Undocumented Critical Theory

Carlos Aguilar[1]

Abstract

Despite an increasing body of literature on undocumented immigrants and an improved access to academia by DACAdemics and undocumented scholars, the need for theories about undocumented experiences in the United States persists. In this article, I introduce the central tenets of a developing theory that I call Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit). Rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), UndocuCrit introduces the lens to better understand the nuanced and liminal experiences that characterize undocumented communities in the United States. Although this initial rendering focuses on the experiences of Mexican immigrants and individuals of Mexican descent, UndocuCrit exhorts DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to contribute to this emerging framework by applying it to their experiences and those of other undocumented communities. As a theoretical framework, UndocuCrit challenges an immigrant binary rhetoric as well as embarking on a journey toward social justice and the empowerment of our communities.

Introduction

As a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)[1] Seminar at Harvard University came to its end on March 5, 2018—a semester-long series of events that focused on issues related to immigration—Yossimar Reyes,[2] a poet, educator, performance artist, and public speaker took the stage during the final concert. Overtaken by feelings of pride, awe, and fear, I sat quietly on a pew adjacent to the middle aisle at Memorial Church. Sunken on the seventh row, I witnessed how Reyes first emerged from the fourth row making his way through the red carpet that led to the steps guarding the main altar. Before the steps, a microphone-stand patiently waited to become an ally. An undocumented American himself, Reyes' opening remarks resonated with my experiences as an undocumented immigrant and DACAdemic.[3] In trying to describe his work in relation to our community, the struggles he has endured, and the courage with which our communities navigate society, Reyes asserted that "[it was] not resilience, [it was] something else, [as he was] still trying to figure out what that word [was]." Despite clouds of uncertainty that obscure our immigrant communities' future, Reyes' words reinforced in me the hope and resistance that I had unknowingly come to seek that night. Furthermore, Reyes' inquiry for the something else resembled that endeavor in which I have too embarked academically. Through scholarship, I remain committed to highlighting the something else that characterizes most undocumented individuals as well as to

denouncing systemic ongoing efforts that continue to marginalize our communities.

Growing up as an undocumented adolescent in Texas, *mi mamá* often reminded me of the importance of higher education. In Mexico, it was perceived as our way out of poverty; on this side of the Rio Bravo, education became a haven, my own personal raft to escaping illegality. Although the DACA[4] program has provided me with temporary deferral from deportation and the opportunity to work legally in the United States, many of the obstacles and forms of discrimination I've encountered have not been postponed. In response to the obstacles, discrimination, and a long-standing anti-immigrant climate as well as conscious of the privileges afforded to me as a "white-passing" Mexican male, my credentials, and la educación[5] that my family has provided, I now seek to transcend a few colonized minds—borders that we still have not been able to cross by foot.[6]

My academic objectives are the result of a life full of contradictions. As a young undocumented student, I enjoyed free access to a high school education. Soon after graduation, I became aware of how difficult getting through a postsecondary education would be. As I continued to further my

[1]Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Carlos Aguilar, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 13 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.
Email: carlos_aguilargonzalez@g.harvard.edu

education during the week and clean tables at a Mexican restaurant on the weekends, I became aware of the vicious caress of our immigration system. In this precarious ongoing phase of my life, it appeared that the more I studied, the more I was tolerated. Unfortunately, the more I cleaned, the messier my life became, the dirtier I was perceived, and the less I was appreciated. Despite those perceptions, I continued to appreciate my community and to value myself. I continued to work in that restaurant during my undergraduate studies from 2010 and throughout the completion of my master's degree in the summer of 2017. It was there, working alongside the owner, cooks, dishwashers, and servers that I was exposed to many stories of success, perseverance, hard-work, and to stories exemplifying the something else that Reyes had struggle to define. Working my way from the rank of a busboy to manager, I became well-acquainted with my restaurant family. They confided in me their biggest fears and most cherished memories from home. They voiced the frustrations with their current situation, they requested legal advice, and when overwhelmed by our legal and social status, I found a way to steal a smile with no fear of repercussions other than a heartfelt and loving "¡ah pinche Carlitos!" On many other occasions, I recall asking the cooks to let me work the line with them.

No Carlitos, tú tienes las manos muy delicadas, no te vayas a quemar.

The head cook would respond, while the rest of the crew smiled and nodded approvingly, "No, Carlitos, you have very sensitive hands, we do not want you to get burned." This was true. Looking through the kitchen window, I thought of their hands, the places they had been, and the things they had made. I thought of the stories I could only dream about writing had I had their hands. As the head cook explained, it was not that they feared for my hands' well-being. Rather, they believed that my hands could be put to a different use, write.

Similar to Brayboy's (2005) conceptualization of a Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), I have too pondered about a theoretical framework, a recipe that augments and provides for a better understanding and appreciation of undocumented communities.[7] In addition to understanding the problems faced by our communities in educational institutions, an analysis that can be undertaken with the adoption of Brayboy's proposed tenets, I am also in search of a theoretical frame that provides the lenses to understand the lived experiences of undocumented communities in the United States.

The following section introduces and outlines Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit): an off-shoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), and TribalCrit. This initial effort seeks to persuade fellow DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to apply and amplify UndocuCrit with their experiences. In doing so, this emerging framework highlights the resilience of undocumented communities by exposing the fear and oppression to which we are subjected, the varied and rich-fullness of our experiences, and the ways in which we navigate and succeed despite the obstacles encountered on a daily basis. Although the tenets introduced are later explored at a deeper level, they are summarized as follows:

1. Fear is endemic among immigrant communities.
2. Different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality.
3. Parental *sacrificios* become a form of capital.
4. *Acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement.

The Influence of Critical Theory

Similar to LatCrit and TribalCrit, UndocuCrit develops from a long tradition of CRTs. Furthermore, it serves as a first attempt to meet a larger academic demand for "nuanced theories about undocumented life" (Gonzales, 2016, p. 71). Like TribalCrit, UndocuCrit honors "the multiple, nuanced, and historically and geographically located epistemologies and ontologies found in" undocumented communities in the United States. Although TribalCrit is rooted in the similarities of tribal nations while also distinguishing the "range of variations that exist within and between communities and individuals" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427), UndocuCrit seeks to highlight differing local, state, and federal sociopolitical contexts, knowledges, backgrounds, intersectionalities, and experiences encountered by undocumented individuals.

Although LatCrit highlights issues such as immigration, language, identity, culture, and skin color (Brayboy, 2005; Bernal, 2002; Montoya, 1994), its conceptualization in general and its name in specific delineate an application specific to Latinx experiences. However, while this initial theoretical rendering engages mostly with the Mexican experience, UndocuCrit's conceptualization provides for, and encourages the engagement of varied [undocumented] immigrant communities.

As DACAdemics and undocumented scholars of color and holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002), it is imperative that the voices of a diverse and intersecting undocumented community are accentuated. Through scholarship, as argued somewhere else (Aguilar, 2017), the creation of a new DACAdemic school of thought that advocates for the improvement and acknowledgment of our communities is vital. In *Mi casa es tu casa: DACAdemics redefine citizenship*, I identified DACAdemics as those students who participate in postsecondary education and civic activities despite the adversities faced on a daily basis. The term DACAdemic developed from the quasi-legal reality afforded by DACA and from the improved, yet constrained feelings of inclusion and educational opportunities that such program has been shown to provide (Gonzales, 2016;

Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). In that work, I interpreted the term DACAdemic as fundamentally similar to that of the Dreamer in that "in both scenarios the youth migrants have internalized US culture and values, they are bright and highly motivated to achieve, yet they also represent youth whose distinctive immigration status is no fault of their own" (Aguilar, 2017, p. 7; Nicholls & Fiorito, 2015).

However, I recognize and cherish the educational and occupational diversity found among undocumented communities. Aware of systemic factors that shape and hinder undocumented immigrants' day-to-day experiences and of how legal liminality affects the lives of millions of undocumented immigrants (Menjívar, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011), my research [the work that I attempt to conduct], to which I invite the engagement of fellow DACAdemics and undocumented scholars, seeks to dismantle the myth of model [undocumented] minorities and erroneous notions of cultural and linguistic deficiencies. As part of the whole community, we must all work together to challenge a superficial and oppressive binary immigrant rhetoric that continues to polarize not only society but also some within our own communities (Buenavista, 2018).

TribalCrit Influences

In this light, that we are beginning to flood the halls of academia does not mean that we forget the currents that brought us here. Thus, UndocuCrit aims to understand and capture the rich, nuanced, complex, and at times contradictory lived experiences of undocumented immigrants (Tuck, 2009). In augmenting UndocuCrit's framework, we are to continue exposing undocumented communities as places of "blossoming intellectualism" and the *ganas* that characterize them (M. Romero, 2008).

The conceptualization and introduction of UndocuCrit was mainly inspired by my initial exposure to TribalCrit during the first year of my doctoral program. Theoretically, the tenets introduced by TribalCrit capture some of the experiences encountered by undocumented communities in the United States (Brayboy, 2005). Although I do not explore all of TribalCrit tenets in depth, I provide brief examples as to how two can be applied to [undocumented] immigrant communities in the United States. One tenet holds that *U.S. policies [or lack thereof, toward undocumented immigrants] are rooted in capitalism, White Supremacy, and a desire for material gain* (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). In 1942, the Bracero Program primarily targeted Mexican agricultural workers by offering short-term labor opportunities that exposed workers to poor working conditions, and to the lack of basic rights and fair wages. Given how unregulated this program appeared to be, worries of an increased number of undocumented immigrants led to "Operation Wetback" in the mid-50s. "Operation Wetback"

resulted in civil rights violations and the arrest and deportation of approximately 1 million Mexican immigrants and U.S. citizens from the United States (Venegas et al., 2017). A critical approach to "Operation Wetback" confirms how certain racial and ethnic groups are controlled through the implementation of racialized immigration policies (M. Romero, 2008). The violation of Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born individuals of Mexican descent's civil rights, despite the continued capitalist demand for their labor, reinforces perceived "inferiority" in the eyes of the oppressor (Haney López, 1997; Telles & Ortiz, 2008), demonstrating an always/already White Supremacy.

Another critical tenet shows how *governmental policies and educational policies toward [undocumented and documented immigrants] are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation* (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). As documented in *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, Valenzuela (1999) maintains that the U.S. educational system often fails to validate Mexican American and immigrant students' culture while also depriving them of resources necessary to succeed academically. Thus, through a method of deculturalization, immigrants are often forced out of their "history, culture, and language with the intent of preparing them for the acceptance of the oppressor group" (Delgado, 1995; M. Romero, 2008, p. 310; Spring, 2008).

By providing the previous examples, I seek to establish the applicability and appropriateness of TribalCrit's tenets when inquiring into [undocumented] immigrant communities in the United States. However, new tenets are necessary when engaging in the lives of undocumented communities. Thus, the following section introduces four emerging UndocuCrit tenets as supported by literature on the issue.

UndocuCrit: An Overview

1. *Fear is endemic among immigrant communities*: CRT, LatCrit, and TribalCrit argue that both racism and colonialism are endemic in society. UndocuCrit agrees with those theories as undocumented communities continue to be negatively affected by racism and colonialism. Although LatCrit scholars have already engaged in the issue through the notion of surveillance, UndocuCrit identifies a tenet that upholds a critical lens to analyze how racist immigration practices, policies, and rhetoric function to spread fear among undocumented immigrants. It is true that movements such as the "Undocumented and Unafraid" campaign have gained visibility in the struggle for immigrant rights. However, that some of us are publicly open about our status and do not let fear dictate our lives does not mean that fear does not affect our physical, mental, and lived experiences. Furthermore, scholarship reveals how

undocumented and documented immigrants and family members navigate society with fear of deportation, while also demonstrating the negative effects of fear on these communities (Aranda, Menjívar, & Donato, 2014; Brabeck, Lykes, Sibley, & Kene, 2014; Cervantes, Minero, & Brito, 2015; Dreby, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012).

Fear and its negative effects among individuals with an undocumented and liminal status are transferable regardless of a receptor's legal status and proximity. As Dreby (2012) suggests, feelings like fear and anxiety have been observed to affect even those distant members of a community as transmitted by threats of deportation and anti-immigrant rhetoric. For example, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2011) highlight how parental fear of deportation and interaction with government representatives has led to lower rates of enrollment in government programs among U.S.-born children. Generationally, restrictive immigration policies and rhetoric have been observed to instill fear among first generation immigrants whereas some in the 1.5 generation experience stigma in response to their status (Abrego, 2011; Rodriguez, Paredes, & Hagan, 2017).

The fear and concern about one's lack of legal status, Berk and Schur (2001) argue, has direct negative effects on the health of undocumented Latinx immigrants and members of mixed-status families as those who report fear are less likely to request and receive medical care. As argued by M. Romero (2008), and consistent with LatCrit, racism in the United States can be better understood through the unfavorable consequences that immigration laws and practices have had on all racial minorities. These unfavorable consequences situate individuals within vulnerable spaces, and in the case of undocumented communities, translate into the fear that undocumented immigrants, individuals placed at a liminal status, and families have to deal with and the resources they have to forgo as they navigate American society.

The aforementioned examples attest to the pervasiveness of fear among undocumented individuals, their families, and communities. Although not representative of all the experiences encountered by undocumented communities, they serve as good indicators of many of the negative effects that current policies exert on individuals, families, communities, and their life trajectories. Simultaneously, the tenet of fear is juxtaposed with its transformational power. Although the objective of an immigration regime is to propagate fear and paralyze [undocumented] immigrant communities by fostering a state of illegality, fear has functioned as a platform on which communities are transformed into powerhouses of resilience and persistence. Given the prevalence of a Eurocentric epistemology, structure, and vocabulary (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), the introduction of UndocuCrit contributes to "mov[ing] us

beyond our [fears and] basic survival . . . to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" in theory and praxis (Vizenor, 1994; as cited in Tuck, 2009, p. 422).

2. *Different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality*: Just as different tones of skin color translate into different lived experiences (Haney López, 1997), positionality in, and relation to legality accounts for different lived experiences and life-course trajectories. Uninspected yet heavily surveilled, for example, some of us have been able to intermittently trespass boundaries and experiences as facilitated by the socially and legally constructed notions of Whiteness as property and through the adoption of White supremacist mythical currencies such as meritocracy and assimilative practices (Harris, 1995). Thus, as argued by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011), a binary of documented versus undocumented no longer captures the experiences and realities of individuals appropriately. In other words, *a legal status, or lack thereof, no longer strictly shields nor predisposes one from experiencing a uniform state of illegality*. Supporting this experiential heterogeneity, research with undocumented individuals and their U.S.-born children show the negative physical, mental, and lived experiences that an undocumented status has on the individual and their mixed-status families and communities (Aranda et al., 2014; Brabeck et al., 2014; Dreby, 2015; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Prior to the implementation of DACA in 2012, Gonzales (2016) found that many undocumented youth and young adults who had been raised in the United States faced the same opportunities and experiences their undocumented parents encountered. Upon high school graduation or college completion, they were observed to transition into a state of illegality given the lack of a legal status. In Central Texas, it was found that while students experienced a state of illegality, access to higher education allowed many to recover from such negative experiences as college served to reinforced feelings of membership, inclusion, and citizenship (Aguilar, 2017). In the absence of a legal status, Scranton, Afifi, Afifi, and Gangi (2016) have also documented differing experiences encountered by unauthorized Latin American immigrants as they negotiate "passing" as documented individuals through speech, dress, and other forms of documentation.

Recent studies with DACA recipients show an increase in feelings of membership, belonging, and inclusion (Gonzales, 2016). Although in a gray area of the law, DACA beneficiaries have reported a decrease in fear of deportation, along with a greater sense of mental freedom, relief,

and peace of mind (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Cervantes et al., 2015; Gonzales, 2016). At the familial level, DACA also improved the lives of other family members even as some remained undocumented. Similarly, despite improved access to higher education after the implementation of DACA (Gonzales & Bautista-Chávez, 2014; Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014; Lyon, 2015; Shiras, 2015; Vaquera, Aranda, & Gonzales, 2014), Pope (2016) and Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman (2016) argue that the program has actually decreased the likelihood of enrollment in postsecondary institutions. Given the authorization to work legally, Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman (2016) note that beneficiaries, especially males, may choose to enter the labor market. Siemons, Raymond-Flesh, Auerswald, & Brindis (2016) also suggest that DACA status offers new challenges to many beneficiaries by adding new responsibilities and a newly obtained precarious identity.

In a similar legal [dis]position, Central Americans benefiting from a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) have also been observed to experience an increase in quality of life, higher rates of homeownership, better jobs, higher incomes, and improved integration and well-being (Menjívar, 2017). Although fear of deportation had previously decreased, recent immigration rhetoric and detentions of DACA and TPS holders have reactivated a fear of deportation among some TPS beneficiaries. As stated by Menjívar (2017), the legal liminality characteristic of TPS holders has consequences not only for the beneficiaries but their families and communities as well.

UndocuCrit's main commitment is to investigate and share the stories of resilience and success despite adversities, highlighting experiences encountered by undocumented individuals and documented family members who defy the legal versus illegal narrative through differing and nuanced realities. As conceptualized by Kubal (2013) when introducing semilegality, these different experiences of reality can be attributed to the multidimensionality that allows for varied types of interactions and expressions of agency among immigrants. With the introduction of the semilegality framework, Kubal sought to reconcile various descriptions of the immigrant experience such as in-betweens (Schuck, 1998), mixed-status families (Chavez, 1998; Ngai, 2004), transition to illegality (Gonzales, 2011), liminal legality (Menjívar, 2006), among others. UndocuCrit seeks not only to describe how an individual's relationship in all spheres of society are affected by the state (Kubal, 2013; Mejívar, 2006) but also to continue a shift to an approach in which the informal, yet effective incorporation patterns among these communities are validated (Kubal, 2013). This second tenet goes beyond legal ambiguity and can be conceptualized as a cloud that follows an individual throughout their intersecting experiences and that manifests differently, and at varying degrees, depending on the entity with which the interaction occurs, and the context in which

it exists. Thus, in addition to Gonzales and Burciaga's (2018) argument indicating that experiences among undocumented youth are not monolithic but rather influenced by their educational access, local context, DACA status, and race and ethnicity, UndocuCrit's focus on individual, familial, and communal experiences is to continue recognizing and emphasizing characteristics such as identity, age, gender, country of origin, sexuality, skin color, familism, among others.

3. *Parental sacrificios become a form of capital*: Conditions encountered by undocumented communities are often characterized by economic and legal restrictions (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzales, Perez, & Ruiz, 2016). However, undocumented communities also possess a type of capital that can't be commodified, monetarized, nor devaluated. As if stock houses filled with *recuerdos*, stories, *consejos*, and lived experiences, parental *sacrificios* are the architectural contours within which resilience is forged and success detailed. Despite low levels of parental supervision due to work responsibilities, limited access to educational opportunities by parents, low socioeconomic status, limited social capital providing information about college, and limited access to federal financial aid (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011), parental *sacrificios* have been shown to motivate undocumented individuals to excel academically and engage civically (Aguilar, 2017; Cervantes et al., 2015; Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2011; Seif, 2011). For example, Seif (2011) documents the importance of parental *sacrificios* as some undocumented individuals' successes are often measured in relation to the social and economic improvements they provide to their families and communities.

As conceptualized by UndocuCrit, the cognitive capital that undocumented parents convey onto their children can be experienced in the moment and/or remembered, valued, assessed or reflected upon retrospectively. Whether retrospectively or in real time, the cognitive capital and dual frame of reference that undocumented parents transfer onto their children is identified, recognized, and utilized to achieve academically and otherwise. Cognitive capital emerges from migration, emotional, and day-to-day *sacrificios* in which undocumented parents engage (Cuevas, 2017). As demonstrated by Cuevas (2017) in her research with undocumented parents in California, many of these parents engage in what she identifies as *concerted sacrificios*. As she explains, concerted *sacrificios* are very intentional decisions and behaviors in which undocumented Latina/o parents engage to support their children's current

and future opportunities despite the risks those behaviors and decisions may carry for themselves. In the case of the children of undocumented immigrants, the cognitive capital develops in response to the magnitude of the risks, an awareness of the *sacrificios*, and an understanding of the deportability that threatens their parents (Cuevas, 2017). Thus, I argue that *sacrificios* are part of what Yosso (2005) identifies as community cultural wealth.

Sacrificios, similar to the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks" that undocumented communities possess, are a driving force for change within and for our communities (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). Although the efforts of DACAdemics and undocumented scholars is imperative, Anzaldúa's (2002, p. 574) work reminds us that "change requires more than words on a page . . . it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity and acts of love." Thus, parental *sacrificios* and community cultural wealth demonstrate the significance of the undocumented community as a whole. As conceptualized by UndocuCrit, parental *sacrificios* complement and inspire knowledge creation through the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks" they facilitate (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). In this light, parental *sacrificios* are likened to and a praxis of the aspirational capital introduced by Yosso (2005). However, while aspirational capital "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 78), cognitive capital refers to the mental tools that are employed to materialize hopes and dreams as motivated by the real barriers that parents encounter and the *sacrificios* they engage in to overcome them. Thus, whereas aspirational capital appears to precede *sacrificios*, UndocuCrit argues that cognitive capital, when identified, recognized, and utilized, follows *sacrificios*.

4. *Acompañamiento is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement*: The UndocuCrit tenet of *acompañamiento* expands on Sepúlveda (2011) conceptualization of a pedagogical tool to support undocumented youth. He defines *acompañamiento* as an "organic, hybrid cultural form and educational practice of adaptation and assistance borne out of a deep sense of empathy, a place where people came together to dialogue on their most pressing concerns and to support each other as they made their way in their new school and country." Building from his definition, UndocuCrit conceptualizes *acompañamiento* not only as a "way to acompañar . . . students in their journeys through school" and life, but also to *acompañar* and be *acompañados* by our communities as we create knowledge (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 568).

To be *acompañados* as UndocuCrit scholars means to create knowledge that is accessible and relatable for our communities by exposing it in such a way that matches their experiences. Similar to the emphasis on experiential knowledge that CRT and LatCrit stipulate (Bell, 1987; Bernal, 2002; Delgado, 1995; Montoya, 1994; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), UndocuCrit also encourages the use of narratives, *testimonios*, counterstories, storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, oral histories, corridos, Facebook posts, *chisme*, and comedy. A conscious effort to facilitate these renderings to our communities should be of great concern to DACAdemics and undocumented scholars (Montoya, 2014).

In addition to having our voices amplified by concerned allied scholars, UndocuCrit centers undocumented experiences, knowledge, and understanding in the creation of stories exposing the complex, varied, and at times contradicting realities of our communities (Villenas, 1996). Although not seeking to replace existent knowledge (Bernal, 2002), DACAdemics, undocumented scholars, and our communities ought to adopt a Zapatista approach to scholarship. Similar to the *tierra y libertad* approach adopted by Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata who fought for *campesinos* to own the lands they worked, UndocuCrit affirms that the stories belong to those who live them. In reforming academia through our experiences, a knowledge-and-liberty approach allows DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to continue a journey toward social justice, the empowerment of our communities, the elimination of racism, poverty, a challenge to dominant ideologies, and a transition "to a space wherein [we] are able to transcend [our] state of uni-dimensionalism" (Bernal, 1998, 2002; Freire, 1970; A. F. Romero, 2013, p. 306; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Conclusion

Theories that explain the experiences of undocumented communities in the United States are necessary (Gonzales, 2016). UndocuCrit is introduced with the objective to serve as a starting point. Although difficult to capture the richness and multidimensionality of our communities with this essay, UndocuCrit is an initial attempt to engage DACAdemics and undocumented scholars in academic endeavors to uplift our communities. As such, UndocuCrit recognizes and encourages other DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to contribute to this theoretical framework by applying it more broadly. In this light, despite many undocumented communities sharing similar experiences, UndocuCrit does not posit that experiences are homogeneous (Haney López, 1997).

Although some critics may deem UndocuCrit as quixotic and repetitive vis-a-vis CRT and its off-shoots, UndocuCrit seeks to validate and honor the experiences and identities of our undocumented communities. Chang (2011) defines hyperdocumentation as an individual effort to validate oneself through awards and academic degrees

to offset the lack of legal status. In a similar light, UndocuCrit pursues the redemption of our communities by validating and cherishing the varied and rich experiences we encounter while also denouncing the societal structures that continue to marginalize and intimidate our communities. In taking control of the creation and diffusion of our knowledge, our experiences, our realities, and our hopes, UndocuCrit encourages DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to reclaim their school of thought in a similar way in which undocumented youth took control of the Dreamer movement after 2008 (Fiorito & Nicholls, 2016; Milkman, 2014; Milkman, 2017). Through this academic transformation, and unlike the Dreamer movement during most of its formative years, UndocuCrit ought to adopt a more inclusive approach when writing about varied and differing undocumented experiences.

Similar to the op-ed written after the 2016 presidential elections, I urge DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to engage with, and contribute to UndocuCrit. As initially highlighted in *Undocumented Does Not Mean Unwanted*, know that

> this is your community; we are as strong as the sum of our people. This is a plea to you—a call to action as capable, academically [active], and ethically engaged individuals. Your active membership and disclosure promise a safe community of [scholars], advocates of social justice and characters committed of moral change and integrity. Accept [UndocuCrit] as an invitation to continue defining who we are, unafraid, and certain that together we will prevail. (Aguilar, 2016)

Notes

1. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an administrative policy that provides eligible undocumented young people temporary protection from deportation and access to a work authorization.
2. Yossimar Reyes's information retrieved from his personal website (see http://yosimarreyes.com).
3. The definition of DACAdemic is provided under the critical theory section.
4. DACA is an executive memorandum implemented by the Obama administration that protects certain undocumented individuals who came to the United States as children.
5. In Spanish, the term refers to the moral development and socialization that occurs at home.
6. The idea of the borders that we still haven't been able to cross comes from a spoken word titled "borders" performed by Denice Frohman (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNK7Hn5_hLQ&t=127s).
7. Aware that this initial theoretical rendering engages literature with Mexican immigrants and people of Mexican descent in its entirety, I exhort DACAdemics and undocumented scholars to diversify this framework through their own personal and communal experiences.

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Author Biography

Carlos Aguilar is a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His research centers on issues related to undocumented communities benefitting from programs such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Carlos holds a BA in Psychology from Schreiner University, an MS in Sociology from UTSA, and 13 years as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. Carlos is most proud of the latter.