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LuzVerde/Greenlight: a history of advocacy for access to driver's licenses for undocumented New Yorkers

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LuzVerde/Greenlight: a history of advocacy for access to driver's licenses for undocumented
New Yorkers

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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This project is dedicated to the many advocates, activists and im/migrants who fought for access to driver's licenses across New York State.

A mi familia, y todos in/migrantes viviendo en Nueva York quien me han enseñado mucho.

This ethnographic thesis was written on the unceded Homelands of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Recollecting a brief history of la lucha para licencias: An ethnographic biography of two central activists in the Greenlight: Driving Together/LuzVerde: Manejando juntos campaign.....	9
Greenlight Timeline	31
Chapter 2 A <i>matrix of tactics</i> : The expansion of the Greenlight movement for licenses in New York from 2017-2020.....	33
Chapter 3 The creation of a <i>voiced community</i> : How grassroots social movements like Greenlight mobilize and map identity in a policy-oriented framework for change.....	58
Conclusion.....	83
Appendix.....	89
Bibliography.....	90

Introduction

“In New York City the way you travel is with your Metrocard. We don’t have a Metrocard in Kingston, NY. We don’t have a good public transportation system; if you want to get around in the Hudson Valley you have to use a vehicle, and you can drive a vehicle without a license but it’s against the law and a bad idea,” said Kevin Cahill, the assemblyman for the 103rd district of the state of New York.” (La Voz: 2018)

This project began initially with a desire to understand the functionality of the public transportation systems that the Hudson Valley had to offer. In Dutchess county, the Loop C bus circulates from Poughkeepsie to Tivoli, spanning across the entire county. The Loop C bus is one of thirteen bus lines that run on delayed schedules typically on the hour. A metrocard was my means of navigating New York City since my adolescence as a born and raised New Yorker. I have never learned to drive and still do not have a driver's license. My navigation of the Hudson Valley over the past four years of undergraduate studies has been one embedded with multiple forms of privileges. Although I cannot personally afford the expenses of a car at the moment, I am nonetheless capable and able to obtain my driver’s license.

My experience in the Hudson Valley as a non-driver has exposed me to some of the realities of trying to use public transportation to get to nearby villages. My experiences riding the Loop C bus over the years has illuminated the unreliability and inconvenience of the buses upstate, paired with various encounters with many different passengers who hop on and off the bus at its twenty nine stops. Often in my experiences on the Loop C line, groups of Latin American im/migrant workers would get on and off, sometimes at unofficial stops. Often when exiting the bus, they would continue walking alongside Route 9 where the bus passes on the northern portion of its route.

My interest in transportation began with my experiences riding the Loop C bus, but quickly transitioned due to the closure of the bus lines and many other public locations. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused New York State to shut down non-essential stores and

services, establishing a quarantine or isolation period to prevent the rapidly spreading virus. Buses and public modes of transportation had been severely minimized if not shut down for over a month. Since Loop C had temporarily shut down, I was worried about pursuing an ethnographic project about the bus and its passengers. In the earlier months of the pandemic, I noticed that the Dutchess County public buses were significantly less frequented by passengers once they reopened in mid-April.

Since I had moved from New York City, I knew it would be difficult to get around the Hudson Valley with no car or license. I began to investigate the different modes of transportation that im/migrants were using in the Hudson Valley and driving was obviously the most crucial. I understood that im/migrants were driving, but I wanted to know the difficulties and polemics of navigating the Hudson Valley as an undocumented resident. Central to my experience in the anthropology department was my focus in Latin American and Iberian Studies and discourse on migration. This led me to consider the different Latin American immigrant identities around the locus of counties surrounding my college. My maternal family are immigrants from Colombia. This aspect of my fragmented Colombian-American identity has prompted my passion to learn from, elevate and write about the lived experiences of im/migrants in New York. My attempt to understand my own connections to immigrant lived experiences is what prompted me to study anthropology concentrating in Latin American Iberian Studies.

In order to try and understand how im/migrants navigated analysis framed in micro-mobility is helpful to understand the modes of transportation available. I wished to understand the micro-mobility in the Hudson Valley with my foundational background of Latin American migratory studies, borderlands, and the crossing of boundaries. This frontier language is what I frame as macro-mobility, in other words larger-scale migration and displacement across

arbitrary national borders. By looking at driving as a means of transportation in the Hudson Valley, I argue that public transportation is one example of an alternative micro-mobility. I make this distinction here to draw on the contrasts to small forms of navigation used by im/migrants (like driving and buses) compared to larger structures and systems of immigration (crossing borders and national boundaries).

Public buses like the Loop C are an example of the immense inadequacy and unreliability of public transportation in rural New York. The Loop C was a place where I would see, hear and occasionally speak with other Spanish speaking passengers. Despite the large demographic of Latinx im/migrants living in the Hudson Valley, encountering Spanish speakers was not common for me in my time at a predominately white institution, further isolated in a predominantly white village. This had all changed once the pandemic hit, and I began to think of other means I could understand transportation. In my preliminary research, I quickly learned that besides the buses, undocumented im/migrants had been driving in the Hudson Valley for decades— regardless of their access to driver’s licenses. It became clear that other alternative modes of transportation, such as the informal system known as *raiteros*,¹ would emerge in the rural landscape similar to states like California with historically large demographics of Latin American agrarian and migrant workers. I became more interested in how im/migrants obtained licenses and other alternative modes of transportation. In this earlier stage, it was clear that driving remained essential. What my earlier research illuminated was a dense history of activism and advocacy efforts that took place to mobilize for legislative policy change regarding licenses. This policy change would eventually allow undocumented New Yorkers to obtain driver’s licenses without verified social security numbers.

¹ Raitero is a colloquial Spanish word that signifies a taxi service provider that operates privately.

The passage of the Greenlight bill (Drivers Access and Privacy Act) was a monumental shift in New York legislative history, one that would aim towards the larger goal of immigration reform and the incorporation of im/migrants into aspects of American civil society and political engagement that they had been excluded from. Greenlight was passed in 2019, and would allow for residents to obtain driver's licenses without requiring a social security number. New York became the 13th state to extend access to licenses to undocumented residents. Greenlight went into effect in December 2020 and was one of many progressive legislative shifts that happened at the end of the decade in New York while the Democratic party occupied the Senate majority. This history is current and fresh, and warrants anthropological, sociological *and* political recognition. This project became centralized around the history of the Greenlight campaign in New York because of its specificity to the Hudson Valley, where my research has been concentrated. Through this policy-oriented campaign, social change is made possible through policy change. The collectivization of communities occurred on a statewide level, and empowered the creation of a distinctive and efficacious grassroots social movement. In order to engage with such a rich and dense history that has not received academic or historical attention, an anthropology *of* activism can provide an entry point into contextualizing and emplacing this history within this specific cultural moment of transformation. In this approach, I have been influenced by other scholars who have anthropologically studied grassroots social movements. For more on anthropology of activism see Limón 1982, Fortun 2001, and Tuominen 2012.

The bilingual coalition that formed under the name of Greenlight launched in 2017 and has the potential to inspire and empower the future leadership of marginalized communities of color who have been systematically silenced. The amalgamation of resources, efforts and individuals at the forefront of this campaign constructed a revolutionary framework to achieve

social change at a state level. Due to the bilingual nature of the Greenlight campaign, I will often provide translations from Spanish to English in the footnotes based on transcriptions or interviews I conducted. If you encounter a phrase that is not translated, it is because it has already been translated in an earlier footnote.

The quotidian hardships that the lack of access to licenses has placed on undocumented residents are plentiful, and the mobilizations that occurred had the potential to ameliorate some of these conditions once the bill was in place. Located in the Northern U.S. borderlands, this movement features a unique history in which so many figures involved share a goal of immigration reform. Although a small change, Greenlight has the potential to influence national and global social policy regarding undocumented im/migrant existence.

My research for this work is primarily based in virtual ethnographic materials from interviews conducted on Zoom, a video platform commonly used during the COVID-19 pandemic. My archival research on Greenlight is based on their social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter: these two outlets provide an abundance of public access documentation of the events and participants involved in the campaign. The pandemic has had ongoing implications on my research, and more importantly the implementation of the Greenlight bill itself.

The success of the Greenlight campaign can be attributed to the activists, advocates and elected officials with whom I spoke with. Without the knowledge and experiences that they shared with me, this project and the movement itself would not have been possible. Greenlight was a grassroots movement that used a collective action framework of tactics to promote a *contramigra*² politics. According to scholars Melanie A. Medeiros and Jennifer R. Guzmán,

² *Contramigra* translates to “against la migra” (immigration enforcement). The United States is sometimes referred to as being in an immigration regime and has a nasty attitude towards im/migrants. *Contramigra* politics works against the oppressive systems of the immigration regime state.

contramigra politics are a mode of resistance in response to the oppressive regime of immigration enforcement against Latin American im/migrants in the U.S. Contramigra efforts involve many different approaches to dismantling or disrupting the system of immigration in the United States. In the aftermath of four years of Donald Trump's presidency, la migra has exponentially created more opportunities for deportation and fear. Efforts like Greenlight operate on a local scale to combat the forces of immigration law enforcement by seeking to protect undocumented im/migrant communities from deportation. With access to licenses, deportability fears can hopefully decrease in New York State. Greenlight is contramigra because it suggests a reorienting of the systems of American political life to include the voices and experiences of undocumented im/migrants, and provide undocumented residents with more protections against deportation.

Collective action in this work is defined as the mobilization of individuals under the framework of the campaign, physically and morally united. Collective action frameworks assemble and build a special type of community. Collective action is also about the coming together of these individuals often to achieve a common objective. They mobilize together, often physically, to induce or persuade change. Collective action that can infiltrate the spheres of American political life (or civil society) is the only way that tangible social change can be made. In Greenlight, collective action was a key feature of some of its motives and strategy of legislative change.

In this work, I have delineated three chapters to address different aspects of Greenlight that tie together through the crossing of cultural differences. The first chapter is dedicated to a biography of two central advocates in the campaign, Ignacio Acevedo and Emma Kreyche. These individuals were my first interlocutors and provided me with so much detail and

information about their participation in Greenlight. The second chapter is dedicated to a reconstruction of the event history through what I describe as a *matrix of tactics*. Without these tactics, the movement would not have been able to branch out and assume a successful collectivity. The final chapter will address the grassroots as a specific type of social movement, and how the history of Greenlight demonstrates the different formations of community and solidarity possible in social movements. Boundaries and borders of existence are contested and crossed in this history.

The theoretical lens of borderlands is essential to my understanding of the world, an understanding where multiculturalism produces different types of navigation between worlds. Using a basis of integral Latin American theory paired with grassroots social movement theory, I suggest that an anthropology *of* activism can help us understand this navigation I describe. Through the mixture and combinations of communities that interacted in the history of Greenlight, a multicultural world is built that can support im/migrants and undocumented existence. The history of this campaign empowered leadership of undocumented Latin American New Yorkers upstate, and is an example of the possibility of integrating their existences, experiences and voices into the American political world. This history is marked by activism and advocacy that were efficacious in making policy changes that could benefit the lives of thousands (or millions). Although much work remains to be done implementing this legislation, the efforts of this campaign history saw fruition when Greenlight went into effect in December 2020.

The Greenlight history is a smaller step in the direction of immigration reform. The legislation effectively made driver's licenses more accessible to im/migrants across the state. Although social security verification is no longer needed, other complications may arise for

undocumented New Yorkers trying to obtain a license. The COVID-19 pandemic has also made driver's license access and DMV visitations extremely difficult across New York State, further delaying the accessibility and implementation of licenses for undocumented residents through Greenlight. The qualifications of documents required in replacement of social security by the DMV are extensive and must satisfy a point system. These alternative documents are often documents that are difficult for undocumented residents to obtain or provide. This remains one of the most pressing questions about the implementation of Greenlight.

Social movements like Greenlight promote mobility by weaving together a community filled with multiculturalism. In a multicultural coalition, communities are tied together, many of them participating in unique mobility known as world-traveling. Coined by Argentinian scholar Maria Lugones, world-travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different worlds, and the advocates of Greenlight navigate multiple worlds of multicultural existence (Lugones 1987: 11). When multiple cultures coexist, individuals navigate different cultural worlds as a means of survival. For Latin Americans living in the United States, this is an experience rooted in *lo cotidiano*, a narrative expression of the lived experience (Isasi-Diaz 2002: 11) of a world-traveler. The world-travelers and advocates for Greenlight contest these boundaries and borders of social life, and are an example of when a community is shaped and defined by a moral commitment to uplifting marginalized voices.

Chapter 1: Recollecting a brief history of la lucha para licencias: A ethnographic biography of two central activists in the Greenlight: Driving Together/LuzVerde: Manejando juntos campaign/campaña.

The Greenlight: Driving together/LuzVerde:Manejando juntos campaign was a historical movement of activism and organization toward progressive legislative shifts in New York States (NYS) that would serve to protect the state's undocumented populations. The history of Greenlight involves communities that come together in defense of undocumented people and their access to driver's licenses.

A driver's license is a manifestation of the state's power to define and regulate identity and the skills of driving according to their regulations. Licenses indicate that one has provided and proved their identity to the Department of Motor Vehicles, a marking of identity, residency and entail a notion of membership to a certain community of residents in the United States. Prior to Greenlight, a social security number was needed to verify an individual's identity in order to apply for a driver's license. Licenses manifest state power and exclusion from licenses entails an exclusion from state legitimacy.

My research began as an attempt to understand the historical precedents of LuzVerde.³ I began to construct a biography of two forefront activists involved in the movement, Ignacio Acevedo and Emma Kreyche. These two interlocutors will be the main focus of this chapter because they revealed the large range of tactics used that led to the success of the movement. In order to understand the importance of Greenlight, an anthropology *of* activism can help us understand the reasons why individuals participate in movements for social change. Key to this investigation is the assertion that social change is possible through political action (Martinez 2011: 137).

³I will use LuzVerde and Greenlight interchangeably to be inclusive of the bilingual context that it was produced.

Divided into four sections, this chapter suggests that different relationships to activism regarding access to driver's licenses in New York allowed for multiple communities to be involved and invested in change. The first section will consist of an overview of the history of the campaign/movement, contextualizing the fight (or *la lucha*) for DL prior to the Greenlight law or bill. The second section is dedicated to a structure within the coalition itself called the *gabinete*, a space where impacted community members could exercise a vocal decision making agency. The final larger section is divided into two subsections that will address a rhetoric of participation in the biography of the two activists. The first subsection will focus on the assertion of existing as a *bridge* between multiple worlds, a concept which arose from Ignacio. The bridge unites the voices and lived experiences of activists, advocates and impacted community members. The latter subsection is dedicated to the perspective of Emma Kreyche, who viewed her ongoing efforts and commitments to Greenlight as a *labor of love*.

Driver's licenses in New York before Greenlight/LuzVerde.

Conversations regarding driver's licenses and state identification cards for undocumented folx in NYS predate LuzVerde. Prior to LuzVerde, NYS law required various credentials, most crucially a social security number, in order to prove an individual's identity before they could obtain a license. In 2002, former governor George E. Pataki implemented an executive order which required a verified social security number in the application process for driver's licenses (Chan 2007). *La lucha* for driver's licenses continued over the years, often concentrated in NYC. In conjunction with national security changes in a post 9/11 setting, policies against undocumented communities prevailed.

As the years went on, undocumented New Yorkers without social security numbers could not obtain licenses. Several NYC based coalitions developed a campaign to reverse the 2002 executive order. The very notion of undocumented New Yorkers having access to driver's licenses was met with extreme legislative resistance accelerated by ongoing anti-immigrant sentiments and rhetoric. Thus, conversations surrounding driver's licenses for the undocumented were happening since the start of the century, but would not meet legislative victory with the passage of Greenlight until almost two decades later.

Both of my core interlocutors were both direct participants in LuzVerde. My first interlocutor, Ignacio Acevedo, is a 42 year old Latino currently attending Bard. He is an extremely passionate and vibrant individual who has fought for im/migrants rights for years. In addition to his other ongoing commitments to the broader Upstate Latinx community, Ignacio also played a crucial role in the development and success of the coalition. My second core interlocutor is a woman named Emma Kreyche, current Senior Workers Rights advocate at the Worker Justice Center (WJC) in Kingston, New York. Emma participated in LuzVerde and is a passionate legal advocate in the Hudson Valley.

There was an emergence of license advocacy that occurred in response to Gov. Pataki's order, and Emma had informed me early on that despite difficulties mobilizing, "[a movement] developed into a full-blown campaign to reverse that Executive Order. There was not a lot of infrastructure at the time for im/migrant communities in the Hudson Valley or anywhere else really outside of New York City to meaningfully participate in that campaign." Emma described this initial movement against the order as bound to the metropolitan area, otherwise existing without a grounding in rural New York.

In 2007, Gov. Eliot Spitzer sought to change the policy of driver's licenses that had been in place since Pataki's time in office. A *New York Times* article from September 23rd that year stated that "New York State, home to more than 500,000 illegal immigrants, will issue driver's licenses without regard to immigration status under a policy change announced yesterday by Gov. Eliot Spitzer"(Bernstein 2007). This decision was met with backlash from a vast array of politicians. The order Spitzer introduced intended to go into effect December that year⁴, but on October 22nd 2007, every Republican voted in opposition. Several quintessential democrats like Kathy Hochul (then county clerk of Erie county) and even Hillary Clinton (then United States Senator) vocally opposed it. Spitzer's decision lost 39-19 in the Senate (Confessore 2007).

At this point in time driver's licenses for undocumented New Yorkers was not able to gain positive political traction after the hard knock down it received that fall. Despite Spitzer's progressive and optimistic attempt, license access was again delayed or halted in political discourse. Looking back at this moment, Ignacio explained that after Spitzer had rescinded this decision, a sensation of defeat was present. "...and they lost the campaign. So and after that nobody wanted to touch anything about this, it was just really bad, anti-immigrant narratives and all this and politicians were scared of touching this topic." We sat together outside and I listened more than I spoke. Keen to continue hearing about his perspective on this specific sentiment of defeat, I paid close attention while Ignacio described the way that this instance felt so targeted against im/migrants, congruent with anti-immigrant rhetoric from 9/11 and Republicans who were opposed to im/migrant access to licenses. Ignacio marked this as a metaphysical attack on his own community.

⁴"Department of Motor Vehicles changes License Policy to include more New Yorkers and implements new regime of anti-fraud measures to strengthen the security of the system." www.ny.gov - September 21, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071030132823/http://www.ny.gov/governor/press/0921071.html>.

Despite this sentiment of defeat, the growing roots of activism and advocacy for immigrant access to licenses did not cease. This initial defeat had a tremendous impact on the trajectory of la lucha that would become Greenlight. Ignacio expressed that the topic of licenses had adopted a taboo-like quality and politicians did not want to address it. Licenses for the undocumented was an undesirable and untouched topic. What remained was a clear sense of difficulty in creating potential allyship to continue forming a movement that had been abruptly halted in legislation. The hatred and fear expressed by politicians led to what felt like the demolition of the cumulative efforts of that year and years prior. Ignacios' tone sounded slightly disappointed when he mentioned the difficulties that this earlier defeat illuminated. These earlier political obstacles would inform the future success of the movement.

Although Emma had mentioned the lack of infrastructure regarding organizing for licenses upstate, this had changed by the early 2010's. She informed me that community meetings were held as early as 2012 regarding community I.D. programs and driver's licenses. As licenses resurfaced as a political topic, the demand for driver's license access became apparently relevant in these meetings⁵. Starting as a space of conversation, community forums regarding licenses transitioned into a full blown campaign. The campaign for license access would eventually be coined Greenlight/LuzVerde. Gaining even more momentum in the years 2015 and 2016, an infrastructure of coalition building had expanded across regions of NYS.

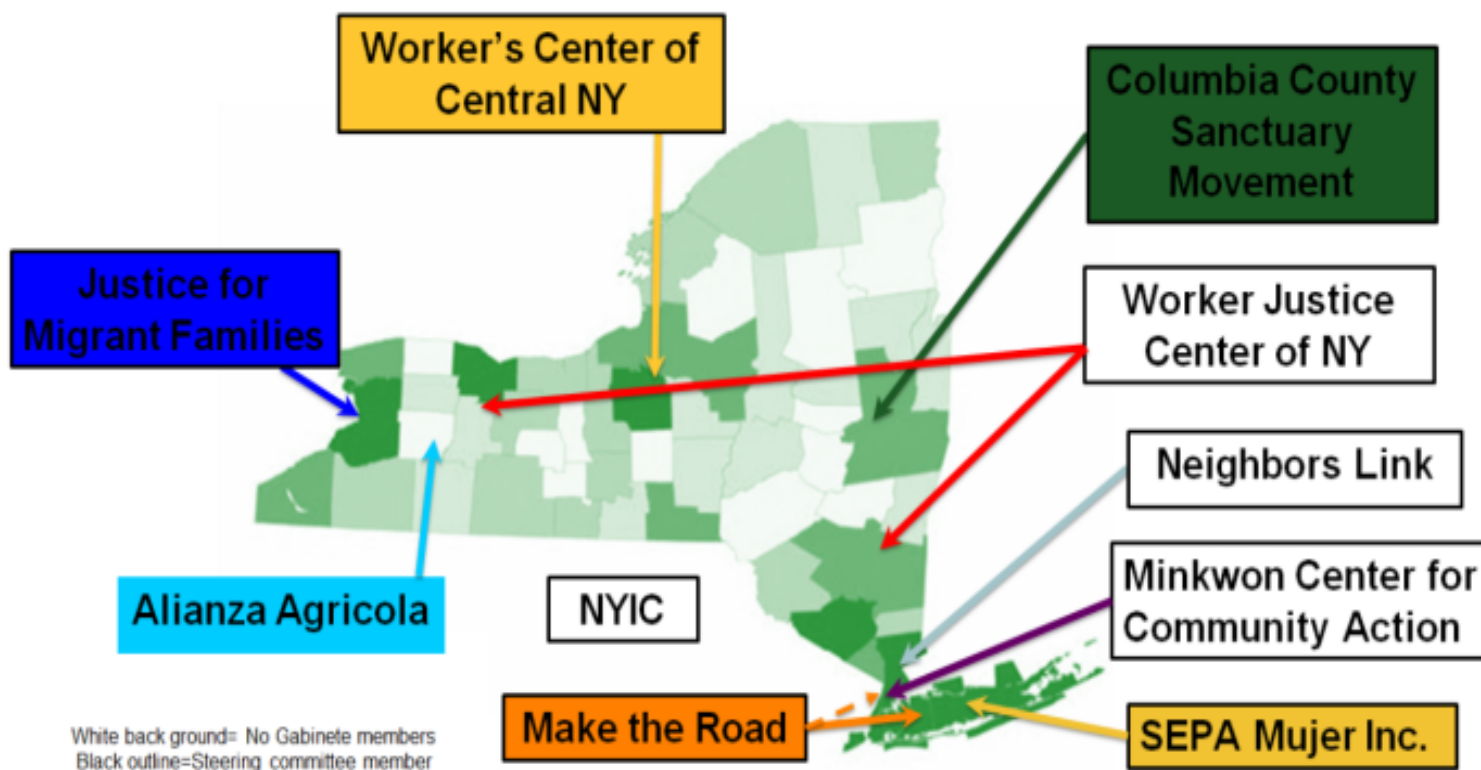
The infrastructure of coalition building for licenses was a network under construction outside of the urban confines of NYC. Around 2015-16, this expansive network consisted of what Emma recounted as "a mix of service providers and advocates and sort of adhoc community leaders across upstate New York. And I say that broadly, Hudson Valley up to, you

⁵ According to another interlocutor of mine, Juanita Lewis (an organizer at Community Voices Heard) described these reunions as an "informational session" that then shifted to become a momentous campaign.

know, the Finger Lakes and capital region.” This nexus that Emma mapped out was briefly called U.N.I.R. (Upstate Network for Immigrant Rights). Two clear topics arose from the U.N.I.R. meetings: language access and license access. This earlier coalition fragmented to better target legislation and become a policy-oriented movement for licenses specifically. This fragmentation gave way to what would evolve into Greenlight.

By 2016, immigrant rights organizations across the state began asking municipal councils in the Hudson Valley region if they would support legislation that would allow undocumented residents to obtain licenses. Branching out across the state, the coalition would be colloquially known as Greenlight. It spread its branches and extended to crucial points across the state. These branches of organizations would become known as the Steering Committee: a composition of various organizations that would construct the Greenlight Driving together/LuzVerde:

STEERING COMMITTEE and GABINETE



Manejando juntos coalition (Map of the Steering Committee courtesy of the Greenlight NY: Driving together website).

The Greenlight NY: Driving Together campaign formally launched at a press conference hosted by the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) on January 31st, 2017. As the campaign took off that year, a variety of organizational strategies were undertaken to tactically approach the necessary legislative change. Approaching 2018, continuous pressure was put on government officials that could support, co-sponsor, and pass the legislation. Rallies and other mobilizations continued to pressure individuals to support the bill and get it passed. Within the first few months of 2018, it was evident that *la lucha* for driver's licenses was grounded and solidified and had entered the respective spheres of the political process (the Assembly and Senate). The Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (colloquially referred to as Greenlight) was passed by the New York Senate on June 17th 2019. Greenlight would be in effect by December that year.

In order to focus on the history of a movement within such a context, it is crucial to look at the individuals who applied the pressure, so to speak, and were at the forefront of the fight for legislation that would aid and support im/migrant and undocumented New Yorkers. Who was involved in LuzVerde? What did they do? A biography of two central advocates at the forefront of Greenlight sheds light on the different rhetorics of participation. Participation and identity inform how these individuals perceive themselves and their existences. This ontological contestation warrants anthropological and thus ethnographic exploration through a means of virtual ethnography with most of my interlocutors. Ignacio and Emma both provide an entry point into a rhetoric of participation in grassroots social movements. Although different modes of participation in social movements are determined by one's individual location on the class structure (Piven and Cloward 1979: 3), linguistic analysis illuminates the possibility of a

traversal of social boundaries and cultural spheres. A rhetoric of participation highlights individualized intentionality and the positionality of the subjects. The way they position themselves within the framework of Greenlight advocacy demonstrates how different cultural communities come together under the premise that social change is possible through legislative and policy changes at the state level.

THE RHETORIC OF PARTICIPATION: El gabinete y Labor(s) of love:

A major insight I gained through my extensive research of the history of the Greenlight campaign in New York was the many different expressions of coalition building. Participation in social movements specifies the definitions of social boundaries and borders in a historicized moment. A biography of individuals at the forefront of LuzVerde show the possibilities that organizing can bestow when social boundaries and borders are navigated, crossed and inhabited.

Within the now multi organizational and statewide coalition, a *gabinete* was formed to empower impacted community members to voice their opinions towards the issues that directly affected their own community. Implementing a direct form of leadership and power creation, the gabinete is what distinguishes Luz Verde as a viable grassroots movement. The gabinete was created as a separate faction from the Steering Committee which was constructed by organizations and the professionals a part of them. The gabinete was a *toma del poder*⁶ where immigrant leaders who were also part of the campaign would gain financial decision making and veto power outside of the Steering Committee. Comprising several regional leaders from across the state, the gabinete helped the campaign strategize and move it forward to where it landed in 2019. Although the gabinete no longer exists, its implementation speaks to the restructuring of

⁶ Translation: an assumption of power

power distribution that occurred within the coalition.

Ignacio and Emma exemplified different relationships to their work and participation in Greenlight. Their language reflected different understandings and emplacements within the community, and they viewed their participation differently although they were connected under the goal of license access for im/migrants. For Ignacio, his participation was a necessity embedded with an immense commitment to his own Latinx immigrant community. Ignacio described himself as a bridge between his community and the professionals. To legal professionals like Emma, Luz Verde was a temporary project that was done out of love and allyship for communities affected by laws and legislation that marginalize them. Despite this difference, these two individuals share solidarity through their work as proponents and advocates for Greenlight. This dialectic between existing a *bridge* and a *laborer of love* reflects their subjectivity, while simultaneously uniting together under a shared goal. Beginning with Ignacio, I argue that communication was a key element that changed during the campaign when a shift to prioritize the voices of affected community members was ratified to create the gabinete.

El gabinete, un puente de comunicación:

I interviewed Ignacio outside of the dining hall on campus. We sat in a mask free designated circle in the grass at the top of a hill to adhere to our campus' COVID-19 protocols of social distancing. It was slightly windy and cold that afternoon, and we sat outside in the sun with our sweaters on. Ignacio and I had just left the Humanities building and continued a conversation we were having about the class we were in together. Once we sat down, I asked Ignacio if I could record our conversation about Luz Verde. Ignacio was passionate to speak about his participation and consented to a recording of our hour-long conversation. Ignacio informed me of the campaign's vast and expansive history from his perspective. Ignacio was a

co-founder and former member of the *gabinete*. The *gabinete*⁷ was central to his role in the coalition. Ignacio's narrative was empowering and extremely informative of the history of LuzVerde. Why did Ignacio feel that the *gabinete* was an important part of the history to relay to me? Precisely because his role in establishing the *gabinete* positioned him within the coalition as a bridge of multicultural communication and navigation, what I will later describe as a form of world-traveling.

Within the coalition the *gabinete* intended to empower the voices of the directly impacted community members. The *gabinete* was meant to allow these community members to participate in decision-making on behalf of the campaign. As the coalition gained strength and support in the Hudson Valley, individuals like Ignacio established the *gabinete* to create a more egalitarian dynamic of power within the broader structure of Greenlight. The formation of the *gabinete* was extremely unique to this coalition in that it gave the voices of directly impacted community members veto power and financial decision-making agency on behalf of the coalition.

Ignacio explained to me how he felt like a bridge between the professionals and the community impacted by lack of access to driver's licenses. Ignacio described his organizational position in Greenlight as a bridge of communication between the different entities in the coalition. Ignacio told me that “[I was] also part of the bridge. I was the one who was organizing the whole leadership of the people affected and I was the bridge to the professionals: to like Immigration Coalition, Make the Road, all those people.” As a bridge himself, his role as a communicator crossed foregoing boundaries. Integral to his experience, he described this as a bridge between affected people and the professionals in the coalition. Affected people in this context refers to the im/migrants of the coalition who were directly affected by driver's license (in)access.

⁷Translation: cabinet (government)

As I reflected on these metaphors that Ignacio displayed, I began to question the ontological importance that a bridge could provide. What did it mean to *be* a bridge? In this case, voices of difference serve to bridge knowledge and experiences together. Bridges regulate movement, and serve as an apparatus designed to be crossed (usually over bodies of water or unnavigable terrain.) The bridge provides a metaphor to not only water and organic boundaries, but boundaries created by humans. A bridge is created to draw two pathways or environments together, a pathway designed for the purpose of unity and connection. A bridge viewed as a non-human actor offers many anthropological insights, but particularly when bridges are anthropomorphized to comprise a part of an immigrant subjectivity.

To understand the bridge, it is necessary to grasp an understanding of it through the *gabinete*. Un puente de comunicación, Ignacio felt he was a bridge similar to the way that the gabinete bridged together the affected community leaders to the bigger structure of Greenlight. Ignacio informed me that “We created a *gabinete*. We chose 8 individuals, representatives of NYC, Upstate NY, Hudson Valley, Westchester—to represent the leadership table of the affected community. They were going to decide budgeting, negotiations, and all this stuff...” The gabinete gained veto power, and took part in fiscal decision making of the coalition. It was a formal and distinguished political entity within the coalition that attempted to create a relationship of communication and leadership for im/migrants. A strategic process, efforts to create such a bridge can refer to a linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally connected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. Such bridging occurs in this instance between a movement and individuals (Benford and Snow 2000:624).

Existing as a structure of power, the *gabinete* could provide inspiration for other community members to hear and influence decision making with members of their very own

community. The call for impacted communities to be at the table when policies are being shaped is a demand for bottom up decision making (Córdova 1997:48) The *gabinete* was tactical in that it attempted to unite the multiple solidarities present within the coalition. The *gabinete* was employed to change power and communication, not merely out of fairness. LuzVerde is distinctly participatory because affected community members could formally participate in la *lucha*, concretely exercising an agency to shape and change the trajectories and strategies of the campaign.

When Ignacio refers to affected community members, he is referring to im/migrants (primarily of Latinx descent) who were and/or are directly impacted by exclusionary policies that disproportionately marginalize im/migrants of color. In this establishment of different members within the organization, different categories of individuals are marked and mapped by the usage of “we.” In this example, Ignacio's use of the pronoun “we” connects his identity to those of the affected community. A person that is labeled as affected implicates that they have a connection to the issues at play.⁸

In this interview with Ignacio, I worked to understand the potential obstacles and challenges embedded in coalition building, particularly for the voices that formed the *gabinete* itself. To protect what they were fighting for, it was clear that the *gabinete* was needed to warrant the success of a grassroots movement that aimed to prioritize their voices and allow them to govern the strategies and tactics of la *lucha*. As a movement that seeks as a goal to empower its constituents, Greenlight needed to validate the voices of the impacted community members. Constituency as a legal term is contested here, and can refer to such examples of im/migrants emerging as actors in American civic and political life, where the capacity of self-representation

⁸ To pause for a moment here, labeling driver's licenses as just an issue is inherently problematic because it assumes that its existence is merely a solvable obstacle or tangible affair. Licenses should exist in discourse as a civil right, not a topic to add to a list of societal follies that detriment already marginalized peoples.

is indicative of migrant civil society's integration into civil society (Fox and Bada 2011:143).

Migrant civil society is migrant-led membership organizations or public institutions that fit into what Fox and Bada call four tangible arenas of collective action: membership organizations, nongovernmental organizations, media, and autonomous public spheres. Although Greenlight was not solely a migrant-led organization, the *gabinete* is an example of migrant civil society joining the coalition. The *gabinete* encouraged self-representation; rather than having advocates speak for them, they could speak for themselves.

To Ignacio, the communities and voices of affected people are crucial to the construction of a viable social movement that would empower the future leadership of affected im/migrants. A viable grassroots social movement should place those influenced by the legislation in positions of power. It should welcome and allow them to be subjects of action and governmentality on their terms; it should be a system where self-representation and an individualized power building can occur, integrating im/migrants into political discourse. The *gabinete* interrupted and negotiated a class hierarchy within the coalition and formed out of the necessity of changing the fabrics of the coalition's power dynamics, a dynamic that principally gave extensive power and decision making to the non-affected professional members.

Interested in his description of feeling like a bridge between these entities, I was prompted to ask Ignacio if it was difficult to navigate the space(s) between the professionals and affected community. Ignacio felt it was important for himself to do it because "this is what an immigrant feels here all the time. I'm able to in some rooms blend in, like right I can come here I'm dressed up. I speak English. I can blend in with this class. I'm just kind of in a multicultural-I'm one of them." Intrinsic to his experience as an immigrant living in the United States, Ignacio continued to describe this sentiment of world-traveling: "So it felt like I'm in that

circle and I know they're doing wrong things. Some stuff, it was not they were doing bad things, but they just were making decisions in the beginning without really investing in the leadership of the affected community.” Ignacio's position and defense of the immigrant community remained concrete and emphasized this leadership.

Born out of necessity, world-traveling is an intrinsic feature of the Latin American experience in the United States. Out of survival and necessity, the shift from being one person to another is how different worlds are understood and navigated. This navigation of multiple worlds is carried out by a world traveler, an individual who is capable of inhabiting and crossing multiple worlds of existence. Those who are world-travelers not only have the ability to be different in different worlds, but they have the capability to remember other worlds and their presence in them. But only when we have traveled to each other's worlds are we fully subject to each other's. (Lugones 1987: 11). The idea of existing as a bridge as Ignacio's way of navigating duo-cultural spaces. By world-traveling, Ignacio is able to successfully delve into a rather multicultural perspective in order to bridge together different knowledge and experiences in the coalition. Ignacio's example of the bridge is multicultural world-traveling, an intrinsic element to his immigrant subjectivity. This blending or multiculturalism that he proposes directly aligns with the intentions of the *gabinete*. This emergence of multiculturalism is part of *lo cotidiano*, the everyday understanding and construction of a narrated Latinx reality (Isasi-Díaz 2002, 14). *Lo cotidiano* is a ground for social change because it encompasses the changing narratives of Latin American existence. These navigation of multiple worlds are part of *lo cotidiano* and mark how the movement is shaped and effectively disrupts the realities of others. Serving to bridge together two distinctive cultural groups is perhaps one of the most difficult experiences.

The multicultural aspects of this movement also likely come out of its growing

multiregional history, reflected in how the use of *we* can encompass all types of im/migrants. Often, participants in the movement were not specified based on their nationality, but rather their relationship to immigration and Latin American identity. The specific *we* that is solidified through the *gabinete* unites multiple immigrant experiences regardless of national origin, bridging together yet another sphere of multiculturalism. In ways, the grassroots movement itself is able to migrate within its hyperlocal origins, and travel to multiple and diverse communities as it evolves into an increasingly widespread unit. Without investment in the leadership of the affected community, the coalition would not have had the same fruition. Through Ignacio's language it was clear that the intentions of the professionals were good, but had a tendency to execute decision making that did not prioritize or centralize around the affected communities concerns regarding Greenlight.

In the moment Ignacio describes himself as "one of them" he aligns himself with the identity and experience as an immigrant. To exist as a bridge means that you can traverse and navigate multiple cultures and more importantly permeate through social and existential boundaries. These boundaries construct what is known as a psychological and cultural borderland⁹. To build on quintessential chicana borderlands theory by Gloria Anzaldúa, to exist between two cultures, the bridge is where one exists and where another liminal borderland is born.

Divisive in their nature, arbitrary borders are landmark features of social stratification in multicultural societies like the United States. Bridges are used by the marginalized to connect and dismantle oppressive counterparts in order to obtain a self-produced and self-actualized form of power (or reclamation of a pre-existing power). Latin Americans in the United States bridge

⁹ A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants."(Anzaldúa 2012, 3).

together multiple groups and cultures, and Ignacio's relationship to this bridge within the coalition was urgently personal to his position in the movement. The *gabinete* was successful in bridging together the voices of the impacted community to the professionals and empowering leadership, but had its problems. After our interview, Ignacio had texted me mentioning that a few *gabinete* members "disliked what the Greenlight coalition had become." I was interested in the possible failures or anxieties about the *gabinete's* implementation. I wanted to further investigate this even though the *gabinete* was no longer intact by the time my research began.

Until it disbanded closer to the legislative win, the *gabinete* existed as a political and self-actualized tool of power that allowed individuals like Ignacio to begin to establish leadership among the affected community of im/migrants. But to other members of the broader coalition, it is important to contextualize how they view and describe their participation and membership to la lucha. Looking at my interview with Emma Kreyche, the usage of the phrase *labor of love* was crucial in mapping out her relationship to the work as an ally and professional. This influenced her understanding of the desire for social change and the collective goal of licenses through LuzVerde.

Labor of love: a project

Inclined to hear from other participants in the coalition, I was intrigued to reach out to Emma Kreyche because of her role as a forefront Greenlight leader and advocate. I reached out to Emma after I found her contact information on the Worker Justice Center (WJC) website. Since Ignacio had referenced Emma, I knew that she was someone who could tell me about Greenlight from another perspective. I reached out via email and we had organized a time frame dedicated to a thirty minute interview. We conversed over a Zoom meeting and I sat in my

apartment at my dining room table as she sat in her office.¹⁰

As the interview began, I started off with a rather biographical question to see when she had first gotten involved in Greenlight. Emma began by telling me how she got involved in immigrant advocacy. After graduating from Bard College, Emma worked for the Rural and Migrant Ministry in Poughkeepsie for about two years. Participating in various organizational efforts over the following years, Emma joined the WJC in 2012. She described to me the implementation of community i.d. initiatives in localities of the Hudson Valley. Leading up to Greenlight, these community i.d. programs sought to provide im/migrants with forms of photo identification cards that could aid in protections within the community.

From her perspective at WJC, “We worked -we produced -this was like an unfunded project. It's just a kind of a *labor of love* where we brought together advocates. We started calling this coalition U.N.I.R.– Upstate Network for Immigrant Rights. For about a year or two we met in person. We did a series of in-person meetings in different regions of the state.” Pointing to several major themes of participation in grassroots activism, I was interested in her use of different words to describe LuzVerde. One being the aspect of an *unfunded project*, pointing to a lack of monetary investment in the cause at first. How do unfunded projects reach the potential to become statewide campaigns for legislative change? Despite initially lacking monetary investment, the movement was one that assumed momentum through those who worked and volunteered at different levels. Emma being one of them, her language reflects her engagement with the work and its trajectory.

A willing act of care, volunteerism is a crucial element to this project for Emma.

Exercised as an act of love, her volunteerism and commitment to the campaign's base building fit

¹⁰ Both within 15 miles of one another, we had connected through Zoom because of the ongoing risks of in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

into her conceptualization of it as an ongoing and temporal project. *Love*–to Emma– was part of the reason for her immense participation in Greenlight. Invested in helping undocumented New Yorkers gain access to driver’s licenses, Emma adopted a political perspective on the issue by giving her support and dedication.

Emma supported and facilitated the growing and statewide recruitment that led to Greenlight. The phrase *labor of love* connotes a task executed voluntarily, done without foreseen benefits or rewards.¹¹ Closely related to a mindset of volunteerism, *labors of love* manifest out of a willingness and urgency attached to participation in im/migrant advocacy. Emma’s work and commitment to Greenlight existed on somewhat of a volunteer basis since the WJC is a legal services provider, not a base building advocacy group. Volunteer work encapsulates a certain commitment to *la lucha*, one that should exist without expecting funding.

Emma’s use of the word “project” to describe LuzVerde indicates a provisional feature of its existence as temporary, one that is open to change. The use of the word “project” connotes an experimentability because it is malleable– able to transform in agenda and strategy. In my interview with Emma, she never used the word grassroots, but made her position clear as an ally in the movement. Since Emma is not an immigrant, she constructs herself with the position of an outsider who cares for these issues out of love and care for the impacted communities.

Volunteerism being a partial relationship to the trajectory of the movement, the combination of these volunteers and impacted community members comprised the Greenlight coalition. Done out of love and commitment to the betterment of migrant civil society, Emma is a dedicated defender of im/migrants. Although she is not directly impacted by this legislation, the communities that she helps in the Hudson Valley will and are. She remains a committed advocate

¹¹ “Labor of love.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/labor%20of%20love>. Accessed 2 Dec. 2020.

and activist to this day. Emma, through her work as a legal advocate, certainly fits into the model that social change is possible through policy change.

Framing Emma's participation within a framework of volunteerism is useful, but also ignores the fact that she was paid for this work by the WJC. Emma pointed this project was unfunded because it did not have any type of funding that came outside of local organizations. Since WJC is a legal service provider, they are not a coalition building organization. They provide legal assistance and pursue justice for those denied human rights (with a focus on agricultural and low wage workers). Although the WJC is primarily a legal service provider, they do participate in advocacy campaigns for social justice.¹²

Emma provides the example of an ally who is willing to help marginalized immigrant communities achieve civil rights like driver's licenses. What distinguished her from Ignacio was precisely her identity-based relationship to the work, and her experience having grown up a citizen of the United States. A part of the professional sphere of the bridge, Emma is a member of an institution that works within the legal frameworks of American society, while simultaneously participating as an activist and advocate. Since the WJC is an enrolled member of the Steering Committee, the relationship between Ignacio and her is one pertinent to the bridge that was needed. Through her work as a legal service provider, Emma certainly would agree that social change is possible through policy change and that was precisely why she supported Greenlight.

Since Emma was a forefront figure of Greenlight she informed me about the movement from her lens. Trying to understand how she viewed the intentions of community making and

¹²According to their website: "WJCNY confronts systemic injustices by supporting worker organizing and advocating for policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels. We partner with grassroots community-based organizations and worker centers to support collective action and empowerment across the state". Below this statement is a photograph and description of the Greenlight campaign. <https://www.wjcnyc.org/advocacy>

coalition building, Emma emphasized a commitment to the creation of longstanding power and leadership that would continue after initial organizing took place. To build the base was important, and this would align with the self-actualized power that Ignacio and members of the *gabinete* exercised. From her professional stance, “part of our intention in going into the coalition building, into the campaign was about building infrastructure over the long term for sustained organizing and building power among immigrant communities outside of New York City. That was like integrated into our approach from the get go.” Emma was drawn by her love and dedication fighting for immigrant rights that she dedicated years in the cumulative efforts of Greenlight.

Building this power for immigrant communities outside of NYC was a crucial aspect that supported Greenlight’s urban to rural shift in focus. Since Emma worked at WJC in Kingston, the efforts of her participation were committed to supporting im/migrants upstate in the Hudson Valley region specifically. Since driving is a necessity in rural New York, it was important for this coalition building to occur outside of the city to expand across the state. Expanding the movement across the state was one of the major tactics of the movement, and allowed for professional spheres to unite across geographies.

Working within the professional spheres of legal work and immigrant advocacy, professionals part of the Greenlight Steering Committee could exercise expansive power over potential legislative change, and helped apply pressure through the institutions they were part of. In a sense, Emma is also a world-traveler because she navigates multiple spaces: legal work and activism. Dealing with professionals with degrees and those without, Emma interacts with different community members in many ways. She travels sociological boundaries that separate lawyers and the directly affected community by participating in activism and having

conversations with advocates alike. Drawn by her love, Emma helped build the bases of infrastructure of communication between legal professionals like herself to those who would benefit from Greenlight legislation. This demonstration of different communities coming together is polysemic. Different members of the Greenlight coalition had different meanings and interpretations of their participation in community. Professionals are bridged together within their context of the Steering Committee, as well as the bridging that occurs between them and individuals like Ignacio. In all, these communities come together under the shared goal of licenses that would benefit all New Yorkers, especially undocumented im/migrants who have been historically excluded. They are united under the premise that policy change will lead to social change. A biography of these two major participants in LuzVerde shows their nuanced and localized contexts, as well as how their identities inform the way that they see the community coming together in coalition.

Both interlocutors shared a commitment to the work for different reasons. Two subject positions can be identified that were crucial to the campaign: a bridge and a labor of love, two roles are inhabited though an interactive community focused on navigating and crossing points of difference. Both exemplify roles in the bridging together of multiple communities, crucial to the configuration of the grassroots movements. Emma and Ignacio are both united under the shared goal of a policy-oriented movement. This movement seeks to externalize undocumented existence and empower their leadership. Greenlight was ultimately a grassroots movement, a thematic label that I will discuss and analyze in the final chapter of this work. In the construction of a coalition, multiple organizations, geographies and identities are coalesced.

This movement seeks to externalize undocumented existence and empower their leadership. The bridge is when existences are externalized and recognized as having a voice and

say in changing a system. In labors of love, solidarity is externalized between non-affected and affected communities (professionals and im/migrants). These differences embody the *bridge* and *labor of love* and matter greatly to this method of externalizing the existence and lived experiences of undocumented im/migrants. Both are focused on crossing borders and managing difference inside of the movement. Emma does this by going outside of the boundaries of her job, a role that is needed to exist to allow the movement to reach multiple communities. Together, bridges and labors of love assist in integrating migrant civil society into the greater structure of American politics, with a policy-oriented focus. In the following chapter, I will analyze the ways in which the tactics taken up by leaders like Emma and Ignacio were efficacious to the trajectory of Greenlight's success in 2019. Greenlight would be impossible without the community and commitment that Ignacio and Emma presented to me in our interviews. Their use of many tactics to expand the movement effectively achieved legislative change to allow undocumented im/migrants in NYS to access to driver's licenses. The tactics used can provide possible inspiration for local, national, and potentially federal change in regard to incorporating im/migrants into modes of political and collective action.

Greenlight History: Key Events Timeline

2016

JULY 24TH Community Forum: Santa Cruz Iglesia. Kingston, NY.

SEPTEMBER 17th Creating a map of power for the campaign. Main Building at Vassar College. Poughkeepsie, NY

2017

JANUARY 31ST Formal launch of the Greenlight NY: Driving together/ LuzVerde NY: Manejando juntos in Albany, NY.

Press release of an analysis of the fiscal costs and benefits of expanding access to driver's licenses for all New York residents. Released by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer, the Fiscal Policy Institute and the New York Immigration Coalition.

MARCH 7TH Rally in Albany addressed at Governor Cuomo, 350+ members and supporters of the campaign join at the state capital.

MAY 8TH Call in Day to local assembly members, call the chair of the transportation committee, David Gantt, and call Speaker of the Assembly, Carl Heastie.

2018

APRIL 18TH Greenlight Bill Launch introduced into Assembly.

MAY 4TH Call in Day to local assembly members, call the chair of the transportation committee, David Gantt, and call Speaker of the Assembly, Carl Heastie.

JULY 10TH The Poughkeepsie City Council voted unanimously to approve a local law creating a city ID available to ALL residents of the City of Poughkeepsie.

JULY 31ST Call-in day to Governor Andrew Cuomo.

OCTOBER 22ND Green Light NY: Driving Together Statewide Coalition Holds a "Day of Action" in Albany to Lobby for Driver's Licenses for All. Press conference, hundreds gathered at the steps at Albany.



Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (S1747B) or Greenlight

Summary:

Authorizes the department of motor vehicles to issue standard drivers' licenses and restricts what information can be retained and given out on those applying or holding standard drivers' licenses.

2019

JANUARY 31ST Bill reintroduced into the Senate (S01747) and the Assembly (A03675)

MARCH 2ND Community Forum at Middletown recreation center organized by Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson and Greenlight NY: Driving together in Middletown, NY.

Speakers: Joe Destefano (Mayor of Middletown) and Jen Metzger (Senator)

MARCH 12TH Large Rally in Albany, nearly 1,000 New York residents and coalition members, Green light shirts.**

MARCH 16TH Juan Figueroa (Sheriff of Ulster county) supports Greenlight

JUNE 17TH The Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (Greenlight) was passed in the New York State Senate in Albany NY

Chapter 2: A *matrix of tactics*: the exponential expansion of the Greenlight movement for licenses in New York from 2017-2020

In the vast collectivity that became Greenlight, many different tactics were used that directly influenced its passage in 2019. It is helpful to map out the use of different tactics and mechanisms of advocacy that took place through collective action. Scholars Jennifer Guzmán and Melanie A. Medeiros both suggest that although driver's licenses will not resolve the multiple forms of precarity that im/migrants experience in contemporary immigration regimes, Greenlight mobilization efforts combat structural vulnerability and act as a mode of executing a *contramigra* method of resistance. Guzmán and Medeiros build on De Certeau's notion of tactics as an art of the weak; tactics allow the disempowered to move creatively within social and structural systems that were designed by the powerful (Meideros and Gúzman 2020:141).

Before I detail the tactics used in the Greenlight movement, it is important to outline my own definition of tactics. I view tactics as an action (individual or collective) that works towards a larger agenda. I do not take up De Certeau's idea of tactics as *just* for the weak, but rather interpret tactics as a means of action to circumvent from within a system designed by the powerful. Greenlight and its many tactics fit into the broader strategy of obtaining access to licenses through state legislation. Quite simply a strategy can be thought of as a plan, and a tactic is the specific action that will execute it. In Greenlight, the strategy was to change legislation and use a variety of tactics to move and circumvent the coalition's position as weaker than those in positions of political power. The Greenlight coalition was tactical and used these tactics everyday as actions that effectively alter and disrupt lo cotidiano. Greenlight had to work within and outside the frameworks of democratic systems in order to branch out as a strong state-wide coalition. Im/migrant and ally efforts to pass Greenlight legislation existed as a mode of resistance within a system that has historically disempowered undocumented people. From 2016

to 2021 (now) the Greenlight coalition used a variety of tactics that are emblematic of grassroots social movements.

One may wonder, why were multiple different tactics needed in the Greenlight *lucha*? The multi-tactical approach undertaken was needed to produce an efficacious mobilization of different communities that could be constructed with narrative momentum. In this chapter, I will refer to the multi-tactical approach that sought to mediate tensions between the grassroots and state power as a *matrix of tactics*. A framework of matrices can incorporate an array of different tactics to mobilize localized identities. The coalition is only as strong as its components, functioning best when they are based on these localized identities (Córdova 1997:49). The cultivation of alliances within the matrix uses these strategies to enter the institutional and political arenas. An enhancement of mobilization occurs in this process, where communities come together to strategically enter these spaces (Martinez 2011:126).

This chapter is dedicated to an autotelic recollection of events in the history of Greenlight. Although the tactics listed attempt to follow a chronological schema, they overlapped and recurred throughout the four years of archival documentation of the movement. The *matrix of tactics* reveals the coordination between communities that took place, and the back and forth communication between advocates and legislative decision-makers in democratic systems. Each tactic is a demonstration of ameliorative collective action, and a helpful way to understand the objectives within the matrix is to center on who(m) each tactic addresses. Each tactic explored has a distinct structure of addressivity, one that changes per genre and may overlap. Addressivity is what allows us to differentiate the intended audience, or who each tactic is addressed to.¹³

¹³ Addressivity is a quality of an utterance: that utterance exists as a specific act of speech that one says to another on a specific occasion. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, an utterance is a dialogic historical event that has a specific and contextualized addressivity (Morson 2006: 3)

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to what may be viewed as a more preliminary tactic: earlier Greenlight community forums that introduced a sense of public belonging and open communication. The second section is dedicated to the tactic of lobbying, where both physical lobbying at the state capital and phone call days were utilized to apply pressure to figures in centralized government. Lobbying was crucial in establishing an assortment of addressivities across several different communities. The third section will centralize around rallies as another crucial site of public gatherings, with concrete demands and objectives. These public demonstrations bring the different communities together towards the goal of driver's licenses for all. The fourth section will focus on the overarching tactic of social media as a platform to disseminate information and organize Greenlight supporters who viewed their Facebook and Twitter pages. To conclude, the final section will be about the tactics employed by legislators who sponsored or supported the Greenlight campaign: bill sponsor and Senator Luis Sepúlveda (of the 32nd district) and former Senator Jen Metzger (from the 42nd district).

The *matrix of tactics* is what allowed the Greenlight movement to be strategically successful as it branched out as a statewide coalition. Since New York City communities and legislators had long supported Greenlight, these tactics mattered most in rural New York. The *matrix of tactics* utilized consisted of a ranging variety of community forums, rallies, lobbying, social media, and educational agendas conducted by the many different participants. In the Hudson Valley, Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson (NLMH) was integral to the organizing efforts in Dutchess and Ulster Counties as well as the capital in Albany. The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) was also a crucial organization that spearheaded the formal launch in 2017. The addressivity illuminated in each tactic demonstrates the importance of the public, and how

publics come to resemble im/migrant civic engagement in society at the political level (Fox and Bada 2011:142, Warner 2002:414).

Community Forums

The Greenlight coalition staged a number of community forums, particularly towards the beginning of the campaign. Community forums were held at a variety of public locations in the Hudson Valley, like community centers, schools, and churches and in organizational office buildings in Albany. Community forums are a means in which the community, at localized levels, can discuss and communicate issues and concerns that they have where they live and inhabit. Community forums were addressed to local residents of Upstate New York who could be persuaded that they were directly affected by transportation access and lack of driver's licenses, and had the potential to create solidarity and allyship with other residents of the community. Community forums occasionally included local authorities such as mayors or elected officials. These three distinct communities are each given time on the stage in this performance of democracy. These three communities are the im/migrants (the affected community), advocates and activists (professionals) and elected officials (senators). Often held in public spaces like churches and recreational centers, Greenlight community forums were organized by members of local upstate communities who were passionate to speak about issues that immigrants and other community members faced in regard to transportation. Not all community forums were organized at such a local level, and some were formally organized by workers rights organizations like the Workers Center of Central New York.¹⁴

Greenlight community forums raised an awareness towards the urgency and necessity of driver's licenses. Emma Kreyche, my secondary interlocutor, had informed me that in other

¹⁴ Community forums were publicized on the Greenlight Facebook page as early as 2016.

community forums predating Greenlight, the urgency and demand for licenses repeatedly arose. The forums were structured so different members could speak for themselves, pointing to how community forums exist as a dialogue that jumbles together many different community members. Membership to these community forums and discussions was not reliant on citizenship to the U.S., a separation from the Anglo idiosyncrasy that membership in society is reliant on citizenship. Non-citizen involvement in Greenlight community forums gave space for the perspectives of the community that were directly affected by the lack of access to driver's licenses. The forums were a designated safe space for conversation and education about the necessity and demand to push for access. A safe space in this context meant Greenlight community forums dually performed as a sanctuary space for a dialogic mixture that sought to address the realities of community existence.

Community forums exist as a site of community engagement, where ideas, concerns and beliefs can be publicly expressed in a respected space designated for that. Community forums usually start with an individual agenda or list of possible topics or objectives of discussion. The stage of community forums is set once it has been introduced by one if not more individuals. Community forums for Greenlight were obviously focused on access to driver's licenses, a problem community members were currently facing. Greenlight community forums often began with brief presentations and followed by personal testimonials of those who were willing to share their experiences regarding access or lack thereof to driver's licenses.

Greenlight community forums were often held in public locations like churches. Churches, a public space of worship historically protected by the state, reveal an alternative public, one that welcomes anyone regardless of their immigration status in the United States. A public can organize itself outside of the confines of state institutions, law, formal frameworks of

citizenship, or within preexisting institutions like the church (Warner 2002: 414). The alternative Greenlight public operated within institutions like the church, existent outside of the formal confines of citizenship to the United States. These forums welcomed community members to join in dialogue regardless of their im/migration status. Advertised to the public on social media, community forums held in local Catholic and Episcopal churches were spaces where individuals—regardless of their faith—could gather in discussion. Another distinctive feature of these community forums was their non-confrontational nature, given that they welcomed different perspectives and ideas brought to the table.

One example of an earlier community forum regarding licenses in the Hudson Valley was at the Iglesia Santa Cruz in Kingston, NY. On July 24th 2016, community members gathered in Ulster County's largest city to publicly discuss the hardships and problems that the lack of licenses had imposed on undocumented residents in rural New York. One post on the Greenlight Facebook page addressed this specific forum, accompanied with photographs and a video that documented it. In one photograph, Emma Kreyche is standing in the right corner of a line of individuals who hold a large yellow banner with big black capitalized letters that states: "No somos uno. No somos cien. Somos milloooooones, Cuéntenos bien"¹⁵ (Appendix A). Another photograph depicted individuals attending this forum. They are seated in foldable metal chairs arranged in an oval shape around a powerpoint presentation. La Virgen de Guadalupe can be seen in the background as the community attentively listens to the presentation, and personal testimony given by a man named Alfredo (Appendix A).

Alfredo was an outspoken latino community leader and is shown speaking in a thirty-second clip from the forum. According to the video and accompanying post, Alfredo states that "Quiero cambio—Yo quiero cambio para mi en primero—Si yo cambio puedo hacer cambio

¹⁵ Translation: We are not one, we are not a hundred, we are millions, count us well.

para todo mi comunidad.”¹⁶ Inciting encouragement to bring change to *his* community, forums like this were a means of vocalizing the issues that im/migrants in the Hudson Valley faced. The forum was a space where they could speak out about this and create a path or system to address their concerns concretely. Greenlight community forums provide a moment where the individual is coupled with a sense of collectivity. The forum in its inherent structure allows for the possibility of one to feel part of the community—in other words, to embody the sentiment of the collective. In Alfredo’s redefinition of the conceptualization of community, he inserts himself as part of the community. The community that Alfredo refers to is the im/migrant community that he is a member of, many of whom are deeply affected by the realities of laws that have prohibited their access to driver’s licenses.

This forum was able to create space for individuals like Alfredo to feel a sense of protection, empowerment and collectivity. A moment where a distinctive emotional vulnerability is present as well, the forums leave an open possibility for people to form a sense of belonging in a place where they may not have felt it before. Truths can emerge from conversation, and community forums about Greenlight allowed for anyone to participate and talk about why they needed licenses, and how they were going to get them.¹⁷

The formal launch of Greenlight was an example of a different type of community forum. This public launch intended to demonstrate the campaign’s intentions and shared the qualities of other previous community forums. At the launch, several individuals shared personal testimony on how Greenlight would benefit them and their communities. Latinx individuals gave their

¹⁶ Translation: “I want a change - I want a change for myself first - and if I change then I can make a change for my entire community”<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1333933439954990>

¹⁷ In community forums like this one in July 2016, driver’s licenses and identification cards (municipal) was one topic that repeatedly came up in the Hudson Valley. According to Juanita Lewis, these events were often bilingual, if not conducted entirely in Spanish with interpreters for English speakers. This emphasis on language, particularly the Spanish language, further pointed to the immense presence and significance of Hispanic and Latinx communities (like Alfredo) in the Hudson Valley community forums.

testimony on a recorded Facebook live video from January 31st, 2017. Among these individuals were some upstate residents who spoke about how the topic of licenses affected them directly, and why they needed it. Below are transcriptions of individuals who spoke at the launch in Albany (kindly translated to English by a woman from NYIC).

Event: Formal Launch of the Greenlight Campaign

Date: January 31st, 2017

Location: NY State Capitol Building- Albany NY¹⁸

Individual: Luis Jimenez

Occupation: Dairy industry worker

Statement: “We are responsible workers and want to contribute to the economy of the state and the city. All of the benefits that we will receive will also be benefits for the rest of the state. and also because of the long time we have been working here, we also have families and we want benefits for our families. Because our children, as US citizens of this country, have the right to be educated with dignity. For us to be better parents, we have to contribute to their education. We are very dedicated and committed to this, together we can achieve driver’s licenses. This is a necessity not a privilege. Thank you everyone for your attention and your time.”

Individual: Jovani Brano*¹⁹

Occupation: Workers Center of Central NY (Syracuse)

Statement: “We know that the first thing a police officer asks for if they stop us is a driver's license and if we don't have it we could be in problems with the authorities. It's unjust that how much we contribute to this country we do not have access to driver's licenses. I think it is time we have access to driver’s licenses so we can drive now. This campaign is going to demonstrate to the community that we really need driver's licenses, to avoid problems. We are here fighting and we're going to keep going until we win.”

Individual: Ray Morales

Occupation: Community Voices Heard (Orange County)

Statement: “I come from the Hudson Valley and I am an active member of Community Voices Heard. The reason I am here today is to share my experiences and my testimony. You have heard from my partners about the need of having a license. A few years back because I was so

¹⁸ This event has been transcribed from a Facebook video post on the Greenlight page.

¹⁹Possible incorrect spelling of his name due to inaudible part of the video.

desperate for a driver's license, I was a victim of two frauds. You might wonder why I am still bringing this up years later. I share this because this was traumatic for me and my family. Imagine you work for 2 to 3 weeks to save money and I was frauded. One of them is behind bars for what he did to me. The other is still around, doing the same thing. I am not the only one this has happened to. One of the main lessons was that it hurt my family. I struggled to feed my family because I lost my wages. We are launching this campaign today so that immigrants like me can have driver's licenses. Do not be afraid of these new nationalist policies. We know it won't be easy but we can achieve it. But remember *no somos uno, no somos cien, somos millones, cuéntenos bien.*”

Given a space at the launch of the coalition to speak about how these issues personally affected themselves and their community, the mix of individuals who spoke testified to the realities of people that would greatly benefit from Greenlight. This event is significant in the event history of the campaign, but also in the fortified sense of community it draws so densely upon. A sense of community is present when personal testimonies are shared, paired with invigorated chant of many of the participants. The voices vibrated in the Facebook live video. Everyone in frame could be seen chanting “No somos uno. No somos cien. Somos millones, Cuéntenos bien.” Stated at the end of Ray Morales’ statement, this slogan or chant was clearly one that had stuck with the movement, through its start as a community forum discussion.

Another notable Greenlight community forum held closer to the legislative win in 2019 was in Middletown, NY. The forum was held by Nobody Leaves Mid Hudson (NLMH) and the Greenlight NY: Driving together coalition in the Middletown recreation center. The first fifteen minutes of the forum was for arrival and music, followed by a welcome prayer by Pastor Charles Ryu. The forum transitioned into an introduction by NLMH and Greenlight. Present at the community forum was Middletown mayor Joseph DeStefano, who spoke first. In his speech, DeStefano spoke to the community members present to express his official support of the campaign and bill. After DeStefano spoke, personal testimonies were shared by the community present. The next governmental figure to speak was Senator Jen Metzger. In her small speech at

the forum, former Senator Metzger stated, “A big task for everyone and advocates: educate other people in the community and all our communities about this issue. When I talk with people outside of cities and outside of some towns in Sullivan County and other places they don't know anything about this issue.” In this sense, Senator Metzger demonstrated both her support and legislative advice to advance the campaign in the next few months approaching the vote.

This forum consisted of various different community members. Generally speaking the forum was attended by the Middletown community, members of NLMH, the mayor and a senator who expressed their support. In the Facebook stream, enthusiastic chanting vibrated from the audiences seated in the gymnasium bleachers. The floor of the gymnasium served as a stage for the speakers of the forum. The mix of testimony and support from members of local government provided a unique moment where a forum seemed to have qualities of a rally as well. Chanting, singing, music, speeches and personal testimonies were shared on a loud-speaker within the intimate yet public environment of a community forum.

A place to discuss organization, community forums quickly transitioned as the movement became locomotive. Community forums built support and allowed for individuals to talk *like* a community. The affected community gained the support to speak in these spaces, while professionals and allies gained a distinct authenticity through their participation and/or allyship. The authorities or elected officials gained a new constituency in the sense that a unified community of im/migrants supports them and/or vice versa. This statement makes me wary that some authorities would not consider these communities part of their formal and legal constituency because of their connections to voting and elections, but nonetheless, they are supported by elected officials in a moment like this.

Lobbying

In the extent of my research looking through documentation of lobbying that occurred for Greenlight, lobbying was predominantly in two distinct forms. Call-in days and lobbying at elected officials offices were the primary ways that Greenlight sought influence from politicians. The relevancy of phone-calls to elected officials and lobbying in Albany were successful tactics for applying pressure to elected officials with political power. Call-in days were employed through years.²⁰ The intention of lobbying is to seek influence from one individual with a goal of persuasion. Often addressed to a specific legislator or elected official, lobbying is targeted around a primary or singular addressivity. Framed dialogically, lobbying often expects a response or reciprocation from the individual that is addressed.

Greenlight call-in days often targeted specific elected officials like the governor, assemblymembers and senators. Call-in days continued after the introduction of Greenlight legislation to the chambers in Albany and continued until it was passed in 2019. Some examples of important phone-in days are depicted below, drawn from the Facebook page. Phone calls to elected officials or representatives of districts located within the nexus of the Hudson Valley were integral to Greenlight's lobbying approach. One large and notable call-in day was on May 4th, 2018. Followers of the Greenlight Facebook page were asked to call three different people. First, to call your elected NY Assemblymember and to let them know you are a constituent.²¹ The second call would be to Assemblyman David Gant (the chair of the New York State Transportation Committee at the time.) The third and final call was directed to Speaker Carl Heastie (the leader of the State Assembly at the time.) This particular call-in day demanded that

²⁰ Call-in days, a common tactic in grassroots organizing is a means of using direct action to communicate or urge a specific legal representative to support or address the matter of concern.

²¹ In this context, constituent refers to being a voting member of a community or organization.

three important politicians be contacted by NYS residents to support the bill, urging them to call directly to pass the Driver's Access and Privacy Act (Greenlight). The post states:

“Let them know passing bill A4050 to restore driver's license access to immigrants, regardless of status, MUST be a priority this session! Call them today then again tomorrow and as many times as it takes for them to take action! #GreenLightNY Please share and ask your friends to do the same!”²²

This specific call in day demonstrates the tactic of showing members a template for what to say on the phone call. At a time when a new session of proceedings was scheduled to come the next month (June), the Greenlight coalition sought to apply more pressure with more calls.

Another publicized call-in day conducted by the coalition was on July 31st, 2018 to Cuomo. The Greenlight Facebook posted photographs from this call-in day with individuals part of the Alianza Agricola.²³ Members of Alianza Agricola are depicted with signs that call on Cuomo to use his executive power to provide driver's licenses to all New Yorkers. In another post from the same day, a script or template of phone calls is shared. This strategy was particularly different from calling other elected officials because it called for the governor to use his executive powers to directly enact Greenlight. The pressure would evidently continue until the moment it was passed in June 2019. Pressuring elected officials to support Greenlight requires addressivity to governmental figures in power. It also designates the phone calls to be made by constituents. Constituents are specifically voting members of a community, so this addressivity is designated to community members with voting rights.

²² This comes directly from a post made on the Greenlight Facebook page from May 4th 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/GreenLightNY/photos/a.1335280383153629/1664794850202179/>

²³ La Alianza Agricola is farmworker-led, grassroots organization that has partaken in the advocacy for Greenlight, and still works to help implement the legislation that restored access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrant New Yorkers.

Rallies

Another tactic part of the matrix employed was rallies; these rallies consisted of physical mobilizations of communities often in major public locations like the Capitol building in Albany. Greenlight rallies mobilized hundreds and thousands of individuals to unite over the same lucha: licenses for all. Rallies applied pressure to politicians by demonstrating the physical bodies that mobilized in support of the campaign. A rally inherently implies the assemblage of people. A mode of mobilization or collective action, rallies are a crucial form of protestation in collective defiance. Marking a societal transformation, rallies serve as a form of collective protestation, one where the ordinary routines of daily life are broken down or deroutinized.

Rallies often channel a message to a greater public and are non-dialogical. Rallies have a rhetorical quality in the sense that they do not expect a dialogue with the individual or collective they address. Although some Greenlight rallies targeted specific elected officials, there was no expected or guaranteed immediate response or dialogue. Rather, a sense of urgency is demonstrated through the physical assemblage of people. These rallies reflected the vulnerability undertaken by undocumented people to show up to government property and demand licenses and recognition of their existences. Rallies like these can be a moment of both protestation *and* liberation, one where once silenced voices, bodies and experiences are forcibly made visible.

One early Greenlight rally took place on March 7th, 2017. Hundreds of individuals occupied the central room and staircase in the Capitol building that day. According to several videos, over 350+ Greenlight members united in Albany that evening. Wearing their green-colored Greenlight t-shirts, individuals spoke in a press conference style regarding their demand that Gov. Cuomo listen and support the legislation. In one live stream from that evening, supporters gathered in the rain protesting outside a government building in Albany. At the rally,

supporters held a mixture of umbrellas and signs. The signage in the video says “Welcome to New York: Driving together.” The signs imitated highway signs, and signs that exist in the United States that welcome you to certain states. Four attendees of the rally marched in unison at the front of the group. All holding these green signs, they walked together as they demanded driving together. This marks the first large scale rally that took place in Albany for Greenlight. This specific rally brought awareness to the campaign and its many supporters. Many photographs from this initial rally were posted on Facebook, and would later become the profile image for the page.

On October 22nd 2018, a rally in the form of a “day of action” was conducted in Albany. According to Greenlight media coverage, the day of action was held at the “Million Dollar Steps” at the NYS Capitol building. On the day of action, the coalition conducted a press conference calling for access to driver’s licenses for all. At this event, hundreds of members of the Greenlight coalition united with affected im/migrants to urge elected officials to “stand behind” and support the bill. Many advocates and elected officials spoke in support of Greenlight.

At the press conference, Queens Assemblymember Francisco P. Moya (the bill sponsor in 2018) stated that “Not all of New York has the extensive mass transit systems that cities do. Whether you’re in a suburb or somewhere even sparser, not having access to a car makes every daily task a struggle.” Pointing directly to the inadequacy of public transportation in rural New York, Moya had tapped into exactly what had prompted my research and investigation on the history of Greenlight and [lack of] access to driver’s licenses for im/migrants upstate. This rural specificity communicated a regionalized urgency where driver’s licenses are necessary. At this

rally, elected officials, law enforcement agents, advocates and affected community members urgently demanded support of the bill.

The largest Greenlight rally occurred just months before its win in June 2019. On March 12th, 2019, Greenlight organized a rally in Albany where about 1,000 individuals showed up in Albany. Similar to the structure of the rally in 2017, thousands of individuals gathered at Albany to urge the final stretch of support for the bill. This extensive mobilization was planned by Greenlight and the various spheres of support it gained. Attendees of this rally were predominately wearing the same Greenlight t-shirts, holding signs identical to the 2017 rally. In addition to the t-shirts, some individuals wore a Greenlight bandana around their necks and heads.

This was the rally with the largest turnout and it was clear that at this point in la lucha there was much more support than earlier assemblages. When I discussed this event with my primary interlocutor Ignacio Acevedo, he informed me of the details of that mobilization. This mobilization at Albany showed the thousands of individuals who were affected by the bill, and they would not give up on la lucha. Ignacio explained:

“...it was a thousand people affected, with kids, in the middle of winter, freaking cold as hell, rainy and snowing. And we're walking a thousand people around through the buildings and all of that. That was the thing that made people in power take us seriously. Like a thousand brown people with some black immigrants too and some asian immigrants. I don't think they've ever seen a thousand of them there marching.”

As I continued to ask Ignacio about the physical presence of the community that cold day in Albany, he pointed out the vulnerable yet powerful stance that immigrants took to show up in person. Ignacio shed light on the courage and direct risk that undocumented people put themselves in to attend this rally on government property. Ignacio described that the physical presence and courage it took for individuals to state their undocumented status to elected

officials publicly was one of the most monumental features of this rally, if not the movement as a whole.

Like many other tactics that compose the matrix, rallies were another strategy of physically mobilizing bodies to address recognition by elected officials. An integral feature to these rallies was their addressivity. Addressed to elected officials who occupied political power, these rallies were conducted by the community directed towards the elected officials who sat in the offices they rallied outside of. Community here is defined by the participants in the rallies (the supporters of Greenlight). Community becomes defined by those who participated in this form of collective action, unified to address the demand for licenses.

One final rally that took place was conducted by the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) in NYC. Since the NYIC is a C4 organization they are allowed to conduct more *formal* legal lobbying to elected officials. Theresa Thanjan (Senior Manager of Member Engagement at NYIC) briefly described her role in NYC at the tail end of the movement in March 2019. Theresa organized a *C4 rally* to explicitly call out Senator Michael Gianaris in Queens. Outside his office in Astoria, approximately 15-20 individuals rallied outside to demand that he take more direct action in support of Greenlight. Although *la lucha* had been concentrated in rural New York, this rally was bound to the urban landscape of NYC. Theresa told me that Senator Gianaris had long been an ally of the NYIC, however she believed he was not doing enough to push Greenlight. Being a C4 organization,²⁴ they were able to utilize their position to directly urge an official like Gianaris to actively do more to support its introduction to the Senate. Once enough support had been gained, organizations like NYIC sought to use their legislative “in” as a means of obtaining

²⁴ a tax exempt as a social welfare organization under section 501(c)(4), an organization must not be organized for profit and must be operated exclusively to promote social welfare
<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/other-non-profits/social-welfare-organizations>

social welfare: in this instance the rally strategy addressed a specific senator to push them to move Greenlight forward for a vote.

A clear feature of all of these rallies was the documentation made by members and attendees. The presence of media at the center of rallies centers the participants' visibility through their presence in a collective. Media often depict rallies as a form of protestation, one that disrupts reality to draw attention to a call for action. In the case studies provided above, rallies demonstrate non-dialogic disruption to the daily lives of elected officials and participants. The above rallies were held in such public places to reaffirm an insistence for legislative policy change. These rallies were extensively documented on Greenlight on social media platforms, which constructed the basis of my archival research for most of this chapter.

Social Media

Social media was a means in which Greenlight disseminated information regarding events and efforts carried out by the campaign. Social media assisted in spreading the *matrix of tactics* while providing a dense and codified archival source of public access information. “GreenLight NY Driving Together: LuzVerde NY Manejando Juntos” Facebook page was created on June 9th, 2016. Greenlight was active on Facebook and Twitter throughout the campaign and still is today. Amidst the archive was an expansive compilation of events, photographs, videos, and visuals. If we are to say a public is based on who is being addressed, attention becomes a crucial way that an issue or problem is illuminated and projected to broader audiences. Greenlight social media pages utilized technology to address their existing members and followers of the pages as well as promote new support and future allyship.

Due to the fact that the page is public access, one does not even need to be a member or subscriber to Facebook itself to view the page. The inclusivity of social media platforms like Facebook make movements like Greenlight more readily accessible to audiences with access to the internet. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter function to circulate and share information (evident in the share button that shares it to all one's friends or community). With social media, Greenlight was able to assume an incredibly faster rate of expansion and recruitment than earlier social movement scholars may have previously anticipated. The technological and virtual qualities of the movement were apparent in the pages' quotidian posts. The history of Greenlight and *matrix of tactics* is well documented in these media records, which archive the many forms of mobilization that took place. My research focused predominantly on the Facebook page, which remains active to this day.²⁵

Legislative tactics

I conducted interviews with former Senator Jen Metzger, and current Senator Luis Sepúlveda. Both senators expressed that their duties align with helping im/migrant communities paired with a moral responsibility to their work. Both senators provided compelling descriptions of Albany on June 17th, 2019 when the legislation was passed.

In February of 2021, I organized to meet with Greenlight bill sponsor Senator Luis Sepúlveda via Zoom. Senator Sepúlveda did not use his camera, but we had an audio discussion from our computers. I received oral consent to record the audio of our interview and use quotations in my work; I began with questions aimed towards his career in local government. Sepúlveda informed me that prior to becoming the representative of the 32nd district in 2018, he

²⁵ Today, the page currently posts a lot of content regarding the implementation of the legislation since it has gone into effect in December 2020. This is a living archive that documents the entire history of the movement for the internet public to see and share.

served as the assemblyman for the 87th Assembly District. This district spanned large sections of the Central and South Bronx, where Greenlight had support.²⁶

When I asked why he supported and sponsored Greenlight, Sepúlveda pointed to his own identity as a Puerto Rican citizen. Sepúlveda pointed to a personal testimony of a woman he had met who had a child with a serious illness. The child needed constant medical attention and the woman would have to leave her house at 4:30 AM to take four buses so her son could receive medical care. This story had impacted Sepúlveda strongly as he pointed to not only the inadequacy of transportation in rural New York, but the quotidian difficulties that im/migrants like her faced. Another reason that Sepúlveda supported Greenlight was because he believed in the potential it had to improve undocumented and im/migrant relationships with law enforcement. Although these were just two small examples, it exemplified his moral reasoning for giving his utmost legislative support.

Sepúlveda saw the “human suffering” that came from not having a license in rural New York. The obstacles that the lack of access to licenses had imposed on undocumented people was relevant to Sepúlveda’s commitment to passing Greenlight. Sepúlveda described that he was honored to have been chosen as the primary sponsor of the bill. Sepúlveda attributed the success of the Greenlight movement to the advocates who had been working towards this before he entered the picture in 2019 as bill sponsor. He pointed to several of the integral NYC-based entities of the coalition, specifically Make the Road, NYIC and the Hispanic Federation. To Sepúlveda, one important distinction to Sepúlveda was the education that the coalitions took part in: particularly educating in areas where people were on the fence or did not understand that “[the bill] was not a backdoor way to citizenship...nor allow undocumented immigrants to get

²⁶ Senator Sepúlveda became the main sponsor of both the DREAM Act and Greenlight because his predecessor Jose Peralta’s family had requested that he deliver both bills in 2019.

registered to vote. It was a narrative that the other side was pushing.” Combating narratives of resistance to Greenlight was an integral part of the coalitions’ educative agenda. This resistance is why the need to focus on Long Island and Upstate was apparent to Sepúlveda.

The focus on rural parts of New York was not explicitly correlated to the urgency or need for licenses in these areas. It is also strongly related to the political resistance to Greenlight that took place in these areas, what Sepúlveda pointed to as a *nucleus of resistance*. I asked Senator Sepúlveda what he thought about the movement being concentrated in rural New York. From his perspective as a NYC senator, he informed me that “The reason that the advocates focus there is because of the need. And also because in those areas is where you have the most political resistance for the bill, Upstate, and Long Island where there's essentially the *nucleus of resistance* for the legislation.” The senator pointed out the infrastructural differences when drawing a comparison of the urban to rural need for licenses. Licenses were needed upstate and in Long Island more. This need was paired with political resistance to the legislation. In order for the bill to pass, the education on behalf of advocates and senators like Sepúlveda was needed for Greenlight to spread across rural New York.

Sepúlveda told me this was the proudest moment of his legislative career thus far. Since Sepúlveda was clearly invested in supporting and proposing the bill to the Senate, it was extraordinarily helpful to hear his perspective especially in regard to the day that the votes were cast. When I asked him about how it felt the day it was passed, he gave me personal insight into the actual mechanics of the debate.²⁷ As the debates began, Sepúlveda told me it was as predicted, meaning that the questions asked by the other side were what was to be expected. One

²⁷ Sepúlveda told me that he received a call at 9:30 AM from Senate Majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins informing him that he would be arguing for Greenlight in two hours. Two hours was extremely short notice for a Senate Debate, and he told me that usually there is more time to anticipate questions and tactics that the other side (Republicans) may have. Sepúlveda told me that he believed this happened because the Senate Majority leader did not want the other side an opportunity to go to the press and attack the bill.

question did strike the senator as out of the ordinary. According to Sepúlveda, Senator Daphne Jordan (Republican) had asked what he called the most illogical question he had ever heard. She asked “why undocumented people don’t become citizens”, to which the chamber assumed utter silence. Shortly after the bill reached the floor, Sepúlveda knew they had the votes but felt a type of uncertainty, stating “you just never know.”

During the debate, Sepúlveda received a message from his staff stating that Attorney General Leticia James had issued a statement that Greenlight was perfectly constitutional.

Sepúlveda continued by saying:

“...so once that all came together, and the vote was announced, it was one of the most euphoric feelings I've ever had as a legislator. And what was icing on the cake is that once the AG submitted a report, the governor immediately announced that he will be signing the bill. So it was awesome. an awesome feeling. I went upstairs to the galley and spoke with some of the undocumented immigrants, the family of the woman who had the child who was ill. It was emotional. But certainly, it was one of the for me anyway, one of the greatest moments as a legislator.”

Sepúlveda’s narration of the debate in Albany powerfully revealed the continued resistance and ignorance of politicians like Daphne Jordan. The importance of individuals like Andrea Stewart's-Cousin (the Majority Senate Leader) and the Attorney General (Leticia James) were highlighted in Sepúlveda’s recollection of the story. The comment made by Senator Jordan also highlighted the delusions of the realities of the issues, as well as an immense misunderstanding of the legal connotations and definitions of the terms “undocumented”, “immigrants” and “citizenship.” This conflation made in her comment reflected the *nucleus of resistance* that Sepúlveda had pointed to, particularly because she represents the 43rd district, the region where they were located to gather at the capitol itself. Letitia James’s support of Greenlight’s constitutionality was a moment that reassured Sepúlveda it would be passed that day, especially following the press announcement that Cuomo would indeed be signing the bill.

The euphoric feeling of victory that Sepúlveda described that evening aligned with former senator Jen Metzger's take on Albany that evening as well. Jen Metzger served as a Democratic Senator for the 42nd district of New York from 2019-2020. Occupying a Democratic seat in a historically republican district, Jen Metzger's former district covered areas in the Hudson Valley that were located in this *nucleus of resistance*. In her experience advocating for Greenlight, she explained to me that she "[I] consistently voted based on what I believed was the right thing to do, even if it wasn't the popular thing to do in my district. But that was the biggest hangup, you know, was. But, but we ended up, you know, it was a squeaker, but we got it passed and it was definitely a squeaker, like, you know, my support of it."

Democratic support for Greenlight was based on a moral commitment to supporting communities that were deeply affected by the lack of access to driver's licenses and safe means of transportation. What differed in Metzger's circumstance was that her district had a lot of resistance to Greenlight, and she had to work to fight against this resistance. Although she did not sponsor the bill, Metzger's commitment to support Greenlight was evident in her approaches to educate the constituents of her community who resisted and/or misunderstood Greenlight. In order to educate constituents who did not understand Greenlight, Metzger informed me that she had to humanize the issue. Apart from using agricultural, economic and safety arguments for Greenlight, Metzger informed me that humanizing the individuals affected by lack of access to licenses was a helpful educational strategy. In our interview, she described how she often had to bring it back to the idea of family. Metzger talked about the educating she did and how she had to:

"just bring it back to, like, your you know, your children go to school with these children, you know, with the children of undocumented parents. Shouldn't those parents shouldn't those children be able to have their parents come see their school play, you know, or or

take them up to take them to the doctor? You know, it's just like just also just humanizing it for people. It's really important.”

This idea of humanizing the issues that undocumented people face was an important part of her argument in educating the *nucleus of resistance*. After she told me about this tactic of humanizing the discourse, we transitioned into speaking about the day it was signed into legislation.

Similar to Sepúlveda, Metzger’s description of the debate and vote in Albany aligned in terms of how they felt the victory in the air. Metzger described the event as an emotionally powerful and important moment in New York legislative history as well as her career. Metzger relayed to me that even thinking about it made her teary. After the vote, she told me that the galleys had reached full capacity, filled with community members crying of joy upon hearing the vote win. To Metzger, it was a monumental instance where as a legislator, she felt like she had made a direct impact on people’s lives.

Grassroots social movements like Greenlight identify a problem at hand, and use a *matrix of tactics* to penetrate various spheres of resistance and marginalization that have been perpetuated against undocumented im/migrants. Through the event history of Greenlight in New York, multiple tactics were needed to establish the voice of the community which I will describe in the next chapter as a *voiced community*. The construction of this community contains a sense of belonging to a public collective like Greenlight requires participation as a means of measuring membership. This public is one that organizes independently of state institutions and formal frameworks of citizenship (Warner 2012:414). Breaking apart the *matrix of tactics* is helpful to map out the different approaches taken to making social change. Operating through those who hold political power, social change remains possible through collective action and policy change.

The lesson to be learned through the *matrix of tactics* is that the prioritization of affected

community members is central to this discourse, and allowed for a successful grassroots structure to exist within a larger framework of historic and ‘progressive’ legislative change. Allowing these members to fight *la lucha* on their own terms is what made this multi-tactical approach so efficacious. In order to make social, political and eventually economic change through the implementation of Greenlight, lessons learned from earlier fights for driver’s license access were crucial in shaping the tactics of what would become Greenlight. The tactics at hand amplified the urgency and necessity of driver’s licenses for undocumented New Yorkers. This demonstrates a historical example of coalition building that spread across an expansive and stratified political ecosphere.

Although each tactic has a different structure of addressivity, Greenlight allowed for expansive communities to be reached. This multi-strategic approach is not unique to Greenlight, but fits into the broader categories of grassroots social movements. In order to approach a system that has oppressed undocumented communities, the *matrix of tactics* was needed to empower migrant civil society to integrate into the institutions of American political life. Although integration is a large topic in discourse regarding im/migrant experiences, this integration allows for these communities to navigate spaces designed by the powerful. This can also be a resistant attempt to disrupt the flow of bureaucratic modern democracy. Contesting the notions of citizenship and membership, this coalitional history seeks to establish a future where undocumented existence is not only recognized, but socio-politically empowered. The *matrix of tactics* promoted im/migrant civic engagement to directly influence policy change. Regionally specific to rural New York, the *matrix of tactics* during the Greenlight campaign history has the potential to be inclusive of multiple audiences through its varied addressivity. Overlapping and restructuring through time, the branches of Greenlight were able to permeate social boundaries

and create leadership that can be seen as an influential example of revolutionary approaches to dismantling the current immigration regime, starting with state government.

Chapter 3: The creation of a *voiced community*: How grassroots social movements like Greenlight mobilize and map identity in a policy-oriented framework for change

The first chant that I encountered in my research on LuzVerde was one I had heard before. “*El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido.*”²⁸ The chant came from one of the most iconic songs of La Nueva Canción movimiento en Chile. The canto (composed by Sergio Ortega) was accompanied by lyrics written by a band of folk musicians known as Quilapayún. The lyrics are rooted in social revolution, and its chorus has been recycled by Latinx activists over the past several decades. Later on, I would learn of a more crucial and specified chant to LuzVerde and its participants. “*No somos uno. No somos cien. Somos millones cuéntenos bien*”²⁹ was a chant often sung and shouted in groups of LuzVerde supporters, one that would resurface throughout the history of the movement in the Hudson Valley.³⁰ Although this chant first appeared in my archival investigation of a community forum held in the summer of 2016, it was more powerfully chanted in a Facebook live stream video from the Greenlight launch event in 2017.

The Greenlight launch press conference was held on January 31st in Albany. The conference began with shouts and chants with a roaring enthusiasm from the participants. As the video begins, a crowd of at least fifteen individuals stand next to the podium on the left side of the shot. Standing in two rows, they chant together in unison, “*No somos uno. No somos cien. ¡Somos millones cuéntenos bien!*” The crowd is wearing a variety of different graphic t-shirts, holding signs as they gathered to the right of the podium. One sign read, “*Necesitamos licencias ahora*”³¹ Another read, “*Libertad de movimiento para TODOS.*”³² The black podium was labeled with a white and red logo that said “The New York Immigration Coalition “ (NYIC). NYIC was

²⁸ Translation: The people united will never be defeated.

²⁹ Translation: We are not one, we are not one hundred, we are millions, count us well!

³⁰ Often, grassroots social movements like LuzVerde have one if not multiple synecdochical figures of speech that intend to represent the collective agenda or voice. This was one of Greenlight’s slogans that embodies the creation of an inclusive and evolving collectivity. (Benford and Snow 2000: 623)

³¹ Translation: We need licenses now.

³² Translation: Freedom of movement for everyone.

the host of the event, and their podium was situated in front of a large vertical banner that displayed the same logo. Shortly after the initial excitement settled, silence engulfed the room as the speakers for the conference were directed to line up to the left of the podium. Steven K. Choi (Senior Advisor of NYIC) warmly introduced the press conference. He described Greenlight as “landmark legislation that would once again introduce driver’s licenses for all New York residents.” The conference transitioned to the various speakers. First, the state comptroller Stringer spoke about and explained the economic reports that had been released regarding the potential for Greenlight to bring revenue to New York. Next, assemblyman Francisco Moya (the bill sponsor at the time) spoke about the importance of this legislation. From economic to political perspectives, the press conference then moved on to the sharing of different testimonials from the Latinx community present.³³ This conference was one of the most intimately recorded series of personal testimonies regarding Greenlight and licenses access. Several individuals spoke about how the lack of access to licenses and safe modes of transportation had impacted their lives directly. Once the testimonials began, two individuals translated their words from Spanish to English.

The last testimony was given by Ray Morales, a middle-age Latino. Ray spoke about his personal experience raising a family as a working immigrant residing in the Hudson Valley. Ray spoke of a time when he was scammed in his desperation for a license. Ray concluded his testimony by talking about the immensely negative impacts it had on his family. Ray concluded saying, “Hoy en día hemos iniciado esta campaña por tener licencias para conducir para inmigrantes. Yo quisiera invitarles a todos que no nos asustemos estas nuevas políticas

³³ Some of these testimonials appear in the previous chapter regarding community forums.

exageradas, sabemos que no será fácil, pero podemos lograrlo y recuerden *¡no somos uno, no somos cien, somos millones, cuéntenos bien!*”³⁴

The crowd joined him in his final words and cheered Ray as he walked away from the podium. The Latinx crowd had their eyes on Ray, many of them smiling towards the podium. The crowd held the signs above their shoulders, positioning them down to support and clap for Ray. It was clear that noticeable solidarity united the Latinx community present at this bilingual press conference. The *we* that reappears in the grammar of the chant is why this investigation begins with linguistic analysis. The chant, which will be readdressed in the end of this chapter, provides an entry point into understanding the distinct ways the community is mapped and represented by the very use of the ambiguous pronoun *we*.

Emphasizing and prioritizing the voice of the affected and localized community, grassroots efforts like Greenlight deserve attention drawn to the language used by its various participants. This chapter is broken into several sections which will center around the idea of a grassroots community. The first subsection will explore the etymological and earlier theoretical conceptualizations of the word *grassroots*. The following section will define community through my interlocutors’ language paired with my interpretation of how the grassroots community signifies the affected community. The next section is dedicated to relevant vignettes which speak to my interlocutors’ articulation of what a grassroots organizing community means to them. The final larger section will conclude with an interrogation of the various uses of the pronoun *we* which often position my interlocutors within their respective participation in the movement. I wish to draw a dialogue between what my interlocutors interpret as grassroots, and what I

³⁴ Translation: “We are launching this campaign today so that immigrants like me can have driver’s licenses. Do not be afraid of these new nationalist policies. *We* know it won’t be easy but *we* can achieve it. But remember no somos uno, no somos cien, somos millones, cuéntenos bien!”

consider it to be. The different ways that my interlocutors define or omit grassroots is indicative of their position within the larger Greenlight community. Manifested linguistically in the construction of several *we*'s, three types of identity are concretely defined in the language of most interlocutors: the affected community, the professionals, and the elected officials that build into a grassroots structure.

For the affected community, *we* can exist as a source of power reclamation and an ability to relate oneself to a larger community of political activism and policy-oriented change. Whether or not this power existed before is a theme for consideration. For the professionals, *we* often tied them to their specific organizational force that they belonged or worked for. For the elected officials that I conducted interviews with, *we* tended to reflect the left wing body of democratic Senators and Assembly members (as a whole) that had a shared goal of passing progressive legislation in the state. The establishment of such linguistic variability is indicative of the shared action that took place under the framework of a grassroots collective action. An aspect of the political environment, opportunities like Greenlight incentivize collective action (Martinez 2011: 126) as a means of altering the present social world.

A central focus of this chapter is to grasp an understanding of what the construction of community means, and how the usage of it can parallel the structural intentions of a grassroots movement. It may seem inherent that a community would be needed for a grassroots social movement, but what remains unclear is the defined and recognized set of linkages between the different communities that come together in coalition. Similar to Ignacio's initial analysis explored in the first chapter, grassroots movements must be built with a framework of bridging, a connection point where multiple communities focus upon an agreed sociopolitical desire for change. The connections and individuals that are bridged together are exemplified when *we* is

used to describe a collectivity, but can mean different things for the many actors involved. Can the usage of *we* take away from the leadership and prioritization of affected community members? In order for a movement to truly be grassroots, its localized concern must focus around the desires of those who are directly affected by the need and desire for change. Grassroots movements that do not prioritize the voices of those affected will not be efficacious, and the history of Greenlight supports this provocation. Policy-oriented social movement like Greenlight use catalyzed grassroots participation to achieve policy change in the larger umbrella goal of immigration reform in the United States (Michener 2020: 1414).

An etymology of grassroots

An interrogation of the word *grassroots* to define a collectivized movement such as Greenlight is warranted. The word *grassroots* can be etymologically traced to botanical references as early as the fifteenth century (early renaissance). Used as a pluralized term, grassroots inhabit the Earth's surface as a root of a plant that will grow. Defined as early as 1899 in the Oxford English Dictionary, grassroots has its etymological roots in a figurative context as such, "Originally *U.S.* Ordinary people considered as the foundation or main body of an organization, industry, etc., or of society more generally; *esp.* ordinary voters or the ordinary members of a political or social organization, movement, etc.; the rank and file."³⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary uses the term "ordinary people" as a way of defining the voices that structure a grassroots organization. The ordinary people are who construct this particular community within larger organizational structures.

³⁵"grass root, n.". OED Online. March 2021. Oxford University Press.
<https://www.oed-com.ezprox.bard.edu/view/Entry/80912?redirectedFrom=grassroots> (accessed April 13, 2021).

The language and rhetoric of grassroots organizing often implies a down-up motion, one that mimics water and nutrients going from the bottom to the top of a plant. The social and botanical connection provides an opportunity to use different languages to depict social movements, and understand how they function similar to that of organic processes. Grassroots is a dialogic process in which something from below rises to the top. In this chapter, I will occasionally use botanical terminology to describe Greenlight's blossoming success.

Grassroots movements come out of the necessity for growth or change. Quite plainly defined, grassroots can intend to mean the basic level of society (or organization), poignantly viewed in relation to higher and more centralized positions of power in a democratic and capitalist social framework.³⁶ One of the core principles of grassroots would be its egalitarian intentionality: one that exists to defend and elevate the voices closest to the soil. The implied plurality of the word comes from the inability for a singular blade of grass to grow, but rather a myriad. Grassroots is an already existing network of affected communities, a set of links that create a wider nexus of organization as they proliferate. Grassroots have historically been connected to small and local forms of sociopolitical organization. If grassroots are intended to grow and become larger entities, they are mobilized to grow with the help of other members of civil society. Grassroots social movements often operate in a collaborative and collective way to politicize the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized. In his book *Race Matters*, Cornel West discusses advocacy during the Civil Rights Movement:

“The politics of conversion proceeds principally on the local level—in those institutions in civil society still vital enough to promote self-worth and self affirmation. It surfaces on the state and national levels only when grassroots democratic organizations put forward a collective leadership that has earned the love and respect of and, most important, has

³⁶“Grassroots,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed November 29, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grassroots>.

proved itself accountable to these organizations. This collective leadership must exemplify moral integrity, character, and democratic statesmanship within itself and within its organizations” (West 1991: 79).

In this sense, a morality is established in the hands of the grassroots collectively, surfacing in larger instances once a self-actualized power is recognized. In the history of LuzVerde, the intentions of grassroots social organizing illuminates the different manifestations of class and the boundaries that exist in coalition building. The grassroots establishes a unique integrity of communities that come together to cross and change boundaries of existence. This integrity that becomes present in the many different participants is paired with a self-organized and self-actualized agentive power.

Born out of necessity, institutions within the coalition building process are needed to circumvent the potential for hegemonic domination. The gabinete was needed to alter the singularity of the coalition, and implement a grassroots strategy that created an agentive power. This agentive power was for the *voiced community* to hold. If a social movement ascribes to hegemonic domination, the voices of the impacted community members are not heard. Social movements constantly struggle to reassign and strategize their power distribution. Grassroots social movements aim to shift power and establish a moral force given to individuals who were not immediately in power. The maintenance of a unique type of accountability is present in the initial framework of such a grassroots movement. Utilizing a variety of strategies of political mobilization to empower leadership, grassroots organizations build up by raising awareness to their dialogues of change.

If we are to understand grassroots social movements as intrinsically connected to localized communities, movements simultaneously exist as a particular social movement that is able to permeate and traverse social boundaries and borders. However, grassroots is not *just*

about the local. Localization is important, but the distinct mobility and leadership that it aspires to create is what makes grassroots a dialogic process as well. Grassroots link together already existing networks of impacted community members; a series or set of links is also made visible within the community actors involved. The grassroots emerges out of the coalition, and is a multivocal and polysemic descriptor for a specific type of social movement. The coalition linked grassroots and non-grassroots groups together as it expanded. The essence of coalition works when coalitions are based on localized identity, and the stronger these identities are, the stronger the basis for coalition becomes (Córdova 1997: 49).

The word *grassroots* implies an upward trajectory of growth similar to that of natural growth. Building and sprouting from the lower layers, grassroots symbolizes and implies a new beginning, ready to sprout. Roots expanding and sprouting new life are key features of botanical growth, and grassroots social movements utilize matrices of tactics to strategically expand their agenda. Grassroots should allow for no certain individuals or groups to hold political power or strategy and should aim to make every voice democratically heard from the bottom up.

What is community?

_____ Efficacious and ethical grassroots social movements must be structured around self-organization and induce an empowerment of historically silenced voices. Ethical and meaningful grassroots social movements must encourage community members to represent themselves and the goals they are working towards, and empower such leadership to continue into the future. Community in this context is very multivocal because it includes all spheres of participants involved.

The establishment of a distinctive and agentive community is one that produces what I

will refer to as a *voiced community*. The *voiced community* is a group of people with a recognized system of speaking as a collective. This recognized system or channel for speaking is evident in the examples of community forums and spaces where im/migrants could speak on their experiences regarding licenses. Community in this sense is able to represent itself. The self-representative desire of forums and spaces to create this *voiced community* to powerfully speak and voice their opinions and experiences. The *voiced community* is able to represent themselves as part of *the* community. The *voiced community* is the empowered individuals part of the gabinete, and the community who is directly affected by the lack of access to licenses (undocumented people). A powerful tool for the *voiced community*, the pronoun *we* can be invitational and inclusive. Grassroots social movements like Greenlight exemplify different communities that participate in the establishment of collective *we*'s and are needed to empower the future leadership of undocumented people. La lucha for driver's licenses in New York was one that sought to prioritize marginalized communities, and uplift them into realms of politics and social change that would be advantageous to them. A social movement cannot be considered grassroots if it does not attempt to reconcile or ratify its agenda to prioritize these voices. Without analyzing the rhetoric by which activists and participants define *the* community, we (as anthropologists and studiers of social movements) will never be able to understand what a grassroots community is in a particular historical moment.

The *voiced community* that is Grassroots locates different communities as part of a shared collectivity, one that is needed to make policy change happen. Examining how my interlocutors theorized and conceptualized the grassroots, it is interesting to note the use and omittance of the word itself. In the following section, I will provide central vignettes from interviews with Ignacio Acevedo and former Senator Jen Metzger. Both were informative of the construction of these

different communities at play as well as the need to address the axis of a dialogic, down-up grassroots. The word *grassroots* takes on similar meanings to establish the leadership of affected people that become part of a *voiced community*.³⁷

In order for individuals to be empowered to participate in la lucha, the voices of the community were to lead and exercise autonomous power. The grassroots community was reinforced in LuzVerde through the gabinete, ensuring that no one individual group (specifically the professionals) held political power over the organization. Social movements that use grassroots organizing tactics can succeed in public policy victories. Although some are successful, many movements find it difficult to “resignify the very meanings of received notions of citizenship, political representation and participation, as a consequence, democracy itself” (Alvarez 1998). Although the grassroots seeks to uplift and prioritize the voices of the impacted communities, it can also contribute to forms of neoliberal democratic hegemony. The *voiced community* should determine the trajectory and execution of a campaign in question and ground it in a specifically localized context.

Grassroots through interview with Ignacio Acevedo October 2020

_____My only in-person interview was conducted with Ignaioco in early October 2020. It was a fairly cold afternoon but we talked for about an hour. Since it was my first real interview in my research, it provided the only in-person ethnographic observations I was able to make. This hour-long interview was filled with so much knowledge and commitment to la lucha for licenses,

³⁷ Another advocate I spoke with that I have not mentioned was Yartiza Mendez, current Associate Organizing Director at Make the Road New York. Yartiza briefly told me about her participation in LuzVerde and how she viewed the formation of the gabinete as well as the organization as a whole. Yartiza explained to me that LuzVerde mimicked the model of a community-led organization. Although also not directly using the word *grassroots*, Yartiza instead mentioned it as a type of “old fashioned community organizing.” Her description of the gabinete relying on old fashioned community organizing encompassed my understanding of this grassroots reality.

and Ignacio told me about his immense participation in Greenlight. Ignacio defined Greenlight as a grassroots movement, noting how he would define and use the word. Ignacio mentioned the word *grassroots* without me using or prompting the phrase. About ten minutes into the interview, he described the shifting moment of focus from urban (New York City) to rural (Upstate). When I asked him if the movement was in New York City earlier on in Greenlight, he responded that New York City was not even involved at that point. Ignacio continued this story, explaining that several other individuals (and coworkers of his) went to talk to the organizer of the last campaign for licenses. He asked the former campaign leader what lessons he had learned from that initial defeat. The lessons Ignacio learned were direct. The campaign could not be focused in New York City. It has to start from Upstate. This is when Ignacio used the word for the first time. Ignacio continued:

“That’s it. To win any legislation because NYC, once it gets there they’re on it. But it has to start Upstate. It can’t be just a coalition. It can’t just be professionals. It has to be *grassroots*. It has to have people affected in it. Why? I’ll tell you. He said last time we fought it, as soon as the fight came people started jumping the vote. Are you going to keep your job? Or are you going to continue with the coalition? And people quit. Quit the fight. If you have people affected, they’re not going to quit. Those are two things that stay in my mind the whole time....I think that was the beginning of the, still no name, it was just a coalition building.”

The coalition that was being built did not have a name yet, and Ignacio’s conversation with the former campaign leader from 2007 in some way showed him how the fight needed to be fought; the mobilization for driver’s licenses in New York needed to be grassroots. Ignacio paralleled the newer and rejuvenated efforts towards driver’s licenses in New York with the older one, learning from its mistakes. This painted the picture for the entire campaign; it would exist grounded in the localities of upstate New York (a region where the need for licenses was clearly stronger and where the most political resistance to the legislative goals of the coalition resided).

As we sat in the sun, I adjusted my sweater because the wind was getting a little colder. Ignacio continued to tell me about his role organizing leaders of different affected community members. In the creation of what became known as the gabinete, a group of 8 individuals were chosen from across the state to represent this leadership. When Ignacio first mentioned the term *bridge* to describe his distinctive position, he marked 2017 as the year in which there was a decision to name the campaign Greenlight. Ignacio concisely mapped out the figures that were the professionals. Ignacio listed Make the Road (NYC) and New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) as two examples of professionals part of the Greenlight Steering Committee. The bridge that he provided was from the affected community to these professional groups. Greenlight viewed in that way aligns with what Ignacio described as a quality of the movement that needed to be consistent: the involvement and empowerment of leadership of the affected community in *la lucha* that would later be colloquially known as Greenlight.

Remarkable in his description of the necessity of grassroots organizing was Ignacio's articulation of class categories. LuzVerde could not exist as merely a coalition run by professionals and other unimpacted individuals. The lesson Ignacio learned in his experience fighting for im/migrant rights was that grassroots was a necessary quality for the perseverance and victory of a grounded movement like LuzVerde. The fight for licenses in New York needed to be based in a form of grassroots organizing, one where the people affected would not give up on an issue that was very much part of their *cotidiano* (Isasi-Diaz 2002:11). The necessity of grassroots that Ignacio proposes again points to the idea of grassroots out of needed change or growth. Individuals impacted or affected by the policies against their own communities would not give up on *la lucha* and it was clear that grassroots organizing was the only way Greenlight could be "won". A rather irreplaceable and relevant passion, the grassroots utilizes democracy to

create a *voiced community* with poder.

Grassroots through an interview with former Senator Jen Metzger February 5th 2021|

_____ When my research for Greenlight had begun, Jen Metzger's name came up several times throughout my archival diggings in the different Greenlight social media platforms. By the time I had solidified my research to become nuanced to Greenlight in the Hudson Valley region, Jen Metzger had just lost the most recent election and was replaced by Republican Senator Marc Molinaro.

Jen Metzger has been a dedicated activist and community-working politician for over a decade and resides in Rosendale, New York. Towards the end of January, I reached out to Jen Metzger's campaign assistant via email. In our quick correspondence, I stated the intentions of my interview and a brief explanation of my thesis project. Jen Metzger emailed me the next day and we organized a time to meet via Zoom, contributing to my archive of virtually conducted interviews.

Prior to the interview, Jen had suggested that I send over some preliminary questions, to give her an 'advance' as to what I may be asking about. Excited to interview a former legislator who was supportive of Greenlight in the Hudson Valley, I immediately emailed her a brief list of about ten questions. About a week later, we met on the morning of February 5th. As she entered the Zoom, the audio activated and her camera displayed a bright library-looking room. Behind her were tall bookshelves that extended high above the frame of the camera. Beginning the interview by thanking her for dedicating time in her schedule to speak with me, I transitioned into asking if I had her consent to record and use quotes of the audio of our conversation. Jen Metzger gladly agreed, and we began the interview quite naturally. My first question was in regard to her first time recalling hearing about Greenlight, a question that I believed at the time

would prompt a rather biographical response from my interlocutor. Jen informed me that the first time she formally heard about Greenlight was during her campaign to become a senator. She began to reference the close work she did with NLMH, reinforcing me that they had a huge role in a lot of the organizing that took place in the Hudson Valley.

Jen Metzger quickly mentioned the importance of agriculture and farming to her rural constituency. Jen Metzger began to speak about the contributions of undocumented communities to the local agrarian economy of the Hudson Valley. As she continued to speak to this, she revealed that in her time sworn in, she served as the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee: the fact that I did not know this was due to my lack of prior biographical research of her role in local government. Jen Metzger enlightened me about her ability to talk about Greenlight in terms of its benefits not only for farmworkers, but farm owners alike from her distinct position as chair of the committee. Relating the polemic of Greenlight to farmers specifically, she connected this by providing examples in which farmers in her district (and much of New York alike) had to drive undocumented employees to places like the grocery store and medical appointments because they could not legally drive themselves. Specifically from her perspective as someone on a council dedicated to agrarian conflicts and bureaucratic issues, Jen Metzger focused her efforts to support Greenlight to be based on educating or bridging this knowledge to different individuals who could have some foreseeable benefit from this legislation besides undocumented people.

Interested in how a former legislator like Jen Metzger would define this type of social movement, I was impressed at her usage of grassroots without direct prompting or mentioning of the word on my part. In a moment where Jen Metzger described other historic legislation being passed at the time, she told me that not everything had passed. In her first mention of the word

grassroots, she told me grassroots was really important to the specific example of Greenlight legislation. Pointing to the strong efforts of the Greenlight campaign, Jen Metzger distinguished this campaign from other formal efforts like those led by the Natural Resource Defense Council, who already had their foot in the door of policy so to speak. Halfway through our interview, Jen Metzger told me what was different about Greenlight.

To her, Greenlight was “empowered people in our society, like undocumented families. [And so] It is pretty amazing that this *grassroots* campaign, you know, is viewed, in that way, *was* successful. And I really feel like it was the *grassroots* organizing. It was just the persistence and the fact that, you know. I mean, just the rationale for it was strong, you know, it just was the right thing to do and it made sense. And the arguments against it were weak and just, you know....” I quickly responded in agreement, still personally shocked that arguments against Greenlight had been a normalized part of the fight for access to driver’s licenses in NY. Jen continued to say that “[Greenlight] actually wouldn't have happened without all that advocacy. It just wouldn't have. So the *grassroots* organizing is definitely key.” Upon her second use of the word *grassroots*, I was prompted to ask what a grassroots organization meant to her. I asked, “What does it mean for an organization in that capacity to be grassroots from your perspective?” Jen Metzger did not need much time to answer this question, and began to tell me about what it meant to her. Jen Metzger told me that to her, it meant

“involving the people most affected by it and having them speak for themselves, in addition to, you know, the organizations doing the work but really making it and getting as you know, being grassroots, getting people involved. It's people power more than resource, power, more than money power, you know, or capital. It's like human resource power that was brought to bear. I guess that's what I think of as grassroots and grassroots organizing.”

Certainly one of the ethnographic highlights of my interviews with (former) elected officials, her

independent usage of grassroots intrigued me in a similar way as Ignacio had. Would other individuals a part of the Greenlight history also describe this movement in the same way?

USAGES OF WE in a grassroots collectivity, how this establishes the *voiced community*

We is a pronoun that is omnipresent in everyday discourse. *We* can be selectively inclusive of the audience or listener. *We* is both an ambiguous and ubiquitous term of daily expression. The use of *we* suggests plurality, a collective where multiple social groups can be compactly mobilized but still runs the risk of remaining vague (Morton 2014: 734) as to who the *we* entails. To question the semantics of *we*, it is marked as a lexical item that changes in meaning: in flux. The pronoun is a major ambiguity marker, the pronominal patterns of *we* indicates an inclusion or exclusion within actual or potential alliances (Seidel 1975: 206) The establishment of a collective voice in the contexts of social movements often is one that attempts to be inclusive, but this passive transformation invites a broader audience. This section will go into three different analyses of *we* used by my interlocutors. The first will examine the chant that was repeated throughout the movement and how I interpret this *we* to mean undocumented in/migrants. The second will examine *we* used by two Greenlight advocates, Ignacio and Emma. The last section will examine the way Luis Sepúlveda and Jen Metzger use *we* to describe their position as Democratic senators.

We often invites one to listen, while incorporating multiple people into the construction of a community. Like the pronoun *you*, *we* can include the listener as well. Unlike *you*, *we* can either include this listener or not, it remains ambivalent. The participants in grassroots movements create particular types of *we*. Grassroots is a bottom-up dialogic motion, one that involves the movement from one hierarchical point to another. Anti-hierarchical, grassroots

movements use *we* as a powerful tool to create the *voiced community*. In different contexts, *we* is inclusive and invites others into the *voiced community*. The invitational quality of *we* suggests an ambiguity that is welcoming and has the potential to include broader audiences of the three main communities involved.

Evident in their powerful chant “No somos uno, no somos cien, somos millones, ¡Cuéntenos bien!” *we* is embedded into the grammatical structure of the Spanish sentence. Demanding recognition, the establishment of *we* is present in every verb of this sentence. Assuming collectivity, the collective voice demands recognition, and invites people to be counted as well. Since it was always chanted in Spanish, a linguistic autonomy is kept and makes their voice heard to those who speak their language. Who is the *we* in this chant? I interpret the *we* as undocumented im/migrants, particularly Spanish speaking im/migrants from Latin America. However this *we* could be ambiguous; it could possibly include the supporters, senators and lawyers who were also part of the Greenlight community. I interpret the chant to be more directly related to a demand for recognition of immigrant existence and solidarity, especially since the chant was only autonomously sung in the Spanish. The chant was often sung by im/migrants in community forums and other events. In one of the earliest Greenlight forums from 2016, supporters stood holding a large sign that had the chant written on it (in Appendix A). The chant or collective voicing is indicative of the broadness that this campaign had intended to achieve, and serves to influence the actual representation and recognition of undocumented existence. The use of this grassroots *we* in the chant is a demand for recognition and to promote the assemblage of more support. Calling to an incorporation of more experiences and individuals to support their movement, this Greenlight chant amplifies the necessity and momentum of la *lucha*. The use of *we* can remain ambiguous and inclusive as a means of establishing connection

to multiple communities. This kind of creates a production and navigation across differences. *We* in this sense embodies the people, creating itself as a topic or subject of its own assertions (Lee 1997: 340).

Social movement slogans created by Hispanic communities in Greenlight channeled a collective community with a shared mode of speech and language. Unified by shared agendas, supporters of Greenlight often cheered “Si se Puede,”³⁸ a widely used slogan that articulates motivation and affirmation of power that resides in the individual.

Although slogans were crucial in amplifying the speech of affected community members in Greenlight, I argue that perhaps “No somos uno. No somos cien. Somos millones. Cuéntenos bien” was the most important chant to the movement. The slogan demonstrated the need to understand the collectivity, and to illuminate the exclusion and neglect that undocumented communities in the United States have faced. The chant demands a recognition of the large demographic of individuals who were struggling with a manifold of issues caused by the lack of licenses. The chant demonstrates their desire for visibility and recognition mobilized through collective action. This demonstration for an urgent recognition fits into theoretical and analytic suggestions about social movements from the past. This is a new sense of efficacy: people who ordinarily consider themselves helpless come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot (Piven and Cloward 1979:4). This provides the moment where self-actualized power is enacted, individuals recognize their need to collectivize, and unite by using slogans to defend their existences. Slogans amplify these exigencies, pointing to the need to approach these multi-actor issues with multi-tactical approaches (the matrix).

Slogans articulate and amplify processes of collective action and “In operating in this

³⁸ The slogan “Si Se Puede” translates to “Yes you can” and is said to have been coined by Dolores Huerta, the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America in the early 1970’s.

fashion, these punctuated issues, beliefs, and events may function much like synecdoches, bringing into sharp relief and symbolizing the larger frame or movement of which it is part. Movement slogans such as “Liberte, Fraternite, Egalite,” “Power to the People,” “We shall Overcome.” and “Homeless, Not Helpless” illustrate this function” (Benford and Snow 2000: 623). Synecdochical slogans in movements emphasize the need to establish why these issues matter: a formal establishment and uplifting of the voices of the community affected. This relates strongly to the vulnerability that these groups faced in moments of protestation and collective action like the instances at the State Capital. The solidarity and assertion of power actualized through the usage of such slogans and collective action gives social relevance to private thought and life (Warner 2002: 418). The use of “No somos uno. No somos cien. Somos millones. Cuéntenos bien” calls for an acknowledgement of undocumented communities’ realities in the state, and to show that their existence matters. Greenlight sought to be inclusive of undocumented existence and narratives. This inclusivity was so that they could shape the trajectory of legislative change that would benefit them and their communities and the state as a whole. The unification that a slogan can provide is the cherry on top of a systematic and strategic approach to social change.

Also interchanging the pronoun *we* with other personalized pronouns, my interlocutors demonstrated how *we* can mean multiple things in multiple contexts of involvement. Not every political actor uses *we* the same way that my interlocutors do. Outside of Greenlight, some political figures use *we* selectively and carefully, confining its meaning to hierarchy and designating the speakers as members of a particular institutional apparatus (i.e. specific organization or political faction). By contrast, one of the qualities that makes Greenlights grassroots is the broad use of “we,” because a collectivity is formed that supports the voiced

community, and empowers the leadership of those affected. The *voiced community* is the im/migrants in the coalition who could speak and exercise political agency through the gabinete.

With multiple organizational figures part of a statewide coalition, the repeated use of the word *we* managed to encompass the greater coalitional goal and established a distinctive ranging solidarity at the same time. This solidarity is able to navigate the different boundaries of progressive and left wing political discourse. Ignacio used *we* to position himself within the communities he bridged. To repeat Ignacio's words, "We created a *gabinete*. We chose 8 individuals, representatives of NYC, Upstate NY, Hudson Valley." The use of *we* here is indicative of Ignacio's perspective as a founder and former member of the gabinete, but more particularly how he and other individuals chose 8 individuals to represent the voices of what he labeled the affected community.

Often manifesting in small and concentrated local levels, grassroots brings an increasingly publicized concern to localized injustices. Within the greater fight for access to driver's license, LuzVerde could not exist as just an amalgamation of coalitions (the Steering Committee). The gabinete needed to be formed to disrupt this structure, and empower the implementation of grassroots voices comprising the impacted community. LuzVerde sought to build power from local resources, but needed the gabinete to ensure that impacted community members received power. Some literature on the implementations of grassroots points to the tendencies for grassroots organizations and movements to be agents of depoliticization and professionalization, a dangerous outcome that could make a social movement succumb to the neoliberal tendencies of contemporary democracy as we know it. The formation of the gabinete adheres to grassroots tendencies to try and reverse pre existing power dynamics, and it attempts to combat the potential for organizations to give hegemonic power to individuals in the

professional spheres of American civil society.

Although the word *grassroots* itself is omitted from Emma's vernacular, she offers other terminology that suggests building from below. In an innate quality of grassroots organizing, something built from below exhibits the need to have organizational and political power be through individuals who are directly impacted by the goal. In our interview on Zoom, Emma pointed out that from her distinct role at WJC:

“[by 2016] we had formed a committee of people in the Kingston area that had started working on this issue of Driver's Licenses. It was super like hyper local. But *we* had some community forums. We gathered some signatures. *We* started to sort of build from below. But, you know, the Worker Justice Center is not a base building organization. *We're* a legal services organization, with an interest in supporting organizing work at work.”

Despite not being a base building organization, Emma's work through the WJC definitely supported the notion of building the base, by communicating with localized communities about issues that directly impacted them. Her omission of the word *grassroots* could be correlated to its rather political connotations, but it is clear that she supports the idea of assisting the building of a grassroots infrastructure for LuzVerde upstate. Emma uses *we* to refer to the committee of individuals who held these hyperlocal community forums. She also uses *we* more specifically at the end of this quotation to position herself within *we* as the WJC.

The love in Emma's work is shed light upon with her usage of “we” to insinuate a solidarity or union among a variety of actors at play. Although *we* is occasionally used to specify her role coming from WJC, Emma also uses it to describe the Greenlight as a collective unit that she is a member of. In one moment of our virtual conversation, Emma corrected herself to use “we” instead of “I” when explaining the adhoc qualities of the movement's birth. Emma told me that,

“[WJC] was not really set up for that kind of base building. So it was a little bit improvised, a little bit *ad hoc*. We were trying to sort of figure out our role in that work. But I-we had, you know, kind of just by sheer force of will and like interest in this issue had brought together this group of folks that were meeting on semi-regular basis to try to strategize about how to advance this work.”

This instance of self correction included a more expansive and solidarity-filled “we” as she positioned herself as adjusting the agendas of the legal services that she worked at to try and establish the initial base building of Greenlight. Emma suggested that the tendencies of this kind of labor of love were out of an ad hoc necessity.

The subtle pluralizing correction that Emma offered pointed towards the role of others being of equal importance to hers, if not more. Emma pluralized her position to express that she is part of the larger community of organization. The usage of this language empowers other allyship from non-impacted community members, and opens a door for inclusivity in advocacy from outside allies. Her insertion within Greenlight’s organizational structure assumed a more collective *we*, one that effectively assigned her as a member of the broader structure, universalized under the shared moral *lucha*.

Emma provided me with a casual reflexivity to her complex position within the entities that make up Greenlight. Although Emma did not use the word *grassroots* once in the interview, she aligned herself with the progressive idea that politics should revolve around the notion of community. In Emma’s participation as an ally, she positions herself as someone who engages with labor and activism out of care or “labor of love” like she states. Positioning herself as a member of the grassroots community without directly using the word *grassroots*, Emma fits herself into the shared nexus of communications that became Greenlight. Framing her participation in the context of volunteerism perhaps posits the norm of advocacy work as being a paid endeavor, but she revolves her work around legally protecting the lives and livelihood of

others. Her repetition of the word *campaign* instead of *grassroots* suggests her efforts to take part in the long-standing goal as part of her individualized involvement in the campaign.

The last *we* used was by that of Democratic legislators, which was used to emplace them into left wing and “progressive” political discourse. Both senators that I spoke with enlightened me on their specific use of the pronoun to indicate their specific political location within state government. Former Senator Jen Metzger and Senator Luis Sepúlveda demonstrated that *we* meant the community of democratic legislators in support of the Greenlight legislation. Former Senator Metzger used *we* several times to connote the Democratic majority during the time that Greenlight was passed. “So *we* passed a lot of really historic legislation in many areas, including Greenlight. That was kind of like the kind of more general atmospheric condition that was very favorable, you know, to passage of Greenlight and other types of legislation like that.” Speaking to the political moment, Democrats like herself occupied the Senate majority at the time. Jen used *we* to describe her position as a former legislator who undoubtedly voted in favor of Greenlight.

The second senator I interviewed used *we* several times in nearly an identical fashion. In our interview, Senator Sepúlveda spoke about his experience prior to the debate in June 2019. As the sponsor of Greenlight, Sepúlveda informed me that “[But] *we* didn't have much time. I think the leader didn't want to give the other side the opportunity to go to the press and attack it before the bill. They realized the bill was gonna go to the floor. So *we* were given very, very little notice. When the debates began, it was as predicted, *we* knew some of the questions.” Sepúlveda’s use of *we* here also signified the Democratic politicians who were in favor of Greenlight in the debate. Adhering to the structure of a debate, *we* positioned him on the Democratic side of New York State's bipartisan system. The language of both senators positioned

them within their respective party, which at the time was the majority senate. The legislative *we* that they both use is not ambiguous, and concretely distinguishes them from their Republican counterparts.

The various uses of *we* present in my interlocutor's language reflected their positioning within the greater nexus of Greenlight communities. In the chant, *we* resurfaced throughout the grammatical structure of the exclamation. This *we* signifies the *voiced community*, and points to the demand of recognition of undocumented and im/migrant existence. *We* used by two advocates expressed different positionalities within the Greenlight community of advocates. For Ignacio, *we* positioned himself in his role as a founder of the gabinete and bridge of the affected community. For Emma, *we* positioned her within the movement specifically tying her to the organization that employed her, the WJC. The last *we* explored through Jen Metzger and Luis Sepúlveda relayed their position as Democrats in a majority Democratic majority Senate. These three distinct usages of the pronoun *we* exist as a tool that could connect the built and vast Greenlight community. Connecting together the spheres of affected community, advocates and legislators, the ambiguity of *we* suggests a potential for a pluralizing word that exists in specific linguistic moments of inclusion.

Although the creation of a *voiced community* benefits those who are impacted by the questions at hand, there remain many limitations to the implementation of real and self-actualized grassroots-driven power. I want to contest that despite their successful and progressive capabilities, the very idea of grassroots as a concept can have the tendency to confine political participation to certain designated social places. Having the potential to succumb to neoliberal and hegemonic tendencies, the grassroots does remain an integral part to real change in movements targeted towards social liberation and freedom. Who actually determines what the

grassroots is and what it does? These questions remain fundamental and important to my scrutiny of Latinx im/migrant advocacy regarding rural transportation. What does remain clear is that the grassroots tendencies and qualities of the Greenlight movement in New York State arose out of necessity, and out of the voices of communities that directly wanted to obtain political power to change policies that disenfranchise their community. Grassroots was and is a necessary element that drove the history of LuzVerde NY: Manejando juntos and continues to spread its roots across the state, and hopefully the nation.

The emplacement of the community was illuminated from this investigation of various shared *we's* utilized in a complex history. Demanding recognition of voice, the community of *we's* utilized invoke solidarity and inclusion that the movement intended to reach.

Policy-oriented social movements have the potential to empower previously silenced communities, and help build a new sense of empowered community. The inclusion and recognition of undocumented existence and hardships was achieved through the passage of Greenlight legislation. The *voiced community* that arose is what distinguishes Greenlight from other grassroots social movements, and its aims to prioritize the affected communities of immigrants in Upstate New York are exemplified through the many different participants in a growing, collective *we*.

Conclusion

The history of Greenlight in NYS is part of a broader agenda of immigration reform in the United States. Greenlight effectively provided the means for undocumented im/migrants without social security numbers to have access to driver's licenses, and the history of activism that took place for this legislative change marks the fusion and unification of multiple communities across the state. A crucial history for migrant civil society in New York as well, Greenlight has incorporated many undocumented communities and professionals alike into organizing for immigrant rights. Greenlight is an example of undocumented im/migrants being incorporated into political actions that can influence their futures and daily lives. Although not solely a migrant-led organization, Greenlight fits into the framework of migrant civil society because of the presence and power held by im/migrants part of the movement. The coalition aimed to incorporate people by working through the systems of American civil society and insert the voices of undocumented im/migrants into arenas of political action.

Greenlight was primarily a coalition, but also a grassroots social movement with added components. Greenlight was a policy-oriented and incorporationism movement and was not autonomous or revolutionary because it did not seek to dismantle larger systems of hegemonic (and democratic) capitalism, but rather work within its frameworks. The Greenlight movement allowed for voice to be given to those who are not citizens, attempting to integrate them into American political life. In this investigation, I have learned that in im/migrant grassroots social movements they often intend to allow these communities to externalize their existence. Greenlight was a coalition that spanned across regions of New York with a strong basis upstate. Rather than recreate a singular identity, Greenlight focused on externalizing and crossing differences. Greenlight was not geographically bound and expanded across sociopolitical and

regional boundaries.

The presence and strength of undocumented im/migrants and Latin American solidarity was ever present in this history, and demonstrate how they navigate demands for social change. Through a coming together and crossing of cultural difference, inclusive movements that are oriented in policy change will uplift and empower these communities and their political representation and recognition. Non-citizen engagement in political action creates a distinctive self-actualized voice. This voice is created through a *voiced community*, one where world-travelers, bridges and professionals come together to fight for policy change. Throughout la lucha, individuals like Ignacio Acevedo and Emma Kreyche dedicated years to the efforts of making this *voiced community* heard and mobilized. Their participation and engagement with multiple communities reflects their subjectivity and social identity, illuminated through their language and expressions of this participation.

Above all a coalition, Greenlight was not just about empowerment. Greenlight was many things, but its dialogic up and down motion consistent through its methods and histories involves the motion from one point in a hierarchy to another. It brings voice into something else, and builds people power as well as a *voiced community*. The *bridge* and *labor of love* is what constructs the different components of an efficacious movement like Greenlight. The bridge connects marginalized identities to larger frameworks within professional organizations, allowing an entrance into decision making and structuring. In this process a bridge crossed is to the professionals, who may view their advocacy as a morally incentivized labors of love. Both of these elements utilize a *matrix of tactics* to branch their ideology and arguments forward layered with demands of the recognition and urgency for licenses for undocumented New Yorkers.

The Greenlight coalition relied on the cultural boundaries crossed between professionals

and im/migrants part of the movement. This crossing of communities and difference is exemplified in the story of the woman and child that senator Luis Sepúlveda told me. To remind you of this anecdote, an immigrant woman who had spoken to Sepúlveda had told him about her struggles taking her child (who was severely ill) on several public buses in the upstate area to get him to doctors. She had to wake up at 4:30 in the morning to take him on multiple buses to access adequate medical care. Her struggle as an immigrant who had been denied access to licenses had affected her and her family's daily life and more importantly her ability to provide for her child. This story had revealed to Sepúlveda the many plights that immigrants upstate faced in regard to transportation. This woman was connected to the senator because of the Greenlight coalition, and her family was present in Albany the day that Greenlight was passed. It was necessary for there to be a whole campaign and many steps and actions in order for these two people to come together in the very house of power at that moment. Sepúlveda told me that when he entered the galleys, her family was there in the crowd of Greenlight supporters. This woman was able to connect to Sepúlveda and shows exactly how Greenlight connected multiple different types of communities and experience across social boundaries. In this example, her personal life and experience was connected to a senator in power who had the ability to change her community's future access to licenses.

Greenlight employed a *matrix of tactics* to connect communities and in this case connect an upstate immigrant to a NYC senator. Sepúlveda crossed these power boundaries as well to interact with local communities who were struggling with the realities of not having access to licenses. If not for these multiple boundaries crossed, the Greenlight movement would not have been successful. In order to incorporate multicultural communities into a conglomerate, shifts and dynamics of power must be altered, as is evident in the example of the gabinete. Without the

various spheres of interconnected coalitions and organizations that composed Greenlight, the legislation would not have had the same outcome.

The externalization of undocumented existence that Greenlight provided is a moment worthy of attention, and can be an inspiration for other states, and hopefully federal policy in the future. Greenlight carries the potential to serve as a rehearsal for bigger social movements and mobilization, an example of a successful grassroots movement that empowered undocumented im/migrants. Externalization asserts the physical presence of bodies and existences to an audience who is different. The *bridge* and *labor of love* matter to this externalization because of how many im/migrants could be mobilized and visible in the eyes of the state. Grassroots social movements like Greenlight orient the construction of a distinct *we* that maps an inclusive and broad community of im/migrants, advocates, activists, professionals and elected officials. The Greenlight chant, *No somos uno, no somos cien, somos millones, cuentenós bien*, illuminated this shared *we*, the most crucial social example in my research. The unification and solidarity that emanated from the chant and its singers drew vulnerability and existence together in strength. The establishment of a collective voice addresses the need to rearrange hierarchies and to draw one's attention to look at a multitude.

Greenlight is a crucial step forward for New York in slowing down the overwhelming number of deportations and stop and searches in motor vehicles. Although not a tangible solution to the horrific realities of deportability, Greenlight is a moment of recognition and acknowledgement of undocumented existence, but also a moment of micro-mobility that can align with larger-frame migratory and movement studies.

In the beginning of this work, I make the distinction that transportation and navigation of the Hudson Valley can be analyzed in a framework of micro-mobility compared to notions of

macro-mobility and border theory. In order to connect the micro-mobility that happens in mobilizations in social moments to broader notions of mobility, it is crucial to think about the way that mobility and transportation will be altered and shifted in the future after Greenlight. In this history, I suggest that Greenlight is another form of micro-mobility. It is micro-mobile because it is a smaller step toward a larger goal, and this is why the coalition comes together. The macro-mobility would be the larger goal of social mobility and immigration reform. Rather than simply talking about physical and geographic motion, I suggest migrant politics as a form of motion. Greenlight as a campaign involved many micro-movements, an example of micro-mobility (an action) part of the larger agenda and strategy of social mobility for im/migrants. Social movements create micro-mobility within their specified contexts, and open the possibilities for future movements. The Greenlight coalition remains active today and still conducts educational and informative sessions on their various social media platforms. The Greenlight coalition is working hard to make the steps forward to implement the legislation, currently addressing the realities of DMV appointments and locations that have altered their hours and services due to the pandemic.

Although certainly a lot needs to be done across the varying counties of New York State, the important part is that it is in legislation, and will soon be more accessible to undocumented im/migrants. The multiscalar efforts of the Greenlight coalition have not ceased and exist connected through the Steering Committee to this day. Without the help of all my interlocutors, I would not have been able to piece these knowledges together. I thank you all deeply for teaching me about how communities come together for social change, and how to understand a complex and rich history of mobilization and social mobility. In movements like Greenlight, prioritizing the voices of those in who are actually affected by the legislation is crucial to uplift the future

empowerment of undocumented im/migrants. Building on Gloria Anzaldúa's theory again, borderlands are navigated as a quotidian part of the immigrant experience (lo cotidiano). This navigation is a crucial and intrinsic element of the im/migrant identity and is amplified in the contexts of Greenlight. The navigation of sociological and psychological borderlands is how one understands their existence living in multiple worlds, a crossing of difference and existence.

Appendix A (Both depicted photographs are courtesy of Green Light NY Driving Together : Luz Verde NY Manejando Juntos Facebook page public access. Date posted: 7/26/2016)



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