

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

---

Global Studies Student Scholarship

Global Studies

---

Spring 4-24-2023

## Networks of Care: An Autoethnography on these Innovative Products of the Migrant Journey as Outlets for One's Development of Citizenship

Catalina Betancur Velez

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/glbstudy\\_students](https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/glbstudy_students)



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

---

It is permitted to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions: (1) the original author(s) must be given proper attribution; (2) this work may not be used for commercial purposes; (3) users must make these conditions clearly known for any reuse or distribution of this work.

**Networks of Care:  
An Autoethnography on these Innovative Products of the Migrant Journey  
as Outlets for One's Development of Citizenship**

Catalina Betancur Velez  
Fall 2022

**ABSTRACT:**

What are the factors that influence a migrant's understanding and development of citizenship as a sentiment in relation to the government and place in a community? Theories about citizenship emphasize the role of law and law enforcement as mediators of the dynamics between migrants and their feeling of citizenship. However, they often disregard or downplay the humanity in the development of one's identity as a citizen or a non-citizen of a country. This paper approaches the study of citizenship through an autoethnography, which provides a unique opportunity to research and analyze the complexities of the process of one's construction of citizenship in their journey for the United States. In studying the processing of interviews and poetry of migrants, the researcher analyzes four themes that influence one's development of citizenship. Violence, as a force, borrowed time, as a sentiment, and the use of voice, as a reaction, create a product of networks of care that are critical outlets for living out citizenship. The researcher finds that networks of care in the migrant journey, such as shelters and other community organizations, become the solid foundation for one's understanding of their citizenship. More concretely, these strategic networks are found to serve as essential to one's development of identity and community specifically in both their process of arrival, and transition towards finding their citizenship within the United States.

“How do individuals come to be seen as socially recognized moral beings worthy of citizenship rights? Should rights and the moral worth that comes from rights differ between those born in a country and for those who enter it later? What are the consequences?”

(Bloemraad,752). These questions currently lead the academic discourse surrounding immigration and citizenship. Scholars attempt to answer these questions through broad quantitative and qualitative analyses that yield overarching definitions of citizenship and one’s relation to the law, especially as members of society in the United States. This paper argues that the concept of citizenship extends beyond the application of law and rather relies on what lies outside the law, on what remains “illegal”. The concept of citizenship is too complex to attempt to understand with numbers, data, and even interviews. Citizenship must be understood as a multi-dimensional state that is influenced by the even more complex environment that surrounds it. It is critical to understand what stops people from developing a notion of citizenship, what feelings come with this, and then what individuals and communities are doing to build systems that enable the sentiment of belonging.

The relationship between people, laws, and citizenship is approached in a variety of ways in studies on the topic. The development of a concept of citizenship entails two different and distinct processes that occur between the relationships of the people and the implications that come with citizenship. The first process considered in academia establishes that citizenship is about the rights people obtain with the status of citizenship. On a superficial level, this would include the right to vote, and with this be represented, but on a deeper level would entail the right to the free pursuit of happiness. The other process of citizenship is the need for individuals to contribute to the community. This being the responsibility of duty to your fellow citizens as an active and participatory member of a community.

The law comes into this dynamic as the mediator between the people and citizenship. Law and legal regimes simultaneously shape the rights that people give, and also their feeling of community belonging. Lerman and Weaver (2014) push this further by affirming that the great mediator between one's feelings of citizenship and the community provision of rights is the law. However, they add that, while law-following behavior and community are key, law enforcement reduces the feeling of belonging and destroys citizenship. Based off of this claim, they also argue that "procedural fairness and due process protections should not stand in for the substantive democratic values of equality, voice, and representation" (Lerman & Weaver, 63). They provide an explanation for the boundaries that are placed on laws and their impact on the feeling, or lack, of citizenship. Their argument provides meaningful tangible insight as to the faults in the development and dangerous foundation of the legal and law-enforcement systems.

There are two grand traditions in answering this effect of the law on the people and their actions. Skinner (1993) writes about these as they attempt to answer the question of the relationship between the individual's feelings of citizenship and the community provision of rights. The contractarian approach claims that "the best way to secure liberty is to insist that the interference of social duties should be minimized and that this is the fundamental purpose of law" (Skinner, 419). This means that citizenship is derivative of the liberty that comes from law. This, for example, referring to the freedom of assembly to be applied as a freedom for individuals to find smaller social communities and therefore expand their derivative feelings of belonging within the context of citizenship. The second, classical republican school of thought, claims that "freedom has to be produced, and not merely secured, by law, i.e., by giving shape to the general will of the community, acting as one body" (Skinner, 419). This argument involves community engagement and the civic responsibilities of being a member of a community. It

claims that citizenship is a product of the freedom that comes from the responsibilities of engaging oneself in the life of the state.

Other theorists have further explored this relationship by emphasizing the malleability and contested aspects in these approaches. These scholars have begun to shift the discourse under the acknowledgement that the definition of citizenship extends beyond political representation or the political and social implications that come from this. Sommers (1994), for example, writes that in the Middle Ages, “the right and necessity to local self-rule mediated the relationship between crown and individual artisan. Only citizenship permitted political participation. Since membership in a guild was the prerequisite for admission into the freedom, guilds effectively determined who exercised full political rights” (Somers, 106). She uses a historical approach to develop the conclusion that it is imperative for legal power to be malleable to the culture developed by its people. Somers returns the power of the defining of citizenship to the people but acknowledges the role that the government has in fostering this as a culture. Similarly, Fourcade (2021) writes on “ordinal citizenship” as a form of community engagement and inclusion that is developed by social measurement and hierarchy. She emphasizes that “institutions are developing a new way of apprehending the social world, anchored in prospectively feeling the *reality on the ground...*” (Fourcade, 164). Such structure, then develops itself from the bottom up rather than the implementation of a vision from the top down. Again, returning the definition of citizenship to the people and using the state as a facilitator. Bloemraad (2014) contrasts with this claim in stepping in and explaining the “life or death” importance of the governmental establishment for the political acknowledgement of immigrants so they can protect themselves and legally pursue their own livelihood. She challenges Somers and Fourcade

by explaining that governments must actually define the citizenship of immigrants within society in order to ensure their protection and rights.

A notion that remains unresolved from the current discourse is that of the personal reflections of these marginalized non-citizens. One is left with no understanding of what is the impact of being labeled “illegal” or feeling like the law is never in your favor. As an extension of this, there is not an understanding of the raw development of citizenship as it happens in the lives of individuals. In order to attempt to answer the question of the meaning of citizenship I will turn to the individual stories that express the personal constructions of the feeling of one’s citizenship in the purest and most unfiltered ways.

Given the complex relationship that the student had with this concept of citizenship, it was important for her to acknowledge her own experiences as she studied it. The most effective way to explain how she developed her understanding of citizenship at 21 years old was to conduct this through an autoethnographic research process. Ethnographies collect qualitative data through observations and interviews, which is then analyzed by the researchers and used to draw conclusions about the subjects in their environments. This is a particularly powerful method of conducting research as, the data is collected through the purest methodology of maintaining the environment intact. An autoethnography incorporates the researcher’s learning process into the research process, making them the student. The way that the student processes the material being studied makes up a percentage of the data. This is critical because there is a complete acknowledgement that the biases and experiences of the student are going to influence how the researcher processes the data.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) emphasize the nature of autoethnographies as a political, socially-just, and socially conscious act which presents analysis as an emergent process. This is unique in that the reader and the researcher are interacting and processing the data simultaneously. An interesting side to autoethnographies is that they permit the variation of point of view and narration. Johnson (2020) explains that the value in this is that changing points of view from the first to second to third person provides a hypervisibility of the processing of the material and “exploits” the rawness of the research. This is a tactic can be seen in practice by Claudia Rankine in *Citizen* (2014), in which she brings the reader into her retelling of various instances in which she was a victim of microaggressions and explicit racial discrimination. This approach becomes powerful because it is the closest that a reader who may not share the same identity as her can get to understanding her positionality in these very uncomfortable situations. In her autoethnography, Behl (2019) is able to reveal a topic that lacks acknowledgement within political science. She opens up to provide insight into the lack of diversity in the field and provides the rather pessimistic conclusion that the field’s lack of transparency will continue to make it hard to diversify the discipline. Her conclusion is validated by the transparency of her experiences and how she has also been impacted by this hostility in the community. Jaramillo (2018) demonstrates how she had to address and analyze her own development of stereotypes in order to understand symbolic implications of the culture she was studying. Vidal-Ortiz (2004) also does this through the exploration of his racial classification as someone from Puerto Rico. He provides insight into his personal understanding of his relationship with abstract theories on racialization. The autoethnography allows for the researcher to regard themselves as learners, or students, of the subject, creating space to acknowledge their own mistakes or biases as a learner.



For this autoethnography, it is first important to understand the two entities of this process: the researcher and the student. In this case, the student is the entity interacting with the material and developing an understanding of the concept of citizenship. The student in this project is Catalina Betancur Vélez, a 21-year-old Colombian finishing her undergraduate studies in Providence, Rhode Island. The researcher is the entity analyzing *how* the student is processing the material given her lived and prior experiences and placing that within the larger discourse about the notion of citizenship. For this autoethnography, the student has looked at both raw and refined pieces of writing, recordings, and performances, drawing a thread between all of them, and formulating a perspective on the notion of citizenship. The researcher, being the same person as the student, is then able to conduct narrative inquiry to contextualize this understanding through a larger framework.

Every week, the student interacted with various expressions of citizenship and identity. Most weeks there was a poem, an interview, and a larger amount of reading assigned. After completing this, she wrote a journal entry to process the material and contextualize it with her past and present experiences. The journals serve as a way for the researcher to track the student's initial thoughts on citizenship. The weekly poems came from authors of various identities and backgrounds, but several of these poems came from Juan Felipe Herrera's *Every Day We Get More Illegal* (2020). The poems gave the student an opportunity to listen to these stories through an artistic lens, as she was able to study their word choice and other literary techniques which better encapsulate the emotions behind the pieces. The interviews that the student studied came from the "Ecologies of Migrant Care" project which aims to bring light to the humanitarian emergency in the Mexico-US border. These interviews brought a more explicit concept of the journeys of migrants. The interviews highlight both migrants and members of the entire system

that helps them in their fight across the border. The stories told in the interviews presented a concept of community and systems to the student. The next main influence in the development of this notion for the student was her experience working at a local immigration law office. In her role as intern, she completes various types of applications for individuals of mainly Latin American nationalities and has the opportunity to interact with both Spanish and French-speaking clients. This experience has redefined the way she reads and listens to migration stories. This is a particularly interesting concept for the researcher: how has *working with* the system influenced her feelings about the system?

One of the most important parts of this ethnography is the distinction between the student and the researcher, as that is what adds value to this study. The entity of the researcher is able to place the growth of the student in conversation with existing literature about the notion of citizenship, especially amongst individuals who share similarities in their experiences. The type of knowledge that one gains through my method is the missing piece of the individual stories that are often clouded away from academia by theories and abstract debates on migration. My methodology returns the rawness and humanity of immigration and draws a conclusion on the factors that impact one's development of citizenship. My point of view is valuable in that I am too in the process of defining my own concept of citizenship. Therefore, the way the student processes the materials is unique to my experiences, further exposing the development of the conclusion, something that remains murky within the discourse on this topic: the application and implications of theories and policies.

One can begin reading this piece and follow the student's thought progression as she processes the information she is reading and documenting how it is happening. This is something that will not be captured by data and statistics alone. Additionally, this form of research is

accessible in that it is more than a literary analysis, or a set of data points. Another aspect of such a methodology is that it preserves the humanity of the stories being studied. These are narratives that are especially erased and looked over by data and statistics. The student studying and developing a thread between them, and then the researcher understanding this process, brings light to these stories that must be included in the discourse surrounding citizenship. The researcher has made sure that the identities of the parties of any of the cases are protected and that only the pertinent experiences of the student are included in the study of the development of her concept of citizenship. The relevance of this project will be further supported by the literature that it builds upon. Current literature has presented several alternatives to researching the concept of citizenship: poetry studied through sole literary analysis, conducting this research through an exploration of the of political theory behind it, or even conducting a quantitative survey that asks the migrants about their experiences. However, the impact of this method will come from its autoethnographic nature of the direct and raw amplification of the identities that remain unable to enter a dialogue in which they are the subject.

The first theme that has been present throughout my study of citizenship throughout both by study of the poetry and my personal experiences has been that of borrowed time. The complexity of this notion can be initially understood by defining what it means. To be on borrowed time is to have a cloud of unsolicited debt over your head after being labeled an immigrant or an outsider.

This theme is thoroughly explored in Juan Felipe Herrera's "Enuf". The first lines of the poem write, [I] "used to think I was not American enuf / used to think I would never be American enuf" (24). These first lines introduce the first feeling of doubt that is rooted in the

inexperience of belonging lived by migrants.<sup>1</sup> Upon reading these first lines, I reacted with empathy as this is not an emotion that is foreign to me.. Pronouncing this word out loud without thinking forced me into my Spanish accent that comes out when I read an unfamiliar word. After reading these first lines a couple times over, I continued to read the poem in my head with my Spanish accent. It was interesting because I then began to think about how the poem translated to Spanish. Under this lens, the line in the middle of the second stanza caught my attention and forced me to restart my reading of the poem. The line writes, “used to think I was on borrowed time”(24). This is when a feeling that I had felt before received a name. The connection between not being American enuf and always being on borrowed time is one that is simple to understand by looking at the lack of belonging felt by immigrant communities and their networks. As Herrera writes, it is a sense that your “motion is always angled in the opposite direction” (24), meaning that after your arrival, every one of your actions is a reflection of you as an outsider, which belittles them into a proof of your “good moral character”. I learned this phrase from working in at the immigration law office because in order to obtain essentially any legal immigration status, migrants must prove to the state that they are of “good moral character”, leaving no room for mistakes and misunderstandings.<sup>2</sup> Herrera expresses this exact sentiment when by writing about how quotidian his behavior was, but conversely how abnormal and unappreciated it was to America. He “was an expert at signing [his] mother’s Alien Registration

---

<sup>1</sup> The use of the spelling “enuf” instead of the spelling “enough” is particularly relevant within the context of the author’s experiences as a native of California

<sup>2</sup> To always be in a state of “good moral character” implies that one must always act to prove that they are worthy of *being legal* and *staying* here.

Card / was an unlicensed professional window shopper” (24). These lines express the feeling that every immigrant child feels of always being the on-call translator for your family and of yearning for material things that you will never have because of the constant state of saving money. These are two experiences that in retrospect, make me feel resilient and appreciative of the instinctive survival tactics that we all adapt ourselves to upon our arrival into the United States. As an immigrant in the United States, you are always on borrowed time, being spoon-fed the feeling that you should “repay” your opportunity to be here with everything you do, including taking on the roles of translator and assimilator as a child.

On this thread of unsolicited opportunity, Dinora Mejía’s interview on the Ecologies of Migrant Care project serves as an accurate example. Dinora tells the heartbreaking story of her two brothers that were kidnapped when they were five and three. Throughout her narration of the events, she speaks with an emphasis on the void that will never be filled because of her brothers’ disappearances. When listening to her story, I was not surprised.<sup>3</sup> Not knowing how to read or

---

<sup>3</sup> The argument proposed by Lerman & Weaver (2014) influenced the student’s understanding of Dinora’s story: “Criminal justice institutions have come to play a socializing role in the lives of a substantial subset of Americans, fundamentally influencing how they come to conceptualize the democratic state and their place in it” (2). Though their claim is based on criminal justice organizations in the United States, and she is a victim of organized crime in El Salvador, there are fundamental parallels that can be drawn between the two. Lerman & Weaver write that marginalized groups develop a mistrust of these organized state structures because they criminalize their identities and make them lose all sense of belonging. Dinora’s story can be understood in relation to their theory because she is also marginalized by a state-like

write, her grandmother was tricked into signing the boys into a “school” that would later put them up for adoption because of the instability of the state of El Salvador during the armed conflict of the 80s. Dinora speaks of them “que fueron desaparecidos” (of being disappeared). It is interesting that she says it this way, as this phrasing reveals that there was an external actor that disappeared them. Her brothers were disappeared away from her family and this actor was ignorant to the irreparable damage that it caused in their lives. This is also when the notion of borrowed time is observable. Dinora recounts that not too long ago, the director of the school asked to meet with her and her father. In this meeting, the director tells them that “they should feel grateful for what they did”. Dinora expresses her frustration with this demand by sharing that her younger brother does not want to meet her because he is not ready. The boys were deprived of a connection with their biological family and that left Dinora and her father with a void that was created in vain because there was no reciprocity in the longing to reconnect. This was the most heartbreaking aspect of the story: the longing in vain for something so close that was taken away.

The young woman also speaks of this void as being a generational curse, as her father passed down this trauma of losing a child to her by saying things like “if only the boys were here”. The family remained in the past and were unable to move on. This loss without the ability to grieve is experienced by migrant populations and their families especially when integrating into

---

organization that promised to care for her brothers. The victims of the carceral state, as explained by Lerman & Weaver, and victims like Dinora, live in a constant state of borrowed time to structures that make them feel the need to prove themselves in order for their humanity to be recognized.

the United States. Edita Maldonado's interview encapsulates this void which is only covered by the grief of what has been disappeared. Edita is the founder of the Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Desaparecidos del Progreso (Committee of the families of disappeared migrants). This organization is a group of mothers who embark on arduous caravans to find their children who have disappeared on the border. She explains that the motto of this organization is that "if they don't appear alive, then they're dead. *But* if they don't appear dead, they're alive". This is an understandable approach to the search for their children as the latter part of the motto is fueled by hope which drives the entire operation. Edita brings attention to the sad reality that there are mothers who die without knowing the whereabouts of their lost children and therefore are chained to a perpetual state of yearning for the past times that they had their children. They are unable to move on as nothing could replace their children. This, under the context of immigration and its impact on belonging, means that these women will never be able to fully accept a new reality in which what they are missing is found. This sentiment is a product of being on borrowed time, as these women remain in a constant state of making up for a situation they did not ask to be in, but the world is telling them that they should be grateful that their children had the opportunity to migrate to the US.

These stories also fall into the next overarching theme of violence. Herrera, Dinora, and Edita are all victims of violence that forces them to be in a state of borrowed time. However, violence goes far beyond their imprisonment in the state of borrowed time and into distorting the migrant's perception of themselves and visibility to the state.

I began the study by reading Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014). This masterpiece began to center in on the concept of microaggressions within the understanding of what it mean to be a

citizen. Her experience as a black immigrant in the United States was heavily tainted by the microaggressions that she was attacked with every day. She writes about the stereotypes placed on black women that incite these microaggressions. For example, when she defends a group of teenagers from a stranger who just called them a racial slur and he responds, “now there you go” (Rankine, 16). When explaining this episode, I perceived Rankine’s use of the word “stranger” to be particularly witty, as this word expresses the distance between him and Rankine and the teenagers. Throughout the book, she also emphasizes the long-lasting hurt that remains from comments as such. In addition to this, Rankine presents how ignorance, while it is expressed in these microaggressions, it also causes a dangerous obstacle to receiving basic needs like healthcare. She writes, “and then the woman with the multiple degrees says, I didn’t know black women could get cancer, instinctively you take two steps back though all urgency leaves the possibility of any kind of relationship as you realize no-where is where you will get from here” (Rankine, 45). This instance again alludes to the physical space that comes from such an expression, but also demonstrates a graver reality that she was not receiving a proper health evaluation because of her doctor’s ignorance.<sup>4</sup> Rankine’s experiences with microaggressions are

---

<sup>4</sup> Upon analyzing the impacts of microaggressions, the researcher concluded that the student had understood these microaggressions as a form of violence. There is emotional, psychological, and even physical consequences from the verbal attacks that Rankine endured. In the case of her construction of citizenship, Rankine expresses between the lines of her writing how these injuries make it difficult for this process to occur. The student’s reflection on microaggressions as a form of violence reflects the barriers that are built around immigrants which limit their access to basic needs into every space in which their identity is discriminated against.



sadly representative of that of most other migrants. One form of discrimination that I am particularly familiar with is hospitals lacking medical translators. Like Rankine's Doctor's ignorance, the absence of a translator in a room when a doctor is trying to explain serious results and possible forms of treatment leaves the patient behind the closed door to adequate healthcare. Though microaggressions are things that immigrants learn to deal with, even though they should not be forced to do so, Rankine perfectly describes these as injuries. Immigrants are injured by these unprovoked jabs at their identity.

Describing microaggressions as injuries is an effective analogy to put into words how these verbal attacks feel. Further developing this idea, I then began to study materials that explained the physical violence that migrants experience, particularly on their journey to the United States. Vogt (2018) writes about several people who she met during her research at the Mexico-United States border.<sup>5</sup> Two stories that first stand out are that of Irma and Mayra. Both of these women are waiting in the shelter for donations for prosthetic limbs. On their journey both women suffered amputations by train. Despite these significant disabilities, these women are waiting for these limbs to continue their journey to return to their family or proceed to the

---

<sup>5</sup> She prefaces these stories by explaining that medical anthropologists have argued that "illness and poor health among marginalized groups, and undocumented people more specifically, must be understood as the embodiment of structural, political and symbolic forms of violence" (Vogt, 109). This is particularly relevant to the student's understanding of the impact of violence on one's feelings of citizenship of the perception of these injuries and traumas as the embodiment of the faults of the systems in place. Vogt explains that these are not accidents or chance, but rather that these tragedies occur because of the disregard of the humanity of these migrants.

United States. The lives of these migrants are completely altered throughout this journey because of external violence as a force that they cannot control. Vogt describes these migrant amputees as *fragmentados*, or “fragmented” (112). This word was incredibly impactful, because not only are these migrants’ bodies physically fragmented by the journey, but their entire lives become pulled apart by this violence that surrounds them. *What are the results of a fragmented human in this setting?* This answer relies on the resilience of these migrants. Their fortitude pushes them to pick up the segments of themselves and push forward their journey to citizenship.<sup>6</sup> This superhuman strength is also seen in Suli and Jasiel’s stories. Suli’s was particularly impactful to me as a woman because Vogt uses her story to explain the infringements on a women’s’ reproductive health. It was especially challenging to read about the contraceptive measures that the women take before embarking on their journey (115).<sup>7</sup> Their natural menstruation becomes a burden that risks their opportunity to become US citizens, and therefore, they are forced to take

---

<sup>6</sup> In trying to understand why Mayra will not return home after being a victim of such violence, her perseverance is a demonstration of the value she has placed on her belonging to the United States. Despite the violence, the belonging begins here in her waiting at the shelter for the prosthetic limb. Her now fragmented identity is being held by the temporary community she has found in the shelter. This strength demonstrates the value of what it means to be a citizen. The journey and all of the consequences that come from it build up a feeling of earned citizenship.

<sup>7</sup> This is yet another infringement upon not only the humanity of the migrants, but it is also a fragmentation of the identity of women who cross. This is, especially considering those who are pregnant and are expecting to grow in their identity as mothers, but because of the pursuit for their citizenship identity, are forced to sacrifice their roles as mothers.

extreme and dangerous measures to suppress this bodily function essential to life and reproduction. I read Jasiel's story (118) with a heavy heart – the shooting at Club Q had just occurred in Colorado and violence against the LGBTQI+ community remains ignored by individuals in power. The trauma he endured will never stop being a leading factor in his decision-making, even beyond the border. Jasiel's story demonstrates the loss of regard for humanity at the border. Vogt writes about his experiences with discrimination even at the migrant shelter, another aspect of the migrant journey that is rarely discussed.<sup>8</sup>

Another source of violence is profit. Vogt writes extensively on the “Economy of fear” (98). She writes that “*los indocumentados* are structurally vulnerable while in transit in Mexico. They are largely invisible to the state, which fails to protect their most basic rights, and even when there are legal provisions for unauthorized people, migrants have such an embedded distrust of officials based on their previous experiences along the arterial border that they often choose not

---

<sup>8</sup> Paying attention and listening to the individual stories is imperative to understanding the extent of the violations of humanity at the border. Vogt's amplification of Jasiel's story brings awareness to added layers of discrimination and violence at the border and opens up another facet of the development of citizenship. US protection against such acts would facilitate the development of citizenship – as the migrant would feel embraced and protected by US law. Instead, individuals like Jasiel become victims of the inability to develop a community even at the border and makes it then close to impossible to feel a sense of belonging.

to report the violations they suffer” (98).<sup>9</sup> Distrust in legal enforcement plays a critical role in citizenship development as it is in direct relation to the visibility of migrants to the state government. Playing in this economy of fear becomes a gamble of people’s lives as they cross the border. The profit that criminal and other organizations involved becomes a form of violence, as they begin to pay for people’s lives.<sup>10</sup>

**VOICE:**

Being subject to the force of violence and the state of borrowed time manifests in the quieting of one’s voice. This is another product of these two forces that influence one’s citizenship. The poems and readings that I explored this semester express a beautiful yet ironic duality in one’s voice as the reaction to oppression and also as the outlet and facilitator for their development of feeling of belonging. The authors demonstrate a reclaiming of power through voice that is essential to the development of the migrant’s concept of citizenship.

---

<sup>9</sup> Vogt soon after further contextualizes this information by explaining other risks the migrants are taking on during this journey, including paying a coyote \$6,000-\$7,000 to be smuggled through Central America.

<sup>10</sup> Money orders: “Money orders are crucial to individual migration strategies because people know they are likely to be robbed or worse, kidnapped, and will need money wired to them at different points along the way. Money-wiring center thus facilitate the exchange of cash for human lives” (Vogt, 101). Vogt adds that companies like Western Union profit off of the various practices that target migrants, one main on being robbery. In order to not be robbed of all of their money, they must use a money order (provided by these companies) that is only valid to them.

As Vogt continues to share her interviews with the migrants at the shelter, the immediate effect of the marginalization that they endure becomes more evident. She writes that in her conversation with Jessenia, she noticed a shift in her demeanor. “Her voice became more of a whisper, but at the same time she spoke more quickly, almost as though she was afraid someone was listening in on our conversation” (Vogt, 140). Throughout the retelling of this entire interview, Vogt noted Jessenia’s behavior and way of telling her traumatic story. The story she went on to tell was one that included retellings of rape, physical and emotional abuse, and loss of autonomy. Jessenia’s voice has been quieted. There is a strong meaning in her ability to tell the story to Vogt as her voice continues to be hushed even while at the shelter. Jessenia continues to share her story through her whispers.<sup>11</sup> This whispering is noted again in Vogt’s conversation with Padre Luis, an influential community leader in Oaxaca. When local residents are touring a new shelter which he is in the process of establishing, he whispers to Vogt, “They are involving the community from the very beginning. You must have the support of the community. This is something we can learn from and work on so that as more migrants pass through, we do not have problems like other shelters” (Vogt, 167). This scene was presented under a very different light

---

<sup>11</sup> Her whispers could be understood as a sign of weakness. The student interprets them, as the obvious reaction to oppression, but also as her way of sharing her story while using Vogt as the amplifier for her what she has to share. If she did not understand the value of her story, Jessenia would not take the time to share the explicit details of the horrible abuse that continues to torture her. Her whispers are a powerful outlet for her story, especially when they reach the ears of people listening, like Vogt, who are then able to amplify what she is whispering.

than that of Jessenia's, but Vogt's strategy to note that this came as a whisper serves to amplify his message.<sup>12</sup>

One's ability to amplify their whispers is both a privilege that is perhaps earned by change or positionality, but also an outlet that is taken away by legal and systemic oppression. One's voice is a reaction to oppression, but this does not mean that it is exempt from all forms of oppression. Joseph's (2016), "Leaving the Nonprofit Immigration Lawyer's Office" is a poem that disturbs the pace of the anthology. The poem's title prepares you to read about a conversation pertinent to immigration or the concept of legality. However, the poem provides an excruciating description of the wind in the car ride. In this dissonance, the reader finds themselves feeling like the individuals in the car: wanting to ignore where they are leaving from so much that they seek stability in only the senses that they are able to perceive and process at this time. The dialogue is irrelevant to the topic of the title. The author's voice has just been so

---

<sup>12</sup> Again, we see that Vogt is taking these whispers and with the action of publishing them in her book, is amplifying these voices. Jessenia and Padre Luis's testimonies are being heard by readers like the student. This develops a thread between the migrant, Vogt, and the reader. Furthermore, it is significant that Padre Luis' advice was presented in a whisper. Through this literary thread, Padre Luis is telling the student what is working at the border and what is not. In this case, its community engagement. The student can now take this advice and incorporate it into her understanding of the immigration crisis.

quieted by what the nonprofit immigration lawyer just told them, that they are unable to even talk about this subject in the car because of their disillusionment and sense of lost power.<sup>1314</sup>

The loss of one's political voice does not, however equate to the silencing of their entire voice. There is a social power found when one reclaims their voice, specifically after recognizing their voices' ability to disturb the oppression in place. Quique Aviles writes really beautifully

---

<sup>13</sup> In this poem, the wind and nature can be representative of the freedom that they do not have. The author is hyper fixated on these two things because they are the only glimpse of freedom that they will have after the news from the lawyer.

<sup>14</sup> To further engage with this concept of an inability to express oneself because of systemic oppression, one can draw a connection with the inability, or lost ability, to vote. Lerman and Weaver (2014), emphasize the loss of power when one loses their ability to vote. Especially when there are facts that prove that "13 percent of adult black men could not take part in [Obama's] election by casting a vote, as they were disenfranchised due to a criminal record" (Lerman & Weaver, 200). It is pertinent to engage the conversation of quieted voices and votes because when the state removes one's ability to vote, they are not just quieting down their voice, they are silencing their political participation, a supposedly guaranteed right in the United States. Lerman and Weaver contextualize this argument in their broader argument of the sense of belonging of racially marginalized groups in the carceral state of the United States. This is all interconnected in the ways that systemic oppression play into the politics of voice as it pertains to one's ability to vote. What does it mean for an active member of society to be unable to vote? Is it their political engagement that grants them a feeling of belonging and citizenship? The student continues to attempt to answer the latter question in the following section.

about the “division” of his tongue in two. The tongue is divided by the two languages that he speaks and the identities behind these tongues. Figuratively, Aviles is also divided in two, for example in instances when, “a border patrol runs through the middle / frisking words / asking for proper identification / checking for pronunciation” (Aviles). No one understands the boundary between the two sides of his tongue except for himself. So much that he ends the poem by expressing that he likes his tongue as “it says what feels right” (Aviles). The poet spends the entire piece writing about the complexity of the division of his tongue, and how more often than not, it gets him into trouble with the systems around him that do not want him to have a divided tongue. However, in the end, he is reclaiming the power of this duality. This was especially inspiring to read because I understand the pressure of having your voice be pulled in two directions or having to silence one part of my tongue to let the other one explain who I am to someone who only accepts that side. Aviles’ reclaiming of his tongue and two voices that come from the division produces a powerful and secure pride that strengthens one’s ability in connecting with others.<sup>15</sup>

Another dynamic of the power of voice can be found in how they own their name. Herrera (2020) presents two versions of how Xochitl Tzompantli presents themselves. In the beginning of the poem, after being asked “what kind of name is that?”, Xochitl explains themselves by saying “it was given to me by an Indian woman black hair long shawl – it means *Skull Rack Flower*” (Herrera, 29). This is a peaceful introduction, but as the poem goes on and

---

<sup>15</sup> The poem demonstrates to the student that there are other immigrants that understand both the beauty and oppression that come with a divided tongue. This is a form of community-building and belonging.



tensions rise in this interview-style conversation, Xochitl ends by saying, “my name is Xochitl Tzompantli Skull Rack Flower I am the life-cutter the eater watchtowers guards artillery... I provide ghosts unclaimed that tie you to a circle of tortured faces on occasion” (Herrera, 31). This change of presentation of their name is representative of the change in demeanor induced by the pride that oftentimes derives ironically from the rage of oppression.

Power in one’s voice is both found and felt especially in communities. As many aligned voices are louder than one voice alone. Vogt presents the importance of communities in action by writing that, “for local communities, demands for community safety also represent attempts to regain control of situations that seem uncontrollable. In this way, we might even conceptualize them as forms of resistance in the chaos and uncertainty of everyday life” (Vogt, 180). The expression of voice brings communities to life. In the case of migrant populations, communities are an imperative system for survival. In order for communities to be well established, however, the voices that support it must be fully reclaimed and ready to continue amplifying other voices in the community.

There is a significant gap in between the rights and benefits the state provides to migrants and their needs. Networks and communities of care step in and fill this gap, and by doing so, establish a sense of belonging that is critical for one’s formation of citizenship.

Vogt affirms the reason for networks of care.<sup>16</sup> She adds, however, that “the irony is that the more humanitarians there are, and humanitarian regimes become institutionalized, the less

---

<sup>16</sup> Vogt writes that “humanitarian efforts exist when the state fails to protect certain populations” (129).

pressure there is for the state to step in” (129) and regulate structures like healthcare systems. This is a complex statement, but it reaffirms the reason why these networks of care develop. If there are people who the state claims are “outside the law”, dare I even say “illegal”, then there are social institutions that will also arise outside of the law. It is the state’s responsibility to respect these systems, as they attempt to fix something they cannot. Their ability to function outside the law is their outlet to stay true to the needs of those in need of them.<sup>17</sup> This way, there is no limit of funding or biased regulations that prevent them from providing the care they need. Vogt incorporates Sara Willen’s claim that “embodied experiences of ‘illegality’ – in both the experiential sense and the epidemiological sense of the term – are profoundly influenced by local moral assessments of who is or is not deserving of society’s attention or investment” (128). However, throughout this research, I have observed how the state is actually the entity that influences and sets the standards for the embodied experiences of “illegality”. The government and their failure to accept individuals coming in set the standards for “who is deserving or is not” of prizes like work permits, healthcare, or even a “legal” status. These standards trickle down into feelings like those expressed by Herrera, Vogt’s interviewees, Joseph, and the other poems that express exclusion and quieting. Granted that there are some flaws in the organization of

---

<sup>17</sup> “To begin, it seems that the push for accessible and safe healthcare for immigrants in transit must be made at the local level through institutions invested in the well-being of *everyone* in the community” (Vogt, 129). Efforts to help migrants must occur at a local level and by community-run organizations, as this is the only way that stays true to the needs of the individuals. Community-run organizations protect and uphold the voices sharing the needs of the migrants coming through.

some of these networks of care, these systems are built on community voices and strengthened by pieces of these voices and identities.

Karen Nuñez is the coordinator of the National Commission of Support for Returning Migrants with Disabilities (Comisión Nacional de Apoyo a Migrantes Retornados con Discapacidad - CONAMIREDIS). This non-governmental organization treats amputees who are victims of “La Bestia”, the freight train that some migrants take to transport them to the border. Nuñez is interviewed by the *Ecologies of Migrant Care* project, and she emphasized that the Honduran and Mexican governments have provided little to no contribution to the commission. She shares that the Honduran government has “created” their own organizations, but that they have not reached out to CONAMIREDIS, despite them having extensive information and experience about the cases and who requires help. She even explains that the commission’s job is especially complex because the migrants who they are helping have not only just become disabled because of “la Bestia”, but that these are also the migrants who do not have enough money to pay for a coyote so they must take the train. In addition to this, she explains that after these migrants fall off of the train, authorities will leave them paralyzed or out to die. This community-established organization has taken this responsibility into their own hands to care for these returning migrants who have not only been rejected entry into the United States, but also denied of their right to live by these governmental authorities.

Vogt writes of another form of community aid that is critical at the border: healthcare. She writes the Casa Guadalupe has a partnership with a local hospital outside of Oaxaca City that agrees to treat migrants free of charge regardless of their immigration status or financial means.

“This is not a state hospital, but a small, nonprofit hospital and drop-in clinic that treats the poorest of patients.<sup>18</sup>

Mayra Leticia Belmares, a member of the House of the Woman Ixim Ansetic, is also interviewed by the *Ecologies of Migrant Care* project. This organization focuses on the inclusive integral health of women. They give visibility to women’s ability to participate and defend themselves. They do not work at a political level, but rather at a social level, and their main message is that “your body is the first territory you must defend” as it is what allows you to participate and engage yourself in conversations about your rights. A challenge that Mayra expresses is that they have to find spaces where women’s voices will be listened to and that in order for this to happen, they must engage in a communal effort. A narrative that is complementary to that of Casa de la Mujer Ixim Ansetic is also expressed by Herrera’s “i want to speak of unity” and “come with me”. These two poems express not only the need for unity but also the feeling of grounding through enabled by unity and a collective effort. “i want to speak of unity... of One when Luz still lived & Felipe still parted the red lands / & no one knew we

---

<sup>18</sup> It receives financial support from benefactors in the United States, helping offset the costs of services given, often free of charge, to local people who cannot afford to pay” (Vogt, 113). This highlights a critical aspect of such networks of care – that everyone working within them must be so dedicated to helping the cause and the migrants that they must give something up themselves. These donations are essential to this network, but they are also given up by benefactors in the United States, just like the doctors and other workers are essential, but are also giving up a much higher salary elsewhere. In order for these networks of care to function properly and stay true to their mission, while remaining “outside of the law”, they come with certain sacrifices.

existed in the fires / the flames that consume all of us / now” (53).<sup>19</sup> This poem refers to the communal peace that was held before their lands were taken away. “come with me” speaks to the peace that is continued to be felt when in a community despite of chaos and attacks that surrounded: “our hands will join and then lift as we / step to the fires at the center of this umber clay floor / sewn with leaves stones and branches and reeds / we will notice the unwinding flames their unending quest / toward something we do not know” (67). In this scene, the joining of hands will allow them to ground themselves to something beyond them. The fire in both poems serves two purposes of representing both a force that consumes the author but also as something that he remembers he belongs in. I interpret these flames as the feeling of illegality: one that both consumes an individual but can also provide a sentiment of liberation if grounded in community.

This interpretation can be applied to understand the effects of social and community-organized movements. In his interview<sup>20</sup>, Rubén Figueroa, the coordinator of the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement, says that migrants came through Mexico, denouncing their countries of origin throughout their journey and they started to make the system shake. And the system responded as it always does – with repressive measures... And they showed us a lot: that there is a movement in this exodus – that they are forced, but that there exists a movement, a collective consciousness there, and there’s a collective denunciation, a collective demand, and they were teaching us that they are protagonists of their own struggles and also their own acts of resistance” (5:52-6:40). Even if there is no space to speak, these resilient migrants will take this flame and

---

<sup>19</sup> “i want to speak of unity”

<sup>20</sup> with the *Ecologies of Migrant Care*

make the opportunity to speak and make their voices and experiences be heard, especially when they come together as a community.

09/22/2022 Journal Entry

*“This week I had a blanket of nostalgia over me. I am working at Escano Law, the first Immigration law office I have worked at. In December of last year, I decided to shift my intent towards pursuing a career as an immigration lawyer. This has been really exciting, because by working at this office since the beginning of the summer, I have been using the law to help individuals: one of the main goals in my decision to switch over to wanting to practice law. In comes the blanket of nostalgia: I have been especially introspective this week because on Sunday, my father traveled back to Colombia to spend time with our family and visit some family who is sick. This was the first time he has traveled back since his visit from December 2019 - June 2020. I ask myself now, what does it mean for a permanent resident to be outside of the United States for more than 6 months? What does it mean for his family and life in the US if he stays longer than those 183 days and is therefore unable to return? I don't know... no. I'm sure that I don't want to know the answer to the latter question. Today, I thank God that other than having to renew my burgundy passport, I never really thought about my immigration status and what that made me before college. It was something that never came up in conversations with my friends in high school and it was assumed by my classmates back then that I was a citizen of the United States. I only realized that people's concept of legality was distorted until after they expressed reactions of relief to finding out that I was a **legal** permanent resident. It is important to bold the legal because in my conversations with people who don't know what a permanent resident is, I always feel the need to explain that I am legally staying in the United States. Why*

*aren't people more aware of their privilege as citizens? Or maybe I can also tell myself that it's better that they don't ask."*

This was the first journal entry I wrote when I started the semester and this independent study. In writing this conclusion, I must begin to unpack it. I was definitely not thinking about this then, but the entry above touches upon the four topics that I have discussed and their influence over the development of citizenship.

*"I ask myself now, what does it mean for a permanent resident to be outside of the United States for more than 6 months?"*

In this sentence, I provided a glimpse as to how the concept of borrowed time has manifested itself in my life. The limit on the time we are able to stay outside of the United States is what allows us green card holders to prove to the state that we are loyal to the US in our status of residency. In broadening my understanding of immigration, I think about individuals who are never able to return to their home countries because of their constant need to prove their loyalty to the United States. Are we proving loyalty to the United States? Or are we digging our roots deeper into American soil? This prompts me to think about what every immigrant is able to do both during their arrival and once they are in the United States: we are developing new networks of support to further establish ourselves within the United States, in ways that oftentimes make the state uncomfortable. Why are green card holders expected to return before a period of 6 months? Because we are expected to return to our families, our jobs, our networks, etc. This feeling of borrowed time, though very uncomfortable at times, pushes immigrants to accomplish the extraordinary. The feeling of discomfort and pain is caused by what we have to sacrifice for these networks. However, we do not do it alone, we have families, friends, and communities supporting our every accomplishment.

*“I only realized that people’s concept of legality was distorted until after they expressed reactions of relief to finding out that I was a **legal** permanent resident.”*

Violence, as explored before, attacks in different ways. Microaggressions are an inescapable form of violence that corrode an immigrant’s feeling of belonging. These are antagonistic expressions of ignorance and lack of acceptance. Physical violence is another manifestation of xenophobia **outside** of these communities of care. As explored above, the only way to deal with physical and verbal violence is to fight back with strong voices. The poems and interview demonstrated the reclaiming of voice to be the ultimate opportunity to finding a community and a sense of belonging in the migrant journey. These voices can only, however, be truly empowered by community-established organizations that function outside of the law.

*“I have been using the law to help individuals: one of the main goals in my decision to switch over to wanting to practice law”*

Contradictory to the conclusion above, I used to see the law as the only opportunity for citizenship and belonging. However, especially with my experience at the firm, I have come to understand that the cases we deal with are more than just stories on paper, but rather people that were, for example, referred to us by a family member or a community leader, is essential to the job. The community and social networks that allow the law firm to act as another layer to the client’s sense of belonging are more important than the piece of paper that they receive after their application is approved.

The feeling of citizenship is one that must extend beyond the law, at least for the moment. The only way to amplify the voices of marginalized immigrants is through community movements, as the government has proven itself to be preoccupied with setting boundaries as to who is “deserving” of pieces of paper. Legality is a concept that is set by the state, but belonging is a concept that is developed throughout the migrant journey and as the migrant settles



themselves in their new country. The danger occurs when “legality” becomes a defining concept of one’s identity, which is what the state entities are quick to define. Because of this, violence and the feeling of borrowed time are inevitable, and they will continue to be present in the migrant experience for a long time. However, the human reaction of voice and expression is just as inevitable, but less powerful. The reclaiming of power occurs when voices come together in community through tight networks to amplify the needs and demands of the people. In this reclaiming of power, comes the process of building that feeling of belonging to a community. Because of their prominent presence and activity in society, community networks and systems are what facilitate the belonging to a country and to a group of people. With this, there is a redefinition in terms like Colombo-American, as I am in fact, proud to say that in addition to my Colombian identity, I am also an American.

## References

- Avilés, Quique. 2004. "My tongue is divided into two".
- Behl, Natasha. 2019. "Mapping Movements and Motivations: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Racial, Gendered, and Epistemic Violence in Academia." *Feminist Formations* 31 (1):85-102. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/723569>.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2014. "Why we Need a Political Sociology of Citizenship and Immigration." *Sociological Forum* 29 (3) (Sep):750-5.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research (Köln)* 36 (4 (138)) (Jan 1.):273-90. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>.
- Fourcade, Marion. 2021. "Ordinal Citizenship." *The British Journal of Sociology* 72 (2) (Mar):154-73. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-4446.12839>.
- Guevara, Nathalia. 2018. "Migración Colombiana En La Ciudad De México, Fronteras Étnicas Y Estereotipos: Una Exploración Autoetnográfica." *Alteridades (Ixtapalapa, México : 1991)* 28 (56) (Jul 27.):59-69.
- Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, and New York University. "Ecologies of Migrant Care." <https://ecologiesofmigrantcare.org/> .
- Herrera, Juan F. 2020. *Every Day we Get More Illegal* City Lights Publishers.
- Johnson, Jessica. 2020. "Autoethnography as a Poetics of Worlding and a Politics of Becoming: Claudia Rankine's Citizen and Kathleen Stewart's Ordinary Affects." *Cultural Studies*,

- Critical Methodologies* 20 (2) (Apr):182-91. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1532708619879207>.
- Joseph, Janine. 2016. *Driving without a License*. Farmington: Alice James Books.
- Lerman, Amy E., and Vesla M. Weaver. 2014. *Arresting Citizenship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rankine, Claudia, and Uda Strätling. 2018. *Citizen*. Leipzig: Spector Books.
- Skinner, Q. 1993. "Two Concepts of Citizenship." *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 55 (3) (Sep 1.):403-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40886879>.
- Somers, Margaret R. 1994. "Rights, Relationality, and Membership: Rethinking the Making and Meaning of Citizenship." *Law & Social Inquiry* 19 (1) (Jan):63-114. <https://api.istex.fr/ark:/67375/WNG-MXB72NV7-Z/fulltext.pdf>.
- VIDAL-ORTIZ, Salvador. 2004. "On being a White Person of Color: Using Autoethnography to Understand Puerto Ricans' Racialization." *Qualitative Sociology* 27 (2):179-203. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/758703184>.
- Vogt, Wendy A. 2018. *Lives in Transit*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.