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“We’re Like Ghosts, but We Have to Be.” Invisibility & Liminality Among Kentuckiana’s Undocumented Population

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Bellarmine University Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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[CONTENT WARNING]

Upsetting material is discussed throughout this work, including but not limited to: mentions of violence, war, organ trafficking, human trafficking, implied sexual assault

Chapter 1: The Introduction & Literature Review

When you think of illegal immigration in the United States, what comes to mind? Is it the children in cages on the United States-Mexico border? Is it caravans full of Central American rapists and Mexican drug dealers? Millions of undocumented immigrants[1] live in the shadows of the United States and are unable to share their stories. With the following project, I aim to amplify the voices of undocumented Latin American immigrants from the Louisville, Kentucky and Southern Indiana area commonly known as Kentuckiana. Utilizing existing literature as well as ethnographic questionnaires and interviews, this project examines the experiences of this local population after their arrival to the United States. To establish a theoretical framework to more easily understand these experiences, I refer to broader themes of liminality and invisibility, as well as conceptualizations of violence in its various forms, which I will expand upon later in this section. Since the narrative around undocumented immigrants is largely controlled by a group that is not comprised of them it is important to act as an amplifier and distribute first-hand accounts from willing members of this population.

Some suggest that ethnography[2] places academic researchers in a unique position of showcasing their "empathy and engagement" as a form of "solidarity with the afflicted" by virtue of its very design, illustrating participants' experiences in their own words (Oliver, 2004;

[1] For the purposes of this research, "im/migrant," "migrant," "immigrant," and "undocumented," all refer to Latin American immigrants residing in the United States without legal permission.
[2] Ethnography is an anthropological research method which studies cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subjects of the study.

Kleinman, 1998.) Celebrated anthropologist Margaret Mead believed that anthropology could play a key role in facilitating social change, and this kind of activism work is becoming more accepted in the field. Humanizing chronically dehumanized individuals is the first step in the process of beginning to understand why im/migrants' stories matter, and they do not often get the opportunity to share them.

Before I address the more personal human aspect of this project, I must first provide some background information. The topic of illegal immigration currently divides the nation. The public's interest in immigration issues comes and goes in waves; however, people who see emigration as their only chance of survival cannot afford such changeability. Latin Americans have migrated to the United States for centuries, but the journey has become increasingly perilous. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the spotlight of media on unauthorized immigrants has fallen intensely on those with brown skin, or who speak different languages. Really, any external indicator of "otherness" has been utilized to judge or ostracize people in this country for a very long time. However, the tragic events of 9/11 resulted in the harsher treatment of more foreign-seeming groups of people. Furthermore, since the 2016 campaign season, attention was brought further onto Latin American immigrants as cries of "build the wall" grew louder, and an us-versus-them mentality became more visible. That mentality then was nurtured into intensified calls to action for many citizens of the U.S. who were passionately opposed to the presence of immigrants in this country. It became increasingly common to find headlines addressing Latin Americans living in the United States unlawfully. When hearing exaggerated descriptions about people in far-away caravans, or reading about mass deportations, it is so easy for U.S. citizens to feel comfortably separated from these issues. I want to humanize the people behind the catastrophized news headlines everyone has been reading.

While there are immigrants in the United States from every Latin American country,[3] the majority come from Mexico and Central America.[4] According to Pew Research Center, close to 50% of immigrants in the United States are from Latin-American countries (2020). Latin Americans form the largest immigrant group in the United States, representative of 17.2% of the total reported population as of 2018 (Doran, et al., 2018). While this number appears to be a significant percentage of the population, it may actually be an underestimate. Latin Americans, especially the undocumented portion of this population, are historically undercounted in the census. Members of the Latin American community tend to distrust the United States government, and undocumented migrants obviously wish to avoid detection (Budiman, et al., 2020; Doran, et al., 2018). Despite the difficulties of making an exact count, United States citizens should be aware of the struggles faced by those who quietly live in the shadows of this country.

A brief history of Latin American migration to the United States:

Well-meaning individuals will sometimes refer to undocumented people as "undocumented laborers." Though that statement is often used in a well-intentioned light, the value in immigrants does not lie in their ability to work, but in their inherent worth as human beings. That being said, most of the documentation relating to migratory patterns relates to work or economics in general, and it is impossible to examine the history of Latin American migration to the United States without acknowledging the extensive record of labor (and labor exploitation) intertwined with America's past, so it will have a strong presence in the following section.

[3] Latin America is comprised of Mexico, most of Central and South America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico.

[4] The majority of today's Central American immigrants come from the "Northern Triangle," referring to the three northernmost Central American countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (Government Accountability Office, 2021).

Immigrant workers have been hired in the U.S. for centuries; they were even referred to as a "golden stream" by Andrew Carnegie, referring to the low cost of immigrants' labor bearing profitable fruits.

The history of Latin-American migration to the United States is characterized by a series of periods in which migration patterns shift and evolve, partially due to American immigration attitudes and ensuing policies. Latin-Americans have lived in what is now considered the United States for as long as it has been a country. When the United States was established, immigration was welcome, as the country was seen as "unsettled" land. However, over the decades with each wave of new immigrants, American citizens began to have conflicts with the idea of immigrants in their country. Numerous anti-immigration policies emerged in an attempt to address these apprehensions. Some worries included fear of economic consequences, possibly resulting from immigrants residing in the U.S., or suspicions about the true intentions of the immigrants that come to the U.S. This pattern has clearly endured throughout history and has created a hostile environment for those newly coming and those who have lived here for years alike.

In the late nineteenth century, anti-immigrant laws were passed to keep certain individuals from coming to the United States. Latin America was *publicly* included, but Mexico had long been seen as a backdoor source for cheap agricultural labor, and this did not change. As long as they kept to the shadows, Latin American migrants did not face too much backlash. In the 1920s, similar acts were passed in response to heightened economic inequality, tainted with racism and xenophobia (Gregory, 2015; Hoffman, 1974; Zolberg, 2009). Later, during the Great Depression, migrants were seen as burdens on the country's resources. Therefore, migrants who were previously ignored by the public and welcomed by employers were now actively rejected by all of the above (Massey et al., 2009).

With the commencement of World War II, the United States began to experience labor shortages and the government quickly changed its tune about how unwelcome and burdensome immigrants were. A solution to the shortages was introduced called the Bracero Program[5] (Calavita, 1992; Massey, 2009). There was not much opposition from the American public, especially because the provisional status of the workers meant they always returned to their countries of origin. This is a pattern that has been repeated throughout history.

After the elimination of this huge work program in the 1960s, large networks of migrant workers suddenly found that they would not be permitted to stay or work in the country legally. It would be very difficult to continue to provide for their families in the ways they had been accustomed to. However, their expectations of better opportunities had previously been so heavily sustained by consistent work that the migratory flow did not stop—it simply continued without authorization. In short, the number of "illegal" immigrants rose substantially at this time in history, not due to an influx of new undocumented immigrants, but because the long-established migratory flows were simply not being accepted anymore.

After the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 was passed, the following period was described by sociologist Douglas Massey as the "era of contradiction" because of the conflicting message this act and surrounding political environment sent (Massey, 2002). Former president Ronald Reagan, one of the most influential people during this era, famously stated that the United States had "lost control" of its southern border. At this time, the United States was helping to fund a violent civil war in El Salvador that resulted in many people fleeing for their lives, incidentally, to the United States (Danner, 1994).Furthermore, due to increased risks associated with crossing as a consequence of the heightening border protection in

[5] *Bracero* literally translates to arm man, which demonstrates the purpose that these workers served for the United States government—a useful pair of arms that did not pose a burden on the host country.

the United States, migrants began to settle indefinitely (Gregory, 2015; Massey, et al., 2002). Therefore, during this era, the actions of the United States government unwittingly drove people toward the country, but the U.S. was increasingly unwelcoming to the refugees it helped create.

This trend of increasing border protection persisted. Later, anti-terrorism laws and the events of September 11th, 2001, led to not only repressive policies targeting terrorists, but also immigrants and perceived foreigners as a whole. Undocumented immigrants—a group comprised of many Latin Americans—served as the perfect scapegoat for many issues. Since the attacks on September 11th, the anti-terrorism war has continued to bleed into an anti-immigrant war. At that time, undocumented migration had begun to decline, but border protections continued (and still continue) to increase (Massey, et al. 2009). Thus, migrants have been paying the price for something not under their control for many years.

The costs of this "era of contradiction" and ensuing timeline were millions of Latin-American migrants living on American soil, feeling disconnected from their place here but unwilling or unable to return to their countries of origin due to increasing militarization of the Southern border. This has made it difficult for migrants to leave, while also maintaining this environment that has made them feel unwelcome and ostracized in the home they have chosen.

The consequences of this hostile environment place undocumented individuals in an "in-between" or *liminal* state—not quite welcome in their new country, but unable to reside in their country of origin from which they had to flee. Those who came as children often do not feel connected to their "home" countries at all, and while they often assimilate more into the United States, they also live with uncertainty as to whether or not the country they have known for most of their life may deport them to an unfamiliar and possibly dangerous place. Studies have indicated that the impacts of the anti-immigration atmosphere of the U.S. are negative, though it

is difficult to hear many personal stories due to the fact that many undocumented immigrants do not want to risk exposure by sharing their feelings and experiences.

Because of the relatively small immigrant population in Kentucky[6] and Indiana[7], the region where Louisville, Kentucky and Southern Indiana meet (Kentuckiana) has not been as extensively studied as other, more migrant-dense areas. The small, but growing, population of migrants in Louisville, Kentucky and the surrounding areas has its own collection of unique stressors, about which they seem to not have been able to speak. The largely ignored undocumented community may benefit from a safe space to discuss traumas and stressors, or from having an opportunity to voice their feelings. Many individuals I interviewed for this project expressed that it felt cathartic to be able to share their stories to just one interested party. Providing more information to promote awareness of serious problems within the migrant community, closer to home, is a primary goal I hope to achieve with this research.

An introduction to the theoretical frameworks utilized in this project

I use the concept of liminality as introduced by noted anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep and expanded upon by anthropologist Victor Turner to investigate the feelings of unbelonging in the United States reported by the interviewees featured in this research. As a result of strong, public, anti-immigrant attitudes expressed in a variety of ways, a constant "low-level" stress is imposed upon Latin-American immigrants. Undocumented immigrants suffer the worst of the effects, as they face a much higher degree of uncertainty. This uncertain status contributes to the space of liminality that was first described as a part of every *rite of passage* (Van Gennep, 1909).

[6] 4% of the total population, and an estimated 22% of the immigrant population is undocumented (American Immigration Council, 2020).

[7] 5% of the total population; an estimated 29% of the immigrant population undocumented (American Immigration Council, 2020).

An individual's life is marked with transitional moments such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. These moments typically include rituals or ceremonies that signify the shift from one status to another: For example, when two people get married, they typically have a ceremony to celebrate and realize the change from being single to being in a partnership. Rituals that may facilitate the incorporation of a person into this country, such as obtaining a driver's license, are unavailable for undocumented immigrants.

The migration from one country to another is known by many anthropologists as a territorial rite of passage, and it is comprised of three parts, as many rites of passage are: the *separation* from the known group or environment, the *transition* or liminal space between, and the *incorporation* into the new group or society (Van Gennep, 1909). No longer simply territorial in nature, many migrants are stuck in a liminal space between the social supports and comforts of their "home countries" and feeling comfortable in the United States. In this context, the widespread anti-immigrant attitudes in this country contribute a great deal to them not feeling at home or completing the *incorporation* step. Other factors, such as family development, English competency levels, and the accumulation of capital also play a large role in whether undocumented individuals feel—and are perceived—like parts of the larger "American" society. However, even some individuals who do establish families, become fluent in English, and build successful careers in the U.S. still feel as though they have not transitioned completely due to the outside view of them or those like them as "illegal aliens"[8] (Chavez, 2012).

This liminal feeling of not belonging is exacerbated by the invisible status many migrants must consent to in order to simply exist in this country. This is known as the *invisibility bargain* as presented by migration scholar Dr. Jeffrey Pugh. Pugh argues under this *invisibility bargain*

[8] This clearly also furthers the feelings of im/migrants as "others." There is no more effective way of saying "You are not welcome here."

the host community tolerates the presence of migrants without active persecution as long as they are perceived as contributing value to the host community and ensure to remain socially and politically invisible. Race, ethnicity, gender, and social class shape the way that multiple forms of difference or otherness make particular immigrants more or less visible or desirable for the host community, and, "more or less likely to be able to maintain secure livelihoods or peaceful relations with citizen neighbors." (Pugh, 2021).

This is perpetuated by and rooted in *structural violence*, which was introduced by Johan Galtung, defined as violence not in the typical sense, but as a foundation of certain groups' suffering based upon long established political, social, legal, or economic traditions. Because they are longstanding, structures resulting in social inequalities are seen as normal when, in fact, large, harmful disparities in safety and security exist between different groups (Galtung, 1969).

Structural vulnerability is the vulnerability experienced by marginalized communities that is placed upon them by social and institutional structures; in other words, when members of an oppressed group are vulnerable to *structural violence* due to their low position in a societal hierarchy (Bourgois, 1988; Bourgois et al., 2017). The term is utilized as a counterpoint to individualistic perspectives which blame an individual's choices for pain, when in fact certain structural factors constrain individual decision making and limit life options, preserving disparities by producing a spectrum of vulnerability and suffering. This is known as *social suffering* (Kleinman et al., 1997). Migrants are particularly vulnerable due to their low position in the economic societal hierarchy, as well as the propensity of the American public to use them as scapegoats and targets for overt xenophobia and ethnic discrimination, the intersection of these factors being known as *conjugated oppression* (Bourgois, 1988). I will be applying these

terms to situate the experiences of the participants in this study within the larger narrative of blame imposed upon them by those opposed to their existence in this country.

Additionally, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identified *symbolic violence,* a concept which indicates interrelations between the social structures of inequalities and individual perceptions. He argues that it works through the perspectives of a *dominating* group and a *dominated* group wherein the groups understand their place and the place of the other as naturally occurring in social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 2001.) These hierarchies exist and are affected by *structural violence* and *vulnerability.* Using this framework, it is easier to conceptualize the position of migrants who come to the United States and unwittingly become actors in a "dominating/dominated" situation, in which creating a comfortable livelihood will typically be nearly impossible to achieve.

Why do people come?

There are many factors that make Latin American people feel it is necessary to make the difficult- and often dangerous- journey to the United States. Some have family in the United States or are seeking better education or employment opportunities. However, political turmoil, extreme violence, and severe poverty are several more factors that drive Latin Americans out of their home countries. Most migrants have faced years of chronic high-level stress before deciding to move to the United States. The decision to leave one's family and home country for a dangerous, expensive, and often traumatizing journey is not one that is or should be taken lightly. Many migrants do not survive, and those that do arrive in an unwelcoming country with constantly changing immigration policies that leave migrants in a constant state of uncertainty.

Public attitudes

Because the way undocumented people are treated in the U.S. heavily influences their level of comfortability and ensuing feelings of incorporation here, it is integral to address the general public attitudes of the larger American community. The idea of building a wall on the United States-Mexico border became something so important in this country that former United States President Donald Trump based his political campaign upon it. This kind of widespread anti-immigration stance impacts the formation of anti-immigration policies, directly affecting a vulnerable population which is unable to fight back without harsh persecution (Casas & Cabrera, 2011; Martinez, et al., 2015). As seen in the history section, several factors leading to these policies and attitudes include political, racial, and economic issues. Immigrants, especially immigrants who entered the country illegally, are great scapegoats for larger, unrelated issues such as economic or national security crises. With these shifting public viewpoints, a large degree of uncertainty projects onto those who are especially vulnerable, such as those without papers.

In the United States, immigrants carry significant symbolic weight (Smith 1997). However, the way that they are depicted by the media is more likely representative of America's aspirations, fears, and insecurities than it is of the "threat" immigrants as a whole pose to the United States. As discussed above, immigrants are effective scapegoats for just about any issue in the United States today, real or imagined. Economics are linked to many discussions about the presence of migrants in this country: Somehow, immigrants are simultaneously perceived as unfair competitors in a limited job market, while also being leeching freeloaders stealing from the U.S.'s shrinking welfare resources (De Genova, 2004; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994).

Or perhaps Latin American migrants have come to steal the United States. Patrick Buchanan, a conservative who was a senior advisor to three American presidents, sounded the

alarm: since 9/11, millions of undocumented immigrants have crossed the border, and it is a part of a plot to, “reconquer the American Southwest, which many Mexicans view is their birthright.” (Buchanan 2006). On a less extreme, but more common and still disturbing note, according to a survey conducted in 2006, 48% of the American population responded yes to an item which read, “newcomers from other countries are a threat to American traditional customs and values” (Kohut & Suro 2006). Needless to say, in general, the United States is not very friendly to im/migrants.

The anti-immigration attitudes of this country have also been accompanied by a rhetoric of Latin-American immigrants as being a threat to security. Militant “vigilante” groups on the Southern border exist, members of which have taken it upon themselves to defend America from a perceived invasion. In 2004, two men named Chris Simcox and Jim Gilchrist founded the vigilante group known as the Minutemen, “to do the work the government has not been able to do” (Cabrera & Glavac, 2010; Chavez, 2008). They have been known to puncture tanks full of potable water for migrants in the scorching Sonoran Desert, a place known for causing thousands of migrant deaths due to dehydration and exposure, to drain the precious resource and put traveling migrants in danger. Hundreds of anti-immigrant organizations like the Minutemen exist in the States today, many with close ties to white supremacist groups, and they are associated with violent anti-immigrant crimes across the country (Cabrera & Glavac, 2010; Carranza 2021; Mosley, 2019; Schabner, 2011). The extremist views harbored by Minutemen and those like them are uncommon in the United States though their numbers and presence seem to be growing. Passive anti-immigrant sentiments are much more customary within the larger American populous (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Martinez, et al., 2015).

This is not to say that the entire U.S. population harbors anti-immigrant sentiments, there are numerous organizations and individuals putting forth efforts to attempt to make life easier for migrants in this country. I want to acknowledge this fact while also making the argument that the negative way many citizens of the U.S. feel and act toward immigrants—Latin American and Hispanic immigrants specifically—contributes to the deep sense of instability that plays a major role in the liminal space in which many migrants get stuck.

As shown previously in the history of Latin American immigration section, anti-immigrant attitude levels fluctuate and often, policies are put into place because of prevalent anti-immigrant sentiments. I want to emphasize that the anti-immigrant sentiments are not only happening on individual levels. Examining how difficult it is to get legal entry into the U.S. for specific groups should give a clue to some of the actors on the violence continuum. From structural violence to symbolic violence to xenophobia and race-related hate crimes, not only is the constant discomfort caused by individual interactions, but the powerful actors of the state have also had a heavy hand in making the United States inhospitable to migrants. The people interviewed for this project mentioned having experience with much of the above.

Literature review

I consulted three primary texts for this project. They all include some form of ethnographic research. The first two works were *They Leave Their Kidneys in the Fields* by Sarah B. Horton and *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* by Seth M. Holmes. Both include an intimate look into the experiences of migrant farmworkers based on years of ethnographic research which included interviews, participant observation (immersion of the researcher into the lives and activities of research subjects), and active advocacy for their research participants.

Seth Holmes is both an anthropologist and a medical doctor, and in his work recounts the stories of undocumented food production and agricultural workers, having harvested plants with them and accompanied some workers to clinics and hospitals (2013). Holmes also interviewed citizens in the towns surrounding the labor camps in which he conducted much of his research. In his book, he includes statements from acquaintances, executives of the food production companies, and the healthcare workers treating the laborers. Holmes argues that racism, anti-immigrant sentiments, chronic dehumanization, and exploitation obscures any sense of empathy people may have for migrants and perpetuates social inequalities. The normalization of migrant suffering leads to it being forgotten by those who feel no need to acknowledge or act to negate it, which is most of the U.S. population.

Anthropologist Sarah B. Horton conducted similar research with migrant farmworkers, documenting their day-to-day lives over nearly a decade (2016). She worked to understand why migrant farmworkers suffer heatstroke at disproportionate numbers compared to others in their field. In her work, Horton argues that a tightly interwoven web of public policy and private interests creates incredible suffering for migrant farmworkers in the United States. Many times, the reasoning behind the disproportionate anguish is attributed to the choices of individual laborers, when, in fact, their environment—from their direct supervisors to the policymakers of the United States—contributes to an exceptional burden of structural vulnerability on the farmworkers, which makes health complications much more likely. In the United States, as stated above, migrants are used as scapegoats for larger issues, but it begins at the individual level: When people begin to look immediately to the individual for blame, they ignore the vast institutions of systemic oppression that exist in this country.

While these works are primarily focused on the social inequalities and suffering of undocumented agricultural laborers in relation to healthcare, they were incredibly useful as foundations to build upon my theoretical research. However, they work within the scope of agriculture and focus, almost solely, on the suffering of the research participants. In my work I aim to humanize the participants of this research projects before anything else, and endeavor to avoid *exclusively* discussing the suffering they endure. The social injustices rampant in this country are important to talk about and inevitably find a spotlight in this piece due to their infection being unavoidable. However, I find that much of the literature surrounding im/migrants focuses on the victimhood and trauma they face to the extent that the humanity and personality of the individual is not as present. In my opinion, this reduces the individuals once more to two-dimensional receptacles for sympathy.

Karla Cornejo Villavicencio's work *The Undocumented Americans* was much of the inspiration for this feature of the project. She wrote about *people*. After visiting sites and conducting interviews, Villavicencio wanted to write about the complexities of the people she interviewed: their lives, their stories, their experiences. In her book, she utilized a very direct approach and ensured that the reader understood what her interviewees were conveying without the reader being present. Her approach to translation was also something that liberated me from the fear of translating the words of my interviewees to English in an unhelpful way. As Villavicencio put it:

> "I approached translating the way a literary translator would approach translating a poem, not the way someone would approach translating a business letter. I hate the way journalists translate the words of Spanish speakers in their stories. They transliterate, and make us sound dumb, like we all have a first-grade vocabulary. I found my subjects to be

warm, funny, dry, evasive, philosophical, weird, annoying, etc., and I tried to convey that tone in the translations."

I did not take many liberties in my translations of the people I interviewed, but I attempted to communicate their tone accurately, without worrying that I was illustrating them as unintelligent.

Villavicencio emphasized something I find very important: not reducing someone to their traumas. Documenting someone's experience can be helpful, but in the end, one must take a step back from associating people without documents solely with their trauma, with death, or even solely with their label of "migrant" or "undocumented." These things are undeniable components of many undocumented peoples' lives, but reducing someone to their suffering is reductive and harmful, and once again strips away the other complexities of their experiences as humans. While this project documents testimonies of crossing the border and of living in the United States as an inhospitable environment, I did not cut out the interviewees' jokes, hopes, dreams, or good experiences. Those details are integral to understanding and humanizing people, more than for the sake of sympathy, but to attempt to better understand their experience.

Methods

In the words of anthropologist Louise Lamphere, ethnography allows us to view undocumented individuals "not as objects of study but as subjects of their own experience and inquiry," and thus not only helps to contextualize impersonal statistics and known demographic research; it also provides valuable new information (2004).

Conducting these interviews allowed me to connect with people and listen to testimonies that they had not been able to share with many others thus far. It was a humbling experience to be able to listen to these stories and I am honored that the individuals I spoke with chose to share them with me. I distributed IRB-approved questionnaires to im/migrant community networks in

the Kentuckiana area, following up with ethnographic interviews.[9] In the end, though there is a huge lack of migrant women's voices in much of the literature pertaining to undocumented immigrants, fourteen out of the final twenty subjects in my study were women. This was not purposeful, but the inclusion of their voices in this work is very important to me.

The choice for ethnographic interviews to be the main research component of this project meant I was given the opportunity to meet with twenty previously or currently undocumented immigrants and bear witness to their stories. Ethnographic interviewing allows researchers to contextualize many known issues faced by the undocumented population in this country as well as to get first-hand accounts from real people in a local area. Thus, this method not only helps to contextualize established demographic research and impersonal narratives; it also provides valuable new information.

Initially, a major goal of this project was to get real people's voices to support existing literature and obtain some insight on the well-being of undocumented individuals in this area. However, it quickly became clear that giving the people I interviewed space to share their stories was actually quite meaningful to them. The truth is that the people *sin papeles*[10] in this country live largely in the shadows, and too many have slipped through the cracks. Ethnography as a research method was uniquely suited to this endeavor because it allowed me to focus on the *human* aspect of this very human matter. Though an experience can never be known completely, this project provides insiders' perspectives on being a person without documents in Kentuckiana.

Some suggest that ethnography places academic researchers in a unique position of showcasing their "empathy and engagement" as a form of "solidarity with the afflicted" by virtue of its very design, illustrating participants' experiences in their own words (Oliver, 2004;

[9] See Appendix C for more information on my research methods.
[10] "Without papers"

Kleinman, 1998.) By allowing me to interview them, and sharing very sensitive information with me, the people I interviewed expect me to represent them accurately and serve as a kind of advocate by spreading awareness using the very human perspective that ethnography allows me to utilize and hopefully, go further into applied activism to help improve the conditions of this country for migrants. I hope to do them some semblance of justice.

Chapter 2: The Journey

"I just wanted to go back to my mom. I couldn't do it anymore." --Lucia

The passage to the United States is often a dangerous one. As shown in previous research and in the following stories, the experience of crossing the border as someone without prior state permission is always risky, and, recently, increasingly life-threatening. Unfortunately, the word "migrant" implies some sort of voluntary movement. Almost none of the interviewees I spoke with felt as though they had a choice. They were leaving inhospitable conditions whether it be in the form of a bloody civil war, organ trafficking, or severe poverty. The common belief that most migrants make the risky choice to cross into the United States voluntarily eliminates the likelihood of empathy from those who already believe Latin-Americans come with malicious intent and even those who passively believe that im/migrants come to the U.S. unnecessarily. In addition to this, the paths to migrating legally to the United States are twisted and marked with nearly unsurpassable obstacles.

In this chapter, I will detail common ways in which individuals attempt to cross the border, legally and illegally, and contextualize the fundamental challenges presented by these attempts. Following this, the testimonies of 4 undocumented people themselves will illustrate their respective crossing attempts and the often unsafe circumstances faced along the way.

Coming legally

A common question from individuals not familiar with the plight of migrants is, "Why don't they just wait their turn and come legally?" The truth is that for many migrants who must come to the U.S. using unauthorized means, it is very difficult to obtain legal "papers" at all, let

alone in a timely manner. Legal immigration to the United States relies on visas, which can be permanent or temporary in nature. The three major approaches used by people to acquire legal entry into the United States are family ties, employment, and requests for asylum or refugee status. However, to obtain permission even as a refugee depends on certain factors that may motivate the U.S. and may not have anything to do with the actual danger posed to the possible refugee or asylee. For example, Cuban citizens fleeing Castro's communist regime were generally immediately granted legal status, something which was in the U.S. government's political interests, while Salvadorans fleeing from the country with the highest homicide rate in the world have been deported in large numbers due to claims that their pleas were not credible (Kahn 2016). This form of structural violence may very well end in physical, mortal violence, but it has been so accepted by the American community that, somehow, there is no public outrage at the fact that people are being turned away at the border of the "great American melting pot" to face widespread gangs, violence, corruption, and murder in their countries of origin.

There are caps put on the number of every kind of visa given each year which are significantly lower than the number of individuals attempting to enter the United States lawfully. Thus, there is a large waiting list of individuals waiting for approval. Theoretically, immigrants seeking permanent residency can apply for a green card, which is an informal term for Lawful Permanent Residency status. There are many limitations on who can apply for green cards, such as requirements of sponsorship from family or employers and a lack of any type of legal infraction.[11] In recent times, the United States has granted approximately one million green cards a year, with half going to immigrants already residing in the States, and half going outward.

[11] Including entering the United States unlawfully in the past without going through Border Patrol.

However, with an estimated peak population of twelve million undocumented immigrants already residing in the United States and millions awaiting approval abroad, the number of legally granted residencies is scarce in comparison. There are significant backlogs of visa applications, and many people wait for decades for their approval to come into the country. Many people wait for years for their turn only to be *denied* access as well (Budiman, 2020; Gelatt 2019).

An experience that is commonly overlooked by citizens of the United States is that of waiting for even just a *tourist* visa when one is from another country. One individual whose family immigrated to the United States legally wrote about how most people in Latin American countries must wait for years to even visit the United States legally, much less to live here, and this is well known in immigrant communities (Machado, 2017). To come to the U.S., someone must prove financial independence or an established family in the home country (i.e., reasons not to stay in America once they get here) and pay huge fees to even be considered. When someone is fleeing abject poverty or violence, they clearly cannot afford to wait years and pay thousands of dollars. Bearing these factors in mind, one may be more inclined to understand why so many people do not or cannot come to America in complete compliance with our laws (Machado, 2017; Martinez, et al., 2015).

Coming illegally

Undocumented individuals arrive in the country using various methods. Many unauthorized migrants in the United States are actually people who came to the country legally and remained longer than they were permitted to stay. This applies to people who have had visas or had other protections such as Temporary Protected Status but were unable to obtain legal residency before the allotted time ran out. Other means by which migrants enter the United

States include hiring *coyotes* or human smugglers who promise to guide people across the border. This is a highly hazardous method, but unfortunately, a very commonly utilized one. Would-be migrants often must use this approach to enter the country when choosing not to enter with counterfeit documents or by overstaying visas. Globally, the use of human smugglers is more popular when legal pathways are limited and border control becomes more militant, as is the case in the U.S. (Cassidy & Lynch, 2016; IRCA, 1986; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1997). This method poses its own risks, as these smugglers can do as much harm as they can help. Sometimes, the relationship between *coyotes* and the migrants they have been hired to help can be mutually beneficial, while other times the relationship can be exploitative and dangerous. Countless stories exist of kidnapping, extortion, and abandonment at the hands of these smugglers, as the relationship is one of extreme vulnerability for the smuggled. Migrants and their families may pay vast sums of money, which often forces them to go into extreme debt to a person who may or may not abandon them, or demand more money for their "safe" arrival to the U.S. For those desperate enough to leave behind everything and everyone they know and love, taking out loans or using any property as collateral becomes a necessary step to take, which adds to the vulnerability suffered by migrants both during and after the crossing (Slack & Campbell, 2016). Migrants must then endure an oftentimes long, complex journey with no guarantee of safety, and, if something goes wrong, must forego legal assistance.

Additionally, the route through Mexico that many Central Americans and Southern Mexicans have to take is not very safe. There is widespread corruption among law enforcement officials, as well as gangs that await vulnerable migrants passing through (Carling, et al., 2015). With increasing pressure from past administrations, border patrol in southern Mexico was

strengthened to discourage migrants from Central America (Isacson et al., 2014). This just makes the journey all the more dangerous.

In the subsequent pages, you will meet some individuals who have been generous enough to share their stories of crossing the Southern border with me. For their safety, pseudonyms have been used in place of their actual names. Portraying the complexities of the stories I have been told is a challenge, and the following tales were written with the aim to present the most accurate translation as possible.

Maria

The first person I interviewed was a small woman in her mid-forties. Maria had a wide smile that bloomed more the longer we sat and conversed. She seemed nervous at the beginning of the interview (so was I), but throughout the meeting, she began to give me deeper-level, more confident responses. We met near her workplace because, like many other interviewees, she was understandably cautious about inviting a stranger to her home. However, she assured me she was comfortable speaking about her experience at that location, and later, I would understand why. She told me her work was her safe space. It was a little bubble where she could feel comfortable, even if she could not feel that way anywhere else. “The people here are my family, at [popular fast-food restaurant], because I do not have any other family here [the United States.] I laugh with them here... The outside is the problem, not in here.”

Maria is from the Tlaxcala state in Mexico, and she was unhappy with the prospects there for herself and her children. She worked as a short-term laborer in Mexico to make money to get to the U.S., but that kind of unstable work environment was one of the reasons she chose to emigrate. She told me that every year, due to the amount of danger the routes pose, the cost of

crossing the border increases, and she wanted to be sure she had enough money to cross safely. She wanted to come so that she could eventually bring her children to give them proper educations, a "better life," something she did not have growing up. "I also wanted to make enough money so I can finally have something for myself when I am an old lady!" She laughed and then paused. "But I have not made that money yet." The air briefly grew somber. Maria has lived and worked in the United States for seventeen years.

When she talked about her journey to the United States, Maria's facial features would crumple into an appearance of discomfort. She was not able to provide very high levels of detail because it was difficult for her to revisit the memories, but she wanted to share what she could. "It stays with me, what happened on the way. It is important to talk about it. Every one of us who has crossed into the U.S. has a story. Some of us have more dangerous stories than others." She told me she did not suffer "too much" on her journey, but that she knows people who have. Her sons, the kids she was trying to make a better life for, are not children anymore, and they are still in Mexico. She had attempted to send for them after she had migrated and settled somewhat in her new home. However, in the middle of their own trek, her sons had chosen to return to their village. "It was because of what they found in the desert. They saw many terrible things. It is very risky, you know; many people lose their lives." She was referencing the Sonoran Desert, one of the only options for migrants now; the desert notorious for causing the deaths of thousands of migrants in the last decade (Campbell-Staton et al., 2021). Maria told me she would like to find a lawyer to help her bring her sons over legally on a work visa, but she thought that was unlikely to succeed.

As for the journey itself, which she described as "risky and dangerous," Maria used a human smuggler, a *coyote*. She spoke of being "closed in a house" for an unknown amount of

time, being given food occasionally, but unable to leave. She recounted her group scaling many large fences, “Then we had to walk… and run, so much. Hours at a time, fearing for ourselves.” Wrapping her arms around herself, she continued. “The worst part was when we found things… backpacks, clothes on the ground, and sometimes… pieces of… people thrown around. We all knew that could be us.” She shuddered when telling me, “Many people are left in the desert because there are bad people in the desert. Sometimes they mug you, they kill you, they take your money… there are many things that happen there.”

Toward the end of Maria’s crossing story, I asked if she knew anything about the journey before leaving Mexico. “I knew a bit, but nobody told us how horrible the desert is, and that there are dead bodies there. Nobody.” She looked angry. “They did not tell us that the walk is hard and fast in the desert because otherwise immigration would catch us and do whatever they want to us.” She took a moment to close her eyes and breathe deeply. I stayed silent, a sick feeling about what may have happened creeping in.[12] I tried to give her the space to gather herself. She opened her eyes and expressed that she could not elaborate at that time. Then, she continued with her earlier statement. “The coyotes make it so you think you can do it, that anyone can do it, so you give them your money. But nobody told us about what really happens.”

Lucia

A short, timid woman walked out of the back room of the fast-food restaurant where I had conducted a few interviews before. Lucia knew Maria and had tentatively agreed to speak with me. At some points in her story, she started to speak quickly and confidently, but most of it was her soft-spoken, almost shaky voice. She left her village in Mexico when she was only

[12] There is widespread reported abuse by immigration and border patrol agents of migrants crossing the border illegally (Cassidy & Lynch, 2016; Brangham & D’Elia, 2021).

fourteen. “We were desperate. We were poor; we didn’t have anything to eat. Didn’t have a house. We were surviving, but just barely.” She described where her family lived: a small hut with a cloth “door” and dirt floors that would often turn to mud, no longer fit to sleep on, even with woven grass mat beds. The roof was made of palm leaves, which Lucia seemed to be embarrassed by, laughing nervously. Although Lucia laughed, her brow remained slightly furrowed. In addition to her family’s poverty, her older brother wanted to stop Lucia from falling into the “delinquency” becoming more common in their village and she wanted to continue her education, so after months of saving money, they set off.

Lucia and her brother attempted to cross the border three times in total before succeeding, but I only heard about two. The first time, they hired coyotes to take them and flew northward on a “tin-can” plane from southern Mexico, continuing on foot after arrival. As soon as they entered the desert, Lucia said, they were assaulted.

Migrants, especially migrant women, are often subjected to physical and sexual violence on the path to the U.S. Violent groups on both sides of the border target migrants, ranging from nationalistic vigilantes to members of drug cartels looking to prey on the most vulnerable of the vulnerable (De Leon, 2015; Leyva-Flores, et al., 2019; Rosas, 2011). Lucia looked uncomfortable and shifted in her seat as she described how they “grabbed us and took out their guns.” The men made the members of Lucia’s party line up, “They made the men unbuckle their pants and take off their shoes.” We had to take off some of our clothes; I thought they would do… bad things to the women. Thank God they did not.” The group gave the men small amounts of money and was let go with minimal damage, walking for one day before being caught by Border Patrol. Border patrol took their names and fingerprints and simply dropped the group on

the other side of the border in Mexico; it did not matter where they had actually come from, all Border Patrol wanted was to get them *out*.

Lucia explained that in a Mexico border town, the group was able to find a woman who promised to get them over personally— for a price, of course. The woman had found some smugglers to guide the travelers, but she abandoned the group when they reached the dangerous Sonoran Desert. “Then we were jumped again by some men, but this time, it was uglier.” The muggers took people’s money by asking first, but when they asked one man and he refused, Lucia said, they got angry and beat his head with a pistol. Lucia would not repeat what they said, but she said they screamed horrible words at him before leaving him on the ground.

Then, they started their intrusive examinations of the women, “they violated us, shoved their hands in our shirts and pants, supposedly to check,” and, puzzlingly, forced them to take their hair out of their buns. When the women complied, the muggers started to cut their hair. Lucia looked down. “I don’t know why they did that. They want money, the people that attack immigrants. They left our hair on the ground.” For one woman, “They put their hands where… nobody should put their hands.” Lucia said that these men were from a well-known gang. They took the group’s food and water, except for one gallon that had to be split between the group, and left them stranded.

They could not waste much time processing that traumatic event. The man who was beaten was attended to as much as possible, and the coyotes told the migrants that they only had to walk twelve more hours. The group did not walk twelve hours. Instead, they walked for three nights and three days, according to Lucia. “We had to hold hands to keep going. For me, because I was so young, they would point at the horizon and say, ‘hey, you see that? When we get there,

we will be done. It will be over.'" When they got to a safe spot on the trail, she remembered, she broke down crying. "I just wanted to go back to my mom. I couldn't do anymore."

Overall, the last trip that allowed them to cross and stay lasted eight days, but to the fourteen-year-old Lucia, it took *forever.* She told me she remembered seeing snakes at night, and dirty clothes, old, weathered, strewn out on the ground. "We saw a man, dead or dying, but they did not let me see him for long. We couldn't stop. People would fall, faint, and we couldn't stay with them." She was clearly remembering these sights, with her fists clenched and her brow deeply furrowed, eyes gazing at something that was not in the room with us, at least physically. After gathering herself, she picked at her fingernails while describing the cruel landscape of the desert, where cacti with spikes would pierce the migrants' shoes and tear up their pants, sticking into their skin.

Lucia told me she wished she had known more before she left, and expressed that as a "naïve little girl" she had not understood the gravity of the move or the difficulty of the journey. I asked her if she had heard about the Americans that try to stop migrants from crossing. She had heard of them, but her group actually came across a man in a border town who helped them. "I guess he was nice. He told us to move slowly and quietly, and we got in his truck. There were people nearby with guns who would—I guess he thought they would shoot us. They are not supposed to, I don't think, but I know they do often shoot immigrants." Lucia and her brother were picked up by her brother's contact and transported to a town in Southern Indiana, but she says she still has dreams about what she saw in the desert.

Rey

Rey is a successful business owner who has been living in the United States for thirty-two years. His border-crossing testimony was much longer than the others; this part alone took him over an hour to recount to me. He has family in the United States and maintains a steady support system, so he was one of few interviewees that had been able to share his story multiple times before. He was a good storyteller; he was very expressive and spoke a lot with his hands. He started by explaining that he left his home country, El Salvador, because of the civil war that had been raging for nearly a decade at that point.

The Salvadoran Civil War was a war fought between the government of El Salvador and left-wing guerilla fighters from 1979 to 1992. The violence, however, was not contained to these two groups. It bled out to civilians, leading to the deaths of at least seventy-five thousand people and hundreds of thousands of missing persons, according to the United Nations. The UN estimated that 5% of the violence came from the guerillas, and about 85% was a result of the actions of the Salvadoran armed forces and death squads contracted by the government. Under the Reagan administration, to help "stop the spread of communism," the United States sent one-to-two million dollars per day to the Salvadoran government. This resulted in at least $4.5 billion dollars in aid sent, though some sources claim up to six billion over the thirteen-year war. The U.S. also provided military training and equipment to Salvadoran troops (Danner, 1994; Hayner, 2011; Howard, 2008). Thus, the Salvadoran government received a lot of resources. So, who was fighting in the war? Rey explained that civilians were drafted by both sides. Many were drafted against their will, including children. While Rey explained this, he looked frustrated at the thought; perhaps he was considering what his own sons may have gone through had he stayed. He told me, "They would pick you up as long as you were old enough to hold a rifle. Ten, eleven, twelve-year-olds."

I asked him why he chose the moment that he chose to leave. Rey detailed being recruited by both the army and the guerillas, having to bribe members of both groups to avoid being drafted. "…It had gotten to the point where you had to choose. Go against the government and die for no reason, or join the army and kill the civilians just because the rich people want to control the territories." The last time the army came through his town he had only narrowly escaped.

One day after that close call, using some money from his mother and that he had earned from his job at the circus, Rey left El Salvador. He wanted to get to California to meet his brother who had already made the journey. Rey thought the trip would be relatively safe; he paid extra to go through the mountains rather than the desert. Besides, he had the money to make it, and the crossing was only supposed to last two weeks.

It was relatively smooth at first; the group of twenty rode in vans through Guatemala and Belize over the next few days, sleeping on each other or on floors of safe houses, to arrive in Mexico, where the *coyote* bribed Mexican border patrol to allow them through. There were some logistical hiccups which necessitated the group staying in safehouses for days or a week at a time, but Rey said it was not a huge deal, since everyone had money for food. He said there was no real problem until a week later when the group arrived in Mexico City.

"In Mexico City, there was a problem. Mexican immigration was there. We had to watch for them, change our clothes, because they know how to spot us, because they know how to get things from immigrants. No one else, not even the muggers, did it like them. At least muggers ask first." The group remained in Mexico City for around two weeks due to more complications with their smuggler's "hook-ups" not following through with promises. However, the group became a bit *too* comfortable; Rey said they even went dancing at a disco in town. He had a

friend who had "gone home" with a girl after their night partying. Unfortunately, he got lost the following morning trying to find their group's safehouse. "…The cops saw him, and they knew what he was. He wasn't being careful. They threatened him and took his money; they knew there were more of us, but he told them there weren't." Rey shrugged. "I guess they believed him, he was pretty beat up 'cause he didn't have much money. But he didn't say anything."

From Mexico City, they rode a bus. The trip had already taken double the time it was supposed to. The coyote was supposed to have connections who would fly the migrants over the border in a small airplane, but immigration caught the first group the coyote sent and deported them back to El Salvador. "So that made it worse. We had to get on another bus. We were told not to socialize, because we talked different." Many Mexican citizens know of Central American migrants trudging through their towns, and they are seen as a nuisance. "If we were asked where we came from, we told them the name of some village, because apparently, we talk like them, but they're Mexican so it was okay. We just had to blend."

The group was tired; they just wanted to get to the United States and their money was running out. They had to reduce meals to once a day and the coyote brought them to a small apartment. "The coyote told us not to leave, I guess it was a dangerous *barrio.*[13] We stayed there, I don't know, three days, being quiet and scared, no food at all." As for water, Rey said, they drank from the sink. The coyote returned and brought them tortillas and beans before leaving for another three days. When the coyote returned, he told them they would soon be able to leave, but not with him. His job ended there. The coyote had sold them.

[13] "neighborhood"

According to an interview by the BBC, human smugglers (coyotes or "polleros") call their human cargo "pollos" or chickens. Coyotes may hold *pollos* hostage in houses, telling them the price of their guided journey just went up, until relatives pay large sums of money. If the deeply dehumanizing experience of being sold is not enough, in some cases, these situations end with *pollos* being assaulted, abused, or killed (Coomarasamy, 2009). Rey explained it to me like this: "They already have your money in their pocket. So, they can sell you to other *polleros* and then *they* will get more money from you or your family, however they have to." The group pled for food once they met their new *pollero* and hours later, he generously brought the exhausted party packages of cold hot dogs to eat before telling them it was time to go.

"We started walking in the morning. And he told us, 'Throw your backpacks [away], just keep what you have.' So, we did. Nobody had any money, so they didn't mind much." Rey had a small amount hidden in his shoe, but he could not reveal this to his group for fear of it being stolen.

When they started into the hills, "we didn't even think about sweaters, it was so hot." An odd mention, but he shook his head like that lack of sweaters had been a bad decision and continued: "It wasn't exactly the desert, it was more the mountains, but we didn't know what to expect." They walked up the mountainous hills where they found vendors who were selling some form of liqueur; Rey could not remember what kind. The coyote bought everyone a bottle. "Even some ladies who said they didn't drink, he said, 'lady, you'll need this. Drink it.' So, they did. And we did need it."

They walked for hours, sometimes catching glimpses of helicopters or officers on horses and four-wheelers. Rey was not sure where he and his group was after a while. He said they had to hide in bushes and run, occasionally seeing other groups. "… But this guy [the coyote] was

pretty good. He avoided immigration and we listened to what he said. He even had a radio." Finally, in the evening, the group was able to rest. The coyote explained that they were already in the United States, so they should not worry, but that he had to check over the side of a large hill to make sure the coast was clear. He promised to come retrieve them as soon as he verified that it was safe. But soon, hours had passed, and he had not come to get them.

Back in the present, Rey looked like he was seeing the memories again, his eyes glazed, but then he continued. "It got dark. And cold. So cold, you can't even imagine. We hadn't eaten so we… and we had been running, so we were sweating, but it had turned to ice." They were freezing, but too frightened to move. He squeezed his eyes closed and started hugging himself like he was protecting himself from the remembered chill. "I thought I was going to die." Though he kept telling me the story, Rey's eyes stayed tightly shut and his arms were wrapped around each other like he was in that freezing moment again. "We were so cold. Extremely cold, I can't describe to you. But we started to huddle together, hug each other, to be warm. It didn't really work. My ears were freezing, and my toes were painful… it was hard to breathe."

Then, thankfully, he started to slowly relax and describe what came next.

At long last, in his desperation, Rey told his group he would have to go find some sort of warmth, and he finally revealed that he still had money. Though his group warned him he would die if he left the group, he started towards a distant light with another member, and they found themselves in a gas station. Inside they found their coyote, drinking coffee and relaxing. After a tense verbal exchange, they reunited with the rest of the party, and the coyote somehow obtained a van to drive them further into what was supposedly the United States.

"We got in and he was driving, it was nine of us then. We were piled on top of each other and there was a tarp over us. He told us not to move or make a sound. After like an hour, we hear on the radio, 'hey, there's cops, *la migra*.'[14] And the guy told us, 'Hey, I'm going to drive off the road. This is the plan. I am going to stop. Once I stop, nobody knows each other. Especially not me. If you tell them you know me, somebody *will* find you and they *will* kill you" The coyote told his pollos to run as fast as they could and to meet him where they stopped the next day, about eight hours from then. "He told us, 'The cops don't run very fast, so you have to.'" Rey looked proud when he proceeded, "So I had my feet on the window of the minivan, I was ready. As soon as he stopped, I pushed the window and started running, not thinking." It was an orange orchard, but it was on a hill, and Rey wanted to get over to the other side where he thought he could hide. He sprinted for fifteen, twenty minutes, he said. "Uphill, uphill, uphill… I was running. Everybody was running. But it was a steep hill. I did get to the top, but…" He stopped, and looked down, almost shamefully. "I tripped and fell. I tumbled down that entire hill, the other side of it. I rolled into a bunch of tumbleweeds and thorns with so much… force." He had "hundreds" of scratches, partially numbed by adrenaline and cold. "My face, arms, legs, my body was scratched and bleeding. Everywhere, especially my face, was bloody. I couldn't move—it was so stiff."

Apparently, a Border Patrol agent had followed him, because a sinister-looking silhouette finally reached the top of the hill from which Rey had fallen. The agent began to yell down at Rey, telling him that he was "only there to help, it was not worth [Rey's] life to get to the United States. "I said, no, it's not fair. I was so, so hungry, so thirsty, and I wanted to go with him." But Rey was hurt, badly. "The thorns in that desert area hurt, and they were so deep in my

[14] Border Patrol

skin. I said *no, he is gonna have to come get me*. I've come so far; I have these things so deep in my… my *everywhere*…" Rey had made it all the way to that point. He was not about to go through *more* pain only to admit defeat, turn himself in, and be sent back to El Salvador.

Suddenly, another member from Rey's party reached the top of the hill and, upon seeing the agent, started sprinting the other way. The agent immediately followed. Rey thought the agent had seen him, was talking directly *to* him, but perhaps it was an act of God that he did not actually know where Rey was in the dark.

"I said, oh my God, he didn't see me! So I immediately started to pray. I prayed and I prayed." When the two men had started running, dirt, rocks, and sand fell onto Rey's immobile body at the bottom of the hill. He did not care. He stayed there, praying, for hours, without moving or saying a word aloud. He saw snakes and heard their rattles, but he prayed they would not hurt him.

The next morning, Rey heard the door of the van slam and the distant roar of a motor. "I heard the coyote leave that morning… but I don't think anyone was with him. They all probably got caught." Later, Rey began to stretch so he could start to escape his painful confines. "I just started moving because at that point, they probably wouldn't come anymore, but if they got me, they got me." Rey worked himself out of his thorny cradle and slowly began his trek into the United States, alone. He made his way up and down the hills, disoriented and exhausted.

"I got me a piece of wood, a walking stick, and eventually I found a highway. I tried to get people to stop for me… but nobody did. Until this one guy. He saw me, he said, 'hey man, *qué pasó?* Where are you going?'" Rey told the man his final destination was Los Angeles. Chuckling and shaking his head, Rey confessed, "And the guy laughed at me! He just said, 'hey

man, you've got your life fucked up, man. You just crossed the border, right?' I nodded and he told me, 'You're not going to make it to LA. This road is going back to Mexico!'"

The man, Rey never got his name (or did not remember it), asked Rey what happened to his face, and Rey explained. He told Rey to get in his car, and they would figure out what to do next. They went to his "friend's house," where they attended a rooster fight. Rey was able to do some work to help and connected more with the stranger. He invited Rey to his house for a shower, his wife made Rey food, and they gave Rey a fresh shirt. "He really saved me. He saved my life." The man asked who Rey was going to see, and if they were going to pay a coyote. Rey told him that had been the plan, and, "He said he would drive me, but if we got caught he had only just picked me up and didn't know me. And my brother would have to pay for gas." It was approximately four hours to Los Angeles from their location but they arrived safely. Rey's brother was shocked to see him alive and paid the man as much as he could. "He thought I was dead. I was supposed to be there like a month ago. I just wish I had gotten that guy's real name; I'd go back and repay him somehow."

Kimberly

One evening, I met a small, hesitant young woman named Kimberly. When I greeted her at the start of our interview, I thought she might have been younger than me because of her youthful appearance and air of shyness. She was apprehensive throughout most of our conversation, but she lost herself when she talked about her children. Then, through her cautious exterior, the strong woman who had transported three young girls between countries and across a cruel border emerged. She came to the United States from Guatemala because she has three daughters and the violence happening around her was coming too close for comfort. She told me, her face contorted in distaste, "It's really hard over there because of burglars and violent people

like that. They rob kids… from their families, kidnap them and take their body parts. They sell the organs of the children they take; I don't know who buys them." Organ trafficking has a well-documented history in Central and South America (Scheper-Hughes, 2014). Brokers approach individuals from vulnerable populations in developing countries, usually to procure organs for upper-middle-class or wealthy recipients from "developed" countries who do not want to be on the long waitlist for legal transplants. Black market surgeons then do the work for a fee and it is forgotten. Those vulnerable individuals just happen to often be sex workers, people with disabilities, and children.

Kim's trip took one month and a half before she was able to cross into the United States; she had been in the U.S. for six months at the time of the interview. I asked if she felt comfortable describing her trip and she described it as "a bit difficult," which, after hearing her story, seems to have been an understatement. The first thing Kim mentioned was that on the way, she and her three kids were treated as one person—she paid extra for each child, but they were only fed enough for one person to split between the four of them. She described being undernourished throughout the entire journey. "The hardest part was having to hear my babies cry from hunger." She looked up, blinked rapidly, like she was holding back an emotional reaction, and gathered herself.

Soon after arriving in Mexico, Kim's group was sold to another *pollero.* I asked her where in Mexico that was, and she looked at her hands clasped tightly in her lap, "To be honest, I don't know because they locked us in the basement as soon as we arrived." She described the first new *coyote* demanding more money from her husband who awaited her in the States. "I had to pay more each time they sold us. Then a gang got us… and we had to pay *a lot* more." She

was forced to leave behind anything she had brought with her and soon she did not even have the meager amount of money she had kept on her person.

She furrowed her brow and began to describe her experience after arriving in Mexico. "At the beginning in Mexico when they kept us in the basement. It was… horrible," she shuddered. "It was dirty… they put us in there and gave us a rag… a "blanket" to share, just to separate us from the floor honestly, and we all had to sleep on it." They were kept in a cellar for eight days. "They gave us maybe two small things to eat a day and that is not enough for children… my children..." Her eyes were looking behind me at something I could not see.[15] I knew at this point to let her reflect for a moment in silence. Kim had migrated more recently than any other interviewee, and her experiences were especially fresh in her mind.

Her eyes cleared and I asked if she wanted to tell me any more about her trip. She shifted in her seat and looked at me carefully, like I was going to judge her answer. "Well, there are people that talk about some really ugly things that happened to them. But for me, I just suffered because my girls were crying and screaming… they were so hungry." She seemed to be slightly emboldened and told me when they were captured by the gang, it was in Monterrey, in Mexico. "They held us in a second cellar, like actually 300 of us… different groups… in another dirty basement." She explained indignantly that there was no space to lay down to sleep and that it was unbearably hot. Kim seemed more concerned when she described not being able to breathe and worrying for her children. "I just folded myself to be as small as possible for the three days they kept us there because I wanted to give my kids space to lay down and sleep. We were

[15] This happened with many individuals I interviewed when they were describing particularly distressing situations.

packed so tightly." The gang organization had threatened Kim and her family with death if Kim's husband did not pay a large sum of money soon.

When he paid, Kim and her kids were dropped off near border patrol in Texas. She said she approached them to turn herself in.

Kim was detained in a center on the border, staying for fifteen days. She described the "ice cold" room they put her in, small and uncomfortable, before moving her to a slightly larger room she was able to share with her children. Then, Kim said, *la migra* called her husband to buy plane tickets to transport the small family. I inquired about why they let her stay, and she explained that nobody told her anything, but she assumed it was due to her young children. Kim now has a pending immigration case for which she needs to attend a court date every year, and told me she has hopes of building a better, safer life in her new home.

While Kim was able to make it across the border safely, she was forced to endure harrowing situations at the hands of organized crime groups and human smugglers. She described dehumanizing situations, and at some points she was indignant, but others, she was reserved and distant, as though she had "spaced out," which is a common reaction to trauma, especially when it has not been processed fully (Marin & Vasquez, 2012; Schauer & Elbert, 2015).

Every one of the individuals included in this chapter noticeably visualized disturbing images of their past with varying intensities. The structural violence that forces people to migrate continues into their trek to the United States, often accompanied by environmental and direct physical violence, and later into their time spent attempting to make a home here. Although there were moments of freedom and even conviviality, a common theme reported by the people I

spoke with (even those not included in this chapter for the sake of space) was that dehumanization manifested in experiences like having to run "like a criminal"[16] and live off meager supplies of sustenance while hoping to avoid being kidnapped.

I was able to observe some of the people I interviewed at their jobs and, as I watched how much of the public interacted with them, was amazed at how some people can treat others with such blatant disrespect, especially knowing the drastic obstacles they may have overcome. I recognize my hypocrisy: I do not often think about the challenges of random strangers' lives. But I now know that clearly, the burdens carried by migrants in this region are just as heavy, if not more so, than those in more migrant-dense areas,[17] and nobody is talking about them.

Memories of their journeys across the Southern U.S. border haunted many interviewees in ways that did not become apparent until they were asked direct questions about their experiences. Consider this the next time you go out in public. That short, cheerful lady with the round cheeks that just took your order at your favorite fast-food joint may have had experiences similar to those documented in this chapter. The sullen man with tired eyes who just passed you on your way to the bathroom. Your neighbor, an outspoken college student with pink hair. Near your workplace, the construction worker with a mischievous smile who always seems like he is making you the punchline of his jokes. The quiet woman who sits in the back during Sunday masses at church. Any one of them could be undocumented. Any one of the people you see every

[16] This is a quote from a woman named Azucena who was indignant about the way she had to act to safely cross the border.

[17] It was indicated to me by some individuals who had moved to Kentucky/Indiana from another place like Los Angeles or Arizona that the smaller number of Hispanics here made many aspects of daily life harder, due to the lack of people with similar language, culture, and experiences and less accessibility, in general, to translated materials (like signs, menus, and informational pamphlets at hospitals or their children's school.)

day but may not think twice about, maybe even someone you know fairly well, could have had similar experiences. They deserve to be heard.

Chapter 3: The Experience Here

"You start to know less and think less and be less." --Manuel

In the following section, I include testimonies from six individuals I interviewed about their experiences now that they live in the States. For most, their experiences have been largely shaped by structural violence in the form of law, such as in the cases of Maria, Marta, Lucia, and Manuel, who cannot drive lawfully. A caveat of the "invisibility bargain" is that while migrants must be contributing economically to their host country to avoid active persecution, they do not get to reap benefits such as healthcare, social security, or legal independent transport. How can someone be expected to work without being able to drive when many public transportation systems are so unreliable? This backs undocumented migrants into a corner where they are forced to break *another* law to survive and often, in the case of travelling to work, *benefits their host country,* with the added negative impacts of constant stress and hypervigilance. Constantly looking over their shoulder, they do not get the small luxury of travelling independently or even relaxing in their own homes without worry. Chronic stress is just another way migrants are structurally vulnerable to mental and physical health complications and interpersonal trust issues.

Maria

When asked what it is like to live without papers, Maria expressed, "Well, for me, it means that you do not have anything like benefits or insurance. You can't even get a license. That affects us. We cannot go to the doctor… even when it is necessary." Since arriving in the United States, Maria has battled with various health difficulties. She lives without health insurance due to her inability to find an affordable option for a person living here without authorization. When she *has* sought treatment, she has been met with inattentive practitioners

who are not able to understand or listen to her, and inadequate support from the healthcare system. Even for housing, she explained that to obtain an apartment in her area of southern Indiana was very difficult, and she has to pay a lot of money to be able to keep it, commenting, "for people without papers, we have to pay a lot of money."

She described chronic fear and uncertainty, illustrating some of the problems she has had since arriving. She is scared of police, "I feel unsafe because… for example, talking to police can be unsafe because they follow the rules here and I didn't. They could report me to ICE. And sometimes they choke people. I don't want that to happen to me." Maria does not get out much. I asked how she travels to where she needs to go and she responded, "Unfortunately, [to get around] I drive. If I do not drive, I do not work, and I need to work to pay my bills. My rent, my health, all of it." She talked about having to make sure her driving is perfect because she must drive without a license. Every time she leaves her home and drives to work, Maria is keenly aware that she is risking deportation. "I only drive to my house, my work, my house, my work. Sometimes I walk to stores. Really, I try not to leave my home." She is unable to obtain a license due to laws prohibiting undocumented immigrants from being able to have them. The law, here, is a form of structural violence keeping migrants from being able to freely move about a country that is largely dependent on car travel. This, as in the case of Maria, can exacerbate feelings of intense anxiety. In the event that these anxieties started to become overwhelmingly troublesome, healthcare, especially mental healthcare, is virtually inaccessible for undocumented migrants, so they are disproportionately left behind in states of mental distress (Beck et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2015).

Maria spoke about some thoughts she has often—those of being beaten, of being hit by cars, of being kidnapped when she leaves her house outside of going to work. She does not do

much outside of work. She could not describe what she does for fun, but she described going home, cleaning, walking when she felt she could, and tucking into bed early so she could go back to work early. She told me her anxieties make her upset and her life is hard, but that is simply the truth of living here in the States. This is symbolic violence in action: Maria accepts her reality because she believes that is where she belongs as a person who "did not follow the law" to get into this country.

Maria works ten hours a day to maintain her health and pay her rent, but a set amount of her earned pay gets sent to her family in Mexico. When relatives are sick, Maria said, she is expected to pay their bills. Coming to the U.S. for many migrants means that they are providing resources for the family members that stayed in their home country due to higher wages found in the States. For many families, resources are pooled to send one person across the border, with the understanding that that person will send remittances back home. Remittances keep millions of people out of poverty and are oftentimes major parts of a household's income in home communities (United Nations News, 2019). Holding the burden of maintaining the health of her family members weighs heavily on Maria, especially since she cannot visit them due to the danger involved in crossing the increasingly militarized border.

Maria's constant precarity has affected her ability to be fully incorporated[18] into her new community, especially since the new community has no interest in accepting her. She had to leave her home country due lack of resources, but she also left behind her support systems and family, which are very important to her. Residing in a space between a *separation* and a *reaggregation* or *reincorporation* into her new society, Maria is in what was defined by

[18] This is distinct from becoming fully *assimilated*, which is the (often negative) experience of completely eliminating one's culture to fit in with another. Incorporation in this context refers to feelings of comfort in the new community.

anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1969) as a stage of *liminality*. In this liminal state, she has been forced to live in the shadows, not leaving her home unless necessary, but working as much as she can. Maria has been unknowingly holding up her end of the "invisibility bargain" for seventeen years. Dr. Jeffrey Pugh explains that this "invisibility bargain" is the informal agreement involving a host country accepting—or, at least, not actively targeting—migrants as long as they abide by three key expectations: The first being that they are perceived to provide some form of *valued contribution* to society, preferably involving economic benefits for the new community. The second and third expectations are that the migrants remain both *socially* and *politically* invisible, meaning that they are minimizing cultural influences and appearances that challenge those of the host country, and that they are not actively contributing to public political discussions (Pugh, 2021). Maria's attempts to "blend in" and avoid leaving her home are for her own feelings of security, while also serving the purpose of ensuring she is less likely to be seen as causing disruption.

Regarding Americans' treatment of her, Maria said, "I have not dealt with too many outward racists—but, of course, I have… I just can't understand them!" She was laughing, but then her smile faded and she continued, "I have seen them. Sometimes, they come and talk to us rudely, but most people treat me well." She mentioned that the racism and xenophobia she has perceived does make her sad, but her sadness mostly stems from her lack of legal status, as she often feels unsafe due to that. She just wants to be able to visit Mexico, have health insurance, and maybe even obtain a license.

Rey

While Rey is now a citizen, he lived for years with an undocumented status. He told me the stress weighed on him. "The thing is, when you don't have papers, you're afraid of

everything. Like even to go to school… They [ICE] would randomly go to schools and restaurants, stores, and do raids. And you could get caught and be deported." He explained that he never went to English classes offered by the local community college out of fear, even though he would have liked to.

Rey said that over the time he has been in the United States, the situation is always similar for people without papers. "… They [people with political power] always have their ways to seduce people, but, really, it is always the same for undocumented people." He continued, "some things get better, but other things get worse, and it is always close to the same." To describe the American public's attitudes, he said, "I think American people give you opportunities as long as you behave… follow the rules they want you to follow." He spoke about the many migrants who come and, "want to be smart, get things done different ways, and that's when Americans don't like it." When asked if the public's attitude has changed, Rey said he believed that people and law enforcement officers are *less* compassionate now than they were in the past. There was a heartbreaking earnestness when he talked about the difference he has seen in deportations: "Back then, they would deport the whole family, not make the kids suffer as much. Now, they keep them in refrigerators and separate them."

When asked if his perceived attitude of the American public has affected him, Rey said he believed it absolutely did. He described having seen people be deported even when they were doing "nothing wrong." Rey explained that he could not sleep very much for years after coming to the United States, and that his chronic stress led him to develop sleep apnea. The structural vulnerability Rey experienced as a person *sin papeles* led to him associating his trauma-related experience of anxiety and insomnia with his diagnosis of sleep apnea.

Marta

Marta is a middle-aged woman who approached me confidently and sat through the hour-long interview with poise. She was very articulate and calm, but the heaviness of the conversation topic grew to be overwhelming at times. She shared some deeply personal things about her life here.

She has been in the United States for thirty-seven years and she has lived in Southern Indiana for sixteen of those years. On the move to the United States from Guadalajara, Mexico, Marta said she did not have to work "too hard." She paid a coyote to help transport her and her two sons in a group. The real fight has been, since arriving, to stay afloat. After Marta crossed, she had to live on the streets for many months with her sons.

Marta told me she lived under a tree for five months and lived in a car for two more months before she was able to afford a small room for herself and her children. "I had family here, but they shut the door in my face, and I had to live on the streets. It is just hard to get comfortable, to adapt in this country. To the rules, the language, the customs, many things. We slept, my sons and I, under a tree for a long time, then the car… slowly, little by little, we were climbing up the ladder." She was working odd jobs and hours, cleaning houses, when a man sold her an old car where she and her children could sleep at night. Two months later, a woman Marta had met offered to rent her a small room. "She felt bad because I was going to have my baby. I was cleaning, cooking… slowly making money. She gave us a little room. Then I started working at a restaurant while my neighbors watched my kids."

Marta had her baby in a hospital and was able to pay the cost, bit by bit, out of pocket. "It's hard without papers because you have to pay cash at the hospital and it's hard to know who to leave your kids with or where to go. I had to find more work after my baby so I wouldn't be a burden on other people." The father of Marta's children was nowhere to be found. Marta

described feeling like a weight on those around her while she was trying to get back on her feet. The people who were not Hispanic, she said, were the hardest to connect with, but she indicated that she felt it was her fault. “It is a fight because it is not your language or territory… The biggest issue is that it is not your language, and you can’t really communicate or talk with people.”

When asked how she thinks the American public views immigrants, she said, “I have spoken and worked with people who are… sometimes very racist. They will treat you badly sometimes, like they feel we have come here to hurt them or rob them. And okay,” She shrugged as if saying, *hey, maybe they have a point*. “I’m not going to say that we are all the same. Because even though some of us come to work and get ahead, realistically, unfortunately, some of the people from my country come and do things they shouldn’t do.” After a pause, she continued, “And for that, sometimes, people look at all of us very badly. But really, sometimes they can be so cruel to us.”

Marta looked somber, so I carefully prodded, asking if she wanted to share her experiences with that. She took a deep breath and nodded. “It can be subtle. It’s not that they come across as super racist all the time. It’s like… like you’re less-than. Less worthy. You can tell. You work a lot, you can give one hundred percent of yourself to your work…” She continued, describing how customers come into her workplace and turn to their companions, and the differences between the way they speak and look at each other versus the way Marta perceived them looking and speaking to her and her fellow im/migrant coworkers. “You can tell by the way they look at you, talk to you, like you’re not *like* them, but it’s a bad thing. And why? Why do they do that when I’m just trying to work? Why do they want to do that?”

Marta had been speaking her sentences all in one breath, like she wanted to get the sentiments out as quickly as possible, like she had not been able to talk this much before to an interested outsider and was trying to make sure I absorbed the information. I told her I would stay as long as she wanted to talk, and she took a long unsteady breath, visibly nervous. "Sometimes you try not to pay too much attention. Because you need to work and come out ahead. Because if you pay too much attention, you are going to get sick. You are going to feel bad, make yourself sad, depressed, feel like it's your fault… whatever." Her voice was getting tighter, more strained. Her eyes were trained on her hands which were resting on the table between us. "Because I have felt it."

Though the attitude of the public *seemed* to upset Marta when she thought about it, I wanted to know if *she* believed it had affected her significantly. She took a sharp breath and began with a tightened, trembling voice. "Sometimes… because they look at you like you're a weirdo, or like…like an alien!" She laughed shakily, obviously trying to ease the tension or lighten the mood, but she quickly continued like she just wanted to push through what she had to say. "Like you're an alien, like," She demonstrated how she felt she was perceived by scrunching up her nose and looking down at me haughtily. "Like you're stinky?" She laughed again. "They do look at you like that, but what are you gonna do? You try not to pay too much attention. Because all I have done…" her voice tightened once more, "I just came to work. I think it makes them feel good sometimes, when they see how uncomfortable you are. It's like making them feel better or something when they look at you like *that.*" The tears that Marta was clearly trying to hold back spilled over and she was shaking, but she still seemed like she was trying to remain controlled. She looked at me apologetically but continued before I could say anything. She cleared her throat. "It makes me feel tiny. Like I'm less, or small or… not here or something.

The way they look at you or talk about you… even if we don't understand the language, we know. Latinos know. We know the looks but we can't say anything." Sometimes, people try to be slick about it, and it just feels like more cruelty. Maria explained that sometimes it can start with people seeming to joke with her or be friendly, but then she gets a strange feeling, "you feel like they are playing with you… they say something and you realize that *you* are being played, like a game."

"I get upset… I feel it. When someone talks to you in a certain way—sorry." She was trembling again. "To be honest, it gives me *nervios* to talk about this."[19] I asked if she needed a break, but she said no, she wanted to continue. "I don't like talking about my experiences with racism, but I want to right now. I'm just always afraid they'll send me back. It's strong, strong fear."

This was when Marta disclosed that she was once married to an American man. I silently handed her napkins so she could dab at her eyes, and I did not dare to interrupt her as she continued. She was still weeping but she laughed nervously, as if she was embarrassed for experiencing those emotions, and was attempting to mask her feelings. "Always, when he was mad, he would scream at me. He would remind me I do not have papers, say that I am not even a person, that I am nothing. To this country I am nothing, to him I was nothing. It hurt because he was my partner, but unfortunately… it is still *there*, so ever-present, under everything. You are still *under* people with papers, even as their spouse, you are nothing, and it hurts. And it was such a threat… to be reminded of that."

[19] *Nervios* are a culturally defined condition of psychological distress—namely, anxiety and panic attack symptoms, shared across Latin-American subgroups (Nogueira, et al., 2015).

This was a striking revelation. While this dynamic clearly had something to do with the character of the person making the offending statements, the fact remains that being undocumented is a *constant* threat to an individual's safety and security. "They don't see you as a human. They see you as if you have an illness and you will infect them." She took a pause and gathered herself enough to look up and speak directly to me. "So please know that it hurts. And we can tell what is happening, and we feel… helpless. We feel it. I felt it when I got so close to someone and realized that I was still being treated differently because of something like that, that should not have mattered so much, that should not be such a threat."

Marta confirmed to me that the stress is constant. "The fear that they will come grab you, send you back. Sometimes we see police and it makes our hearts stop. The never-ending feeling… it makes you so tired." Toward the end of the interview, she apologized once more for expressing her emotions. I asked her to please not apologize for feeling things and she responded, "Sometimes it is not easy. Many immigrants do not get to talk about what happened to them, about what they lived through, especially after we get here. Maybe the people here just care when we are in our home countries being threatened or not being able to get enough food to eat, when we are far away... if they feel for us at all."

Marta left California sixteen years ago, but she told me she has much more difficulty in Southern Indiana than she did in California due to the smaller Hispanic population in Indiana. "Wherever I want to go [in Los Angeles], I can speak Spanish, but here I need to work more for everything. Communicating with schools, the doctor, to find work… it takes a lot of energy. It's hard." In California, she said that many people discriminated against Hispanics, but she feels it especially harshly in and around where she lives now in Southern Indiana and where she has

lived in Louisville. Her feelings of not belonging were weaker in a place where more people spoke her language and had similar experiences.

I inquired about what she does in her day-to-day life, something I thought might be more of a safe topic. “I come to work, I laugh and play with people.” A good start, but then she continued, “And I did go to a therapist. It is truly hard to at least try to put on a smile, to laugh, to play, to get ahead, but it is so hard when you have to give food to your children…” Tears were streaming down her cheeks and her lips began to tremble again. “That you found in the garbage. You come here for them, but you still have to feed them food from the garbage.”

I wanted to ask Marta outright: *Do you ever feel like you’re in a limbo between the United States and Mexico*? Her eyes immediately grew moist. She said sometimes, with the feeling of uncertainty, of insecurity, of being in danger of being sent back to her old country, it is difficult for her to feel as though her home is here, even though she has family and employment here. She expressed that she would love to see her family in Mexico, but she cannot leave her children in Indiana. “I *want* to be over there, but I know I can’t go over there because I am here. But I *want* to be here. So you are… neither here nor there.” To elaborate, she continued, “It is not easy. I mean, you love your parents, who could be dying, your relatives, any support you may have had…” Marta has spent the last thirty-seven years in the U.S. not being able to see her parents. She emphasized that she is not the only one, that many migrants feel this “torn-apart” feeling. “Many people feel this-- not being able to return for a very long time to see their parents, or many immigrants’ parents die but they can’t go and see them for one last time… they can’t go back.”

Marta described the feeling as a heavy, horrible guilt because she feels as though she came here and left her family behind. Not being able to physically be with relatives when they are sick

or dying is heartbreaking for her. She feels helpless, sending money from the work she wanted so much, just trying to help the people she wants so badly to be with back in her old country. “It’s a guilt that sits in your chest. It makes you stressed, depressed… it feels like it could kill you.”

Guadalupe

Guadalupe was a sweet woman with a round face who met with me one evening after she got off work. She expressed similar feelings to those of Marta and Maria. I asked her if she felt between two spaces…, and she started nodding before I even got the chance to finish my question. Then she stopped, head down, and there was silence. When she looked up again, her eyes were wet. She said yes, with a watery laugh, and said, “Well, here, I’m fine…” but her voice was trembling. She, also, was attempting to remain composed without expressing her emotions too much. She took a moment and continued.

She tentatively told me she wants to go back to her *pueblo* in Mexico, but that her American-born children are in school here and speak more English than Spanish. Her voice became strained and tears streamed down her face, but she explained, “It is a balance. Because I would love to go see my mom, hug her. But I know if I go,” she swallowed and dabbed her nose with a napkin. “I won’t be able to come back. To bring my children with me to Mexico would be to take away their opportunities, their ability to study and come out ahead.” She expressed that she felt hopeless, because she can support her mother while she is living in the States, making more money than would be available in her home village, but the feeling of tightness, of not being at home, really, and balancing her responsibilities weighs on her every day. She said, “Many who have come over here with our parents back over there, dead, dying… we can’t see them. My mom is the reason I want to go back, but it is also *for* her that I don’t. I’ve been

helping her since I came thank God, and she does not have to worry about how she is going to eat now."

Later, we discussed the perceptions Americans have of immigrants. Guadalupe told me, "There are a few that treat us well. They like our work, they know we come here to work." She explained that there are, also, many who do not want immigrants in their country, and she tittered nervously. She continued, "They think we want to steal their work and all that… There are a lot who don't want us here. And I understand, because, of course, every person needs to defend their country." She saw the shocked look on my face and laughed again, for real this time.

Lucia

When Lucia arrived in the Kentuckiana town in which she currently resides, she lived in a small two-bedroom apartment with fourteen other migrants. She told me she sometimes regrets migrating to the U.S. She explained, "My brother and I talk; he says maybe I *could* have studied in Mexico, learned English, and tried to come here legally on a work visa. I agree." Her original plan was to come to the States, make money, and return to Mexico, "But, unfortunately, the years passed, and we remain here. I would love to go see my mom; my father died five years ago." She told me, "I was not able to say goodbye because I am here… I could not do anything other than speak to them over the phone." Though she wants to go back to Mexico, she told me her children are her priority. Lucia's chronic stress associated with being undocumented primarily lies with the fear of the fate of her children should she be deported. "If someone like a president says, 'immigrants need to go back to Mexico,' my worries are mostly for my kids… what would happen to them? Would they come with me, or would they have to let go of their studies, of their goals… of their dreams? I never know what will happen."

Describing some of her experiences being a person without papers, Lucia also mentioned her fear of law enforcement. She expressed that she must work, but every time she leaves for one of her two jobs, she is fearful of encountering police. “Sometimes police stop you and take you to immigration and one never knows… an accident could happen… it is heavy weight to know they could take us at any moment.” She drives without a license as well, but between her two jobs and young children, she does not have the time nor the resources to learn English, which she would need for a license. “I barely have enough time for my kids, let alone school.” Without English, passing a citizenship test is nearly impossible. “I think me and all Mexicans without papers feel the same, like it is inevitable. One day, they will find us, and they will deport us.”

Lucia has had some close calls with immigration law enforcement. ICE came to her apartment one day, and though Lucia said most of her undocumented neighbors do not answer the door when people knock, that day, her sister-in-law had forgotten her key, and was supposed to be home at any moment. Lucia’s brother answered the knock, expecting his wife, but instead he was met with some of the most dreaded entities to appear on an undocumented person’s doorstep. Lucia did not know what was happening at first—she said she thought they were the police. “They gathered us all into the living room, and they took my cousin’s husband and my husband. They did not take me, presumably because of my young children.” Lucia had to witness members of her family being taken away by ICE officers, which she described as “terrifying.”

In her apartment complex, Lucia identified a specific neighbor who, “does not like Mexicans.” This was the first experience she mentioned when I asked about how she believes Americans perceive immigrants: “She wants us to leave forever. When we leave our apartment, she watches us.” One day, the woman was in her car when Lucia was also trying to leave. “She backed right into me even though I wasn’t moving, and she began yelling.” The woman was

yelling in English, of course, “I could not understand her, but one of my kids told me that she was saying things like we are stupid Mexicans… and I just took my kids, told the woman there is no problem.” Lucia whisked her children away to their apartment, where she locked the door and instructed her children to not open it for any reason.

Lucia continued, telling me, “There is really no problem. That woman has reasons for feeling that way… we are in her country.” She expressed that, in her opinion, Americans feel that, “we came here to take their work or to take over their country.” She mentioned that there are Americans who believe in rights for people like her, but that many disagree with her existence in the country. “Some people do not like us because we are horrible, they say ‘you are not from here’ or ‘you do not speak English’ and that means they can mistreat us.” In reality, Lucia said she believed many immigrants just come to work, not to steal jobs. “Mexicans know how to work, and we work very hard to get ahead. Hispanics in general. We are not trying to deceive them.” Once again, Lucia accepted her maltreatment because she feels a guilt, or as if the “dominating” group—in this case, citizens of the U.S., belong in their place and deserve to mistreat individuals in the “dominated” group, undocumented migrants.

Manuel

My meeting with Manuel started with me pulling up to a nice house in the suburbs. I knocked on the front door. A dog barked in the backyard and the door opened a crack. Manuel was an unassuming man, and he invited me into his empty living room. There was a bench on a side and a chair in the middle, which he sat in, and on the bench, it felt a bit like I was the one being interviewed. He was very hesitant to tell me he did not have papers. He sometimes spoke slowly, like he was unsure of himself or his responses, but he warmed up to me eventually.

He began by speaking about his work history. I asked him how he felt Americans perceive immigrants, and he responded in English, “I don’t know much, but sometimes… like… discrimination?” I asked if he felt a lot of discrimination, and he told me that in his jobs, he has often felt ostracized because of his legal status. “Especially in this state. My coworkers are all white, at least the bosses. They yell at me. There are practically no Hispanics… around here, there are almost none.” Manuel has worked as a machine operator and a carpenter during his time in the U.S. and has not made any lasting connections with people outside his family. He doesn’t feel the need to. I asked if the American public’s attitude toward immigrants has affected him, but he shut that down fairly quickly. “At times, yes. But it doesn’t matter.”

However, soon, I posed a question about what he wanted the non-immigrant public to know about his experience. That was when his eyes became red and watery, which obviously made him very uncomfortable. “I want them to know that… let me think. This is one of those things where like,” and he cleared his throat, looking apologetic. “You work a lot. It is hard. To come here is… difficult. It is a decision that is not easy to make. You have to leave 100% of what you have, what you know.” He explained that a migrant has to travel to a foreign place, where they may not know the language or culture. “Different everything. And you can’t share with people, you can’t do anything outside…” Manuel took classes in English at a local community college to try to feel more comfortable, but he said it did not work very well. After arriving, he had to re-learn and re-obtain the social and economic capital he had in Mexico, which is a continuous process. “They are strong decisions you have to make… you have to leave it all and you might not even gain anything.” He said, “It is not easy. You start to know less and think less and be less.” On arrival, he said, “You don’t start with zero when you get to this

country, you start with less than zero. You owe your coyote $2,000, $3,000, and your life depends on it."

Manuel told me he works very hard every day, even though he suffers from chronic stomach pains and headaches. He explained that no matter what, he must work. He does not have compensation if he misses work or gets injured there. He can avoids visiting the doctor at all costs, because of course, without health insurance, medical care in the U.S. is incredibly costly. When he came here, Manuel was "afflicted for two or three months with a depression." He spent an entire month in bed, unable to get out of bed and face his new reality. It took him a long time to look for work due to his difficulties with functioning, but Manuel seemed proud to say he has worked almost every day since.

I asked if he ever felt uncertain about his status here, and he said, "Yes. There are a few things, no? Because I try to get papers—I have tried with several different lawyers… they don't care if you win and get your papers, you have to pay no matter what." Manuel also drives without a license. "I used to have a license… there were different rules back then. That was before the laws changed and now, if you don't have papers, you don't get licenses." He, like some others, reported constantly looking behind his back, remaining hypervigilant, due to fears of being caught driving without permission. However, he believes this is the price one must pay to live in the United States, and he has not been caught yet.

Manuel told me he feels fortunate for what he has in the United States and he appreciates his family and his support system. I learned that he had recently purchased the house in which we interviewed! He explained that one must work to be happy and thankful for what one has, especially in this country.

To examine the experiences of the people who shared these stories with me, I want to contextualize them using these concepts of invisibility and liminality. It is necessary for migrants to adhere to the expectations of the "invisibility bargain" to avoid active persecution in their new community. Without being able to fully express themselves or move freely from one space to another, the small luxury of independent travel is taken from them.

Regarding Lucia's altercation with a neighbor, besides expressing to me, "My neighbor has reasons for feeling that way, we are in her country," Lucia continued by saying, "We can't do anything, because we are immigrants. I do not look for problems. I try not to cause problems because if I do, it will be easier for them to send me back to Mexico, so it is better that way." She said she felt uncomfortable, but that, "one feels guilty because, of course, it is not my country… I am a trespasser. It is their country." She feels the need to stay in the shadows and not draw attention to herself. The individuals with whom I spoke expressed a form of chronic fear that haunted their every day. If you are not undocumented, you do not understand to the same extent, the experience of waking up every day with the reminder that you are unwelcome in your country of residence.

The structural vulnerability that connects with structural violence, causing social suffering, is apparent in the law, interpersonal communication, and healthcare system of the U.S. Driving the knife in deeper, the clear power differentials between migrants and non-migrants are unconsciously agreed upon— Symbolic violence in its quintessential form. For many migrants, life is severely altered and their experience of living in the United States is very distinct from that of citizens and authorized immigrants living in the U.S. From the reasons people come, enduring through their journey, and for years after they reach their destination, these indirect forms of violence lead to disproportionate suffering in the migrant community. Though there are

gems of happiness, contentment, and appreciation, the authentic experiences of the people I interviewed should be shared. Within these stories, the consequences of the continuum of violence, forced invisibility, and uncomfortable liminal spaces emerge from the woodwork to reveal the ugly truth.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

"Maybe if Latinos and Americans work together… we would make a good team. Things could be different." --Lucia

Hostile attitudes and policies in this country maintain the marginalized living conditions of migrants, leading to forced invisibility. These feelings of invisibility and constant ostracization contribute to migrants' positions in a liminal space, which is a deeply uncomfortable situation wherein an undocumented individual does not feel as though they have a "real place" in the United States. The discomfort is not the only consequence of the inhospitality of the U.S.—very real physical and mental consequences arise from the constant stress of feeling unsafe, as though some sinister law enforcement entity may send you to an inimical place from which you have fled (Bourgois, et al., 2017; Campbell-Staton et al., 2021; Garcini et al., 2017).

A common misconception, even in well-meaning individuals, is that there is nothing to be done for migrants outside of the Southern border wall region. Outside of this region, at the very least, the number and impact of undocumented immigrants is grossly underestimated, and their suffering is then relegated to a comfortable distance for those with no need to examine it further. The Kentuckiana area is not exactly known for its high number of undocumented immigrants, but they are indubitably here, with their complex backgrounds and stories— both those that are entertaining and those that are tragic, like every other person in this country.

Additionally, those less familiar with the situation easily focus *only* on the negativity faced by undocumented individuals. While this thesis examines the structural vulnerability and violence that impacts those without documents, I have taken care to avoid reducing the people I interviewed into sympathetic vessels used to prove a point "on their behalf," or keeping only the information that may have supported the direction of my research. For this reason, this piece

includes depictions of their nonverbal mannerisms, witty quips, and varied personalities. The people I interviewed are more than just their suffering. They are disproportionally impacted by the stigma of living undocumented in the U.S., but it is imperative to avoid the reductive fallacy of perceiving them solely through their "victimhood." Even well-meaning researchers unwittingly exploit the shock-value trauma of the immigrant experience for the sake of making a spectacle to bring awareness. However, this practice inadvertently results in further othering of the marginalized individual. Furthermore, despite the extent of both the trauma that forced them to flee their home countries and that is associated with migration, the people I interviewed defy victimhood. For many of them, their mere survival testifies to remarkable resilience and constitutes their own assertion of human dignity.

Personal Reflection, Limitations, and Implications:

For me, this project was life-altering, but I have many avenues of study I wish to pursue to expand it. The interviews were a strange experience; they were a hyper-acceleration of the normal process of becoming acquainted with a new individual. We went from sweaty palms (me) and nervous glances (most of them) to the "Hello, how are you? Tell me about yourself,"s of establishing rapport, followed by conversations about some *incredibly* traumatic experiences, usually within the span of a few hours. One of the conditions of this institution-affiliated research was that I had to maintain the anonymity of the research subjects. The precarious social and legal positions of the interviewees made this condition necessary. However, because I was unwilling to keep most of their contact information for the sake of privacy, I was often unable to obtain more than one interview. While this was useful for a shorter-term, one-year project such as this one, getting to know the interviewees in the same session in which I inquired about

possibly upsetting circumstances may have resulted in their discomfort at the nature of these questions being asked by a virtual stranger.

Multiple interviews would have been useful in the event that I missed crucial information or did not follow up on certain responses sufficiently[20]. The works of Jason De León, Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, Sarah B. Horton, and Seth M. Holmes all involved working with the same research subjects for longer periods of time—from weeks to over a decade. Their research also involved some form of participant observation, if not immersion into lives of their research subjects[21], which was not possible given the context of this research. The fact that my research was not longitudinal presented an impediment in that one interview, no matter how long, will always result in partially fragmented information with little opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

Another limitation became apparent as I was translating and transcribing the words of the interviewees. In my endeavor to humanize the participants in my research, I came to the troubling conclusion that no amount of writing will be enough to fully do so. That is to say, an inherent limitation of this work is that the reader was not present to experience these individuals in their complete, complex humanity. Though I had the privilege of obtaining new information directly from the mouths of the people whose experiences I hoped to document and analyze, I was unsure how to portray the nuanced signals that are only conveyed through the act of in-person human interaction. I attempted to depict the snippets of conversations included in this piece as they happened, but many conversations had to be excluded. Therefore, also excluded were more fidgets, shifts in chairs, pauses, rapid changes of subject, sentences that may have

[20] This is why some of the original twenty interviewees were excluded from this written work.
[21] Seth Holmes infamously accompanied and documented some of his research subjects on their journey across the Southern border into the United States, ending in his group being caught by U.S. Border Patrol and Holmes witnessing some of his companions get deported (Holmes, 2013).

trailed off… that, in some way, help to form a more authentic image in a reader's mind of the human being that was in front of me recounting their experiences. It is only my hope that the included descriptions were enough for the reader to create some form of emotional connection to the individuals and their stories. Nothing will fully replace the act of conversing with these individuals, but I am honored to have gotten the opportunity to examine their experiences and represent them.

Projects such as this one are crucial in facilitating the humanization of chronically dehumanized individuals, especially in relation to a topic as divisive as immigration. The issues surrounding illegal immigration are not confined to the geographic area around the Southern border, nor are they concluded the moment a migrant arrives "safely" in the United States. This project specifically endeavors to showcase 1) the fact that undocumented immigrants have an undeniable presence in Kentuckiana, and that 2) they are faced with unnecessary suffering. However, also, that 3) they are more than their anguish and deserve to be 4) acknowledged and 5) integrated to the extent that is comfortable for them into the United States. It is imperative that non-migrants see migrants as more than sufferers, more than laborers, even more than dreamers.

Next Steps

While I believe this thesis adds an important, multilayered narrative (from the mouths of Kentuckiana's very own undocumented population) to the conversation surrounding im/migration in academia, it must follow that action and behavior changes with this knowledge.

Celebrated anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes has proposed a more "militant anthropology" which strays away from traditional ethnographic work of observing from a respectful distance with a hesitancy to call for change, even in the face of considerable human

misery. Traditional anthropological research has avoided taking a stand for people[22] although anthropology as a field demands an "explicit orientation to 'the other'" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Scheper-Hughes suggests that, "anthropologists are privileged to witness human events and are privy to community secrets that are generally hidden from the view of outsiders or from historical scrutiny until… after the collective graves have been discovered" and have an ethical obligation to identify ills endured by marginalized communities. Acting as a witness by actively listening to an individual's story places the researcher inside human events as a responsive, reflective, and morally committed body. Ideally, a morally committed body who will act if needed, though this goes against the traditional anthropological nonengagement with principles and politics. Although, of course, being uninvolved is in itself an ethical position.[23] Should anthropologists reject their capability of identifying occurrences of oppression due to the unwanted accompanying insinuation of being in an advantaged position, the extent to which dominated groups are marginalized remains unchanged[24]. This implicates the researcher as collaborating with the web of power and silence that allows that destruction to continue.

As scholar Charles Hale (2006) puts it, "To align oneself with a political struggle while carrying out research on issues related to that struggle is to occupy a space of profoundly generative scholarly understanding." It is possible for anthropological writing such as this project to be a "site of resistance" in itself (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). However, while in some form, this

[22] The reason for this originates in anthropology's historical roots in exploitation of research subjects (people and cultures) leading to the field being seen by some as a manifestation of academic colonialism (Lewis, 1973).
[23] *"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."* -Desmond Tutu (attributed) (*Oxford Essential Quotations*, 2017).
[24] It is important to avoid thinking of oneself as a "savior" for the "unfortunate victims of marginalization" as this diminishes the autonomy of the members of that population and alienates them further. In the words of activist Lilla Watson, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

thesis embodies "activist anthropology," it is more of a "social critique" (Hale 2006). Although I am endeavoring to elevate voices of persecuted people, there is much more work to be done.

Should this research be expanded, it will be in the nature of "barefoot anthropology." This is anthropology with one's feet "on the ground," doing work that is not solely speculative and theoretical. It resembles what psychiatrist Franco Basaglia called becoming a "negative worker" (Basaglia, 1987). According to Scheper-Hughes (1995),

> "The negative worker is a species of class traitor—a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, psychologist, a manager… a social scientist, even—who colludes with the powerless to identify their needs against the interests of the bourgeois institution: The university, the hospital, the factory,"

Or, in the case of those writing in the interest of undocumented immigrants, the country.

The point is, we too can be "negative workers." Barefoot anthropology, acting on behalf[25] of and *with* those about whom we are fortunate enough to write, who have given us, as researchers and outsiders, the gift of a glimpse into their lives, is a necessity. So what can we do? In an academic setting, we can write pieces that go against the norm by avoiding impenetrable jargon to make our writing more accessible for individuals without academic backgrounds or, further, accessible for the people we say we represent. We can make ourselves available not just as acquaintances, but as translators, advocates, and friends.

This academic project must be accompanied by efforts on all levels of an individual to societal continuum. These actions will result in denaturalization of social suffering. Pierre Bourdieu, whose concept of symbolic violence is used in this project to facilitate the understanding of immigrants' experiences, argues that social change is not possible solely

[25] Within reasonable and respectful limits

through the "immediate act of the 'raising of consciousness.'" Rather, social change occurs through a radical alteration of the conditions that produce the traditional structures which lend themselves to the creation and maintenance of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2003). "Pragmatic solidarity" is a phrase used by anthropologist Paul Farmer to encourage readers to join in practical ways with the struggles of oppressed people (Farmer, 1992). Outside of academia, there is more to do. At the most fundamental levels this could mean practicing patience for those who do not speak English[26], not treating all immigrants like they are part of a homogeneous body, not tolerating untrue statements about sinister migrants coming to sell drugs, rape people, and commit crimes. It could mean volunteering for local refugee and migrant services, donating to organizations dedicated to immigrant justice, or talking to elected officials. On a more systemic level, making healthcare more accessible for undocumented people, allowing them to obtain driver's licenses, and making English lessons available for whoever wishes to take them would alleviate some of the structural violence that imposes great vulnerability onto migrants.

The participants involved in this project ranged from sullen to cheerful, timid to lively, softspoken to boisterous. They have lives that contain fulfillment, but their harrowing experiences and the abysmal conditions for migrants in the United States have undeniably made that fulfillment substantially harder to achieve. Their relative contentment also comes in varying strengths and forms. Rey has a booming business, but it took him twenty years of back-breaking work. Lucia works so that she can put her children through school and see them educated, but she does not personally feel content; her hopes of improving the lives of her children keep her going. Maria dreams of making money to indulge herself in ways she has never been able to

[26] Perhaps also learning some phrases in a second language common in your area

before, but she has been in the United States for almost two decades and is still living paycheck-to-paycheck due to the incredible expense of having medical needs while being uninsured here.

Undocumented people are everywhere, forced into invisibility and liminal discomfort, but their experiences are being unheard. Citizens of the United States are indicated in this continued struggle because of the lack of action and, worse, the presence of purposeful, harmful action against the undocumented population. The injustices of this country must be changed so that people like the individuals in this study can experience safety and security in the place that is supposed to be their home. The place that was supposed to represent a fresh start and new opportunities. They represent a large number of the United States population, and their experiences must be considered. Radical change that will make conditions safer for undocumented immigrants in the United States starts at the individual level with action from those with privilege. So, if that includes you, what are you going to do?

Appendix A: Statements to Americans

Not everyone I interviewed was involved in the written work of this project, but each interview was moving, and I wanted to know what they wanted to say directly. Only eight felt comfortable enough to share:

What do you want to say to Americans who may not understand your experience?

Maria

Just that we don't mean any harm. I want to share my experience—it is an experience like a book. One suffers in the crossing, and one has fear here. Fortunately, I only suffered a bit. My dream was only ever to get money and help myself and my family. The truth is that I am helping my family, but I do not have a lot… my dream has not been fulfilled. I am content that I am here, but I am not happy… but I cannot return to Mexico now. I just want them to know I don't mean harm.

Marta

Truthfully, that we did not come, well, I know I didn't come, to take anything from them or hurt anyone. We came to work and get documents so we can see our family, but mostly work so that we can get ahead and send money back to help people in our country. Mostly. I know some immigrants who, unfortunately, have hurt people. But I know that people all over the world. from above to below… we all just want to get ahead.

Guadalupe

Well, just that we wanted to come here to work, to look for a better life, and now, at least, there are businesses that need working hands so at least there is opportunity to keep working. I just

wish we could more easily get papers to work legally in this country, to drive with a legal license, and maybe one day get papers so we can visit our home countries.

Lucia

Well, I would want them to know that we didn't come for anything but to work. We do not want to be burdens or hurt anyone; we just want to work. We are not bad; we just want a better future. If we could work together, without racism, I think it would be good. I think it would be a good team with Mexicans and Americans, like if we were legal, if they looked at us like they look at other Americans, things could be different. Truthfully, this interview made me feel very good because if you really do publish it at your school, hopefully some Americans will hear this or read that we did not come to hurt. We are here for necessity.

Manuel

I want them to know that it is not an easy decision to make. And that if you live here, have family here, were born here, you have to appreciate it. It is a gift to have been born in the U.S. Americans have everything, or they can get it. They can drive, they can do… whatever they want. Because of what they have. Me, I started here with less than zero. Another thing to say is the people who migrate here and do not do anything wrong should not be deported. Most of us don't want to do anything wrong.

Azucena

I just think it's ridiculous. I just want to live here and honestly it weighs on me… I just want to say I wish they would treat us like people, because that's what we are. I am not as sad anymore… I am just angry. It's a helpless anger, one that comes from the pit of my stomach, but at least I'm not depressed.

Jackie

The police in [town] look for us at night. Some people are nice, but some people will find you and deport you… People need to know about this. I mean, you see the racism from people… from white people. [non-immigrant] people need this information… even the first people who came here, you know, the Europeans came and killed the Native Americans, and they are the people upset at immigrants for "invading" their country. I just think it's not right.

Rosa

It hurts here. It's like we're ghosts… but we have to be. We don't want to be. I try not to let it affect my life, my kid's life, but we're always looking over our shoulders. Even him, now… I don't have the luxury of shielding him from the realities of this country, because he needs to know what to avoid. I can't afford being sent back so I have to live as a ghost. I just want them to think about if they would like living like a ghost, and maybe they will realize… maybe they will help us, somehow.

Appendix B: Addressing my usage of the word "migrant"

The way to which migrants are referred has been criticized by many (Ruz, 2015.) Even the word itself, "migrant," carries connotations of not belonging, of not being in one's proper place. Oxford English Dictionary defines a migrant as, "one who moves, either temporarily or permanently, from one place, area, or country of residence to another." The word migrant indicates that someone is moving between a "sending" community and toward a separate "receiving" community, but what if the receiving community does not want to receive them? Let us do the exercise from Chapter 1 again— but this time, when you picture a migrant, what do you see? Is the image a neuroscientist or engineer emigrating from Canada, Europe, or Asia? Or is the image a faceless brown body cleaning your hotel room or working in fields? Even if the mental portrait incites your indignation, there is no denying that only certain groups of people are considered "aliens" and "migrants." In this way, the word used to describe a person moving from one country to another carries heavy racial and class overtones (Pugh, 2021.) As Dr. Seth Holmes states, "In its current usage in the United States, 'migrants' are only poor, Latin American laborers" (2013).

Even use of the word "refugee" has not often been granted to Latin American populations, though many come to the U.S. seeking refugee or asylee status. How the word itself is used to contribute to outside perception of migrants as not belonging, and, furthermore, to *their* feelings of unbelonging, should be considered. Noting this, however, the words "migrant" and "[undocumented] immigrant" are used interchangeably to refer to this population for the purposes of this research. It would be unwieldy to attempt to avoid using the word,

After all, the individuals interviewed for this research described themselves in this way, and there is no need for sterilizing the words or pretending that migrants are regularly referred to as anything else.

Appendix C: Methods (Continued)

Anthropologist and doctor Seth Holmes points out that the presence of a "methods" section is useful in many sciences, but in ethnography, has drawbacks: Specifically, the presentation of the material is not as flexible as it can be to showcase the "subjectivity and positionality" of the researcher, which is becoming more typical in ethnographic works (Holmes, 2013; Horton, 2016). On a similar note, Sarah Horton also suggests that the different form—that is, the integration of the thoughts of an ethnographer presents readers with purposefully revealed "partiality and subjective investments" of the researcher (2016).

However, the insertion of the researcher also provides many readers with more 'comfortable shoes' with which to view the lives of the vulnerable and diminish the reader's discomfort at engaging with unfamiliar ways of life. However, because it invites the reader to identify with the ethnographer (often white and middle class), Horton suggests that it may diminish the, "radical potential of anthropology to humanize and demystify the 'Other'" (2016). Included are more details of my methods to shed light on how I achieved what I did, without disrupting the flexibility (as Holmes put it) of the presentation of the material in the introduction.

I distributed English and Spanish IRB-approved questionnaires through people well-connected in networks of im/migrants around Southern Indiana and Louisville (Kentuckiana.) The questionnaires involved basic questions about countries of origin and why they came to the United States, as well as their documentation status. Thanks to the Joe and Angela Schmidt Research Award, I was able to provide a small incentive for those who were available to interview. The interviews were often in Spanish and most took at least an hour to complete.

The individuals I spoke with were understandably hesitant to respond to outright questions such as those inquiring about legal status. However, the assurance of confidentiality and establishment of good rapport helped to relax their fears. I contacted the people who fit the criteria of living in the Kentuckiana area and being undocumented, and scheduled interviews.

After the first few interviews, more people were more amenable to sharing since they knew I had kept my promises to other interviewees, and many preferred to be interviewed with a friend or coworker to help make them more comfortable.

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