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## Out of the Shadows: *Testimonio* as Civic Participation

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This article draws from a 23-month ethnographic study of mixed-status families living in an emerging Latino/a community to examine 3 undocumented mothers' participation in the act of giving *testimonio*, or testimony. In this context, *testimonio* serves as a grassroots tactic for political advocacy and community formation that compensates for and reacts against the limited opportunities for civic participation afforded noncitizens. The findings indicate that giving *testimonio* in both public and domestic settings constitutes a form of civic participation in which undocumented mothers actually attempt to move out of the shadows and into a more public domain.

Key words: activism, Diaspora, ethnography, migration/transnationalism, languages, parent and community

*Si Rigoberta ha hablado, no ha sido únicamente para que escuchemos sus desaventuras, sino, y sobre todo, para hacernos comprender su cultura, de la que se siente tan orgullosa y para la que pide reconocimiento.*—Rigoberta Menchú (1985, p. 18)

She talked to me not only because she wanted to tell us about her sufferings but also—or perhaps mainly—because she wanted us to hear about a culture of which she is extremely proud and which she wants to have recognized.—Rigoberta Menchú (1984, p. xxii)

This article examines the experiences of three undocumented mothers who gave *testimonio* in an attempt to assert their rights and build community while also negotiating the risks involved in speaking out as noncitizens living in the United States. I draw from data collected during a 23-month ethnographic study investigating how migratory status shapes mixed-status families' everyday lives in Millvalley, Pennsylvania, a city that forms part of the New Latino Diaspora (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002) of the U.S. Rust Belt.<sup>1</sup> The case of Millvalley is significant “not only because of its ‘newness’ as a phenomenon across much of the region but also because of the new social, cultural and political dynamics it generates” (Winders & Smith, 2012, p. 223). Mixed-status families include members who are undocumented migrants, U.S.-born citizens, and

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<sup>1</sup>All names used throughout this article to refer to the city and local institutions where the study took place, along with the names of the individuals who participated in the study, are pseudonyms. I have also changed the names printed in Figure 1 in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

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others in various stages of the migratory process (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001).<sup>2</sup> The number of mixed-status families living in the United States has grown in recent years, as undocumented Mexican parents have given birth to U.S.-born children and stayed to raise them in the United States (Passel & Taylor, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Nearly 3 million children of Mexican descent born in the United States have at least one undocumented parent (Passel, 2011).

Recent reports indicate that mixed-status family members are both vulnerable to extremely harsh living conditions and actively involved in pursuing more equitable opportunities for migrants. Resulting in part from their legal status, undocumented parents tend to work in the lowest earning sectors of the labor market while their families are systematically denied social services available to families living in poverty (Cervantes & Gonzales, 2013; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Public policies aimed at denying services to undocumented individuals negatively impact access to adequate health care for all members of mixed-status households (O’Leary & Sanchez, 2011). Moreover, these families are susceptible to heightened forms of policing and surveillance that can lead to family separations as a result of parents’ detention or deportation (Dreby, 2012; Freed Wessler, 2011).

Even though mixed-status family members have become the target of anti-immigration measures in recent years—including calls to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment, which grants birthright citizenship to the U.S.-born children of immigrants (Lacey, 2011)—they have still assumed leadership roles in national efforts to advocate for migrants’ rights. Undocumented parents and adolescents have actively participated in grassroots movements calling for migratory reform and equal educational opportunities for citizen and noncitizen youth (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008). Undocumented youth demonstrate higher levels of civic engagement than their U.S.-born counterparts (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010; Terriquez & Patler, 2012), and public schools are sites where undocumented students and parents can actively participate in public institutions and effect social change (Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008).

Members of mixed-status families have to balance their desire to participate in public life and to insist on their rights and the rights of their family members with the dangers that attend making themselves visible—most notably the threat of deportation for those who are undocumented (Mangual Figueroa, 2013). Examining undocumented mothers’ strategic decisions about civic participation can provide insight into the broader phenomena of political engagement and cultural citizenship of particular interest in Latino studies and related disciplines (Flores & Benmayor, 1997) yet underexplored in emerging research on new Latino/a experiences in the South (Winders & Smith, 2012) and elsewhere. As we will see, when mothers make choices about when and how to give *testimonio*, they talk about the roles that they hope to play within their communities and they articulate their expectations for equitable treatment within the host society. This dual process of responding to institutional oppression and asserting novel forms of civic participation forms part of individuals’ and communities’ attempts to establish cultural citizenship in the United States (Ong, 1996).

I specifically examine the experiences of three undocumented mothers, as well as church leaders and community organizers, to show how they used *testimonio* as a strategy for advocating

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<sup>2</sup>I use the term *migrant* to refer to the families who participated in this study because they meet the following criteria: They entered the United States by land and without legal permission, they sustained relationships with relatives in both Mexico and the United States, and they had family members or friends who returned to Mexico during the course of the study (Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009; Lukose, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

institutional policy change and for strengthening interpersonal support networks. Although invisibility is an important survival strategy for undocumented migrants (Chavez, 1998; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012), these mothers were willing to publically reveal their undocumented status in order to provide *testimonio* about police practices because they believed that doing so was an important part of advocating for the rights of Latino/a families more generally. The mothers, as I show here, became resources within the community for helping prepare others to give *testimonio* in which they articulated their personal experiences in relation to the transpersonal concerns of mixed-status families. Because I was present and recording the exchange between two mothers in their home as they encouraged each other to give *testimonio*, these preparations themselves became forms of performative speech, not just descriptions of future events. For all three mothers, *testimonio* began to function as a grassroots substitute for the kinds of civic participation from which they were largely barred by their noncitizen status.

Three themes emerge in the data presented: First, the mothers offer local definitions for an emerging Latino/a community by describing the migrant community to which they belonged and for whom they were speaking out; second, while giving *testimonio*, the mothers tend to link up multiple temporalities—past, present, and future—into a transpersonal narrative of migrant struggle, and third, the mothers refer to the social imperative of giving *testimonio* by declaring their responsibility to advocate for migrants' rights. In what follows, I first briefly review relevant scholarship on *testimonio* and describe my ethnographic engagement with the families and the sociopolitical context that shaped their everyday lives. I then present the *testimonios* of Inés Chavez, Marta Utuado, and Luz Durán. I close by returning to a discussion of how *testimonio* offers an opportunity for these undocumented mothers to claim cultural citizenship in the United States and to assert their rights despite their undocumented status.

### TESTIMONIO IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

The epigraph presented at the start of this article—a quote from Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* published by anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos and translated into English by Ann Wright—signals some of the core characteristics of the *testimonio* form. These include an individual's narrative that seeks to represent the experiences of a broader community, the retelling of historical and contemporary struggles that also highlight a community's cultural wealth and resilience, and the importance of entering the oral narrative into a published record that contributes to a body of knowledge generated from within a community and shared with a wider audience. Grounded in an analysis of published testimonies of Latin American revolutionary figures such as Rigoberta Menchú and Che Guevara, Beverley (2004) wrote that

*dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness. Testimonio's ethical and epistemological authority derives from the fact that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in his or her person, or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family, neighbors, or significant others, the events and experiences that he or she narrates. (p. 3)

Researchers in the field of education share an interest in the social and epistemological significance of giving *testimonio* as it relates to Latino/a students' and scholars' schooling experiences. Their work extends understanding of *testimonio* in three important ways: First, they amplify the scope of what counts as *testimonio*; second, they draw attention to the form's significance across

the lifespan, from adolescence through adulthood; and third, they demonstrate the ways in which giving *testimonio* can form part of a larger movement to improve schools and support Latino/a students and scholars throughout their educational trajectories.

## Youth

Recent scholarship has expanded understanding of what counts as *testimonio*—including not only the published narratives of renowned Latin American revolutionary leaders but also the oral narratives delivered by undocumented youth during protests held in U.S. educational and political institutions (Gonzales, 2008; Rogers et al., 2008). The participation of undocumented youth in the act of giving *testimonio* indicates that these youth negotiate and establish group codes about when it is appropriate to reveal their juridical status in public, given the risk of deportation (González, Plata, García, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003; Seif, 2004). Researchers have also shown that *testimonio* can serve as a methodological tool for eliciting disenfranchised youths' stories about the challenges they face in gaining equitable access to public resources and educational opportunities (Erbstein, Burciaga, & Rodriguez, 2010).

## Adults

Educational scholars working within a Chicana/Latina feminist tradition have shown how the collective process of sharing and recording *testimonio* can lead to novel forms of knowledge production among academics who are historically marginalized from the university settings in which they teach (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Pérez Huber, 2009; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Two recently published issues of educational journals call attention to the significance of *testimonio* within the field and across the lifespan. This important set of publications urges researchers to consider the possibility of using *testimonio* to support Latino/a students and scholars while also improving the educational institutions where they teach and learn.

A 2012 special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* demonstrates that delivering *testimonio* is a multilayered, intergenerational process of meaning making in which Latina students and educators share experiences and generate new ideas while also preserving those aspects of their cultural heritage that are not represented in schools. The authors convened in the issue argue that *testimonio* is both a methodology and pedagogy—a practice of eliciting stories documenting a community's struggles and forms of cultural wealth that can then be drawn on when working to change educational institutions that underserve Latinos. In the volume and elsewhere, the authors show how *testimonio* can be used to improve educational practice through curriculum development in secondary schools (Cruz, 2012) and teacher preparation for primary school educators (Saavedra, 2001). The process of *reflexión*, or the “examination of the inner self and sharing that inner self with a trusted dialogue partner” (p. 445), highlighted in the volume's introduction (p. 367) and expanded on in Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz's (2012) contribution signals one way in which *testimonio* can be taken up in the field of education. *Reflexión* entails an intergenerational exchange of *testimonios* that, once recorded, become a source of knowledge that the entire community can learn from. By sharing *testimonios*, interlocutors develop relationships and a collective sense of responsibility for delivering and gathering additional *testimonios*. This process of *reflexión* can become an integral part of the relationship building and leadership development needed to effect change within and beyond schools.

A complementary volume—a 2013 special issue of the *Journal of Educational Foundations*—examines the significance of *testimonio* across the educational trajectory of Latina scholars. The issue specifically focuses on the experiences of Latina women as they reach academic milestones like becoming a graduate student, tenure track professor, and senior scholar. The authors' *testimonios* make visible the multiple forms of oppression that they face throughout their careers and describe the social networks that they created within their institutions in order to share cultural capital and support one another. This volume underscores the complex intersections of the scholars' identity (e.g., racial, gendered, national) and the challenges that they faced when working to retain their cultural and linguistic identity on entering educational institutions like the academy. Similar to the 2012 publication, this special issue foregrounds the importance of *consejos* (p. 10)—pieces of advice shared between elder and junior members of the community. Like the process of *reflexión*, the social significance of these *consejos* lies in the intergenerational process of sharing cultural knowledge and strategies for resistance that can sustain younger community members as they face the everyday challenges of working in higher education. The shared sense of responsibility for mentoring suggests that one possible goal for giving *testimonio* is to empower others to speak out as advocates.

Building on this important work, the analysis of *testimonio* presented in this article underscores the significance of *testimonio* as a social process and highlights the ways in which exchanges about *testimonio* serve as a learning experience for research participants as well as the researcher. As we will see, giving *testimonio* became a means for undocumented mothers to participate in a kind of civic life and to fulfill their responsibility for strengthening social networks within their community. When the mothers discussed in home settings the *testimonio* they had given or would give in more public settings—discussions that, in part because of my presence as transcriber, could themselves be described as instances of *testimonio*—they transformed the private space of the home into a place where notions of community could be forged and disseminated. A significant feature of the *testimonios* that I present, then, is the movement of the form and the content between individuals and across the conventional threshold of private and public spheres.

### ETHNOGRAPHIC ENGAGEMENT IN MILLVALLEY, PENNSYLVANIA

I first met members of the emerging Latino/a community of Millvalley, Pennsylvania, when I moved to the area and began working at a local university in the winter of 2009. Millvalley is a historically immigrant city that attracted European laborers to work in the growing steel industry during the early 20th century. Shortly after moving to Millvalley, I began asking my colleagues whether they knew of a Latino/a community; most of them explained that although the city had a rich immigrant history, there was almost no contemporary immigration to the region. Although this was a reasonable conjecture given the depressed state of Millvalley's economy (Ritzer, 2007), I remained skeptical because migration trends indicated that Mexican migrants were leaving traditional receiving states like California and New York and moving to nontraditional settlement areas in southern and midwestern states across the United States (Fix, Zimmerman, & Passel, 2001; Passel, 2005).

One afternoon, I noticed a flyer posted in a public bus stop announcing a weekly Spanish-language Mass held at a local Catholic church. That Sunday I went to St. Martin Church and attended Mass, along with hundreds of parishioners from Mexico, Central and South America,

and the Caribbean. The congregation was evidence of a growing Latino/a community that was intergenerational and diverse—some members were university professors, others worked as doctors and nurses in the local hospitals, and many were migrant families working in the service industry. The families themselves were diverse in the sense of containing both citizens and noncitizens; like many families living in emerging Latino/a communities, parents and older siblings tended to have migrated from their country of origin, whereas younger children were generally U.S.-born citizens (Passel & Cohn, 2009). The Latino/a community helping to fill the pews of St. Martin Church was in fact part of the fastest growing ethnic group in the county; it had grown, according to the 2010 Census, by 71% in the past decade.

In the following months, I continued to attend Mass at St. Martin Church, and I quickly learned that the church, in addition to providing a space for religious worship in Spanish, served two important roles in Millvalley's Latino/a community. First, it formed the center of an expansive social network of families who offered one another multiple kinds of social and economic support. Second, church leaders brokered relationships between community members and local public institutions by coordinating access to social services and organizing families to advocate for migratory reform in the region.

One citywide effort that depended on these interpersonal and institutional connections was the grassroots campaign led by an interfaith organization called the Immigrant Advocacy Network (IAN) to institute a “don't ask, don't tell” policy for immigrants in the region. This campaign arose out of growing fear in the Latino/a community during the winter of 2008 when the number of deportations and family separations in Millvalley rose dramatically. Many of these deportations occurred when the Millvalley Police Department would stop undocumented migrants for traffic violations such as running a stop sign or driving a car without proper registration. When the migrants were asked for a state license or identification that they could not produce, the Millvalley Police Department would call the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and initiate deportation proceedings. Church leaders became involved when family members called them for help in navigating the detention system. In turn, church leaders began pressuring Millvalley officials to stop this trend and called on families to give *testimonio* about the detrimental effects of these local law enforcement practices.

As church leaders and members of the Millvalley Latino/a community got to know me, they began asking me to serve as a simultaneous translator in community meetings organized by IAN. During these meetings, or “actions,” as IAN organizers called them, I translated between Spanish-speaking undocumented family members speaking out about the detrimental effects of deportation and family separation and the English-speaking officials called on to institute local policy reform. IAN organizers referred to the family narratives as *testimonio*; the bilingual agendas that they distributed at the actions often included a section called *testimonio*. Figure 1 is an excerpt from the first page of an agenda distributed at an IAN action held in the fall of 2009 at which I served as a simultaneous translator.

The document in Figure 1 highlights three themes that circulated throughout IAN actions and that emerged as the focal mothers talked with me about *testimonio*: community, temporality, and responsibility. The agenda defines the emerging Latino/a community as an intergenerational group of immigrant families. IAN often presented an image of hardworking migrant families, despite the fact that there were also many single migrant men residing and working in Millvalley.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For an extended analysis and critique of this grassroots strategy, see Mangual Figueroa (2013).

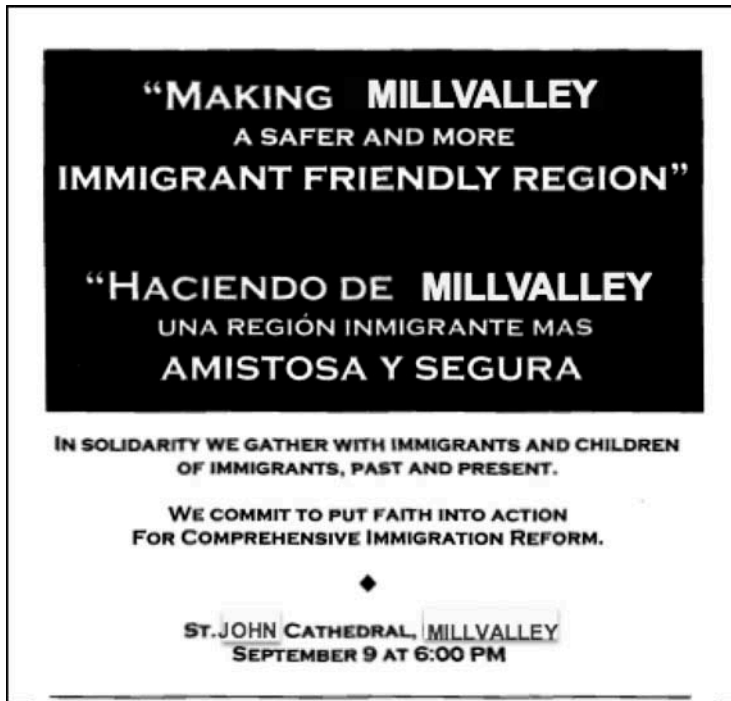


FIGURE 1 Cover page of the agenda for an Immigrant Advocacy Network action.

During this action, for example, only employed parents and school-age youth were asked to give *testimonio*. By calling for unity between immigrants past and present, IAN attempted to index a shared immigrant experience. This image served to counter the discourse, heard on the radio and published in local newspapers, that newer Latin American migrants were stealing jobs or draining public resources. Finally, the group's belief in sharing responsibility for advocating immigration reform was expressed through the use of phrases like "in solidarity" and "we commit" to making Millvalley "safer and more immigrant friendly." During the action, undocumented mothers (including Marta Utuado, one of the focal mothers in this article) gave *testimonio* about the constant fear that she and her children would be separated. These mothers often justified the need for migratory reform by calling for equal opportunities for their undocumented children and for their U.S.-born children and by reminding public officials that they wanted to raise their children to become educated and engaged citizens of this country.

After serving as a translator for several months, I began recruiting mixed-status families to participate in this study through the snowball method of talking with families about the project, asking them for recommendations of other families who might be interested, and so on (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). I visited the three focal families once a week for the following year, beginning when I met the parents and children after school and ending around dinnertime. I participated in routine activities, including completing homework assignments and attending parent-teacher conferences, going to appointments at medical clinics and social service offices, and attending



IAN meetings. I gathered more than 45 hrs of video recordings in homes, collected artifacts and conducted interviews, and took ethnographic field notes at home and in public spaces. Data analysis involved the inductive coding of field notes, video logs, and artifacts as well as the identification of patterns in everyday activity and conversation. I also inductively coded the audio and video transcripts in order to capture the way in which participants' understandings of citizenship were coconstructed throughout the course of everyday conversations with others.

### TESTIMONIO: COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Marta Utuado, Luz Durán, and Inés Chavez all migrated to the United States between 2003 and 2008. Marta and Inés each migrated from Mexico with their eldest sons (they and their sons shared undocumented legal status); these children attended the same elementary school at the time of the study. Both mothers also had younger U.S.-born children who attended state-subsidized preschools. Luz migrated from Honduras and had a 2-year-old U.S.-born daughter whom she cared for at home. The three women knew one another through St. Martin Church and through their eldest sons' schools; they all lived in one of the two Millvalley neighborhoods with the highest concentration of Latino/a residents. Marta's and Luz's families rented a shared duplex apartment, and Inés lived with her family in a rented apartment less than a mile away. With the exception of Luz, who cared for her daughter full time, the adults in all three families worked in the service industry as domestic workers and custodial or restaurant staff.

Members of all three families faced the daily threat of deportation: Inés's husband was deported in the winter of 2008, and Luz and her husband were stopped by police in the spring of 2009. In the sections that follow I detail the circumstances of the deportations and police encounters, how these experiences prompted the mothers to give *testimonio*, and the institutional and interpersonal relationships that facilitated their ability to do so. These examples show that the dichotomy between public and private action is fluid because public acts of giving *testimonio* shape interactions among women in the home, and rehearsals of *testimonio* in the domestic sphere prepare mothers to share their *testimonio* in public venues. My presence in the interactions in the home further blurred the boundary between public and private spaces, as the mothers had granted me permission to codify these instances of talk for future dissemination.

#### Inés Chavez

One snowy afternoon in mid-January, I met Inés, Sister Elise (a member of IAN and the director of social services at St. Martin Church), and other IAN members to translate for Inés as she gave *testimonio* about her husband's recent deportation. Inés's husband, Ignacio, had been deported a month earlier after running a stop sign and being stopped by police. When he was unable to produce a Pennsylvania driver's license, the police called Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Ignacio was deported. Sister Elise provided support to Inés during this time and also arranged for Inés to give *testimonio* at this meeting with the local police chief. Inés arrived with her two youngest U.S.-born children in tow; because the meeting took place on a weekday afternoon, her eldest son was in school. Among the 12 IAN members present were two community organizers

from outside the church, Sister Elise as well as another nun and a reverend, and 3 migrant parents and their children. The chief of police was present, as was one policeman who the chief explained was a Latino officer hired in response to IAN's demands for a liaison to the Latino/a community.

The meeting began when one of the Latino/a parents explained that its purpose was to share the effects of recent deportations on one family. This was followed by a prayer delivered by the nuns in English and Spanish. Inés's children looked at her wide-eyed as she described living in fear, losing her job, and being evicted from her home. She presented Ignacio's international driver's license, asking the police to explain why it did not count as valid identification, and cried as she explained "*Yo quiero a mi país, pero quiero América más porque de aquí son mis hijos*" (I love my country, but I love America more because my children are from here). Despite the fact that Inés's eldest son had also migrated from Mexico, and even though she feared for his future opportunities because of his undocumented status (Mangual Figueroa, 2011), she sometimes referred to him as American because he had spent most of his life north of the border.

Building on Inés's poignant *testimonio*, IAN organizers called for "immigrant-friendly policies" and requested follow-up meetings to discuss their short- and long-term demands for reform. The organizers emphasized the need to keep migrant families intact and called for the reform of local police practices that threatened the stability of the family unit. The chief of police explained that he was the grandson of immigrants who had left Europe for Millvalley and that he could only imagine the hardships faced by Inés and other migrants. He promised to meet with police chiefs in the region to establish uniform policies about which forms of identification would be accepted and to improve relations between police and Latino/a community members. Before we left, Inés reiterated that she hoped her experience would serve as a catalyst for the urgent reforms needed to improve the living conditions for all migrants in Millvalley. As we left, the chief of police gave each of Inés's children a toy car with the police department logo emblazoned on the door. The children began playing with the cars as Inés thanked him; he responded that it was the least he could do.

By late March Ignacio had returned from Mexico, again crossing the border without legal permission to reunite with his family. A few weeks after his return, I received an e-mail from Sister Elise asking for Inés's phone number because she wanted to introduce her to Lara—an undocumented mother whose husband had been deported. Because Inés had changed her telephone number several times since the deportation, Sister Elise no longer had current contact information but knew that I remained in contact with Inés. Sister Elise explained that she would like to introduce the two mothers because "Lara could really benefit from learning how Inés and Ignacio dealt with the trauma of deportation" (2009, personal communication). I asked Inés if I could give Sister Elise her contact information, and she consented. On my next visit with Inés, we talked about why she had chosen to give *testimonio* those many months ago when Ignacio was deported. The following transcript represents 2 min of sequential talk and begins with Inés explaining why she gave *testimonio*.<sup>4</sup>

The three themes of community, temporality, and responsibility can be traced in Inés's explanation of giving *testimonio*. Inés began her explanation by naming two community members

<sup>4</sup>I use the conversation analysis system of numbering lines in a transcript in order to track the development of shared understandings over the course of unfolding conversation (Schegloff, 2007). I have omitted the transcription symbols used to identify those paralinguistic resources used by speakers during interaction because this article focuses on the narrative content of participants' talk in the context of *testimonio*.

## Example 1

- 1 Inés: Ya como que. Es como yo le dije yo. Cuando me pasó a mi todo este problema,  
 2 yo le dije a la Sister. La Sister me dice “yo quiero que vayas a mi lado.” Entonces,  
 3 como yo le dije a la Sister, “si alguien le sirve lo que me pasó a mi y con  
 4 experiencia y para que no, o maneje menos o se cuide mas, o qué sé yo tome  
 5 precauciones. Adelante. Con que a una persona le ayude, absolutamente una.  
 6 Porque yo sé esto que pasó no es en vano.”  
 Now it’s like. It’s like I told her. When this whole problem happened to me, I told Sister.  
 Sister tells me, “I want you to be by my side.” Then, like I told Sister, “If one person  
 benefits from what I went through and with experience and so that they don’t, or they  
 drive less or take better care of themselves, or I don’t know takes precautions. Onward.  
 If this were to help at least one person, just one. Because I know that what happened is  
 not in vain.”

integral to her decision to offer her testimony in public. First she mentioned her exchange with Sister, a key interlocutor and community advocate who encouraged Inés to speak out. Then she identified a group of migrants particularly vulnerable to police harassment and deportation in Millvalley—employed individuals who, much like Ignacio, became publically visible and subject to police surveillance during their commute to and from work (line 4). Undocumented migrants cannot legally obtain a Pennsylvania driver’s license, yet many risked driving each day because the municipal transportation system made it difficult to access the service jobs in neighboring suburbs where they could find employment. By describing other Millvalley migrants who resembled her and Ignacio, Inés linked her individual experience to a collective experience and identified a community whose best interest she hoped to represent when giving *testimonio*.

Inés connected temporal frames of reference as she described giving *testimonio*: Although she located Ignacio’s deportation in the past (“when this whole problem happened to me,” line 1), she indicated that the difficulties raised by the deportation were still quite proximal (“this . . . problem,” line 1). She recounted Sister Elise’s call to action in the present tense (“Sister tells me,” line 2), consistent with Sister Elise’s ongoing requests for her to share experiences in large- and small-group settings. Inés expressed hopeful uncertainty, expressed by the use of the subjunctive, that the deportation could transcend individual hardship and become a useful lesson for others once she spoke out about her experience (“if one person benefits,” line 3). Despite her uncertainty, Inés felt that her fate was linked to those of other migrants living in Millvalley. Her sense of responsibility for their safety also had a redemptive quality—if her testimony could help another person in her position, she would believe that she had not suffered “in vain” (line 6).

Seamlessly, Inés segued from talk about *testimonio* to her conversation with Lara:

- 7 Inés: Yo llame a ésta persona. A Lara  
 I called this person, Lara  
 8 Author: Mm hm  
 Uh huh  
 9 Inés: y hasta que se me parte el corazón. Y le digo a mi esposo, “Yo me veo en ella. Yo  
 10 sé lo que esta pasando.” Le digo a ella, “tal vez va pensar que estoy loca pero yo

- 11 sé lo que tú estas pasando. Yo se que tú estas peor pero porque tienes una bebe de  
 12 tres meses.”  
 and my heart almost breaks. And I tell my husband, “I see myself in her. I know what  
 she is going through.” I tell her, “You might think I’m crazy but I know what you are  
 going through. I know that you are worse off because you have a 3-month-old baby.”
- 13 Author: Mm hm  
 Uh huh
- 14 Inés: Entonces, le digo “Yo lo que le puedo ayudar es conseguir trabajo tal vez.”  
 15 Créame, y como se lo digo a él, “Si yo hubiera estado en otra casa, o si tuviera un  
 16 poquito más espacio aquí, yo le digo, yo me la traigo por acá.”  
 Then, I tell her, “What I can help with is maybe finding a job.” Believe me, as I tell him,  
 “If I were in another house, or if I had a little more space here, I tell him, I would bring  
 her here.”
- 17 Author: Mm hm  
 Uh huh
- 18 Inés: Yo la ayudo, y yo, mientras que se acomoda. Porque yo pasé por eso y es horrible.  
 I will help her, and I, until she gets settled. Because I went through that and it is horrible.
- 19 Author: Ya  
 Yes
- 20 Inés: Pero lamentablemente tú ves como es de pequeño aquí, entonces, es imposible.  
 But unfortunately you see how small it is here, so, it is impossible.
- 21 Author: Mm hm  
 Uh huh
- 22 Inés: Pero como yo le dije a ella, me pidió. Le pueda ayudar, a traerla, a ayudarla  
 23 a conseguir buen trabajo. Yo le puedo ayudar, le dije a las personas que a mi me  
 24 ayudaron, yo le dije que llevara sus niños a la guardería para que empezara a  
 25 trabajar.  
 But like I told her, she asked me. I can help her, to bring her, to help her find a good job,  
 I can help her, I told her the people that helped me, I told her to take her children to day  
 care so that she can start working.
- 26 Author: Ya  
 Yes
- 27 Inés: Yo le dije, “Se va a sentir desesperada, yo lo sé.” Y yo le digo, “Hasta eso se le ve  
 28 que usted es una mujer fuerte porque usted, apenas hace eso una semana y puede,  
 29 puede conversar de lo que le pasó a su esposo. Yo ya llevaba semana y media y  
 30 yo, me decían Ignacio, y yo eran llantos, llantos, y llantos.”  
 I told her, “You’re going to feel desperate, I know.” And I tell her, “But even so one can  
 tell that you are a strong woman because you, it’s only been a week and you can, you  
 can talk about what happened to your husband. I had already gone a week and a half and  
 I, when someone said Ignacio, I would cry, cry, and cry.”

Inés shifted from describing giving *testimonio* at an IAN meeting to sharing experiences with Lara, explaining the distinctions between speaking out in these contexts. In group settings, Inés spoke for a general migrant population living and working in Millvalley, whereas in the one-on-one conversation she related to Lara as a migrant, mother, and worker who resembled herself in specific ways (line 9). As a result of the collaboration with Sister Elise that led Inés to give *testimonio*, Inés became a representative of the community and gained a new authority *within* her

community. This is not unlike a local politician or community leader who would hear grievances and concerns from individuals, helping to connect them with local resources (lines 14–16) and drawing on their existing strength to help them cope with new hardships (lines 18 and 22–25).

### Luz Durán and Marta Utuado

As we have seen, *testimonio* is a kind of grassroots practice that takes the place of conventional forms of civic participation from which undocumented mothers are barred. Luz's desire to give *testimonio* began after an incident in March 2009 when she was stopped by the police while driving her husband, Carlos, and his migrant coworkers home from work. As Luz drove into Millvalley from the neighboring suburb of Hebron where they worked, she was hailed by an undercover police car and pulled over. When she was unable to provide a Pennsylvania license, the police confiscated her international driver's license and identification, and she was held by the officers on the side of the road until an IAN leader arrived to mediate the exchange and to drive her and the others home. Luz was given two fines (one for driving without a license and one for driving with an expired vehicle registration) and a date to appear in court. The following transcript includes segments of a conversation that took place between Luz, Marta, and me in their home a week after the event. This exchange began as Marta encouraged Luz to go the IAN meeting at St. Martin Church that evening in order to volunteer her *testimonio*.

#### Example 2

- 1 Marta: Yo voy a ir a la junta, porque quiero que esta mujer hable con Ryan, para que la autorice:  
 2 “¿Sabes qué? Sí, haz la cita con el jefe de la policía.” Porque de aquí a  
 3 que venga esa fulana, otras tres semanas.  
 I'm going to the meeting, because I want this woman to talk to Ryan, so that he can  
 authorize: “You know what? Yes, make an appointment with the chief of police.”  
 Because from now until this other woman comes back, another 3 weeks.
- 4 Luz: Bueno pues si va estar usted, pues entonces, lo hablamos esto ahora.  
 Well then if you're going to be there, then well, let's talk about this now.
- 5 Author: Sí, sí lo hablamos y hacemos el plan y yo de acuerdo totalmente.  
 Yes, yes let's talk about it and make a plan and I'm totally in agreement.
- 6 Marta: Y de una vez platicar con todos ellos. Sí Luz, si se va a hacer que se haga ya, y  
 7 sino que no se haga.  
 And once and for all talk with all of them. Yes, Luz, if it's going to happen it should  
 happen now, and if not then it shouldn't happen.

Marta took a firm stand about wanting Luz to give *testimonio* (line 1). She noted the urgent need to give *testimonio* and explained that they could not wait for an IAN community organizer who was out of town (“this woman,” line 2) to arrange the meeting (the meeting had to take place immediately or not at all, lines 6–7). Luz, who was accustomed to my serving as a translator for mothers giving *testimonio*, confirmed that I would be present at the meeting and willing to translate, and I responded affirmatively (lines 4–5).

After several turns of talk during which the details of child care were arranged, Marta continued encouraging Luz to give *testimonio*, recalling the incident and invoking the fear that Luz experienced that night: “*que te gritaban, dice Luz que se gritaban . . . ¡bueno ella sabe todo! Porque ella estaba esperando que inmigración ya . . .*” (they yelled at you, Luz says that they

yelled . . . well she knows everything! Because she was waiting for immigration already . . .). Marta set the stage for Luz to give her expert testimony, and Luz took up this invitation:

- 8 Luz: Venía yo manejando y me dice María: “¿Venías a velocidad alta?” “¡No María!”  
 9 Le digo yo “Ahí va a ver los papeles porque me dieron la multa” le digo, y ya  
 10 después se convenció. “Es cierto.” Ya cuando yo le dije al policía, me dice:  
 11 “¿English?” “No, no.”  
 I was driving and Marta tells me: “Were you speeding?” “No Maria!” I tell her “There you’ll see the papers with the reasons for fining me” I tell her, and after that she was convinced. “It’s true.” Then when I said to the police, he tells me: “English?” “No no.”
- 12 Marta: Y a mí me dicen anoche: “¿porque vas tan rápido?” “Porque voy bien tarde a mi  
 13 trabajo, por favor déjame ir” le digo (se rie). Porque sí anoche que iba yo por  
 14 Franklin. Porque me voy por el, la Franklin no doy la gran vuelta aquí. Le digo:  
 15 “¿Voy rápido?” “¿A dónde vas a trabajar?” “Aquí al cine le digo” “Okay, está  
 16 bien go.”  
 And last night they tell me: “Why are you going so fast?” “Because I’m really late to work, please let me go” (she laughs). Yes because last night I was going to Franklin. I go via Franklin because I don’t make that huge circle here. I say: “I’m going fast?” “Where are you going to work?” “Here at the movie theatre I tell him.” “Okay, fine, go.”

Luz opened her account by rehearsing the type of exchange that she might have if she were taking the witness stand in a court case. She responded to Marta’s reported question about speeding by furnishing the evidence available to her—the two fines that she was issued by the police on that night that cited other violations (line 9). Marta then took a turn at reenacting a recent experience she had when she was stopped by police while driving. Marta and Luz recounted common experiences, and in doing so they legitimized each other’s *testimonio*.

I turned the conversation back to Luz’s experience, confirming that the first question the police asked was whether she spoke English (referring back to where she left off her account in line 10). She answered yes and proceeded to provide the details about their exchange:

- 17 Luz: Sí, y no me pidió papeles de inmigración, papeles si yo estaba aquí, no nada.  
 18 Solo me dijo “Tu licencia, la seguridad.” Y ya cuando miró la licencia  
 19 internacional “No, esto no es bueno” me dijo “no good” y me quedé callada, ya  
 20 no le contesté. Ya al rato viene uno que habla español, un policía.  
 Yes, and he didn’t ask me for immigration papers, papers to show if I was here, no nothing. He only told me, “Your license, the insurance.” And then when he looked at the international license “No, this is not good,” he told me, “no good,” and I stayed quiet, I didn’t respond. In a while another one came over who spoke Spanish, a policeman.
- ((Brief exchange about the languages spoken during the police encounter.))
- 21 Y ya cuando me dice el policía “Bájate del carro porque me vas a dar la llave” y  
 22 “¿Porque te voy a dar las llaves del carro?” le dije al policía. “Mira porque tu  
 23 licencia no es buena” me dice. Bueno pues, ya me bajé del carro y le di las llaves.  
 24 Ya me dijeron de que esperamos un rato.

And when the policeman tells me, “Get out of the car because you’re going to give me the keys” and “Why am I going to give you the car keys?” I said to the police officer. “Look because your license isn’t good,” he tells me. Well then, I got out of the car and I gave him the keys. They told me that we were going to wait a while.

25 Author: ¿Ahí, dentro del carro?  
There, inside the car?

26 Luz: ¡Afuera! Y yo, desde que yo llegué yo le hablé a Arturo, le hablé a Arturo.

27 Arturo me costó como, quince veces le marquee. Le marco a esta mujer, no me

28 contesta. A la Sister. ¡Nadie! Ya como a la una y media me contesta Arturo:

29 “¿qué pasó Luz?” “Estoy con la policía Arturo”.

Outside! And I, since we got there I called Arturo, I called Arturo. With Arturo it took me like, I dialed him 15 times. I dialed this woman, she didn’t answer me. Sister. Nobody! Then at like one thirty Arturo answers: “What happened Luz?” “I’m with the police Arturo.”

Luz explained that she was asked to present her driver’s license and insurance (line 18); when she could not, she was told in Spanish to exit the vehicle because she could not drive without a valid state-issued license (lines 21–23). Although Luz said nothing to the English-speaking police officer (line 20), she did question the Spanish-speaking officer about why she needed to turn over her keys to the car (line 22). This suggests that Luz was prepared for this type of event—she knew whom to call in this crisis and she knew that she had certain due process rights that she could inquire about. Her first reaction had been to call Marta, Sister Elise, or a member of IAN (lines 27–28). After dialing frantically and receiving no answer, she finally reached Arturo—a lead organizer for IAN who had been present at the meeting that I had attended with Inés several months earlier. Arturo called Ryan, the head of IAN, to intervene and he arrived at the scene—it is likely that his involvement helped to avoid their detention or deportation because he was able to explain the circumstances and drive them home.

We continued talking about the details of the night, and our exchange concluded as I asked Luz what she would say if she had the opportunity to give *testimonio* publicly. She responded as follows:

30 Luz: Yo quiero hablar con el jefe de Hebron y decirle que uno, no es porque

31 ande en la calle, sino que por necesidad lo hace, tener su carro y por el trabajo y

32 por eso. No es porque uno anda allí comprando droga a tal hora, tomado.

I want to speak to the chief of Hebron and tell him that one, it’s not because one is out in the streets, instead one does it out of necessity, to have one’s car and because of work and therefore. It’s not because one is out there buying drugs at all hours, drunk.

As Luz expressed what she would say to the chief of police of Hebron, she shifted out of the detailed narrative about her own experience and into the generalized account of migrants’ experiences in Millvalley conveyed through the use of the general subject “one” (lines 30–32). She spoke for the hardworking heads of mixed-status families that she hoped to represent by giving *testimonio* (those who have a car in order to work, line 31), distancing herself from stereotypic images of lazy, drunk migrants (line 32). Finally, she underscored the need to work and called on authorities to understand the social and economic circumstances that shaped migrants’ everyday lives.

## CONCLUSION

Many of the protections afforded undocumented immigrants revolve around their right to invisibility, to stay in the shadows, keeping their juridical status private. For example, the landmark case *Plyler v. Doe* attempts to guarantee equitable educational access for all children by prohibiting schools from checking on the citizenship status of enrolling students or their parents. Although this kind of protection remains very important in a time when state legislatures have passed anti-immigrant legislation violating this ruling (Zubrzycki, 2011), this article has considered one way that undocumented mothers in mixed-status families actually attempt to move out of the shadows and into a more public domain by giving *testimonio*. *Testimonio* is a grassroots tactic for political advocacy and community formation that compensates for and reacts against the limited opportunities for civic participation afforded noncitizens. As I have attempted to show, in the act of giving *testimonio*, these mothers define their community, integrate themselves into a larger temporal framework of immigrant struggle, and declare the social responsibility that compels them to engage in this act—and that should inspire further acts of *testimonio*. I would suggest that the points of similarity between *testimonio* and giving legal testimony are not incidental; rather, *testimonio* is a grassroots strategy for taking on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship even when legal citizenship status is not obtainable. These findings raise broader questions about what constitutes democratic participation and the ways in which figurative and juridical notions of citizenship highlight or obscure those bids for engagement made by immigrant and undocumented migrant communities (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Levinson, 2012).

The first act of *testimonio* at the IAN action established Inés as a resource for other mothers and advocates in the community who wanted to help link up personal experiences into a transpersonal narrative that could justify calls for policy change. The conversations and rehearsals about *testimonio* that took place in Inés's as well as Marta's and Luz's residences were not simply off the record, in the shadows. My presence as someone recording the conversations, as an academic researcher and as a community liaison who had served as a translator at various actions, helped constitute a space that was neither as public as the IAN action nor simply private. In these interactions, talk about giving *testimonio* became a form of *testimonio*, and the same themes that arose in Marta's talk at the IAN action recurred. *Testimonio* is a *portable* strategy for establishing a space in which personal experience and speech can become a site for transpersonal community advocacy. Its portability requires that one move beyond a binary between public and private, light and shadow, and attend to the ways in which immigrants largely excluded from the conventional public sphere attempt to constitute alternative spaces in which they can engage in community building and advocacy.

The role of the academic researcher in establishing a space for testimony by functioning as a codifier with access to publication resources raises interesting methodological and political questions that are beyond the immediate scope of this article. Many ethnographers, for example, focus on gaining access to participants' informal talk. The way *testimonio* traveled into the home after the IAN event, however, before subsequently returning to a larger public in future actions, should remind one that even talk located in the home can become a kind of testimonial performance in the presence of a researcher. How do participants in such studies understand the role of the researcher/codifier in such speech events? How do they imagine the publication resources available to the researcher? Into what kind of record do they believe their *testimonio* is being entered? How do we as scholars incur responsibilities in relation to these expectations? If



*testimonio* is a way of dispelling shadows, researchers should welcome the light it shines on their own motivations, imperatives, and methods.

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