ways, it is very similar but I feel like it's also very much 'night and day'. [...] 2006 is very much different from 2010. And like 2006 is also, like, very much different from, like, 9/11, like immediately post-9/11 and it's – 2010 – is very, very different from, I think, even 2012 – two years later.

S.Q.: How?

U.S.: I think it's very hard to pinpoint as to *why*, right? It's very different in that...

S.Q.: Maybe, how? It's a feeling that is different...?

U.S.: 2010 certainly had a sense of urgency. 2011 didn't have...or 2012...no! 2013 and in late 2012 didn't have that large sense of urgency. I think, fundamentally, that's what it is. That urgency; or that sense of urgency or pressure on ourselves. You know, like, almost being, I think, pushed to the wall to decide and choose. Like, you're being pushed to a wall and somebody is making you decide, 'choose what's on my left hand or choose what's on my right hand'. Right? And, but you're still fighting and you're still doing it for, like, 2010, 2011, 2012, '13, '14, you're still doing it for justice, you're still doing it for this and that. But 2010, the DREAM Act fails, fails to pass. And 2011, there's not much except for locally, and, but you still have like a piece of legislation, which is like the Illinois DREAM Act, at least in the state of Illinois. In other states, in other states it could be something like SB1070, right? Or in-state tuition or driver's licenses or similar things as to like SB1070 [...], so you still were, like, kind of being pushed to the wall. And I think as time progressed, to like 2012, 2013 and '14, and as Congress failed to deliver around *anything* and the President as well, people were still being pushed to a wall because you still have deportations; you still have people in detention centers; that's the one thing that hasn't changed; that's the one thing that's all-in similar; and I think that's why it's kinda hard for me to say like 'how is it, kind of, different'?

S.Q.: ...because so much hasn't changed?

U.S.: Yeah, because so much hasn't changed! And it seems like, you know, like if you do a self-reflection, it's like 'alright, do I have...?' – kind of like a symptom-check, 'do I still have this and that...?' and it's like, 'the doctor gave me this and that and this and that' but I still have symptom A, B, and C. So, not much has changed! But it has definitely been a different approach in that from 2010 and even to 2011, it was no longer people being pushed to the wall and being made to decide 'Immigration for all or DREAM Act?'. It was now, now we had like a little sense of more like our own decision-making, our own sense of, I don't know, - I don't wanna say 'destiny'-making us, but, you know, like, at least what the outcome is gonna look like, and like, for example the Illinois DREAM Act, we had a little bit more saying there. And then as time progresses, we began to say 'no' to 'your immigration reform bill' because we're not content with it, not happy with it, instead we want *this* – 'Not One More [...] Deportation' – or – 'Shut Down Detention Centers' – or – 'Stop Secure Communities' – or – 'Give Sanctuary to Immigrants' – or – so-and-so many driver's licenses, or health care. All of a sudden, I think, 2010 was definitely the cocoon, little stage, or maybe even a cap. Yeah! Cocoon stage. I think the 2000s, I think, again, it's difficult to say, you know, to compare things, because the youth, like, the Movement didn't start in 2010 also, or 2009, or 2008 – I don't know, it started such a long time ago but because it is all interconnected. [...]

S.Q.: O.k. Yeah, but so, you think, you know, there's so much that's still not changed that it's hard to say that something really has changed.

U.S.: Yeah, a lot has changed. A lot has *not* changed.

S.Q.: And how about *this* year? What do you think is gonna happen this year?

U.S.: I think, what is it, 2014?

S.Q.: Yeah (*laughs*).

U.S.: (*laughs*). Oh! A lot might happen this year, actually! Obama...and you know that. I think, it's tough to say, it's tough to say. Because everything isn't no longer black and white anymore. The do-gooders are doing the evil deeds and the evil deeds are being done by the do-gooders, I don't know. So, it's hard to say but I think, and I've been asked this before, too, like in 2010, so I don't want to make like a prophecy, I don't know, jinx myself, you could think this

is really what I think, this is legit, something to knock on with. But I think *Obama*, I think, oh, so, *this* is what's different from 2010, and 2011, 2012: *We* were the ones being pushed against the wall and now, as years progress, we were pushing back and pushing back and pushing the politicians and the institutions towards those walls. So we were pushing back! So people would say, 'push back' or 'fight back' but I think that's the best way to, like, imagine it. Somebody pushing towards a wall, or towards a corner. And now you're doing it to *them*. You're not doing it like, again, to hurt them, to swipe them, or because you necessarily hate them or some people *might* hate them. But you're doing that do bring about change. And I think, I think something is gonna happen. I wouldn't be surprised if nothing happens until, like, November or like December, or an announcement is made, or really, it's, I don't see anything – might sound kind of pessimistic – but anything *dramatic* or big. All of the sudden, I think it's gonna be incremental steps. The administration, specifically, is gonna be doing things and they, themselves, are gonna be escalating. But not in the way we're thinking. Because they've already been escalating – we've been escalating and they've been escalating – right? They've been escalating with enforcement, we've been escalating through our other means. But they're gonna be escalating in response to the pressure that they're feeling. And so [...] it's not gonna be felt, I think like DACA, like, it's not gonna be like one day, all of the sudden, Obama...although it might! 'Cause it is kind of, like, election year. But *because* it is election year, because it *is* different from 2008 and 2012, as I was saying, stuff is getting much more slimmer and like, closer, between Republicans and Democrats, it is like a riskier chance. I think among them Movement, it's only gonna escalate, and escalate, and escalate. People in the communities don't have anything to lose, except for, you know, continuing to be criminalized, demonized, and, you know, going back to 2006 or 2001, or the 1990s. Kind of similar to when I was saying earlier, when I said, I'm gonna keep doing what I'm doing to survive. I think that is, what people are taking and they're taking it out to the government. 'I'm gonna keep doing what I gotta do to survive' and the community is gonna keep escalating, so I know *that* for sure! I know community organization in the Movement is only

gonna escalate. What that looks like, I have no idea! I'm not that creative! (*laughs*) Find myself at least to come and think about like what is it gonna look like? But I do think, I do see the President administration; I do see change coming. Maybe that's how I end it. I don't know. Or one of the last things I'll say. I do, even though I might say, things might not come out about suddenly, I definitely do *not* see a pessimistic or a very, I don't know, dark future or future-future, like, years ahead of now. [...] I honestly do not see the same deportation numbers that we are seeing, we have seen in these past, what?, five years, six years; I don't think we're gonna see in the future the same type of militarization in the Southern border and the same type of extreme right opinions and political views in the border states, and specifically in like Arizona and I don't think we're gonna be seeing the same politicians and people in New Media and Old Media being as publicly supported by others as we did, you know, even as early as 2010.

Now, John McCain was first *for* the DREAM Act but then in 2010 he was completely *against* it and now he's completely *for* it. And I think that's gonna stay, I don't see it going back. There is no way going back, even if people wanna take us back; I see that it's extremely difficult, is going back, you know. The landscape has completely changed. You know, 'erosion' stuff, you know, science, has completely changed and in the political view, in the social view, culturally, the landscape has also changed and there is no going back, you know. It sounds cliché, or cheesy, corny, but there is a bright future ahead. And whether that's gonna happen this year, I don't think so, but I honestly see that in the next two years, you know, 2014, 2015, for sure, 2016, a lot of people are gonna, a lot of people's lives are gonna be changed and there's no going back but if, again, if that momentum does stop, a lot of people are gonna be left out. And that's not necessarily 'going back' but that just 'stopping'. Which could be equally as bad. But...

...sun is going down! It is not longer sunny on the fifth floor of the IYJL office...

S.Q.: ...ninth floor...ninth floor... (*laughs*)

U.S.: (*laughs*) Ninth floor! I don't know why I keep saying 'fifth floor'? I don't go to the fifth floor...Oh, I was at the fifth floor earlier to deliver some mail... –

Ninth floor of the IJYL office, sun is going down! And so it is it on ‘Politics from Tonight’ – but I will be back tomorrow morning! Stay tuned America, change is coming!

### **2.3. Interview with Antonio Gutiérrez, Chicago, Illinois, 25 March 2014**

S.Q.: I’m here with Antonio. I have a couple of questions about the Immigrants’ Rights Movement. I’ll name them first. Well, first of all, I guess the most general question is, what does this Immigrant Rights Movement mean to you? What is it to you? What does it define?

A.G.: Hi, I’m Antonio. I think, right now, the Movement for me...I joined the Movement as an active member of IYJL – Immigrant Youth Justice League – about a year-and-a-half ago now and before that I was a very ...I used to go to their rallies and things like that and support them in anyway I could, signing the petitions or following them on *Facebook* and social media but I really wanted to join IYJL and be more of an active member just to building a community in the sense of more understanding about what I was going through and others were going through and it was about collaboration and I think that’s what the Movement is all about: it’s about collaborating and letting other people know that they’re not really alone and that we can support each other and help each other.

When I was in high school, I was undocumented and I didn’t tell anybody. I thought I was the only one in my whole high school. And it happens that I wasn’t but because I was ashamed or afraid of saying that I was undocumented for having fear of being, like, deported or that my family was gonna get deported. I secluded myself from everybody, and, I remained myself hidden from my true personality and my true self to others. And so when I came to IYJL and [...] I became part of the Movement and I really started expressing this whole other side of me that I really never really thought that I had.

Yeah, and besides that, I mean, I think it’s about the collaboration and just getting to know all these beautiful people that are all over the nation that have been going through stuff that is more difficult and, just throughout their lives

about being undocumented and just moving the community forward in order to collaborate together, in order to finalize this oppression that keeps going, year by year.

S.Q.: So, what would you say, is there anything that has changed since you were involved or maybe anything you know of that has changed so far?

A.G.: Right, so, I mean I think IYJL has changed within the year-and-a-half that I've been part of it. We used to be very oriented as far as just working with youth, and dealing with youth as far as the development. Now we're really focusing on this whole aspect of families and working with the whole community, whether that means stopping individuals' deportations or saying 'Not One More' or saying 'stop deportations' in general. We also keep working with youth but we do see this whole other side of, like, becoming more collaborative with other organizations that are being far from youth that are led by undocumented folks, also, but they're maybe in the second or third generation. They're parents, they're grandparents, and that's when I think that's great that we're starting to do that. Just because for once we're now really asking about, like, 'Oh, we want the DREAM Act', 'Oh, we want DACA', 'Oh, we want things for students', 'we want to be able to study and be able to do this' but we really are asking for what the whole community wants, which is this aspect of, like, keeping our families together and stopping the separation of our families and communities.

S.Q.: [...] What do you think is, now, the role that youth and students play?

A.G.: Yeah, so I feel like now, all those people that were really doing the DREAM Act and the ones that founded IYJL, I have seen that most of us, we graduated already from college. So, when we started – or *they* started doing this because I wasn't really involved in the beginning – they were barely graduating from high school, and they were *thinking* about going to college and they saw how impossible it was; they saw the difficulty of going from high school to college, not only financially but just going through the college application and being discouraged because the college wanted to know where your social security number was and you couldn't really present that information. So now they're in the process of graduating and most of us have graduated and then, now we see the concern of, like, 'O.k. Now we graduated. But what does that

mean for us? We're still undocumented, most of our community is still undocumented and even if we have a work permit'. Now [...] that's kinda like saying: "Now you graduated, you can go to work". That's not enough! I mean, we don't wanna put ourselves in that situation where we feel like we're the *good* ones and that we should deserve this and the rest shouldn't. So, I think it's very important that now we're overseeing that, and when it's not about our needs, but as youth need to continue, but it's about everybody's needs, and kinda the community needs. As far as the Movement...to keep going forward.

S.Q.: Hmm-hmm. So, would you say that you include more people? Not only the best students of the best, but you include everybody?

A.G.: Yeah, I mean, we definitely do that. We're starting to also allow the new members that we had had at IYJL to getting to the point that...I think at one point, IYJL was, is an undocumented organization and that is still true, but now we're getting to that diversity that maybe it's not just about having the undocumented completely be the leaders of the organization but it's all. And now it's the undocumented, it's the citizen that is just really involved and passionate about the Movement and I think having that diversity is very important; having somebody like some of the members that were undocumented once but now they're not because they found a way to relieve themselves or just going from 'undocumented' to DACA. Or going from the ones that were just citizens, now they can find a space where they can feel like they're still part of the Movement, even though they really can't say that they're undocumented. I mean, I feel like if you're really passionate or involved in this Movement it's because you have [...] somebody affected you personally, in any way, that their story is coming from an undocumented side, and that's really all that counts. So we're really trying to involve everybody not just the best students in high schools anymore. And I think that that just makes it more diverse and more, much more *fruitful*. The conversations are better; the experiences are more different and diverse. And that just makes us a stronger group.



S.Q.: What is, would you say, [...] the difference between the different terms, say, ‘undocumented’, ‘unauthorized’, or ‘illegal’? How do you feel towards these different terms that are used to really describe and really put people in a box?

A.G.: Right, so, I recently went to – on Saturday – to a conference for the *Illinois Dream Fund* and I had a conversation with a couple of students from high school, from all, all ages from high school. And it was actually really interesting to see that some of the students, they still refer themselves as ‘illegal’ and in a way, I mean, I just couldn’t... all I wanted to do was to have a conversation with them and try to get, convince them that’s not the word they should be using. Overall, we haven’t done anything wrong; we haven’t done any big crime, I mean, I know that, practically, or in a legal sense, yes, being here undocumented is an illegal form of being here, just because we *entered* ‘illegally’ or we stayed here ‘illegally’ and based on *their* laws, but overall, as human beings we haven’t done anything criminal, as far as I know, because we came here with the reason of bettering ourselves, of bettering our families. So, yeah, I mean, the term ‘illegal’ just doesn’t make any sense to me and I feel like the ‘Drop I-Word’, which was a campaign for dropping the word ‘illegal’, it did a very good sense of that; of, like, we’re a community that is not a *criminal* community; we’re just here to make a better life. And so we shouldn’t be named or represented with that word. It’s like, ‘illegal’! And then, ‘unauthorized’, I mean, it’s just one of those words that is kinda, does have a reaction out of me, as far as I know, it’s just that I wouldn’t want to use it for me. It’s saying like ‘I’m not *allowed* to do something’. And that’s how I see that word and it’s just, I feel like I can do whatever I want, because I’m still here and I’m still human. And, I think that one of the students – that word makes me think that one of the students from the same conversation on Saturday – she was saying something about like: “Oh, well, don’t you guys get *scared* about doing ‘civil disobedience’ or ‘direct actions’ because, technically, you guys don’t have the right of the first amendment, or the third amendment, or the fourth amendment, because you guys are not U.S. citizens”. And my response to her was that overall, we’re still human beings. We don’t have to be citizens in this nation to have that right of...be able to speak and be able to organize ourselves and be able to wish for a better

treatment. And I think when you're saying 'unauthorized', it's like putting you into this conversation, this box, of like, 'you're not allowed to do certain things' and I truly don't believe that.

S.Q.: What would you say is the role there is of *New Media* in this Movement? Do you think there's a certain position or what does New Media do to you or you do to New Media?

A.G.: Yeah! I mean, we're all, IYJL, is known for using social media to really get to push our audiences and the people that support us. That's how we have built our database and IYJL has one of the strongest databases out there, as far as organizing. We're very good at messaging and knowing how to approach people to really care about the subject.

As far as *New Media*, I mean, I feel like with everything that is going on and all these intersections of *Twitter*, and *Facebook*, and *Instagram* – and we're doing that *all*. We're doing all of it. And we are reaching all of these audiences, the ones that are really visual or the ones that are a little more about *reading* and getting all the information or the ones that just really want to have it on their *iPhone* and they just wanna click one button and say 'Yes, I support!'.

Yeah, but I mean, I feel like the media helps communicate the Movement and it makes the Movement larger. It gives us the opportunity to reach people that we wouldn't normally be able to reach. We have collaborations with the organizations from, Indiana, Wisconsin, which are out-of-state, and we do this based on media. Now, we're using *Google-Hangout* – and that's becoming like a media that we're using to organize ourselves. Whether that's just between us, on the local level, or whether we're having a *Google-Hangout* with somebody in D.C. or somebody in California, just so we can exchange views and perspectives. So, I only feel that whenever media is gonna keep involving, we're also gonna keep involving and using it more and more because we have found it to be a very useful tool so far.

S.Q.: How do you feel, or do you think the whole nation is connected? I mean, how are the relations between the different states?

A.G.: Yeah, I mean, right now, I feel that the whole nation is really connecting through this whole deportation-issue. I mean, it is two million families now

that are broken and it's become something that...we all *know* a person. Whether it's your actual family member or a friend of a friend. Or you heard from another organizer that has been deported. And that way we're all interlocking and communicating and we're exchanging stories and we are connecting with each other. But I also feel that there's certain national organizations like NDLO and NIYA that are really putting organizations in this whole other set of being able to collaborate with themselves. Being able to exchange information and exchange strategies that, before, we haven't really been able to do. It is these new campaigns like 'Not One More' or 'Bring Them Home', you've seen like a hashtag that really unites us all. And just by putting in one individual organization, doing a status and you've seen the hashtag. We're already collaborating with that other organization, because we're already collaborating the campaign or what they're trying to do.

So, I think, it's a little of both, but it's this *need* of having our people, our community, to stay *here*, where they *belong*, what they call *home*, that really makes the big effort to connect us all. [...] It doesn't matter what state you're in, and some are worse than the other, but at the end of the day, *every* state is getting, is deporting people. So, we're all in the same situation. It's not about anymore, about like, 'Wow, the people in Arizona have it bad, because all the laws they're passing over there'. At the end of the day, we'll all have it bad, because everybody, all these states have caught us. It doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter what state you're in.

S.Q.: That's right. And this is also how something like 'undocumented – unapologetic – unafraid' comes into being, right?

A.G.: Yes, of course. I mean, it comes to that... [...] I mean, the 'undocumented – unafraid – unapologetic' is a symbol, or the phrase that IYJL got known for nation-wide. And now, it's like a *national* thing. I mean, I just remember, one of the first trips that I was able to be part of is, I went to a conference in D.C. where I was part. NDLO was organizing it. [...] It was really the first conference to really unite all the best organizations, all the organizations that wanted to come and be part of the discussion to really talk about these deportation issues. And in a way we came up with the campaign of the 'Not One More' after that conference. And I just remember, after we had our

conferences and discussions and stuff, we also wanted to go out and we went to a bar, a couple of us and stuff, and I just remember, there was some other group there that was also undocumented and it was odd. I think at one point, we started chanting like “undocumented – unafraid!” and *everybody* in that bar, whether it was maybe four of us that were from IYJL, everybody in that bar starting chanting with us. Because it became something that is well-known nationally. And that’s how we re-connect with other people and so the Movement becomes national, I believe.

S.Q.: And the ‘unapologetic’ – that came a bit later, right?

A.G.: Yes. So, that came a little later and that’s when we were really just frustrated with the situation, I think. I think it was, really that was when the DREAM Act, the national DREAM Act failed. And that’s when people started getting really kinda upset about the whole situation. It wasn’t about, anymore, about saying that you were undocumented, and you were also not *scared* to put yourself on the line, or to *show* yourself, so to come out of the shadows but it was also to this point of like they really wanted us to say that we were *sorry* and that it was our fault that we were here. And that was not the case.

S.Q.: Or your parents’ fault?

A.G.: -Or our parents’ fault! So we came to the point where the ‘unapologetic’-*thing* was just kinda like the last way for us to say that either we needed a change or that we were gonna...there was nothing that was gonna stop us. Because at that point we didn’t have anything to stop us. We didn’t have a...we were *angry*. We were upset.

S.Q.: How do you feel or how did you feel at that point about President Obama’s administration and policies and...?

A.G.: Yeah, well, I mean, at that point, the DREAM Act failed, and I was still going through school. [...] Again, it was upsetting. [...] We had been fighting for this for *years* and for them to just not pass it, it was kinda insulting. It was: “It doesn’t matter what all you all do, we’re still not gonna do this. You still don’t deserve this.” So, I mean, I was very upset, but then the DACA – deferred action – policy passed. And I feel that that was the way that Obama – so that after the ‘unapologetic’-thing happened – that he really needed to do something and that whether it wasn’t gonna become something that the

Senate and the House of Representatives was gonna pass, then maybe he...his executive power, he could do some change about it. But I also feel like [...] it was so little for what we were asking, it was to give us crumbs of what we were expecting. Then also this sub-division of who gets DACA and who doesn't and having all these guidelines that are really just separating the youth into even more sub-divisions.

*(I stop the dictation device for a moment. In this time of pausing, I ask Antonio whether he would mind answering a very personal question, too, hinting at his own sexual identity).*

S.Q.: [...] So now I was wondering, what, where do you kind of see a parallel, if you do, to the gay and lesbian rights movement?

A.G.: Yeah, so, I'm actually gay. I consider myself a homosexual male. [...] I came out as a homosexual to my friends and family when I was a senior in high school and it was a very, also very fearful time for me and I was very afraid that I wasn't gonna be accepted by my family, I wasn't gonna be accepted by my friends and that it was gonna be very depressing for me. But at the end of the day I decided to do it and I had the best reaction that I could have thought of. They were very accepting. If anything, I became closer to them because now, I was able to have this other side of me be able to be shown to them. Unfortunately it wasn't the same thing for me coming out as being undocumented. I didn't come out as being undocumented maybe until I was a junior in college and I was with one of my ex-boyfriends. He was starting about the Movement because he was doing a paper in college in his class. And he started asking about things, and whatever, and eventually I just told him because we had been dating for that long [...] that I wanted to tell him. And he was the first person I told outside my family. And within my family it was a subject that we never really discussed at our table. It was a subject that we knew how to deal with, if we needed to...when I wanted to work, we went to a place and we got fake documents for me to be able to do that, but we never really deep conversation about how me going to get these fake documents and presenting them to an employer made me feel. So, that was a little hard.

[...] But coming out as being undocumented, it was even more nerve-racking than coming out as being gay. I just remember being so afraid of getting myself into trouble and getting my family into trouble and I think it feels, just having both – being gay and also being undocumented – is double the oppression in individuals. And I know a lot of people that have to deal with that. But it just really adds on. I mean, having to deal with this whole side of you of being gay and how you interact with people and then having this side of being undocumented and not being able to do everything that should be expected from you or you *want* to do as being a gay guy. And I remember wanting – when I turned 21 – I wanted to go out to the gay bars and just experience that gay culture and I really I was afraid because I only had my counselor's card. And I wasn't sure whether they were gonna be able to take that. I wasn't sure whether the bouncer or the doorman was gonna tell me that this wasn't a valid id. So just having to deal with all of that and then also being undocumented and being in groups where a lot of the older generations in undocumented movements, they're not really associated with *gay rights*. They don't believe that so it's like, I feel like, in both situations, in both groups, I have found myself in situations where one of my identities is not well-taken in that space. Or that they don't wanna support that side of me. [...] They're definitely connecting a little more now and interconnecting and working together a little more but I feel that there's still a big distinction between the Immigration Movement and the human rights movement and that's unfortunate because we could be *so* much stronger if we just unite them both at the same time.

Yeah, so it's unfortunate that that's still happening, that very strong distinction. I mean, just in Arizona recently, where they were trying to pass that law against gay marriage and they ended up [...] not passing it – the governor didn't sign the policy – the gay population in Arizona and in the nation were very happy but one of the reasons they [...] decided not to do that, it was because they're very much focusing in the anti-immigration laws that they already have. So, they feel like they didn't wanna unite...by doing both oppressions – anti-immigration and the gay rights – then that would give them the opportunity to actually unite and organize themselves together in

order to go against the Arizona government. But the government knows better than to allow that to happen, because that would only make them stronger.

Yeah, but, that really was why it's been really hard to seeing the two my identities, they are very distant from each other and they don't seem to see that overall, we're very similar and we're still very oppressed and we're still minorities in this nation and that we should all be working together instead of trying to hurt each other or trying to see who wins or the other one.

S.Q.: [...] What does the term 'to escalate' mean to you?

A.G.: [...] 'Escalate' is a word that we use a *lot* in organizing. 'Escalate' just really means, 'What are the next steps to take?', 'What is the next thing that we're gonna do?', 'What is the most creative way to get somebody to listen to us and really get their attention?'; 'escalate' can get from doing a direct action, to doing a civil disobedience, it can mean anything from sitting down at an official's office or chaining yourself to the White House. But, I mean, it's very important to understand that there's always gonna be the next step, that escalation, that is possibly gonna be needed. So you always have to be ready for that. And you also understand where your limits and your organization limits goes to. [...] It's a word that is very much used in organizing especially, at least, in the organizations that I'm part of and the type of work that we do. It's something that we're always thinking about. Just, we're always expecting the worst and we're always preparing for that, just to keep whatever we're trying to achieve, to keep it moving. We don't wanna rely on *one* thing, in particular, because then if that doesn't happen, we don't have the next step to go and that's only gonna make us slower. So, we're always anticipating escalation.

S.Q.: And, one last question, how do you think 're-entry' is going to develop, the topic of 're-entry'?

A.G.: [...] As far as the organization that I'm part of, OCAD – Organized Communities Against Deportation, we have seen *many*, many cases. And a lot of the cases that are very, that they can go very public because they don't have any criminal record, except for the re-entry, which ICE considers a [...] felony, criminal record, it is becoming something that we're seeing that they're [...] putting priority on these people and that is *unfair* because they don't have any

other criminal, a natural criminal record, so we're really trying to focus on that campaign of 're-entry'. Overall, we want to stop *all* deportations, but we want to, at least, begin with that aspect, because it is very unfair, that somebody that has...they got caught when they were trying to enter the United States for the first time, and then they got sent back and eventually they were able to get in or whether [...] they were already here and then they got deported, they got sent back and then they came back because their family was here. I just, we don't feel that the need of 're-entry' just because you already have family here or because you're still looking for a better opportunity – that should be considered a crime. And that's where the big campaign right now, that is happening with these 're-entry'-cases that we're building up, here in Chicago, and we're starting to move nationally in another level with the 'Not One More'-campaign. But it really comes to play, that aspect, that we really, I mean, we're hoping that within time, within the next six months or something, we can really build up that momentum and really get that re-entry policy to really change as far as how *ICE* treats it. And we're really slowly starting to see little success stories with that – as with the case with Anibal, that he actually got an extension of six months. So that was a great success for the organization and for other communities here, in Chicago, and for all the other different organizations that have been helping but it's a slow, it's a very slow movement that is taking place but, hopefully, as time goes by, go faster and faster and we can actually achieve something that would only help the 'stop deportations', overall aspect.

#### **2.4. Interview with Marcela Hernandez, Chicago, Illinois, 27 March 2014**

S.Q.: I'm here with Marcela from Chicago, from the Immigrant Youth Justice League. And I have a couple of questions. So, first of all, I was thinking, what does – that's a general question – so what does this Immigrants' Rights Movement mean to you?

M.H.: It has really meant for a way to fight for my own rights. You know, I was brought to this country by parents and I ...(unintelligible)... be 'undocumented', so when I found out about it, it was a very hard time for me.



And when found, right, about youth that were actually fighting to get access to higher education and at that point, that was my dream, to go to college. So, getting involved in this Movement allowed me to give a little bit more meaning to my life. I also know that I had the power to change my life, because all the time people kept telling me, like, “well, this is how it is. And you just have to accept it”. So, it kind of gave me hope that I know things can change and there’s been, you know, youth that have fought a lot for change and I was actually enjoying some of that. In California<sup>156</sup>, we were able to pay in-state tuition because of youth. That came before me. And now, right, we were fighting to have access to higher education, which meant that I could realize my dream. So it was a way to work, to realize my dreams and also, to know that I could change the situation I was in, and it wasn’t hopeless, so hopeless.

S.Q.: [...] Since you mentioned ‘California’, what was about the H.B.50040, I didn’t understand that.

M.H.: Well, yeah. So, in California – in a lot of states nation-wide – undocumented students [...] that had been living there for years, because they didn’t have a social security number, they had to pay out-of-state tuition. So that was double, double of what folks would usually pay at public universities. And a lot of youth fought really hard to pass a State Bill, called AB540, and that would allow, you know, *certain* youth who had gone to high school for certain years and got their GED or spent so many years in California to be able to pay in-state tuition.

So, when *I* applied to college, you know, that’s what was happening. I was able to, I knew that I was gonna be able to pay in-state tuition because of this law they passed and you would just fill out... (*unintelligible*) ...school like ‘Yeah, I’m undocumented, you know, but I’ve been this many years here and will legalize as soon as I get an opportunity’.

S.Q.: But that law didn’t pass, right?

M.H.: It *did*! [...] And I forgot the year but I think it was in 2000.

S.Q.: Pretty ‘early’.

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<sup>156</sup> Marcela is originally from L.A., California, and also grew up there most of her life. She moved to Chicago about three years prior to this interview.

M.H.: Hmm-hmm.

S.Q.: So, why do you think they still fight for the DREAM Act?

M.H.: So, the difference is that that didn't give *any* financial aid to students; it only allowed them to pay what a resident in California would pay. Because of us *were* residents, we had been paying taxes, you know, at the local level and everything but we didn't get the same rights. And the DREAM Act would allow to have funding. Because – that was another thing for undocumented students, a lot of them came from very low-income families, so paying 40,000 dollars a year, for a public school 25,000, was just not a reality for low-income families to be able to afford it. And they didn't, and because they were not citizens or resident they couldn't get financial aid. And in California there's grants that are just for people that are residents of the state and also, so that was the main thing that 'undocumented' just didn't qualify for those state grants. And also, you know, a lot of them fought to pass a national DREAM Act, which would actually allow a pathway to legalization, residency and citizenship. That didn't pass in 2010, so a lot of states just decided to work on their own DREAM Acts, which wouldn't give a pathway to legalization but would allow, you know, to have funding for students that the state would manage. And you know students could apply for that financial aid and actually be able to go to college. Because even if people got accepted, if they didn't have the money, they decided to go into the workforce. And also most of them, you know, went into the fast food restaurant industry or like very *... (unintelligible) ...* service at very low, like minimum wage paid. Or, I heard a lot of students, a lot of stories of students who would work one semester and then go to school the other semester. So they actually had to, it actually took them maybe like six years to get their undergraduate, six or eight years, whereas another person, a person, usually, it takes them four years to get their undergraduate degree.

S.Q.: [...] What do you think is the role of New Media in the Movement?

M.H.: I think, it served a lot, just a way we can communicate. And make national strategies, you know, now there's e-mail, there's *(unintelligible)*. Also, it allows to reach way more people via Social Media, like *Facebook*, and invite people to events that maybe we couldn't, you know, tap into or go deliver

flyers to, or necessarily had their e-mails but they were interested in what we were doing and they liked our page and now we just have communications to these hundreds of people. You know, across the city, across the state, across the nation. So, yeah, it really has allowed us to reach a bigger audience and also organize ourselves *better* across states. I, you know, I know people via *Facebook*, via conference calls, for maybe like three years and never met them in person and then when you meet them in person, it's like you know them because you've been working with this person, right?

And you can share resources so it made us stronger, because we can share our strategies across states. But also let us know that we are not alone. I mean, there was a bigger network of people who are working on this issue. And, yeah, it also allows to mobilize people in a different way, you know, by putting petitions up and getting youth, [...] I think, it's been very critical in the undocumented Movement, because at first, the voices of youth, you know, were not being picked up by the media. And now, that we found this tool, called news stream, we were actually able to produce our media and record our own Movement. And put it out there to anybody in the nation or the world that wanted to watch it. So, it has really allowed us to produce a, you know, to really record our own voices and put it out there, even if mainstream media is not gonna cover all of it. So, I think that has been one of the most valuable things that we have used in recent, you know, in the last probably three, four years. That power of not relying on mainstream media and now creating our own media and put in our own stories out there.

S.Q.: So, putting yourselves out there, what does the tradition of personal stories or *testimonio* mean to you in the Movement?

M.H.: I think a lot of the youth started organizing as part of the bigger immigration Movement. But then we saw how, you know, non-profits or elected officials were shaping the story to what was gonna get them votes, to what was gonna get them, you know, what was gonna *appeal* to the mainstream of who you would call the mainstream folk, like the mainstream 'American' but then we realized that a lot of the messaging was actually hurting the immigrant community because one of the big issues was that it was blaming parents for bringing youth here or it was saying that 'Yeah, we need to put up bigger

borders in the south American border, only', not the North American border, so it was still creating that sense of being afraid of the immigrant, not addressing the real causes of migration.

So, for a lot of youth, sharing their stories meant also being able to control their own messaging and putting their family first, instead of, you know, putting where a lot of politicians were just trying to keep their jobs or were trying to appeal to mainstream media. No! We wanted to make sure that the stories people heard actually also addressed some other real causes of migration or also addressed a reality that a lot of people were facing. And also, letting people know that no human is perfect but just because a human is not perfect it means that they should be separated from their family or that there's bigger social factors that made them take certain choices that might not make them look perfect in front of society but that doesn't mean they don't deserve rights!

So, I think undocumented youth use their stories to change the minds of folks that have not heard about Immigration Movement but also make sure that the people that were directly affected were the ones that were at the forefront, saying their stories instead of politicians shaping them, which was actually very meaningful because I do remember that when I started getting involved in the Movement when I was in high school, the whole rhetoric about, like, 'Oh, we should just provide a pathway to legalization of undocumented youth who fit this criteria' – that was like the main messaging – and that it's not their fault, it's the fault of their parents. And that actually, yeah, made me feel like my parents were *at fault* or you know, in like, I mean, when I got here, I think, yeah, I just couldn't understand why my parents had brought me here and I actually, like, *resented* them for a while for doing that. But then I started learning about, you know, why people migrate and their real causes and made me understand that, you know, parents are not at fault; it's actually, you know, our foreign policy towards Latin America or like corporation being greedy or just treating humans as exchangeable things. So, when youth started challenging that and I started seeing that, made me value, like, my parents more and really attack, you know, attack the source of our oppression rather than turn against, like, our own community.

And also, like, because, you know, I think I was, you know, very fortunate to have great mentors throughout my life that were helping me to learn English, that were helping me have good grades and I was just a person that could learn in the atmosphere of the current education system. But then looking back at it I saw that a lot of my peers, you know, maybe that come from abusive households; maybe were close to joining gangs because that was like their own way of survival or maybe they came from single-parent households where they actually had to work to, you know, right after they got out of high school and they just couldn't get the grades to apply for a scholarship or they just, right? And it wasn't for them or early on, they had something on their record, because they got like a small crime, or there were just a lot of social factors that could push them not to be the foster child that big non-profits or politicians pushed. And we never really thought – like we would always – so the main messaging that didn't include them in, you know, in ever allowing them to also gain a pathway to legalization but then we started to understand, I mean: 'No, like, *everybody* deserves a pathway to legalization because they've been pushed by other factors and everybody deserves a second chance. So, I think it was also like coming to the realization that some people are not more deserving; that everybody should deserve, deserves the same opportunity and there's a lot of other things in our society we need to fix because they're oppressing low-income communities, communities of color in the United States. So, I think it was very important to also have a simple conversations about, you know, everybody's story and realizing that you can't judge somebody right away because they have something on their record or because they're not the straightest student but you have to hear their story to really understand what were some of the other things that affected *them* being in that place and [...] that they also deserve a chance to legalize because they had also been a big part, they're also part of the society and contributing in different ways. And maybe society was actually the one that was not fair to them.

So, I think it was really important for youth to also start, you know, that Movement and also, like, or even like, I get to see how a lot of adults, you know, also became, like, empowered by this because I feel that a lot of adults

were *always* afraid of sharing their story; were always afraid of ‘coming out’ because they were seen as people that were invading this country but in the reality, they have been pushed out of their own lands or there was a demand here for their work, so they came here. And that allowed them to see their own humanity and they deserved dignity. So I think that was really important to highlight, like, the stories of parents as well. Like now, for example, we see a lot more adults also, you know, sharing their stories.

S.Q.: Yeah, that’s right, so for example, 2013 – in the ‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ – event, you also had non-youth present their stories.

M.H.: Yeah! Do you want me to talk a little bit more about that [...]?

S.Q.: Yeah!

M.H.: So, yeah, I’ve seen the progression. I think, a lot of us, you know, it’s been a growth process, and a learning process, as we organize, because [...] I think a lot of the folks, a lot of the youth that started organizing were actually people that were in college and we knew that we had that privilege that we were actually able to make it to college and get a degree. So we wanted to use that to push rights for everybody. And just for people that were coming, you know, after us. For me, it was my little sister, my little brother, you know, I didn’t want them to go through the same thing that I went through. And then, we see that in the ‘Coming Out of the Shadows’ in Chicago, right? The first one that they had was in 2010 – most of us youth, you know, they were all youth. Most of them had or were in college, were educated, or had their degrees, the second time around, we saw youth again but we saw different youth, right? Different ethnicities and then youth that maybe didn’t go to college and then now we see *adults* that are in deportation proceedings or adults that have lost a loved one to deportation or adults that have stopped their deportation or, you know, or parents of undocumented, or U.S.A. citizen children.

S.Q.: ...or those who come back, right? Re-entry.

M.H.: ...Or those who come back! Who [...] said, you know, “It’s not fair that [...] they’re just using me as something that is disposable”, like, ‘I’m worth something and I have the right to be here with my family and have a safe

space for myself. So, yeah, they came back, they took the choice, like, of coming back and re-unite with their families.

S.Q.: You touched ‘ethnicity’. And I was wondering, which effect your work in the organization and in the immigrant rights struggle, has on your personal, ethnic identity or vice versa. So, what’s the idea of ethnicity? Is there a ‘panethnicity’ – all together – or post-ethnicity – you know, choosing ethnicities? [...] What’s the role of ethnicity?

M.H.: So, I think it’s very interesting because a lot of us that grew up part of our time in another country and then came here and [...] are not residents or citizens. Society doesn’t consider us Americans.

So, for myself, I consider myself Mexican, because that’s where I was born; that’s where I grew up half of my life. But also the U.S.A. labels folks that came from Latin America or Spain ‘Hispanic’ – and that was a term that was given by the U.S.A. government and a lot of people did not like that term – [...] so people just started calling themselves Latinos or Latinas, because from Latin America. And some people – but that’s usually a term that’s used for people – I’ve seen people use that when they were born here. So, I personally consider myself Mexican because I was born there, you know, I grew up there and I’m still not a resident or a citizen<sup>157</sup>, if I was ever to become a resident or citizen, I would probably call myself Mexican-American. But I also think, though, that I don’t like the whole hyphenation. Because if you think about it, the *Americas include* Latin America, so, like, why only people that live in the United States can call themselves American? Are they not United States American? (*laughs*) – that’s how we call them. And, you know, if you’re in Mexico, you’re still in the Americas; if you’re in Argentina, you’re still in the Americas; so, I mean, technically, anybody that lives in the *Americas* continent should be able to call themselves ‘American’. But they have, society has using this term. And, you know, it’s really interesting because usually ‘America’ is also identified to a very capitalistic, [...] self-centered, individualistic kind of society. So I don’t know if I would want to identify myself as American, because [...] the culture of America is that, like capitalism, individualism, and all of that, where I see in Mexico,

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<sup>157</sup> In the U.S.

where I grew up, as a Mexican identity, it's more about family, it's more, you know, a lot about, sometimes, exploring your indigenous roots, before the Spanish came to conquer us. So, it's very interesting, right? To see, though how people have used, have used that and also people always, a lot of people are pushed to assimilate, and say, like, you need to be 'American', but what does that mean? Like, you know, it's forgetting about your first language, if you don't have that at home, and it's about also being part of this capitalistic society. So, I don't think that's necessarily good then, because, you know...how do I explain that?...I don't agree with that way of living. So, yeah, I don't know if, you know, if I will legalize, I don't know if I could, if I would be proud to say 'I'm American', because really, how to identify that word is very different than maybe some other people to. A lot of people [...] are really prideful of their country, which is fine, like, I think we should all be prideful of where we come from, but we should also accept that negatives that come with our country. And I think [...] some Americans, some people from the United States that were born here and grew up here, don't acknowledge the bad stuff of a country. And if you criticize the country, then you're seen as a bad American. So I don't necessarily agree with that.

That is very interesting because when I went to college there was this student group, called M.E.Ch.A., and that stands for *Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán*, so, student Movement, 'Chican@ Student Movement of Aztlán'. And [...] it was born out of the right, you know, the civil rights Movement of the, you know, students across the nation who were trying to fight for equality for students of color and a lot of them *were* born here, but it was just about this mentality of staying true to your culture, staying true to your language and knowing, being involved in your community. And it's a state of mind, it's not an ethnicity but I also would call myself a *Mechista* because I was really involved with that Movement because it was all about, like, access to higher education and access to equality and dignity for people of color. So, that's another identity that I identify myself with besides, you know, Mexicana, Mexican or 'undocumented', also, like, 'Mechista' – [...] that Movement is way bigger in lower West Coast because California and Texas, and, you know, some of those states used to be part of Mexico and



they were lost in a war to the U.S. So a lot of people that actually lived there as Mexicans, say, you know, “We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us”, because literally the border line was shifted. So a lot of people do think that’s their land and a lot of people did grow up with indigenous traditions and they don’t agree that they’re not American because they still identify us, you know, with their indigenous traditions and with, you know, the origin of their land. So, Aztlán is the promised land of the Aztecs.

So, it’s very interesting as well, you know, the whole Movement of, you know, Mexicans who even live in a America and you know stole our challenging mainstream society, and saying, like, ‘No, you know, this is our culture, this is also our community, is also about being a good to our mother, to, you know, our planet, our Mother Earth, respecting each other, and not, yeah, holding to this capitalistic system.

So, I mean, that’s a long answer (*laughs*) for ethnicity but I think a lot of people struggle, you know, because they want you all just to be American but I think a lot of people struggle to keep their roots, because, we cannot, I mean, we should live in community together, but if we’re all the same, then we’re little robots and then I think ‘American’ itself was formed by a mixed group of people that migrated here, so why don’t we still respect that as what we think, as who we think mainstream means, saying ‘American’.

S.Q.: That was a great answer, though. I haven’t heard many of these things yet, you know, from people. [...]

Then I wanted to ask you, what’s the difference between a ‘Shout it Out’ and ‘Coming Outs’, I just didn’t... or *is* there a difference?

M.H.: There *is* a difference! Of how we use them. ‘Coming Outs’ are meant to be public and for people to share their stories and I think for a lot of us, it’s a way of liberating ourselves, because all of our lives we were like ‘Don’t tell people you’re undocumented, because what if they come and get you?’, like, ‘Don’t share your story. Be afraid of authority’. And a ‘Coming Out’ is in us public way of saying ‘No, we’re breaking the chains of oppression! And this is who we are! And it’s, you know, the fault of bigger social problems, because, like, the way that we’re being oppressed. And we want people to know our story, to know what’s going on in our lives and to know what’s in

the lives of our families and people who are undocumented and we're gonna break from the chains', you know, like I said, 'from the chains of oppression'. Because I think, you know, the more quiet you keep people the better it is to oppress them, but once they start communicating and people realize the injustice, then it's not easy to calm them, to like 'tame' them down and control them and oppress them.

'Shout it Outs' were born because of (*unintelligible*) for undocumented youth; to support each other, as a family or as a community. So, 'Shout it Outs' were created as a safe space and for a lot of people that's the first step to then using their story publicly to change public opinion or to move politics. To create a safe space just for us to talk about our stories, band with each other and know that people understood where we were coming from and [...] we wouldn't be afraid, like, of saying what we felt. And also to, you know, for a lot of people it was like: 'O.k., I'm not alone in this world', like, 'there is people like me and we can support each other'. [...] 'Shout it Outs', I think, was more of, like, you know, us a circle, people were all in a circle and it's more the model of a support group, for people that are struggling with something, and also a way to check in with us emotionally because, I think, also, you know, in certain cultures where we come from, it's not acceptable subject to talk about your feelings and to be able to get support from it, like, through your feelings or through your depression and just, like, a lot of the emotions you face as undocumented, so it was also to create a space where people could be comfortable to share their feelings. We've been trying to see how we can better them because none of us is a psychologist or anything, it is just for us to check in with each other at an emotional level, but we also have been trying to find ways [...] – if we do see that someone has, like, struggled emotionally with something – how can we find support for them, professional support. In, you know, in making it say that 'It's o.k. for you to feel like this', you know, 'but how can we help you, help each other here?' and 'how can we help [...] each other find resources to heal ourselves?', because a lot of this is very traumatic and also now, I think it's also helped at 'direct actions', for a lot of people to really deal through with their emotions after an action because it's [...] very emotional, and have that space, right? To reflect and share. And

I think, at the beginning, that's what, like, the Immigrant Youth Justice League was a lot of, just folks finding that safe space to share their stories because they didn't have that space anywhere else. And then, right, they started saying 'how can we change our lives?' And that's when organizing started as well. Right? And 'how do we use our stories to change?'

But [...] I think 'Shout it Outs' are more to support each other rather than trying, you know, trying to move anything politically or anything that's more about, 'How do we support each other? How do we heal ourselves?' And so, it's very, it's more of a private, safe space, and 'Shout it Outs'<sup>158</sup> are used more to move something forward. So, I think, that's the difference between them.

S.Q.: So... maybe a short statement on what you think is gonna happen *this* year...? So what is this year about, 2014?

M.H.: 2013, a lot of people said that there was an opportunity to pass something that would [...] provide a pathway to citizenship to the 11<sup>159</sup> plus undocumented folks, but we saw, it was a lot of politics again, a lot of politicians were more for other jobs than for immigrants, and that's when you know, the bill was horrible. And since, you know, a couple of years ago, laws have changed to build a deportation and detention system that profits from people and separates a lot of families. So, President Obama's institutes (*unintelligible*) to deport around, like, 1100 people a day, so we were seeing, right, as the policies have changed against families and that this bill was not, you know, was *not* what we wanted.

So, a lot of, you know, undocumented youth, their priority were their families, undocumented families. So they got tired of playing politics because, you know, a lot of them had been involved since like 2000s, 2010, and trying to pass a reform, and they still saw people being split apart because of deportations and they saw how now there was a lot of local and state anti-immigrant laws and national anti-immigrant laws and a lot of them were around detention and deportation and profiting out of, you know, undocumented bodies. So, the undocumented youth Movement – a lot of it, a

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<sup>158</sup> At this point, Marcela probably means 'Coming Outs'.

<sup>159</sup> million

good portion of it – decided just to focus on helping families stop their deportations because that was an (*unintelligible*) community and our families were under dread.

And then we discovered that the President had some power to take that pain away and to alleviate some of that and we saw how that legislation was horrible so, you know, the undocumented youth Movement since, you know, the beginning, since years ago, have just been pressuring the President to do something, because of just how bad it seems in Congress. And also because our priority are our families. So this year is all about trying get the President to use his power, you know, his executive power, to stop the deportations of certain individuals, kind of how he did with the youth. And that being a first step to immigration reform.

So, for us, the (*unintelligible*) just enough. Politicians are always gonna do whatever is in their best interest, so we're gonna do whatever is in the best interest of our families, of the undocumented community – and try to get as much relief as, for a bigger portion of the community, as possible and keep fighting for our, I think, messaging is for our, so just keep pushing the President to use that this year since we know nothing good, not a good bill, you know, is gonna happen and, or be brought up to vote this year.

### 3. Release and Informed Consent Form for Media Recordings

#### 3.1. Gaby Benítez

##### Release and Informed Consent Form for Media Recording

Dear Participant,

**Release:**


I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that Ms. Stefanie Quakernack has the right to take photographs of me and digital recordings of the interviews given beginning on 01/02/2014 and ending on 03/30/2014 and to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purposes of her academic research project. I further consent that my name and identity may be revealed therein or by descriptive text or commentary.

I do hereby release to Stefanie Quakernack all rights to exhibit and publish this work in print and electronic form publicly or privately and to market and sell copies. I waive any rights, claims, or interest I may have to control the use of my identity or likeness in whatever media used.

I understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

I also understand that Stefanie Quakernack is not responsible for any expense or liability incurred as a result of my participation in this recording, including medical expenses due to any sickness or injury incurred as a result.

I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: Gabriela Benitez Date: 03/13/14  
(Address): 4570 N. Christiana Ave #1 Chicago IL 60625  
(Phone:): (901) 690 5786  
Signature: 

### 3.2. Uriel Sánchez

#### Release and Informed Consent Form for Media Recording

Dear Participant,

**Release:**


I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that Ms. Stefanie Quakernack has the right to take photographs of me and digital recordings of the interviews given beginning on 01/02/2014 and ending on 03/30/2014 and to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purposes of her academic research project. I further consent that my name and identity may be revealed therein or by descriptive text or commentary.

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I also understand that Stefanie Quakernack is not responsible for any expense or liability incurred as a result of my participation in this recording, including medical expenses due to any sickness or injury incurred as a result.

I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: URIEL SANCHEZ Date: 03/24/2014  
(Address:) 5231 W. EDDY STREET, CHICAGO, IL 60641  
(Phone:) 773-341-8502  
Signature: 

### 3.3. Antonio Gutiérrez

#### Release and Informed Consent Form for Media Recording

Dear Participant,

**Release:**

I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that Ms. Stefanie Quakernack has the right to take photographs of me and digital recordings of the interviews given beginning on 01/02/2014 and ending on 03/30/2014 and to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purposes of her academic research project. I further consent that my name and identity may be revealed therein or by descriptive text or commentary.

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I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: Antonio Gutierrez Date: 3/25/14

(Address:) \_\_\_\_\_

(Phone:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: 

### 3.4. Marcela Hernandez

#### Release and Informed Consent Form for Media Recording

Dear Participant,

**Release:**

I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that Ms. Stefanie Quakernack has the right to take photographs of me and digital recordings of the interviews given beginning on 01/02/2014 and ending on 03/30/2014 and to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purposes of her academic research project. I further consent that my name and identity may be revealed therein or by descriptive text or commentary.

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I understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

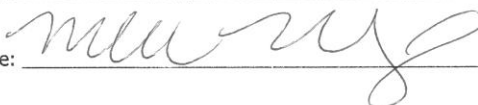
I also understand that Stefanie Quakernack is not responsible for any expense or liability incurred as a result of my participation in this recording, including medical expenses due to any sickness or injury incurred as a result.

I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: Marcela Hernandez Date: 3/27/14

(Address:) \_\_\_\_\_

(Phone:) (626) 260-8003

Signature: 



#### **4. Erklärung**

Diese Arbeit wurde selbstständig von mir verfasst. Dabei wurden keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel verwendet und sämtliche Stellen, die benutzten Werken im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen sind, mit Quellenangaben kenntlich gemacht. Diese Versicherung bezieht sich auch auf verwendete Modelle und bildliche Darstellungen.

Bielefeld, Oktober 2015

Stefanie Quakernack