

# *Ni de aquí ni de allá*: the Dreamers' Audiovisual Self-Narration and Representation

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## Abstract

In recent years, the US immigration system has shown increasing signs of failure, as it seems unable to cope with the flows of immigration nor the consolidated existence of undocumented immigrants in the country. In spite of the intense ongoing public debate on the topic, the immigrants' perspective is often absent; the immigrant community itself—whether documented or not—is often rendered invisible and voiceless in the public sphere. Consequently, grassroots immigrant activism movements have emerged and with them a diverse production of audiovisual products related to immigrant justice. Among the most active organizations, those related to undocumented youth certainly stand out; in particular, it's prominent the engagement of the Dreamers, recipients or potential recipients of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program established in 2012. Documentaries and activist videos related to immigrant justice are chiefly participatory and rely on storytelling, exploiting the effectiveness of personal experiences in stimulating interest, awareness and compassion in the public. Young undocumented people admit to their controversial status using video as a mean of expression, resistance and freedom, voicing their commitment and struggle to fit in the American society, their fear of deportation and the downsides intrinsic to the DACA opportunity.

**Keywords:** Immigration; documentary; United States; undocumented; DACA.

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## 1 Introduction

The US immigration system has repeatedly failed to recognize immigrants' human rights since the implementation of a series of reforms begun in the 80s; in the present time, it has become evident that the system is broken. An insight into the immigrant perspective, though, it is often missing in the ongoing controversial public debate on the topic, favoring representations constructed through media and institutional discourse. Consequently, in recent years undocumented immigrants have begun to share their own stories using video as a means of expression and resistance altogether, voicing the hardship intrinsic to their status and their commitment to migrant justice activism. In some cases, immigrants with such undocumented status even have a conditional, provisional status such as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) granting them limited rights; nonetheless, uncertainty, fear of deportation, discrimination and racializing bias, mark their everyday life and, consequently, their personal storytelling.

## 2 The complex reality of the illegal status

According to either conservative estimates or more updated projections, the undocumented population in the US is assumed to reach between 11.3 million and 22.1 million people (Fazel-Zarandi et al. 2018), mostly of Latino origins and in particular Mexican-born. The Pew Research Center – specialized in collecting data and realizing a diverse range data-driven social science research – in 2016 estimated that the 66% of undocumented immigrants have lived and worked in the US for more than a decade (Cohn and Passel 2018). In most of cases, the population that resides in the country with an illegal status is indeed composed by immigrants who conduct a stable life – albeit usually in harsh conditions – and even pay federal income taxes. Using an Individual Taxpayer Identification number, people without a social number can file a tax return, often in the hope this will help in their eventual judicial case and shield them from deportation; according to the Internal Revenue Service, in 2015 undocumented taxpayers contributed an estimated total of \$23.6 billion.<sup>1</sup>

Any immigrant that is residing illegally in the US needs a sponsor and eligibility for some kind of legal status to be able to apply for citizenship, to which a wide range of restrictions applies; overstaying one's temporary visa or unlawfully entering the country implies the impossibility to do so. No matter for how long or how productively an immigrant has lived in the US, contributing to the local community and paying taxes, legalizing depends on a vast, overbearing bureaucratic machine full of quibbles and institutional prejudice. Sometimes, the system doesn't provide any clear motive for permit refusals and – even with the aid of a lawyer or advocate – overcoming the unexplained obstacle becomes unfeasible. In her short but intense essay *Los niños perdidos* (2016), Mexican author Valeria Luiselli described her personal epiphany on the matter, as she and her husband applied for a Green Card fulfilling identical requisites and yet hers was denied without explanation, leaving her technically undocumented for a few months; this personal struggle led her to take on a job as interpreter for Hispanic minors who crossed the border alone. The path to legalization is very complex even when an immigrant achieves a provisional status, such as a DACA documentation; recipients live for years in a limbo, with the uncertainty of a possible refusal and the awareness that their status is conditional, thus it could be revoked for a variety of unexpected reasons. Indeed, US immigration policies have bound a great number of young immigrants – commonly known as the Dreamers – to a rather uncertain future, allowing them to study and build a life for themselves without the concrete opportunity of obtaining legalization. Since its first proposal in 2001, variations of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act have been rejected and reintroduced several times; through the years the act proposal has partly inspired approved bills in favor of undocumented minors who were brought into the country illegally. In 2010 a proposal to pass the act was presented, stirring a wave of activism supporting the approval and campaigning to push the Obama administration to implement new and more viable immigration reforms. In 2011, the DREAM Act failed to pass and many hopes were broken; at the same time, collaborations between the state Police and federal agency ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, formed in 2002) were implemented along the border, creating a harsher environment for documented and undocumented immigrant communities. The enforcement has been supported by the articulation of a public discourse, strongly criminalizing immigrants and fomenting fear

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1. 2015 National Taxpayer Advocate's Annual Report to Congress.

related to so-called illegal aliens. Nonetheless, in 2012 the Obama administration established the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program; the executive order allowed illegal immigrants brought to the US as children to be shielded from deportation, under strict eligibility criteria and for 2-year periods subject to renewal. In order to obtain eligibility, applicants must be under the age of 31, have resided continuously in the country since June of 2007, have a clean criminal record, be in school or having graduated from high school. Since its launch the program has approved almost 800,000 recipients, mostly of Mexican origin.<sup>2</sup> The DACA status granted eligible applicants a social security number, a work permit (the Employment Authorization Card), the possibility to obtain a driving license, and a deferral of deportation; it also granted eligibility for Advanced Parole (AP), a pre-approved and costly permit to travel outside the country for work, study or personal reasons, and reenter the US (even though reentry could still be denied by the CBP, Customs and Border Protection). After the 2-year period has expired, participants might expensively reapply without any guarantee that their permit will be renewed; furthermore, it is neither a residency permit nor a path to lawful permanent legalization. The DACA status also brings its holders under the purview of the State, as their background gets thoroughly checked, they are surveilled, and their scope is limited. The youth often end up living far from their partially or completely deported families and making the most of their provisional status, pursuing higher education and holding very high employment rates. In spite of the positive results, in 2017 the Trump administration moved to repeal DACA, disregarding the Dreamers' rights and freezing their chances to avoid deportation. This downturn embodies the fear and instability that has accompanied the life of the Dreamers, as their status has never granted anything beyond its 2-year duration and it barely allowed them to seek a different bureaucratic path to an effective residence permit.

Many Dreamers are also politically active and advocates for immigrant rights; with the establishment of the DACA though, participating in civil disobedience and protest became more difficult, as the youth got conscious of the peril of losing their eligibility. To an extent, the program allowed the State to exert more control on the young and active segment of the undocumented population, inhibiting its presence in activism under the menace that any criminal record could affect their eligibility. Nonetheless, activism promoted by undocumented youth and in particular recipients (or potential recipients) of the DACA has undeniably characterized US immigrant rights movements in the 21st century, bringing in powerful visibility and political force (Negrón-Gonzales 2015). The Dreamers' wish for equality, their transnational, hybrid culture, their claim for rights, have been a catalyzing force to many a movement; organizations specifically dedicated to immigrant youth justice have been rising and thriving along with the bumpy course of the DREAM Act. These grassroots youth-led organizations aim at providing and spreading information about the illegal status, fostering cultural activities and events, as well as organizing the local undocumented communities to gain collective power and establish immigrant activist networks. The largest and most consolidated community is the United We Dream Network, founded in 2008 and active nation-wide, supporting potential recipients of the DACA and exposing the suffering of immigrant communities. The community is rather active on social networks as well, frequently producing Facebook videos – at times based on openly autobiographical narratives – to discuss and clarify matters related to immigration, as well as to reiterate the support given by the network.

Locally, this kind of organizations usually forms in the borderlands as well as in cities and States where there are rooted Mexican immigrant communities, such as California, Arizona, Texas and Illinois (Durand 2016). Among the most active, it is worth mentioning the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA, founded in 2011), fighting for immigrant rights to the slogan “undocumented and unafraid”. The alliance has been actively campaigning for the abolishment of ICE due to its frequently unjust, unlawful, and inhumane conduct, backing up its protest producing informative videos and recording its activist actions. Relevant and active have also been the Illinois-based Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL, founded in 2009) and the Californian Immigrant Youth Coalition (IYC, founded in 2011), dedicated to raise awareness on undocumented and queer youth, and aimed at mobilizing local communities to end criminalization of immigrants. Movements such as the Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD, founded in Chicago in 2010) specifically target the matter of deportation, raising awareness, supporting communities and organizing protest against immigrant rights violation. Through their grassroots activism, immigrants try to counter the hegemonic discourse on ille-

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2. According to data collected by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, in 2017 the 79.4% of DACA recipients were of Mexican origin.

gality, citizenship, American identity, through the construction of a discourse based on concepts relative to social justice (De la Torre 2012).

Compared to other types of undocumented status, DACA recipients are privileged; nonetheless, they remain object of discrimination and incur in criminalization, racial profiling and segregation. Among the cruxes of their public struggle, there is a strong reclaiming of what their relatives have given to the US as workers and taxpayers; they often represent the first generation in their family attaining higher education, skilled labor and even highly qualified employments, at a very high cost. The Dreamers often claim awareness of the reasons that pushed their families to cross the border illegally, facing danger and persecution: The lack of real opportunities and the stark conditions they dealt with in their homeland – as violence, State repression, pressure imposed by the organized crime, and so on – are often neglected or ill-represented in public discourse and media coverage in the US. To oppose misrepresentations or partial takes on migratory matters, these grassroots organizations usually rely on the exploitation of digital means. The intent to offer an alternative narrative is evident; the articulation of different modes of subjectivity (Lebow 2012), proposing different conceptions of the migrant self through activist videos – whether individual or collective – is fundamental to the Dreamers' struggle for social and legal justice. The growing opportunities to employ information technologies and access a shared, virtual space such as the internet, have stimulated use of what could be called digital storytelling, multimedia products destined to wide online circulation through social media platforms (Couldry 2008). Aside from the disseminated and diverse storytelling produced and shared by individuals through personal social media channels – which would require a specific study on its own –, many activist movements and groups have supported such kind of storytelling, fostering the creation of videos and documentaries focused on migrant justice and related topics.

### 3 The rise of immigrant video activism

In 2011, journalist Jose Antonio Vargas publicly admitted to his undocumented status by means of an essay published by the New York Times Magazine. Born in the Philippines and brought to the US as a child, Vargas had worked hard to achieve a brilliant career in journalism, forming part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team in 2008 and working for major daily newspapers, all of which as a closeted undocumented immigrant. After his public confession, the journalist created the platform dedicated to immigration advocacy Define American and consequently realized *Documented: A film by an undocumented American* (2013) to narrate his personal story and struggle; Vargas has since been object of cross – sectional discrimination for his illegal status, open homosexuality and phenotypical features. His case reached the attention of a wide public and yet it is just one among many diverse contributions to immigrant justice activism. Indeed, many grassroot movements fighting for the recognition and legalization of immigrant rights have been rising especially since the aforementioned DREAM Act proposal in 2010, striving to give voice to a segment of population that is often obliterated from the public sphere. One of the most powerful tools that these movements began to exploit is the audiovisual mean, as it allows them to address and reach out to the public in a more direct, in an easily sharing and effective way. Approaching the analysis of the diverse audiovisual production related to immigrant justice activism, it is clear that one of the most shared and fundamental aims is the recognition of the undocumented lives; it is also evident that a major expectation of these productions is facilitating cognizance and stimulating sympathy in the viewers. The mode of documentaries related to immigrant activism is usually participatory, where subjects get interviewed and the account of undocumented life is made in first-person. In some cases, there is also a performative component mingling with the production, as filmmakers and producers are usually politically engaged and immigration advocates themselves. In this type of documentary, modes often overlap and intermingle (Nichols 2001), as even in the editing phase the production is subjective and it is up to the filmmaker to aim at specific responses by the audience. To an extent, subjectivity is a performance in the visual text, taking place through different strategies that the spectator can identify and perceive as a subjective narration (Rascaroli 2009). Subjectivity and the exploitation of autobiographical narrations are fundamental aspects of the communication across contemporary mass media and social networks (Rascaroli 2014), representing a connection between personal social media videos and essay film. Individual stories hold an inherent, shared meaning that may reach out to shared values, others' personal experience and human compassion. Therefore, the most employed strategy is storytelling, focusing on the ontology of personal experiences. It represents an

undoubtedly powerful means of communication to try to overcome the absence of real-life personal stories in the public debate about immigration. More easily accessible than other forms of art, audiovisual production empowers single individuals to disclose their experience through the construction of poignant narratives and exposure of their status. To an extent, the present production of audiovisual activism fosters a reconstruction of an oral history of undocumented communities, which hasn't effectively been considered nor allowed in the US public sphere so far. As journalism does, the recollection of oral storytelling – albeit done without the historian's specialist methodology – represents a necessary tool to record history (Feldstein 2004); it is even more necessary in the case of discriminated minorities whose history has been neglected by the national narrative, making it more democratic (Thompson 2000). Personal narratives allow to recognize collective processes of meaning-making, serving as a complement to other sources that deal with more visible facts (Portelli 1981).

Striving to convey their message to a wider public, these audiovisual products also aim at unveiling the ambiguity of the American State and society on the migrant matter, as well as the related structural violence. They reveal a slice of reality most of the American public does not know, deconstructing preconceptions about what an illegal alien really is and how difficult it is, in fact, to obtain legal status. Documentaries and activist videos somehow pick up the resistance aim intrinsic to early Chicano film production, which was strictly related with the revindication of equal rights for the Mexican-American people (Fregoso 1993; Maciel 1993; Ramirez Berg 2002). In addition to politically charged activism, there is a strong, pervasive emotional component, as – in spite of the diversity of the undocumented experience – the hardship uncovered by personal stories reveals shared recurring struggles. At times, the spectator is induced to bluntly witness deeply emotional reactions or very intimate reflections. Undocumented interviewees frame their personal account usually by expressing vulnerability due to fear of deportation, as well as a sense of irreparable loss due to the impossibility to exit the country for family matters. Another trope that persistently recurs in personal narrations is the overbearing presence of work, usually characterized by an intrinsic commitment to one's own family, whether it lives in the US or it has stayed in the homeland.

According to film scholar Bill Nichols, especially since 9/11 the realization of documentary films with public funding – for example in the case of PBS (Public Broadcasting System) productions – has been somehow reduced and often influenced by political administrations, in particular the Republican ones (Crowder-Taraborrelli and Nichols 2013). Since the establishment of the Trump administration – whose public discourse is strongly based on Trump's variation of the wall discourse – the inclusion of diverse voices in media and the representation of the struggle of minorities is mostly left to independent filmmakers and documentary producers involved in diversity documentary networks (Lee 2017). Recounting the undocumented daily life, though, bears complicated political decisions; documentary director Bernardo Ruiz for example declared that – in spite of their fundamental role in Californian agriculture – he chose not to film some undocumented workers in his documentary *Harvest season* (2019, produced by PBS) because he “didn't want to put anybody in harm's way” (Ruiz and Valentini 2019). Consequently, most of audiovisual products on undocumented immigrants are produced by small nonprofit organizations, independent cultural associations, and university research centers focusing on migration-related topics. It's also relevant to note that immigrant activism videos are usually bilingual, as most of undocumented people are; the illegal youth in particular features a strongly hybrid ethnolinguistic and cultural identity. In many cases the videos are available through media platforms that promote and give space specifically to undocumented storytelling. Among the most interesting platforms, it is worth mentioning the project *Things I'll Never Say*, through which young undocumented individuals create narratives and share personal experiences in diverse, creative forms of expression. The platform has a rich audiovisual section and is supported by Educators for Fair Consideration/Immigrants Rising, an organization founded in 2006 to empower undocumented immigrants and promote equal opportunities in education. PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) as well has a multimedia section with both informative and storytelling videos. The aforementioned Define American is a nonprofit media and culture organization that promotes equality through storytelling. The focus is on immigrants and the need to stimulate reflection on the topic of identity and citizenship, based on the idea that the American population is diverse by definition. The Midpen Media Center (founded in 1985 and based in Palo Alto, California) is a nonprofit agency providing technical support and training to produce community-focused videos and digital media products to tell cross-cultural stories, fostering public engagement; in addition, the center has been recording and sharing live encounters where Dreamers share their compelling experiences. A different – mostly forgotten

– perspective is also shown by independent documentaries such as *Una vida dos países* (2016, funded by the US-Mexico Foundation), focusing on the transborder experience of youth of Mexican origin, who grew up as undocumented in the US and then followed their parents back to Mexico. In the film, the young students express the hardship of being discriminated in both countries and having to readapt, whereas their parents disclose the difficult decision behind their return.

Documentaries based on personal stories of illegal immigrants have been promoted by cultural organizations such as INDOCUMENTALES/UNDOCUMENTARIES, born in 2010 in New York with the support of academic departments and Hispanic cultural institutions, in order to create a US/Mexico Interdependent Film Series. Some documentary films are more articulated and cinematic, they embed the activist component in more subtle way, and yet aim at sharing individual experiences lived by undocumented people that otherwise would often remain untold. Albeit it incorporates fictional elements to render the protagonist's story, binational production *Ya me voy/I'm Leaving Now* (2018) is a good example of this type of documentaries. Without being openly political, the film achieves the – intendedly touching – portrait of a man who longs for returning to Mexico after 16 years as an undocumented worker in New York; the story strongly conveys the hardship and conflicts immigrants have to face in order to survive and maintain their families back in their homeland. Filmmakers Lindsey Cordero and Armando Croda themselves have gone through the experience of moving to the US and obtain some type of legal status as young Mexican citizens; their collaborative work has often focused indeed on narratives related to Mexican urban immigrant communities, their struggle for survival and quest for identity.

It is due mentioning that the media service provider Netflix has recently produced original content focusing on Mexican undocumented immigrants' personal lives, blending interview-based activist documentary and trending TV show genres paradigms. The platform streams a few high-quality documentaries in which the undocumented individual storytelling element is very strong, such as the *Chef's Table* chapter on Philadelphia – based, award – winning taco maker Cristina Martínez (2018) and the cross-border restaurant story *A tale of two Kitchens* (2019), produced by Mexican actor Gael García Bernal. On October 2, 2019, the docu-series *Living Undocumented* premiered, showing the everyday struggle of eight mixed status families, exploring the matters related to DACA as well. The series is based on personal storytelling and subjective narration strategies. In spite of the shift towards reality show paradigms, the product still retains some of the activist documentary strengths, relying on actual information on the undocumented question and its current relevance. Furthermore, Netflix CEO and founder Reed Hastings is actually active in the field of immigration rights and funder for example of fwd.us, an organization founded by tech community leaders fighting for immigration and criminal justice reform.

#### 4 The audiovisual voice of the Dreamers

Whether they manage to qualify for DACA requirements or not, Dreamers represent a peculiar group of migrants, whose position remains liminal and uncertain in spite of their consistent number. At times, a very partial Dreamer-related narrative has been exploited by the media and institutions, which tend to present the DACA status as an all-positive privilege without downsides. It is clearly a discourse aimed at victimizing non-eligible undocumented individuals and it creates a discursive mechanism implying that Dreamers should be only grateful to the US government, whereas if they fail to make the most of it they deserve deportation. The representation of the Dreamers as archetype of young undocumented immigrant is also misleading; even though the youth remain discriminated and their life is characterized by an uncertain future, obtaining their provisional status liberates them from the need to find illegal ways to cope. For many a reason then, in the past few years Dreamers have begun to channel their own voice through audiovisual narration, contributing effectively to document the reality shared by undocumented immigrants in the US. The Dreamers' stories are diverse and yet the cruxes of undocumented life are a constant shared background. They often live a life of mixed feelings and pressure; aside from the feeling of being a second-rate human being, the persistent fear of deportation and the unchanging need to prove one's own value and work, young undocumented individuals consistently show distress related to the definition of their identity.

Among the most promoted and professionally produced documentaries exploiting the personal storytelling

and exposing the reality of undocumented life is *Beyond Borders: undocumented Mexican-Americans* (2016), co-produced by Independent Production Fund (New York), Clío TV (directed by Mexican historian Enrique Krauze), and Fábrica de Cine (Mexico City), supported by BBVA Bancomer foundation, Cemex, the US-Mexico Foundation, aside from private investors. *Beyond Borders* represents the most common type of immigrant awareness documentary with the expressivity relying on the individual storytelling and bare emotions, as the storylines overall narrative is constructed as increasingly emotional and intimate. The film is articulated along three alternate storylines, each presenting a different configuration of the undocumented life, interspersed with contributes from different experts, namely Douglas Massey (Mexican Migration Project, Princeton University), Marta Tienda (Sociology and Public Affairs, Princeton University), and historian Enrique Krauze. In addition, some inserts of selected footage are shown, starting with a fragment of Bush's speech on immigration in 1980 and marking a chronological path of presidential immigration bill speeches and news reports on restrictive laws on immigration. The first storyline is led by Julissa Arce, who was brought from Mexico to the US as a child and could earn a Green Card as an adult – and thus follow the path to naturalization – exclusively by marrying a US citizen. Despite being a potential DACA recipient, Arce could not obtain eligibility in any way; caught by despair, she resorted to buy fake documentation to pursue her academic career and secure a job. Strengthened by her own experience and impossibility to obtain the DACA support, Arce is now a social justice advocate and co-founder of the Ascend Educational Fund assisting immigrant students. The second storyline revolves around the peculiar life of Elia Cano and Isamar Padilla, mother and daughter of Mexican origin. Cano has been able to stay in the US thanks to a business visa; making the most of her status, she travels weekly between the US and Mexico as an informal courier, delivering packages for undocumented people and their families. Her daughter Isamar was brought to the US as a child and she's now as Dreamer pursuing her academic career; her storytelling though reveals the downsides of her status, as she can't obtain a permit to visit her family back in Mexico and fears that her opportunities to stay in the US could come to an end. The third storyline tackles an aspect that is often neglected even by immigrant narratives: the reality of a mixed status family in which both parents are undocumented while their children are US citizens. Judith Zambrano and Ismael Amaro are a couple whose three minor daughters were born in the US; they lead a quiet life in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, affording a life they couldn't imagine having back in Mexico. As minors can't act as sponsors for their parents, Zambrano and Amaro could be deported any day, without the chance to be shielded or delay their departure to manage their children's safety.

The trope of the mixed status family is the main pivot of one of the most interesting documentaries on DACA, *WE ARE DREAMERS* (2018). The Immigrant Legal Center (founded in 1999) is the Nebraska affiliate of the Justice For Our Neighbors Network; since its foundation, it offers legal assistance, education and general support to immigrants, facilitating their integration in the local communities. In December 2017, the nonprofit organization coordinated a series of workshops in Omaha with the participation of local DACA recipients, as well as immigration justice advocates and service providers; with the support of the Sherwood Foundation, twenty personal stories collected during such event were then articulated in a documentary film. Once more, the product is a documentary based on personal storytelling, with talks by experts and professionals engaged in the field of immigration justice to provide data and insights on the topic. This film is particularly relevant as it raises questions and tackles matters that are often neglected in the public debate on DACA. Without any dramatic pretense or emotional amplification – a quality that makes *WE ARE DREAMERS* stand out from the paradigm characterizing the analyzed genre – the narration relies on the revelation of often forgotten aspects of the provisional status the interviewees hold. The film is articulated in different thematic blocks and for each of them it alternates fragments of storytelling by different youth, starting with the narration of the moment they first faced their undocumented status. There is a definitely recurrent pattern in the stories of DACA recipients and undocumented youth in general: children usually discover that they are illegal aliens when they reach high school and suddenly need to face the problems intrinsic to their status. Without a social security number they can't obtain a driving license nor scholarships, and in general their opportunities of legally pursuing a career in most of fields are curtailed. The sudden awareness and the identity shift from normalcy to undocumented status bears a trauma for them, which the psychological hardship of this not yet been properly investigated, nor considered as a critical matter to tackle. The sociocultural aspects of it haven't really been covered academically nor methodologically documented. The documentary is constructed in a way that the trauma is revealed through the articulation of its narrative steps. To all the interviewees, the implementation of DACA was truly liberating as it allowed them to break free of a negative role – that of the illegal alien

– imposed and stigmatized by the US society. The film collects recounts of this breakthrough moment – a metaphoric transition from darkness to light for the youth and their families – without sparing the spectator realistic details. If on one hand the viewer is informed about the positive implications of the policy, on the other hand it tells details about the process to obtain the status and its potential consequences. To apply for DACA, the youth have to go through an extensive background check and release information to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services in order to have their eligibility assessed; such information, though, could be used against them and their families in any moment, as the USCIS only guarantees that it will not cede it proactively to other agencies. The youth's fear of seeing their data used to remove them or their families is backed up by fwd.us Communication Director Peter Boogaard, one of the main specialists involved in the film making along with Tom Jawetz, vice President of the prominent nonpartisan policy institute Center for American Progress. Jawetz provides an insight on another – often neglected – matter related to the eventual end of the DACA program, which would imply the withdrawal of the recipients from their occupations and their possible deportation; basing his claim on data, he reveals that the Dreamers represent a segment of huge economic drivers for the country. In Nebraska currently live about 34,000 DACA recipients, most of them employed in the medical, legal, and educational fields. In fact, the almost 800,000 recipients not only contribute to a social safety net to which they don't have access for their status, but their removal would imply an estimated loss of over \$460 billion in the decade following. Overall, *WE ARE DREAMERS* manages to accomplish evocation and personal storytelling without losing the connection with pragmatic aspects of the DACA experience, beyond a strictly emotional narration.

It's worth mentioning, as well, the documentary *The Unafraid* (2018), in which the personal lives of Alejandro, Silvia and Aldo, three DACA students in Georgia, are exposed. Albeit not as effective and accomplished as the previously mentioned works, the film represents yet another type of immigration activist documentary, as it was shot in an observational style over a period of four years. The narrative follows the daily life of the DACA recipients through their activist journey trying to pursue their right to education, in one of the few States where an admission ban against undocumented students was passed in 2010. The protagonists are involved in a grassroots movement called Freedom University and *The Unafraid* tackles one of the main pivots of DACA activism: the right to equal education as well as to career opportunities for the children of immigrants, whose presence on the US soil was not their choice in the first place but for whom the US have become home.

## 5 Conclusions

Technologies change, but the need to have a voice with which is possible to address others, giving expression to a distinct way to see our shared world, remains a constant. It is as elemental as the need to tell a story, present a point of view, or give poetic form to a formless world (Nichols 2016, 74). Through audiovisual products that voice can take a conveyable form, be given a concrete audience and the power to be heard. If narrative cinema has revealed to be a great means to consider and tell stories that otherwise would remain untold (Metz 1974), the merging of cinema and personal storytelling allows immigrant stories to achieve consideration and therefore be told. As much as the hardship of the undocumented immigrant life is difficult to grasp per se, a collection of stories unveiling its endless and diverse shades can contribute to raise awareness and spark a more just and inclusive debate on the topic. Especially in the case of the Dreamers, tackling the matter from different angles is fundamental. In spite of having grown up in the US, their spaces of affection, culture and meaning-making connect them strongly to their family's homeland; they're bilingual and form a cross-culture, transnational group of people that happen to be discriminated in both the US and their country of origin, as they can't belong or identify with just one of the two. A society unable to cope with such a complex sociocultural – aside from political – matter can only benefit from this kind of audiovisual works to achieve awareness and therefore the capacity of dealing with it as effectively and inclusively as possible.

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