

# Documenting the undocumented: Toward a queer politics of no borders

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## Abstract

This article explores the challenges of developing queer migrant justice strategies within nation-state contexts. With a focus on the Toronto-based ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign (2011) and Julio Salgado’s collaborative ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ project, I critically examine queer anti-deportation activists’ reliance on methodological nationalisms and visibility politics in making claims hearable to the state. While such tactics risk reinforcing the nation-state as a primary site of identification, thereby contributing to its naturalization as an inevitable horizon of belonging, I argue that they also open space for imagining queer(er) no borders futures.

## Keywords

Anti-deportation politics, methodological nationalism, queer migration, undocumented migrant activism, undocuqueer

*There can be no radical change without performative contradiction . . . The contradiction must be relied on, exposed, and worked on to move toward something new. There seems to be no other way.*

Judith Butler (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 66–67)

This article is inspired by the growing visibility of queer migrant justice organizing over the last several years in Canada and the USA. Since the mass demonstrations of undocumented migrants on 1 May 2006 in cities across the USA and beyond under the banner of ‘A Day Without Immigrants,’ a number of

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commentators have explored the promise of migrant mobilizations for a profound rethinking of the politics of rights and recognition in relation to logics of citizenship and borders (e.g. De Genova and Borcila, 2011; Marciniak, 2013; Nyers, 2010). To my mind, one of the most provocative analyses of the upsurge in migrant mobilizations that burst into view that day is Nicolas De Genova's (2010) assertion that 'A Day Without Immigrants' advanced a decidedly *queer* politics that went beyond the twin logics of rights and representation to challenge the very legitimacy of the nation-state and its immigration and border security regimes. In De Genova's (2010: 103) words, the 'millions who literally put their deportable bodies on the line in this struggle . . . were not begging anyone for their putative civil or human "rights," were not asking any authorities for permission or pardon, and did not seek anyone's approval or acceptance.' By unapologetically asserting an indomitable presence, such queer acts of migrant mobilization constituted not only a deeply political challenge to the legitimacy of what De Genova (2007) calls the 'Homeland Security State,' but also functioned as acts of subjectivity production, producing new political actors and agencies (c.f. Nyers, 2010: 129).

Such optimistic readings of the migrant mobilizations of 2006 and those that have since unfolded in the USA, Canada and several European countries<sup>1</sup> aim to wrench open spaces for theorizing mobility, migration and movement politics beyond the frameworks of national and territorial logics. Yet, the challenges of breaking with national frameworks or the 'methodological nationalisms' (De Genova, 2013; Harvey 2009; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003) that reproduce the nation-state as a primary, naturalized site of identification in theory and/or activism are significant precisely because of the role of the nation-state in aligning identifications and vulnerabilities as both a legacy of empire building and ongoing motor for the global intensification of capitalism. In Maria Lorena Cook's (2010: 145) words, 'the debates around which immigration arguments typically turn, and the terrain on which advocates must fight, derive their values and assumptions from a nation-state framework that is self-limiting.'

For those of us working from the perspectives of queer and trans theory, such an 'advocate's dilemma' (Cook, 2010) resonates with the quotidian challenges of making the lives of gender and sexual minoritarian subjects more livable within the present moment while still aiming to transform the grids of normative intelligibility that produce and organize the very conditions of gender and sexual vulnerability. A number of trans scholars have argued, for example, that the ability for trans subjects to access health care and employment often rests upon the repetition of essentializing narratives about being 'trapped in the wrong body' since childhood (Bettcher, 2014; Spade, 2006), or arguments about achieving gendered normativity through access to medical intervention as a necessity for becoming a truly 'productive' member of society (Irving, 2008, 2012). Such strategies of negotiating regimes of gendered violence may be necessary for a more livable life within the present context of capitalist logics of productivity and social belonging as subtended by taxonomies of race, gender, (dis)ability and sexuality, but they also

risk shoring up the very systems of normative power that abject gender non-conforming subjects to begin with.

The problematic common to both migrant politics and queer and trans politics I've briefly sketched out here is one of the relationship between tactics and imaginaries, or what Judith Butler otherwise articulates as a 'performative contradiction' at the heart of any possibility for radical change (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 67). The dynamic tension between tactics and imaginaries takes hold spatially and temporally, carrying the capacity to deterritorialize/reterritorialize terrains of engagement and action, while tracing a lag or cleavage between the urgency of acting 'now' and the open question of 'the future.' As the epigraph from Butler suggests, there is something inevitable about the performative contradiction that emerges through the entanglement of tactics and imaginaries: '[t]he contradiction must be relied on, exposed, and worked on to move toward something new. There seems to be no other way' (Butler and Spivak, 2007). In other words, tactics and imaginaries are not to be understood dualistically, as two extremes on a continuum of action, but rather as entwined, each informing the other in a dialectical manner.

This article traces the performative contradictions in two recent examples of queer migrant justice organizing in Canada and the USA to ask the implicit question: 'What's queer about queer migrant justice organizing?' 'Queer' is used in this article in two senses. The first is as an umbrella term for contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, and gender non-conforming 'identities.' The second is in David Halperin's (1995: 62), where queer 'demarcates not a *positivity* but a *positionality* vis-à-vis the normative . . . a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance' (original emphases). These are not necessarily competing approaches if queer in the first sense is taken as marking a spatialized politics of location relative to normative regimes of power. As Cathy Cohen (1997: 440) has argued, even when used as an 'identity' referent, 'queer' nevertheless seeks to acknowledge *embodiment*<sup>2</sup> as a site of resistance to normative systems 'that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics.'

Very little to date has been written about queer migrant organizing (see K Chávez, 2011, 2013 for notable exceptions), and this article responds, in part, to that lacuna with a focus on the Toronto-based 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign of 2011 and the still emerging nation-wide Undocuqueer/Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project in the USA. More broadly, this exploration of queer migrant organizing is motivated by an interest in bringing more closely together the insights of queer and trans scholarship on normative violence and that of mobility scholarship on the inherent violence of the nation-state form. Because queer anti-deportation and migrant justice activism holds the promising capacity to explicate connections between the intensifying carceral geographies of global apartheid, the vulnerabilities produced through immigration regimes, and the ongoing criminalization of queer- and trans-ness as a legacy of colonial rule, I argue that it is crucially

important to acknowledge, expose and work the performative contradictions that take hold in such organizing. To do so opens space to work toward something new.

Situated in relation to these broader debates, this article specifically focuses on the analysis of two contemporary examples of queer migrant organizing. The analysis draws out the performative contradictions at play in both of the cases I analyze to move toward a queer ‘no borders’ imaginary that pushes the horizon for queer politics beyond both national and representational frameworks. Unfolding in three parts, the article first develops a reading of a series of community testimonial videos created as part of the Toronto-based ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign of 2011 to explore the tensions between queer world making desires and the methodological nationalisms deployed – strategically or otherwise – by activists to effectively overturn undocumented queer artist Alvaro Orozco’s deportation order by the state. I then turn to an analysis of the iconographic tactics of the Undocuqueer movement in the USA through an exploration of Julio Salgado’s collaborative protest art. This section focuses on the tensions between the emergence of new political subjectivities and desires on the one hand and the normative risks that inhere in representational strategies on the other. Bringing these tensions together, the third and final section of the article suggests that the performative contradictions endemic to contemporary queer migrant justice organizing in North America open space to work toward queer(er) no-borders futures, where the hold of citizenship and the nation-state form over our political imaginaries and epistemologies might loosen its grip. But to get (t)here, I argue we must move beyond a politics of recognition, visibility and representation toward a more thoroughgoing critique of how the control and regulation of mobility and identity function as central technologies of capitalist sovereignty.

### **‘Let Alvaro Stay’ (Toronto, 2011)**

On Friday 13 May 2011, queer undocumented artist Alvaro Orozco was ‘randomly’ stopped by Toronto Police at the Ossington subway station and asked about his immigration status. It was around 8 p.m. and he was on his way out for dinner with friends. After his arrest, he was detained at the Rexdale Immigration Holding Center, a converted hotel that now serves as a prison for illegalized migrants with pending deportation hearings or orders. Orozco had been living in Toronto under a deportation order since 2007 after his claim for asylum on the basis of sexual orientation was denied via a videoconference with an Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) member who didn’t believe he ‘looked gay enough’ to warrant protection on the grounds of sexual persecution. Alvaro had been on the move since the late 1990s when, at the age of 12, his father threatened ‘to kill any child of his who was homosexual’ (Erickson, 2011). After leaving Nicaragua, a country in which there were no legal protections for LGBT people, Orozco hitchhiked through Honduras and Guatemala, lived in Mexico for a period of time, entered the USA by swimming across the Rio Grande, and was

detained there for a year prior to making his way to Canada with the assistance of a church organization in 2005.

News of Orozco's detention at Rexdale quickly spread through the queer activist and artist circles he had established himself in over his many years of living in Toronto. No One Is Illegal (NOII) and allies immediately organized the 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign via various social networking sites, deploying a variety of tactics to make their appeal to immigration officials on Alvaro's behalf. Three days after Orozco's arrest, an ad-hoc testimonial video project was set up at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre during a broad-based community action to stop Rob Ford, Toronto's now infamous mayor, from defunding Pride celebrations. A few days later, a flash mob took over the intersection of Church and Wellesley, in the heart of Toronto's commercialized gay district. Holding up placards bearing Bay-area artist Julio Salgado's colorful portrait of Alvaro (see Figure 1) while dancing to the tune of Sister Sledge's 1979 hit, 'We Are Family,' the flash mob effectively held up traffic, dispersing only once to allow the passage of an ambulance. A petition to 'Let Alvaro Stay' circulated on-line, collecting over 10,000 signatures. This series of tactical interventions into Alvaro's pending deportation combined to support the intelligibility of Orozco's claim for protection through the humanitarian and compassionate (H & C) considerations of Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), and, one thin day before his scheduled deportation to Nicaragua, he was granted permanent residency privileges.<sup>3</sup>

In this section I examine a number of the 16 community testimonial videos produced as part of the 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre just days after Orozco's arrest. While the videos themselves did not achieve a centrally important place as a campaign tactic (at the time of writing they had received fewer than 2000 views overall), they nevertheless provide a digital archive of an otherwise ephemeral instance of queer anti-deportation organizing. Moreover, the testimonials provocatively illuminate the tensions between queer world making desires and the seductions of methodological nationalism that powerfully reproduce the nation-state as a taken-for-granted and unavoidable territorial frame of reference (cf. Harvey, 2009: 267). To demonstrate the tensions between tactics and imaginaries, I trace three pronounced themes that emerge through this archive of testimony: migrant exceptionalism, state benevolence, and 'citizenship-for-all.'

One of the most conspicuous themes that emerges across the 16 'Let Alvaro Stay' community support videos is that of what Yasmin Nair (2012) has described as 'migrant exceptionalism.' Such narratives depict Orozco as an 'out and proud' queer and undocumented migrant who consistently asserts his presence and value to the communities of which he is part despite significant personal risks to his freedom as a deportable subject. Such testimonials stress his many accomplishments, despite his precarity. Alvaro is represented as heroic, able to overcome fear, and, by implication, made of the strong stuff the neoliberal nation-state – with its retraction of social supports and ever-intensifying reliance on individual



**Figure 1.** 'Let Alvaro Stay' (2011). Reprinted with permission by Julio Salgado.

entrepreneurship and make-do-ness – cannot do without. As one of his supporters testified:

I think that it's been amazing ...all of what he's contributed to the community has been amazing, in spite of the fact that he's been living here without status, undocumented, dealing with the daily realities of the fear of being arrested, the fear of being sent back to Nicaragua. And despite that, he has done so much as an artist and an advocate, and really put himself out there and taken personal risks to advocate and speak on behalf of his communities. And I think *somebody like that* is the kind of person I want to have around. (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 10, 2011, emphasis mine)

Echoing the sentiment that ‘somebody like that’ is the kind of person the community – and by extension, the nation, needs, another advocate reckoned:

[Alvaro] is exactly *the kind of people* [sic] that we need in this community, and I think it’s absolutely appalling that Immigration Canada should move in and incarcerate him, but mostly deprive our community of the kind of force, and energy, and talent that this young man has. (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 13, 2011, emphasis added)

Both of these testimonies focus on Orozco’s capacities as an artist, activist and advocate, highlighting his ‘force, and energy, and talent’ – in short, his liveliness and productivity. It is clear from the testimonials that these attributes are incredibly important to queer world making projects. Alvaro’s friendship and presence in the various scenes in which he is involved is conveyed as affectively important, enhancing the capacities of all those who encounter him. While such depictions powerfully articulate the affinities between those who are involved in creating alternative worlds, they also carry the potential to destabilize what Katarzyna Marciniak (2013: 262) has called ‘the persistent imagining of “illegal aliens” as nonwhite, dangerous, and poor.’ Yet, when directed as a plea to the state such narratives also risk reproducing the binary between *deserving* and *undeserving* migrants. The quite explicit tactic of these testimonial excerpts is to depict a hard-working, energetic community builder whose efforts augment forms of self-sufficiency amongst marginalized subjects (migrants, queers, youth). Far from threatening to the current order, such attributes of self-reliance can be readily assimilated within the logic of the nation-state given their capacity to sustain the (nationalized) population even as the (neoliberal) state redirects resources away from shared investments like public health, education, and social welfare. The representation of Orozco in these testimonies, offered *within* the context of a nation-state frame as a defense against imminent deportation are thus deeply ambivalent. Orozco’s value to ‘the community’ functions as supplemental rather than necessarily oppositional to nation-building (cf. Joseph, 2002).

Such narrative appeals advance a methodological nationalism in the sense that they shore up the terms of belonging set out by the economic role of the nation-state as a key node in the possibility of global capitalism rather than directly countering them. More specifically, they implicitly insist on asserting Orozco’s capacity to not only ‘fit into’ but also ‘build up’ the nation’s capacity for productivity. Consider, for another example, the following testimonial:

As an artist and a community organizer and someone who’s done a lot of work with LGBT young people, I had the pleasure of connecting with Alvaro on various different levels. In particular, in doing arts exhibits and having the pleasure of getting to hear his story, and see how optimistic and positive and inspiring he is . . . And for him to still be able to – despite those obstacles – make art that is resilient and full of love and optimism says something about him, and his integrity and commitment to

community. To be like, “You know what? I’m gonna tell my story even if it makes me vulnerable. I’m gonna tell my story!” (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 8, 2011)

This testimony reflects and expands upon the previous excerpts in that Orozco is again represented as a productive – and much admired – community builder whose commitment to queer and newcomer youth far outweighs considerations of his personal vulnerability. But further, this testimony situates Alvaro as a resolutely optimistic, positive, and inspiring organizer – a queer world builder, perhaps, but no less a nation-builder. In any case, the highlighting of these positive affective economies are themselves a kind of ‘migrant exceptionalism’ discourse in that they find expression in relation to the absent presence of migrant melancholia to situate Orozco as a future-oriented (optimistic, inspiring, happy) proxy-citizen rather than nostalgic (melancholic, bitter, depressed) migrant. The testimony here functions ambivalently to situate Orozco as both a queer comrade and also as a nationalized subject emotionally and libidinally invested in ‘Canada’ as a site of belonging.

Other testimonials build on these affective tactics to differentially situate Alvaro as a vulnerable subject ‘in need’ of love and protection from the nation-state, thereby positioning the nation-state as a benevolent care-provider deeply invested in enacting the putatively ‘protective’ embrace of multiculturalism. These testimonials rely on a methodological nationalism that crafts ‘Canada’ as a zone of domesticated safety in an otherwise inhospitable world. For example:

[Alvaro] got his major achievement when he was 12-years old because he saved his own life. A 12-year-old boy, who is supposed to be in school learning and playing like other boys, he had to run away. At an early age, he started his journey. He crossed many countries, trying to find a place where he can call home . . . Alvaro Orozco, the 12-year-old boy who was forced to become a man, the boy who made a decision to protect himself, hoping to find a place to call home, a place with rights and freedoms. That place, the place he needs, is in your hands. 12 years of waiting since he left his home. 12 years. It’s half of his life. Please let Alvaro stay. (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 14, 2011)

Strikingly, this testimony simultaneously presents Orozco as a self-actualized (child) subject who ‘saved his own life’ and ‘made a decision to protect himself’ who also needs the protection of the state in order to ‘find a place to call home, a place with rights and freedoms.’ In a similar vein, another testimony invokes a ‘Canada’ that, as a fantasized site of sexual and racial emancipation, promises an unconditional love for the migrant equivalent to that of the speaker’s familial love for her (presumably citizen) children:

I want for Alvaro what I give to my own children, and if Alvaro was denied that when he was the age that my children are now, then he deserves that now. He needs love, he needs protection, and he needs a safe space where he can be, and where he can be in



community and know what unconditional love is. And I want Canada *to continue to be that place for him*, where he doesn't have to hide, where he doesn't have to be afraid, and he doesn't have to always be looking over his shoulder. (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 1, 2011, my emphasis)

This narrative deploys Alvaro's childhood as an appeal to family and kin-like values that shore up rather than challenge methodological nationalisms. As Jasbir Puar (2013: 31) points out, 'if we are to promote a truly non-national queer agenda, we must not only be critical of familial homophobia but also of the model of family itself – even queer family.' This is because the family provides the 'affective basis of the community and nation' and is 'right at the heart of neoliberalism' in mitigating the effects of 'small government' (Ahmed in Antwi et al. 2013: 122). In both of the directly preceding testimonials, 'Canada' is figured as a space of sanctuary and protection, a place in which the rights and freedoms of vulnerable persons are not only respected but also embraced with the unconditional love of a (good) parent for her child. This might generously be read as a testimony that speaks to the queering of the kinship form, whereby the speaker and Alvaro have a familial bond that is not based on blood or domesticated belongings. But even queer family has its uses for the nation-state – family is as family does in neoliberal times (White, 2013). Moreover, the methodological nationalism at work in this narrative and the one preceding it dangerously elide the role that the nation-state plays in actually *producing* the very conditions of vulnerability it is then asked to ameliorate. After all, Alvaro was 'looking over his shoulder' for years precisely because his claim for protection on the grounds of sexual persecution was denied by the Immigration and Refugee Board. Canada's immigration and border security regimes quite literally produced Orozco as a criminalized subject. In highlighting Alvaro's vulnerability and 'Canada's ability to protect him, what is obscured is the fact that 'migrants are not naturally vulnerable, rather *the state* is deeply implicated in constructing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices' (Anderson et al., 2009: 8, original emphasis). The frameworks of methodological nationalism – strategic or otherwise – render such insights literally unspeakable if not unthinkable.

Finally, a third thread running across the collective community testimonies extends upon the characterization of Orozco as a high-performing, cosmopolitan (non)citizen of the world to argue not only that 'Canada' would be very fortunate to claim Alvaro as its own given his liveliness and vitality, but also that citizenship should be available to everyone.

This is a message for Alvaro and everyone that is supporting him. I believe that we are citizens of this world and citizenship shouldn't be, like, that difficult for someone to acquire, especially like Alvaro who has been struggling since he was 11–12 years old. I strongly believe that he deserves to stay in Canada. He deserves to become a Canadian. He deserves an opportunity to live a life with dignity, and I think that if the government allowed him to stay, the government would be doing the right thing.

And this is going to be a precedent that we need to continue to fight, we need to continue to work to build a community of everyone, because we are all one, regardless of your sexual orientation, regardless of your identity, your gender, or background. It doesn't matter. We are all one human race and we should all be supporting one another. (Let Alvaro Stay Community Support Video 15, 2011)

This testimony is significant not only in that it shores up the notion of the deserving migrant (and therefore the state's right to deny citizenship to those deemed undeserving), but further, it advances the most expansive claim for belonging of all the community testimonials. Arguing that 'we are citizens of the world,' this testimonial suggests that what is needed is 'a community of everyone.' However passionate this argument is, it nevertheless reproduces, in effect, a methodological nationalism by positioning 'citizenship-for-all' as a solution to the exclusions that are in fact endemic to citizenship *as a technology of governance* (Tyler, 2010; Tyler and Marciniak, 2013). Citizenship, by definition, is exclusionary. As Papadopoulos and Tsianos explain (2013: 182), 'if you include everyone and if you assign rights to everyone, citizenship becomes obsolete. "Citizenship for all" is an impossible term. Citizenship is "designed to fail"' (citing Tyler, 2010). Thus, while citizenship may function as 'an important tool for creating possibilities for certain groups to be included,' Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 184) go on to argue that 'it can never respond to the question that migration poses to capitalist sovereignty: What about all those who are mobile and cannot be included, that is the *majority* of the mobile populations?' As I will draw out further in the concluding section, the solution to the geopolitical disparities organized through the nation-state form and its hierarchies of citizenship cannot be 'citizenship for all.' Rather it must be the dissolution of borders and the dismantling of the differential rights that the categories of citizen, migrant, refugee, undocumented, and so on hold in place. To put it succinctly, as Nicolas De Genova does (2013: 255): 'if there were no borders, there would indeed be no migrants—only mobility.'

In gesturing toward how methodological nationalisms informed the community testimonials in support of the successful 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign, this section has aimed to illuminate how queer anti-deportation tactics risk shoring up the nation-state as a primary site of identification while contributing to its naturalization as an inevitable horizon of belonging. To point this out is not to undermine the material outcomes achieved by the artists and activists who thoughtfully and passionately spoke out on behalf of their friend Alvaro and successfully overturned his deportation order.<sup>4</sup> Without doubt, the 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign was successful because of the ability of activists to, on the one hand, galvanize a significant showing of support for Orozco's H & C claim (which had been filed prior to his arrest), and, on the other, to frame that support in a manner intelligible within the terms available in Canadian immigration policy and law. Given their association or affinity with No One Is Illegal (NOII), many of the advocates who created testimonies on behalf of their friend Alvaro would have been all too aware of the contradictions that inhere in advancing narratives of migrant exceptionalism,

state benevolence, and ‘citizenship for all,’ which are in tension with NOII’s more radical imaginaries of open borders. Such performative contradictions are at the heart of the attempt to advance migrant struggles *within* the reality of national contexts, particularly given the profoundly individualizing logics of political asylum coupled with the carcerality of immigration and border security regimes increasingly hostile to the claims of asylum seekers unless they neatly align with particular foreign policy agendas.<sup>5</sup> I will further expand on these insights through the next section, which turns to the emergent Undocuqueer movement in the USA.

### **‘We’re here, we’re undocuqueer’ (USA, c. 2012–present)**

Where the ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign of 2011 was highly localized and centered on the struggle to prevent the deportation and regularize the status of a single undocumented migrant, the convergence of queer and migrant politics in the USA is much broader-based, more pronounced, and larger in scale. Likely, this has to do with the much greater numbers of undocumented migrants living in the USA (approximately 12 million in contrast to an estimated 120,000 in Canada).<sup>6</sup> Self-identified LGBT/queer organizers have long played a central role in the undocumented youth movement in the USA, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that a new hybridized political identity – ‘undocuqueer’ – was recently coined to reflect this (Gutierrez, 2012; Lal, 2013; Nair, 2012). This new political moniker was first introduced by the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, which has been involved in several inspiring direct actions in migrant detention centers,<sup>7</sup> and then augmented through the United We Dream Network’s launch of the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP), which gathered 60 or so self-identified ‘undocuqueer’ activists at the UCLA Labor Center in March 2012 to develop dynamic and broad-based strategies for advancing migrant and LGBT rights simultaneously (Gutierrez, 2012). Describing its mission as one that ‘seeks to organize and empower LGBTQ-identified undocumented people, LGBTQ immigrant youth and allies,’ QUIP quips, ‘Change the law, not the Queer. Drop the fear!’ (QUIP, 2013).

Since the launch of QUIP in March 2012, Bay-area queer undocumented ‘artist’ Julio Salgado (who also created the portrait of Alvaro Orozco for the ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign pictured in Figure 1) has jettisoned the visibility of undocuqueer organizing through his protest-art styled ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ project. Basing his portraits on photographs and short narratives submitted by self-identified undocuqueer organizers themselves, Salgado’s ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ series effectively puts a vibrant face (or faces) to a nationwide movement that is intent upon highlighting the simultaneity of LGBT and migrant rights struggles as they are lived and experienced by undocumented youth who are also queer-identified. According to Karma Chávez (2013: 81), the ‘coalitional subject of the “undocuqueer” . . . emerged from within DREAM activism in order to call attention to the unique situation of queers in the migrant rights movement and to emphasize queer leadership.’

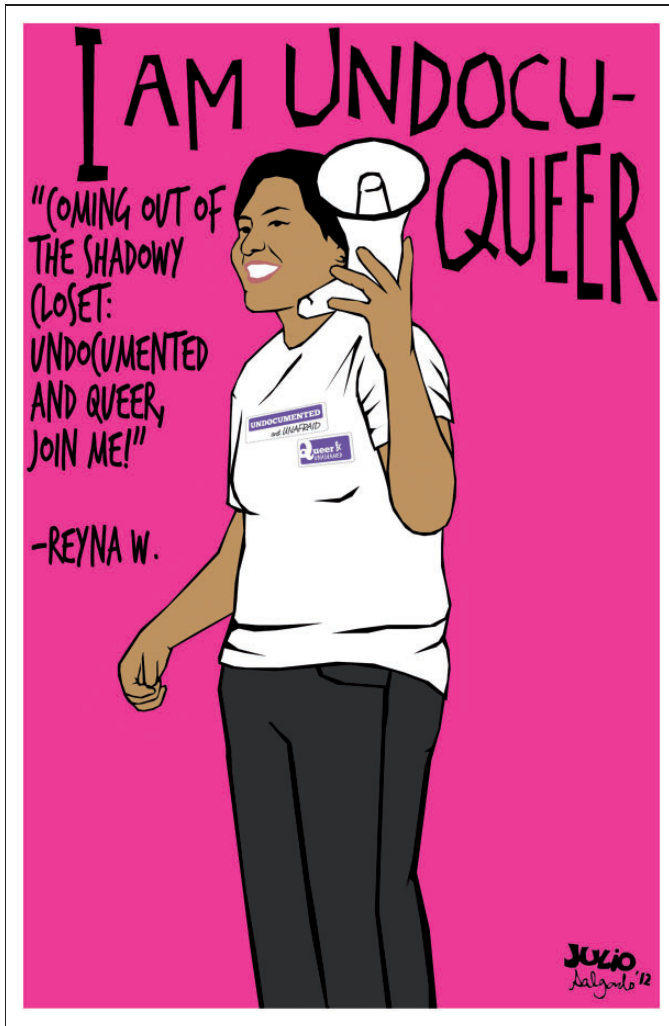
Given the very limited and contested terrain through which migrant politics can be practically advanced in the USA, much recent activism has been oriented around various renditions of the DREAM Act (the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act), which would extend permanent residency privileges to undocumented youth who met a number of conditions. The conditions include:

arriving in the United States prior to the age of sixteen, living in the United States for at least five consecutive years prior to the act's approval, possessing a clean criminal record and thus good moral standing, graduating from high school or obtaining a GED, attending two years of college or serving two years in the military within six years of the act's authorization, and being between the ages of twelve and thirty-five at the time of the act's enactment (K Chávez, 2013: 80).<sup>8</sup>

The DREAM Act was introduced as a means of regularizing the status of a very particular portion of the estimated 12 million migrants living without formal migration or residency status in the USA. As will be clear to the attuned reader, the Act is extremely exclusionary in that it reproduces dominant ideas about productive/deserving migrants – those who do not have a criminal record, those who have completed high school and post-secondary education, those who have served in the military, and, crucially, those who arrived in the USA while still technically 'children' – through no 'choice' (read: criminalized intention) of their own. Yasmin Nair (2012) has pointed out that because of the distinctions that the DREAM Act produces between unwitting undocumented migrants and intentional illegalized migrants, DREAM Activism risks directly pitting migrant youth against the grand/parent(s) or other family members who brought them to the country.

Migrant activism in the USA is extremely dynamic and complex, riddled, as it must be, with contradictions and potentials. This section focuses narrowly on Salgado's 'I Am Undocuqueer' project in order to explore the promising emergence of new political subjectivities and desires as depicted in undocuqueer portraiture on the one hand, and the dangers or risks of such representational strategies on the other. In focusing thus, this section does not aim to summarize or encapsulate the divergent wealth of migrant activist strategies that continue to emerge in the USA (some of them very confrontational indeed), but rather to – in tandem with my analysis of the 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign – flash up and work through some of the performative contradictions at play in the iconographic tactics and political imaginaries of undocuqueer organizers and allies.

Salgado's signature in the 'I Am Undocuqueer' project is the use of a bright and vibrant palette of colors through which he renders cartoon-like portraits of self-declared undocuqueers (Figure 2). The festive colors make these portraits immediately non-threatening, positively representing undocuqueer identities and political subjectivities as resolutely cheerful, optimistic, brave and insistent. Playing on the notion of 'coming out' about both sexual orientation and migration status at once, each of Salgado's portraits include brief, punchy texts in the style of



**Figure 2.** 'I Am Undocuqueer' portrait of Reyna W (2012). Reprinted with permission by Julio Salgado.

'the personal is the political,' drawn from activists' self-produced narratives regarding experiences and political visions.

Unsurprisingly, a wide range of politicized positions is evident amongst organizers depicted in the 'I Am Undocuqueer' project. Reyna W (see Figure 2) quips, 'Coming out of the shadowy closet: Undocumented and queer, come join me!' The text accompanying Jorge M's image (not pictured) reads: 'Because my identity is constantly denied, blamed and silenced, it is my duty to be out and to stand up and use my voice to make a difference.' Mario's portrait, against a backdrop of acidic

mint green, somewhat ominously advises in stark contrast to his friendly grin: 'I am Undocuqueer. You will meet me sooner or later!' In a more confessional manner, Imelda's portrait reads, 'As an undocumented Jota, I was taught to hate myself but I have consciously struggled to love me.' A portrait of Nicolas romantically muses, 'Unknowingly but willingly these many talents will continue to expand just like the wings in my dreams that take me to new grounds. Not looking back, not expecting much, just letting those migrating winds blow me where I'm supposed to be.' Organizer Ireri's portrait more directly challenges legal and territorial imaginaries in declaring, 'Just like being queer has allowed me to forget the norms, I want to be able to say forget the laws (immigration laws specifically) and start living.' The range of political identifications and desires gathered and deployed through Salgado's 'I Am Undocuqueer' project is, I would suggest, indicative of the dynamism within undocuqueer organizing. What is common to all of these portraits is the declaration of a new hybridized or 'coalitional' (K Chávez, 2013) political identity that has been made possible through the lived experiences of undocumented migrant youth who also self identify as queer.

Compellingly drawing on political protest iconography and personal testimony, Salgado's 'I Am Undocuqueer' portraits have circulated widely through various social media sites (tumblr, Facebook) over the last three years, and a compilation of his vibrant portraiture is forthcoming under the title *The Undocuqueer Book*. Salgado's first undocuqueer mural was installed at the corner of Bryant and 24th Streets in San Francisco's Mission district in June 2013, during the city's gay pride month. Like the otherwise ephemeral community support videos created for Alvaro Orozco, these portraits and their compilation index an important moment in convergent queer and migrant justice/anti-deportation organizing, carrying, not least, the potential to return a political edge to mainstream gay and lesbian organizing. As Salgado put it himself in a recent interview, 'I think it's really important that [the Undocuqueer billboard] is there for the month of Pride because a lot of times when we think about Gay Pride, we think Gay Marriage, we think white males and it's important for us to tell the LGBT community, "Hey we're also undocumented, we're also immigrants." There's other issues that are not being talked about in the mainstream media' (Salgado, quoted in Moreno, 2013).

Salgado's documentation of the 'undocumented and unafraid' through his undocuqueer portraiture functions to draw greater attention, from a more diverse range of politicized networks, to the plight of undocumented migrants living in the USA without status or permanent residency privileges. As one undocumented college graduate who recently witnessed the deportation of both of his parents declared, 'The purpose of our media is to bring this discussion forward. It gives us the opportunities to share our stories and voices, our opinions... to alter people's perceptions of *who* an undocumented person or student *is*' (quoted in AL Chavez, 2011, my emphasis). Efforts such as Salgado's to document the undocumented thus aim, in part, to challenge dominant stereotypical views of undocumented migrants as heterosexual, reproductively 'threatening,' poor, and de facto criminals.

Tactics designed to reveal ‘who’ undocumented migrants ‘really are’ – or what they might become (‘undocuqueer’) – enact a performative contradiction in that they risk reinforcing as much as disrupting normative scripts around deserving (morally upstanding, ‘accidental’ migrants) and undeserving migrants (criminals, intentionally law-breaking migrants). In other words, the ‘coalitional’ rhetorical moves of migrant youth activism gesture toward both normative and utopian politics at once (K Chávez, 2013: 81). The increasing visibility and cultural capital of Salgado’s ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ portraiture opens promising space for the vibrant, colorful and festive celebration of new political subjectivities that have the potential to simultaneously challenge the vulnerabilities produced through grids of sexuality and gender normativity and the violences of detention and deportation. Yet, at the same time, such representational tactics – in the form of announcing a new ‘identity’ formation – risk subtending the radical potential of such convergent politics within a register of visual containment: normativizing by definition.

To better illustrate the tensions that I am pointing to here, let me bring Salgado’s ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ project into contrast with a poster produced for ‘National Coming Out of the Shadows Day.’ Drawing on the fact that much of the leadership of the Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) self-identified as queer and undocumented, the declaration of 10 March 2010 by the IYJL as ‘National Coming Out of the Shadows Day’ clearly drew on the rhetorical strategies of gay and lesbian politics in calling on undocumented migrants to ‘come out’ about their migration status and march for legalization (see K Chávez, 2013: 82–100 for an insightful discussion of the discourse of closets and shadows in relation to migrant politics). The poster for the event depicted only the silhouette of a person to visually portray the anonymity that the shadow of illegality enforces, but also allows. In contrast to the highly individualized ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ portraiture, I would argue that the figure in silhouette on the ‘National Coming Out of the Shadows Day’ poster is, in fact, much more suggestive of a *queer* politics along the lines of that described by Nicolas De Genova’s analysis of the migrant mobilizations of Spring 2006. Rather than relying on strategies of representation, the poster of the anonymous figure gestures toward the imperceptible presence of differential statuses and mobilities. In an inversion of Mario’s warning, ‘I’m Undocuqueer. You will meet me sooner or later,’ referenced earlier, the promise of the figure in shadows is the implied message ‘we’re here, we’re all over, and you don’t even know where to look for us’ (K Chávez, 2013: 93).

Indeed, political strategies of visibility and representation carry the material effect of exposing undocumented or otherwise ‘irregular’ migrants to the brutalities of detention, deportation and state border patrol (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013: 152). As Papadopoulos and Tsianos put it (2008: 229), ‘visibility, in the context of illegal migration, belongs to the inventory of the technologies for policing migrational flows.’ Visibility politics, as a last resort, may be subversive to the extent that migrants enact themselves as recognizably political subjects, pushing back against an invisibilization necessitated by the precarities of deportability. But visibility politics are also highly problematic in that they shore up the legitimacy of the

quantifying representational regimes that sovereign power uses to individualize and quantify persons as belonging or not belonging to the territorialized population. The politics of visibility and representation thus function in tandem with methodological nationalism in the sense that national sovereignty insists on ‘the ideal correspondence and congruence of people and territory’ (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2008: 231). To the extent that all queer anti-deportation activism is forced to negotiate the terrain of visibility politics in advocating rights and recognition, it could be argued that such activism is always already wrapped up in the logics of methodological nationalism. After all, the demand for rights and recognition presupposes and thus reaffirms the authority of the state to grant such privileges to individuals rather than challenging the inherent violences organized and naturalized through borders and immigration regimes. Such is the ‘advocate’s dilemma’ of advancing migrant justice within the nation-state context.

### **Queering queer migrant politics: Toward no borders futures**

In deploying methodological nationalisms and visibility politics as tactics for alleviating the suffering, marginalization and exploitation of queer undocumented migrants, queer migrant organizing such as the ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign in Canada and the undocuqueer movement in the USA risks slipping into the vortex of what David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz (2005) have termed ‘queer liberalism.’ Queer liberalism describes the ways that radical political aspirations get rounded up and contained through the petitioning for rights and recognition (Eng et al., 2005: 10). Such rights-based organizing ultimately reasserts the state’s authority to make determinations about who should be subject to rights (of citizenship, of permanent residency) and who can – and should – rightfully be excluded. While gaining rights and recognition for (some) queer undocumented migrants stands to alleviate the suffering, vulnerability and precarity of those who, like Alvaro, gain the ‘right to stay,’ such strategies are inherently limited. As forms of ‘homonationalism’ (Puar, 2007), they cannot, and do not, fundamentally challenge the nation-state form or the technologies of governance that citizenship upholds.

Both the ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign and the ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ project are examples of demands for regularization, a means to legalize or ‘regularize’ the status of undocumented migrants. Regularization programs like the DREAM Act are themselves forms of governance, acting to categorize and separate ‘those worthy of permanent residency and eventual formal citizenship from those deemed unworthy or dangerous’ (McDonald, 2009: 68). In Jean McDonald’s (2009: 74) succinct formulation, ‘to advocate for a regularization program is to participate in a nation-building exercise: to ask the state to reassert itself and make decisions about who is desirable and who is undesirable.’ And yet, the demand for regularization remains one of the central strategies of groups such as No One Is Illegal, the Toronto-chapter of which organized the ‘Let Alvaro Stay’ campaign, which evokes the state’s authority in the very plea to ‘let’ Alvaro stay.



While neither the 'Let Alvaro Stay' campaign nor the still emerging undocuqueer movement directly challenge the logic of nation-states and border security regimes, activists involved in both of these examples of queer anti-deportation activism are demonstrably critical of discourses of rights and citizenship. Recall, for example, the text accompanying Ileri's 'I Am Undocuqueer' portrait, in which she declares: 'Just like being queer has allowed me to forget the norms, I want to be able to say forget the laws (immigration laws specifically) and start living.' Ileri's declaration suggests that immigration law – which upholds the nation-state's right to determine who will be granted the rights of residence and citizenship – captures and contains life and its possibilities. She suggests that the state form, much like regimes of gender and sexual identity, actively controls and limits desire, whereas mobility across and through these normative grids opens up spaces for new desires, new forms of life. Likewise, Dmitri Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos (2008: 224) argue that mobility is not about 'movement' per se, rather it is about 'the appropriation and *remaking* of space' (my emphasis). Building on these insights, I would argue that queer migrant justice activism is inherently a *spatial* politics. At its best, queer migrant activism could be *respatializing*, challenging the territorialities of the nation-state form – that power that produces the vulnerability that it is then asked to ameliorate – and also that of gender and sexual identity – which, through the inherent violence of representation, territorializes desire, holding it in place.

This returns me to the problem or tension of 'performative contradiction' that Butler insists is necessary for the very possibility of radical politics. In working to expand the sphere of inclusion, queer anti-deportation activists do not only unwittingly reproduce methodological nationalisms, they do so *strategically* in order to make their claims hearable by the state. As Harsha Walia (2013: 184), movement organizer with No One Is Illegal has reflected, there are deep paradoxes in meeting the immediate needs of individuals within the system 'while also mobilizing for the eventual abolition of oppressive systems.' Clearly there are 'contradictions inherent in fighting for immigration status while advancing opposition to the legitimacy of borders' (Fortier, 2010: 3). Yet, as Walia suggests (2013: 184), what has sustained NOI is 'the deliberate *fusion* and *cohesion* of these seemingly divergent strategies, with attentiveness to context, as well as to refuse to engage in reformist strategies that are essentially contrary to our transformative values.' The granting of status to the millions of migrants living without legal rights in the USA, Canada and beyond would have an enormous impact on the quality of lives lived within the context of nation-states, the current dominant form of geopolitical social order. But to what extent might this energy be redirected into a more expansive critique of the nation-state form and its governance through citizenship as key mechanisms in the global organization of hierarchies of exploitation that are central to the intensification of capitalism?

Fighting for 'fairer' immigration policies is not a solution to the violences that are produced and organized through the nation-state form as a motor for global capitalism. As Bridget Anderson, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright (2009: 5) have asserted, 'the simultaneous process of granting more freedom to capital and

less to migrants is far from a contradiction and is in fact a crucial underpinning of global capitalism and the equally global system of national states.' Undocumented migrants – and their perpetual deportability – are *necessary* for the functioning of global capitalism and the nation-states we currently describe as 'Canada' and 'the USA' as peripheral and exploitable laborers. Borders do not function to stop migration, rather they function to produce differential belongings and 'an active process of inclusion of migrant labor by means of its criminalization' (Mezzadra, 2004). This is why it is so crucial to move beyond a politics of representation and visibility and toward a more thoroughgoing critique of how nation-states and nationalized identities – citizen, migrant, undocumented, all these are identities of un/belonging whose intelligibility is entirely yoked to a methodological nationalism – must be transformed if we are ever to move beyond the disparities relied on and reproduced by global capitalism.

I suggested earlier that the solution is not one of 'citizenship-for-all' as advocated by one of Alvaro's allies. 'Citizenship-for-all' is an impossible formulation in that it ignores the fact that citizenship, by definition, is exclusionary. But moreover, this formulation obscures the role that citizenship plays as a global difference-making device and as a technology of labor governance. Whether as a form of 'inherited property' or a 'birthright lottery' (Shachar, 2009; Shachar and Hirschl, 2007), one's citizenship or non-citizenship has profound effects on one's life chances. The solution to the unevenness in life chances that national borders not only reflect but actively produce and organize is therefore not 'citizenship-for-all' but rather the dissolution of borders and nation-states. Recollecting De Genova (2013: 255), without borders there can be no 'migrants,' only mobility.

Calls for the dissolution of national borders require a rethinking and creation of new forms of 'society,' new subjectivities, and new political imaginaries 'not identified with nationalist projects (projects that are deeply racialized, gendered, sexualized, and productive of class relations)' (Anderson et al., 2009: 6). A politics of no borders finds resonance with queer critique in that both queer theory and no borders imaginaries focus on potentialities and becoming rather than the apprehensions of 'being.'<sup>9</sup> Far from a 'utopian' project, then, queer no-borders imaginaries are 'imminently practical' as a challenge to the ongoing legacies of colonialism and empire building that the nation-state system holds in place (Anderson et al., 2009). Just as the burden of challenging the violences of the gender/sex system is not one to be borne by gender non-conforming, trans and queer people alone, nor should the challenge of advancing a no-borders politic be up to undocumented migrants by themselves. Indeed, one of the most radical challenges to borders and immigration regimes that could emerge would be a mass scale refusal of citizens themselves to continue to identify as such. As a way of moving beyond the 'advocate's dilemma' (Cook, 2010) of advancing migrant rights within national contexts, those of us with the documents of citizenship might best enact the possibilities for a queer solidarity by ourselves refusing a national identification and the documents themselves. Declaring not 'we are all citizens' but rather 'we are all undocumented' could be a means toward not the erasure of the specificity of migrant vulnerability, but to the

enactment of a Deleuzian becoming imperceptible of everyone. The becoming imperceptible of everyone would immediately overwhelm the grip of methodological nationalisms, and would throw the societies of control into generative crisis.

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### Notes

1. Such as the 'A Day Without Us' marches and strikes in Italy, Greece, Spain and France in 2011 that were directly inspired by the 'A Day Without Immigrants' mobilizations of Spring 2006 in the USA (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013: 143).
2. The spatial politics of embodiment are clear in Adrienne Rich's description of the body as 'the geography closest in' (1986, 212).
3. The H & C provisions are currently the only means available for migrants to appeal a denied refugee or asylum claim in Canada. The outcome of such appeals relies heavily on the applicant's ability to demonstrate a high degree of integration into Canadian society, having family members in Canada and paid employment. Jean McDonald (2009: 73) suggests that H & C applications have a very low rate of success at approximately 5% overall.
4. It is important to point out that the swift response to Orozco's detention was made possible in the first instance through the many connections Alvaro himself had established over his many years of living and working in the city. This bears witness to the creative capacities of migrants to generate 'infrastructures of connectivity, affective cooperation, mutual support and care' that signal an autonomization of migration and mobility that escapes or flies under the radar of the regimes of control (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 185).
5. For instance, at the time that Alvaro was incarcerated in immigration detention, Jason Kenney, then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, was working with Arsham Parsi of the Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees to raise the quota for UNHCR assisted Iranian queer refugees to Canada. Meanwhile, in the years spanning 2006 to 2011, more than 72,000 refugees were arbitrarily detained and the Canadian Border Services Agency carried out more than 83,000 deportations (Behrens, 2012). It must be noted that queer asylum advocacy is fraught given that the resistance to negative asylum decisions often focuses on the 'right' of a particular individual (like Alvaro) to stay, rather than challenging the logics of deportation and state violence as such. This is, in part, because of the profoundly individualizing logic at the heart of the political asylum system in the global North and West. I am grateful to the editors of this special issue for pointing this out.
6. There is no way to accurately measure the numbers of people who have departed from the quantitative, datalogical control apparatuses of the state.

7. For example, El Paso detention center in Texas and the Broward Detention center in Florida.
8. The DREAM Act has gone through multiple renditions and been squashed multiple times since its introduction in August 2001. In the summer of 2012, Barack Obama promised that the 'spirit' of the Act would be honored to the extent that his government would not deport undocumented youth who fit the DREAM Act criteria, calling this the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). According to Presente.org's Deportation Clock, however, the Obama administration has deported more than 1.7 million people since 2009 (Presente.org, 2013). Over the last four years (from 2009 to 2013), more people have been deported than in all the years prior to 1997 combined.
9. The politics of representation effectively operate as processes of ontological capture/seizure in the sense that recognition binds 'becoming' into 'being.'

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