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## Disabled and Undocumented: In/Visibility at the Borders of Presence, Disclosure, and Nation

Christina V. Cedillo

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## Disabled and Undocumented: In/Visibility at the Borders of Presence, Disclosure, and Nation

Christina V. Cedillo

### ABSTRACT

Attention to disability and undocumented status illuminates the impact of in/visibility on multiply marginalized individuals. Visibility can prove dangerous for vulnerable populations exposed to physical and symbolic violence; yet invisibility also poses risks. Nevertheless, visibility and invisibility can also be useful rhetorical schemes. Here, I focus on branding and non/images to interrogate this ambivalence in the case of Rosa Maria Hernandez, a 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy brought to the United States when she was three months old, and that of Eva Chavez, an undocumented activist whose defense campaign publicized her role as primary caretaker of her 11-year-old disabled citizen son. These cases show that, for targeted people, in/visibility is graded, compulsory, and tactical, producing presence and belonging relative to exposure and risk.

### KEYWORDS

Branding; disability; im/migration; in/visibility; non/image

Visibility and invisibility are complex rhetorical conditions. Typically, the former is associated with presence and possibility, the latter with their lack. However, this assumption reinforces the centrality of privileged rhetorics and rhetors to rhetorical studies. This view ignores the complicated relationships to in/visibility maintained by marginalized people whose vital praxes are too often overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Invisibility can simultaneously protect vulnerable people and render them susceptible to violence; visibility can invite public support while increasing surveillance and policing. The experiences of marginalized people show that relationships to in/visibility cannot be generalized. Instead, critical considerations of visibility and invisibility must focus on their everyday material and spatial associations, particularly as they create and contest conditions of vulnerability.

Below, I analyze two cases that highlight the ambivalent impact that visibility and invisibility can have on people with multiply marginalized identities, specifically at the intersections of undocumented status and disability: those of Rosa Maria Hernandez, a 10-year-old undocumented child with cerebral palsy from Laredo, Texas, and Eva Chavez, an undocumented activist and mother to an 11-year-old disabled (citizen) son from Texas's Rio Grande Valley. I examine media coverage and advocacy group rhetorics to show how, in both situations, the threat of deportation is complicated by the presence of disability. These cases illustrate how invisibility and visibility prove compulsory and tactical for people at risk, even as these conditions signify a nationalist desire for undocumented and disabled legibility.<sup>2</sup> The examples examined here complicate static notions of invisibility and visibility, drawing attention to the interactional rhetorical dimensions of belonging, presence, and risk.

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Christina V. Cedillo is an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric in the Department of Communication and Studio Arts, University of Houston–Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058, USA. E-mail: [cvcedillo@gmail.com](mailto:cvcedillo@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>This essay was composed on Akokisa/Orcoquisa and Karankawa territories.

<sup>2</sup>I use the term “tactical” rather than “strategic” when referring to undocumented people’s rhetorical practices to deliberately invoke the distinction between schemes deployed from a place of power and those used by people in positions of vulnerability (de Certeau).

## In/Visibility: Undocumented Status and Disability

The public spatial praxes of undocumented im/migrants have received previous attention from scholars in rhetorical studies (Chávez, “Spatializing Gender”; Cisneros, “(Re) Bordering”; García de Müeller). Licona and Maldonado explain that the “regime of deportability” produces conditions of hyper/visibility and hyper/invisibility by “call[ing] migrants out from the shadows (in a spectacle of detention practices and raids) and forc[ing] them back into the shadows by entrenching notions of illegality and practices of surveillance and policeability” (521).<sup>3</sup> In response to these constraints, undocumented activists tactically draw on the powerful lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer (LGBTQ) trope of “coming out” to supplant negatively constructed images with their own stories and experiences (De la Torre and Germano; Enriquez and Saguy; Galindo). Using the term “undocuqueer,” activists point to the intersecting conditions that threaten LGBTQ, undocumented, and undocumented LGBTQ people (Seif). These contrasting deployments of in/visibility reveal that its implications depend on rhetorical socio-geographic contexts—that is, where, when, and how these conditions are experienced or exploited.

The production of visibility and invisibility also sets the onus of establishing presence against a general tendency to overlook disability as “always present” even in spaces marked by ablebodiedness (Campbell 212; Michalko 68). In their work on disability disclosure, Price et al. contend that “the ‘visibility’ metaphor implies accountability: it assumes that the disabled person who is ‘invisible’ is responsible for making himself visible, or discernible.” In/visibility and choices regarding disclosure must be understood as ongoing negotiations of empowerment and vulnerability for disabled people (Kerschbaum). As with LGBTQ and undocumented people, disabled people must often “come out” to access needed services and contest stereotypes (Cramer and Gilson; McRuer). Thus, visibility and invisibility cannot be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of seen/not seen but must instead be recognized as phenomena that derive from a matrix of factors that privilege certain bodies and jeopardize others across “structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power” (Dhamoon 237; see also Quijano).

In the cases examined here, these pressures interact to force people targeted by immigration agencies to engage the ambivalent power of in/visibility, revealing “how power and oppression interact to produce subjects, institutions, and ideologies to enable and constrain political response” (Chávez, *Queer Migration* 18). Visibility and invisibility are not neutral, happenstance states but spatialized and spatializing “instantiations of border making” that signify “inclusion and exclusion, regulation, and differently bound mobility” within “geographies of power” (Licona and Maldonado 518). Rhetorically, visibility and invisibility advance social hierarchies that enable marginalization and privilege. They attach notions of dis/belonging to bodies vis-à-vis identification and dissociation, legitimizing some and exposing others to symbolic and physical violence. However, they also prove tactically useful in challenging these conditions.

## In/Visibility: Branding and Non/Images

Despite the Trump administration’s assurances of focusing on “real criminals,” the *New York Times* reports that im/migration arrests rose more than 40% between January and September 2017 due to rescinding of Obama-era guidelines that made detention of noncriminal cases a low priority (Yee and Dickerson). As a result, on 24 October 2017, Rosa Maria Hernandez was detained by Border Patrol agents as she was transported from Laredo, Texas, to Corpus Christi, Texas, 150 miles away. The ambulance carrying Rosa Maria traveled to Driscoll Children’s Hospital where the 10-year-old was scheduled for emergency gallbladder surgery. Her parents were two hours away in Laredo, where they had moved from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, when Rosa Maria was a baby. In Texas, she had access to treatment through the Children with Special Health Care Needs benefits program (Yee).

<sup>3</sup>Except when in reference to national agencies, I use the terms “im/migration” and “im/migrant” to mean “those who have been labeled immigrant, migrant, and refugee, including the undocumented” (Arzubiaga et al. 246) whose movements are constrained by political, social, and economic forces, and to acknowledge migration across the continent as a fundamental human right.

Although Border Patrol allowed the ambulance to proceed, agents followed and remained posted outside the girl's room until she was discharged. By the next evening, they had transferred her to a San Antonio federal detention facility for im/migrant children arriving in the United States alone through the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Finally, on 3 November Rosa Maria was released and driven home with deportation charges pending (Aguilar; Chan).

A few months later, another case highlighted the precarity attending the complex of disability and undocumented status. Eva Chavez was detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in Texas's Rio Grande Valley. ICE had arrived in search of her partner. Instead, they arrested Eva, who is a domestic abuse survivor, the primary caretaker of her 11-year-old disabled son, and an activist with La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) and the Texas Latina Advocacy Network of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH). Known for her work and leadership in the movement for im/migration reproductive justice, she was arrested in the same one-month period as another activist, Alejandra Pablos, a field coordinator for NLIRH and member of the organizations Mijente and We Testify, an abortion storytelling leadership program (Vasquez). A video about Eva's case published by Neta, a social justice media platform based in the Rio Grande Valley, reveals that, although she was released, she continued her scheduled check-ins (Cardenas). NBC's national coverage noted in January 2019 that her case is ongoing (Jacobovitz).

Visibility and invisibility inform depictions of Rosa Maria and Eva by both the media and supporters, revealing how branding functions to provide the grounds for visual arguments involving Othered bodies. Jennifer Wingard argues that branding relies on "affective identification" that orients physical and affective responses toward categories that do not have to be articulated be influential (9). Branded bodies have no identity of their own, as their value is determined affectively in context, reflecting the status of the nation as a "temporal and affective [category]" (Gopinath 10). In the cases of Rosa Maria and Eva, the persuasive power of branding lies in the realm of affect rather than more explicit discourses surrounding these cases. That is, it lies in the dominant culture anxieties undocumented and disabled people are forced to signify. Deep-rooted prejudices regarding undocumented and disabled people frame the former as transgressive and the latter as costly, with the totality of these identities deemed expensive intrusions that are not the nation's problem.

Media depiction of Rosa Maria's detention countered these prejudices by justifying her treatment in the United States as a matter of necessity. Im/migration activists and lawmakers drew deliberate distinctions between the sick child and "bigger threats" posed by the violent offenders the new administration had promised to target. US Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-TX 20th District) and Henry Cuellar (D-TX 28th District) issued statements of support, demanding Rosa Maria be released and reunited with her family. Celebrities spread word of the case via social media using the hashtag #FreeRosa (Sacchetti). Editorials deemed the case a "a sickening new low" for the president (*Washington Post*). These discourses roused public sentiment by stressing her disability. For example, the *New York Times* reported that soon after Rosa Maria's birth, physicians had told her mother that "the newborn would never walk, speak or feed herself," and that she had "survived her first day thanks only to a blood transfusion from a friend of a friend, a woman named Rosa Maria, for whom the baby was named" (Yee). Given that subsequent news articles repeated this trope of helplessness, I analyze only a few representative depictions here.

In contrast, news agencies did not publicize Eva's case as widely as Rosa Maria's, perhaps because there was no "innocent child" image present to "mine a deep cultural resonance" calling for visual proofs (Demo 32, 43). Unlike Rosa Maria, whose name and image featured prominently in news coverage, Eva's son remain unnamed. In Neta's video, where he is depicted with his mother, his face is turned away from the viewer, concealing his identity. Thus, it fell primarily to activists and community supporters to argue her case by stressing her motherhood. They released statements of support and organized social media campaigns using the hashtag #LetEvaStay; by adopting the #FamiliesBelongTogether hashtag, they also joined Eva's case to the larger issue of family reunification. Activist organizations informed the public that Eva's husband had been detained by ICE, making Eva the family's lone breadwinner and sole caretaker of her 11-year-old son. A LUPE statement affirmed, "Eva's ability to live without fear of deportation is critical to the stability of

her family and community. ... Her child has special needs and depends on his mother to take him to a specialist 2 to 3 times per week” (Treviño). Although it is her son rather than Eva who is disabled, and he is never depicted except in his deliberate absence, disability nevertheless provides the rhetorical lynchpin in the campaign against her detainment and deportation.

Branding shaped how Rosa Maria and Eva were portrayed in the media. Disabled and undocumented persons become hypervisible as they are “branded,” grouped into neoliberal status categories, even as they are rendered invisible as individuals. Wingard argues that brands draw on “a backdrop of feeling that resonates with histories, rhetorics, and images that are not evoked directly but that circulate to connect our memories and bodies” (9). These meaning-making elements lie in the realm of affect, proving powerful because they are highly persuasive but cannot be countered outright, granting them greater circulation. Branding occurs through the lens of neoliberalism, an individual’s social and political value established based on their perceived earning potential versus possible consumption of public goods and services.<sup>4</sup> Oft-repeated claims that undocumented im/migrants steal jobs and resources from citizens produce latent anger and resentment, ready to be triggered in response to current events despite the presence of data suggesting the opposite is true (Beasley 11; Flores 363–64).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, people like Rosa Maria and Eva are branded “unnecessary expenses,” human beings whose human needs are subordinate to racism camouflaged as economic anxiety. Likewise, disability is reduced to a matter of cost rather than context where undocumented status exacerbates a lack of access.

The US Immigration system combines race and disability—categories assumed to be “fixed, legible, and categorizable” (Samuels 11)—into a eugenicist apparatus of classification that is used to weed out undesirable elements while creating conditions of exclusion. Here, eugenics is revealed as a fundamentally “nationalist project” (Baynton 12). The disabled and/or undocumented individual becomes both a “risky body—contaminating, boundary crossing, other” and a “body at risk—threatened by disaster and violence” (Olson 90). Their highly mediated presence provokes political fears regarding corporeal pollution of the body politic and its citizens through introduction of “foreign” contagions, ideological and somatic (Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities” 572; Flores 373). They also come to represent economic anxieties regarding the nation’s ethical responsibilities toward citizens versus outsiders. It is no coincidence that circulation of these stereotypes increases alongside economic unease. Framing im/migrant and disabled Others as “both outsiders of the community and insiders of the economy” (Wingard 5), public figures deploy disidentification to reinforce nationalism. In/visibility informs this process as technologies of specularity create “the freak,” the aberrant body that disrupts the integral, visually constituted nationalist imaginary (Dolmage 74–75).

Based on their disruptive signification, bodies take on moral and social value, a conflation that influences the immigration process vis-à-vis disability and erases the socially and politically constructed dimensions of undocumented status and disability. Biases that demand that “real” need and vulnerability be proven via a rhetorical spectacle of “legible” disability rely on the medical model of disability that frames “medical and/or health issues [as] located primarily in the failed body/mind/desire/behavior of the individual” (Schalk). As Ann Teresa Demo explains, dense media coverage requires “good visuals, strong dramatic features, and a compelling cultural mythology” (34). Together, these biases and discourse expectations require that undocumented and/or disabled people be depicted as suffering, ready to be saved by a benevolent nation. A public desire for “suffer porn” means that if Rosa Maria, Eva’s son, and their families are to be viewed as human, they must contend with branding signifying helplessness and degradation.

Hence, in a *New York Times* article, immigration activist Priscila Martinez argues that Rosa Maria was being treated “like she was the highest-priority criminal that ever walked on this earth ...” (qtd. in Yee and Dickerson). Elsewhere, Rosa Maria is described as a “fragile little girl” with the “cognitive ability of a 6-year-old” (*Washington Post*). Time notes that, despite it all, Rosa Maria tried to make her mother

<sup>4</sup>At the time of this writing, the Trump administration is attempting to further limit immigration applications under the “public charge” rule, which excludes im/migrants with low incomes if they have used public benefits previously or are likely to do so again.

<sup>5</sup>A 2016 report finds that undocumented people living in the United States contribute an estimated \$11.64 billion a year in local and state taxes, or 8% of their incomes compared to 5.4% by citizens (Gee et al.).

smile even as they both cried (Chan). She is an innocent child who exists in contrast to undocumented im/migrants who “really are” criminals. Similarly, in the Neta video, Eva’s son’s face remains out of frame although he is depicted sitting by his mother at the dinner table and during other everyday activities. At one point, the video shows Eva taking a pack of adult diapers from the closet as she explains that it is time for her son to go to bed. While attempting to depict the difficulties of her life and the dire need for her to remain in the United States, the video discloses very private information that the public has no right to claim. Her son’s plight is made hypervisible through that pack of diapers, affirming the dominant culture’s power to demand a heartrending spectacle that denies Othered people their dignity.

Thus, while these tactics prove highly persuasive, they also inure stereotypical views that further imperil im/migrant lives, particularly those that do not fit a nationalist centering of heteronormative family values. In order to contest the “threat” posed by undocumented disability to the dominant group, defenses of Rosa Maria and Eva must draw on neoliberal expectations entwined with brands while also deliberately countering threatening non/images. Sympathetic depictions of Rosa Maria and Eva rely on tropes that frame the nation as “inclusive” and undocumented individuals as “acceptable” if they fit a heteropatriarchal script (Ribero 275). Accordingly, these tropes contribute to the production of “non/images,” non-referential images that can be used to stoke xenophobic nationalist anxieties. Licona defines the non/image as “an imagining, a conjuring, a fear. ... It is a written term that refuses the idea that an image ever offers all there is to see. It is a visual and affective rhetorical claim without (the need for) an actual referent that functions as a taken-for-granted given-to-be-seen and circulates as precarious rhetorics” (169). For example, former US Attorney General Jeff Sessions and then-Arizona Governor Jan Brewer made false claims regarding violence by undocumented im/migrants as proof of the threat facing citizens living near the border. As Licona notes, Border Patrol agents could not corroborate these statements, but truth wasn’t the point—dissociation was: “In their vulnerability, proper citizens [were] marked as nationalist subjects who are deemed worthy and in need of protection, while im/migrants [were] marked as devalued necropolitical subjects unworthy of protection” (172). What mattered was the ability to draw stark, convenient distinctions between true citizens and Others based on appeals to physical risk.

Such juxtapositions can frame queer and/or disabled im/migrants as especially threatening strangers who must be denied “material and imagined belonging,” thereby uniting a national(ist) community through dissociation from the Other (Chávez, “Border (In)Securities” 138). That Other has no place in the social imaginary except as a specter of fear and no place within the bounds of national geography except as an element to be purged. Rosa Maria and Eva become sympathetically legible to the public through tropic media coverage that hinges on a contrast to the menacing non/image, obscuring the difficulties experienced by human beings who are not mothers or children or who challenge compulsory heteronormativity. Even so, individuals like Rosa Maria and Eva cannot be Subjects in their own right. They are evaluated against the non/image and, typically, construed by dominant culture audiences only through their relationships to family and non-relationships to risk.

The maintenance of heteropatriarchal family values means women and children’s roles are circumscribed according to traditional middle-class expectations. Women’s possible roles include mother and caregiver, positions that are feminine and nonthreatening. The *New York Times* quotes Rosa Maria’s mother, Felipa de la Cruz: “All I wanted was for her to get the surgery that she needed. ... When you’re a mother, all you care about is your child” (Yee and Dickerson). While a *Time* article and a *Washington Post* editorial explain that Rosa Maria’s parents are undocumented and have resided in the United States for over a decade, the former then states that “Rosamaria [sic] has been by her mother’s side since she was ... only three-months-old” (Chan). Both news items ignore her father in order to make maternal love the focus. Many news stories do not mention Rosa Maria’s father at all, or he remains unnamed although her mother is named and quoted. The advanced narrative dissociates her father from the role of parent, reinforcing perceptions of male im/migrants as more likely to be threats. This centering of maternal love, while touching, also overshadows the possibility that queer, trans, and nonbinary people might maintain close ties inside the nation’s borders or require crucial health services. The “heterosexual matrix” that (re)produces the gender binary renders LGBTQ and gender nonconforming people “literally and figuratively

immobile” (Chávez, “Spatializing Gender” 7), erasing their roles as parents, children, or guardians, or even human beings in need.

Defenses of Eva also focus on her relationship with her child. Eva is quoted as saying her fear for her son was greater than for herself when ICE knocked on her door (Nelsen). Her case hinges on a mother’s willingness to sacrifice self-respect, ethics, and freedom for the sake of her child—and therefore on her “ability to adhere to heteronormative definitions of femininity” (Nielsen 315). This impression may also illuminate the connection of Eva’s role as mother to that of her activist work by NLIRH Texas associate director for policy and advocacy Nancy Cárdenas Peña, who argues that Eva’s case is “so clearly a reproductive justice issue because she is a mother who deserves the right to parent her child in a safe environment without fear of retaliation” (Vasquez). This claim proves necessary since some audiences may see Eva’s activism as antithetical to the sanctity of motherhood. Her unnamed partner also remains out of focus. The specter of the criminal non/image—ICE agents were originally there to pick up Eva’s partner, not Eva—requires that im/migrant men “only be part of the family as an absence, even if their absence raises questions about the family’s legitimacy” (Licona 280). If Eva’s partner is not named to safeguard against ICE surveillance, dominant culture frameworks nevertheless require him to be invisible, not for his own protection but that of the nation-state’s integrity. And yet, because United-Statesian values necessarily equate (hyper)visibility with belonging and legitimacy, his absence proves suspect (see Decena).

Moreover, these depictions help produce the non/image of the unwelcome interloper and/as the “polluting” im/migrant (see Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities” 582). After Rosa Maria’s detention, the *Washington Post* editorial writers demanded of government officials, “Do the right thing, the human thing, and regularize Rosa Maria’s status so she can remain in the only home she has ever known.” Along similar lines, in a statement issued by LUPE, Eva is described as a “loved member of the community [who] belongs in the Rio Grande Valley, with her child, family, and the community she has dedicated 15 years to as an organizer” (Treviño). Her place in the community is mirrored by her place in her organization (see Ramos). This argument privileges individual experiences of a specific geography. Belonging is based on one’s history in a space, on repetition of an ethical performance over time. John-Michael Torres, LUPE’s communications director and leader of Eva’s deportation defense campaign, argued, “The impact of Eva’s case is already being felt in the community, and it’s heartbreaking. . . . [I]t’s about more than family separation. It’s ripping a person away from their community” (qtd. in Vasquez). Such claims promote communal ties and long-term residency as safe, familial markers. However, if residency is proof of citizenship, recent im/migrants become suspect and threatening. Centering the Subject who belongs entails shoring up terms of disbelonging by establishing “other others” who are necessarily pushed out of sight through appeals to the same schemes that foster vulnerability (Ahmed; Wingard).

At the same time, non/images restrict how vulnerable groups can be “seen” by training the dominant culture gaze to negative reception so that they remain invisible except when perceived from a perspective of deficit—they can only be Others. Non/images “work as disciplining delimitations to, among other things, practices of looking that make im/migrants knowable and able to be seen as always only criminals and culprits and that secure violent conditions of their sustained vulnerability” (Licona 169). In depictions of Rosa Maria and Eva, non/images include those alarming threats of violent invaders promoted by public figures and pundits that the dominant culture audience then conjures by association. Ironically, these non/images implicate women as agents of reproduction in the “immigration invasion” that portends the “death of the nation through cultural and demographic changes” (Chavez 250). Moreover, due to the palpable presence of disability, Rosa Maria and Eva must contend with the non/image of the citizen in need whose birthright is being stolen by im/migrants. This non/image obscures systemic inequality by framing scarcity as a real, external threat. These highly potent impressions influence audiences’ perceptions of undocumented and disabled individuals, even if their grounds do not exist or do not play an active role in these stories.

As a result, sympathetic portrayals of Othered individuals must counter these non/images and, as is often the case for marked, non-whitestream bodies, such depictions rely on the hypervisibility of

suffering and hardship. In so doing, these portrayals evoke the fantasy of the im/migrant body—particularly the Latinx im/migrant body—as “a foreign body” that might “potentially infect the national body” (Flores 374; see also Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities”). US political discourses have long associated Latinxs, especially Mexicans, with disability in the forms of “mental feebleness” and “national decay” (Molina 32). As Harold and DeLuca note, “It is tempting to say that bodies at risk call out to an innate human empathy, but even the most cursory review of the historical record belies any such comforting notion” (267). Since privileged bodies and identities depend on interactions with nonprivileged bodies and identities for their coherence, the latter are always in danger of slipping further into categories of deficiency (Campbell 215), making empathy a less likely response.

Unfortunately, using neoliberal nationalist frameworks even for basic survival entails an affirmation of their rhetorical grounds. Opposing spaces cannot coexist, whether at the local or international levels, whether as material geographies or sociopolitical imaginaries. Another nation becomes an Other nation, an im/migrant becomes an exception to an other Other—the nation’s “nowheres.” Attempts by undocumented people with relationships to disability to claim belonging require taking on exclusionary frameworks steeped in neoliberal branding and the use of non/images, two rhetorical strategies that make disability and undocumented status hypervisible while rendering undocumented disability invisible. Belonging can only be “achieved at a price—the discursive exclusion of non-normative others and the suppression of difference” (Ribero 90). This dissociation contributes to ongoing conditions wherein vulnerable groups must assert that they are more than brands and stereotypical non/images conjured by discourses of ideological tension.

## Conclusion

As individuals who exist in multiple cultural, geographical, ideological, and political spaces, im/migrants expose the illusory quality of borders that must be maintained to preserve dominant space; thus, preservation requires the restriction of im/migrant bodies through and in space. This process fundamentally relies on the in/visibility of undocumented people whose bodies become more “visible, even hypervisible, and therefore more readily surveilled and contained” as a result (Maldonado, Licona, and Hendricks 323). Other-Other im/migrants must remain invisible if exceptional cases are to be rendered visible to a sympathetic public vis-à-vis ableist US political discourses that rely on branding and non/images to render Otherness legible and discernable against a field of “well ordered”—and socially ordering—bodies. Yet visibility does not grant vulnerable people Subject autonomy either. Women like Felipa and Eva are constrained by motherhood; disabled children like Rosa Maria must be evidently sad and suffering while some like Eva’s son can only be known as a source of responsibility; men must be erased. Framed by heteronormative family values set ever in contrast to criminality, im/migrants who do not fit one of these prescriptive roles must be erasable and yet determinable.

A reliance on tropic brands and non/images in the production of undocumented and disabled identities underscores an urgent desire for the Other’s legibility but point up the instability of categories like disability and undocumented status as foundations for social taxonomies. For this reason, the boundaries of whiteness, ablebodiedness, citizenship, and belonging must be carefully, constantly regulated to prevent contamination by the Other (Cisneros, *The Border Crossed Us*; Ono)—or at least the “other Other.” Rhetorical strategies like brands and non/images function like politically constructed snapshots that “freeze” people in action (Chavez 58); they fix disruptive elements (disabled, undocumented, and disabled undocumented people) in place, granting citizens a national(ist) identificatory stability by preventing the traversal of categorical borders if not geographical ones. Visibility and invisibility provide crucial tools for persuading an anxious public to patrol those borders and the bodies that ostensibly signify their material veracity. The spatial precarity of marginalized groups highlights in/visibility’s ambivalent and polymorphic character, providing a needed challenge to rhetorical expectations that privilege patency. This tendency ignores how some bodies are allowed to be in/visible while others are deliberately spatialized as hyper/visible, and it largely discounts the indispensable tactical choices that vulnerable people must make regarding visibility and invisibility.

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