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Cultivating Ethical and Politically Rooted Research Practices With Undocumented Migrants

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Abstract

One of the authors and two co-editors of the anthology *We Are Not Dreamers: Undocumented Scholars Theorize Undocumented Life in the United States* reflect on the meanings, emotions, and expectations of the project as they are associated with the factor of time. While academic timelines can feel urgent and pressing, the authors learned through their collective work that when guided by a politics of care, the slowing of time can be a foundation for an ethical and political imperative in research with undocumented immigrants and scholars. Researchers with a deep commitment to the community they write about can rely on time to digest information slowly and to handle complex emotions as they theorize difficult experiences that may parallel their own lives. Time can also be prioritized to grant study participants multiple rounds of feedback for each written piece, until they feel comfortable with how their experiences are represented. We also reflect on the need for researchers to take their time in developing an ethical data collection process. For example, conducting interviews with care with undocumented migrants requires researchers to take the time to get to know people, give them time to reflect during the conversation, and consider the timing of questions to ensure that each interview minimizes harm to interviewees. In these ways, we highlight the importance of extending time as an ethical imperative of doing research with undocumented migrants.

Keywords

accompaniment; ethical research; political imperative; time; undocumented migration; writing

1. Introduction: Creating *We Are Not Dreamers*

We Are Not Dreamers: Undocumented Scholars Theorize Undocumented Life in the United States (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020) centers the empirical work of 10 contributors—themselves currently or formerly undocumented migrants—as they theorize nuanced understandings of undocumented life in the US. In this first edited volume of empirical research by undocumented scholars, the authors—who included one undergraduate student (Maldonado Dominguez, 2020), three recent college graduates (García Cruz, 2020; Mondragón, 2020; Mónico, 2020), five doctoral students (Cabrera, 2020; León, 2020; Ramirez, 2020; Sati, 2020; Silvestre, 2020), and one postdoctoral fellow (Valdivia, 2020)—challenge exclusionary narratives, call for an expansive articulation of immigrant justice, and offer new paths for scholarship and activism. The collaboration began in 2016, coinciding with the US presidential campaign of Donald Trump; the hateful discourse targeting immigrants that was a cornerstone of his platform was also the backdrop for the early days of the anthology's development. Navigating this broader political context and grappling with the potential ramifications of what a Trump presidency would mean for immigrants deeply impacted the contributors who were based across four US states at the time. Once Trump was elected, the repressive reality of the political situation brought on a new moment of anxiety, stress, fear, and vulnerability for the authors. This impacted multiple facets of their lives, making it uniquely challenging to write about and theorize undocumented life. Writing about the vulnerability of immigrants felt harder as the Trump policy agenda began to take shape, putting the contributors' lives, and those of their families, loved ones, and communities, directly in the line of fire. When people's livelihoods and wellbeing are at stake, writing can feel impossible (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014), and, on the other hand, the urgency of the political reality can reinvigorate a need for ethical and engaged research.

As law and society scholars of migration, in this piece we reflect on the role of time as an important element when working with undocumented scholars. We focus on the association between how time is allocated and the development of ethical and politically rooted practices of reflexivity, accompaniment, and politics of care. For the purposes of this piece, we draw on the concept of time to refer to pragmatic, logistical matters in academia and research. Moreover, we employ the conceptualization of *time work* and *temporal experiences*, including multidimensional temporal experiences that include duration, frequency, allocation, and timing (Flaherty et al., 2020) to engage with the agentic use of time during the research process. Time arose as an important factor because of ethical research considerations that surfaced during our collaboration. As one of the authors and two co-editors, we share our reflections on the meanings, emotions, and expectations of the book project as we extended our time with the anthology, despite the pressures of time and political urgency.

Contributing author Lucia León reflects on the emotions and meaning that emerged during her research, writing, and theorizing as a formerly undocumented migrant. Sharing her reflexive process, she describes allocating time to cultivate her *(un)documented scholarly voice*, a theorizing space inhabited through her research, an embodied undocumented experience, and ethical and political commitment to immigration justice. The co-editors, also navigating their grief over the political situation, share how their process of developing the anthology was guided by an ethical, political, and scholarly commitment to bring the anthology's scholars' work to broader audiences. Their vision was for undocumented scholars to not only contribute to the field, but to help lead it, moving beyond the field's prior practices of situating them only as the objects of study. As editors, they balanced the timeline and deliverables of the project with a politics of care (Valenzuela, 2017), prioritizing time

for check-ins with authors, double-checking that they continued to feel interested in pursuing this project, and supporting them closely through the edits. The lessons we offer here may be helpful to other scholars who are similarly situated in the academy and in relations with immigrant communities. An agentic use of time, we argue, needs to be considered as an ethical imperative in research, particularly as intentional modifications to duration, allocation, frequency, and timing serve to support scholars' emotional labor in their careful research design, writing, and analysis, and during attempts to build a collective of support for scholars to work relationally with mentors, participants, and other scholars.

2. Ethical Research with Undocumented Migrants

Law and society scholars of migration are concerned with understanding the causes and consequences of migration, the complex lived experience of migrants and their families, and the role of law and the state in shaping immigrants' lives. In the US, the use of *undocumented migration* refers to migrants without the legally required documents to enter and/or remain in the country. The term "undocumented" emerges from the efforts of immigrants and US advocates who call for humanizing language when describing immigrant experiences. "Undocumented" is akin to terms like "irregular," "forced," and "clandestine" that are preferred in other countries (see Duvell et al., 2008). Across these contexts, migrants who do not have legal status to reside in their new country face restrictive and detrimental laws that make them subject to surveillance, detention, and deportation. Given the precarity and vulnerability of undocumented communities globally and locally, ethical considerations are of critical importance for scholars who work with undocumented communities.

Some migration researchers have developed ethical guidelines in their work. The CLANDESTINO project (Duvell et al., 2008), an EU-funded research project on irregular migration, for example, offers a guiding framework for when ethical issues arise during research with undocumented communities. The authors define research ethics as "a code of practice," or a set of "moral principles and guidelines" that are adopted or developed by researchers, groups, or institutions from the research project's inception to completion (Duvell et al., 2008, p. 4). We agree with their assessment that while research ethics is a valuable framework that can set minimum standards for conducting ethical research and protections for participants and researchers, it is a starting point, not an end point: "Ethical codes and guidelines are conducive to this aim but are neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for ethical research" (Duvell et al., 2008, p. 5). Rather, a scholar's research ethics is the process of consistently making informed decisions from an ethical and informed position. Scholars must lead with an "ethical conscience," wherein making ethical decisions becomes a central and persistent component of their research process.

Research with and by undocumented immigrants similarly calls for ethical and political imperatives for undocumented theorists and their scholarship (Aguilar, 2019; Bejarano et al., 2019; Reyna Rivarola & López, 2021; Veinrich, 2019). In their collaborative book *Decolonizing Ethnography*, Bejarano and Goldstein, with their undergraduate research assistants Juárez and García, propose a decolonial approach to theory and method and a joining of academic scholarship with social engagement and political activism. In their anthropological study with undocumented workers (Bejarano et al., 2019), they argue that decolonizing anthropology and ethnographic research requires us to rethink research practices at all levels and to recognize research "subjects" as producers of knowledge and theorists of their own lived experience:

> Decolonizing anthropology, then, requires a shift in orientation and technique, the adoption of new perspectives on both theory and method, with the goal of enabling subalterns—those enduring objects of anthropological study—to decolonize knowledge practices as they become powerful actors in their own liberation. (Bejarano et al., 2019, p. 37)

Emphasizing the utility of ethnography as a tool for self-empowerment and advocacy, Juárez and García's journey as producers of knowledge is presented as a powerful personal transformation resulting from their merging of ethnography with activism. Moreover, the authors argue that given the urgency of the situation of undocumented migrants, scholars have an ethical and moral imperative to decenter academic knowledge as the exclusive goal of their work and move towards engaged political action.

Undocumented scholars also discuss strategies for navigating academia and the political dimensions of their work. Bazo Vienrich (2019) names three strategies as an undocumented teacher and researcher, including taking ownership of immigrant narratives, "coming out" as a source of bravery, and finding meaning in her academic journey. She underscores that this act required much self-reflection and support from family and mentors. Similarly, Reyna Rivarola and López (2021) call attention to important considerations for undocumented scholars in theorizing about the self, bringing into question the purpose of research devoid of a critical practice of reflexivity and clear articulation of political intentions. These interventions by undocumented immigrant scholars require an intentional use of time and underscore the need to build community and to produce work that matters beyond the academy as central aspects of research. Along with our own long-term commitments to the immigrant community, we align ourselves with these scholars in calling for a deeper, more ethically-informed engagement with undocumented immigrants and undocumented scholars.

3. Allocating Time in Academia to Developing Collective Practices

Caring, ethically-informed research takes time. This additional time can feel like a burden when faculty, staff, and students regularly experience academia as a site of urgency, with insufficient time in an ongoing negotiation across multiple temporal layers. Students must read and write and submit assignments always on deadlines within the parameters of a quarter/semester or school year. Graduate students, in particular, feel the pressure to advance in their program because their funding is likely tied to their time to degree and they need the degree to begin to earn living wages. To increase their chances of getting hired as faculty, during their training, they must also attempt to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals and present at academic conferences, all of which also require them to be on multiple additional timelines and deadlines. This is also true for untenured faculty who are expected to publish their work as journal articles and books to earn tenure. The ongoing nature of these multiple expectations and deadlines creates a sense of urgency and the feeling that there is never enough time for all of the academic work that needs to be completed (Mountz et al., 2015).

Immigration researchers may also feel added urgency in their work related to the role of time and timely considerations in immigration processes for the people and experiences they write about (Cohen, 2018; Coutin, 2005; Griffiths, 2014; Menjívar, 2006). That is, immigration processes themselves (i.e., legalization, visas, temporary work permits, applications for asylum, etc.) are centered around time and timeliness in ways that exalt the meaning of time for migrants. Quick changes in immigration policies and practices ushered in

by new presidential, gubernatorial, or mayoral administrations also add a sense of urgency for scholars to produce analysis about the consequences of such changes. For example, the executive action known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals has had a notable effect in the lives of recipients. This executive action provided a cohort of over 800,000 undocumented youth with protection from deportation and a renewable work permit, making higher education more accessible and allowing many to work in professional fields of their choice. Scholars documented massive changes in income, health, and general wellbeing over a relatively short span of time since 2012 when President Obama first signed it to 2017 when President Trump attempted to fully rescind it (Alulema, 2019; Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Wong & García, 2016). Between 2017 and 2024 at the time of this writing, the dispensation has been debated and considered in courts at state and federal levels, blocking access to new potential applicants. The inability to inform the public in a timely way about these speedy yet consequential changes makes academic publishing feel chronically behind and perpetually too slow.

In scholarly writing, time is generally a pragmatic consideration related to productivity, publication processes, and output. When we say that time can also be a foundation for an ethical and political imperative in research with undocumented immigrants and scholars, we are intentionally broadening out from the pragmatic realm. In developing the anthology with undocumented scholars, considerations of time extended beyond pragmatic considerations because the writing process became a site to grapple with trauma, explore deep connections between personal stories and documented histories, and care for vulnerabilities embedded in the undocumented experience. In this sense, we enacted an agentic use of time, what Flaherty calls *time work*, "a personal or interpersonal enterprise directed toward provoking or preventing various kinds of temporal experience" (Flaherty et al., 2020, p. 13). Although we are used to thinking about time in terms of pragmatic and logistical matters, it is through an agentic use of time that individuals can shape and modify various dimensions of temporal experience, including duration, frequency, timing, and allocation of time (Flaherty et al., 2020). In academia, this requires great effort to plan, deliberate, and negotiate choices.

In creating the anthology, we shaped various dimensions of our temporal experiences, including the duration and frequency of time and our intentional allocation of time (Flaherty et al., 2020) to facilitate collective practices of politics of care (Valenzuela, 2017) and accompaniment (Aguilar, 2019). Education scholar Valenzuela (2017) theorizes a "politics of care" that is an orientation, rooted in a set of practices, that intentionally resists a deficit model of understanding marginalized students. Politics of care insists on a holistic approach to the multiple and intersectional needs of marginalized students as central to their ability to function at full capacity and reach full potential in an educational setting. Accompaniment practices emerge from immigrant rights work and refer to a category of work that brings volunteers into community with immigrants navigating the immigration system to "accompany" them in this navigation. Accompaniment does not require a legal background, but rather is a way for ordinary people to walk in solidarity with immigrants as they navigate the notoriously confusing and complicated immigration system in this country. Aguilar (2019) conceptualizes *acompañamiento*, not only as a cultural and educational practice of supporting undocumented youth, but as an extension of accompanying and being accompanied by community in the creation of knowledge. Thus, we draw a connection between accompaniment in the immigration process to accompaniment in the research and writing process, which for first-generation undocumented scholars can be similarly intimidating, confusing, and obtuse. We practice a politics of care to centralize a holistic approach to supporting undocumented scholars in their navigation of the ethical and political imperatives that ground their knowledge production.

4. Cultivating an (Un)Documented Scholarly Voice: Reflections From a Formerly Undocumented Scholar

I, Lucia León, was a graduate student when Leisy Abrego shared the call for the anthology *We Are Not Dreamers*. My chapter is titled "Legalization Through Marriage: When Love and Papers Converge," and theorizes how undocumented young adults grapple with the impact of adjusting their immigration status through an invasive marriage-based legalization process. As a formerly undocumented person and scholar of migration, it was a deeply personal topic grounded in my long-standing commitment to undocumented communities. Like the undocumented folks I spoke with for this project, I migrated to the US as a child and grew up undocumented. Politicized in the early 2000s, I became a youth organizer with undocumented movements in California mobilizing for educational rights and legalization. It would be over 20 years before I obtained legal status through the only pathway available to me: marriage. My experience with and post legalization was an intense and isolating process, leaving me with disquieting questions about my new legal status. I sought solace and searched for stories about migrants' process of adjusting their legal status in books, articles, news, and films. At best, I found oversimplifications and, at worst, problematic caricatures of "green card marriages" set in assimilationist narratives. The absence of my experience was a deafening silence and I committed to graduate school as an avenue to fill this void and deepen the understanding of legalization *for* undocumented folks and their loved ones.

The book project's vision to center the empirical work of undocumented theorists was a timely and exciting opportunity. Nonetheless, theorizing through the lens of my undocumented experience was a challenging process that weighed heavily. Without a clear strategy or guidelines for how to theorize illegality as folks intimately tied to the undocumented experience, I relied on my graduate training and produced scholarship that was technical and mechanical, devoid of my narrative voice. As mentors and editors, Professors Abrego and Negrón-Gonzales encouraged me to insert myself, my experience, and my voice more deeply into my chapter. As a book contributor, I benefited from the editing and collective process to more profoundly consider *how* to craft my chapter and my *scholarly voice*.

Through careful recrafting, I began my chapter by stating my positionality and connection to the topic. While the bulk of the chapter was the empirical analysis of interviews with undocumented folks, I inserted myself as narrator with a shared experience:

> I am reminded of the difficult balance undocumented young adults face in navigating the legalization process and protecting our marriages, all while also claiming our humanity against a system that deems us eligible for legal recognition only upon the bureaucratization of our most intimate relationship. (León, 2020)

Moreover, I ended the chapter with a section titled "We Did the Best We Could" to provide insight into my own methodological and analytical decisions. I outlined how I had dedicated additional time, prior to the formality of interviews, to form a deeper human connection with my participants, taking time to get to know each other while discussing the interviews and their involvement with the project. Participants often asked me to share about my undocumented experience and legalization process; we spoke of our family and romantic partners, our career goals, and our intention to understand legalization for undocumented people. In sharing how I weave my experience during interviews and in my writing, I guide the reader through my

strategies to create ethical human connections based on reciprocal vulnerability and openness. This form of accompaniment became an ethical engagement with participants who openly recounted their lives and challenges for the research process as well as for our own journeys of reflection and healing.

I am unequivocally committed to centering the humanity of undocumented communities and the complex consequences of illegality in my scholarship. Centering *my* humanity through the process of forging my scholarly voice took time, patience, and compassion. The process for cultivating a voice as undocumented theorists has received minimal attention. Notably, Bejarano et al. (2019) articulate *undocumented activist theory*, an inductive theory emerging from scholars' research and activism as they draw on their emotions, experiences, and identities as undocumented people. As my immigration status changed, from undocumented to documented, I grappled with the emotional and legal changes that accompanied this rare privilege. As I de-centered "undocumented" as an identity (Campos Ramales, 2019), I struggled to find language that captured theorizing through an immigrant experience, past and present. Born out of a struggle to define my theoretical voice, I articulate what I call my *scholarly (un)documented voice*, as a "grounded" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) theorizing space that draws on my embodied existence with undocumented and documented life, my research observations, and my ethical and political commitments to immigration justice and migration studies.

The anthology and forming part of this collective of scholars allowed me to consider how and when to cultivate this (un)documented scholarly voice with intention by implementing strategies to care for myself as an immigrant theorist. In that process, time became my greatest companion as I confronted my vulnerabilities, the contradictions of competing goals, and the pieces of me that I had to unlearn. Over time, I learned to give myself grace and compassion to accept setbacks, mistakes, ask for help, and make changes. For example, I learned to let go of frustration over delays by understanding that I needed time after conducting interviews or during my writing process to hold space for the complex emotions that emerge when we recount distressful and dehumanizing experiences. I implemented various approaches in my field notes, complementing my research notes with journal entries and voice memos to solely capture my raw human emotions. I took time to pause and deeply reflect on and revisit important questions: What topic/discussion do I have the capacity to include? The courage to confront? The wisdom to abandon? How certain am I of my argument? Can I push past incomplete thoughts or are they too incomplete to include? What does my argument add to a broader conversation? Is this project/argument a helpful contribution for undocumented immigrants? Can this information be misconstrued or weaponized? How does this project fit with my overall goals? What would be helpful to complete this project or step? How am I taking care of myself? How am I showing up for undocumented communities? Who can I lean on to discuss these questions?

My development as a scholar has allowed me to see the *doing* of the work itself as the goal, rather than focusing solely on the finished product. This required new strategies of sustainability and wellbeing. I learned to negotiate when to push past the discomfort or tiredness of the tediousness of writing, versus when to pause, suspend, or abandon if the price was too high. I learned that I could not avoid, nor afford to ignore, the pain that comes from the undocumented experience, but I could learn to address it with more intention and in tune with my mental and physical health. I learned to lean on a larger community of undocumented scholars and mentors and to bring family and friends into the journey, for their accompaniment was often the source of gentle reminders to center rest, joy, love, and celebration in more intentional ways.

Through these profound acts of reflection and vulnerability, I learned to identify and address the particularities of conducting research with and as (un)documented migrants. It took time and accompaniment by the co-authors, editors, and broader community to forge helpful strategies and deepen my political commitment to the scholarly contributions of current and former undocumented scholars. In doing so, it enhanced my agency and power to speak our truths and purpose more boldly and proudly. I reclaimed my power through the alchemy of turning my experience, and that of my immigrant communities, into living moving text. I argue, this alchemy is the materialization of my *(un)documented scholarly voice* as I transform my lived experience into textual articulations that aim to be generative, actionable, and coexistent with other voices. Over time, a regular practice of self-reflection opened new possibilities to create deeper insights, purpose, and meaning for my work. These are practices that I renegotiated through the remainder of my PhD and do so today, as a faculty member. In this article, we discuss similar practices and call for a purposeful use of time as an ethical imperative for researchers, mentors, and folks who hold personal, political, and professional commitments with undocumented immigrants. As we demonstrate, these practices can be useful as scholars begin their research design and as they build collective spaces to write and share their scholarship.

5. Reflections of Accompaniment Through Ethical and Politically Rooted Research

First as doctoral students and then as faculty members, we (Leisy Abrego and Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales) had been advising and accompanying undocumented students and the undocumented youth movement for many years at our respective campuses before we decided to work together on this volume. We had learned tremendously from brilliant students who conducted research that told the stories of undocumented communities, rooted in personal narratives of navigating illegality but also speaking to a broader set of experiences, as well. This process was guided by a political, ethical, and scholarly imperative to bring these scholars' work to broader audiences, not only to contribute to the field but to lead it. We recruited 10 undocumented or formerly undocumented people who had conducted research in undergraduate, master's, or doctoral programs, and worked closely with them to revise these existing papers into book chapters that could be included in the edited volume. Between the two of us, we had previously advised four of them, and met the others through this project. Having many times supported students through the writing process, we also anticipated, though we could not yet fully account for, how much time it would take to help writers through what are often paralyzing phases of the writing process. In our experience, this happened for multiple reasons, as students and their families continued to face structural challenges as undocumented immigrants and because this type of analysis brought them face to face with the consequences of legal violence in their lives (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Working in the university context, with its set calendars, deadlines, and rules, in our advising we felt the urgency of getting students to complete their projects so that they could graduate, apply to graduate school, or simply reach a sense of completion on this work. In taking on the book project, the factor of time was initially more amorphous and therefore became the source of important lessons for us.

Producing a book requires working closely with a press; editors have their own timelines and expectations, so we started out by setting benchmarks for completion. We divided up the chapters and met individually with authors, working with them in the early stages on the broader elements of writing such as the central argument and the goals for the piece, and in the later stages to closely read and provide line-by-line suggestions for clarity. A recurring theme that emerged from these conversations was the emotional and intellectual work required

of them as they grappled with writing about communities they were connected deeply to and taking on the role of scholar and researcher. Indeed, many had participated in other scholars' research as interviewees, several recounting experience after experience of sitting for an interview with a grad student, researcher, or journalist who asked them to recount their "story." These experiences spurned a process of reflection—what aspects of those experiences did they want to reproduce, and which ones did they want to unsettle, disturb, and problematize now that they sat in the chair as researchers? Some felt strongly that they wanted the people in their studies to approve of the work before it went to print because they had not ever had a chance to review what other scholars had written about them. These reviews could take many additional weeks, requiring the authors to send multiple reminders, set appointments for conversations, and more time to make additional edits. It was only after taking this time to check in with each participant that authors felt comfortable moving forward, feeling validated in their work when participants felt that their experiences were carefully and accurately represented. These kinds of processes, which they came to see as cornerstones of intentional and ethical research, require extended periods of time.

A key learning moment in the process of co-editing the volume came after the first round of edits of all the chapters, when we drafted the introduction to the volume. By that point, we were familiar with all the chapters and had developed a sense of how they fit coherently in the volume. Our introduction endeavored to help readers understand the political and scholarly contexts in which the field of undocumented students had developed, drawing on our background as long-term mentors to contextualize the personal and intimate experiences of undocumented scholars who face unique challenges in the research and writing process. We felt it was important to name these dynamics. We shared the draft with the 10 authors, requesting their feedback, edits, and reactions. While they did not have substantive changes, many shared their raw emotions at reading what felt to be painfully true of their own writing processes. While they were proud of their scholarship and enthusiastic about their inclusion in what would become the edited volume, the rawness of the writing process sat heavily on them. In particular, theorizing experiences they were living through in acutely vulnerable ways raised many challenges in the writing process. It became especially clear that though writing can sometimes serve as a space of healing and empowerment for many who face their struggles through a research process, for undocumented scholars the writing process also has the potential to bring up deep trauma, rip off scars that never really properly healed over, and bring to the surface emotions, fears, and vulnerability in new and different ways. Because they believed so profoundly in the work, sorting through these emotions was also intensely difficult. This type of process exposes the nuances of what writing is and can be—beautiful and exhilarating and deeply painful all at the same time—and this process naturally requires time. Time is necessary to sit with, confront, and work through emotions and also to find ways to capture these processes in the written word for others to take in.

Throughout the process, we needed more time to fully engage the authors in their work, in our chapter, in their process, and in their vision of the volume. We worked intentionally to welcome their thoughts, input, feedback, and concerns, always making it explicit that we were committed to making sure both the process and the product were respectful and reflective of their experiences, insights, analyses, and reflections. We also were committed to making sure that the final version of each chapter, though a product of many rounds of revisions and involving substantive mentorship, still felt like it was singularly theirs and reflective of their voice. Although it took a long four years from the review of their first drafts to the date of publication, now that we can look back on the process, we feel confident that we took the right amount of time to do this collaborative work in the most ethical way.

6. Ethical and Political Imperatives for Undocumented Theorists in Research With Undocumented Migrants

The violence of illegality is a familiar experience for undocumented and formerly undocumented researchers. Theorizing through the lens of undocumented lived experience can resurface painful memories and produce complex emotions. As an author and co-editors, we learned through collective reflection that allowing time to process these experiences and emotions is a critical step in centering the humanity of immigrant researchers. Not everyone will require the same tools, but we offer here some possibilities learned through our collective process to facilitate the work and mentorship and support of undocumented theorists.

Authors of *We Are Not Dreamers* developed practices to support their wellbeing through the writing stages. One particularly notable strategy was to recognize that when feeling overwhelmed by the painful aspects of the work, it was not helpful simply to avoid writing or to move on to the next thing to avoid feeling difficult emotions. Writing paralysis, or avoidance, happened often when authors preferred not to engage with interviews or analysis. Initially, this felt like it allowed the authors to bypass the hard emotional and intellectual work; but even after long periods of avoidance, the feelings were still present when they returned to the work. Such practices, moreover, add time to the process, but do little to empower the author or to strengthen the work in the long run. Time that ran this way also had the undesired effect of adding stress to the process because writers were coming up on deadlines without a sense of control.

Through collective discussions, scholars realized that they needed to conjure more intentionality to stop and reflect on the materials they were gathering for their research and to feel their emotions during the writing process. Noticing that it was hard to process the emotions stemming from interviews and her writing, León slowly and iteratively came to develop a practice of journaling through written or voice memos whenever she was experiencing a desire to avoid the work. Recognizing that avoidance was a setback, she eventually found it more useful and humane to reclaim the time with strategies that supported her own agency. As she reflects back on that period, León notes:

> I accepted that I indeed needed more time, but with deeper reflection. Much like healing work (McClintock, 2019; Singh, 2019), I purposely built into my research and writing schedule time to pay attention to my emotional and physical symptoms. For example, after conducting an interview at a park, I found another location to sit and write quick reflections of my raw emotions. This space allowed me to express when something was difficult to process or too complex to engage with, in that moment; but the recognition alone felt validating enough to let me release it with the understanding that I would come back to it when I felt ready.

These practices that require scheduling additional time for contemplation are perhaps useful for any writer, but are especially important for creating space to release and reflect on the human response when conducting research that is parallel to lived experience.

These complex human responses are also accompanied by other challenges scholars may face, such as the trials of graduate school, financial precarity, career planning, community commitments, family responsibilities, xenophobia, and other intersecting forms of oppression that impact their daily lives and take time to consider. In those moments, amidst multiple challenges, scholars may also negotiate time to step

away from the work and refocus energy towards other activities that holistically support their wellbeing. In academia, this is a delicate balance to strike, particularly for researchers with intimate ties to the work, where research and everyday life are impossible to fully separate. To center the scholar holistically requires a politics of care for their overall wellbeing (Valenzuela, 2017), including the scholar's mental and physical health, to combat distressful or physical manifestations stemming from the work. While we do not aim to be prescriptive, we encourage scholars to seek mental health resources and support while researching and writing. Other practices that were helpful among members of our collective include: being outdoors, drinking plenty of water, taking walks, joining online and in-person writing groups, getting enough rest, and frequently coming back to what grounds them and inspires them to do their work.

Time is also necessary to humanely accommodate the ongoing considerations of doing this kind of research. For example, the authors built a network to check in with each other about topics such as disclosing vulnerable immigration statuses in their chapter drafts. How much of oneself should one disclose? When is it appropriate to speak of their own fears and struggles alongside those of study participants? And when does it serve the work best to focus the analysis exclusively on others' words and experiences? To expand on these conversations, three authors of the anthology, Lucia León, Katy Maldonado Dominguez, and Carolina Valdivia, founded Undocumented Insights, a collective *for and by* undocumented and formerly undocumented scholars of migration (Maldonado Dominguez et al., 2020). They organized a series of webinars that offered panelists and attendees intentional space to speak frankly about the state of immigration scholarship, emerging challenges, and pathways to recenter the power of undocumented theorists individually and as members of a larger collective. They offered peer support to acknowledge their emotions and plan more intentionally for potential challenges they would face during research. And they gave each other tools for minimizing harm in their writing, creating support teams, and promoting wellbeing across various stages of their work. Similar collectives have emerged, as dedicated spaces for undocumented scholars to share scholarship, build community, and create collaborations (University of California – Santa Cruz, 2024).

Although it can add more time to their writing process, personal reflection and conversation with trusted supporters can help scholars process fears and motivations about sharing their undocumented experiences, including negotiating how much to disclose, when, and to whom. These are important considerations, as immigrant scholars also share intersecting identities and various immigration situations with different levels of vulnerability. For example, someone waiting on a decision about their immigrant visa application may rightfully feel especially apprehensive about revealing personal details in a publication that may delay or derail their immigration process. Even those who obtain legal permanent residency, moreover, may continue to fear the possible loss of legalization (Menjívar & Lakhani, 2016), thereby worrying about how their published scholarship may affect their own legal protections. As the anthology intentionally centered the theoretical voices of undocumented scholars, the contributors each decided the extent to which they felt comfortable sharing their personal experience of being undocumented in their respective chapters. Indeed, they feel the weight of this decision every time they contemplate the intended audience of each new piece they write. For undocumented scholars, similarly careful consideration and time must be taken for decisions about publishing venues, academic institutions for study or work, selection of mentors and dissertation committees, and development of professional and community networks. In each case, their own protection may be at stake.

The reflexivity we encouraged in the volume among the editors and authors also led to conversations about the time needed to treat study participants ethically in the research. The authors agreed that they often felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to represent their study participants well; did not want to pathologize or oversimplify study participants' experiences; and feared replicating harmful narratives about undocumented immigrants in their work. In response, they were committed to their study participants' approval of the work, requiring extended time to allow interlocutors and participants multiple rounds of feedback for each version of the chapter. Such a commitment, while it extends the length of time of any project, also grants these authors a sense of satisfaction that their work is accurate and that they remain accountable to the community that most matters to them.

The scholars of the anthology were motivated by personal and political connections to their chosen topics. Their chapters were undergraduate projects, master's theses, or doctoral projects which they revisited, extended, and adapted for the edited volume. While writing, revising, and editing takes time for all writers, we came to understand that time took on a unique importance in the project. While ethical practices in research design, data collection, and writing is a clear principle to get behind, there are real implications on time that adopting this approach entails. This was magnified in many ways for the authors in this collection, not only because they were managing deep community and personal commitments, but also because nearly all had personal experiences of feeling like objects of study. They intimately knew how those previous research engagements had negatively impacted them. For example, sitting down for an interview with a stranger who then began asking probing, personal questions that bring up traumatic experiences was a cautionary tale for these undocumented researchers, insistent they did not want to repeat this dehumanizing and damaging dynamic. Rather, they put effort into building relationships and meaningful connections with research participants to make interviews less impersonal and extractive. The added time spent developing relationships also elongates the research process, but we feel strongly that the extended time is necessary for ethical research with undocumented immigrants.

At the point of developing interview questionnaires, another example of the undocumented researchers working to disrupt problematic dynamics is in spending additional time to carefully consider what might seem to be a relatively benign question in most contexts but that takes on a different tone when asked of undocumented research participants. One researcher remembers being asked at the end of an interview where she sees herself five years from now; it is a question that is commonly asked of college students. She recounts the way the question rubbed her raw—everything about her future as an undocumented young person was uncertain. The seemingly innocuous question was everything but, when asked of her, in this context, at the end of the interview, leaving her to grapple with this uncertainty long after the interview concluded and the interviewer moved on with her own life without a second thought. The timing of the question—at the end of the interview—magnified its impact. This is yet another way that time took on a different and unique importance to these researchers. While time can seem to be a flat concept—measured clearly in numbers, with little ambiguity—this experience opened up the ways in which time for undocumented researchers is complicated, requiring and sometimes demanding special care and nuanced consideration and approaches.

Published in August 2020, the anthology continues to be an important contribution as it reaches broader audiences in the US and globally. The editors and authors have held numerous book talks on college campuses, at conferences, and in community spaces. These talks have often been generative and community-building

spaces as attendees share their perspectives, inquiries, experiences, and aspirations. During our book talks, readers have also expressed a strong connection with the anthology and its scholars. For some, reading the book and engaging in conversations caused an emotional response and they too sought a slower digestion of the book and its analysis. While we continue to grapple with this response, we find comfort in knowing that readers seek this book in search of connection and find it, albeit sometimes painfully. Like the scholars, readers also benefit from the passage of time and exercise their temporal agency as readers by absorbing chapters slowly and in intervals. Attendees also reminded us of the importance of centering our joy, of being present and celebrating the impact of the anthology—all of which is increasingly more available to us with the passage of time.

The question thus emerges, what should other professors/mentors/researchers do to responsibly and enthusiastically accompany undocumented scholars in the scholarly research and writing process? We resist the inclination to put forward a set of formal guidelines, and instead encourage our colleagues to consider the context of their particular institution and the needs of their students in the development of a practice suitable to that context. It is our responsibility to see undocumented students as scholars, not simply as students or research subjects, and to take steps to cultivate not only this scholarly practice but also to consider how we live up to our responsibility to accompany undocumented students in the research and writing process as a part of our professional obligations not only to them but to the field as a whole.

7. Conclusion

While a careful allocation of time can help mitigate some of the painful aspects of research, we are reminded that time has its limits. Time does not heal all wounds. To theorize from this wound is painful. The hard truth is that being undocumented in the US is harmful and immigrant scholars both experience and theorize the consequences of this harm. When their scholarship examines those most impacted, they aim to do so in ethical and responsive ways that uplift their shared commitments to end oppressive systems. Practices of accompaniment and politics of care allow scholars and supporters to exercise and provide care, practice reflexivity, uphold accountability and harm reduction, and center individual and collective wellbeing and healing. In doing so, we also witness the power, commitment, and deep connection of theorists and readers as the authors continue their work, and readers return to the book to accompany their own journeys.

The book project and emerging collaborations between the authors counter the dominant culture of academia that enshrines competitiveness, individualism, and transactional relationships (Mountz et al., 2015). As supportive environments that amplify undocumented people as facilitators of knowledge, they require practices of vulnerability, reflection, and trust between immigrant scholars and supportive networks. Much like liberatory practices (Jawaid & Azali-Rojas, 2022), grappling with challenges as an undocumented scholar is an act of self-reflection and self-determination and can take many forms. Primarily, it requires an agentic use of time, including modifications of duration, frequency, allocation, and timing (Flaherty et al., 2020), to consider and make informed choices about the challenges of researching familiar topics and how to reduce these challenges and potential harms towards new liberatory practices. There is no “chosen path” that can be prescribed, rather we lean on the encouraging experiences of the authors who call for generative, reflexive, and collaborative spaces. In turn, their intentional use of time to build liberatory practices can facilitate greater epistemic and ontological capacity to address the intellectual and ethical dimensions of research with undocumented communities. As undocumented students practice their own research ethic

they will continue to innovate research methods and writing practices to ethically engage with undocumented communities and the multiple audiences of their work. As their supporters, we encourage collective and reflexive practices rooted in ethical and political commitments to undocumented communities.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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