

‘Why do *they* hate *us*?’ Reframing immigration through participatory action research

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Revised manuscript received 23 October 2009

Why do ‘they’ hate ‘us’? is a painful starting point for trying to make sense of the tangled web of global restructuring, politics and racism. My discussion draws upon ‘Dreaming of No Judgment’, a participatory action research project developed with young people in Salt Lake City, Utah that explores the emotional and economic impacts of stereotypes upon immigrant communities. My analysis focuses upon the disjunctures between the dominant immigration discourse and the everyday experiences of young Latino immigrants. Drawing upon borderlands scholarship, starting with embodied everyday lived experiences and concerns, here I consider how the questions, concerns and feelings of young people offer new openings for reframing immigration. In conclusion, I reflect upon how PAR might be a transformative ‘construction site’ for reworking and responding to social injustices through the arts.

Key words: Salt Lake City, Utah, immigration, participatory action research, young people, racism, arts

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‘Why do they hate us?’ Former President George Bush asked the same question in 2001. In a speech to the US Congress in the weeks following September 11th, Bush said ‘They hate us because of our freedoms.’ But this question means something very different when posed by Latino/Chicano young people growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah. Instead of asking why the world hates Americans, their question raises the issue of why Americans ‘hate’ people who have migrated here from other parts of the world.

Definition for S.W.I.N.E.= Stupid.Wetbacks.Infecting.Nearly.Everyone!!! Lol keep this going! (text sent to me by a student, May 2009)

Why do ‘they’ hate ‘us’? is also a painful starting point for trying to make sense of their positioning within the tangled web of global restructuring, politics and racism that spins out in their everyday lives as reflected in the xenophobic text circulated at the out-

break of the H1N1/Swine flu. My discussion will reference the participatory action research (PAR) project ‘Dreaming of No Judgment: Mi Pleito Against Stereotypes’, developed by young people participating in the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective, that aims to counter criminalising discourses focused on ‘illegals’ and ‘aliens’ that justify their exploitation and dehumanisation. Drawing upon borderlands scholarship (Anzaldúa [1987]1999; Torre and Ayala 2009) my analysis ‘theorises from the flesh’, starting with the embodied everyday lived experiences and concerns of young Latino immigrants that illuminate this particular political moment and offer new vantage points for reframing our understandings of immigration.

While certainly a very complex issue intersecting social, cultural, political and economic concerns, the reductive conceptual framing of immigration in the national public debate has constrained our analysis and response (Lakoff and Ferguson 2006). Erasing the global context, the dominant metanarrative identifies ‘immigration’ itself as the problem. The language within this framework reflects a privileged standpoint and is anything but neutral. Illegal aliens, border

security, citizenship, criminals and guest temporary workers are branded as part of the problem that must be addressed.

The 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project shifts the target and expands the frame of analysis. Starting with the experiences of young undocumented students growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah, our participatory action research project is founded upon

the understanding that people – especially those who have experienced historic oppression – hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions, [and] frame the interpretations [of research]. (Torre and Fine 2006)

This paper will discuss the critical reframing of immigration politics through a participatory action research process. The reframing represents ontological and epistemological shifts, new ways of knowing and being in the world, informed by the stories of young immigrants' negotiations of the contradictions of everyday life. Critically, these shifts are galvanised by an emotional geopolitics that connects political processes, agency and feelings (Pain 2009).

Tracing the line of inquiry of the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project, my discussion maps out the conceptual journey of our research process. To begin, I discuss the geopolitical context for understanding the immigration 'problem' in Utah. Next I share background on our collective and the particular interaction that inspired our project. In my analysis, first I explain the dominant framing of the immigration fear discourses, then I look at the flipside, the counter story offered by our research that provides a space for reflecting upon the emotional and economic impacts of stereotyping upon immigrant communities. In conclusion, I discuss the creative ways that the Mestizo Collective developed to respond and challenge the 'commonsense' understandings of immigration (González Coronado 2009).

The Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective

The young people who created this image, 'Caution' (Plate 1), are participants in the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective, a social justice think tank in Salt Lake City, that engages young people as catalysts of change through leadership and active civic engagement in a model integrating community-based participatory action research, arts and activism. Mestizo Arts & Activism is a university–community partnership I developed with my colleagues Matt Bradley and David Quijada in 2008 in collaboration with community



Plate 1 'Caution'

Source: Participants in the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective

partner Mestizo Institute for Culture & Arts (www.mestizoarts.org). The photograph 'Caution' is an example of how we use the arts to process and make sense of social issues. 'Caution' was created in response to anti-immigrant comments that were posted on a local news website (discussed further below).

The young people involved with the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective reflect the diversity of Salt Lake City's west side, which is the most diverse zip code in the state of Utah, home to many immigrant and working-class families. Between 15 and 20 high school and college students of Latino/Chicano, African-American, Asian, and bi-racial backgrounds, aged 14–20, participate in the collective, meeting after school throughout the year. The objective is to build the capacity of young people as leaders using a community-based PAR approach to investigate issues based on their concerns. Over the past year, the Mestizo researchers have decided to focus on access to higher education for undocumented young people (<http://educatexcambio.blogspot.com>); stereotypes of immigrant communities (<http://www.myspace.com/dreamingofnojudgement>); media representations of young people of colour (currently collecting data) and a GIS mapping project identifying the assets of Salt Lake City's west side. This paper focuses upon the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project.

Our inquiry is youth-directed and places emphasis upon the particular contribution and access young people bring to understanding their everyday lives. Working from the inside out, PAR creates an opportunity for the production of new knowledge and the development of new theory. Challenging the privileges

of the 'ivory tower', PAR involves de-centring whiteness and foregrounding the concerns of those who have been excluded or whose contributions to knowledge production have been marginalised, distorted or otherwise silenced. Here, for example, we will consider how the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project pushes scholarship in new directions and offers a critical lens for reframing immigration politics.

At the same time, the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective embodies what Chavez and Soep (2005) identify as a 'pedagogy of collegiality' where youth researchers work closely with others, university students/mentors and faculty facilitators, to frame questions, collect and analyse data, and strategise how to represent their concerns most effectively to diverse audiences. Our process is characterised by exchange and collective negotiation. We all – youth researchers and adult mentors – have a stake in the projects we develop, in terms of the integrity of the research and thinking through the personal and political implications of our work (Chavez and Soep 2005, 9). As a collective, we are all committed to a larger project of social justice and working to make our community a more equitable place for all, especially those who have been marginalised or disenfranchised. Working *with* rather than *for* PAR is a commitment to collaboration in its most profound sense as not only a politics of engagement but of solidarity (Cahill 2009).

Immigration politics in Utah

Utah is one of the last white 'frontiers'. Recently redubbed the 'hate state' because of the role of Utah's Mormon Church of the Latter Day Saints in supporting Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California, Utah is one of the 'reddest', most conservative states in the country. It is also one of the whitest. But this is changing; while almost 90 per cent of Utah's population is white, over the last decade Utah has undergone massive demographic changes. In Salt Lake City's west side more than 40 per cent of the residents are ethnic minorities, predominantly Latino. Between 2000 and 2004, 41 per cent of Utah's population growth consisted of people of colour, predominantly from Latino backgrounds, the majority from Mexico. During the same time period, 75 per cent of the enrolment increase in Utah's public school system was students of colour (Perlich 2006).

Immigration is one of the most inflammatory issues in Utah, and also in the US as a whole. State polls report that immigration is one of the top three concerns for the Utah public (Bulkeley 2008). While not a

border state, the vigilante Minutemen group, dedicated to 'secure our homeland, borders and ports from illegal alien entrants' maintains an active presence in the public sphere and is very involved with the state legislature. While the public debate focuses on the 'illegal immigration problem', the framing of this issue without taking into account the context of global restructuring unjustly projects blame onto undocumented communities (as we shall discuss further).

Until comprehensive immigration reform is achieved, undocumented immigrants in Utah and elsewhere are caught in the middle of a political standstill between state and federal policy. Over the past few years across the country, hundreds of anti-immigrant bills were proposed in the state legislatures, tightening restrictions on immigrants. In 2008 Utah passed the omnibus Senate Bill 81, Utah's most punitive and comprehensive policy to date, modelled after similar bills in Kansas, Oklahoma, Arizona and Colorado. This law places burdensome restrictions upon labour, social service access, and cross-deputises police to act as immigration (ICE) agents, among other provisions. Currently several groups have filed lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the legislation, arguing that its discriminatory policies encourage racial profiling by authorities. Undocumented immigrants are forced to navigate a minefield of local and national politics, trying to make the best decisions about how to achieve success (and how to survive) in a society that relegates them to a shadow-state.

Dreaming of No Judgment: Mi Pleito Against Stereotypes

Because immigration issues are one of the most important concerns for the young people we work with, one significant site for our research (and activism) is the Utah State Legislature body. During the legislative session we follow proposed policies and discuss their implications and potential impacts upon the community. We write to our representatives, visit the state capital to track bills, attend committee hearings and speak to legislators about our concerns.¹

The 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project was inspired by an interaction with one of Utah's most notorious anti-immigrant policymakers. Unabashedly supported by the Minutemen, Representative Donnelson single-handedly proposed over ten anti-immigrant bills between the years 2006 and 2008 (he retired in 2008). On our visit to the state capital in spring 2008, we met Donnelson in the hallway and several youth researchers spent time discussing with him their concerns.

What became apparent to the youth researchers was Donnelson's lack of understanding and compassion for the struggles of undocumented immigrants and his blatant disregard for their welfare. It was upsetting to engage face to face with someone who wielded power and who was taking bold steps to restrict the rights of undocumented community members whom he knew little about. Donnelson said

I'm sorry your mother broke the law crossing the border illegally, and now you have to pay for her mistakes, for her criminal behavior. This is a country of rules and laws.

What became apparent to the youth research team was the key role that representations of immigrant communities as 'criminals' and 'illegals' played in framing Donnelson's anti-immigrant position. Challenging him, the youth researchers exposed Donnelson's deep-seated xenophobia and spoke back to this country's history of unjust and racist laws, discussed globalisation and raised issues of white privilege. Their argument fell on deaf ears.

The interaction with Donnelson revealed in stark relief the contradictions of neoliberal restructuring. Jorge,² one of the youth researchers, queried

Why do they hate us? I don't understand. I mean why don't they like us? We help them out, we work so hard for so little money, we bring our families here, we're good community members and we're good students. Why do they want us to go back to our country?

This line of questioning inspired the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project. Additional questions raised by the youth researchers in the initial stages of the project included 'what can we do to stop discrimination and racism? When will it end?' and 'What is the solution to the problem – if there is a problem at all?' As Lakoff and Ferguson (2006) argue, the framing of this issue as an 'immigration problem' directs attention away from such critical issues as the humanitarian crisis of mass migration and displacement. They suggest that immigration might also be understood as a 'civil rights problem' or a 'cheap labour problem', pointing to the exploitation of undocumented communities who are forced to live underground and denied basic human rights.

Investigating the research question 'why do they hate us?' posed methodological dilemmas for the youth research team. First, we discussed the challenges of investigating 'others' hating 'us'. The youth researchers wondered how they would interview white people on this subject and whether they would be honest with

them. After much collective negotiation, the project changed direction and evolved into an investigation of the emotional and economic impacts of stereotyping upon immigrant communities. Shifting the object of study from potentially racist others to people within their own community, the research team decided to conduct two focus groups with young people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds about their experiences of stereotyping. The students who participated shared poignant stories of discrimination and systematic denial, from racial profiling by police and guidance counsellors, to being denied access to housing and educational opportunities.

The context: patrolling the border

Borders are set up to define the spaces that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (Anzaldúa 1999, 25)

Anzaldúa's discussion of the borderland captures the contradictory positioning articulated by the young Latino/a immigrants who participated in our research. The borderland is an emotional, political and geographical space. Unlike the clear-cut lines of the apartheid geographies of segregation, it is much harder to trace the topographies of immigration. Literal and figurative borderlines zig-zag not just along the craggy edges of the US/Mexican border but through communities. The shifting 'frontier line' of 'legal'/'illegal' cannot be traced point by point as immigrant communities are characterised by a complicated reality of extended families of differential status. In one household there might be undocumented parents with children who are citizens living next door to another family including two sisters, one documented, the other not, who live with their children and the nephews of their brother who was recently deported. This pixilated geography might be imagined by Yiftachel's (2009) conceptualisation of 'gray spacing'. Positioned between "the 'lightness' of legality/approval/safety and the 'darkness' of eviction/destruction/death", grey spaces are a 'ceaseless process of "producing" social relations, bypasses the false modernist dichotomy between "legal" and "criminal"', that are 'neither integrated nor eliminated' (Yiftachel 2009, 250). This reflects the precarious positioning of undocumented communities who are quietly tolerated, but trapped in between the fine lines of accep-

tance and rejection. From a political standpoint, this represents both a challenge and a potential strength for the immigrant community. In Salt Lake City for example, most Latino immigrants report experiences of discrimination and racial profiling in their everyday lives whether they are documented or not. Similarly, most claim a relative or friend who is undocumented and know intimately their struggles. This shared experience of social injustice offers a unifying political platform. The dramatic turnout for the 2006 Dignity March for Immigration Rights, held in cities across the nation, demonstrated the solidarity of the Latino community. The largest political gathering in Utah's history, the protesters held signs proudly displaying 'Invisible No More!' And yet, three years later in Utah the undocumented community is still living underground, facing even tighter restrictions on their rights and an increase in public opposition as the economy has soured.

The Mestizo youth researchers were surprised to find out that the dominant immigration discourse is framed by fear, and specifically, whites' fears of immigrants. If anything, our research speaks loudly to the opposite. Our project documents the fears of immigrants and their everyday war stories of negotiating a toxic terrain of discrimination. In our research young immigrants express often feeling disempowered, stuck and weary of navigating the landscape of racist immigration politics in their everyday lives, as we shall discuss further later. This raised the question for us as to whose fears are privileged in the immigration discourse and why? This is the context for our research.

It's getting really crowded here. There's too many of them and their stealing our jobs. I wish they would go back home to wherever they're from.

This response was given by Charlene, a young white woman in her twenties, after she told me that immigration was one of her most important concerns. 'I wish they would all just go back to where they come from'. Why? I asked. Undocumented immigrants currently number approximately 110 000 (Pew Hispanic Center 2009) of the less than 3 million population in a state that is well known for its sprawl, not its density. Utah is not crowded by any standard. When I pressed Charlene on her response, she told me she really wasn't 'into politics' and rarely read the newspaper or watched the news on TV. She then went on to explain that her cousin's boyfriend worked as a guard at the border and she didn't care if 'they' were here as long as they came here legally. Typical of the dominant

framing of immigration, Charlene's comments conflate economic insecurities with a deep sense of loss for 'our way of life'. Assuming a white audience, immigration has become a code word for the dangers of losing 'our' jobs, 'our' language, and 'our' culture (Sandercock 2003). This is augmented by fears of an 'invasion' of the 'other', immigrants of colour, who are allegedly taking over the United States state by state.

The fear that whites are losing power as they become a new minority (Chen 2000) is compounded by a deep-seated sense of betrayal by the state in protecting *their* interests. While the immigration discourse foregrounds jobs – economic anxieties – underlying these concerns is an attempt to preserve a precarious white national, 'American', identity, whose borders are carefully constructed and surveilled (Chen 2000; Flores 2003). The 'problem' of immigration is central to this project.

Fearmongering is nothing new to American politics. There are, of course, well-founded concerns about dramatic sociopolitical changes, especially within the context of our ongoing economic crisis. The immigration fear discourse capitalises on this, redirecting anxieties and anger. Eclipsing scales of responsibility, it projects blame onto undocumented immigrants, who have unwittingly become key sites for the political and cultural struggles of globalisation (Flores 2003). Acting as a smokescreen, the immigration debate riles up the white working class that immigrants are stealing their jobs and taking advantage of American's generosity. Zooming out, and shifting scales of analysis, another picture emerges. Tracing the contour lines of immigration shows all too clearly how wealthy countries' exploitation of poorer 'developing' countries is a driving force in immigration. People are forced to move to find the means of social reproduction. Undocumented immigrants find themselves stuck in a cycle of survival, as the situation here in the US is not so dissimilar from their countries of origin. Kristin Koptiuch identifies this process as 'third-worlding at home', referring to 'the effects of a process of exploitative incorporation and hegemonic domination – and its fierce contestation by subjugated peoples – that used to take place at a safe, reassuring distance' (1991, 85).

Rachel Pain (2009) discusses the privileging of fears whose unspoken dimension is its 'whiteness' and how fear itself is often an assumed prerogative of the privileged. This raises critical questions about what Sandercock (2003, 115) identifies as a political economy of fears. She asks: whose fears get legitimised and translated into policy responses? And whose fears are

silenced and marginalised? Historically, anti-immigrant policies have attempted to manage and exclude 'the Other' through strategies of policing (restricting rights, 'rule of law'), spatial containment and segregation (deportation, borders, 'push outs'), and assimilation/reform (with the goal of achieving whiteness, for example *How the Jews became white*, Brodtkin 1999). Anti-immigrant policies work in conjunction with discourses in a similar fashion as a futile but aggressive attempt to preserve a fictitious white, homogenous 'homeland' (Flores 2003; Sandercock 2003).

Public representations of undocumented immigrants as dangerous alien invaders, imagined as dark figures darting across the border, serve to reinforce their social and spatial exclusion (Flores 2003). As historian Lisa Flores argues, the Mexican body is a symbolic site for constructing national borders and threats to US citizenship. The competing narratives surrounding undocumented immigrants as both a 'need' (for docile labour) and a 'problem' reflects social contentions over the complex issues of immigration and inherent contradictions (Flores 2003, 380). Representations of fear are not coincidental to, but constitutive of, global economic restructuring, revealing neoliberal capitalism's dependence upon the devaluation of immigrant labour. The discursive construction of fear patrols the social and geopolitical borders of American identity, and is critical in securing the consent of the public who witness and accept the exploitation and unjust treatment of undocumented immigrants.

Borderlands: the space between fear and hate

Like the word 'diaspora', which Kathleen Cleaver argues 'is such a polite word to describe such a brutal process' (Cleaver 2004), the dominant discourses surrounding immigration mask the violences of poverty that push people to leave their homeland, children and partners behind, taking great risk for survival and the pursuit of a better life. Paradoxically, while the immigration narrative is preoccupied by the fears of anglos, the devastation and havoc of those who have had to migrate, or of the disenfranchised, are rarely discussed (Pain 2009; cf. Hopkins 2007). Pain reminds us that neoliberal global restructuring (immigration) is a sharply differentiated process in terms of its unequal social and geographical impacts. 'The poor are routinely written out of fear' (Pain 2009). Rarely do we hear of their fears, for example of being homeless, being unable to provide for their own children, of not

being accepted, of having no work prospects, of being deported, or being the target of violence (Sandercock 2003, 124). Similarly, the hopes, dreams and aspirations of undocumented communities are unarticulated in public debates.

Centring the perspectives of young Latino immigrants and their families, the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project focuses upon the deeply felt experiences of discrimination that motivated our research. Our study takes seriously what it means to feel hated, as exemplified by the vitriolic comments posted on the website of the *Salt Lake Tribune* (a local Salt Lake City newspaper) in response to an article that featured the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective:

By the way, Americans understand that illegal aliens are criminals and parasites, one and all. Their very presence here and practically everything they do on U. S. soil is illegal. They need to be ferreted out, rounded up like cattle, punished for their numerous crimes, then booted back to whence they snuck in from with such extreme prejudice that they will never, ever think of violating our sovereignty again. Enough is enough.

The illegal alien on the other hand does not deserve our respect any more than someone who breaks into your house and refuses to leave. (Anonymous post on *Salt Lake Tribune* comment board, November 2008)

Typical of belligerent rants that can be found daily in the local Utah newspapers responding to articles about immigration, these comments should not be understood as examples of fringe extremism. This xenophobic discourse plays an active role in the public sphere in Utah and around the country (blogsphere, talk radio, cable TV etc.). As mentioned previously, the Minutemen and other anti-immigrant conservative coalitions maintain an active aggressive and visible presence at the State Legislature and other public forums and are regularly quoted in mainstream newspapers. This hate talk is a backdrop for young immigrants' everyday experiences negotiating racism and xenophobia.

Our research findings focus upon personal experiences of racial profiling and being stereotyped as gang-bangers, drop outs and teen moms. The deeply troubling comments on the news, websites are experienced as a double-punch, the ugly face of profound dispossession and structural racism, the violence of dreams deferred and denied, and economic exploitation. The stereotypes of immigrants perpetrated in the public discourses are experienced as both a social betrayal and a public assault. The stories shared by young people in our research reveal how deficit dis-

courses function as a mechanism of control that is both symbolic and material. Our findings also demonstrate the role of social and structural inequalities in the production of stereotypes. For example, Julio, a junior in high school, discussed how the low expectations of his guidance counsellor and teachers coupled with institutional barriers in his school locked him in a low-achieving track that focused on testing. Julio expressed his frustration that despite the fact that he had high grades, his counsellor refused to put him in Honors or AP classes. Bored, Julio expressed feeling stuck in place and a sense of relative deprivation as he witnessed white students' upward mobility within the school's racial hierarchies. Dolores, a Latina sophomore originally from Mexico, shared a similar point of view:

Why be there when no one is helping you? It kind of makes you feel dumb. It also makes you think, like, you can't have no help from people. You have to do it on your own. And even though they tell us what to do, it's like they, they don't really support us.

The same theme came up repeatedly in our research with immigrant students and is confirmed by an exceptionally high drop-out or 'push-out' rate for Latinos in the Utah public school system (Alemán and Rorrer 2006).

Maria, a 15-year-old Latina from Peru, shared with us her family's repeated attempts to find an apartment to live in and their bitter experiences of housing discrimination. This is exhausting. As Maria suggests, 'Sometimes you feel . . . like, tired. It's like you're beaten down, and all that. I mean you've watched it so much.' Maria expresses what scholar William Smith (2004) identifies as racial battle fatigue, the chronic socio-psychological stress responses (withdrawal, shock, anger, alienation, hopelessness, fear, coping strategies) to both mundane and extreme experiences of racism. Here in Utah, immigrant families experience racial micro- and macro-aggressions, from the everyday war stories of disregard and stereotyping, to large-scale publicised deportations, acts of violence and public humiliations such as Arizona's Sheriff Arpaio's ritualised chain gang march of migrant inmates in shackles to a detention camp. Many of the stories shared in our research reflect the cumulative effects of negotiating a hostile environment, being stereotyped, under surveillance and feeling like you want to give up.

Our research also demonstrated the desire to 'prove others wrong' (Yosso 2000), motivated to succeed in opposition to stereotypes. Students shared with us

stories of challenging misrepresentations. For example, Amelia, an undocumented student, decided to post her responses to xenophobic comments on the blogosphere (such as the one discussed earlier):

I feel like – you know what, I educated you. . . . Like I know I'm educated and I know what's the truth. So I have power like that. I have power to tell you you're wrong . . . Like it's okay. Like you could be in denial all you want, but I know. I have the power to know.

Engaging the wisdom of 'dual consciousness' (Du Bois 1989), Amelia speaks back her truth and expresses her agency.

Sharing stories of self-preservation, being silenced/silencing oneself, feeling alternately isolated, confused, ambivalent, angry and empowered, the young people we spoke with struggled to make sense of their contradictory positioning.

Pushed and pulled between individual accountability and the structural production of inequalities, the students narrated stories that shifted between hope and despair, as articulated on our Myspace page:

The oppression imposed by all these negative experiences made these young people lose hope and want to give up. But we also found that many of these young people found the strength to go on because they wanted to break the stereotypes that were laid on them. It made students want to better themselves. (myspace/dreamingofnojudgment)

Although all the students knew that it was necessary to graduate high school to realise the 'American Dream', most of their stories revealed their struggle to do so and their bitter disappointments. The students' everyday experiences reveal how stereotyping cuts both ways, denying access to opportunities, and demoralising young people who take responsibility for institutional barriers.

Our analysis of the contradictory positioning of young immigrants in our research sheds light on how global restructuring is worked out on the ground and in the intimate and everyday spaces of their lives. One of the critical insights of the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project is that power lies in controlling not only how you are defined, but how you define the 'problem'. As our research revealed, not only do young immigrants negotiate stereotypes, they also struggle within and against the material conditions of structural racism and poverty. Significantly, while the Dreaming of No Judgment project foregrounds the critical role of representations, it highlights the relationship *between* discourse, agency and structural

forces. To this end, our research draws connections between representations of immigrant communities and access to opportunities, by focusing upon the emotional and economic impacts of stereotyping.

Doing the research was also a revelatory and painful process. Our analysis pushed us to reflect upon the disjunctures between our own experiences of discrimination and the dominant discourses. On most of the days we worked together someone would inevitably share a personal story of racism. These stories became another point of comparison that informed our analysis. Our research was deeply personal, intimate and inspired by the concerns and outrage of the youth research team members. Emotion was not only a point of analysis, but motivated our work and was central to our inquiry. Our processes of collective reflection opened up critical insights, what Freire identifies as a process of conscientisation, 'the pain of coming to terms with the roots of your oppression as you come into your subjecthood' (Freire [1970]1997, 31; Cahill 2007).

Reframing and responding

'Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one' (Freire [1970]1997, 31), but it is this pain that pushes us forward towards personal and social transformation.

Freire argues that it is through the praxis of the struggle, through reflection and action upon the world, that we are able to transform it. This is the space of new possibilities, of 'defying gravity' and doing something to contribute to social change (Cahill 2004). Action!

Engaging what Shawn Ginwright (2008) identifies as a 'collective radical imagination', we believe a rein-vigorated youth activist politics is founded upon dreams not only of bread, but roses too. A slogan associated with the US labour movement in the early 20th century, 'bread and roses', reminds us that the struggles for social justice are not just about rights, but about psychic and emotional well-being – feeding our body and soul –the two are interdependent. With this in mind, the arts are critical and revelatory space that extends our research process and is part of it. In response to what is happening within our community, we engage in spoken word, photography, song, visual art-making, movement and performance to process and make sense of social issues such as the xenophobic racism of anti-immigrant politics. Through collective creative-making processes we express ourselves and engage in ways of knowing that otherwise we might not have a language to articulate. We also engage in the arts as part of our outreach in order to

present our work in a way that is powerful and might provoke action.

Our first creative presentation of the 'Dreaming of No Judgment' project was a myspace page (<http://www.myspace.com/dreamingofnojudgment>) we developed for other young people, the audience we were most concerned about. The purpose was to share our findings and raise the consciousness of other young people about how stereotyping works in order that they will be better prepared to challenge misrepresentations, and so that they will feel less alone. To bring our research to life, the youth researchers created a video docudrama where they performed scenes from the stories shared by the focus group participants. In addition, on their myspace they posted an interactive quiz 'Discrimination & You', which includes revealing questions such as: How often do you feel like you are living freely? How often do you feel like you belong in this country? This community? How often do you feel like your opinion/ thoughts matter?

Another audience we wanted to reach was those who made decisions that affected the immigrant community. In spring 2009, the Mestizo Collective collaborated with the Liberation School to perform the spoken word piece 'We the People' at the last night of the 2009 Utah State Legislative Session in the rotunda of the state capital. 'We the People' refers to the first line of the US Constitution, rearticulating what it means based on personal, familial and communal lived experiences. Here are a few lines that open up the piece that speaks to our project of reframing:

(One voice) We the people of the Westside

(One male voice) We from Your so-called 'shadow' lands, . . . My home, . . . My pride Land . . . Come one, . . . Come all. Welcome Home, homes!

(2 voices) Home Sweet Home.

(One voice) We are the familia, the people. We the familia who cares and has each others back. We the ones that regulate.

(one mujer) It is obvious we will not melt into the pot, but rather will savor our flavors in a pico de gallo bowl.

(one voice) We are most importantly the people who make up Utah.

Expressing pride, our collective poem articulates a sense of belonging and ownership as a basis for claiming rights.

(one voice) We who started off by putting chains on ankles and wrists, and stole dirt and earth even though

it was a gift. We who re-sell what you build and break your backs in the field so our green eyes of dead-presidents can keep slavery alive, and if you don't do your time in our factory then were sure we have one of your family doin' time in the yard without salary.

Situating immigration within a historic legacy of social injustice that includes slavery and the prison industrial complex, we challenge the definition of the 'problem'. As Robin Kelley (referencing Césaire) explains 'Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge', allowing us to imagine new possibilities (Ginwright 2008, 20). Guinier and Torres propose the concept of magic realism to explain the same thing: 'Certain promising political dynamics may be invisible to most of us at the moment because the categories we have for naming them make them invisible. Step outside the categories and suddenly there are new things to see' (2002, 25). Similarly the Mestizo youth researchers collectively challenge the metanarrative of immigration, acknowledging young people as transformative subjects, not passive victims or the collateral damage of the sweeping forces of globalisation. In the 'We the People' performance the Mestizo Collective takes up, and opens up, a new political space in the belly of the beast, the capital of one of the most conservative state legislatures in the country. Demanding our rights for 'Change! Meaningful Change!' (the last line of the piece), the Mestizo Collective speaks back in a space that is coded white, male, Republican. New ways of seeing the world inspires new ways of being in the world.

Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to the persistent, patient and fabulous Peter Hopkins. Thanks to both Peter Hopkins and Anoop Nayak for inviting me to participate in a thought-provoking session at the AAG that helped to push my thinking. I am grateful to Mrs Kinpaysby, whose ongoing support and cutting edge theoretical work is refreshing and sustaining. I am indebted to the two reviewers whose critical constructive comments were super helpful in revising this paper. How blessed am I to work so closely with my comrades in arms Matt Bradley and David Quijada who I learn from everyday and who keep me both sane and engaged. I am thankful for the privilege to work with the wonderful Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective, the changemakers of SLC. Sonia Caraveo, Mariana Ramiro and Carmela Willden worked closely with the youth researchers to create their video and the Myspace page. Jarred Martinez and X. Yvette González mentored the youth research team in their development of 'We the People'. Thank you all!

Notes

- 1 In 2009, Matt Bradley developed a Mestizo legislative internship where students visit the capital every morning to track bills through the legislative process.
- 2 All names of youth researchers and participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

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