

# Representations and Images of Frontiers and Borders



# Representations and Images of Frontiers and Borders:

*On the Edge*

Edited by

Katarzyna Nowak-McNeice

and Alejandra María Aventín Fontana

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	vii
Introduction .....	ix
On the Edge: Literary and Theoretical Considerations of the Frontiers, Borders, and Liminal Spaces Katarzyna Nowak-McNeice	
Chapter One.....	1
Reframing Borders: Acts of Citizenship and Modes of Belonging in the Recent U.S. Theater of Undocumentedness Diana Benea	
Chapter Two .....	20
Gathered Around the Table: Borders and Frontiers in Germaine Guèvremont's <i>Le Survenant</i> Elizabeth Robinson	
Chapter Three .....	36
'This Is Not a Border': Borderlands as Discursive Space in Palestinian and US/Mexico Border Writing Benay Blend	
Chapter Four .....	53
Estados Unidos de Amnesia: The American Frontier, the U.S.-Mexico Border, and the Continuity of Conquest in <i>La frontera de cristal</i> (1995) by Carlos Fuentes Joshua D. Martin	
Chapter Five .....	71
Fluid Borders and Confounding Liminality: Reading Jorge Luis Borges Nishtha Pandey	

Chapter Six.....	86
Paradoxical Figurations of the Frontier in David Malouf's <i>An Imaginary Life</i> Chinmaya Lal Thakur	
Chapter Seven.....	99
Horse Operas and Real Operas: Melodramatic Reflections and Refutations of the Turner Thesis Andrew Grossman	
Chapter Eight.....	121
Amazonian Frontiers, Anthropology, and the Tropical Abject: Rewatching (!) <i>Cannibal Holocaust</i> Jaime Moreno-Tejada	
Chapter Nine.....	139
On the Boundaries between Reality and Fiction in the Literary Narrative: A Theoretical Approach to Indeterminacy of the Fictional Status in the Non-Fiction Novel Gemma López Canicio	
Chapter Ten.....	153
Border Storytelling: The Search for One's Voice in Latina/o Communities Fernando Ariza	
Chapter Eleven.....	169
A Step before the Insanity: The Psychology of Extreme Border Situations in African Fiction Henry Obakore Unuajohwofia and Julius Oweifie Babogha	
Chapter Twelve.....	183
The Incentives of the Window: The Multiple Possibilities of Music Ana Benavides	
List of Literary and Artistic Works.....	197
Contributors.....	202

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# INTRODUCTION

## ON THE EDGE: LITERARY AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF FRONTIERS, BORDERS, AND LIMINAL SPACES.

KATARZYNA NOWAK-MCNEICE

This collection concerns itself with literary, textual, artistic and critical representations of borders and embraces the problems and paradoxes that these terms provoke. The very idea of an edge, a border, or a frontier rests on a paradox. Maurice Blanchot starts his classic meditation on literature by saying, “A book, even a fragmentary one, has a center which attracts it. This center is not fixed, but is displaced by the pressure of the book and circumstances of its composition.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, Blanchot invites us to think of a written work in terms of spatial practice, whose center – and, by extrapolation, also the periphery, remain unsettled. There is a paradox there that the philosopher explores further by saying, “Yet it is also a fixed center which, if it is genuine, displaces itself, while remaining the same and becoming always more central, more hidden, more uncertain and more imperious.”<sup>2</sup> In these sentences, we come across the idea of a text whose center is set to be unfixed: one paradox rests here on the idea of setting the unfixed; but this fixed center disperses continuously, thus the second paradox: the fixed unfixed. A way of resolving the paradox, without robbing it of its provocative potential, is to see the necessity of placing the center of a literary work only ever in its periphery, in its unfixedness, and its decentering; this is precisely the paradox that the essays gathered in the present collections explore.

The volume title looks back at the term used by Frederick Jackson

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 1982, n.p.

Turner in his famous “Frontier Thesis” which explained American character through the existence of the frontier and a move westward in the United States in the nineteenth century, and perhaps it is the most poignant example of the controversial character this word has enjoyed. If we think for a moment about the American context of the term, before turning to other geo-political milieus, it will be evident that a clean break has been a core element of American historiography for centuries; John Winthrop’s idea of building “a city upon a hill”<sup>3</sup> voiced in 1630 is perhaps the earliest example. In November 1839 journalist John O’Sullivan coined the term “Manifest Destiny”<sup>4</sup> that was later used as a justification of both the Mexican-American war and the acquisition of California. Even though O’Sullivan’s grand ideas of progress and expansion were not unquestioned at the time of their expression (we need to mention only Henry David Thoreau and his opposition of the “unjust war on Mexico”<sup>5</sup> among those for whom the relentless drive west was problematic), they signify a certain tendency in American press and letters to see history as a reflection of a higher order.

The frontier emerged as an important critical concept for an understanding of American history over a hundred years ago,<sup>6</sup> and its status has changed from a celebrated catchphrase used to explain away the perplexities of American identity, through an impolite word not tolerated in progressive circles (in *The Frontier in American Culture* Patricia Limerick mentions frontier being the f-word among some historians)<sup>7</sup>, leading finally to a rehabilitated, more inclusive use. Even at the time of Jackson Turner’s writing, when his concept of the frontier was enjoying the height of its popularity, it never was, in fact, an uncontested term, and Turner himself was rather at a loss as to how to grasp its meaning. The term frontier, Turner is quoted as saying, is “an elastic one, and for our purposes does not need

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<sup>3</sup> John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity.” In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Shorter Fourth Edition*, eds. Nina Baym et al. (New York: Norton, 1995), 101-112.

<sup>4</sup> John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity.” *The United States Democratic Review*, Vol. 0006 Issue 23 (November 1839): 426-430.  
<http://digital.library.cornell.edu>

<sup>5</sup> Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government.” In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Shorter Fourth Edition*, eds. Nina Baym et al. (New York: Norton, 1995), 773-787.

<sup>6</sup> For a brilliant and highly original discussion of Turner, see Michael C. Steiner, 1979, 1995, 2013 and 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Limerick in Grossman, James R., ed. *The Frontier in American Culture: Essays by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick*. Berkeley: the University of California Press, 1994.

sharp definition.”<sup>8</sup>

Its variations and synonyms include periphery, edge, and borderland, and the very proliferation of the term suggests that its provocative (and perhaps grating) character still inspires critics and artists today. The word border, albeit perhaps less controversial, nevertheless suggests painful history, a wound, and divisiveness. As Gloria Anzaldúa memorably explained in her seminal work *Borderlands / La Frontera*, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”<sup>9</sup> Hence the provocative nature of our proposal: to rethink the terms frontiers and borders in order to better understand their firm grip on popular imagination, as reflected in a variety of texts, including fiction, television, music and opera, and critical theory.

Even though the references to the Frontier Thesis or Manifest Destiny seem to suggest an overwhelmingly American focus, the essays gathered in this collection explore different meanings and geographical permutations of the term and its incarnations. The underlying idea of the volume is to provide space to explore the borderlands between critical theory and other ways of interpretative thinking, such as art. The idea that poetry or photography can be and indeed is a form of critical praxis, has been suggested widely in contemporary literary, and especially ecocritical studies. Treating the permutations of the meaning of the frontier as a point of departure, the editors gathered scholarly essays surveying the borders between literary theory and other practices of critical consideration. On the whole, the guiding idea of the border as the very symbol and representation for subversion is offered. Contributors consider the following questions: How have historical conceptions of the frontier and the borderland changed over time, and with what implications? What are the philosophical implications of the use of the term? What are the ethical implications of the artistic choices of inhabiting the peripheries of a discipline, an art form, or a critical tradition? How do contemporary debates in posthumanism, ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and feminism reshape our understanding of the frontiers?

The first chapter in the collection attempts to answer some of these questions referring to the theatrical productions made by those who cross borders, both geographical and conceptual. **Diana Benea**’s “Reframing Borders: Acts of Citizenship and Modes of Belonging in the Recent U.S. Theater of Undocumentedness” aims at raising readers’ awareness of the

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<sup>8</sup> Qtd. in Limerick, 77.

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

necessity to give voice to those who cross borders. Benea claims that theatre is a privileged space for such voices to emerge; this allows her to explore not only the idea of crossing physical (and political) borders between national entities, but also to examine the borders between theatrical performance and activism. Ethical and political dimensions of theatrical performance come to the fore, with the idea of performative citizenship (after Engin Isin) offering a productive reconfiguration of the meanings attached to frontiers, border crossing, belonging and citizenship. The two plays that are analyzed in detail to serve as examples for the issues raised are Mia Chung, Jessica Litwak, Chiori Miyagawa, Saviana Stănescu, and Andrea Thome's *Dream Acts* (2012) and Motus Theater's *Do You Know Who I Am?* (2013).

Chapter Two continues our analysis of the borders focusing on the figure of a traveler who crosses borders and broadens our understanding of what lies beyond: **Elizabeth Robinson** in the chapter titled "Gathered Around the Table: Borders and Frontiers in Germaine Guèvremont's *Le Survenant*" directs her attention to Germaine Guèvremont's 1945 classic of Québécois fiction, also considered one of the most important contributions to the genre of novels about the land (*roman du terroir*), as well as bringing to the discussion Erik Canuel's 2005 film adaptation. Robinson demonstrates the use of frontier spaces and the importance of the figure of a traveler in francophone Canadian fiction, while musing upon the concept of the frontier in the French language and the lack of equivalence of the English term, thus demonstrating the tensions the definitions carry within them, which are in turn represented in fiction. Robinson analyzes the table as the object illustrating these tensions: a place of meeting, of exchange, of change and of communion; she supports her analysis with Sara Ahmed's theorization of spatiality in *Queer Phenomenology*.

Chapter Three focuses our attention on the memory of border crossing: **Benay Blend** in her chapter titled "'This Is Not a Border': Borderlands as Discursive Space in Palestinian and US/Mexico Border Writing" discusses border writing using the textual examples of Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (2009) and Ibtisam Azem's *The Book of Disappearance* (2019). For the theoretical anchoring, Blend uses Edward Said's musings on "the power of culture" winning over "the culture of power", as well as Gloria Anzaldúa's extensive theorization of the borderlands and their inhabitants. Blend analyzes language and identity in the context of political and social movements arising from the borderlands to test the limits of Anzaldúa's theoretical optimism. Her chapter is a practice in postcolonial consciousness raising aimed at directing the attention of the readers to the consequences of erasure of memory of borderland experiences.

Chapter Four also points out the dangers of forgetting the pain inflicted by borders: **Joshua D. Martin**'s chapter, "Estados Unidos de Amnesia: The American Frontier, the U.S.-Mexico Border, and the Continuity of Conquest in *La frontera de cristal* (1995) by Carlos Fuentes", already signals the linguistic frontiers it aims to cross in the title, with the Spanish and English languages flowing across the divide. American exceptionalism and hegemonic power are situated at the geographical border represented in Carlos Fuentes's fiction. The cultural amnesia denies not only the historical violence of the border, but also its current rootedness in the structures of power across the border, working to dispossess one side at the expense of the other. Despite the mutability of the outward manifestations of power imbalance working to disguise its immutable core (which Martin illustrates in the example of Donald Trump's presidency and its unabashed use of the rhetoric of racism and nationalism), there is hope offered in Fuentes's fiction, however cautious: we might be able to remember the history of violence inflicted at the borders and thus, through awareness of the past and with effort in the present, build a future that closes the wounds of the frontiers.

Chapter Five asks us to consider borders from a philosophical perspective: **Nishtha Pandey**'s chapter, titled "Fluid Borders and Confounding Liminality: Reading Jorge Luis Borges. 'The Endlessness Borges Depicts Is the Endlessness of Endlessness of Endlessness, Ad Infinitum'," starts with the premise that an ontology of the border might be impossible to reach; Pandey focuses on the (im)possible distinction between literature and philosophy to claim that Borges's writing is situated in the fertile frontier between them. The analysis of "frontier-becoming" in Borges's three short stories, "The Cult of the Phoenix", "The South" and "The End", leads the author to theorize subjectivity and identity as fluid, as well as muse on the role of philosophical and fictional writing. The discussion takes Pandey to the very frontiers of thought and representation.

Chapter Six crosses the border between philosophy and fiction. **Chinmaya Lal Thakur** in "Paradoxical Figurations of the Frontier in David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*" takes as the subject of his analysis Malouf's most frequently examined work, at the center of which is the life of exiled Roman poet Ovid, but approaches it from an infrequently employed angle: Thakur focuses on the role of temporal and spatial frontiers in the novel, and the paradoxical and ironical ways in which they are reconfigured. The ethical, political, and aesthetic implications of these reconfigurations are inspected in the essay, which allows Thakur to muse on the nature of metamorphosis (ostensibly the core interest of Malouf's text), and to extend his analysis to the inherently paradoxical nature of the frontier with recourse to Kantian

philosophy, reaching conclusions about the equally paradoxical nature of human identity.

Chapter Seven takes us back to a North American context and directs our focus to music. **Andrew Grossman's** "Horse Operas and Real Operas: Melodramatic Reflections and Refutations of the Turner Thesis" analyzes rare operatic representations of frontiers and borders, claiming that despite being few in number, these "frontier operas" nevertheless managed to transplant the epic of Western expansion onto the epic dimensions and aesthetics of opera, thus crossing generic and aesthetic boundaries. Grossman's contribution focuses particularly on expressions of gender, analyzing how operatic frontiersmen and -women are differently rendered as musical representations of the pioneer mythology. Presenting such examples as *Susanna*, *Baby Doe*, and *The Sojourner and Molly Sinclair*, it explores frontier operas from a narratological rather than a musicological perspective.

In Chapter Eight, the borders between genres are crossed, and analyzed. **Jaime Moreno-Tejada's** chapter, "Amazonian Frontiers, Anthropology, and the Tropical Object: Rewatching (!) *Cannibal Holocaust*" focuses on the 1980 movie, considered a classic of the grindhouse scene, as well as a good example of what is in a rather self-explanatory way called *cinéma vomitif*. The hyperrealism verging on the surreal, and the cinematic techniques suggestive of a documentary crossing over to horror, all provide ample examples of crossing generic boundaries. Scandalizing and offensive on both cultural and biological levels, the movie serves as a springboard for Moreno-Tejada to discuss the implications of the crossing of various frontiers, both geographical (such as the Amazonian rainforest where the movie is set) and ones of taste and acceptability (here Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and her discussion of *chora* prove useful).

Chapter Nine continues our reflection on the borders between literary genres. **Gemma López Canicio** in her chapter "On the Boundaries between Reality and Fiction in the Literary Narrative: a Theoretical Approach to Indeterminacy of the Fictional Status in the Non-Fiction Novel" undertakes the task of determining the blurred boundaries between fiction and reality in non-fiction novels such as Truman Capote's classic *In Cold Blood* and Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre*. López Canicio is interested in the fusion between journalistic and literary discourse, and the problems that are generated by it, such as the very status of fiction, lie, verisimilitude, and truth claims of fictional and nonfictional texts.

Chapter Ten focuses on the border crossing as a lived experience and symbol reflected in narratives. **Fernando Ariza's** chapter, titled "Border Storytelling: The Search for One's Voice in Latina/o Communities,"

undertakes the task of analyzing six storytelling initiatives whose aim is to give a narrative voice to Latinx immigrants. In the narratives analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective using sociological and psychological tools, the frequent themes are identity, language, emigration, and history, all of them contributing to the idea that crossing borders – geographical and conceptual ones – is an important element of the Latinx literary production.

Chapter Eleven takes us to yet another context, that of African fiction. **Henry Obakore Unuajohwofia** and **Julius Oweifie Babogha** in their chapter “A Step before the Insanity: the Psychology of Extreme Border Situations in African Fiction” undertake the task of presenting a variety of novelistic representations of situations in which the characters experiencing them cross the border between sanity and madness. Among the analyzed texts there are such classics as Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (1991) or Peter Abrahams’s *Mine Boy* (1946), or less known novels such as Tiyaambe Zeleza’s *Smouldering Charcoal* (1992), Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), or Naguib Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley* (1966). This wide selection of primary texts allows the authors to explore various liminal situations represented in African fiction.

Chapter Twelve closes our discussion of borders with an examination of what borders between different expressive means and diverse genres are. **Ana Benavides** in her chapter titled “The Incentives of the Window: the Multiple Possibilities of Music” focuses on the borders and alliances between music and other art forms, such as painting, architecture, poetry, and cinema. Her chapter is a poetic meditation on what music in fact is and whether it is possible to impose boundaries on it.

The twelve essays gathered in this collection, albeit representing a variety of approaches and discussing a wide array of textual examples, are nevertheless connected by a powerful link: they all stress the importance of questioning the clear-cut borders between binary states (deserving – undeserving immigrant, border as a productive – unproductive space, citizen – non-citizen), and they all signal a disruption and subversion of the border as a divisive category. Many contemplate characters who carry borders and frontiers within themselves, and situate within and on their bodies (of an othered subject) the signs of resistance against the hegemonic totality of history and nationalistic narratives, thus opposing the harmful fantasy of the wholeness of a nation encapsulated in geographical boundaries as well as in time. The essays collected here make an effort at redressing and closing the wound of the border, while attempting to come up with a more inclusive understanding of borderlands and, at the same time, to transmit an optimistic message for the future.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# REFRAMING BORDERS: ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP AND MODES OF BELONGING IN THE RECENT U.S. THEATER OF UNDOCUMENTEDNESS

DIANA BENEÀ

In the last two decades, the field of U.S. cultural production has witnessed the consolidation of an increasingly diverse and nuanced repertoire of representations of “undocumentedness”<sup>1</sup> offering a productive space for critical reflection on the state of precariousness, structural insecurity, and vulnerability that undocumented immigrants<sup>2</sup> face in their everyday lives, particularly in the current climate of anxiety surrounding federal immigration laws and the future of the DACA program.<sup>3</sup> Mobilizing a wide

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<sup>1</sup> Gad Guterman, *Performance, Identity and Immigration Law: A Theatre of Undocumentedness*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2. As Guterman argues, the noun “undocumentedness” is a strategic choice since it shifts the focus from an adjective describing the static legal status of “what one is” to the performativity of “how one lives,” i.e., to “the circumstances under which people must live, [which] often create specific stresses and contradictions that inevitably shape an individual’s sense of self and of community.”

<sup>2</sup> Predicated on a belief that linguistic framing is important in shaping public perception, this essay uses the more descriptive, neutral, and less politically laden term “undocumented” to refer to the individuals currently living in the U.S. without lawful residency status. Importantly, this is also the term preferred by undocumented immigrants themselves and their allies. See also the introductory chapter of Ina Batzke’s *Undocumented Migrants in the United States: Life Narratives and Self-Representations*, (NY: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> According to the latest figures provided by Pew Research Center, there were 10.5 million undocumented immigrants in the United States in 2017. Mexicans made up 47% of this group. See Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Pasel and D’Vera Cohn, “5 Facts about Illegal Immigration in the U.S.,” *Pew Research Center*, June 12, 2019,

array of media – from literature to music, film, theater, the visual arts, as well as social media – this ever-expanding constellation of representations has aimed at documenting “the undocumented everyday”<sup>4</sup> by providing richly textured accounts of “silent and invisible” lives led “under the radar,” “in the shadows,” under the permanent specter of the D-word – deportation. Such narratives of undocumented lives on the move, unfolding within the interstices of nation-states, always navigating and negotiating between geographical, psychic, and cultural borderlands, have ranged in their artistic and political strategies, as well as their overall vision and tone, from heart-rending accounts of vulnerability and disenfranchisement to more uplifting representations highlighting perseverance and acts of resistance. With its diversity of approaches and its penchant to explore the inherent tensions and contradictions of undocumentedness, this corpus of works has constituted itself as a vital counterpoint talking back to the often-reductive tropes that have dominated the mainstream public discourse about this population.

Given its emphasis on live, embodied performance, its mechanisms of display and role play, and its grounding in the co-presence of performers and audience, theater has distinguished itself as a fertile space where such imaginings and stagings of undocumentedness might be even more productively articulated. As Guterman has clarified, the specific contributions of theater in documenting undocumentedness lie in creating “spaces of existence, even if fleeting ones” for a category that has been primarily defined through its legal non-existence, thus “mak[ing] present for audiences a condition predicated on non-presence.”<sup>5</sup> Making full use of the strengths of the medium and its great capacity to address the fault lines between what is and what might be by providing a space of (self-) representation, the theatrical inquiry into undocumentedness has ranged in format from interview-based documentary pieces performed either as solo or ensemble shows, to fictional(ized) plays in a variety of styles, from stripped-down realism to musicals to Brechtian anti-realist devices. The majority of such pieces have been performed in smaller, generally not-for-profit venues with an explicit commitment to idea(l)s of social justice, such as off- and off-off-Broadway theaters in New York City and regional theaters across the U.S.<sup>6</sup> While

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca M. Schreiber, *The Undocumented Everyday: Migrant Lives and the Politics of Visibility*, 15. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Guterman, *Performance, Identity and Immigration Law*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing this paper, the most recent additions to this corpus were the musical *Americano!* (Phoenix Theatre Company, January-February 2020), Andrea Thome’s *Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)* (La MaMa ETC, February 2020),

many of the plays in this ever-growing corpus have only been performed for limited runs, there are a number of examples, such as Karen Zacarias' *Just Like Us* (original production at Denver Center, 2013), David Lozano and Lee Trull's *Deferred Action* (co-produced by Dallas Theater Center and Cara Mía Theatre Company, 2016), and Alex Alpharaoh's one-man show *WET: A DACAmended Journey* (developed at the Ensemble Theatre Studio/LA, 2017), whose circulation and longevity testify to a wide-ranging impact, as illustrated by multiple productions for different venues and communities, touring requests, script publication, or media coverage in such outlets as *American Theatre*, *The Theatre Times*, or *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Acknowledging the diversity of experiences subsumed under undocumentedness, this contribution will zoom in on the ways in which two recent theater projects explore a particular category of this umbrella term, namely undocumented youth, also known as Dreamers, who take their name from the Dream Act.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, by examining Mia Chung, Jessica Litwak, Chiori Miyagawa, Saviana Stănescu, and Andrea Thome's *Dream Acts* (2012), which has been presented in a variety of venues including college theaters, and Motus Theater's *Do You Know Who I Am?* (2013),<sup>8</sup> which has been geared towards community and educational settings, this essay aims to bring to the fore a particular section of the theater of

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and Martyna Majok's long-awaited *Sanctuary City*, originally scheduled for a March-April 2020 run at the New York Theatre Workshop, currently postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> First introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2001, the Dream Act aimed to allow eligible undocumented youth who had maintained "good moral character" throughout their stay in the U.S. to obtain permanent legal status if they attended college or served in the U.S. military. DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) was created in 2012 in response to the multiple failures of the Dream Act to pass in the Congress. While not offering a path to citizenship, DACA was nonetheless meant to protect undocumented youth from deportation and authorize work permits on a two-year renewable basis. In September 2017, the Trump administration announced that it would end DACA as of March 5, 2018. On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court issued a decision that overturned the termination of the DACA program, reasoning that the rescission is (1) "reviewable" and (2) "arbitrary and capricious under the APA" [Administrative Procedure Act]. See Caitlin Dickerson, "What is DACA? And How Did It End Up in the Supreme Court?" *New York Times*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/12/us/daca-supreme-court.html>; Supreme Court of the United States, "Department of Homeland Security et al. v. Regents of the University of California et al. Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. No. 18–587. Argued November 12, 2019—Decided June 18, 2020," [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/18-587\\_5ifl.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/18-587_5ifl.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Subsequently referred to in this essay as *DYKWIA?*

undocumentedness that has so far largely escaped attention within the emerging body of scholarship dedicated to the topic, namely theater for social change, situated on the border between performance and activism.

Symptomatic of the more general reception of this corpus, the media coverage of the two plays has consistently emphasized the ways in which, for example, *DYKWIA?* “puts a real face on the challenges of what it’s like being undocumented”<sup>9</sup> or “adds a sense of human lives at stake to the labels.”<sup>10</sup> This is precisely one of the typical concerns and a major agenda of the theater of undocumentedness<sup>11</sup> – to humanize lifeless statistics and thus depart from the limited repertoire of narratives in the media and political discourse, as well as the dry legal definitions applicable to this group. However, this contribution aims to nuance such arguments so as to show that the political labor of the two pieces goes beyond a humanizing impulse, engaging instead in a more high-stakes critique of the American judicial and immigration systems and their unsettling overlapping in what has been called “the crimmigration” paradigm.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, the ethical and political stakes of the productions lie in the ways in which they reframe the very notion of the border itself – in its material and metaphorical dimensions – by rethinking what is commonly assumed to be its core vocabulary of markers, namely such concepts as citizenship, belonging, and inclusion/exclusion.

In conversation with recent works in and beyond citizenship studies, I argue that the representation of undocumentedness offered by the two plays contributes to a reconfiguration of our traditional understanding of the notions above, shifting the focus from citizenship as a legal institution to the urgency of a more flexible, performative citizenship, as envisioned by Engin Isin:

I shall use ‘performative citizenship’ in five distinct but overlapping senses, that: (a) citizenship involves political and social struggles over who may and

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<sup>9</sup> Lukas Leben, “Meet Those Who Make A Difference in Boulder County,” *Daily Camera*, September 28, 2014, <https://www.dailycamera.com/2014/09/28/meet-those-who-make-a-difference-in-boulder-county/>.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Miller, “Living in the Light,” *Boulder Weekly*, December 31, 2014, <https://www.boulderweekly.com/news/living-in-the-light/>.

<sup>11</sup> David Lozano, Karen Zacarías and Alex Alpharaoh, “Undocumented Stories Have Always Mattered / Las Historias Sobre Los Indocumentados Siempre Han Importado,” *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, October 15, 2017, <https://howlround.com/undocumented-stories-have-always-mattered-las-historias-sobre-los-indocumentados-siempre-han>.

<sup>12</sup> Juliet P. Stumpf, “The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign Power,” *American University Law Review*, No 56, (December 2006): 367-419.

may not act as a subject of rights; (b) these struggles feature not only citizens but also non-citizens as relational actors; (c) citizens and non-citizens include different social groups making rights claims; (d) people enact citizenship by exercising, claiming, and performing rights and duties, and; (e) when people enact citizenship they creatively transform its meanings and functions.<sup>13</sup>

As such, at the core of performative citizenship Isin locates a struggle to enact particular rights that are unauthorized or contested, arguing that, in the case of non-citizens, making such rights claims also implies a claim for “the right to have rights.”<sup>14</sup> In this capacious understanding of the notion, the acts that constitute performative citizenship range from more spectacular manifestations (declarations, proclamations, protests, demonstrations, strikes) to the less heroic everyday acts by which such subjects make rights claims.<sup>15</sup>

While it is clear that undocumented migrants question their position within the citizenship regimes to which they belong, raising crucial questions about the boundaries that separate citizens from non-citizens, some scholars and activists have suggested that many such subjects prioritize the right to move freely across borders and the right to belong to and participate in multiple political communities over their demands for citizenship.<sup>16</sup> In a similar move to shift the focus from citizenship – a problematic concept too tethered to the nation-state – to a more expansive category that would provide a more adequate description of the stakes of undocumented immigrants’ struggle, scholars like Shirin M. Rai have trained their critical gaze on modes and practices of belonging. Rooted not in some abstract concept of the nation, but rather in “the diverse social spaces of everyday life – local, national, and global,” belonging is placed in an uneasy, ambivalent relationship with citizenship, with the two categories often working in conjunction through state and non-state mechanisms to form a network of “co-constitutive” affiliations.<sup>17</sup> The paradox of this “imbrication” of formal citizenship and the more informal practices of belonging to various communities resides, of course, in the fact that “while

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<sup>13</sup> Engin Isin, “Performative Citizenship”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, edited by Ayelet Shachar, Rainer Bauböck, Irene Bloemraad and Maarten Vink, 502. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Isin, “Performative Citizenship,” 506, 517.

<sup>15</sup> Isin, “Performative Citizenship,” 518.

<sup>16</sup> Luis Fernandez and Joel Olson, “To live, love and work anywhere you please,” *Contemporary Political Theory*, No 10 (August 2011): 412-419.

<sup>17</sup> Shirin M. Rai, “The Dilemmas of Performative Citizenship”. In *Gendered Citizenship*, edited by Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt and Shrinkhla Sahai, 29 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

struggles for belonging may lead to struggles for and attainment of citizenship, citizenship does not automatically generate belonging.”<sup>18</sup> Drawing on such theoretical reframings, the following analysis of the two productions is also informed by Janelle Reinelt’s argument that theater might provide a worksite for the cultivation of a sense of “lived citizenship” attuned to “the situatedness of each individual’s experiences, [which] produces uneven meanings and values of citizenship.”<sup>19</sup>

*Dream Acts* was written collectively by Mia Chung, Jessica Litwak, Chiori Miyagawa, Saviana Stănescu, and Andrea Thome, five U.S. playwrights of different immigrant backgrounds, who have all explored the intricacies of immigration and attendant questions of cultural, socio-political, and psychological displacement and identity reconfiguration, throughout their artistic careers.<sup>20</sup> The play was produced by Re/Union Company, which aims to create socially engaged, non-traditional theater pieces, or, in their words, “performance as activism,” with a view to “amusing, rousing, and moving the audience while informing about all kinds of wonders and issues, through outrageous acts of performance.”<sup>21</sup> Based on research into current immigration laws, on the one hand, and on the playwrights’ fictionalized interviews with undocumented high school and college students, on the other, the play premiered at HERE Arts Center in New York City, directed by Kristin Horton, in March 2012. As the playwrights have often argued in post-show panels, it was meant to serve as a platform for raising awareness about the existence and “the everyday lives of Dreamers,”<sup>22</sup> a topic that was not making the headlines at the time of its first presentation, not even among informed audiences. Between 2012 and 2014, the play was performed by professional and student actors as a staged reading in several venues, including NYU’s Skirball Center, and typically followed by panels with the artistic team as well as immigration experts and,

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<sup>18</sup> Rai, “The Dilemmas of Performative Citizenship”, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Janelle Reinelt, “Performance at the Crossroads of Citizenship”. In *The Grammar of Politics and Performance*, edited by Shirin M. Rai and Janelle Reinelt, 40. (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> In terms of these playwrights’ previous engagement with the question of undocumentedness, it is worth mentioning that Stănescu’s most successful play, *Aliens with Extraordinary Skills* (2008), which enjoyed extended runs at several theaters in the U.S., Mexico, and Romania, delves into the plight of two Eastern European undocumented clowns travelling to the U.S. on fake visas, and embarking on an ambivalent pursuit of an American dream turned American nightmare.

<sup>21</sup> Mia Chung, Jessica Litwak, Chiori Miyagawa, Saviana Stănescu, and Andrea Thome, *Dream Acts*, Unpublished manuscript, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Saviana Stănescu, “Panel Discussion after a Performance of *Dream Acts*”, The Cherry Artspace, Ithaca, March 25, 2018.

occasionally, Dream-eligible undocumented students. As Stănescu detailed in a panel discussion in March 2018, the piece was put to rest after then-President Obama signed the DACA executive order in 2014, only to be revived in 2017, after President Trump announced an imminent phasing-out of the program and “the issues around the Dreamers became so painfully relevant again.”<sup>23</sup> In this second life, it was presented at the New Ohio Theatre American AF Festival (dedicated to “queer, black, brown, differently able-bodied, and radical voices”) in September 2017, followed by early 2018 iterations at La MaMa ETC in New York City and The Cherry Artspace in Ithaca.

The second case study of this analysis is Motus Theater’s *Do You Know Who I Am?*, which premiered in November 2013 in Boulder, Colorado, and toured for approximately three years across the state, turning into a major platform for community conversations on immigration policies and reform. Founded by artistic director Kirsten Wilson as a theater “for” the community and “by” the community, Motus’ mission is to produce original works that facilitate dialogue on vital issues of our times, “expanding our audiences’ experiences of the variety of stories that make up our country.”<sup>24</sup> The piece was scripted by Wilson from autobiographical monologues written as part of workshops by Juan Juarez, Victor Galvan, Oscar Juarez, Ana Cristina Temu, and Hugo Juarez, who also perform in the piece. Except for Ana, the other four performers are Dreamers. A major difference from *Dream Acts* lies in the fact that the writers/performers are all activists from the Northern Colorado Dreamers United (NCDU), a group of Dreamers and allies working towards enhancing immigrant rights through grassroots community organizing. As the artistic team and the cast have clarified in post-show panels, the goal of the piece is two-fold: on the one hand, to educate community members about immigration issues; on the other, to serve as a call to action for undocumented immigrants, urging them not to give up on their American dreams. Since its English-language premiere in 2013 and that of its Spanish-language version (*Sabes Quién Soy?*) in 2014, the original piece<sup>25</sup> has been performed extensively across the state of Colorado, for numerous schools and universities as well as community organizations, reaching an estimated audience of more than 5000 individuals, which

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<sup>23</sup> Stănescu, “Panel Discussion”.

<sup>24</sup> Kirsten Wilson, “Artistic Director Statement,” *Motus Theater*. Accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.motustheater.org/story-and-mission>.

<sup>25</sup> A second version of the show premiered in 2017 for a one-time only performance featuring an unusual twist: law enforcement officials reading the same autobiographical monologues, while the original writers/performers stand next to them and listen to their own stories uttered in a different voice.

included, significantly, ever higher percentages of immigrants, especially from the Latinx community, as well as young people.<sup>26</sup> The show has been performed in front of welcoming audiences in Boulder, a sanctuary city as of January 2017, as well as less progressive communities that might not have been so responsive to the plight of the undocumented, which testifies to the company's commitment to avoid preaching only to the converted.<sup>27</sup> In response to the great demand for the show, the company has also created a video version of the theater performance, which has been screened to even larger audiences, in public libraries and cultural centers, and used in a number of schools, as part of the social sciences curriculum.

The two plays dramatize the ways in which Dreamers negotiate and make sense of their lived experiences at the intersection of two paradigms – one that they and their families have constructed for themselves as long-term or more recent residents of the U.S., driven by the promise of opportunity inherent in the narrative of the American dream, which is repeatedly referenced in the shows, and one created by the federal and local authorities and reinforced by the media discourse, which has often been slanted towards criminalizing, racializing or otherwise minoritizing them. In both plays, the central tension at the heart of undocumentedness as a condition of being is that between a desire to live full, rewarding lives as subjects of rights and the drastic limitations of all kinds resulting from their ambiguous legal status as “impossible subjects,” i.e., “legal and political subject[s], whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility – a subject barred from citizenship and without rights.”<sup>28</sup>

In *DYKWIA?*, the unemphatic stage design offers a symbolic representation of this tension, juxtaposing a street framed by two “Road Closed” signs with the background video projection of an open road, which is, of course, a cherished representation of the American ideal of freedom, unbounded mobility, and infinite sense of possibility lying ahead. The same tension is symbolically encapsulated in the only props present on stage, which are being used alternatively as roadblocks, pieces of luggage, and pedestals for the performers' graduation speeches. This dual symbolism becomes effective in conveying the perpetual limbo in which the negotiations of their

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<sup>26</sup> Motus Theater, “Annual Report 2016.” Accessed February 1, 2020. <https://www.motustheater.org/annual-reports-financial-statements>.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, “Living in the Light.”

<sup>28</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Updated edition with a New Foreword, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.



everyday lives have to unfold, i.e., in the liminal, uncertain space they forge for themselves between stasis and mobility, setbacks and accomplishments.

Similarly, choreographed to suggest virtual interaction, *Dream Acts* starts with an Internet forum scene where a number of users describe their ambivalent status as “not welcomed in the only country they know as home” and the cognitive dissonance they experience as liminal subjects who “can’t ever leave this country,” while “not being supposed to be staying either.”<sup>29</sup> As they further discuss learning about their status only after being confronted with its legal and institutional consequences (in terms of not being able to apply for financial aid or to get a legal job), this first scene ends by dramatizing the more specific tension of the play: between an objectless hope in a better future for the Dreamers – encapsulated in the phrase “no matter how many of us they deport, they can’t stop us from hoping” – and a realization that “coming out of hiding” and “helping the movement”<sup>30</sup> could be the most effective, albeit perilous, tactic at hand.

As they progress from one scene to the next, both productions clearly make the case for the latter stance, while critiquing some of the popular discourses around undocumentedness, especially the now-classic anti-immigration rhetoric pitting the “good,” hard-working, and obedient immigrants against the “bad” immigrants who, to quote one character from *Dream Acts*, “break the law just by coming here,” “take our jobs” while American citizens cannot find work, and, generally, “rob honest citizens of their rights.”<sup>31</sup> Overhearing these familiar comments from a customer at the deli where she works, undocumented Ksenia immediately offers, though only to herself, counter-arguments worthy of a sociological analysis about cheap labor and the often-overqualified migrants doing it, such as her family. Likewise, *DYKWIA?* repeatedly invokes the statistically inaccurate association between criminality and undocumentedness, and, in broader terms, the crimmigration paradigm, i.e., the ever-increasing overlaps between immigration law and criminal law that have come to define the American judicial landscape in recent decades. Juliet Stumpf, who coined the term in a 2006 article, explains the convergence of the two through the lens of membership theory – at their core, both are “systems of exclusion and inclusion,” which shed light upon “choices about who is a member of US society” and who is not, establishing lesser levels of citizenship and deciding on the circumstances in which an individual may be excluded from a community.<sup>32</sup> In Stumpf’s view, the two realms have merged to such an

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<sup>29</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 11-16.

<sup>32</sup> Stumpf, “The Crimmigration Crisis,” 381.

extent that this has created a stratified society with an ever-expanding group of outsiders “cast out of the community by means of borders, walls, rules, and public condemnation,”<sup>33</sup> hence denied the rights and privileges of citizenship.

In many ways, the writers/performers’ life stories and presentation of the self in *DYKWIA?* are explicitly structured as a necessary counterpoint to the crimmigration construct framing them as “criminals” who only want “to steal money and take people’s lives,” “sell drugs,” or “have lots of kids and get food stamps without paying any taxes,”<sup>34</sup> an inflamed rhetoric that has been employed to justify calls for increased border security and the deportation of undocumented Mexicans. Confronted with a “moral panic” predicated on “zombie ideas”<sup>35</sup> conflating undocumentedness with criminality that will persist even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary, the performers of *DYKWIA?* offer their personal stories about “the daily injustices, obstacles, and threats” embedded in their status. The constellation of intersecting sections includes the story of Oscar, the “little American kid” who grew up not knowing “he was any different from any other American kid” and learned about his status only after seeing his educational and professional options close down; Victor’s story of getting up at 3 a.m. to help his mom sell burritos and tamales at bus stations, so that they could have “food on the table and clothes on their backs”; Ana’s stepfather’s story of bending down all day in a row of chemical fertilizers for 88 cents a pound, “for the convenience of you and I and the American agricultural system”; Juan’s story of choosing not to attend his beloved grandfather’s funeral in Mexico, as this would have implied not being able to cross the border back into the U.S.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, the play centers on stories of border-crossings – not only the perilous crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border and the long physical and psychological distances they and their families have had to travel in search of a better life in “the land of opportunity,” but also the various daily crossings of the linguistic, social, and cultural borders of their communities and the shifting institutional and legal landscapes in which

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<sup>33</sup> Stumpf, “The Crimmigration Crisis,” 419.

<sup>34</sup> Kirsten Wilson, *Do You Know Who I Am?*, based on monologues by Juan Juarez, Victor Galvan, Oscar Juarez, Ana Cristina Temu, and Hugo Juarez, *Vimeo*, Nov. 28, 2016. Video, 46:42, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/doyouknowwhoiam>. All subsequent quotes from the play are taken from this video recording of the performance.

<sup>35</sup> Rúben G. Rumbaut, “Zombie Ideas and Moral Panics: Framing Immigrants as Criminal and Cultural Threats,” *Russell Sage Foundation*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.russellsage.org/zombie-ideas-and-moral-panics-framing-immigrants-criminal-and-cultural-threats>

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *Do You Know Who I Am?*

their lives unfold. Collectively, this assemblage of narratives offers valuable insights into the ways in which undocumentedness becomes the master status of these subjects, intersecting with questions of labor, education, family, and social life, and prompting them to negotiate experiences of radical transgression, rupture, and loss. The narrative arc of the stories is similar: by the end of the show, the audience members will have witnessed how the multiple dimensions of dislocation have catalyzed these young people's attempts at reconfiguring the parameters and meanings of their social worlds by forging alliances and spaces of belonging – at school, in their communities, or through their activist work. As such, what *DYKWIA?* ultimately foregrounds is the trajectory of excelling students and outstanding individuals who have managed to overcome adversity and find their voices as youth leaders of their communities by becoming involved, for instance, in tuition equity struggles leading to the passage of important legislation for the undocumented.

By contrast, *Dream Acts* takes issue with this mode of representation positioning exceptional Dreamers as uniquely deserving of a pathway to citizenship, by choosing to include “the 67% of us kids who are not dragged out gangbangers but not valedictorians either. We aren't on the posters. We don't make it through high school.”<sup>37</sup> Walter J. Nicholls and Tara Fiorito have noted that earlier strategies of representing the Dreamer, or what they call “the bounded Dreamer,”<sup>38</sup> emphasized precisely “the cleavage between good (deserving) and bad (undeserving) immigrants rather than criticize and deconstruct it,” in addition to other attributes such as “cultural assimilation, economic contribution, and innocence.”<sup>39</sup> While *Dream Acts* shares certain frames of representation with *DYKWIA?*, it also brings to the fore a more refined and diverse perspective also inherent in the ethnic backgrounds of the protagonists: Nigerian, Ukrainian, Mexican, Jordanian, Korean. Thus, this expanded range of representation includes not only the experiences of outstanding math students (Wahid) or characters who wish to help others and be “part of things, part of here, part of this, my country” (Ksenia), but also stories of undocumented youth still in denial about their status (Jiwon), or having to confront the additional trauma of gender violence and sexual abuse (Arewa), while generally questioning any hierarchy between “deserving” and “undeserving” subjects.

Furthermore, the play does not shy away from representing one of the most problematic practices associated with undocumentedness, namely

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<sup>37</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Walter J. Nicholls and Tara Fiorito, “Dreamers Unbound: Immigrant Youth Mobilizing,” *New Labor Forum*, No 24, 1 (January 2015): 88.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholls and Fiorito, “Dreamers Unbound: Immigrant Youth Mobilizing,” 87.

indefinite detention, which, ironically, provides them with a “documented” identity for the first time in their lives: “bad paper” ... we got it cause we never had the good papers to begin with: called a passport, called a visa, called a birth certificate, called a certification of citizenship, called a social security number, called a green card.”<sup>40</sup> One of the most powerful sections of the piece focuses on Danny, one of the 67%, a “removable” subject who has been moved so many times from one detention center to another that his mother can no longer find him, and whose rights are routinely infringed in such carceral settings. Yet, despite the harsh conditions of detention, he still attempts at destabilizing preconceived notions about the position that he is expected to occupy as a subject firmly placed outside (the legal constructs of) his polity; as such, he engages in quite heated conversations with the prison guard and claims basic rights such as getting a new pair of glasses (his old pair had been destroyed by the other guard) or making inquiries about his whereabouts and those of his friend Ramon, a similarly “removable” subject. Unsurprisingly, the guard is intrigued by Danny’s courage to make such claims, especially from a subject position that, according to a static conception of citizenship, prevents him from doing so: “What are you a union organizer? [...] What are you a revolutionary?”<sup>41</sup> Danny is equally unafraid to engage in arguments with the criminal law prisoners, the “first class convicts” who remain citizens despite having robbed a bank or raped someone,<sup>42</sup> which naturally calls attention to the dissonance between paper citizenship (and its contradictions) and performed citizenship (and its limitations). Painfully aware that he is not a subject of rights according to the U.S. legal system – “no papers” means “no rights, and no country”<sup>43</sup> – Danny nevertheless understands that playing with legal categories and resignifying them is one of the few political acts still available to him. Tellingly, he flips the script on his “removable” status by changing the very definition of “removable” from something enforced by the legal system to something that he himself can enforce. In his reading, “removable” becomes having the right to remove himself by committing suicide.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 14, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 37-38.

<sup>43</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Suicide as a strategy of resistance and an act of exercising freedom has been historically used by other disenfranchised groups as well, most notably by slaves in the U.S. Slave narratives such as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* (1798), among many

While Danny's acts of citizenship are certainly limited by his imprisonment, the potentialities available to those outside prison are highlighted throughout the play, especially in the latter half, which shows his girlfriend Manuela calling for action and rage instead of empathy – thus, for raising their voices as “undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic” instead of exercising caution and leading “invisible and silent” lives. It is here that the two theater productions depart from the humanizing impulse invoked earlier in this contribution as a major agenda of representing undocumentedness. While many projects dedicated to the topic aimed to “reinforce liberal beliefs about migrants’ humanity in efforts to gain support from individuals outside these communities,”<sup>45</sup> the two plays suggest that compassion and sympathy are limited, ineffective responses to the issue at stake, shifting the focus instead to the subjects’ acts of defying the legal status quo, hence to questions of agency and risk. Against the background of violence – physical, social, and discursive –, surveillance, and the relentless policing of everyday life, the Dreamers in both plays realize that coming out of the shadows and claiming their rights might be a more effective tactic of making their struggle part of the public discourse and of forging alliances than any liberal notions of empathy based on an (impossible) identification with the plight of the undocumented. Case in point: Juan’s story of growing up undocumented in the border state of Arizona and having to relocate because of the infamous “Show me your papers” law allowing officers to ask anyone for proof of immigration status, only to find out there were similar policies in Colorado too. Instead of moving to a different state and continuing their precarious life on the run from ICE, Juan and his brothers decided they would stay in Colorado, publicly acknowledge their undocumented status, and join immigrants’ rights organizations like Northern Colorado Dreamers United.

The notions of struggle (Isin) and risk (Rai) are crucial components of performance-based ideas of citizenship, given that they are inextricably related to making rights claims when such rights are contested and their assertion is not authorized. In Rai’s view, in making claims on the state, or against its institutions, citizenship performance becomes a “disruptive” act, simultaneously empowering and dangerous, performed in a “threshold” space and time offering liminal or fragile conditions of possibility. The two plays demonstrate that theater can successfully perform the function of this negotiated space where such disruptions of legal status and assigned

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other examples, document the suicidal impulses and practices within the slave community.

<sup>45</sup> Schreiber, *The Undocumented Everyday*, 27.

identities are being temporarily enacted, agency is being exercised, while more flexible understandings of citizenship are being tested out. As Rai further notes, “if the liminal moment passes, political actors often become once more subject to custom and law, but sometimes in that moment a more lasting rupture can occur.”<sup>46</sup> Theater is indeed uniquely positioned to create the conditions of possibility for rehearsing such future ruptures (and revolutions), as famously argued by influential practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal: “[t]he practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action.”<sup>47</sup> In this light, what the plays offer is more than a mere critique of the pitfalls of immigration law in line with so many other projects on the topic. The sheer embodied presence of the undocumented performers in *DYKWIA?*, performing their stories live, on a theater stage, in front of audiences whose reactions are by no means predictable, challenges the legal prescriptions about their “non-existence” as subjects of rights and the more informal code of conduct recommending their invisibility in public life. Needless to say, participating in such disruptive acts of citizenship entails a high degree of risk and vulnerability; while the *Dream Acts* playwrights had to fictionalize their interviews with undocumented students and cast actors in the respective roles so as to protect the identities of their subjects, coming forward as undocumented in a theater play was only possible for the writers/performers of *DYKWIA?* as an extension of their previous activist work.

In the very final scene of *Dream Acts*, the five unidentified users in the Internet forum step forward and, as the light spreads throughout the collective space of stage and audience, “come out” in front of an audience now situated as a (moral) witness to their public act. They identify their backgrounds and discuss plans to take the bus to Washington and “talk to people, to politicians” as a collective “we.”<sup>48</sup> In the last but one scene of *DYKWIA?*, the performers similarly “come out,” by telling their names and their status as “undocumented and unafraid and asking for immigration reform.”<sup>49</sup> The interpellation of the audience as a privileged ally is reinforced in the final scene of the play, voiced by Ana Temu, the holder of a document that “holds this country’s people back from realizing their full potential,” namely a U.S. passport. Accompanied by projections of her social security card and the American flag, Ana talks about the sharp divide between paper citizenship and the performance of citizenship, highlighting

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<sup>46</sup> Rai, “The Dilemmas of Performative Citizenship,” 37.

<sup>47</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer, (London: Pluto Press, new edition 2008), 120.

<sup>48</sup> Chung et al., *Dream Acts*, unpublished manuscript, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *Do You Know Who I Am?*