

## The undocumented everyday

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## BOOK REVIEW

**The undocumented everyday**, by Rebecca M. Schreiber, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2018, vii +281 pp., U\$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-5179-0023-6

*The Undocumented Everyday* examines the exhibition of undocumented migrant self-representation as a political strategy for challenging dominant structures and regimes of state surveillance. It is ultimately a book about immigrant inclusion. Using pictures and videos, it explores how undocumented migrants visualize ways of belonging and deploy documentary media to rearticulate the boundaries of citizenship. A cultural studies scholar, Rebecca Schreiber's book provides probing insights into the interrelationship of the visual aesthetic – documentary photography, film, video, and audio projects – activism, and the politics of migration.

The book focuses on undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants to the United States. Schreiber uses a series of case studies of the self-representation of Mexican and Central American migrants – the book includes 27 photos taken by migrants and activists – between 2000 and 2012. Schreiber argues that each case is a struggle over meaning which is only understood within the historical and political context in which it is embedded. For this reason, the book also offers readers a helpful orientation to the evolution of U.S. immigration policy during this time period.

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 showcases two labour union-affiliated documentary projects from the early 2000s with photographs taken by migrants of their everyday lives. These images intend to challenge the criminalization and dehumanization of immigrants, particularly in locations where their rights are already circumscribed. In Schreiber's analysis, the pictures also emphasize the "disappearance" of migrants from sending communities and, given heightened border enforcement following 9/11, their inability to return home due to restrictive immigration policy.

Part 2 takes up the case of the U.S.-Mexico border and the enforcement regime in border communities. This section examines different forms of "collaboration" in the production of documentary films focused on this region. Schreiber argues that the case studies she selects from the borderlands – including the curation of migrant's documentary photography and film projects – are examples of how migrants use self-visualization to counter prevailing views that criminalize and dehumanize undocumented migrants.


Part 3 is comprised of two chapters that examine work by artists and activists. Moving away from the borderlands, the documentary case studies in this section are centered on U.S. immigration laws and policies more broadly. Here Schreiber addresses how documentary media and activism converge to highlight how the use of disruption exposes the presence of state action and the absence – or disappearance – of migrants. For example, one case is an exhibition in San Francisco in which the artists convey the "aesthetics of disappearance" that conveys the

absence of migrants due to their fear of detention/deportation, as well as their presence, through testimonies from hearings about the ICE raids (220). These chapters describe activists' strategies to use counter-surveillance – where migrants report on actions of the state – as a means to make state violence more visible.

*The Undocumented Everyday* is a thoughtful analysis of self-representation used by undocumented migrants which, Schreiber argues, are politically disruptive. The book thus relies on visual media, but her analysis also examines what is *not* represented in the photographic, film, and video work. She puzzles over how migrant self-representation at times seeks to make visible what is not there, often to protect themselves from harassment or identification. While her point would have been strengthened with data collected from the artists who produced the self-representations she analyzed, the aesthetics of disappearance seems like an increasingly important concept in the current U.S. political context.

Schreiber's work also offers a caution to advocates and allies who try to mediate migrant self-expressions, such as well-intentioned efforts to adapt documentary visualization for a particular audience or message. Her cases provide examples of social service organizations and advocates that at times co-opted the migrant self-documentation, effectively depoliticizing it. In one example, an organization took an installation of photographs and modified the exhibit to fit the goals and spatial dimensions of a large building lobby in Washington. The organization positioned the photographs as a medium for cultivating the empathy of the professional class of individuals who frequent the lobby, muting the original intent of the installation to be a catalyst for social change.

Readers who have a background in the social sciences should know that, as a cultural studies project, the book does not include a methods section. It does not explain how or why Schreiber selected the case studies or provide details concerning her analytic approach. The book is richly situated within a range of theoretical perspectives, however, and presents a rigorous exploration that promises to advance migration scholarship. It also raises questions about self-representation since 2012, particularly in social media. There is critical work to be done on how evolving forms of visualization – and the platforms which deliver this content – are being used to disrupt, challenge, and reimagine forms of belonging for undocumented immigrants. This book also raises question about the post-Obama political context and the impact of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy, both in the U.S. and Europe. How have these conditions affected the evolution of visual self-expression? What new forms of self-documentation are migrants mobilizing to challenge anti-immigrant discourse? Ultimately, this book also raises questions about how migrants themselves make meaning of these new forms of visual self-representation – and how they view the mediating influence of scholars who attempt to interpret it.

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