

Intersectional Resistance in the Dreamers Immigrant Movement

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Abstract

This paper analyses the experiences of undocumented youth organizers in the U.S., known as the Dreamers, to shed light on the specific ways that “illegality” and heteropatriarchy manifested, changed or remained stagnant, intersected with race and class, and how these intersections were negotiated in undocumented spaces of resistance. This research challenges single-axis organizing frameworks based on “identity politics” (Crenshaw, 1991) in immigrant organizing. Immigrant justice movements have failed to address conditions of violence that “intersectional resistance,” as Spade (2013) describes, seeks to legally and culturally transform. Findings from interview and observation data with undocumented youth organizers, some of whom identify as female and some as queer, illustrate how nationalistic discourses of citizenship are embedded in structures of white racism and heteropatriarchy. The young women of color endured interlocking forms of gendered and raced oppression, even sexual violence, which became a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men seldom confronted. The undocuqueer youth organizers acknowledged how they strategically omitted experiences of gender violence from undocumented narratives to be heard by policymakers and be conceded material access. One queer participant noted: “when we go to talk to legislators we do not explicitly talk about gender issues, and how we are escaping gender violence in Mexico, or Brazil, or Latin American where women and trans people are killed in the streets and no one cares.” This paper argues for citizenship pathways for undocumented communities as well as actionoriented policies rooted in intersectional frames aimed at decentering gendered and raced citizenship.

