





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Undocumented immigrants at work: invisibility, hypervisibility, and the making of the modern slave

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The undocumented immigrant represents a socio-legal category, referring to a subject who does not have legal standing to be in the country in which they are located. Extending from their lack of legal standing, undocumented immigrant workers in the United States occupy spaces marked by extreme conditions of vulnerability, which were exacerbated by the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016. The aim of this ethnographic study is to make sense of the experiences of undocumented immigrants under a particularly vicious political rhetoric. Studying the lives of Latinx undocumented immigrant workers in the U.S., our findings capture how the dynamic interplay between the types of labor that they undertake and the socio-legal identity they are attributed function together to systematically disenfranchise them. Specifically, we explicate how doing invisible labor while, at the same time, occupying a hypervisible identity culminates in extreme conditions of vulnerability. In addition to developing the concept of hypervisible identity, we also inform theory on the idea of modern slavery. We contend that without the existence of invisible labor and hypervisible identity performing as interlocking, constitutive precursors, some forms of modern slavery would be negated.

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Introduction

The undocumented immigrant represents a socio-legal category, referring to someone who does not have the legal standing to be in the country in which they are located. A lack of legal standing is critical in defining undocumented immigrants' lived experiences. Among other things, it determines "who they are, how they relate to others, their participation in local communities, and their continued relationship to their homeland" (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1000). While this specific circumstance has a deep impact on the lives of undocumented immigrants, it is an invisible attribute that has a deep impact on their lives.

Extending from not possessing legal standing, undocumented immigrant workers in the United States occupy precarious social and organizational spaces (Heyman, 1998; Mehan, 1997; Young, 2017). The precarity experienced by undocumented immigrant workers was only exacerbated with the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th American president (Giroux, 2017). Indeed, the polemical discourse that fermented during the campaign—coupled with the policies that were proposed and enacted in the aftermath of the presidential election—engendered more frequent and more disturbing incidents of symbolic and physical violence against those who embody (and, at times, those who are merely perceived to embody) the category of the undocumented immigrant (Huber, 2016).

Several researchers have identified the pressing need to account for the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the backdrop of an increasingly hostile political climate (Chomsky, 2017; Ngai, 2017). This political climate has established a "war culture" of "normalized violence" (Giroux, 2017), with one commentator observing that it is representative of "virulent adherence to white supremacy that opens the discursive doors of public discourses to engage in more overt and violent practices of racism that targets people of color in the U.S. and particularly Latinx immigrants" (Huber, 2016, p. 216). In response, scholarship published since the presidential election offers preliminary findings into the detrimental outcomes created by political moves towards right-wing populism on the experiences of undocumented immigrants (Romero, 2018)—especially on critical aspects of life such as health (Gostin and Cathaoir, 2017; Reardon, 2017) and education (Sulkowski, 2017; Talamantes and Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2017).

The question of agency is one that frequently arises when talking about immigrants. Mainwaring (2016) has highlighted the importance of agency when studying migration and asserted that this is a central concept that academics and policymakers should not disregard. On this matter, Schweitzer (2017) has highlighted the importance of understanding how migrants' agency has been portrayed as integration and argues that "much of this agency resembles popular understandings and expectations of 'integration', that is, of how newcomers, in general, can and should become part of, and accepted by, the receiving society, whether through participation, incorporation or assimilation" (p. 320). Given the substantive and enduring repercussions that the recent transformations in the realm of politics have had on the lives of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., more research on this population is needed.

The aim of this ethnographic study is to understand the experiences of undocumented immigrants under a particularly vicious political rhetoric. Our main research question was: how do Latinx undocumented immigrants experience vulnerability, and how has this condition been exacerbated in the era of Donald Trump's presidency? Our data collection was guided specifically by the following questions:

- What are the lived experiences of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the United States at work and non-work contexts?
- What have been the effects of Donald Trump's rhetoric on undocumented Latinx immigrants' identities?
- What are the effects that precarious work has on undocumented Latinx immigrants' identities?

This study allowed us to hear the voices of those Latinx immigrants who have left everything behind, hoping to achieve the "American Dream." In our attempt to understand the extreme conditions of vulnerability under which undocumented immigrants work, we were purposeful in not limiting the scope of our examination predominantly to the nature of the work that they do (Moyce and Schenker, 2018; Orrenius and Zavadny, 2009) or to the absence of legal standing (Heyman, 1998; Menjívar, 2006), as has often been the case in extant research on the topic. Instead, we sought to ascertain a nuanced understanding of the myriad of processes occurring in work and non-work contexts by which members of this population are subjugated. Analyzing our data led us to one main discovery, which is this paper's central contribution: populist rhetoric made the identities of undocumented immigrants hypervisible, and when that new identity is taken in tandem with the types of work that they usually have access to due to their legal—or lack thereof—legal status in the country (i.e., invisible work), has led to conditions of what could be considered modern slavery (Crane, 2013).

The remainder of this article unfolds in five substantive sections. First, we offer the theoretical foundation for our study. To capture the contours of life that make work—and other—experiences precarious for undocumented immigrants, we draw upon Butler's (2004) articulation of vulnerability. Second, we provide a description of the methods of our ethnographic study. In this section, we detail the research context, data collection strategy, and approach to data analysis. Third, we present our findings. Our findings reveal the process by which undocumented immigrant workers experience extreme conditions of vulnerability. Fourth, we discuss the contributions of our study and identify directions for future research. Following our grounded theory approach, our contributions focus on developing a theory on the phenomenon of undocumented immigrants at work. Finally, in the fifth section, we close the article with some concluding remarks.

Theoretical foundations

Judith Butler is a contemporary social theorist whose ideas have meaningfully informed the works of scholars from disciplines across the social sciences and the humanities. Since 9/11, she has devoted much of her attention to conceptualizing the idea of vulnerability. Butler's (2004) idea of vulnerability is a germane starting point from which to make sense of the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. as it engages the very questions that define their existence—national borders, state violence, and cultural intolerance.

Butler (2004) conceives vulnerability as the ubiquitous presence of insecurity, exploitation, and exclusion. For Butler, all lives are vulnerable, though vulnerability is not evenly distributed—thus, making some lives more vulnerable than others. She elaborates that within the paradigm of neoliberal capitalism, a value-laden set of social, political, and economic factors render certain lives to merit protections against vulnerability; and, concomitantly, other lives that would not merit such protections. Moreover, Butler specifies which lives need protecting and which lives do not by linking these questions to the discourses perennially invoked in U.S. politics about how to create and maintain

invulnerability for its citizens. As she stated in an interview in which she was asked to expand on her position:

And it seems to me that implicitly what's being promised is that, as a major First World country the US has a right to have our borders remain impermeable, protected from incursion, and to have our sovereignty guarantee our invulnerability to attack; at the same time, others, whose state formations are not like our own, or who are not explicitly in alliance with us, are to be targeted and presumptively treated as expungable, as instrumentalizable, and certainly not as enjoying the same kind of presumptive rights to invulnerability that we do. (Bell, 2010, p. 147)

Butler elucidates how vulnerability is both socially and corporeally fabricated inasmuch as it ideologically positions certain subjects as *others*. Once these subjects have been othered, it gives license to cast disproportionate amounts of vulnerability onto them. Indeed, based on this vulnerability, it constructs their lives as “expungable” (insecurity), “instrumentalizable” (exploitation), and not entitled to “presumptive rights” (exclusion).

Interestingly, the bodies of one segment of the population that Butler explicitly qualifies as occupying extreme conditions of vulnerability are undocumented immigrants. Indeed, “illegal immigrants” represent “bodies (that is, human capital) ...as becoming increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for” (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 29). This assertion is consistent with how extant research has characterized the lived realities of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Indeed, prior scholarship has identified the plethora of ways through which undocumented immigrants are relegated to the margins of society (e.g., Fussell, 2011; Passel, 1986) and, how this relegation, engenders myriad forms of physical, symbolic, and legal violence (e.g., Menjivar and Abrego, 2012; Raj and Silverman, 2002).

We seek to extend prior studies on this group by unraveling the various repertoires of social life—and, as importantly, the interrelationships between them—that define extreme conditions of vulnerability in the lives of undocumented immigrant workers in the U.S. In other words, we seek to make sense of the specific processes occurring at work and non-work contexts by which extreme vulnerability is inscribed into their experiences. In the following section, we describe the research setting and methods of our empirical study.

Research setting and methods

To develop a theory around the experiences of undocumented immigrants at work in the United States, we followed a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach allowed us to inductively make sense of our data. In this section, we describe the study's research context, data collection strategy, and data analysis approach.

Research context and empirical setting. The researcher arrived in Southern California in September 2016, a mere couple of months before Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. When Donald Trump was, in fact, elected on 8 November 2016, the researcher noticed how Latinx immigrants immediately became even more vigilant and worried. In fact, her fieldnotes reflect the concerns that she noticed the day after Trump's election. The notes mention how 9 November 2016 was the quietest day she had experienced while she had been in Southern California since everyone around her seemed to be shocked by the news and the changes this would bring to their lives.

Choosing Southern California to perform a study on undocumented immigrants was not a coincidence. Through research aiming to find the most suitable place to develop a study on undocumented Latinx immigrants, the researcher found that the U.S. is home to approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants, 78% of whom are of Latin American origin (Hayes and Hill, 2017). While undocumented immigrants are dispersed across the country, a study by the Pew Research Center has found that southern California houses more undocumented immigrants than any other region in the United States (Passel and Cohn, 2017).

Data collection. The researcher adopted an ethnographic approach, relying on fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and documentary data. The data collection for this study occurred between September 2016 and May 2017. After almost nine months in the field, theoretical saturation had been achieved. Even when the stories and observations that participants were sharing were still undoubtedly interesting, they had become repetitive. The researcher's participation in the ‘Resist’ protest, which occurred on May 1st in Los Angeles, marked the conclusion of the data collection process.

Gaining, securing, and maintaining access to research participants is particularly challenging when studying a highly vulnerable population. Undocumented immigrants are ostensibly vulnerable as they are under constant fear of arrest, prosecution, and deportation for not possessing legal documents to be in the country (Fussell, 2011; Hernandez et al. 2013). Access was a significant consideration for this study, given that undocumented immigrants were encountering a new wave of political and social backlash during the period of data collection. Namely, at the start of data collection, the leading Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump was running on a xenophobic, anti-immigrant campaign. A couple of months into the commencement of data collection, Trump was elected as president. Making matters even more uncertain for the target population of the study, once he was inaugurated as president, among the first actions Trump took was the issuing of two executive orders that targeted refugees and undocumented immigrants.

The researcher was born and raised in Mexico and is fluent in Spanish. These facts offered her an initial level of legitimacy with the target population—Latinx undocumented immigrants. She also took several other steps to increase her legitimacy. Heeding Pettica-Harris, DeGama, and Elias' (2016) observation that modifying physical appearance is an important factor in gaining access, the researcher darkened her hair and dressed modestly to be more esthetically relatable to the research participants. Ultimately, her cultural background, language skills, and esthetics increased her status of “insiderness” (Labaree, 2002, p.102). A methodological advantage of a researcher being an insider is that it lowers the probability of encountering distrust, aggressiveness, and exclusion (Geertz, 1991).

Being an insider, namely, speaking the same language and aiming to somehow look like the research participants, allowed the researcher to eventually become part of the community. When reflecting on the implications that making such changes had on both the researcher and research participants; it was not done with the intention to deceive them but aiming to fit in an already vigilant community. The researcher always presented herself as a doctoral student from Mexico and when people asked more questions regarding her degree, she was always happy to answer.

Ethnographic approach. To build trust with the target population, the researcher volunteered at a large Church in Southern

California that attended a Latinx congregation. This Church has a dedicated social services office that serves undocumented immigrants, the elderly, and the homeless. The social services office employed one full-time staff member, who was an undocumented immigrant herself.

In her role as a volunteer, the researcher participated in all the activities of the social services office by working closely with the full-time staff member, working 8-hour shifts at least 4 days a week, starting by the end of her first month in the field. A regular presence at the Church's social services office allowed her to interact with and earn the trust of undocumented immigrants who sought the services of the office—and who would have likely otherwise viewed her with suspicion.

Through one of the research participants she originally met at the Church, the researcher also volunteered at the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA). CHIRLA was founded in 1986 as a response to the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which made the hiring of undocumented immigrants a crime (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, n.d.). At CHIRLA, the researcher became an active participant in the organization. On occasion, she also did office hours at CHIRLA's offices, where she would pick up phones and provide basic information to immigrants who contacted the agency. Alongside these activities, dozens of informal conversations were carried out with fellow CHIRLA members, which were recorded as fieldnotes.

In order to interview undocumented immigrants who made a living as day laborers, the researcher visited five Home Depot locations. Day laborers typically gather in and around Home Depot parking lots awaiting potential jobs. Given that day laborers at these locations were exclusively men, at CHIRLA, she recruited the assistance of an older man who was himself an undocumented day laborer. He introduced her to the day laborers in and around the parking lots. The presence of this person—as both a man and an undocumented immigrant who was known to some of the day laborers—provided another layer of legitimacy to this population.

In sum, physical and social access to the target population was enabled by “gatekeepers” at various sites who “offered efficient and expedient routes to participants that would otherwise be difficult to access” (Clark, 2011, p. 489). These gatekeepers were paramount in this study as they created trust between the researcher and the research participants by mitigating suspicion (Clark, 2011).

Finally, to achieve a deeper understanding of the scope of the work that undocumented immigrants perform, the researcher joined some of the participants during their work shifts at various locations. For example, on three separate occasions, she went with the Church's social office worker, who held a second job as a cleaner, on her overnight shifts at a local Best Buy. While participating at these work sites, the researcher not only observed the participants' work, but also performed many of the activities herself.

Semi-structured interviews. During the fieldwork stage of the study, the researcher conducted 62 interviews with undocumented immigrants from Latin America, each of which lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. While language preference for the interviews was left to the discretion of the research participants, all participants elected to have their interviews conducted in Spanish. These interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed into verbatim text. This text was subsequently translated into English. The research participants were mostly cleaners, domestic workers, and day laborers, whom the researcher met at the Church, CHIRLA, Home Depot parking lots, and through the adoption of the snowballing technique. The questions in the interviews mostly revolved around research participants' life and work circumstances in their countries of origin and in the U.S., as well as the challenges they encountered as a result of being undocumented immigrants. The interviews

took place at different locations; sometimes, people would agree to talk with the researcher at the Church's basement, other times on the streets while day laborers were waiting for a job, and she was once invited to one of the participants' homes to have lunch and interview some of her friends.

Documentary data. Documentary data were collected during data collection, which included meeting minutes of CHIRLA, ‘Know Your Rights’ workshop materials, flyers which were provided by the Mexican consulate, ‘Preparing Your Family for Immigration Enforcement’ documents provided by the Roman Catholic Diocese, and ‘Lobbying Guidelines’ provided by CHIRLA from the Sacramento visit. In order to capture how undocumented immigrants were being represented in the media during the data collection period, targeted searches of newspapers, magazines, and websites were also conducted. Specifically, *Time Magazine*, the CNN website, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Guardian* were scanned to ascertain a national perspective, while the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Voice of San Diego* were examined to acquire a local perspective. In addition, *Univision News* was also scanned as it represents a widely consumed media outlet by the American-based Latinx population. The search yielded a total of 26 media articles that were considered relevant to the phenomenon under study. This collection of documentary data provided us with a real-time set of documents that illuminated the most pressing issues confronting undocumented immigrants in the wake of Trump's presidential nomination and election.

Data analysis. In¹ following the tradition of grounded theory, hypotheses were not developed prior to the data being collected (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Data analysis was performed in an iterative manner, which commenced while the researcher was in the field. As initial interviews and documentary evidence were collected and analyzed in the early stages of fieldwork, unforeseen aspects of the undocumented immigrant experience emerged. The interview guide evolved as a result (Charmaz, 2014) and, whenever possible, the researcher went back to previously interviewed research participants with new questions.

Grounded theory charges researchers with the task of observing data in ways that allow them to develop theoretical insights by conceptualizing the connections between the ideas revealed by the data, of which research participants themselves might not be aware (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013). After reading the interview transcripts, a list of relevant concepts and themes was developed, which sought to identify passages in which research participants spoke about their thoughts and feelings, their lives in the U.S., and their experiences at work.

NVivo software was used to analyze data comprehensively and systematically. This process reduces the opportunities for data not to be captured during analysis (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Using NVivo allowed the authors to apply the approach to the grounded theory proposed by Gioia et al. (2013). More specifically, during the first phase of data analysis, transcripts were analyzed with the intent to allow codes to surface. Comparative analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) was then used in order to find connections and dissimilarities between the identified passages. While comparing these quotes, we aimed to find the most prevalent issues raised by the research participants, which led us to first-order concepts. Focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) further allowed us to use the most meaningful initial codes to distill and classify data. Additionally, axial coding allowed us to build links between our data (Charmaz, 2015). Subsequently, second-order themes were ascertained based on the similarities between the first-order concepts, leading to more “theoretically revelatory” categories (Eury et al. 2018, p. 833). Table 1 provides illustrative excerpts

Table 1 Additional representative data for second-order themes.**Devalued work**

- “They [employers] think we just work for food. I mean, like giving a tip, and that’s disrespectful because they are not taking one seriously, the value of our work...they just look at us like ‘ok, they will be ok with us giving them lunch money’.” (Miguel)
- “We do the worst jobs, the most difficult ones, and we get the lowest wages.” (Mario)
- “It’s a lot of work and little money.” (Daniel)

Dirty work

- “A little while ago, I went to clean the Wells Fargo Bank, and the man who hired me said, ‘If you have sex with me, I’ll keep giving you the job’.” (María)
- “I work in plumbing, sometimes you have to change clogged drain pipes which are full of poop and sometimes you get covered in it. It’s dirty work that they [Americans] don’t do.” (Angel)
- “Americans can make more money. They are not going to sacrifice under the sun while being thirsty, while being hungry, without having a restroom when they can be in an office. We [Latinxs] are working cleaning houses, looking after kids, looking after old people.” (Lidia)

Targeted by political rhetoric

- “Trump is attacking us, families...He’s threatening to separate parents from their children.” (Aracely)
- “What I see is that this president is a racist...He wanted to screw Mexicans over and Mexicans haven’t allowed that to happen. There’s hatred underlying everything he says and for him, all of us [Latinxs] are Mexicans!” (Maru)
- “Yes, [I’m afraid] of this new president...Even the people who have documents are afraid because they don’t know what’s going to happen next.” (Mario)

Moral panic

- “I don’t think it’s true that immigrants are stealing jobs from the American people, they don’t get in the filth, Mexicans do. American people don’t do landscaping, Mexican people do. American women don’t clean houses, they don’t babysit, they don’t look after elderly people, Mexican women do, Latinxs do. We’re not really in their territory to take jobs from them.” (Lidia)
- “A lot of Americans don’t like us, they’ve had a bad experience with a Mexican and blame all of us...On the buses, [they’ll call me] ‘fucking Mexican’. You can only put your head down and get off the bus because they can hit you, and you’ll end up losing more.” (Pablo)
- “For them [Americans] to call us ‘rapists’, that’s not ok.” (Fernando)

Ubiquitous surveillance

- “I don’t want to go out, even yesterday I was locked in all day... I didn’t even want to go to the grocery store, which is really close. I didn’t want to go out at all. I heard people going upstairs, and I quickly looked through the window to check who it was. I was anxious, completely anxious, and on edge...I am taking pills to feel calmer since we heard the news about the raids.” (Gloria)
- “I tell my husband, ‘look out through the door’s peephole before you leave, if there’s anything suspicious, then you can leave.’ Lately, that’s what every morning has been like.” (Carolina)
- “When the president was inaugurated, I swear I spent six days at home, I didn’t go out because he talked about massive raids.” (Patricia)

Wage theft

- One day, my boss just didn’t come back. I called him over and over and he never picked up the phone. Why should I look for him? What for? He is the one who owes me money and doesn’t want to pay but a lot of people are shameless.” (Daniel)
- “Once I cried because I didn’t get paid, and I felt bad because I already had plans for that little money, and I cried. My self-esteem, I don’t know, I lost it...I don’t want to remember that.” (Dionisio)
- “You can’t do much but beg [the employer] to pay, to give you at least something for the job because if they call the police, you are going to be the one who is affected.” (Antonio)

Precarious working conditions

- “Here, I used to iron eight to ten hours, from Monday to Saturday...I hurt my spine...So, I hurt myself, and when they [my bosses] noticed it, they didn’t want to answer for my injury, and I wasn’t as fast anymore. I was one of the fastest ones because I worked on commission...so I got used to working very quickly and logically, I hurt myself faster and more seriously. When they saw that and realized I wasn’t going to be able to work in the same way, they fired me.” (Karla)
- “I lived there, locked up from Sunday to Friday because my day off was Saturday. I was there for seven months until I got ill from so much pressure and work. I cooked, did laundry, bathed the kids...I barely slept because the little girl was a newborn, and I went to the living room to sleep with her for two or three hours. Then, I’d get up and make breakfast for the older kids and take them to school...I didn’t have any breaks and they limited the food they gave me.” (Estrella)
- “I was very thirsty...I took a disposable cup and was getting water from the sink when she [my boss] came out and asked me what was I doing there...I told her I needed water, she said the iron had water. When I said I needed water, she said ‘You have to finish ironing and then do your other things.’ She said a bunch of things and I threw the water away. It was really hot, I was sweating, and I asked her, ‘may I get some water?’, she said ‘you have to bring your own’.” (Patricia)

Workplace bullying

- “Once, I worked at a famous cookie factory...there all your rights were violated. If you wanted to go to the restroom, you couldn’t, and they wouldn’t let you drink water...All while working around six hot ovens.” (Aracely)
- “I was working with another person at a house, and the lady there, yelled at us. I’m not sure about what she didn’t like but something was wrong. She yelled at us, it was horrible, I got really scared.” (Lupita)
- “It feels really bad, right? The man is yelling at you. Would you like someone to come, yell, and insult you? But, what can I do? (Fernando)

No recourse

- “He stole my salary, he paid me with a cheque with no funds...Since I’m undocumented, I thought, ‘What am I going to demand? And to who?’ They would say ‘What are you demanding if you have no papers?’ That was one of my obstacles because you can’t speak up, you can’t, and they make you feel guilty for having no documents to work legally in this country.” (Maru)
- “When they hired me, they said they would increase my payment and give me days off, they never raised my salary or gave me a day off.” (Diana)
- “They [employers] refused to pay me two or three times. I didn’t know how to defend myself.” (Raúl)

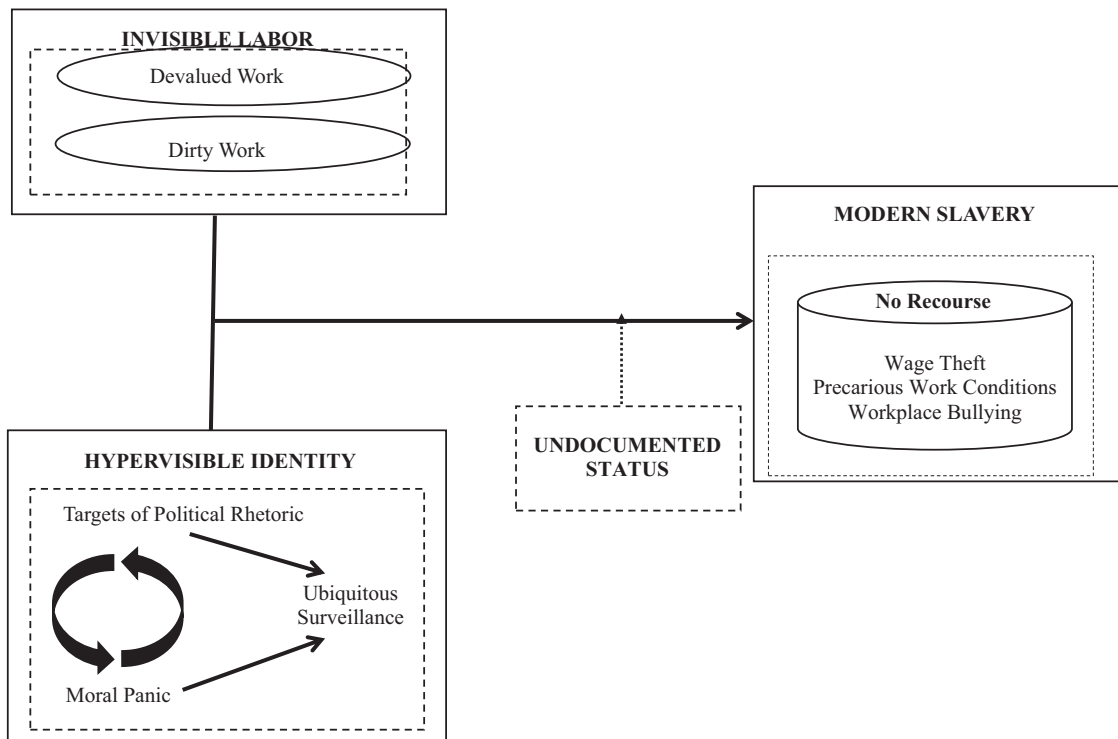


Fig. 1 Latinx undocumented immigrants at work. Figure 1 identifies what constitutes invisible labor and the process by which hypervisible identity is socially constructed. The model depicts how the doing of invisible labor while, at the same time, occupying a hypervisible identity engenders a form of modern slavery.

representative of second-order themes. As Gioia and colleagues (2013) suggested, performing this type of analysis allows for the conflation of informants’ and researchers’ voices, which links the data and allows for the emergence of new concepts and processes.

We went back and forth between the selected excerpts we identified from a set of core themes, which captured three aggregate dimensions: *invisible labor*, *hypervisible identity*, and *modern slavery*. We analyzed the dimensions in pursuance of the attainment of integration (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), which entails making sense of how the aggregate dimensions are related. This procedure allowed us to build an inductive model, which illuminates the connections between data and theory (Gioia et al. 2013). Our inductive model, which we explicate in our discussion, lends authenticity to our findings as it identifies how the aggregate dimensions are linked. Figure 1 offers the data structure that inductively emerged from the analysis.

Findings

The corpus of the data emanating from this study—including the ethnography, documentary evidence, and interviews—was theoretically revealing. The theoretical revelations inform the process model offered in Fig. 1, which we use, following Eury and colleagues (2018), to structure this section. Figure 2 illuminates which themes emerged from our data analysis and shows the relationship(s) between the emergent themes. Specifically, Fig. 1 identifies what constitutes invisible labor and the process by which hypervisible identity is socially constructed. The model then depicts how the doing of invisible labor while, at the same time, occupying a hypervisible identity engenders a form of modern slavery.

Figure 2 presents the data structure, showing first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. To contextualize our claims and to underscore the interplay between second-order themes and aggregate dimensions, throughout this section, we

will include some exemplary quotes from the interviews as well as other sources of data.

Invisible labor. Undocumented immigrants are habitually relegated to doing invisible labor. Invisible labor represents work that is largely unseen and meaningfully underappreciated by others; labor that is taken for granted and is only noticed when it is not performed. The fact that undocumented laborers are not taken into consideration most of the time renders them invisible to American society, which benefits from their work. As Herod and Aguiar (2006, p. 427) observe when discussing cleaners, “most of us know when somewhere has not been cleaned but few of us... stop to think much about the laboring process which goes into maintaining spaces as clean.” Invisible work is especially tenable under circumstances when work is performed outside the formal labor market—such work is classified as not constructively contributing to the national economy (Daniels, 1988; Leonard, 1998). In our study, research participants reflected on the kind of jobs that are available to them, considering their lack of legal status. Invisible labor performed by undocumented immigrants manifested in two forms: (i) devalued work and (ii) dirty work.

Devalued work. How someone attributes meaning to the work that they do is intersubjectively constructed through the interactions between the individual who does the work and those with whom the individual is socially and professionally related (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003). Also, how a worker is treated by others will inform how they make sense of the value of their work as well as their professional worth (Dutton et al. 2016). Research participants appeared cognizant of the fact that the work that they do is not valued by others with whom they interact in the community, including those for whom they perform the work. As Rosa, a 43-year-old restaurant worker from El Salvador described, “that’s what they don’t see, it’s what these presidents don’t see...”

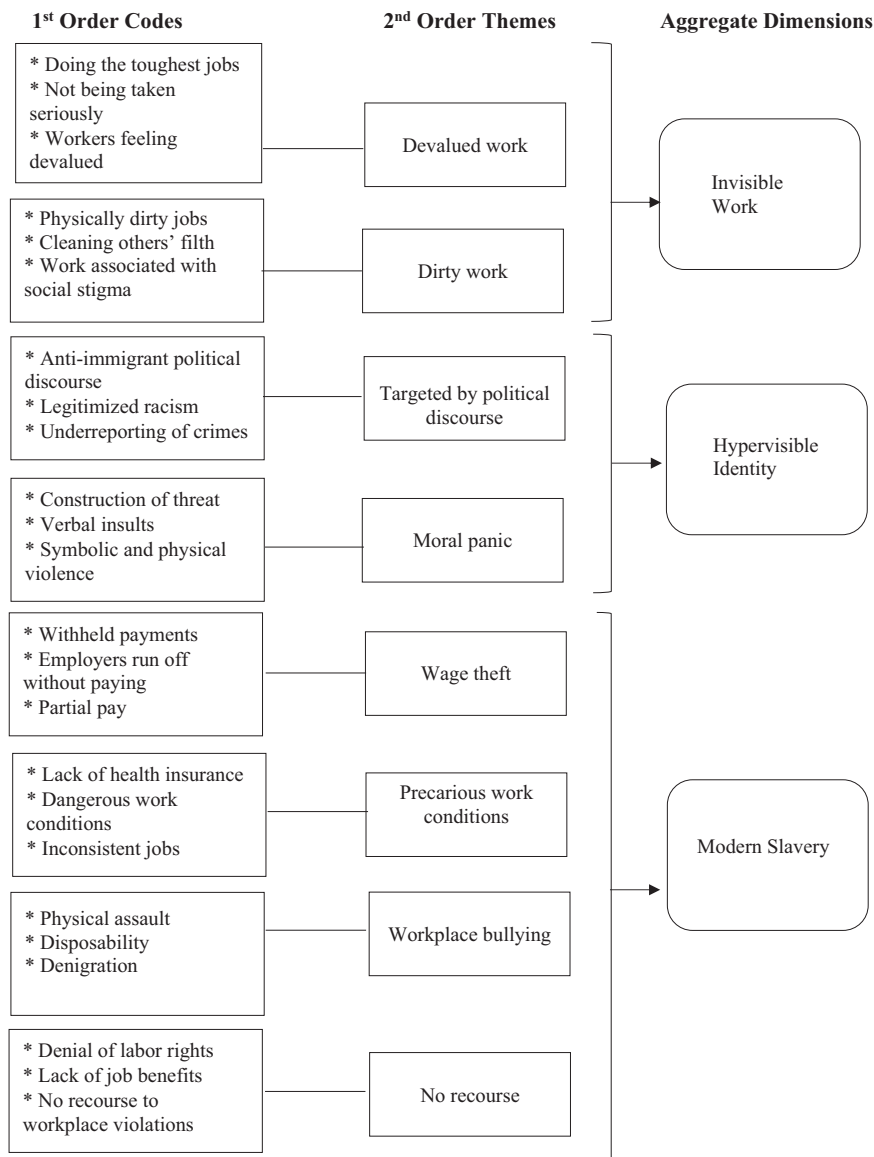


Fig. 2 Data structure. Figure presents the data structure, showing first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions.

our effort. They think only about their own well-being, but they don't think about the well-being of Latinx undocumented immigrants." Rosa had been living in the United States for over 8 years after crossing the Rio Grande using car tires as makeshift rafts.

Undocumented immigrants undertaking devalued work is an established fact in the United States, with the well-recited proverb, *undocumented immigrants do the work that Americans refuse to do*, only adding veracity to the point. When asked about the reason for why undocumented immigrants do devalued work, Miguel, a Guatemalan day laborer responded: "They charge less, they take the toughest jobs, that's why Latinxs are chosen. *Gabachos* (Americans) are going to take longer and will charge more money." Edgar, a 30-year-old Guatemalan farm worker bitterly stated while waiting for a job at a street corner during a warm day in sunny California: "*Gabachos* (Americans) don't want to do these jobs because it's too tough...they're afraid of the sun."

Research participants elaborated on feeling devalued by illuminating what Chang (2016) refers to as, their own disposability. Oscar, a Mexican man who had previously worked

a factory, said: "We [undocumented immigrant workers] are disposable, once one doesn't perform as needed, they can just bring another one." This participant had first-hand experience of "feeling disposable" as he was replaced immediately after he had a work accident, which did not allow him to work anymore.

Further, devalued work was personally experienced by the researcher when she accompanied one of the participants on her shift as a janitor at Best Buy. The researcher reflected in her fieldnotes:

I followed her around while she skillfully worked a ghostbuster looking vacuum, leaned down to pick garbage up and pulled a 60 ft. cable around...all at the same time. Incredibly, other Best Buy's workers wouldn't even acknowledge her presence and would, nonchalantly, step on the cable. Others would just jump over the cable without even looking at who was cleaning the store.

Dirty work. The term "dirty work" refers to those "tasks and occupations that are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading" (Hughes cited in Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999, p. 413)

and are culturally tainted (Ashforth et al. 2017; Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2021, 2022). Participants engaged in a wide array of what they referred to as dirty work, including house cleaning, caretaking, and landscaping. One of the participants, Estela, a Mexican woman who had been living in the U.S. without legal documents for a decade, shared one of her worst experiences with doing dirty work when she reflected on working as a janitor at a large store:

I found that one of the toilets in the men's room was clogged with a lot of toilet paper. [Once I tried to remove the toilet paper] I saw that it was clogged with the security device that is attached to merchandise to prevent theft...It looked like someone had tried to steal something and when the alarm broke it started to make noise. In order to stop the noise, the person must have thrown the alarm into the toilet. You could still hear a very faint noise. I imagine someone else tried to use the toilet and when he flushed it, it all flooded...When I saw what happened, I cried! I looked at all the mess and thought, 'I'm going to have to clean it, how am I going to do it?'

Individuals who perform dirty work typically experience some form of social stigmatization for doing such work (Bosmans et al. 2016; Duffy, 2007). In the study, participants explained how they were ontologically marked; that because they did dirty work, employers considered them to be dirty themselves. While riding the bus to go lobbying in Sacramento along with undocumented immigrants seeking to speak to state senators regarding immigrant rights, the researcher spoke to Claudia, a Mexican cleaning lady who recalled: "Once, a lady told me 'you can't use the restroom, but if you must use it, you have to clean it afterwards'...I felt humiliated. I'm not dirty!" Rocío, another Mexican cleaning lady, described an incident experienced by her husband: "They wouldn't let him sit on the couch because they thought that he was dirty—that he smelled bad." These denigrating comments have the effect of diminishing the undocumented immigrants' perception of who they are, which has a lasting effect on their sense of self-worth and their idea of being helpless in a country where they have found opportunities amidst hardships.

The participants were cognizant of the fact that the dirty work they did represented the labor that no one else would want to do. As Claudia, who had previously worked as a seamstress when she arrived in the United States over two decades before, described: "No one wants to do the work that we [undocumented immigrants] do. Not cleaning, sewing, fast food jobs, or working the field." Similarly, Oscar, a Guatemalan day laborer, who had lived in California for over a decade, asserted: "If Trump is set on getting rid of all illegal people, I don't think an American is going to go wash toilets for minimum wage." In both quotes, participants suggest that the "dirty jobs" that they undertake would not be performed by American-born citizens or others with legal residency status would do it for a considerably higher amount of money.

Hypervisible identity. Foucault (1977) used subjectivity to conceptualize how individuals devise their sense of self (i.e., identity). For Foucault, subjectivity is a discursive, identity-forming project that establishes how individuals perceive themselves, which, in turn, determines how they relate to others. Butler (1997) adopted Foucault's meaning of the term to argue that subjectivity is only possible when one's identity is recognized in social discourse—that is, when one is recognized by others. Extending the works of Foucault and Butler, we define hypervisible identity as the sense of self that is formed when the recognition from others is cast

with the intent to discursively and juridically control one's existence by rendering their subjectivity to be readily available for social and political interrogation. The study reveals that hypervisible identity emerged as the corollary of three interrelated social phenomena directed towards undocumented immigrants: (i) targeting them in political rhetoric, (ii) moral panic, and (iii) ubiquitous surveillance.

Targets of political rhetoric. While undocumented immigrants have often been the targets of political rhetoric in the U.S., Trump's toxic anti-immigrant and xenophobic discourse only heightened their vulnerability (Giroux, 2017). When announcing his bid for the Republican nomination for president on 16 June 2015, Trump stated: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best...They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Koplan, 2016). Trump echoed his claim in the following tweet directed at undocumented immigrants: "Illegal immigration costs the United States more than 200 billion Dollars a year. How was this allowed to happen?" In another tweet, he added: "Mexico is not our friend. They're killing us at the border and they're killing us on jobs and trade. FIGHT!" Note how Trump makes a call for action ('FIGHT!') that was directed at undermining any sense of security of immigrants who crossed the border into the US illegally. In fact, as Saramo (2017) has stated, "the rise of Donald Trump... has relied on emotional evocations of violence—fear, threats, aggression, hatred, and division" (p.1).

Trump reified his anti-immigrant and xenophobic discourse by signing executive orders shortly after being inaugurated as president. On 25 January 2017, two executive orders were signed that ostensibly targeted undocumented immigrants. Trump justified his executive orders by asserting: "[A] nation without borders is not a nation...I just signed two Executive Orders that will save thousands of lives, millions of jobs, and billions of dollars" (Smith, 2017).

Research participants described the uncertainty engendered by being the targets of political rhetoric. One month after President Trump took office, the researcher had the chance to speak with several women who were part of the domestic workers coalition. During one interview, Rocío, an undocumented cleaning lady originally from Mexico poignantly said:

Now with what's happening with the president...he made all the people who were already racist to come out. He made these hidden people to come out and feel with the freedom to reject us, disrespect us, yell at us, offend us. He encouraged this.

Similarly, others commented: "I never thought a crazy man would be president...he is encouraging the people who are racist like him" (Edgar) and "the new president wants to separate us from our kids" (Maru).

Being targeted in political rhetoric had direct and far-reaching effects on the undocumented immigrant community. Los Angeles Police Chief, Charlie Beck, cited one such detrimental outcome. Beck stated that undocumented immigrants were refraining from reporting incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence due to the fear that engaging with the police would lead to deportation (Queally, 2017).

Moral panic. Being targeted in political rhetoric functioned as a precursor to moral panic. Moral panic refers to "[a] condition, episode, person, or groups of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen, 1972, p. 9). During moral panics, societal harm may either be "alleged but imaginary" or "real but exaggerated" (Goode & Ben Yehuda cited

in Laws, 2016, p. 12). Moral panic developed against undocumented immigrants, who were portrayed as job-stealing criminals whom the citizenry needed urgent protection (Stupi, Chiricos, and Gertz, 2016; for a related argument on the outcome of this phenomenon on legal immigrants, see Zatz and Smith, 2012). Moral panic against undocumented immigrants is not grounded in any such reality. Extant research has consistently shown undocumented immigrants do not commit disproportionately higher rates of crime than others in the U.S. (O'Brien et al. 2019; Wang, 2012); in fact, statistically speaking, undocumented immigrants engage in lower rates of crime relative to others (Light and Miller, 2018).

Although this moral panic is not based in fact, it did have material consequences on the experiences of undocumented immigrants—and others who were perceived to be “one of them.” Indeed, there was a proliferation of violence against undocumented immigrants from members of the public who perceived them as threats to the existing social order. In the immediate aftermath of Trump’s inauguration, Univision News reported that they received hundreds of cases of anti-immigrant physical and non-physical violence (Weiss, 2017). A candid example of this violence was offered by CNN in a report about a homeless man of Latin descent being assaulted and urinated on by two men with one of them declaring: “Donald Trump was right, all these illegals need to be deported” (Ferrigno, 2015).

During Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, he invoked the death of Kate Steinle, a young woman who had allegedly been murdered in San Francisco by a Mexican undocumented immigrant. Trump stated, “This senseless and totally preventable act of violence committed by an illegal immigrant is yet another example of why we must secure our border immediately... This is an absolutely disgraceful situation, and I am the only one that can fix it” (Schleifer, 2015). Trump even made a point of meeting with family members of people killed by undocumented immigrants as a part of his political campaign (Gray, 2015). When José Inés García Zárate, the man accused of Steinle’s death, was acquitted in late November 2017, Trump responded with two tweets that aggrandized the fear of undocumented immigrants that the American population was already experiencing: “A disgraceful verdict in the Kate Steinle case! No wonder the people in our Country are so angry with illegal immigration” and “The Kate Steinle killer came back and back over the weakly protected Obama border, always committing crimes and being violent, and yet this info was not used in court. His exoneration is a complete travesty of justice. BUILD THE WALL!” (Tatum, 2017). While conducting fieldwork, the researcher noticed the conspicuous apprehension felt by some Americans who, fostered by toxic political rhetoric, interpreted undocumented immigrants to be an omnipresent threat. This apprehension among Americans was captured during a conversation with a Mexican day laborer who said that after Trump’s statements, he was getting fewer jobs since employers were afraid to take him to their homes, fearing that their physical well-being and their property would be at risk. Trump had previously been seen as a celebrity and a successful businessman, so there were people eagerly willing to follow his ideas (Mollan and Geesin, 2020).

The outcomes of moral panic against undocumented immigrants were also represented in the interviews. One of the research participants, María, a woman from Honduras, described how she had been verbally attacked on the streets: “Once I was walking by, and someone said, ‘oh, look! All of them illegal immigrants, all of them, all those people are shit. They are trash.’” Another participant described his experience while waiting for a job as a day laborer: “The *gabachos* (Americans) go by and say, ‘those are the ones who need to be deported’” (Edgar). In the construction of this moral panic, undocumented immigrants are

configured as deviants whose extrication from the country (“need to be deported”) will establish the proper social order.

Ubiquitous surveillance. Political rhetoric and moral panic, when taken collectively, establish ubiquitous surveillance in the lives of undocumented immigrants. Surveillance of this group manifested ubiquitously through two distinct, though mutually constituting, forms: social constructions and discursive constructions. That is, for undocumented immigrants, it involved being both surveilled by others and surveilling themselves. The latter phenomenon is perhaps best reflected in Foucault’s (1997) idea of the panopticon—the gaze under which subjects monitor their behavior through internalized governance.

The first form of ubiquitous surveillance appeared to be socially constructed. Immediately following Trump’s inauguration, there were some high-profile raids by ICE agents in Southern California. The chilling effects of these raids were felt immediately among undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants became fearful of being constantly watched by authorities who might at any time raid a residence or place of employment to arrest them. The uncertainty of arrest (and subsequent deportation) was evidenced by the numerous individuals who spoke with the researcher when they visited the Church’s social office and CHIRLA seeking advice about what they should do in case of arrest. At the Church, among other things, the full-time employee (and the researcher) handed out a flyer entitled “Preparing Your Family for Immigration Enforcement,” which was prepared by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The document detailed the necessary precautions that undocumented immigrants should take given the increasingly hostile climate towards them (e.g., have an emergency plan, what to do during a raid, what to do if immigration officers visit your home, what your rights are under detention). Similarly, CHIRLA workers would furnish “rights cards” to undocumented immigrants, which they were to provide to ICE officers in case of arrest. The card read:

I am giving you this card because I do not wish to speak to you or have any further contact with you. I choose to exercise my constitutional right to remain silent and refuse to answer your questions. If you arrest me, I will continue to exercise my right to remain silent and refuse to answer any of your questions. I want to speak to a lawyer before answering your questions. I would like to contact this attorney or Organization:

Interestingly, documents such as these only further inculcated, among undocumented immigrants, the omnipresent sense that they are being watched and at risk of arrest.

The second form of ubiquitous surveillance was, in essence, caused by the first form. Specifically, the social construction of ubiquitous surveillance was shown to be experienced discursively. In assuming that they were being watched, undocumented immigrants internalized the surveillance and began to change how they behaved in meaningful ways. For instance, several research participants quit their jobs in fear of encountering ICE. Out of necessity, others kept working, though the fear remained significant. While being interviewed at a Home Depot parking lot, Juan, a 22-year-old day laborer who had arrived in the U.S. only a month before, said:

I’m afraid to come to work because if Immigration [an ICE officer] sees me... I want to be honest with the law. I want to abide the law, what the law says but, how am I supposed to eat now? I have to work, I have to fight for my daughter, for my wife.

Similarly, Roberto, another Mexican day laborer recalled: “On the subway, you do not see so many Latin people that come to

work anymore... It has been a problem for me since I am afraid that I might run into an immigration agent in a subway station.”

The discursive effects of ubiquitous surveillance were associated with psychological problems such as anxiety and paranoia. Victoria, an undocumented immigrant of Mexican origin who continuously volunteered at CHIRLA, felt detrimentally impacted by the new stories about the ongoing ICE raids, which instilled into the participant that fear of imminent raid. As she explained:

I don't want to go out, even yesterday I was locked in all day...I didn't even want to go to the grocery store which is very close. I didn't want to go out at all. I heard people going upstairs and I quickly looked through the window to check who it was. I was anxious, completely anxious and on edge...I am taking pills to feel calmer since we heard the news about the raids.

The routines of Victoria's life were altered dramatically as she internalized the (fear of) ubiquitous surveillance. The following account from her further underscores this point:

Even now when I left the house, I saw someone who was talking, a man who was speaking English with someone and I thought I better went back [home]. I went back because I thought maybe he was talking to someone. And he [my son] is also scared, every time he hears someone knocking on the door, he runs to the bedroom.

Modern slavery. Even after the legal abolition of slavery around the world, slavery is a phenomenon that has not entirely dissipated (Bales, 2012). The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that currently, forty million people are under some form of slavery that exacts from them, forced labor (United Nations, 2018). Forced labor refers to:

[W]ork that is performed involuntarily and under the menace of any penalty. It refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as manipulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities. (ILO, 2012)

This definition is adopted by Crane (2013, p. 51) in the field of management and organization studies, who describes modern slaves as satisfying the following criteria: “(1) people [who] are forced to work through threats; (2) owned or controlled by an “employer” typically through mental, physical or threatened abuse; (3) dehumanized and treated as a commodity; and (4) physically constrained or restricted in freedom of movement.” Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. all too often meet the conditions of modern slavery. The conditions of modern slavery experienced by undocumented immigrants—as well as their concomitant outcomes—emerged in the study in four distinct ways: i) wage theft, ii) precarious work conditions, iii) workplace bullying, and iv) no recourse.

Latinx undocumented immigrants leave their homelands due “devastating social, political, and economic conditions” (Segarra and Prasad, 2020: 176) and are desperate to secure a living when they illegally arrive in the United States. In theory, undocumented immigrants in the United States, have the same rights as every other worker with some exceptions such as unions and unemployment insurance; furthermore, the same wage and hour laws apply to every worker, and they have the right to file a wage claim and to collect State Disability Insurance (Legal Aid at Work, 2023). The Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA) bans the conscious hiring of undocumented immigrants but does allow them to work independently. This puts workers in

vulnerable positions since often, they get precarious jobs and do not know the rights they are entitled to while working in the United States. As García Quijano (n.d.) has asserted, “undocumented workers often lack, in practice, the rights and protections enshrined in the laws that could benefit them.”

Wage theft. Wage theft is defined as “the failure of employers to pay their employees the full amount they have earned” (Galvin, 2016, p. 325). Wage theft is a common form of victimization encountered by undocumented immigrants (Fussell, 2011). Undocumented immigrants experience wage theft extending from the fear of being reported to ICE, and other government authorities, by unscrupulous employers who want to avoid paying them for their work (Bobo, 2011).

Research participants described how some employers went as far as to explicitly tell them that their immigration status was the reason why they were not being paid. Luis, a Mexican day laborer who had been in the U.S. for over 12 years recalled such an experience: “The worst experience is that they take you, you work, and there's no money. They tell you, ‘you can do whatever you want, I'm a citizen, you are an illegal.’” In this situation, the employer even challenged the undocumented immigrant worker (“you can do whatever you want”), knowing that he will not go to the police because of what Fussell (2011) has termed, ‘the deportation threat dynamic’. During a different interview, Gustavo, a man who had just got back into the U.S. after being deported, agreed to be interviewed at the Church's basement. He got very emotional while expressing the feelings conjured when employers refused to pay him:

They didn't pay me because they knew I'm illegal and just like that, nothing happened. They just said they would be right back to pay, and they didn't come back. I trusted them, and they didn't return. They do it because you can't defend yourself...Once I cried because I wasn't paid... I had plans with that little money and yes, I cried.... I don't want to remember that.

Another moving response came from María, a homeless woman who described how she felt after not getting paid:

The worst thing is not getting paid because I'm excited, I'm hungry, sometimes asking for money to take the bus to go to work. Then, when I don't get paid, I let down the person I borrowed the money from...I know what being hungry is like. [When I don't get paid] I cry all night, I cry and wonder if it's God's punishment.

Together these quotes reflect the devastating impact that wage theft has on undocumented immigrant workers, as they often do not have accrued savings upon which they can depend during financial exigencies.

Victoria used to work as a house cleaner and she further elaborated on the cruel reality of wage theft for undocumented immigrants:

My brother and I painted houses, and we painted many. When we were about to finish the job, they would kick us out not to pay us...We would tell them we were there to finish the job, and the owners would say: ‘Who are you? If you don't leave now, we are going to call the police.’ We would ask: ‘What do you mean you don't know us? If we came to work yesterday, we were working!’ They would reply: ‘No, go! Otherwise, we will call the police!’

Precarious work conditions. While earlier we described how undocumented immigrants do culturally devalued and dirty work, it is equally important to note that they do such work (and

others) under precarious work conditions. Precarious work conditions involve “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker” (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 2). This definition is extended by Vosko (2010, p. 2), who describes precarious work as, “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.” Precarious conditions often characterize the work done by undocumented immigrants, a claim that has been confirmed in a study by Orrenius and Zavodny (2009). The authors conclude that undocumented immigrants not only do low-skilled work but also physically dangerous and riskier jobs relative to legal residents.

While working under precarious conditions, undocumented immigrants often become victims of workplace accidents. This is vividly captured by Roberto, a young day laborer who, while sitting on the sidewalk next to the researcher at a Home Depot parking lot, described an accident he had at work:

I got hit by a leaf blower... At first, I wasn't taken to a clinic... Maybe about two hours later he [the employer] said he would take me to a clinic to get stitches... I got 28 stitches on my head and asked him to help me get an MRI. He said he didn't have money and that it wasn't necessary... I couldn't work for ten days and when pay day came, he refused to pay me.

While Roberto was the victim of a significant workplace injury, he was in no way compensated for the days that he could not work as a direct result of that injury.

Edgar, a 30-year-old day laborer from Guatemala, described a workplace accident in which he was involved and linked it to the consequences of being undocumented:

I tripped with a machine, I used to spray a vineyard in Malibu... I hurt my back while spraying chemicals, I got asthma. They didn't pay for the hospital, and I was getting the bill. In order to get disability, you need to have social [security number] and if you don't get a lawyer, you get nothing.

No remuneration was offered to the victim as he would need to get a lawyer and make a legal case against the employer, which would only heighten threats of arrest, prosecution, and deportation.

Precarious work conditions are made more problematic by the fact that most undocumented immigrants do not have access to health insurance. In the specific case of the state of California—a state that is relatively more liberal towards undocumented immigrants than others—health insurance is available for undocumented immigrants only if they are either under twenty years of age or pregnant (Covered California, 2019). Not having access to health insurance and knowing that employers will not assume financial responsibility for workplace injuries, Carolina, a Mexican domestic worker, described the need to be especially cautious while on the job and even being advised by employers to be careful: “You have to go upstairs and downstairs carefully... [employers say] ‘be careful! Don't hurt yourself because here there is no insurance!’”

Workplace bullying. Workplace bullying takes place when someone is “teased, badgered, and insulted, and perceives that he or she has little recourse to retaliate in kind... bullying may take the form of open verbal or physical attacks on the victim” (Zapf and Einarsen, 2001, p.370). At the crux of workplace bullying is the question of power; namely, one's ability to exercise power over another in efforts to demean. Given how power is central to workplace bullying, it appears commonly in asymmetrical power relationships where highly skewed levels of power are held by the

parties involved, including, especially, between employers and employees.

The participants described workplace bullying to manifest in the form of abuse both on their body and their dignity. Carolina, a domestic worker who kindly hosted the researcher so that she could interview other domestic workers at her home, recalled the following experience:

I knelt down, and I was scraping [the floor]. Then she [my boss] kicked something at me and said: ‘It's done with this because you are going to stain the floor with that type of cleaner!’ I felt so bad there that I started crying... It was the pain of not being able to say anything or not knowing what to say... I kept scraping and then she grabbed me by the hair and said, ‘don't tell me that you are crying!’

This was hardly shown to be an isolated incident as similar stories were shared by others—especially house cleaners. While talking with the researcher at one of CHIRLA's empty call-center offices, Lupita, another 65-year-old Mexican woman, teared up while recalling an appalling event that she experienced during a day at work:

Once my boss asked me to clean silver. I didn't do it well and she got very mad because I scratched it. I didn't know how to do it properly. She got the cleaning rag and scratched my hand and said: ‘Look! Now you can feel how my scratched silverware feels!’ I started to cry but I didn't want her to see my tears because I felt very bad.

Here, the interviewee was not only physically abused by her boss but was verbally attacked when she had her hand scratched, comparing it to what she had done to the owner's utensils.

Other undocumented immigrants described the bullying at work that they experienced as unmitigated derogation. Dionisio, a young man who often volunteered at the Church, recalled: “When I started to work, I was afraid to say something back... They would call me *pinche puto* [fucking faggot] and *pinche illegal* [fucking illegal].”

Participants described how they acquiesced to workplace bullying. Angel, who had worked as a plumber in the U.S. for over 10 years said: “Sometimes people will mistreat you... the best thing to do is keep silent because you are undocumented. It's better to keep silent... It is humiliation.” Ana, a 40-year-old Mexican woman working as a seamstress, went to the church one day seeking legal help since she was about to be evicted from her home. She agreed to talk to the researcher about her experiences in the United States and poignantly described how she endured bullying to make a living for herself and her family:

They [employers] abuse us [undocumented immigrants] too much because they know that since we're undocumented, we can't lose the job and we want to be able to say ‘today, I'm getting money for my kids.’ That's why you stand so many humiliations.

No recourse. The Department of Labor represents the American government at the ILO and is responsible for ensuring that worker rights are assured. Such rights pertain to, among other things, the elimination of discrimination, occupational health, and safety, as well as wages and hours of work (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). As the previous sub-sections have shown, as a direct outcome of not possessing legal standing, undocumented immigrants are bereft of these rights. Except for a small minority of cases, the deportation threat dynamic effectively thwarts undocumented immigrants from seeking redress to the different types of violations occurring at work (Fussell, 2011).

While undocumented immigrants recognized that they frequently had their basic rights violated by employers, they expressed that they did not have any recourse by which to rectify such violations. José, a Guatemalan day laborer, described how impotent he had felt after not being paid for his work and not being able to do anything about it due to his undocumented status:

A few years ago, I went to work in San Francisco to change beds at a hotel. We worked there for seven days. They [the employer] took us there. When we got back, they told us we would get paid the next day because it was late...they ran away without paying us. At the time we wanted to do something, to get a lawyer. But the first thing we were told was, 'you don't have papers, there's nothing you can do.' So, we didn't do anything.

Luis, a Mexican day laborer who even described his experience in the United States, as the “American nightmare” expressed sentiments more directly, with one interviewee declaring: “The way I see it, if you don't have papers, you don't have rights.” Lidia, a young woman of Mexican origin working as a caregiver of Mexican origin, explained some of what being denied worker rights means for her in practice: “The most difficult part of being in the United States is not having rights to have paid days off, sick leaves, holidays...that's the most difficult part.”

Overall, the research participants pointed to how not possessing legal status meant that they did not have access to the same labor rights afforded to other workers. There is *no recourse* available to them when they encounter any number of work-related violations. From the interviews, it became abundantly clear that *no recourse* functions as the antecedent that provisions for specific work-related violations to occur, three of which were captured in this study—wage theft, precarious work conditions, and bullying. Undocumented immigrants described acquiescence and silence to be the normative response to gross mistreatment at work. Indeed, having no recourse translated, for undocumented immigrants, into a form of indentured servitude, wherein they worked without basic protections that workers in the U.S. (and most other countries) are assured.

Discussion

Based on a rich dataset that included 9-month ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and myriad sources of documentary evidence, our grounded study revealed several important theoretical insights for understanding undocumented immigrants at work. These theoretical insights are visualized in Fig. 1. This grounded study developed the concept of hypervisible identity, which is not only new to the extant literature but is, at face value, contradictory to what is known about the social identities of undocumented immigrants. In particular, existing studies suggest that these individuals possess social and professional identities that are largely invisible because of their undocumented status and because they do invisible work (Bell et al. 2010). This study moves beyond such a reading of undocumented immigrants' identity by showing that their identity can be made hypervisible for ideological purposes. To add veracity to this position, we identify the external and the internal process mechanics by which this hypervisible identity is socially and intersubjectively constructed.

The study also demonstrates the possibilities for hypervisible identity to engender modern slavery when the former intersects with invisible labor. Namely, there is a dynamic interplay between the types of labor that undocumented immigrants undertake and the socio-legal identity that they are attributed to function together to systematically disenfranchise them. The study depicts how

the denial of legal and non-legal recourse is crucial in explaining the prevalence and the types of workplace violations that undocumented immigrants regularly encounter.

We now turn to discuss, in-depth, our three main, though interrelated, theoretical contributions that emerged from this study. Following this discussion, we identify limitations and future research directions.

Invisible labor and hypervisible identity. Our study identifies the imbricated, yet seemingly contradictory nexus between doing invisible labor and possessing a hypervisible identity. Buchanan and Settles (2019) have argued that invisibility and hypervisibility work in tandem “to maintain a social hierarchy where marginalized groups are constrained to the periphery” (p.2). Indeed, while researchers have studied how historically marginalized subjects do devalued and dirty work, they tend to point to how doing such work renders their identity invisible to others (e.g., Dutton et al. 2016; Herod and Aguiar, 2006; Rabelo and Mahalingam, 2019). This is especially the case for undocumented immigrants whose work and identity are routinely unseen by others (Bell et al. 2010; Samers, 2003). Our findings move against the current of perspective by revealing how extreme conditions of vulnerability (Butler, 2004) are tenable when the identity of undocumented immigrants is made hypervisible for ideological purposes.

Our findings also illuminate the specific process by which the subjugated identity is made hypervisible and the implications that emerge thereof. As Fig. 1 depicts, undocumented immigrants become targets of political rhetoric. This political rhetoric is invoked with the intention to allow their racialized bodies to be easily located and, from there, to make them available for interrogation by the disciplinary gaze of the state. Once undocumented immigrants have been targeted in political rhetoric, which represent them as an imminent danger to the proper social order, moral panic develops among the citizenry. This moral panic achieves two outcomes: (i) it legitimates the public to engage in castigatory actions against targeted subjects, and (ii) it creates public demands on the government to eliminate what is perceived to be an existential threat. There is historical evidence to support this position. For instance, during the era of Nazi Germany, Hitler targeted Jews through political discourse. Moral panic ensued, resulting in public backlash against Jews as well as calls for more laws to be created in an effort to protect the German population from the demonized group (Marti and Fernandez, 2013). As such, political discourse and moral panic should be read as being mutually reinforcing.

Moral panic catalyzed by political rhetoric foregrounds a culture of ubiquitous surveillance. That is, undocumented immigrants begin to conceive of omnipresent monitoring from both authorized enforcers of the state (e.g., ICE) as well as others in the community (e.g., neighbors, co-workers). It merits underscoring that ubiquitous surveillance is as much a discursive phenomenon as it is one that is enacted by external actors. In other words, it is undocumented immigrants who regulate their own behavior as they believe that they are constantly being watched. There may be little veracity upon which such an assumption is predicated. Indeed, as recent reports have shown, even with Trump's enactment of draconian measures on undocumented immigrants, there has not been “any surge of arrests or activity or round-ups” (Valencia, 2019). Nonetheless, simply the belief that ubiquitous surveillance exists is enough for undocumented immigrants to meaningfully alter their behavior in efforts to abscond arrest and deportation.

Modern slavery. Another theoretical contribution emerging from our study informs the notion of modern slavery. While modern

slavery is illegal worldwide (Sigmon, 2008), it continues to prevail across myriad sites and manifests in different forms of human exploitation (Walk Free Foundation, 2018). The phenomenon is certainly not relegated only to countries that are predicated on relatively illiberal values and is clearly present not only in impoverished countries, but it is part of the reality of developed ones (Crane et al. 2019). Indeed, the Global Slavery Index estimates that there are more than 400,000 modern slaves in the U.S. alone (Walk Free Foundation, 2018). Crane (2013) has introduced the idea of modern slavery to the field of management and organization studies. Specifically, he conceptually examined the ways in which management practice and various institutional factors together allow modern slavery to occur and to be sustained. Crane called for rigorous empirical study of the mechanics that enable modern slavery and explication of how exactly such mechanics function. This study heeds Crane's call for more empirical inquiry into the phenomenon in the management literature. We also observe Harrison et al.'s (2019) call to develop research focused on immigrant employees.

Through our study of undocumented immigrants, we offer insights into some of the precursors and the catalysts that perform as boundary conditions to certain manifestations of modern slavery. Namely, we contend that doing invisible work and occupying a hypervisible identity function, concomitantly, as interlocking, constitutive properties for modern slavery in cases when affected individuals are not considered to be legal persons from the perspective of the state. We contend that without the existence of these constitutive properties, conditions of modern slavery currently being experienced by non-legal persons would be negated.

Moreover, we identify some of the process dynamics that sustain and shape modern slavery. As Crane (2013, p.61) notes, slavery enterprises “need to develop capabilities that enable them to carry out the institutional work that sustains favorable contexts and shapes unfavorable ones.” For Crane, these capabilities consist of moral legitimization and domain maintenance. That is, the existence of modern slavery is dependent on slave enterprises rationalizing such an immoral phenomenon (moral legitimization) by managing various stakeholders—through either placating or coopting them—in efforts to sustain it (domain maintenance) (Crane, 2013). Caruana et al. (2021, p.258) have identified how modern slavery is also enabled by a “supply chain of workers” which puts people in a position in which their basic rights are denied. Our study reveals how moral panic is critical to rationalizing modern slavery within the communities in which it operates. Although the outcomes of modern slavery identified in this study would unequivocally be considered morally illegitimate in ordinary circumstances, when moral panic is cast against target subjects, they become dehumanized. Dehumanization results in them not being considered as worthy of the same basic rights and freedoms afforded to everyone else (Segarra and Prasad, 2018). In the study, we also see evidence of how actors of authority, who are charged with the responsibility of curtailing illegal acts like modern slavery, come to perform in the service of modern slavery. Such was the case of Los Angeles County sheriff Jim McDonnell opposing California Senate Bill 54, which would have offered some safeguards to undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented status. Finally, our study also illuminates how, for undocumented immigrants, it is, specifically, their lack of legal status that provisions for invisible labor and hypervisible identity to engender modern slavery. If not for being undocumented, these individuals would ostensibly have some agency to evade, what we identified to be, the defining features of modern slavery. Namely, they would have access to types of legal and non-legal recourse when encountering work-related violations. When an employer

improperly withholds an employee's wages, for instance, the employee with legal standing can seek financial (and punitive) redress from the local labor board or industry ombudsman. It is in the case of the employee being undocumented that systems of recourse are undermined if not entirely rendered inaccessible. Indeed, having no recourse explains why undocumented immigrants remain silent when they experience even fundamental violations of their dignity. As the model depicts, having no recourse foregrounds specific types of workplace violations, including wage theft, precarious work conditions, and bullying.

While this point would return us, once more, to the matter of not qualifying as a legal person in the eyes of the state, it is critical to note, here, the paradoxical circumstances that emerge when an individual is undocumented. Menjivar and Abrego's (2012) analysis of legal violence that is enacted against members of this group is insightful for articulating the nature of this paradox. As they explain, immigration and criminal law function, in tandem, “to punish the behaviors of undocumented immigrants but at the same time push them to spaces outside the law” (Menjivar and Abrego, 2012, p.1385). This is a meaningful paradox in the lives of undocumented immigrants insofar as it defines their experiences in virtually all critical aspects of life, including work. That is, punitive criminal laws subject undocumented immigrants to the juridical purview of the state, which is enabled when the identity of the target subject is made hypervisible. However, by not having legal status, complementary immigration laws compel affected individuals to engage in invisible labor that, by necessity, operates outside of the purview of the formal economy. There are numerous cases of how this phenomenon is operationalized in practice. For example, in June 2018, when ICE agents raided Corso's Flower and Garden Center in Ohio, over 100 undocumented immigrants, and low-skilled workers were arrested for violating immigration law as they did not have the legal right to live or work in the US. These same undocumented immigrants would be charged under criminal law with identity theft and tax evasion (Schmidt, 2018).

In short, undocumented immigrants must acquiesce to the existing laws of the country yet are not entitled to any of the rights and protections that these laws afford. Without these rights and protections, unscrupulous employers are permitted to exploit the labor and undermine the dignity of undocumented immigrants with impunity. Indeed, this is the logical corollary of no meaningful recourse being available for redress.

Limitations and future research directions. This study was limited in several ways. These limitations can be redressed in future research. First, the ethnography was conducted during a specific time period (September 2016 to May 2017). The timing was particularly useful in understanding the role of political rhetoric in informing the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. as it represents periods of time immediately before and immediately after Trump's election. It would be interesting to study undocumented immigrants in light of the proposed and newly enacted public policies that affect this population. For example, it was only after the completion of fieldwork that California Senate bill SB 54 was ratified, which presumably offers greater protections to undocumented immigrants. Likewise, the potential suspension of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy would expectedly worsen existing vulnerabilities of undocumented immigrants. Future research can offer empirical insights into how specific laws and public policies influence the experiences of this group.

Second, this study did not limit its scope to undocumented immigrants in the U.S. from a particular country or region—though it did solely focus on individuals from Latin America. As such, there were different motivating factors that caused research

participants to leave their country of origin and assume the undocumented immigrant status in the U.S. For instance, one of the informants from Mexico identified extreme poverty and better job opportunities as the main reasons for migrating to the U.S., while informants from El Salvador identified violence posed by local guerilla groups and gangs as the primary reason for migrating. It would be useful for future research to comparatively account for how the geopolitical determinants of migration shape the undocumented immigrants' experiences in the U.S.

Third, this study was conducted in Southern California and, thus, only considered the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. It would be beneficial to pursue cross-country studies on how undocumented immigrants—and other non-legal populations—experience and negotiate vulnerability. For example, many European countries today are seeing an influx of refugees entering and settling within their geographical boundaries. Cross-country studies would explicate how a country's historical background and institutional arrangements' structure and pattern the experiences of non-legal persons living there. Such studies could also reveal the different mechanisms by which non-legal persons are regulated around the world as well as potential opportunities for ameliorating the constitutive properties of modern slavery identified in this article.

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems apropos to return to Butler. Butler (2012, p. 134) has considered the ethical obligations we have, specifically to those with whom we live in what she calls “unwilled adjacency.” By unwilled adjacency, she refers to individuals or groups who live in geographical proximity by circumstances beyond their willful choice. Legal citizens (and other legal residents) residing within the same community as undocumented immigrants are, perhaps, the quintessential example of unwilled adjacency in practice. For Butler, unwilled adjacency impresses upon us, as an ethical obligation, to recognize the humanity of whom we did not choose “to inhabit the earth...[who] we may not love, those we may never love [and] do not know” (p. 150). This study has illuminated the process dynamics by which extreme conditions of vulnerability are enacted and to which undocumented immigrants are subjected. In doing so, we hope that this study contributes to ongoing debates about the ethical obligations that are owed to this vulnerable population—which ought to inform their treatment in society.

Data availability

As research participants with whom interviews were conducted were assured anonymity, we are unable to provide access to raw data. Metadata is available upon request.

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Note

1 For the data analysis and the findings presented in this paper, all of the informants' names have been changed to respect their anonymity.

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Author contributions

Both authors contributed to the conceptualization and writing of this article. The first author is referred to as “the researcher” as she was responsible for the data collection and analysis.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Research was conducted based on institutional and national norms of the Mexican university at which the study was conducted. As the lead author is affiliated with a Mexican university that does not have an institutional review board, no ethical approval was required to undertake this project. Nonetheless, the research was performed in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

Informed consent

All research involved voluntary participation, and the study’s participants were told what the contents of their interviews would be used for. The informants were ensured the anonymity of the data generated from their interviews.

Additional information

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