NO! Against Adult Supremacy Vol. 16

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I Am

DAVID: A younger version of myself waits for the bus after school. My friend starts to tell me some of the jokes about "illegals" he knows. I look visibly uncomfortable and he acknowledges it: "You shouldn't take it personally" he says with a smirk, "I mean, unless you're 'illegal.' " I freeze and then fumble to change the subject. His reasoning is perfectly sound. Why would I be offended unless I was "illegal"? I take the bus home thinking what a close call that was, and I start to plan how I'll make it so that this never happens again. I become super-conscious of the potential trajectory of conversations. I try to avoid anything that can lead to someone asking me about my status, and in my mind everything leads there.

"Illegal is illegal" is straightforward logic to a kid, and at 12 it had paralyzed me. It held me back and kept me isolated from others. Yes, I've done all the work and I want to go on our school trip, but "illegal is illegal." Yes, I'm a high achieving student and I want to go to a good school, but "illegal is illegal." My parents have sacrificed everything for me and I love them and I want to love them, but "illegal is illegal." That word was the afterthought of everything that I did, and it degraded anything positive in my life. The i-word created a wall between my human dignity and myself. The criminalizing language didn't respect me and didn't allow me to respect myself.

Last year on March 10, those of us forced to sit in the shadow of that wall of disrespect stood up and confronted the slur. Along with immigrant youth across the nation, led by the Immigrant Youth Justice League, I declared that I am undocumented, and I am no longer afraid to defend my dignity. This year I continue to do so without apologies. By coming out, we're taking a hammer to the wall of ignorance that is confining us to the shadows. We're changing the popular narrative surrounding undocumented immigrants, and today as "illegal is illegal" fuels in more than a dozen states, it is more important for us to be out. You can help by making where you live a safer place for us to live with dignity. Help us make America a safer place for immigrant youth to share our stories. Help us drop the i-word.

TONY: I found out I was undocumented when I was about 13 years old. I used to play soccer and my coach at the time had informed me about these tryouts that were being held in Queens, to form a team that would go to Italy to compete. My coach insisted that I should go try out and I did. Tryouts were held for about two weeks and I made the final list. In my mind, I was going to Italy. I was so excited. All I could think of was to run home and tell my mother the great news. I got home and ran up the stairs calling out for mom. I told her the big news. She looked at me with this face that I will never forget.

Everything around me froze; time ceased to exist. It was just my mother and I in the living room staring at each other. She suddenly began to cry. She sat me down and explained that I was not going to be able to go because of my status in this country. I was confused. Status? She said we were not here legally in this country. I was more confused, "illegal"? She told me that life was not going to be easy for me. She told me that it was going to be hard to get into college, to find a job, to be able to get a driver's license, to travel. I always dreamed of getting into college, since no one in my family had ever graduated from high school let alone gone to college. I figured I would be the first, yet what she was telling me made my goal seem near impossible. My dream was to get into college and I sure wasn't going to let people tell me I couldn't get in. In high school I worked hard and got excellent grades. I was part of the soccer team and senior year I was offered four scholarships to universities based on my achievements in soccer and for my good grades. I had to decline because of my status did not allow me to get the funding.

Reality hit me in the face. I always reminded myself why my parents brought me here; all their hard work and sacrifice would not go in vain. I refused to give up and quit. I applied to colleges and finally I was accepted to John Jay College here in New York City, and was able to attend without a scholarship. But I still think of the words that blocked my scholarships: We don't give scholarships or monetary help to people who are "illegal." That word made me feel like dirt and made me feel worthless. I began to ask, how can humans be "illegal"? Why would media, society, and politicians use the i-word? They made it seem like we were a sickness that people should stay away from. The i-word is a terrible word that should not be used. It is a huge step back and we need to move forward. We are made to live in fear.

I no longer want to live in fear, no longer in the shadows. I exist. My dreams, my voice counts. We are no different from anyone else, we are not better than anyone, and no one is better than we are. Nine dumb numbers do not define us. We are people who have grown up here all our lives. This is our home. We can do something about creating a better future. It's time to make a change and to break all these racial barriers and learn to understand each other learn to accept our differences and live free. Today, I come out publicly undocumented, unafraid, unapologetic and now I am FREE.

SONIA: Many times, when I am asked who I am, I respond with "I am undocumented." I haven't always identified as undocumented. When I was little my parents left me in the care of my grandparents, they migrated to the United States. I was too little to understand why my parents were not there to share birthdays with me, did not understand why they were not there walking me to school. I did not understand why phone calls where the vehicle in which my parents were able to express their love for me. Calling card after calling card, I asked them when will I be with them.

No one actually prefers to risk their life crossing the border, leaving behind memories and childhoods, leaving behind their mothers and fathers and leaving behind their children. No one comes to this country because they want to be exploited, and treated less than human. No one migrates to this country and wants to identify as "illegal". Their decision is not done out of thin air, there have been structures and policies that have pushed many to migrate (NAFTA, Bracero Program, Imperialism, privatization). My parents migrated to the United States because they wanted a better life for their children. My mom worked in factories, and my dad worked as a cook. They paid taxes (still do), hired lawyers, paid fines, got robbed by lawyers. But most of all, they lost many nights of tucking me to bed, many nights of reading me books, and combing my hair and seeing me walk for the first time. They sacrificed those nights for a better future for me. They are not illegals, they are my parents. They are strong courageous and admirable.

I remember the time I was reunited with my parents; I was about 5 years old. I arrived in Harlem. They pushed me to be the best I can be; making sure education was a priority, motivating me to always be honor roll. And that is what I did, I excelled in school. I hoped time would soften the difference between others and me. I always knew that I was undocumented, but I trusted there was a fair system that would fix that up. My dad promised me my status would soon change, lawyers promised him that too. But no results. I knew my undocumented status put me on a different path than those friends I hung out with. There would be no Cornell University, no going away, no trips abroad, no teaching, no career, no fraternities, and no peaceful nights that did not consist of thinking of "deportation" or "illegal". I am undocumented. I do not speak on behalf of undocumented youth across the country. I speak of my experience, a similar experience shared across states.

When I say I am undocumented, I own my liberation, I own my humanity and the power I have. I stand with the undocumented youth across the states because we are beautiful amazing leaders. I am not the "model dreamer." I am undocumented. I stand with youth that are not high honor roll in Harvard. I stand with youth who are marginalized out as not fitting what the "American Dream" looks like. I stand with my brothers and sisters who organize 24/7 with no pay, who are about community and not politicians. I stand with my mother and father because they are not the reason that I am undocumented. They and I are not "illegals". I am undocumented, unafraid and unapologetic.

Meeting Parents
Lily Schapira

Eight days after my daughter was born, I sent this message to the organizing committee members of the Seattle Solidarity Network:

"I wanted to let you all know that I need to take a few week hiatus from coming to SeaSol meetings…. Baby is doing well, we just need to clear the decks while I recover and while we figure out this whole nursing thing. Thanks for understanding, and we'll see you in a few weeks! (I'd estimate three.)"

Four months later, I had still not returned to SeaSol meetings more than a handful of times. I was an I.W.W. member and had been organizing with SeaSol since our first fight in 2008. I was the only female-identified person to consistently attend SeaSol meetings for our entire first year and for several more years for the IWW branch in Seattle. Both groups planned to pay for childcare, and I was committed to continuing my activism after giving birth, but somehow I was not managing to make it happen. What was the problem?

What follows are some reflections on becoming a mom while trying to continue work as a class warrior. Because my daughter is only six months old now, I can only base my reflections on these first months of parenthood. While I will mostly present ideas about how to make our organizing "baby friendly," I'm sure there are many more topics to come about becoming "kid friendly". The following suggestions are also influenced by the fact that while my partner is on baby duty from 10am to 4pm, I am on duty from 4pm to 10pm every day. This system of "watches" is how we both manage to keep our sanity and our part-time jobs, but it also means that I am responsible for the bulk of childcare during prime meeting times. This advice is for other individuals who would like to help support new parents in organizations such as SeaSol and the IWW, as well as newly expecting parents who might appreciate some suggestions to help smooth the transition from activist to parent + activist.

Step One Childcare in meetings. Childcare is obviously an important part of helping any organization become parent- and baby-friendly. However, I'm not a believer in the "build it and they will come" style of organization building. If you start offering childcare in meetings, I wouldn't expect moms, dads, babies and kids to just appear out of the woodwork. In SeaSol and the Seattle IWW branch we started providing childcare after four very active members of both organizations became parents within weeks of each other. That is, we based our actions on a current, felt need in the organizations rather than a hypothetical future need. (If anyone does the opposite and finds out that parent activists do come out of the woodwork, please let me know. That would be great!)

We also decided to do advance fundraising in order to pay for childcare. While several members (often women) volunteered to do the childcare for free, we didn't want to lose out on the possibility of having those people participate in the meetings. We need everyone we can to do the organizing work of SeaSol and the IWW, so we decided it would be better to have the childcare done by someone who would not otherwise be involved with our organizations.

This is all well and good, but unfortunately, childcare isn't really what I needed to come back to organizing. I've come to believe there's a difference between being truly baby-friendly in meetings and simply providing childcare (however important that is). What I needed as a new mom was not just someone to hand the baby off to so that I could participate in meetings in a "normal" way. What I needed and still need is support for my new normal, which involves being in an extremely dependent and time-consuming nutritional and emotional relationship with a tiny human. Steps Two through Six are about supporting this new normal.

Step Two Help with meals. It's really hard finding time to cook any kind of meal, let alone a healthy one, while taking care of an infant. I mean, impossibly hard. Add to that the fact that our meetings are right at dinner time and you have me between a rock (hungry baby) and a hard place (hungry mama).

One of the best things helpers can do for new parents is to have food waiting for them at meetings. This would probably work best as a shift system where interested individuals could sign up to bring a dinner for one or two hungry mamas or papas per meeting. Shifts would not be as logistically challenging as providing food for everyone at the meeting, but I guarantee it would make it far more likely that your new mamas could attend meetings. (The breastfeeding ones are extra hungry, too!) We have not tried this in SeaSol, but we do have a monthly potluck meeting with food provided, and I am much more likely to attend those meetings.

Step Three Help with rides or packing. I have a car but am still daunted by all the logistical challenges of getting out of the house with a baby. This includes everything from making sure she is fed and changed to visiting with her in the car seat so she doesn't scream her head off on the way to the meeting. I also sometimes bring a giant exercise ball to meetings for bouncing her to sleep, a baby carrier, and so much other stuff that I feel like a pack mule trying to make my way into meetings. Helpers can offer rides and/or offer to show up early to help the parents gather things together. I've been lucky enough to have a fabulous SeaSol organizer helping me out with these sorts of pre-meeting preparations.

Step Four Have supplies on hand at meetings. Parents and helpers can keep supplies on hand to help reduce the burden of packing before meetings. These care packages should contain extra diapers in several sizes, wipes, a couple of toys, and a few changes of clothing. There should also be snacks for emergency parent feeding as well. A very motivated helper could even show up at the parents' house to help them pack such a bag.

Step Five Volunteer to do childcare for events other than meetings. Meetings aren't the only events that new parents want to attend. Often the help I most need is just an extra pair of hands, or someone to sit beside me and entertain the baby during an event. My baby never wants to be banished off to some "kid room" with just herself and a non-parental adult – she wants to be where the action is! A helper can simply offer to sit by a parent and entertain their kid for a little while, if needed.

Step Six Don't push it. It's an understatement to say that new parents are "adjusting" to their new role. For me, especially for the first several months, it felt like my new life was a Picasso painting of my old life – there were many recognizable elements, but they were all mashed up

and weird looking. I'm now figuring out how to weave activities I value back into my life, but there's no going "back to normal." I'm not going to be able to participate in exactly the same way I did before I became a mom. For example, I used to facilitate meetings regularly. Now, I will absolutely abandon that duty for a crying baby with no qualms whatsoever. But I can contribute in other ways that are meaningful and useful for the organization, such as writing, graphic design, and other activities that I can do during nap times or off duty. This is all to say – don't feel too disappointed if your new parents can't contribute to your organizing in their old way – hopefully they can find new ways that suit their new schedules and responsibilities.

In the first months of motherhood, I was too discombobulated to think of any of these suggestions. As a potential helper, you may find that new parents are too overwhelmed to think of these things or ask you for them. But if you offer, they will sometimes take you up on it. I can guarantee you it's worth the effort. I might be biased, but I think during a tense moment in a meeting, there's hardly anything better than having a baby go, "Fffppppttt!"

Neurodivergence and Kindergarten
Nick Walker

In August of 2012, as many families prepared for the start of a new school year, the editorial team of the Thinking Person's Guide to Autism blog contacted a few Autistic people who'd survived the public school system, and a few non-autistic parents who'd worked hard to help their Autistic children survive the public school system. What, they asked us, did we wish that we had known, back when we (or our kids) were first starting school?

There's a lot that I learned later on, in adolescence and adulthood, that I wish I'd known in kindergarten and elementary school. I wish I'd known the things that I later learned through aikido training: the self-regulation and self-defense skills; the ability to both inwardly access and outwardly convey calm centeredness and physical confidence.

And I wish I'd known that I wasn't alone, that I would eventually find more and more people like me. By this I mean not only the Autistic community, and the friends I made as a teenager and adult who weren't Autistic but to whom I could relate in other ways. I also mean that I wish I'd known there were others out there who'd seen what I was seeing and experiencing: the dynamics of institutionalized oppression, privilege, marginalization, injustice, and abuse; the fact that school was clearly constructed to brutalize children into soulless conformity and unquestioning compliance, and to crush, rather than cultivate, genuine creativity and curiosity.

I could see all of this clearly, but I had no words for it, and the fact that I didn't have the words for it and that no one else seemed to be seeing it left me feeling alienated and furious; the frustration ate at me every day, throughout my elementary school years.

I wish someone had said to me, back then, "Yes, what you're witnessing and experiencing is institutionalized social injustice; it's everywhere in the world and it follows the same basic patterns that it has followed throughout history. There are other people who've seen it for what it is, who've come up with words for it and written about it. These systems of injustice dominate human society, and yes, most people are largely oblivious and complicit. But some people have woken up, and more people will; you're not alone." I wish someone had said all of that to me on my first day of kindergarten.

Never assume a that child isn't ready to understand such things. Especially not an Autistic or otherwise neurodivergent child (not because we're necessarily any smarter than neurotypical children, but because there are more likely to be unpredictable discrepancies between what we know and what we're capable of communicating that we know). To quote one of the common maxims of the Neurodiversity Movement: presume competence. Sometimes what's causing meltdowns and rages and "behavior issues" is that a child really does understand.

The Boy Who Is Free
Laura Gottesdiener

Fifteen years after the uprising, a child named Diego was born in Zapatista territory. He was the youngest member of the household where I was staying, and during my week with the family, he was always up to something. He agitated the chickens, peeked his head through the window to surprise his father at the breakfast table, and amused the family by telling me long stories in Ch'ol that I couldn't possibly understand. He also, unknowingly, defied the government's claim that he does not exist.

Diego is part of the first generation of Zapatista children whose births are registered by one of the organization's own civil judges. In the eyes of his father, he is one of the first fully independent human beings. He was born in Zapatista territory, attends a Zapatista school, lives on unregistered land, and his body is free of pesticides and genetically modified organisms. Adding to his autonomy is the fact that nothing about him—not his name, weight, eye color, or birth date—is officially registered with the Mexican government. His family does not receive a peso of government aid, nor does it pay a peso worth of taxes. Not even the name of Diego's town appears on any official map. By first-world standards, this autonomy comes at a steep price: some serious poverty. Diego's home has electricity but no running water or indoor plumbing. The outhouse is a hole in the ground concealed by waist-high tarp walls. The bathtub is the small stream in the backyard. Their chickens often free-range it right through their one-room, dirt-floor house. Eating them is considered a luxury.

The population of the town is split between Zapatistas and government loyalists, whom the Zapatistas call "priistas" in reference to Mexico's ruling political party, the PRI. To discern who is who, all you have to do is check whether or not a family's roof sports a satellite dish. Then again, the Zapatistas aren't focused on accumulating wealth, but on living with dignity. Most of the movement's work over the last two decades has involved patiently building autonomous structures for Diego and his generation. Today, children like him grow up in a community with its own Zapatista schools; communal businesses; banks; hospitals; clinics; judicial processes; birth, death, and marriage certificates; annual censuses; transportation systems; sports teams; musical bands; art collectives; and a three-tiered system of government. There are no prisons. Students learn both Spanish and their own indigenous language in school. An operation in the autonomous hospital can cost one-tenth that in an official hospital. Members of the Zapatista government, elected through town assemblies, serve without receiving any monetary compensation.

Economic independence is considered the cornerstone of autonomy—especially for a movement that opposes the dominant global model of neoliberal capitalism. In Diego's town, the Zapatista families have organized a handful of small collectives: a pig-raising operation, a bakery, a shared field for farming, and a chicken coop. The twenty-odd chickens had all been sold just

before Christmas, so the coop was empty when we visited. The three women who ran the collective explained, somewhat bashfully, that they would soon purchase more chicks to raise. As they spoke in the outdoor chicken coop, there were squealing noises beneath a nearby table. A tangled cluster of four newly born puppies, eyes still crusted shut against the light, were squirming to stay warm. Their mother was nowhere in sight, and the whole world was new and cold, and everything was unknown. I watched them for a moment and thought about how, although it seemed impossible, they would undoubtedly survive and grow.

Unlike Diego, the majority of young children on the planet today are born into densely packed cities without access to land, animals, crops, or almost any of the natural resources that are required to sustain human life. Instead, we city dwellers often need a ridiculous amount of money simply to meet our basic needs. My first apartment in New York City, a studio smaller than my host family's thatched-roof house, cost more per month than the family has likely spent in Diego's entire lifetime. As a result, many wonder if the example of the Zapatistas has anything to offer an urbanized planet in search of change. Then again, this movement resisted defeat by the military of a modern state and built its own school, medical, and governmental systems for the next generation without even having the convenience of running water. So perhaps a more appropriate question is: What's the rest of the world waiting for?

Around six o'clock, when night falls in Oventic, the music for the celebration begins. On stage, a band of guitar-strumming men wear hats that look like lampshades with brightly colored tassels. Younger boys perform Spanish rap. Women, probably from the nearby state of Veracruz, play son jarocho, a type of folk music featuring miniature guitar-like instruments. It's raining gently in the open field. The mist clings to shawls and skirts and pasamontañas, the face-covering ski masks that have become iconic imagery for the Zapatistas. "We cover our faces so that you can see us" is a famous Zapatista saying. And it's true: for a group of people often erased by politicians and exploited by global economies, the ski-masks have the curious effect of making previously invisible faces visible. Still, there are many strategies to make dissent disappear, of which the least effective may be violence. The most ingenious is undoubtedly to make the rest of the world—and even the dissenter herself—dismissive of what's being accomplished. Since curtailing its military offensive, the government has waged a propaganda war focused on convincing the rest of Mexico, the world, and even Zapatista communities themselves that the movement and its vision no longer exists.

But there are just as many strategies for keeping dissent and dissenters going. One way is certainly to invite thousands of outsiders to visit your communities and see firsthand that they are real, that in every way that matters they are thriving, and that they have something to teach the rest of us. As Diego's father said in an uncharacteristic moment of boastfulness, "I think by now that the whole world has heard of our organization."

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