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**NOTES ON UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS
AND AFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP**

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Abstract: This paper offers an analysis of self-representations in texts of an autobiographical nature published recently by three undocumented migrants in the United States. Following the recent phenomenon of claiming visibility as the right to be seen, this piece of research looks into elaborations of citizenship, namely whether forms of affect are “allowed” into modes of belonging not necessarily mediated by the law or connected to citizenship. Notions such as “acts of citizenship” (Isin, 2008) and “affective citizenship” (Grossberg, 2015; Ayata, 2019) form the critical lens to approach the texts. Articulated into forms of attachment, the undocumented migrants’ positions as expressed in these texts can foster our imagination towards more encompassing notions of citizenship that include forms of belonging beyond the territorial, the legal, and the duty to the land.

Keywords: undocumented migrants, citizenship, affects, autobiography, American studies.

Introduction

Undocumented migrants have recently begun to appear in the US public sphere claiming a place of enunciation. Because undocumented migrants are speechless, invisible, unregistered, and non-existent by definition, this crafting of agency sparks interest. This paper looks into the ways these performative acts express particular forms of attachment to the nation, and how they claim participation and belonging. In other words, it tries to identify the extent to which they can enhance different understandings of citizenship.

It is obvious that the sense of belonging is closely knit to the daring act of taking to the streets or to the media and revealing their identities – coming to the light rather than yielding to the fear of visibility is a form of agency. As Nicholas Mirzoeff has remarked, beyond being seen, the move allows the immigrants to define the terms of representation themselves, producing what Mirzoeff calls instances of countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011). By giving their names, exposing their bodies and disclosing their life stories, they shatter the established representations, that is, the affective registers equating undocumentedness

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and invisibility, non-citizenship and crime. By unsettling the established representations of undocumented immigrants, they allow us to envision the possibility of resettling the forms of citizenship as we know them, along with the meanings we attach to citizenship.¹

This approach follows Engin F. Isin's ideas about "acts of citizenship" as any claims to rights, regardless of the claimant being a citizen or a non-citizen (Isin, 2008). Isin suggests that the very claim to rights is enough to signal an instance of citizenship, proposing an understanding of the term that goes way beyond the formal top-down mechanism that produces citizens by default. The undocumented immigrants staging of subjecthood in these terms is a case in point because the forms of recognition they claim conflate the normative idea of citizenship (the legal tool) with very personal views on forms of participation, since their condition as undocumented is by definition outside the law.

Rather than considering the undocumented's efforts as "impossible activism" (Pallares, 2014: 1-2), I take their actions as acts of citizenship precisely because they are acts of "rupture in the given" (Isin, 2008: 25), that is, they do not correspond to established orientations, strategies and technologies regarding participation in the community. Acts of citizenship are of a different order, even though they engage – by claim – with citizenship matters: they are "ways of being political in the sense that being implicated in them is not necessarily calculable and rational but may also be unintentional or affective" (*ibidem*: 37). Hence, the right to be seen and heard derives not from recognized or formal arrangements of participation but from the undocumented immigrants' perceptions that, despite constrictions, participation is meaningful and emancipatory. Their coming to the fore suggests that beyond the legal construct, citizenship can be claimed, signified, and lived in ways that go beyond the normative framework and that I propose can be analyzed under the concept of "affective citizenship". From a critical perspective grounded in American Studies, this paper discusses issues of meaning in these new subject positions, the mechanisms involved in their performance, and, last but not least, how the immigrants' elaborations impart more encompassing forms of citizenship.

1. Undocumented Immigrants

In the present reflection I analyze a couple of undocumented immigrants' texts, mainly texts of an autobiographical nature but also a couple of interviews published in

¹ For forms of visual representation in some of the media venues used as platforms for these acts of citizenship, see Canelo (2020).

newspapers and virtual media. This study includes both immigrants who have attained a middle-way between documented and undocumentedness and therefore feel safer in both exposing their experiences and taking to activism, and immigrants who still live as fugitives but have managed to evade deportation despite this momentaneous visibility. Jose Antonio Vargas is a Filipino born undocumented immigrant who fell short to comply with such legal requirements for a few months and his visibility is more difficult to explain, given that he has been identified by immigration authorities more than once; it is generally assumed, also by himself, that his high profile as an awarded journalist published in respected US media venues has protected him from deportation; Julissa Arce is a Mexican born undocumented immigrant who meanwhile naturalized and Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, a natural of Ecuador, is a DREAMer.

DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals; approved in 2012) and the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors, first proposed in 2001) are federal provisions that cut across the experience of immigrants like these and may have had a lasting influence in the acts of citizenship they came to embrace. DACA and DREAM were intent on acknowledging a degree of integration and belongingness to people who were not responsible to make decisions about entering the country (they were children at the time) and were raised and educated in the US.

Although I first came across some of these authors still as individuals, namely Jose Antonio Vargas's two ground breaking and memorable articles – in the *New York Times* (NYT) in 2011, and in *Time* magazine, in 2012 –, the autobiographical texts allow for a deeper reflection on issues of affective citizenship; actually, these books publication is already an act of citizenship in its disruptiveness (Isin, 2008). The works in question are Vargas's memoir, *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen* (2018), Julissa Arce's autobiography *My (Underground) American Dream (Entre las sombras del Sueño Americano* in the consulted version),² both advertised as best-sellers, and *The Undocumented Americans* (2020), a creative nonfiction book by Cornejo Villavicencio that was a finalist of the National Book Award 2020.³ All of these individuals have

² Both editions were published in 2016.

³ Karla Cornejo's book featured among the 17 books list given by ex-president Barack Obama as his 2020 favorites. In Stephanie Merry (2020), "Barack Obama took a break from promoting his own book to highlight 17 of the year's best", *The Washington Post*, December 17. Accessed on 05.03.2021, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/obama-best-books-2020/2020/12/17/efb95a0e-4098-11eb-8db8-395dedaaa036_story.html.

published these books to add to the visibility of undocumentedness in the public sphere and all of them are involved in the pro-immigration movement.

On a somewhat disproportionate comparison, these texts might stand for the pro-immigration movement these days as slave narratives and autobiographies did for the abolitionist movement in the 19th century. Vargas suggested it himself, when comparing the informal network of regular citizens who show solidarity to these individuals' hardships – and “illegally” help them navigate the system by closing their eyes to false documents, for instance, helping them find immigration attorneys, or driving them to states with milder immigration restrictions to get some documents –, and what was once the Underground Railroad, in its efforts to make slaves free citizens by helping them flee and make their way safely to the North. In both cases, written texts stand as active interventions in the public sphere and also as testimonies to life experiences; they both state claims to a common humanity aimed at abolishing racial, class, and legal divisions that are crucial to the ways these individuals, the undocumented, relate both to the community and to the State.

2. Citizenship and the Affects of Belonging

The undocumented is by and large the citizen's Other, or the non-citizen. The concept of citizenship is based on a fundamental paradox: like any mechanism based on identitarian grounds (in this case related to territory), it is both a regulatory and an emancipatory device. Since citizenship aims to produce equality in contribution and access to a community bounded by national borders, it deals very poorly with difference. The migrants, the exiles and the refugees are figures that always challenged citizenship, exposing its limits and also disturbing the comfortable citizen-minded fiction of the absolute security of sameness within national borders. But the history of citizenship is actually one of flexibility. After all, as the tool to make citizens, its options between land (*jus soli*) and blood (*jus sanguini*), as for admitting the “transformation” of nationalities through bureaucratic processes such as naturalization, showed that the idea of the citizenry allowed for a large degree of political invention, rather than just natural bonds.

Citizenship ultimately puts into law the ways the nation imagines itself in the relation between its members and the State. It is therefore also a cultural concept that absorbs, articulates, and expresses habits, forms of behavior, beliefs, desires, ideas, the aspirations and the interests of particular social groups in given historical contexts. Which is to say that citizenship inevitably takes part in the naturalization of the ideas and

meanings that circulate and guide a particular community in a specific framework. So, while it may be primarily conceived as a legal tool for the distribution of the rights and duties of belonging, its workings are not devoid of an emotional, or affective investment. One must therefore ask what it *means* to be a citizen. Because if citizenship entitles the citizens to derive political, social, and economic rights from a particular territorial sovereign unit, it also requests of them to conceive of their affective attachment to the nation-state in different ways, from patriotism – love of land –, to solidarity to fellow-citizens – love of community (Brown, 2005). Actually, as remarked by Wendy Brown, love of the nation is more often than not demanded from the citizen as a duty rather than a right (*ibidem*).

In fact, the importance of cultural politics of affect to the political life of a society has been acknowledged. The State rules through disciplinary forms of power (Foucault, 1995 [1975]; Butler, 1997; Ahmed, 2004) and also through an emotional investment in discourses such as patriotism and nationalism that fuels the bonds between the individuals, the communities, and the nation-State. Yet, the importance of affects in the practice of citizenship has only of late been tackled. Bilgin Ayata for one notes that the very distinction between “us” and “them” produced by State mechanisms (such as citizenship) generates different feelings among those who may be a part of the public sphere without necessarily being a part of the community. These feelings range from “comfort, unease, anger, empathy, (mis)trust) [and] (dis)respect”, to “love, and hate” (Ayata, 2019: 334) and are “regulated and reproduced in official policies, discourses, and practices” (*ibidem*) that establish what Ayata calls “affective registers”. These registers describe particular, usually marginal, groups in the community (Ayatta, 2019: 331), working as the State’s affective infrastructure, as it were.

Recent studies in affective citizenship follow previous feminist and queer scholarship on issues of the body and the public sphere. Lauren Berlant (1997), for example, distinguishes between acts of intimacy validated by the State, and acts of intimacy punished by the State, which evolved into the notion of the intimate public sphere. For public spheres, she argues, are “always affect worlds” (Berlant, 2011: 226), so the subject’s body is marked by and eventually comes to embody particular experiences of participation or exclusion that result from differences in gender or sexual choice, for instance. Emotions, as both deriving from bodies and affecting other bodies, became a part of this debate by the hand of Sara Ahmed, who called attention to the dynamics of affects: not just felt on a personal level, but deriving from relations and the

“circulation between objects and signs” (Ahmed, 2004: 120). How legality produces affects, in the case of undocumented immigrants, could be added to this strain of scholarship.

Affect studies have certainly been central to a new understanding of “the roles affects and emotions play in the state-subject relations” (Ayatta, 2019: 331). For lack of space to dwell into the extensive literature in the field, suffice it to say that I use affect as a category that includes both emotions and feelings, while it also lays stress on the dynamic nature of affects in context resulting from embodied experience. The latter is a notion inspired by Raymond Williams’s theorization of the structure of feeling recovered by both feminist and affect critics. Williams posited the structure of feeling as the product of a particular period that encompassed social experiences and relationships resulting from the interaction between everyday practices and power institutions that always generated “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (Williams, 2015 [1977]: 23). Affects, following Williams, are complex forms of expression that call together a social and mental dynamics: “not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought [...] at once interlocking and in tension” (*ibidem*). Understanding the interplay as dynamic is fundamental to understanding affect as both what moves the individual to act and the result of that action in the world (agency). Devika Sharma and Frederick Tygstrup (2015: 14) call this dynamic “affectivity” – “that which disposes one to act/react in a particular way”, that is, what happens to us and what we do about it (*ibidem*: 15).

If State forms of governance, as mentioned, can meet different reactions on part of both citizens and non-citizens and generate different kinds of affects, from negotiating, contributing to, or contesting such state efforts (Ayata, 2019: 334), an affective citizenship research will therefore focus on “how citizens themselves respond to, engage in, or practice affective citizenship and what forms of resistance, contestation, compliance, or adaptation are expressed” (*ibidem*). As I shall expose next, the undocumented immigrants’ reflections exhibit the capacity to affect and being affected, so we can deal with their texts as what Grossberg calls “affective organizations and formations” which, as he also asserts, “can become sites of struggle” (Grossberg, 2015: 107). As such, they can favor the emergence of alternative political practices and positions that shatter established concepts.

Along these lines, if we take both DACA and DREAM as results of previous advocacy for the legalization of undocumented immigration, that is, activism that had

impact on the law, we can also examine the acts of citizenship by Vargas, Arce and Cornejo Villavicencio as instances that result from embodied experiences of undocumentedness, or the experience of non-belonging derived from the exclusion from citizenship rights. Here I follow Lawrence Grossberg again, when he argues that

[a]ffect raises questions at the intersection of the psyche, the body and the social – understood not as distinct realms but as relational dimensions of the totality of any lived reality, as historically constituted and articulated, as a socio-political rather than an individualist construction in the first instance. (*ibidem*: 105)

The undocumented subjects in my analysis become citizens by “enacting themselves through acts [that] affect the law that recognizes them” (Isin, 2008: 38).

3. Belonging and Deportation

The undocumented in the US usually fall on the other extreme of belonging; they face deportation. Their experience in the US is rooted on a daily fear that penetrates and molds all their actions both in the public and the private spheres. Despite this, they claim a shared “Americanness” and affective forms of belonging that may translate into or add to their right to be accepted as functional and meaningful members of the community. The affectivity exposed in Arce, Vargas and Cornejo Villavicencio’s texts results from their engagement with the circulation in the US public sphere of discursive constructions that represent the undocumented immigrants as lawless and criminal individuals who injure the nation in both crossing the border without authorization and taking the jobs of the so-called “good [read US] citizen”. It is to this affective economy of undocumentedness that they write against and speak up to.

DACA recipients and DREAMers have been in the lead for immigration reform since the turn of the century, and championed resistance against President Donald Trump’s zero-tolerance immigration politics. DACA and DREAM placed these youngsters in an interstitial position between non-citizen and citizen which in any case protected them from retaliations. However, the sense of safety is never whole because these are temporary provisions, renewed on a temporary basis and pressing strict requirements. Actually, both DACA and DREAM impose the feeling of a life-on-deadlines that curtails any sense of freedom. The tone in Cornejo Villavicencio’s writing is invariably one that merges revolt with claims to justice; Arce has moved on to steady

immigrant activism but she keeps health issues related to the fear and anxiety of years of conscious and dangerous deception (a feature she holds in common with Cornejo Villavicencio), whereas Vargas appears to be in a permanent quest for his own self, or for some sort of truth after years of fabricating conscious and consistent lies.

Although they share the experience of undocumentedness, these three authors relate differently both to the condition and to the legal paths created to citizenship, even if their affects are in the end part of a larger constellation of affectivity. What immediately stands out as a commonality is the fact that all of them are young, high achievers and turned to writing about undocumented as a way of life, as it were, and as an act of affective citizenship. Stepping up through writing could be seen largely as volunteering in the sense that all of them reflect on the bonds the experience of undocumentedness relied on or generated, and how these bonds demand further action. The affects the texts expose engage family and friends, strangers yet members of the undocumented community, and State apparatuses.

Status certainly plays a role in the issue. Before making his undocumentedness public, Jose Antonio Vargas worked for venues such as *The Washington Post*, where he was part of a team who won the Pulitzer prize for the coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings in 2008. He later worked as a reporter for the *Huffington Post* and the *New Yorker*, as well. His paradoxical status as “the most famous illegal in America” (Vargas, 2018: xii-xiii) may explain why he has not been deported yet, since he was identified by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in 2014, in line with his coming out undocumented in the NYT in 2011 and making the cover of *Time* magazine the following year. In the latter, he led a group of 35 DREAMers, all self-portrayed in the pages of the magazine issue, all claiming their “Americanness” and contesting illegality (“We Are Americans, Just Not Legally”, as the title read; Vargas, 2018: 144-145). The same group made it to a Congressional hearing on undocumented immigration, where Vargas’s speech started with the questions “How do you define ‘American’?” (Vargas, 2018: 181).

His option for journalism as a form of revealing the truth of events and create justice was often brought into conflict with his concurrent practices of hiding and faking documents, issues he profusely dwells on in his writing. He masters the dominant discourse about the good citizen: hard work, self-reliance, love of country (Vargas, 2011), but the undocumented status pushes the immigrant into a painful dissociation, as the desire for the requirements of the good citizen is at odds with the practices of “illegality” one engages in on a daily basis: “It means reluctantly, even painfully, doing things I know

are wrong and unlawful” (*ibidem*). The experience of undocumentedness goes beyond the way his deceptions affect the system, though. Routine lying ends up taking a toll on self-perception too: “[m]aintaining a deception for so long distorts your sense of self. You start wondering who you’ve become, and why [...] lying to people I respect and institutions that trusted me [...] running away from who I am” (*ibidem*).

Paradoxically, coming out as undocumented, which he also calls “radical transparency” (Vargas, 2018: 177), ends up implying a measure of freedom from the enforced habits of secrecy and falsehood, and results in an act of self-acknowledgement: “a mix of humiliation and liberation coming with each disclosure” (Vargas, 2011). Maybe that is why he writes about his memoir: “After twenty-five years of living illegally in a country that does not consider me one of its own, this book is the closest thing I have to freedom” (Vargas, 2018: xiii). Making the decision to expose his unlawful condition in such a visible platform as the NYT an act of citizenship, Vargas went on to create a pro-immigration association, Define American (in 2011), and has become the most famous voice for the undocumented community in the US.⁴

Fear is the hallmark of his experience, as described in all interviews and also in the book. Mounting achievement triggered a growing sense of unprotected visibility, suggesting a perversion of the sense of entitlement associated to achievement. The practice of hiding and secrecy also reinforce isolation that translates into an obsession with limits and prohibitions at an interpersonal level: “We begin creating walls and borders in our own relationships” (Itelson, 2020). It should therefore come as no surprise that he links citizenship to community and equality: “Being a citizen is fully knowing I am never the only person in the room” (Vargas *apud* Itelson, 2020).

Citizenship is registered in the title of Vargas’s memoir as a conflicting concept: *Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*, the last word underlined in the book cover, as a willful reminder of the problem at stake. The book is organized according to his concerns with the habit of deception: “Lying,” “Passing,” and “Hiding,” while the title paradoxically suggests intimacy in the evocation of the epistolary genre: the desire for communication, to speak to an audience, to find an interlocutor. The same idea emerges when he defines citizenship as belonging to a particular model of community, one based on freedom: “To

⁴ His activism does not go without critics and polemics, though. Many in the undocumented community do not see his experience as mirroring their own. Vargas is resented as a high-profile immigrant, therefore not subjected to the same penalizing mechanisms as Mexican or Guatemalan laborers, for instance. Vargas admits to what he himself calls his “privilege” and discusses it in his memoir, but ultimately dismisses the criticism as self-damaging for the cause (See Vargas, 2018: 165-174).

me, the question of citizenship and how do I sit here in front of you, claim myself, all the while knowing that I'm never the only person in the room. That we all share a space whether or not we like it" (Masters, 2020). His sense of home is also worthwhile exploring: "home is already here, and it's not a physical space. Home is actually all of these people in my life that have made me feel at home" (*ibidem*). His memoir is dedicated to both his closest relatives and "to every American who has made [him] feel at home in the United States".

That Vargas's coming out undocumented in the 2011 NYT article was an act of activism is confirmed in the autobiography of Julissa Arce. In her *Entre las sombras del Sueño Americano* (Arce, 2016), Arce mentions the illumination she had when Vargas's NYT article interrupted the affective economy of the "illegality" of immigrants, revealing that there were 11 million people like him – and her – and that they were just common people. It brought her to a new sense of herself. She realized that the trauma she had developed, a sense of shame and humiliation she remembered feeling when she was around 14 (Arce, 2016: 265), was closely knit to the frightening prospect of having someone discover 'the truth' about her condition and call her "an illegal foreigner". The condition terrorized her for its dehumanizing aura, although she did not quite understand it then (*ibidem*). The meaning of wrongfulness was also changed by the fact that the numbers were so high and she understood that rather than being alone she was a part of a community.

Although Vargas's act was inspiring, she herself came out of the shadow only after she attained citizenship, and it is a part of the experience she discloses in her book. Arce's autobiography is sold in Amazon as the American Dream fulfilled, the version from rags to riches, now in its undocumented version. Yet, her life story reveals how her affective relationship to the US was punctuated by anxiety and relentlessness, which eventually left marks in her body too, no matter the material success and political rights she achieved. The very drive to success, perfectly in tune with the US imaginary and the centrality of social mobility, evinces however features that are closely knit to the experience of undocumentedness: failure is never an option for the children of undocumented immigrants, and neither is rebellion (*ibidem*: 61). In the end, Arce features as the most extreme case of undercover accomplishment, as she held top positions at famous corporations such as Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch, while still undocumented. She was later considered "2019 Woman of the Year" by the City of Los Angeles and is currently a contributor to CNBC. This proves that educational success is core to the

children of undocumented immigrants in justifying their belonging in the US. Indeed, the affective economy of DACA and DREAM develops around these individuals' experience of US institutions – being “raised and educated in the US”.

Lawrence Grossberg argues that “[a]ffect [...] is always the effect of apparatuses that are partly discursive” (Grossberg, 2015: 109). Such is the case of systematic beliefs, such as national fantasies including the American Dream, which may affect the undocumented because of the values accrued to it ultimately materialize in the experience of social mobility or the deprivation from that experience. The American Dream is a part of the affective infrastructure of the State, in making the US a *desirable* nation and is certainly the guiding light for many undocumented, as for the documented. In the particular affectivity of undocumented migrants, the DREAM Act's very name retrieves the symbolic capital of that national fantasy and that is the reason why Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, even while assuming that DREAM acts as a protective and comfortable robe for her, deliberately sought manual laborers and people who share none of the privileges the law affords exclusively to some children of immigrants as the interviewees for her book. In a similar fashion, it is not uncommon for Julissa Arce's in her autobiography to invert the meaning of the American Dream and call the US “the golden cage” (Arce, 2016: 74), as soon as she realized how obstructed her movements and choices as an undocumented immigrant were, even after she became a successful professional in the financial area. Both these young women eventually nail the issue in their assumed obsession with wealth and making a lot of money to provide for the whole family; but it is Arce who easily conflates the myth of the Dream with the definition of the desirable citizen: “if I were successful and rich, why should anyone forbid me from coming in [crossing the border]?” (*ibidem*: 83).

This is precisely the affective economy Karla Cornejo Villavicencio contests, making a clear choice to document the lived experiences of undocumented workers, people who would not qualify for legal protection, even though they share similar stories in terms of aspirations and endured the same forms of destitution and fear. Her book is explained as an attempt to make room for that wide section of undocumented immigrants who feel completely alien to the privilege someone like Vargas assumes to have. After having excelled in education and making her way through Ivy League institutions (Yale and Harvard), Cornejo Villavicencio sees herself as an activist who, like Vargas, writes to speak truth to power. Her book, *The Undocumented Americans* (2020), was an affective reaction to Donald Trump's election in 2016 and his plans to curtail the few benefits

young undocumented immigrants had won (Trump announced very early on his intention to strike DACA). She took to write it admittedly out of defiance and outrage. Cornejo Villavicencio is the most revolted, the one that questions the system more deeply and the least compromising. *The Undocumented* sets out to give voice to the common undocumented workers from central and south America who undergo decades in the shadow, fearing ICE, the police, anyone. Like her parents, who are included in the book. In terms of methodology, she opts to write what she calls creative nonfiction. This means dispensing with ethnography proper out of the need to protect her interviewees from revealing their identities – she uses fictional names, they are half-people, half-characters (Cornejo Villavicencio, 2020: xvii) –, while still being able to add her own views, quite emotional at times, on the issues at hand.

In *The Undocumented Americans*, Cornejo Villavicencio exposes the experiences of the kind of people who fail to receive instructions on an impending storm because of fear to open the door to police officers, and eventually die shut at home. Those who visit neighborhood botanical shops to get products said to fight medical conditions no doctor has diagnosed so they have no regular prescriptions for, and who, in any case, would not be admitted at a regular hospital for treatment (*ibidem*: 65). They could be the same individuals who endure years of disease after responding to patriotic duty in volunteering to clean up the rubble of the World Trade Center, anonymously as usual, and later unable to claim health assistance because no papers ever attested to their solidarity (*ibidem*: 49) – undocumented workers were the second responders to the rescue operation, after the firemen and ETM workers (*ibidem*: 32) and many non-existent workers like them died anonymously in the Towers (*ibidem*: 50). They are, for Cornejo Villavicencio, the UNDREAMERS, as it were; and she is not sad about them: she is outraged. Her writing is not poetic, but it is respectful. Their experiences speak to other forms of commitment to the Dream and to citizenship; they acted as citizens, they affected the US social, cultural, and economic fabric, but it was a one-sided experience – no rights for their duties.

Unless Cornejo Villavicencio makes us, as readers, reflect upon these forms of active involvement with the nation and the nation-state and consider if they do not qualify as participation and engagement with the community. About these contradictions, she argues “I think I can get things that are in circulation as clichés, and take them out of that, take them out of circulation, and revive them from cliché to something a lot more human,

something a lot weirder”, something that makes the reader “think or feel something” (Menendez, 2020: 7-8).

(In)conclusive Notes

These texts suggest that solidarity with the undocumented also qualifies as an act of affective citizenship. Not just amidst those who experience undocumentedness but from regular citizens who take pains to help them navigate the system. Both Vargas and Arce highlight the roles played by co-workers, teachers, mentors, and friends who acted in solidarity with them. Actually, none of these activist citizens’ stories of achievement would have been possible without the assistance and the friendship of common/good citizens, those who provided affects as forms of community attachment: senses of protection and safety that may count as affective citizenship.

Along the same lines, the writers’ experiences are acts of citizenship also because they entail practices of solidarity towards the undocumented community. Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, for one, assumes a compulsion to help others, especially youngsters, coaching them to climb the educational ladder, when not assisting them financially. The same applies to the foundation Julissa Arce co-created, Ascend Educational Fund, which awards scholarships to children of immigrants like herself regardless of immigration status. Vargas’s memoir announces that part of the proceeds of the book will be donated to his association, Define American. Vargas’s name was recently given to a new elementary school, inaugurated in 2019, in the Bay Area, beating Steve Jobs and other sounding names who made the shortlist with him, including Barack and Michelle Obama. The Superintendent reported that he won after the school community was asked what characteristics someone whose name could stand for the school should have and they replied it should be “someone who was local, who would be an inspiration to the kids, and who had an impact on education” (Wigglesworth, 2019).

These are not citizenship requirements and the school is not the nation; but Vargas highlighted that when he himself was a student, the school provided him with a sense of security and belonging, and his first experiences of solidarity to his condition as well (*ibidem*). Despite the exceptionality of the situation, its pedagogic value is immense, as many students in this school, as in other schools across the US, are also children of undocumented immigrants. That an undocumented immigrant can have this sort of distinction attests to the affective value of citizenship; for these parents, teachers and pupils, Vargas is an example of a good citizen, who belongs. A similar rationale must be

in both Vargas's and Arce's decisions to publish children versions of their books, as they craft a space and a positive identity to the undocumented immigrant.⁵ This may ultimately allow the students to imagine and develop an understanding of the political subjectivities involved in both the notion and the experiences of belonging and engage them in furthering the acts of citizenship.

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⁵ The children's versions are the following: Julissa Arce, *Someone Like Me: How One Undocumented Girl Fought for Her American Dream* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018); and Jose Antonio Vargas, *Dear America: Young Reader's Edition: The Story of an Undocumented Citizen* (HarperCollins, 2020).

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