The temporality of illegality

Experiences of undocumented Latin American migrants in London

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Abstract: Through an ethnography of undocumented migrants from Latin America to London, I explore the temporality of illegality as a piecemeal process in which migrants find themselves embodying new ways of being in the world. I investigate the power of illegality beyond its legal connotations and through the analysis of the everyday experiences of migrants in London, I show how it affects the external structure of migrants' worlds, as well as their subjectivities. I show how the illegal status is imagined, embodied, and sustained over an indefinite and uncertain length of time. Undocumented migrants in London are required to slowly adapt, to wait through anxious engagements with other people, and to deal with a legal system that controls their fractured presents and their uncertain futures.

Keywords: illegality, Latin America, London, migrants, subjectivity, temporality

In March 2010, I visited Elephant and Castle, one of the so-called Latin American enclaves in South London, with my friend Jovanna from Bolivia. We went to Elephant because she wanted to get some *salteñas* (pastries) from a Bolivian woman who sells them in the market. It is a busy place with a subway station and several bus stops that connect South London to the center and east of the city. Because of the strong presence of migrants, it is one of the places surveyed by the police and by the Border Agency (UKBA) authorities. As we walked toward the entrance of the shopping center, Jovanna saw a police officer at a distance; she quickly stopped and told me to head with her toward another entrance. We did not stop until we got to the second floor of the building. Once

there, we slowed down and she started sending text messages to her family and friends in order to warn them about the police in the area. She was particularly worried about her mother and daughter, who were undocumented. "They are looking for us," she said. "Who is us?" I asked. "*Los ilegales*," she said.

This remark surprised me because of its violent connotations, because of the fear that it revealed, but more importantly because of its inaccuracy in Jovanna's case. "Don't you still have your student visa?" I asked. She explained to me that indeed she did; therefore, formally speaking, she was legal in the country. However, she said that her visa hardly made any difference, as it was about to expire and she would soon be an "illegal" migrant. "Before I even came to Lon-

don, I knew that I would become *illegal*,” she said. By saying this, Jovanna expressed a kind of resignation about her immediate future and about the inevitability of becoming illegal. I say “becoming illegal” because none of the people I met had entered the United Kingdom illegally. They had entered the UK by plane and had been granted tourist visas at the point of entry. For them, becoming illegal was located in the future but was nonetheless inevitable.

My aim in this article is to understand the temporality of becoming illegal, to examine how migrants experience illegality, and how it is embodied and negotiated on a daily basis. Examining the relationship that exists between illegality and temporality in the lives of Latin American migrants in London, I place the focus on those whose lives were marked by the uncertainty and liminality that an undocumented status represented. To understand the temporal dimension of illegality and its impact on migrants’ subjectivities, I first draw on recent anthropological studies that have directed their attention toward the study of illegality and its effects on migrants’ social worlds. The work of Deborah Boehm (2012), Joanna Dreby (2016), and Sarah Willen (2007) has been particularly interesting in offering a nuanced and intimate approach to the embodiment of illegality along with an analysis of the dispositions (physical, mental, and social) that migrants develop in order to cope with their new status (Khosravi 2007; Sigona 2012). Willen’s phenomenological approach to the study of undocumented migrants in Israel demonstrates how illegality not only affects the external structures of migrants’ worlds but also shapes their subjective experiences of space, time, embodiment, sociality, and self (2007: 9–10). By taking into account the relevance of sensations and bodily perceptions as a fundamental part of migrants’ illegality, her analysis proves that being undocumented is not only a juridical status—or in my own case, the prospect of losing one’s juridical status—or a sociopolitical condition, but also a mode of being-in-the-world.

Alongside these approaches, the investigation of migration, time, and temporalities has

been tentatively explored in recent years. Several studies have tried to move away from depicting migration as a temporal process in which the decision, the journey, and the progression from arrival to the gaining of settlement and possibly citizenship unfold in a mechanized, linear way. For instance, the work of Melanie Griffiths among asylum seekers and detainees in the United Kingdom shows how time is experienced in a manifold way that includes various temporalities, that is, “as a long, slowing time of waiting (sticky time), one that can decelerate into complete stagnation (suspended time), a fast time rushing out of control (frenzied time) and tears in people’s imagined time frames (temporal ruptures)” (2014: 1994). Similarly, the cross-cultural work of Alison Mountz among asylum seekers alerts us to the ambiguities of waiting and how waiting is actively experienced and can become a site of struggle, action, and political possibility (2011: 390). These studies show how immigration controls impact the temporalities of mobility and enforce migrants’ liminality and temporariness (see also Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Heyman 1995; Rotter 2010).

Inspired by these studies, I examine the temporal process of migration (from the decision moment to the final destination) by taking into account how people embody illegality through experiencing anxious encounters with authorities and enduring the latent threat of deportation. I aim to show how this embodiment is characterized by invisibility, immobility, and uncertainty, but also by its temporality. I argue that it is the temporality of this status, including its influence on migrants’ imaginations before migrating, on their experiences in London, and on the uncertainty that they withstand in the process of waiting to acquire some legal footing in the future, that makes it so paramount in migrants’ subjectivities. Following Nancy Munn’s anthropological approach to time, I examine the lives of my informants and the development of their life projects—within illegality—immersed in a “sociocultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing, past-present-future relations, etc.)” I look into the ways in which these

dimensions are “lived or apprehended concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world” (Munn 1992: 116). In this regard, I depart from the fact that my informants are entangled in meaningful relations that develop in a space that represents a hopeful present and an uncertain future at the same time.

Fieldwork

My analysis is based on qualitative ethnographic research and on participant observation conducted between August 2009 and April 2011 in London with women migrants from various parts of Latin America who worked in the care work industry.¹ The increase in Latin American migration to Europe in recent years has been influenced by a series of restrictions that the US government had imposed on immigration from the 1990s onward and then after 9/11. My informants expressed a desire to go to the United States as their first option but found such a move impossible to achieve. Europe, particularly London, offered a viable alternative, thanks to fewer migration/visa restrictions and to the increasingly well-established social networks and job opportunities for migrants working in the service sector.² Today, according to Cathy McIlwaine and Diego Bunge, Latin Americans are the eighth largest non-UK-born population in London (83,000). There were approximately 145,000 Latin Americans in London and just under 250,000 in the United Kingdom as a whole in 2013 (2016: 14).

Although my informants came from different countries, the stories that I present in this article are chiefly from Bolivian women (and one from a Honduran woman) who had migrated on their own to the United Kingdom (only two of them were joined by partners and families later on) and had been in London for a period of 8 to 10 years. They defined themselves as middle-class Latin Americans who migrated because they were struggling with the economic situation in

their countries. Despite occupying a variety of positions within the wider middle classes in their own countries, in their narratives of class identification they shared similar ideas regarding homeownership, access to higher education, credentials, moral values, and consumption as means through which they could symbolically and materially attain and perform their class identity (Heiman et al. 2012; O'Dougherty 2002). In recent years, however, they had no longer been able to improve their social status through education and therefore found themselves facing increasing levels of unemployment and debt, and dealing with a dearth of opportunities (Parker and Walker 2013).

They migrated in order to repay various debts that they had accrued back in their home countries, including further debts accumulated for the purposes of traveling abroad. They were, as Tanja Bastia and Siobhan McGrath (2011) argue, mortgaging their present through debts while at the same time using the promises that migration offered in anticipation of a valuable future (Cohen 2004). This was a future in which they would be no longer indebted thanks to the market demand that existed in London for care workers (Anderson and Shutes 2014; McIlwaine et al. 2010). They became part of the female global care market in which women from less developed countries migrate to fill what Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) have called the “care gap” in the developed world. In the case of my informants, their choice of work was limited by their lack of English skills, recognized educational qualifications, and relevant work experience in the United Kingdom; weak social connections; and—most important for the present article—a legal status that was insecure.³ Scholarship on the feminization of migration shows how, although migration confers a degree of economic independence that may improve women's status in the family, it is often outweighed by the exploitative nature of care work, the downward status mobility that the jobs represent, and the highly constraining female roles that they perform within these jobs (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994;

Pessar and Mahler 2003). As Rhacel Parreñas (2001) explains, for middle-class women migrants working as domestic workers produce significant personal dislocations.

In this article, however, I focus on a further dislocation that had powerful sway in my informants' lives. I am referring to being undocumented. I show how illegality affects not only the physical and emotional well-being of my informants but the external structure of migrants' worlds as well, for it represents a decline in status experienced as a class and racial dislocation in the new place. *Los ilegales* (the illegals) were those people crossing the border between Mexico and the United States, as Marisa from Honduras told me once. An illegal was a person who had to migrate because of extreme poverty and who did it clandestinely. My informants thought of themselves as different, as they were not the poorest of their countries and they had entered the United Kingdom by plane with tourist visas. For them, becoming undocumented took time, but regardless of their ideological class and racial identifications, they had no choice but to slowly learn how to cope with such dislocation.

The undocumented status affected not only women but their families as well (for those who had families in London). As several scholars have suggested, women and men experience illegality in particular ways that are related to their attempts to fulfill gendered expectations (Abrego 2009; Hagan 1994; Menjívar 2000). For instance, illegality prolongs family separation, blocking mothers from providing care for their children as they would like and as is socially expected of them (Abrego and Menjívar 2011). Likewise, it prevents undocumented fathers from fulfilling their roles as breadwinners in the family. Although my research was mainly with women, in this article I take into account the effects that illegality had on women's relationships and on their families.

In order to address the temporality of illegality, I first focus on migrants' narratives before migrating. The stories they told highlight the uncertainty of the journey, with illegality anticipated and imagined long before their journeys

ever began. Second, I analyze how once in London, they embody illegality through anxious engagements with the public space and the public authorities. Finally, I explore the temporality of the law by focusing on the notion of waiting, in which, as Vincent Crapanzano states, "the present is always secondary to the future. It is held in expectation. It is filled with suspense. It is a sort of holding action—a lingering" (1986: 44) in order to understand migrants' negotiations with the law and state bureaucracies (see also Bissell 2007; Jeffrey 2008).

The journey toward illegality

Journeys of migration often include preparations for departure and careful planning to reach a destination where migrants could pay their debts and be able to take care of their families. But when it came to my informants, the future was colored by the prospects of illegality,—by the fact that they would become undocumented at some point in their trajectories. My informants had entered the United Kingdom with visas; it was only later, once they had overstayed their visas and vanished from the system, that they became undocumented. This resonates with what McIlwaine (2015) found among Latin Americans in the UK where 70 percent of 960 people interviewed had entered the country with an immigration status different than their current one; more than three-quarters had arrived on tourist/visitor visas, and another 10 percent on student visas, later becoming overstayers. Some 19 percent of the total were migrants living irregularly in London, with the caveat that 93 percent of this group had entered the country legally.⁴ Nonetheless, they talked about their preparations for departure and traveling with an awareness of the temporality of becoming undocumented.

Migrants' journeys toward illegality started with the planning of "tourist trips" around Europe before entering the United Kingdom. Many of my informants traveled to Paris or Barcelona first, even though this added considerably to the

expense of travel, and eventually entered the UK by bus or train. By proving at the UK border that they had been traveling in Europe and were now including London in their trip, they felt that they were less likely to be questioned about their intentions. They were convinced that the role of the tourist, along with a persuading performance to the immigration authorities, could actually make a difference. Following this logic, Jovanna from Bolivia arrived in Paris in September 2003 pretending to be a tourist. She met a friend, who was unaware of the true intentions of her trip: paying off debts and a mortgage and supporting her family. However, her friend had booked a hotel that was more expensive than she had budgeted for. “When I saw the hotel, I knew I was screwed; it looked expensive, but I was ashamed of confessing the reality of my situation. Every euro I spent in Paris felt like a punch to my stomach,” she told me. As I gradually came to understand, maintaining this pretense was her way of slowly locating herself in a new reality that was ultimately uncertain, as she did not know whether she would get a tourist visa at the border. All she knew was that as a woman she had more opportunities to get a job as a domestic worker and would soon start earning money to secure the future of her family, even if doing this represented a sharp downward change in status. Despite the distinction that the status of tourist offered her, Jovanna explained that the moment she faced the border authorities and had to lie about her real intentions was crucial in the temporality of becoming undocumented. For other women, the most frightening moment was when they had to provide evidence of a return ticket to their home countries and proof that they had enough money to pay for their expenses while visiting London, and when they were subjected to a long interrogation about their lives, family, and occupations in their countries of origin. As Jovanna explained to me: “You don’t even want to look them in the eye directly because you feel as if they can read the truth in your eyes and they will know you are lying. This is the moment when you start feeling like an illegal migrant.”

In a similar vein, Sonia from Bolivia came to London in 2007 to work and pay off debts (\$20,000) back home. To get to London, Sonia paid an extra \$6,000 to a travel agency that claimed to be able to offer a plane ticket, a work visa, and accommodation in London. These travel agencies were especially canny in smuggling future undocumented migrants through various routes all over the United Kingdom under legal circumstances. Sonia’s odyssey started in Edinburgh. Her trip involved traveling by taxi from Edinburgh all the way to London because, according to the “tour guides,” it was dangerous to travel by train or coach, as immigration officers checked for undocumented migrants on public transport. “The funny thing is that we had our visas; we were not undocumented!” she said. Regardless of the legal status of their clients, these “tour guides” efficiently made use of the discourse and anxieties produced by the idea of their future illegality in order to take advantage of the group. After traveling from Edinburgh to Newcastle and then to Manchester, the guides disappeared with the money and left the whole group alone and clueless about their whereabouts in the UK. Lacking knowledge and resources, the group composed of three women and four men asked a minivan driver to take them to the only place that sounded logical to their minds; they asked the driver to take them to the Plaza Central (Central Plaza) of the City of London. As Sonia recalls, the taxi driver was bewildered by this request, and after several attempts to communicate with them, he decided to take them to Victoria Station in Central London. In her narrative, Sonia explained that, although they were not undocumented, their intention to overstay their visas, combined with the fear that the guides had implanted in them, affected their initial engagements with the city and their future plans.

What these stories suggest is that an insecure legal status entails a particular temporality that is framed by the different phases of the migration journey and the final destination, but it is there in essence from the start. Regardless of migrants’ earlier social status and expectations

for the future that were certainly infused with a sense of hope, they were nevertheless immersed in the intricate prospects of becoming undocumented: their future was tainted by the insecurity and uncertainty that an irregular status brings with it in the present.

Embodying illegality

In the first part of this article, I showed how the imaginings of the future affect women's experiences of the present through a description of Jovanna's anxious engagements with the city while walking around Elephant and Castle and facing state authorities. This experience was shared and commonly described by most of my informants and their families. Here, I explore the embodied tensions and anxieties via a discussion of migrants' experiences and engagements with the public space, particularly while commuting, that came about as a result of the temporal ruptures produced by the threat of deportation. In order to analyze the ways in which migrants inhabit and move around spaces that represent potential threats for their future plans, I understand the body as, first, a locus of social practice that is continuously invested with the cultural meanings of space just like space is invested with bodily meanings (Bourdieu 1977: 90) and, second, as a permanent condition of experience and our vehicle to make sense of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 25).

Like Jovanna, Sarita from Honduras lived in the city in a distinctively distressed manner. For her, taking the bus was a huge challenge that altered her mental state and her physical body. While we were commuting together, she always looked around her, anxiously waiting for the bus to come. Afraid and aware of her surroundings, she explained that sometimes she felt as if the word "illegal" was tattooed on her forehead and that she was therefore was afraid of bumping into police officers, who would see her illegality. After finding a seat, she often remained silent for the duration of the journey. I learned not to talk to her because I realized that she did

not like to speak Spanish while commuting in order to avoid bringing any attention to her person. Although I constantly tried to distract her, her eyes always darted around; her air remained guarded and distracted. "I withstand the anxiety of commuting because I know that at the end my daughter is waiting for me at home," she said.

These ways of inhabiting and moving (or not moving) constitute what Thomas Csordas has called "somatic modes of attention," which are described as "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (1993: 138). My informants' bodies and cultural worlds were constantly mediated by people who were potentially dangerous and could put their livelihoods and futures in London at risk, futures that included caring for their families back home. While commuting, the presence of the Transport for London inspectors, who occasionally boarded buses to carry out random checks on tickets and travel passes, intensified the anxiety of their travels. Stories of deportation that started on a bus or in the Tube—for not having paid the correct fee—loomed large in my informants' imaginaries and embodied fears. Because of this edginess, Pedro, for example, decided to cycle instead of taking the bus to save money and avoid the checks that were taking place in South London. However, he had an accident while riding his bicycle and, as a result, was deported to Bolivia:

At 9 a.m., I was riding my bicycle and crashed into another bicycle. The accident caught the attention of several people including police officers who came to see what had happened. The police asked for ID, and as I did not have any documents with my photo on it, they started asking me more and more questions. I guess I started getting nervous, and they arrested me under suspicion of being illegal in this country. They took me to the police station. Without even noticing, a week later, I was back in Bolivia. I felt I was back at the beginning.

The temporal rupture of Pedro's deportation relates to what Griffiths calls "frenzied time," that is, a time experienced as "one in which developments can happen suddenly without warning" (2014: 1999). When the police caught him, he was able to briefly contact his wife, Lourdes, and warn her that the immigration authorities might come to the flat and detain the whole family; as a result, Lourdes and her two sons temporarily moved to a friend's house. While he was in detention, he explained that everything was very quick, that he had no time to think about what to do next or dwell on the consequences that this might have on his future in the United Kingdom. Alongside this sense of rushed time, in which migrants experience sudden changes over short periods, there is an antithetical sense of time that is characterized by suspension and delay. Yet, this suspension is not only temporal but also personal, as it affects migrants' roles within their families and within their social reality. "I thought I was not going to be able to see my children again, to take care of them again. All I could think of was that I was their father and that as such my place was back with them," he said.

While waiting to hear from Pedro, Lourdes's anxiety grew considerably—not only when she was on the street but especially when she was at home. The place that had been considered a safe haven for the last few years, a place where she had been able to "stop being a maid and feel like a normal mother and a wife," suddenly switched to becoming the most threatening place in the city. Even when the door was locked and she had the company of flatmates, Lourdes was unable to feel safe because she knew that and had heard that immigration officers were visiting the homes of undocumented migrants. Pedro's deportation enhanced the "temporality of everyday risk" (Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2016; Willen 2007: 22), as she was waiting to get caught by the police every time she returned home from work or from picking up the kids from the bus stop on their way back from school. Furthermore, the threat of deportation loomed large even in her sleep and gave her nightmares. As she told me:

I keep dreaming about the police coming to the flat; they are looking for our passports, turning all our clothes upside down, looking under the bed to see if there is anyone hiding. I am there with my two kids, under the bed hiding; suddenly, the officer finds us and grabs my children from under the bed away from me. This is where I wake up, sweating and nervous, almost feeling that I am about to cry.

The deportation of Pedro deeply affected Lourdes's role as a mother who needed but could not protect their children. The terror of being caught by the police reinforced her personhood as deportable and created significant uncertainties toward the future, as she did not know whether Pedro would be able to return to the United Kingdom. The fear of deportation, or what Nicholas De Genova (2004: 161) calls a "sense of deportability," which is a strategy used by the authorities to render illegal migrants as a distinctly disposable community, infuses the present with apprehension and distress and colors the future with ambiguity (see Talavera et al. 2010).⁵ More importantly, illegality, as these stories suggest, affects men and women in distinctive ways according to their kinship relations and caring duties. Sarita's, Lourdes's, and Pedro's sense of deportability infused not only their present lives but also the future of their children with uncertainty and anxiety. Therefore, if migration is a tactic of creating futures in which people aim to solve an economic situation and acquire a better way of life, then, withstanding the burden of being undocumented means that they might negotiate the possibility to gain a more secure footing in the country and thus take a significant step toward realizing their hopes and ambitions.

Temporality of the law

Current restrictions on migrants have made it almost impossible for them to retain their legal status and/or achieve a different one. Recent

changes, for instance to students' visas, have affected both prospective and current students who were previously allowed to work part time and whose partners were permitted to work full time under the terms of their visas. English student visas are more restricted now than before. To extend a visa, migrants are now required to complete a higher-level English test and prove that they are actually studying. Earlier, many were able to maintain the fiction of being students while in reality working full time and barely attending classes, if at all. Several of my informants had paid student fees to private colleges (2,000 to 3,000 pounds sterling a year) for several years in order to maintain their legal status, but this has now become much more difficult, as the government has clamped down on bogus colleges.

As an illustration, let me take you back to Jovanna's story. When she arrived in London, she started working using the national insurance number of a woman from Bolivia. Jovanna's income was deposited into the account of the possessor of the national insurance number, who started stealing the money. To avoid further problems, she decided to enroll in an English course to get a student visa and thus gain access to a part-time work permit. In 2001 and until 2011, it was possible for tourists to change the status of their visa while in the United Kingdom, a practice that many migrants used in order to prove that they had some legal footing in the UK, that they were enduring the temporality of their in-between status.⁶ Like many migrants, Jovanna took advantage of her student visa and managed to work more than 40 hours a week for different cleaning companies and in private homes for more than seven years. This was common practice among many of my informants, even though they were, according to the law, engaging in illicit practices by breaching their visa restrictions by working more than 20 hours a week. This suggests that the undocumented person and illegality are not bound together as categories because people are sometimes in between and must adapt and position themselves in blurred legal categories—as

long as they can—according to their resources and possibilities. Nowadays, it is not possible to work on a student visa (while studying English). The current and growing impositions and legal restrictions on low-skilled migrants force people to become and remain semilegal or undocumented for longer periods of time and thus commit further illicit acts to survive. The temporal barriers that the UK imposes on migrants' lives orchestrate various temporalities as a strategy to exercise power, as the migrants are forced to live in a state of liminality or limbo while waiting for their legal situation to change (Boehm 2009; Griffiths et al. 2013: 30; Lal 1997; Sigona and Torre 2005).

For instance, retaining one's student visa allows migrants to accumulate years of residency, so they can eventually apply for a residence visa. Under current UK immigration law, those who enter the United Kingdom and remain there legally for 10 years continuously—either as students or in possession of some other category of visa—are permitted to apply for permanent residence or, in legal parlance, “indefinite leave to remain” (ILR). For those who become undocumented, either by overstaying their temporary visas or by becoming semilegal, gaining legal status is a difficult process because it requires them to navigate successfully changing immigration rules. As David Bissell argues, “the experience of being-in-waiting seems to be a hard-to-pin-down but arguably integral aspect of being-in-transit” (2007: 282); it is an intrinsic part of being undocumented. Indeed, the undocumented lives of my informants were marked by the temporality of their status, in which they could accumulate “illegal” time, wait, and hope that they might eventually become eligible to apply for a resident visa. One route to legality—at least until 9 July 2012—was to remain in the UK undetected for 14 years and then prove that they had done so. In 2012, however, the state amended the law, lengthening the period from 14 to 20 years, which made the wait far longer. Waiting, as Bourdieu argues, is an integral part of the exercise of power: “By making people wait . . . delaying without destroying hope is part of

the domination” (2000: 228). However, as I will further show, waiting is also infused with meanings because it is characterized by the anticipation of something to come, the anticipation of a future in which one might have the opportunity to acquire legal residence.

Several of the people whom I met had applied for a resident visa under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This article explains the right to respect for private and family life, establishing that “everyone has the right to respect his private and family life, his home and his correspondence” (ECHR 2010: 10). It establishes that the state should not interfere in an individual’s enjoyment of their family or private life.⁷ In the context of immigration law, and much to the chagrin of the signatory states, Article 8 has been interpreted liberally by the courts as conferring rights on migrants who accumulate time in and ties to the host country, even though they have been there illegally. The stronger the established ties or “family life” or “private life,” the stronger a migrant’s claim to legalizing their status.⁸

The success of these applications often seems to depend on how much evidence that lawyers are able to gather to prove that migrants indeed have an established family life in the United Kingdom. Lawyers are in charge of reconfiguring the undocumented person by piecing together a suitable, desirable family-oriented migrant for the state who, first of all, had integrated into the UK. In order to prove this, they have to support their case with letters from friends (especially British people), employers, church members, and teachers in order to prove that they are integrated and rooted in the UK and that their illegality is no longer relevant (James and Killick 2012; Kalir 2010). Second, migrants need to prove that they fit the figure of the family-oriented migrant reproducing particular roles within the family.

Although immigration policies and procedures are formally gender neutral, as Olivia Salcido and Cecilia Menjívar argue, “gender differentiation continues to inform the counters of legalization, residency, and citizenship” (2012:

337). Therefore, when Lourdes and Pedro applied under Article 8, they were required in their statement to explain that they had been undocumented in London for the well-being of their children. By constructing the narrative of the breadwinner and caring father, Pedro justified his actions (working without documents) and showed his remorse. Lourdes used a letter from the priest of the church that she attended because he had emphasized Lourdes’ maternal caring features, regarding not only her family but also her community. In addition to this, they needed to prove that deportation or removal would be a traumatic experience for their children because of the amount of time they had already lived in the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding the fact that this type of application is not always successful, I witnessed several successful cases during fieldwork. The outcome of a successful application resulted in a discretionary leave to remain (DLR) visa that was granted for a period of three to five years, which has to be renewed for an extra three to five years, after which the couple would have to apply for an ILR.⁹ The DLR speaks of yet another form of managing temporal legal statuses that exposes the power of the state while deciding whether—but more importantly, when—citizenship will be granted.

This long and onerous road to citizenship has been designed to force undesirable/low-skilled migrants to remain undocumented, to remain invisible, to wait years to obtain legal documents, and, in the meantime, to endure the threat of deportation. Furthermore, immigration laws and their constant modification make it impossible for migrants—and lawyers—to follow the guidelines and meet the never-ending and ever more demanding requirements. These are characterized by black-and-white administrative categorizations and decontextualized evaluations of migrants’ moments in time that presume that events occur in a flowing sequence of temporality that will lead them to naturalization. Thus, “control over time is not just a strategy of interaction; it is also a medium of hierarchic power and governance” (Munn 1992: 106). In this re-

gard, one could argue that immigration controls demonstrate how far the state actually sustains and creates temporal uncertainty that enforces migrants' temporariness and liminality.

Conclusion

I cannot believe that the nightmare is over. We have waited for many years and have worked hard in this country to become residents. This is the achievement of our dream. Now my family will have the opportunities that Bolivia cannot give them; we do not have to hide anymore; we are not going to be invisible. Our efforts were fruitful and our sacrifices worthwhile. This is the beginning of a new life for my family.

This is what Pedro said during a party in 2012 when the family, after being in the United Kingdom for eight years, successfully acquired a residence permit by claiming the right to family life under Article 8. After his deportation in 2008, he managed to come back to the UK. Four years later, the news of their legal status was celebrated as the basis for beginning a new life. For Lourdes, this meant that she would be able to regain a lifestyle in which they would have a house for the family—by claiming housing benefits. “We will be able to have a house for the family, just like we did in Bolivia,” Lourdes told me. Their case was proof that it was possible to become legal. Sarita from Honduras, the nervous bus passenger whose anxiety I described earlier, told me at the party, “We just have to wait a bit longer, that’s all.”

Sonia was never able to gain legal status in the country, but she used her outstanding application at the Home Office in order to get assistance from the state after being hit by a taxi while going to work. Although she was undocumented, under the National Assistance Act (1948) local authorities have to help people in need and/or people who are sick; they are obliged to provide a safety net for people that are unable to take

care of themselves for various reasons.¹⁰ While recovering, Sonia did not have to worry about deportation anymore; instead, she was waiting for a lawsuit—against the taxi driver—to settle. After waiting for a year, she won a substantial amount of money (70,000 pounds sterling) and returned to Bolivia to pay the debts she still had and to fulfill her kinship duties.

The future that Jovanna imagined for her daughter was sadly interrupted by breast cancer. Having secured a DLR visa under special circumstances because of her illness—and because she was a single mother—she was hoping that her daughter (who arrived in London in 2010) would be able to grow up in London. During our last days together, Jovanna’s concerns about her daughter’s future occupied her mind. She tried unsuccessfully to find someone who might adopt her daughter. In the end, she accepted that the best thing for her daughter was to go back to Bolivia and live among her family. She went back to Bolivia in January 2013 and spent the last months of her life among her loved ones and died in April 2013.

The experiences that I have analyzed in this article pointed to the inherently temporal dimension of illegality and its impact on migrants’ subjectivities. As this article has sought to demonstrate, the process of becoming undocumented goes beyond being a form of juridical status or a kind of sociopolitical condition. I have outlined first how illegality is imagined and anxiously lived before people’s journeys. I have shown how migrants not only become undocumented but embody their status in anxious temporal ways (sometimes through frenzied times) that affect their bodies and minds. Their status, that of being unwanted, becomes a crude reality the moment they encounter state authorities and are reminded of their vulnerability; it is at this point when the threat of deportation creeps into their homes, dreams, and hopes for the future.

As anthropologists, we cannot fully understand the meanings and consequences of illegality if we do not pay attention to its temporal dimension. It is within this temporality that we

can explore in detail the embodiment of a status that transforms the lives and subjectivities of those who find themselves living in limbo trapped in a system that rejects their existence, that surveys it, and that therefore controls their future. Studying the relationship between temporality and illegality brings light to how migrants become stuck at various points in their migration journeys because of a loss of social status, changing lifestyles, and having an undocumented status that affects their movement, job opportunities, and plans for the future. Undocumented migrants are increasingly becoming expendable, worthless, and forced to wait and navigate lengthy draconian legal systems that fracture their inner selves and exploit them in new ways.

Discussions of the lives of migrants who are undocumented often center on the power that the law exerts over their everyday lives. Given that state processes and legal discourses often seem rigid and all-encompassing, focusing on the everyday illegality of migrants' lives can shed light on the nuances and fractures of their subjectivities. Behind these debates lie questions of exploitation, racism, and the enjoyment of basic human rights. For people who live their lives under the weight and limitations of an undocumented status, the present becomes a continuous challenge and the future becomes just an illusion that is difficult to sustain. Their lives are depleted of future imaginings and are instead filled with insecurity and fear. A nuanced ethnographic account of the traces of the everyday lives of migrants—as the one that I tried to portray—confirms that borders are effectively everywhere and that they affect the external and inner structure of migrants' worlds.

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Notes

1. My informants were from Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Honduras, and Mexico. During fieldwork, I established intimate and close relationships with 33 women, as well as with their families and friends. Ten of them migrated to London with their families, and the rest of them left their families back in their countries of origin. Some of them formed new families in London. All of the names used in this article are pseudonyms. In this way, I can protect the identity of my informants.
2. Up until 2009, Bolivians, Venezuelans, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians were not required to possess a tourist visa to visit the United Kingdom and other countries in Europe such as France. (Spain was an exception.)
3. McIlwaine and Bunge (2016) explain that 51 percent of Latin Americans are well educated, as they have attained a tertiary level / university education (of which 1 percent attained the post-graduate level).
4. Three-quarters of Bolivians entered as tourists or visitors, which is a much higher rate than for other countries. Brazilians and Bolivians were also the most likely to be irregular (38 percent and 36.5 percent, respectively), with Colombians being the least likely (6 percent) among the larger nationality groups (McIlwaine 2015: 499).
5. De Genova (2004: 166) argues that the production of illegality provides an apparatus for sustaining Mexican migrants' vulnerability and tractability—as workers whose labor power, inasmuch as it is deportable, becomes an eminently disposable commodity.
6. Until 2011, their visas had allowed them to work up to 20 hours a week.

7. Except “as . . . is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others” (ECHR 2010: 10).
 8. As a rule of thumb, seven years’ residence was often sufficient to provide the basis for a successful application for the child, and, by extension, their family.
 9. ILR is granted for 10 years, but when people have an ILR for one year, they are automatically entitled to apply for citizenship, which involves other sets of conditions, including passing a Life in the United Kingdom test and an English test.
 10. National Assistance Act (1948), Section 21, Duty of local authorities to provide accommodation. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/11-12/29/section/21>.
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