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The Undocumented Subjects of el Hueco: Theorizing a Colombian Metaphor for Migration

This article theorizes the trope of el Hueco that Colombians use to describe crossing undocumented into the United States, colloquially referring to undocumented migration as entering “por el Hueco,” which translates as “through the Hole or Gap.” I posit that el Hueco provides a fruitful new metaphor for Latina/o studies that is directly rooted in the experience of undocumented migration and in an extended geography that connects South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. I analyze how Jorge Franco’s novel *Paraíso Travel* and Kofre’s CD *¡Por el hueco!* figure crossing through el Hueco as a form of burial, thereby symbolically capturing the death of migrants’ legal subjectivity and of their national identities. I posit that Franco and Kofre simultaneously reconfigure restrictive notions of national affiliation by imagining affective citizenship and insurgent hemispheric belonging. Overall, the article opens up a space to consider the critical import of U.S. Colombian literary production within the field imaginary of Latina/o studies.

Gloria Anzaldúa begins her landmark book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* with a poem situated at the U.S.-Mexico border:

Wind tugging at my sleeve
feet sinking into the sand
I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean
where the two overlap
a gentle coming together
at other times and places a violent clash.
Across the border in Mexico
 stark silhouette of houses gutted by waves,
 cliffs crumbling into the sea
 silver waves marbled with spume
 gashing a hole under the border fence.
[...]
 I walk through the hole in the fence
 to the other side¹

While Anzaldúa goes on to proclaim, “This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire,” using the trope of the U.S.-Mexico border to expound on the mestiza subjectivity and consciousness that can emerge from the borderlands, what would happen if we paused and lingered on the hole through which Anzaldúa

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* [1987] (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999): 23–24.

walks?² The small but evocative gap in spacing between the words “walk” and “through” visually prefigures the hole in the fence, and her border crossing initiates the poem’s line break. The line break evokes the fracturing of identity that occurs in the migration across national borders, while the “to” in the succeeding line seems to float just below the gap and bridge the space in between. The gap and the line break function as absent presences on the surface of the page that simultaneously mark the moment when Anzaldúa crosses over the border or, more precisely, through the hole in the border. What conceptual work can this hole in the border fence and this gap in the visual topography of the poem perform?

Colombians colloquially describe crossing undocumented into the United States as going “por el Hueco,” which translates as “through the Hole” or “through the Gap.”³ I posit that theorizing the Colombian metaphor of el Hueco provides a fruitful new trope for Latina/o studies, one that is directly rooted in the experience of undocumented migration and that complements “the guiding metaphor of Latino Studies: ‘la frontera,’ the border.”⁴ As the Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo explains, many Colombians lack the resources to migrate to the United States through official channels, so they come “por ‘el hueco,’ es decir, en forma clandestina a través de la frontera con México, desde Bahamas en bote o en avión, e incluso algunos por Haití [through ‘el hueco,’ that is, clandestinely over the border with Mexico, from the Bahamas in boat or airplane, and even via Haiti].”⁵ María Elena Cepeda estimates that 4 million Colombians live in the United States and that 40 to 50 percent of this Colombian population is undocumented.⁶ To gain entry into the United States, Colombian

² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 25.

³ The term is more frequently written as “el hueco,” but some authors use “el Hueco” or “El Hueco.” I choose to capitalize el Hueco as a proper name in order to distinguish it from the common noun el hueco. Colombian newspapers use the term when they report on Colombian undocumented migration to the United States, and the prolific Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo interviewed a number of Colombians who journeyed por el Hueco, publishing a non-fiction book entitled *El hueco* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1989). To my knowledge, there is no scholarship on el Hueco.

⁴ Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000): 212.

⁵ Note that Castryo Caycedo chooses not to capitalize the article or the noun (i. e., “el hueco”). Castro Caycedo, *El hueco*, 20. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

⁶ María Elena Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation: U.S-Colombian Identity and the Latin Music Boom* (New York: New York UP, 2010): 32. Note that Cepeda’s estimates are over five years old, so these numbers are likely higher. Cepeda relies on various sources for her data because, as she and other researchers point out, errors in the 2000 U.S. Census resulted in a very inaccurate count of the U.S. Colombian population (Cepeda, *Musical Imagination*, 178). Unfortunately, the 2010 U.S. Census and more recent studies, such as those released by

undocumented migrants use varying modes of transportation and journey via multiple routes that extend throughout Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In her theorization of the Gulf of Mexico as a “Latino-Anglo border system,” Kirsten Silva Gruesz has demonstrated how this Gulf region provides border studies and Latina/o studies a fresh perspective on “the reified map of the land border, la línea.”⁷ I contend that, like the Gulf, el Hueco, is a “distinctive kind of border zone,” but its distinctiveness does not lie in a specific topography, geographic location, or geo-political space.⁸ Rather, it lies in the border crossing sites and tactics that can be collected together under the expression *por el Hueco*, as well as the undocumented subjectivity that emerges from *el Hueco*. I am especially interested in theorizing *el Hueco* as a metaphor for undocumented migration rooted in this extended geography – one that connects South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean – and based on the dual signification in English of *hueco* as a hole and a gap.

I argue that the term *el Hueco* captures both the time and place where migrants cross geo-political borders undetected as well as the entire complex process of entering into and subsequently navigating life as undocumented subjects in the United States. The border demarcating the territorial limits of the U.S. nation state is a geopolitical boundary, a national historical configuration, a rhetorical and ideological construct, and a legal entity upheld by a regulatory system of immigration quotas, visa documents, and the border enforcement apparatus. The routes migrants traverse *por el Hueco* to access the United States extend throughout Latin America, and these routes are desperate and resourceful responses to exclusionary policies.⁹ *Huecos* are chronotopes of crossing, temporal-spatial gaps in border surveillance that are the result of the multi-layered clandestine tactics migrants and their guides use to gain entry. Holes are deliberately opened when authorized routes of entry are closed, and when one hole is closed by border security, holes are sought and created elsewhere. Going through a *hueco* in the border, then, entails exploiting a temporary gap that presents an opportunity as well as enacting shifting strategies to pass under the radar of the State. It necessitates exposing and strategically negotiating loopholes in the formal structures, institutional arrangements, and policing apparatuses that mediate and regulate national geopolitical boundaries. Maneuvering *el Hueco* involves not only agency and opportunity; it also entails being confined and limited in one’s spaces of movement and access to resources.

the PEW Research Center and the Migration Policy Institute, still appear to underestimate the number of Colombians in the United States.

⁷ Kirsten Silva Gruesz, “The Gulf of Mexico System and the ‘Latinness’ of New Orleans,” *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 468–495, 470.

⁸ Gruesz, “The Gulf of Mexico System,” 490.

⁹ When referring to the United States’ policy toward migrants, I use the term immigration because that is the term employed by the State. However, I prefer the terms migrant and migration to immigrant and immigration because they accommodate a number of different trajectories, goals, and statuses, rather than the fixed destination with the eventual acquisition of citizenship implied by the term immigration.

The term *el Hueco* interrogates the nation state's hegemonic border and its naturalized status. The United States imagines its borders to demarcate a sovereign, fixed, bounded territorial space. Shifting attention from the border as a site of exclusion to *el Hueco* as a site of fraught access enacts a critical shift in the discourse used to imagine the border. This is similar to the critical shift enacted by the trope of *la frontera* or the borderlands as both tropes expose the border's unstable and constructed nature. By highlighting holes, gaps, breaks, and hidden sites of entry, the border from the perspective of *el Hueco* is a tension-filled geography of political, social, and legal space that subjects differentially navigate. The trope of *el Hueco* thus works in tandem with the trope of the borderlands in fashioning an alternative national cartography demarcated not by natural, static, and stable boundaries but by gap-filled, fissured, and porous margins. *El Hueco*, in differentiation from the borderlands, focuses exclusively on the process of undocumented migration by shedding conceptual light on the spaces entered clandestinely to escape border security apparatuses and on the daily under-the-cover negotiations essential to living and working undocumented within the nation state.

Though the borderlands and *el Hueco* are doing similar conceptual work, *el Hueco* is a Colombian metaphor for undocumented migration that is not the product of the U.S.-Mexico contact zone nor is it generated out of or delimited to the spatial imaginary of Greater Mexico.¹⁰ This is crucial for multiple reasons. Given the dominant focus on the U.S.-Mexico border in the U.S. political imaginary and the stereotypical assumption that all undocumented migrants are impoverished Mexicans in the public sphere, it is pressing that Latina/o studies contest these over-simplified views by considering Latin American migration from a comparative perspective that accounts for different national groups, modes of crossing, socioeconomic classes, and geographic sites of entry. U.S. Colombian cultural production is also just starting to be mapped in Latina/o studies, so attending to *el Hueco* helps contribute to this burgeoning subfield and thus to expanding Latina/o studies.¹¹ Moreover, *el Hueco* maps a relationship to countries in South America, Central America, the Caribbean, and North America that are involved as crucial sites of passage through *el Hueco*. Yet, like the

¹⁰ Coined by Américo Paredes, "Greater Mexico" is the collection of Mexican culture and Mexican-origin people extending beyond the nation state boundaries of Mexico.

¹¹ To date, Cepeda's book is the only full-length work on the cultural production of U.S. Colombians. Most work on U.S. Colombians has emerged in the social sciences. For exceptions to this, see: Michelle Rocío Nasser de la Torre, "Bellas por naturaleza: Mapping National Identity on U.S. Colombian Beauty Queens," *Latino Studies* 11.3 (2013): 293–312; Juanita Heredia, "South American Latino/a Writers in the United States," in *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, eds. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (New York: Routledge, 2013): 436–444; Suzanne Oboler, "Introduction: Los que llegaron: 50 Years of South American Immigration (1950–2000) – An Overview," *Latino Studies* 3.1 (2005): 42–52; Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Pitfalls of Latino Chronologies: South and Central Americans," *Latino Studies* 5.4 (2007): 489–502.

borderlands, el Hueco is a both a “geographic and metaphorical space.”¹² Though subjectivity can be fashioned anew in the borderlands – as Anzaldúa and other Chicana/o scholars and cultural producers have so poignantly demonstrated – the subjectivity that emerges from el Hueco is not necessarily one that is multiple or mestiza. For, crossing through el Hueco produces a death of legal subjectivity and a burial of one’s social and national identity. As a trope for undocumented migration, el Hueco highlights the very painful and visceral effects that entering without authorization has on migrant subjects, even as it holds out the possibility of forging a new, transnational identity and of reconfiguring restrictive notions of citizenship.

In this article, I unpack the theoretical salience of el Hueco by examining the spatial tropes and metaphorical associations linked to el Hueco in two texts that center on undocumented migration: Jorge Franco’s novel *Paraíso Travel* [*Paradise Travel*]¹³ and the musical group Kofre’s album *¡Por el hueco!*¹⁴ I explore how the novel and the CD’s cover art represent undocumented border crossing as a process in which death is imminent.¹⁵ Migrants face bodily death, social death, and the death of their national identities. Yet, by figuring death as a process rather than a final state, the texts suggest that el Hueco can function as a transitory border zone and that in migrating via el Hueco undocumented subjects can arrive at alternative understandings of national belonging. Overall, my analysis attempts to fill a hueco or gap in Latina/o studies by sketching some of the contours of the Colombian undocumented migrant imaginary. In doing so, I ask us to consider what we might gain from studying the discourses developed by undocumented subjects from various Latin American national origin groups that document experiences of migrating to and of living in the United States.

Burying subjectivity

The Colombian novelist Jorge Franco interviewed undocumented Colombian migrants in New York and on the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the research for his novel *Paraíso Travel*, which centers narrative attention on the fraught experiences

¹² Monica Perales, “On Borderlands/La Frontera: Gloria Anzaldúa and Twenty-Five Years of Research on Gender in the Borderlands,” *Journal of Women’s History* 25.4 (2013): 163–173, 164.

¹³ Jorge Franco, *Paraíso Travel* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombia, 2001); Jorge Franco, *Paradise Travel*, trans. Katherine Silver (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006). I will be citing both Franco’s original Spanish-language novel and Katherine Silver’s English-language translation. For the most part, I quote from Silver’s translation; occasionally, I offer my own translation when I see fit. Further references in the text to Franco’s Spanish-language novel and Silver’s English-language translation will be abbreviated as “Franco, PT” and “Silver, PT.”

¹⁴ Kofre, *¡Por el hueco!* (Kofre Studies, 2008).

¹⁵ The two cultural products I examine in this article depict crossing por el Hueco at the U.S.-Mexico border; see Castro Caycedo’s *El hueco* for narratives focused on crossing via the Caribbean.

of Colombian migrants and functions as a fictional form of testimonio or politically engaged testimony about those who traverse el Hueco. The novel details the experiences of the protagonist Marlon Cruz and his girlfriend Reina as they make their way clandestinely from Medellín, Colombia to the United States, their accidental physical separation in New York City, Marlon's obsessive year-long search for Reina along with his coinciding integration into the local Colombian community in Queens, and the couple's reencounter in Florida at the novel's end.¹⁶ *Paraíso Travel* is narrated in an oral, colloquial mode. Seemingly a reflective, direct address to the reader, Marlon's first-person perspective is intermittently broken by various characters who interrupt his narrative with questions, comments, and their own recollections, revealing that the reader is not, in fact, Marlon's explicit audience. Instead, his friends Giovanni, Patricia, Pastor, Caleña, Roger, and Milagros are the addressees of his tale as well as his newfound kin. The novel is a series of fragments and episodes in Marlon's personal life story, which he importantly pieces back together with the help of these different interlocutors. A communally constructed individual narrative thus emerges as Marlon reconstructs his story by incorporating his friends' comments and memories, making his testimonio a tale of inter-dependence. The novel's form is structurally built around this inter-dependence, which formally reflects how Marlon establishes new kinship ties in New York City that shift his sense of national belonging.

Moreover, there are three temporal modes through which events unfold; as such, the novel is not strictly chronological in its temporality nor strictly South-to-North in its geographic spatiality. There is the near past in which the novel begins, with Marlon and Reina's arrival in New York City and his yearlong search for her; there is the more distant past interspersed throughout the novel, with Marlon and Reina's romance in Colombia and their treacherous journey north to the United States, and there is the present that ends the novel, with Marlon traveling south to Florida to find Reina. These various temporalities, interspersed throughout the novel, create a simultaneous and free-flowing movement between nation spaces in Marlon's memory, which highlights the transnational subjectivity of undocumented migrants and challenges us to consider how and when migrants become Latina/os. John "Rio" Riofrio postulates that Latina/o identities begin to develop in Latin America; using the writings of the Colombian Jorge Franco and the Chilean Alberto Fuguet, Riofrio argues that

it doesn't make sense to suppose that Latino identities 'begin' when one crosses the northern shore of the Rio Grande [...]. Their [Franco's and Fuguet's] engagement with shifting hemispheric realities reveals immigrant identities are intimately structured by the dynamic

¹⁶ *Paraíso Travel* was made into a Spanish language film with the same name in 2008. Jorge Franco co-wrote the script; the film was directed by the U.S. Colombian Simón Brand, and the U.S. Colombian Puerto Rican John Leguizamo acted in the film and was a co-producer.

relationship between the United States and their countries of origin.¹⁷

Paraíso Travel is an important novel to consider within Latina/o cultural production about undocumented migration because it is an engaged narrative that demands the reform of the socio-economic forces in Colombia that drive people to migrate, that testifies against the migration industry that exploits the undocumented migrant, and that criticizes the United States for its immigration policies, its hyper-militarization of the border, and its hierarchies of race and class. And it does so not just from the perspective of los de abajo but also those who come into the United States “por abajo,” as one character puts, meaning from below or clandestinely (Franco, PT, 105).¹⁸

In order to migrate por el Hueco, Marlon and Reina must pay someone to guide them; what they encounter is an elaborate structure of exploitation. Scholars use the term migration industry to describe the whole apparatus that makes undocumented migration feasible; this extends from travel agents to labor recruiters and from coyotes or human smugglers to document forgers, etc. Marlon and Reina contract the travel agency Paraíso Travel that gives the book its ironic title. They use tourist visas to fly to Guatemala where they then move via bus through Guatemala and Mexico. All along the route they confront a “cadena de mentiras y abusos [string of abuse and lies]” (Franco, PT, 194; Silver, PT, 186) with agency employees, transportation workers, and smugglers bribing them into paying additional fees and threatening them with exposure, abandonment, and brute violence if they hesitate. Having heard multiple stories while in Colombia of those who died while going por el Hueco, Marlon and Reina see no option but to pay. Their experiences are not exceptional; in fact, many undocumented migrants crossing through Central America and Mexico fall victim to robbery, beatings, rape, and desertion at the hands of coyotes, gangs, Mexican police, and U.S. border patrol officials. To recount his experience of crossing, Marlon warns, “tendría que hablarte de muertos, de huecos, y de ataúdes [I’ll have to tell you about the dead, about holes, and coffins]” (Franco, PT, 201; Silver, PT, 194). By linking these three together, Marlon intuitively links el Hueco of Colombian migrant discourse with the literal deaths that occur and with the figurative death he and Reina undergo as they pass over nation state borders.

The novel represents their migration por el Hueco by materializing it as a kind of burial. As they cross over the border between Guatemala and Mexico, the coyotes force them to throw all their identification documents into the river, which they do “como si arrojáramos flores sobre la fosa de un muerto dolido [as if we were throwing flowers on the grave of a dead loved one]” (Franco, PT, 179; Silver, PT, 171). Symbolically shedding their national identities and mourning

¹⁷ John D. “Rio” Riofrio, *Continental Shifts: Migration, Representation, and the Struggle for Justice in Latin(o) America* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2015): 36.

¹⁸ An undocumented Colombian migrant in Castro Caycedo’s testimonio collection also uses the term “por abajo” (Castro Caycedo, *El hueco*, 59). *Los de abajo* is a famous novel about the Mexican Revolution by Mariano Azuela that is translated as *The Underdogs*, though here I play on its literal translation as “those from below.”

the loss of their Colombian selves, they attempt to pass as Mexicans to avoid being harassed by Mexican authorities.¹⁹ Later, in order to cross over the U.S.-Mexico border, they must hide in a long truck with huge wooden logs in the back that form coffin-like spaces. As Marlon describes it:

[L]a madera iba extendida en el camión, pero desde atrás podías ver unos huecos. [...] Que por detrás del camion la madera parecía un queso, con agujeros profundos donde supuestamente teníamos que meternos. Haz de cuenta que tenías que entrar en los nichos de un cementerio. Una fosa por persona donde quedaríamos tendimos y apretados, como si nos hubieran enterrado boca abajo. [...] [T]aparon el hueco como si pusieron una lápida. Allí solo faltaron flores y un pariente que nos llorara. (Franco, PT, 203–205)

The logs were lying on the truck bed, and from where we were standing behind it, we could see some gaps between them. [...] In the back of the truck, the stack of wood was kind of like Swiss cheese, with big deep holes where we were supposedly going to fit in. Just imagine if you had to go hide in holes dug in a graveyard. One grave per person, where we would be alone and squooshed in, as if we were being buried facedown. [...] [T]hey covered up the holes as if they were setting gravestones. All we needed was some flowers and a relative to cry for us.] (Silver, PT, 195–197)

By wedging themselves in the gaps or holes between the wooden logs, they pass through el Hueco hidden within the fossae and buried within the wood in confined positions. The confined space resembles the cavity dug in the earth for a coffin, making the crossing into a form of burial. When they throw their Colombian passports into the river at the border between Guatemala and Mexico, the novel describes this moment using a simile that positions them standing over the grave of a loved one whom they are mourning. In contrast, in order to pass over the border between Mexico and the United States, they do not stand above the grave of another; instead, they are inside their own graves, being buried alive alone, and though the loved ones who would mourn their deaths are invoked, they are absent from the scene, which symbolizes how kinship networks and social relations are fractured by undocumented migration.

What is most striking about the scene is how it metaphorically enacts the kind of death that migrants undergo as they enter unauthorized into the United States. While Marlon and Reina are spared literal death (and many undocumented migrants are not so fortunate), what ensues from their successful border crossing is social death. Lisa Marie Cacho argues that undocumented migrants are subjected to what she and other scholars have termed “social death” because they are “permanently criminalized” as “illegal aliens” by immigration law; moreover and most problematically, immigration law creates a “permanently rightless status” that makes them “ineligible for personhood” because they are

¹⁹ See Castro Caycedo’s *El hueco* for stories of how Mexican authorities target, detain, torture, and sometimes even kill Colombian migrants.

“subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them.”²⁰ The novel spacializes this social death by placing them in a metaphoric wooden cemetery. The coffin-like experience of el Hueco signifies the burial of migrants’ previous national identities and social locations as subjects with the rights of citizenship. When they emerge from their graves, they are alive but socially dead as they are now “illegal aliens.”

While the expression *por el Hueco* is traditionally used just to describe how one comes into the United States without authorization, I argue that migrants do not leave el Hueco once they are living here. In other words, they do not pass through el Hueco and then exit the other side when arriving in the United States; rather, they now must live in and forge a life out of el Hueco. As the character Orlando tells Marlon, “[N]i tú ni Reina existen en este país. Ustedes entraron por El Hueco y las computadoras no saben nada de ustedes [Neither you nor Reina exists in this country. You entered through El Hueco and the computers do not know anything about you]” (Franco, PT, 139). As Orlando puts it, they do not officially exist in the United States because they came through “El Hueco”²¹ and thus do not appear in any governmental databases because the computers – which symbolize State regulatory regimes of knowledge, political subjectivity, and legal documentation – do not know about or recognize their existence as subjects. Orlando’s phrasing highlights the contradiction that even though Marlon and Reina exist as living, breathing, laboring migrants, they do not exist according to State records. They are, to use Mai Ngai’s term, “impossible subjects.” Ngai writes,

Immigration restriction produced the illegal alien as a new legal and political subject, whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility – a subject barred from citizenship and without rights. [. . .] The illegal alien is thus an ‘impossible subject,’ a person who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved.²²

El Hueco provides a Spanish-language term and image for this condition of being an impossible subject. As undocumented migrants, Marlon and Reina exist in a legal gap or hole that generates their nonexistence as rights-bearing subjects.

Moreover, while social death and being an impossible subject technically begin when one enters the United States without proper authorization, this temporal construction ignores how the process of becoming undocumented begins in the home country. The fact that the trope of death runs throughout the

²⁰ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York UP, 2012): 6.

²¹ Note that Franco chooses to capitalize the article and the noun (i. e., “El Hueco”). The English-language edition translates the term as “a black hole,” which captures how there is no official trace of them, but it misses the dual connotations of “hole” and “gap” on which I center my analysis of el Hueco (Silver, PT, 133).

²² Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004): 4.

novel is important in this regard as it haunts not just Marlon's and Reina's experiences of undocumented migration but also their lives in Colombia. Overcome by despair because of her lack of options in Colombia, Reina is known for declaring that they should just kill themselves whenever she is frustrated, and at one point, she even tries to commit suicide. Marlon and Reina are part of the (lower) middle class, but they lack the economic and cultural capital to attain U.S. tourist visas. Marlon captures the situation thus: "La circunstancia era para sentir dolor y rabia con una patria que no ofrece nada que no sea sangre y muertos y un futuro de pobreza [The whole thing and all the circumstances around it made me feel hurt and angry about a country that offered nothing besides blood and death and a future of poverty]" (Franco, PT, 173; Silver, PT, 166). This suggests that migrating por el Hueco does not begin when they start their physical journey; rather, it begins with the decisions they make in Colombia that lead them to become undocumented migrants. In other words, the social death imposed by U.S. immigration law is inextricably intertwined with the death of socio-economic opportunities in Colombia, which are exacerbated by the five-decade long civil war in Colombia and the United States' military and economic aid distributed to the country through Plan Colombia.²³ Living in el Hueco is a transnational experience marked by limited opportunities and mobility, but living in el Hueco can also produce alternative kinds of attachments.

Migrant mañas and affective citizenship

Though social death overdetermines the lives of undocumented Colombian migrants, Paraíso Travel suggests that it can also provide the occasion to reimagine national belonging. The novel begins with Marlon relating how he could have died when he runs away from a policeman who approaches him after he throws a cigarette butt on the ground; Marlon, who does not speak English but knows he has been criminalized in the eyes of the State, flees in fear of deportation. Marlon gets hopelessly lost and, as he wanders for an immeasurable amount of time, he loses touch with reality, causing him to experience another figurative death. Eventually he stumbles upon a restaurant aptly called Tierra Colombiana [Colombian Land]. When Marlon is barred from entering the restaurant because he appears to be "un loco eloquecido [a raving lunatic]," he sits immobile, half starving and utterly filthy, for days desperately staring at Tierra Colombiana

²³ See Cepeda for a useful and brief historical overview of the political crisis in Colombia and the United States' involvement through Plan Colombia. Cepeda traces how these have influenced Colombian migration; at the same time, she points out that "[t]he international media's longstanding focus on Colombia's political struggles, while justified, has unwittingly led to a decreased emphasis on the other primary impetus driving mass migration to the United States. [...] In actuality, high unemployment rates provoked by neoliberal economic policies, the socioeconomic disconnects provoked by rising education rates, and an increased familiarity with North American styles of consumption constitute the key immigration 'push' factors for rural Colombians in particular" (Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*, 28).

from across the street (Franco, PT, 22; Silver, PT, 19). Marlon's spatial separation from this symbolically nationalist space captures how he is a doubly nationally alienated subject who has experienced the death of his Colombianness and the social death of the undocumented migrant in the United States. It is not until Patricia, the wife of the owner, brings him into the restaurant to clean him up and offer him shelter as well as access to a community of fellow migrants that Marlon comes back to life.

In another crossing of sorts, Marlon, who is described as a "dead man walking," crosses over the threshold of the street into a new life (Silver, PT, 48).²⁴ Marlon thus undergoes his second rebirth of sorts. Earlier in order to cross over the border, Marlon slides through a "hueco [hole]" in the wooden logs into a "túnel oscuro [dark tunnel]" (Franco, PT, 205/ Silver, PT, 197), and upon arriving in the United States, he is pulled out "como si [él] estuviera naciendo de culo [as if [he] were being born backward]" (Franco, PT, 214; Silver, PT, 206). El Hueco thus functions as a migrant burial space and birth canal, suggesting that the death of one national and legal subjectivity can result in the birth of a new one. Moving away from the paradigm of the nation state that only offers social death, the novel figures Marlon's reentry into Colombian land, so to speak, as a transnational space of belonging based on shared cultural affinities and affective kinship ties. Tierra Colombiana becomes Marlon's new home and the base from which he learns to craft a new subjectivity and an affective sense of citizenship.

While Marlon's crossing por el Hueco turns him into an impossible subject, it is from precisely this social location that he learns, over the course of the novel, to forge a new sense of identity and enact shifting strategies to live under the radar of the State. Marlon learns to generate a critical reading of New York City and, implicitly, the United States from his perspective as an undocumented migrant. Jorge Franco reimagines José Martí's infamous 1895 declaration, "I have lived in the monster, and I know its entrails – and my sling is that of David [Viví en el monstruo y le conozco las entrañas – y mi honda es la de David]."²⁵ Giovanni, a fellow undocumented migrant from Colombia, teaches Marlon how to survive in the belly of the beast. Giovanni leads Marlon into the subway tunnels,

²⁴ Due to the grammatical construction of the original, I quote from the translation. The original reads "ver caminar a un muerto" (Franco, PT, 51). Marlon's last name is Cruz, which means "cross" in Spanish. His name highlights his identity as a migrant who has crossed borders at the same time that it suggests that he has a cross to bear as a result of his status as an unauthorized migrant.

²⁵ See Martí's "Letter to Manuel Mercado" in José Martí: Selected Writings, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002): 347. In reflecting on Martí's metaphorization of the power relationship between Latin America and the United States as one between David and the giant Goliath, Laura Lomas notes, "Martí's strategy for addressing this difference is to defeat brute force with ingenuity [...]. Such a strategy authorizes the perspective of the dissenting minority deep within the monster's gut, precisely the position that Martí claims he occupied while living in New York." Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009): 221.

telling him “Estas son las tripas del animal [These are the intestines of the beast]” (Franco, PT, 76; Silver, PT, 71) and then onto the roof of a building, saying as they gaze out at the cityscape, “Esta es la bestia que tenés que domar [That’s the beast you’ve got to tame]” (Franco, PT, 77; Silver, PT, 72). Giovanni explains that Marlon must do so not with “fuerza sino con maña,” that is, not with force or strength but with skills or tricks, and that he must remain vigilant because the apparatus of authority is always watching, ready to enforce the consequences of their undocumented status (Franco, PT, 81). Following Giovanni’s advice, Marlon later claims, “como un parasito aprendí a habitar en sus entrañas y a comer de ellas, siempre atento a no provocar la bestia;” that is, like a parasite he learns to live in the monster’s entrails and feed off of them, always careful not to provoke the beast (Franco, PT, 141).²⁶ There is an interesting gap between Giovanni’s choice of words – “taming” the beast with mañas – and Marlon’s choice of words – living as a “parasite” in the beast. Both necessitate tactical strategies for socio-economic survival, but Marlon’s use of “parasite” suggests that he has internalized the anti-immigrant discourse that constructs migrants as threats to the national body and as drains on the nation’s economy and its social services.²⁷ In reality, the relationship between undocumented migrants and the United States as a host nation is not parasitic but symbiotic and, usually, undocumented migrants are the ones being exploited. Translating *el Hueco* as the Gap calls to mind this wealth gap. Though undocumented migrants have frequently been described as living in the “shadows,” *el Hueco* provides an alternative image that is not dependent on an absence of light but on a gap in the legal system and economic structure that those in power frequently exploit at the expense of migrants. For, while undocumented migrants are constructed as “illegals” and as threats to the welfare of the nation, the money their labor generates is legal and profitable, and the United States relies on, indeed thrives off of, lowwage undocumented workers.

Like Martí’s writings, Franco’s novel highlights the tactics that are necessary

²⁶ I use “monster” and “beast” because Marlon uses “monstruo [monster]” at other points (Franco, PT, 122, 139) and that is the word that José Martí uses. The use of “bestia” is interesting given that Central American undocumented migrants call the freight trains that they ride to cross through Mexico to reach the U.S.-Mexico border “la Bestia.” Just as I argue that undocumented migrants do not leave *el Hueco* once in the United States, undocumented migrants have also not escaped the dangers of *la Bestia* when they arrive in the United States – they just face a different set of dangers.

²⁷ For studies of the corporeal images, stigmatizing discourses, and hegemonic metaphors used to construct undocumented migrants in particular and Latina/os more generally, see Julie Avril Minich, *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2014), Leo R. Chávez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013) and Otto Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2002). Their analyses of how the nation is imagined as a healthy body that is threatened by migrants, who are depicted as a disease or as parasites, are particularly apt here.

to negotiate one's position in the entrails of power. Martí's metaphor for the prolonged physiological huecos in the cavernous space of the monster's belly still has critical force. But, as Franco suggests, undocumented migrants who live in the belly of the beast have a different relationship to the structures of power than those who are here with documents. Being undocumented modifies Marlon's habitus and forces him to acquire a different kind of cultural capital. For Marlon, there is a distinct danger in provoking the beast (the danger of being deported) and this threat modifies his approach to the beast. That is, Martí claims he is David ready to fight the Goliath of U.S. imperialism with the slingshot of his writing; Franco focuses more on the crushing, restricted living space of the entrails than on the active, assertive power of the slingshot. The novel suggests that being "indocumentado, jodido," or undocumented, broke, and screwed, produces a different kind of knowledge about and critique of the United States (Franco, PT, 81). Though Martí, Giovanni, and Marlon are migrants who, to invoke the novel's title, travel to the United States and come to see through the crafted myth of the United States as a paradise where everyone who works hard can achieve the American Dream, Martí resorts to the confrontational strength of his pen while Marlon must resort to his resourceful mañas.

While Paraíso Travel usefully critiques the illusion of the American Dream that tantalizes many Latin American migrants, it accomplishes this, in part, through the problematic hypersexualization of Reina. Reina seduces Marlon into accompanying her to the United States by putting photos of New York City and the money she steals to pay for their journey through el Hueco down her pants, promising Marlon that they will consummate their relationship once they are in the United States. Reina represents "the seductive power of the American Dream. She is its manifestation in Colombia: obsessed with the opportunity

America promises, convinced of the hopelessness of life in Colombia, and deeply seductive in her narrative about the possibilities of life in the United States."²⁸ Marlon quickly learns that the idealized image of the prosperous life Reina continually tells him they will have – a high rise apartment with a view of the Statue of Liberty and a small terrace from which they can view the sunset over the water – is an illusion. For, what they encounter as poor, undocumented migrants in New York City "nada tenía que ver con el sitio que ella me hizo soñar [had nothing to do with the place she made me dream about]" (Franco, PT, 9; Silver, PT, 5). The novel contains a double romance narrative in which Marlon is lured by his desire for Reina and by her desire for the American Dream, but both turn out to be failed romances. Marlon's accidental physical separation from Reina is traumatic, but it serves as a catalyst for him to develop alternative forms of attachment and thereby, by the end of the novel, to no longer desire Reina or believe in the myth of the American Dream. Though the novel ultimately provides a productive reimagining of national affiliation, it is important to note

²⁸ Riofrio, *Continental Shifts*, 51.

that its plot development centers on the migration experience of its male protagonist and its narrative resolution is based on Marlon's growth, which comes at the expense of Reina's character development and which reinforces the wellworn tropes of the female seductress and the gendering of the nation as a female.

As a result of his social location as an undocumented subject and the connections he establishes with a network of Colombian migrants in Queens, Marlon comes to imagine national belonging differently. Giovanni and Roger teach Marlon how to strategically and resourcefully use *mañas* to get by, Pastor and Patricia provide him with a job at the restaurant, and Milagros shows him how to have fun and some romance in New York City, and all of them serve as much needed interlocutors for Marlon to recount and process his experiences of *el Hueco*. These and other characters provide Marlon with the necessary financial, emotional, and narrative resources to begin his new life anew. The novel ends with Marlon coming to the realization that “*la patria es cualquier lugar donde esté el afecto* [a person's country is wherever there is love and affection]” (Franco, PT, 237; Silver, PT, 228).²⁹ Marlon's sense of belonging is no longer tethered to state-sanctioned citizenship or the geopolitical boundaries of the nation state; instead, it is based on the action of caring affectionately for others and creating intimate relationship ties. As he creates kinship through *el Hueco*, Marlon comes to espouse an affective sense of belonging that is not based on the singular nation state or on a single (heterosexual) relationship but rather on a more diffuse set of attachments.

This affective citizenship is a feeling and a state of being. María Elena Cepeda's spelling of “*imagiNation*” to highlight how it functions as “both noun and verb,” or as “a collective activity embedded in a definite sense of place(lessness),” aptly describes Marlon's shifted sense of Colombian identity and cultural citizenship.³⁰ The novel reimagines national affiliation by positing that it need not be restricted to the nation state; rather, it can extend transnationally and inter-subjectively. Moreover, Marlon's experiences of social death in the United States are counter balanced by his experiences of a tight-knit migrant community that functions as a community of sentiment, and this in turn gives rise to his alternative sense of citizenship.³¹ Marlon's claim to affective citizenship is rooted in an expanded notion of kinship, and he produces this vision precisely because he entered into the critical space of *el Hueco*.

²⁹ The English edition translates *afecto* as “love and affection,” which captures the dual signification of the word, but *patria* also has the dual signification of country and homeland.

³⁰ Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*, 8, 10. For more on cultural citizenship, see Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism,” in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, eds. William F. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon P, 1997): 27–38.

³¹ I take the phrase “community of sentiment” from Arjun Appadurai who defines it as “a group that begins to imagine and feel things together.” Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996): 8.

Insurgent images

Since the establishment of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, the United States has built more elaborate barriers along portions of the U.S.-Mexico border and drastically increased its border policing, detention, and deportation apparatuses. Paraíso Travel is one text among a plethora of “post-Gatekeeper border fictions” and cultural productions that testify to the violence undocumented migrants face given this increasingly militarized border.³² The notion that the State could seal the border or completely control movement in the region – that it could close all the huecos in the nearly 2,000 mile stretch of territory – is a fiction but one that has had violent effects, creating a “landscape of death” along the border.³³ Kofre, a New Jersey-based Latina/o Spanish-language band, released a CD entitled *¡Por el hueco!* in 2008 that renders this landscape in visual and sonic terms. The album is framed through the titular Colombian expression, but the group is a pan- and trans- Latina/o band.³⁴ The cover art is a visual depiction of undocumented migration from Latin America and several titles songs index how the music is likewise steeped in this reality: “El Muerto [The Dead One]” “Papeles [Papers],” El Cruce [The Crossing].” The album cover strikingly depicts *el Hueco* using two very different aesthetic modes – the front cover [Figure 1] with a tableau of crudely drawn stick figure migrants and the back cover [Figure 2] with a palimpsest of different types of identity documents and photos of the band. Like Paraíso Travel, the album cover imagines the condition of social death as a burial of national identity, but, unlike Paraíso Travel, it suggests that migrating *por el Hueco* is a broadly Latin American, not exclusively Colombian, phenomenon.

Joseph Nevins argues that since Operation Gatekeeper the divide between the United States and Mexico has evolved from a “border (or zone of interaction and transition between two separate political entities) to a boundary (or a line of strict demarcation).”³⁵ The front cover image renders this line of demarcation with a straight black line topped by barbed wire that divides the page in half. This symbolic territorial configuration separates the United States in the top half of the page from Latin America in the bottom half; yet, *el Hueco* appears in both spaces, a product of, as well as a response to, this division. Rather than depicting a hole in “the steel curtain – / chainlink fence crowned with rolled

³² Marta Caminero-Santangelo, *Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper*. (Gainesville: U of Florida P: 2016): 56.

³³ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on ‘Illegals’ and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge: 2010): 174.

³⁴ Following Juan Flores usage of the terms, pan-Latina/o and trans-Latina/o highlight how the band is panethnic and transnational (From *Bomba to Hip-Hop*, 157). They have a U.S.-born Latino member and Latina/o members who migrated at varying ages from Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia.

³⁵ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 13. In addition, see Wendy Brown’s *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), which theorizes how border walls are emblematic of the waning sovereignty of the nation state.

barbed wire –” like the one through which Gloria Anzaldúa walks or a hole in wooden logs like the ones in which Marlon and Reina hide, the cover image depicts huecos or holes in the ground both below and above the barbed wire fence.³⁶ The image thus literalizes the metaphor of migrating “¡POR EL HUECO!” as the title on the cover prominently exclaims. The stick figure migrants disrupt and circumvent geopolitical boundaries by entering into huecos dug out of the ground in Latin America and emerging through other ones in the United States.

The landscape of the page is structured around and dramatizes the enforcement of nation state boundaries. In the top half, one migrant looks longingly toward New York City in the background, but the threat of detention and violence looms large – represented by the squad cars of “la migra [border patrol]” and the guns wielded by both the border patrol officer and the border vigilante – as the undocumented migrants face socio-economic and legal precarity. In the bottom half, the stick figure migrants prepare to migrate from Latin America dressed in the colors of their national flags.³⁷ When they arrive in the United States, though, they are no longer clad in their national colors; this suggests that they, like Marlon and Reina who were forced to discard their passports, were stripped of their national identities as they came through el Hueco. The huecos function as tunnels to the United States, but they also double as graves, evidenced by the stick figure women dressed in black with crosses over their heads who could be mourning the migrants’ physical deaths or their social deaths. Unlike Jorge Franco’s *Paraíso Travel*, which focuses exclusively on Colombians, Kofre’s album reveals how el Hueco can serve as a productive metaphor for undocumented migration from Latin America more broadly. While the front cover visually renders the social death of undocumented Latin America migrants and the loss of their national identities, the back cover imagines a non-nation based Latin American identity forged through the shared condition of undocumented migration.

With an array of identification cards that overlay a map of the New York City-New Jersey area, the back cover engages a different kind of geospatial imagination that highlights forms of documentation more than forms of crossing. Playfully manipulating Spanish phonetics and English language names, the social security card is issued to “Joe Soy Falso.” “Soy falso” means “I am false,” but the deceptive slippage between “Joe” as a first name in English and “yo” as “I” in Spanish is humorous and exploits a gap between the seeming homophones. That is, when pronounced with a Spanish accent, “yo” sounds similar to “Joe” in a bilingual pun that turns the identifying Spanish-language pronoun

³⁶ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 24. I argued earlier that the gap in spacing in Anzaldúa’s poem evokes the hole in the border fence; here the black lines of the hyphens used as line breaks in the poem visually and typographically imitate the strict line of demarcation that the chain link fence represents.

³⁷ These include Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Honduras, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. The colors of the flags of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela are the same – yellow, blue, and red – so that shirt can represent any of these countries.

for the subject (“yo”) into a nominal English-language name (“Joe”), in effect turning “I” into a false subject. “Joe Soy Falso” not only declares that the document is falsified but that the subject it identifies is a false or impossible subject. Documenting the undocumented subject on a social security card entails humorously exploiting the linguistic gap or hueco that generates the bilingual pun. We can read the card’s social security number, which is “000 –00 –0000,” as a series of zeroes or as a series of huecos that visually recall the holes dug in the ground on the CD’s front cover image. Acquiring false documents is one of the many mañas undocumented migrants living in el Hueco use to access resources. Another fake document, the passport for the “REPUBLICA DEL PUEBLO,” imitates the names of Latin American countries such as La República de Colombia or La República de Perú but replaces the country name with el pueblo,³⁸ which evokes popular struggle slogans such as un pueblo unido jamás será vencido [a people united will never be defeated] and calls for the people to unite on behalf of the struggles of undocumented migrants. The anti-imperial and anticapitalist ethos symbolized by the iconic image of Ernesto “Che” Guevara that graces the cover of the passport is in dialogue with the call for liberation embedded in the song lyrics³⁹ at the same time that the passport calls into question the regime of citizenship and immigration quotas that regulate national belonging and migrants’ (lack of) rights. In its place, the passport imagines a literal nation of the people: the Republic of the People. The passport thus materializes an imagined community for those who come through and live in el Hueco. The passport extends or even dissipates the borders of the nation given that el pueblo can signify the members of a nation state or a people linked by a shared sense of hemispheric belonging.

This more utopian reading of the passport, though, needs to be tempered with an acknowledgement that the artwork’s visual landscape is masculinist and, like Paraíso Travel, centers on male protagonists and male agency. The “revolutionary masculinity” embodied by Che Guevara reminds us of the failure of Latin American revolutions and U.S. ethnic nationalisms to incorporate feminist and queer issues into their agendas.⁴⁰ In contrast to the front cover that portrays

³⁸ El pueblo translates as “the people,” “the nation,” and “the village.”

³⁹ One song, for example, denounces the economic exploitation of Latina/os in the “máquina maldita [damn machine]” of New York City and declares that Latina/os have risen up in the streets, for “El pueblo latino jamás sera vencido [Latino people will never be defeated]” (“Makina”). Kofre’s musical imagination aligns with other Latina/s and Latin American musicians singing about undocumented migration such as La Santa Cecilia, Calle 13, Los Tigres del Norte, Las Cafeteras, Willie Colón, Winsin & Yadel, Rebel Diaz, Molotov, Chicano Batman, and Ana Tijoux.

⁴⁰ Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003): 77. For further analyses of how other Latina/o popular musicians frequently rely on masculinist icons of resistance and revolution, see María Elena Cepeda, “Media and the Musical Imagination: Comparative Discourses of Belonging in ‘Nuestro Himno’ and ‘Reggaetón Latino,’” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16.5

men and women migrating, all of the identification documents on the back cover are for males, literally and metaphorically foregrounding male migrants and masculinist dissent. The experiences of female and queer migrants are problematically disappeared from this collection of documents.⁴¹ The back cover of the CD thus reinforces the common but erroneous assumption in the United States that undocumented migrants are predominately male, and it reinscribes heteropatriarchal anti-imperialist struggles.

Overall, the CD's album cover functions as a "migrant cartography" that maps out the dire reality of undocumented migration and provides a vision of another possible future.⁴² The migrants go through el Hueco and are threatened with capture, deportation, and death on the front cover, but they emerge as citizens of the República del Pueblo on the back cover. The artwork thus moves from the condition of social death in which the migrants are stripped of legal rights and national belonging toward the condition of hemispheric citizenship. This future remains anticipatory given that the República del Pueblo does not currently exist, but the passport overlays a map, gesturing toward a different configuration that can emerge from el Hueco if we reimagine and redraw our maps of territorial affiliation. Franco's novel depicts national belonging in terms of extended kinship relations and affective citizenship, whereas Kofre's album art depicts an insurgent notion of citizenship in which shared solidarity around migrant social justice struggles generates transnational belonging.

Given the current slew of anti-immigration laws, discriminatory policies, and xenophobic discourse surrounding undocumented migration in the United States and in Europe, it is ever more pressing that we be attune to the differing contours of undocumented migrant imaginaries. I employ "undocumented" here in two different ways. I use it to build on Alicia Schmidt Camacho's term "migrant imaginaries," which refers to "the world-making aspirations of Mexican border crossers," in order to highlight the migrant imaginaries produced by and about undocumented Latin American migrants.⁴³ I also use it to refer to migrant imaginaries that have not been documented in scholarship or cultural production. It is urgent that we challenge the negative hegemonic metaphors associated with Latina/o migrants and citizens because that stigmatizing discourse only serves to reinforce their domination, racialization, and marginalization. The metaphor of el Hueco is part of a larger set of what Otto Santa Anna calls "insurgent metaphors," which Latina/o migrants and citizens are constructing to contest the dominant negative construction of undocumented migration.⁴⁴ We can thus position Jorge Franco's *Paraíso Travel* and Kofre's *¡Por el hueco!*

(2009): 548–572 and Richard T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicana/o Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

⁴¹ In contrast, the "UndocQueer Movement" has helped center the experiences of queer undocumented migrants in the struggle for social justice.

⁴² Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York UP, 2008): 16.

⁴³ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 5.

⁴⁴ Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*, 295.

alongside other cultural production that advocates for migrants rights such as the empowering images of butterflies by artists and activists like Favianna Rodriguez, Julio Salgado, Cesar Maxit, and the UndocuBus riders or the provocative images of superheroes by artists like Dulce Pinzón and Neil Rivas. The structural and ideological conditions that produce undocumented migration and its attendant social death necessitate radical transformation. In the meantime, the knowledge and metaphors that undocumented migrants (and their allies) use to describe and interpret their existence as impossible subjects contribute critical paradigms for documenting migrant lives in the Americas.

Mobilizing a range of insurgent metaphors and alternative transnational imaginaries about undocumented migration not only contests but, ideally, will also ultimately help dismantle anti-immigration policies and exclusionary nationalist discourses. As Kofre invokes us to chant:

Inmigrantes, Sí!
Criminales, No!
Inocentes, no ilegales
La justicia no comprende
Que este sistema no nos defiende
[...]
Hay leyes que hay que romper
Immigrants, Yes!
Criminals, No!
Innocent, not illegal
The justice system does not understand
That the system does not defend us
[...]

There are laws that have to be broken (“El Cruce”)
Crossing borders por el Hueco need not be criminalized. For true justice entails the right to migrate freely.