

Walled Territory: The Everyday Lives of Undocumented Restaurant Employees

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This paper examines undocumented restaurant workers in New Haven, Connecticut using an ethnographic approach. The goal of this study is to understand how this population conducts their day-to-day interactions in their personal, social and working lives. The project investigates how the absence of legal documents to reside in the United States affects the complexities and peculiarities of immigrants' everyday lives. In this paper, I discuss the ways in which undocumented immigrants in my study create normative lives by maintaining close relations with friends and family back home, building new friendships, and immersing themselves into a fictive kin relationship with coworkers. The picture of the undocumented restaurant workers I sketch in this essay show that even though undocumented immigrants as a whole are surrounded by potential problems such as the threat of deportation, feelings of homesickness, and experiences of disrespect and neglect, some are able to uphold a strong sense of community and belonging. As exemplified by the individuals in my observational study, the way they go about their daily lives illustrate how this marginalized group is able to cope with their situations.