



## Article

# The Interlocking Processes Constraining the Struggle for Sanctuary in the Trump Era: The Case of La Puente, CA

Gilda L. Ochoa

Chicana/o Latina/o Studies, Pomona College, Claremont, CA 91711, USA; gochoa@pomona.edu

**Abstract:** By 10 January 2017, activists in the predominately Latina/o working class city of La Puente, California had lobbied the council to declare the city a sanctuary supporting immigrants, people of color, Muslims, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities. The same community members urged the school district to declare itself a sanctuary. While community members rejoiced in pushing elected officials to pass these inclusive resolutions, there were multiple roadblocks reducing the potential for more substantive change. Drawing on city council and school board meetings, resolutions and my own involvement in this sanctuary struggle, I focus on a continuum of three overlapping and interlocking manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy: neoliberal diversity discourses, institutionalized policies, and a re-emergence of high-profiled white supremacist activities. Together, these dynamics minimized, contained and absorbed community activism and possibilities of change. They reinforced the status quo by maintaining limits on who belongs and sustaining intersecting hierarchies of race, immigration status, gender, and sexuality. This extended case adds to the scant scholarship on the current sanctuary struggles, including among immigration scholars. It also illustrates how the state co-opts and marginalizes movement language, ideas, and people, providing a cautionary tale about the forces that restrict more transformative change.



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## 1. Introduction

As president, Donald Trump fortified the “immigration enforcement machine,” created by his predecessors, through increasing border enforcement, ending DACA and TPS, instituting travel bans, and furthering the criminalization of immigrants (Abrego and Negrón-Gonzales 2020, pp. 16–17). Such policies, along with Trump’s blatantly inflammatory rhetoric about preserving Western civilization intensified a climate of violence, fear and activism across the United States. In just the first three days after Donald Trump’s presidential election, there were 200 reported cases of hate crimes, harassment and intimidation. In schools, Latina/o children were told, “Go back where you come from,” by classmates and even teachers. Others were threatened with deportation and harassed with chants of “Build that wall”—in reference to Trump’s promise to construct a wall along the US-Mexico border (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). Within months, demonstrators bearing pro-Trump signs and red hats with his campaign slogan Make America Great Again became more visible at city council meetings and other political events in even more progressive regions in California (Yee 2017).

One response to such Trump-era policies and climate was a revived movement to make cities and schools sanctuaries. Sanctuary is a concept and practice long used by activists and religious organizations to provide a safe harbor for those facing persecution. Yet, the number of US religious congregations signing up to support sanctuary doubled to 800 before President-elect Trump’s inauguration in January 2017 (Orozco and Anderson 2018, p. 3). Likewise, from 2010 to 2016, the number of jurisdictions declaring sanctuary grew from a few dozen to over 600 across the US (Paik 2017). More than 200 of these

cities, counties, and states refused to corroborate with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the start of Trump's presidency (Cox Media National Context Desk and Lord 2019). Faculty, students, staff, and alumni at over 200 colleges and universities petitioned to make their institutions sanctuaries, pledging to support undocumented students (Maciel 2016). During the same period, community pressure resulted in a safe haven designation of 11% of California's K-12 school districts, and in December 2016, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson urged making all of the state's public schools safe havens (Torlakson 2016; California Department of Education 2017). Similarly, organizers throughout California pushed their cities to declare sanctuary, until the signing of California Senate Bill 54 in October 2017, ensuring that state and local resources would not be used to aid federal immigration enforcement.

Much of this organizing occurred at the local level—including in the predominately Latina/o, working class city of La Puente, California—my own community where I have lived and researched for nearly 30 years. Community members formed the Puente Coalition and successfully lobbied the La Puente City Council to become a sanctuary city supporting immigrants, people of color, Muslims, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities on 10 January 2017. Two weeks later, the Puente Coalition effectively called on the Hacienda-La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD) to also declare itself a sanctuary.

To realize these victories, the Puente Coalition—of which I was a member—drafted resolutions, lobbied elected officials, wrote press releases, and packed city council and school board chambers. We were able to move quickly due to decades of Latina/o and immigrant rights organizing, including within La Puente, and the relationships between older residents and younger students involved with recent movements (Ochoa Forthcoming). Community members rejoiced in the collective power in mobilizing, creating space for community voices, pushing elected officials, and being part of a larger sanctuary movement, yet the sanctuary victories were incomplete.

Elected officials altered key components of the resolutions, and the Coalition encountered additional processes that weakened community power and restricted more transformative possibilities. Drawing from city council and school board meetings, resolutions and my own involvement in this sanctuary struggle, I focus on a continuum of three overlapping and interlocking dynamics that minimized, contained and absorbed community activism and possibilities of change. These include: (1) neoliberal discourses, (2) institutionalized policies, and (3) a re-emergence of high-profiled white supremacist activities. While different in their form and magnitude, these covert and overt processes are manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy. As such they reflect and reinforced the status quo by maintaining limits on who belongs and sustaining intersecting hierarchies of race, immigration status, gender, and sexuality.

Combining scholarship on sanctuary struggles, racism, critical discourse analysis and how the state responds to social movements, this qualitative study expands the scholarship on white supremacy by using an intersectional analysis of racism, heterosexism and patriarchy to unpack the multi-faceted forms stifling grassroots community activism. It also adds to the scant literature on the current sanctuary struggles, including by immigration scholars, and it illustrates how the state co-opts and marginalizes movement language, ideas, and people, providing a cautionary tale about the forces that work to restrict more transformative change.

## 2. New Sanctuary Movements and Immigration in the US

Building upon the 1980s Sanctuary Movement that opposed US military involvement and supported Central American refugees fleeing brutal US-backed civil wars, the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) emerged in the 2000s. The NSM encouraged religious organizations and local jurisdictions in the US to pledge support and provide shelter for undocumented immigrants by keeping families together in the midst of escalating rates of detention and deportation (Freeland 2010; Irazábal and Dyrness 2010; Paik 2017; Orozco and Anderson 2018). In this more contemporary context, much of the recent support

has been on mixed status families and framed with religious passages such as “love thy neighbor as thyself” and “welcome the stranger” (Houston and Morse 2017, p. 36). By providing refuge to undocumented immigrants and making undocumented stories public, the NSM also aims to amplify the struggles of millions of undocumented immigrants and call attention to unjust policies through public vigils, marches, and other events (Irazábal and Dyrness 2010).

After the 2016 presidential election, the movement for sanctuary broadened to include a wider range of people, given the groups targeted by Donald Trump’s xenophobic, racist, misogynist, homophobic and able-ist discourses and policies (Orozco and Anderson 2018). Compared to the 1980s sanctuary movement and the NSM which are rooted in faith-based organizations, the push for sanctuary during Trump’s 2016 presidential election and 2017–2021 presidency included more secular groups advocating for sanctuary in public venues such as cities and schools.

Much of the literature on these recent sanctuary struggles provides important context, rationales, reflections, descriptions and theories of sanctuary (for examples, see Silverman et al. 2016; Chávez 2017; Ritchie and Morris 2017; Paik 2020). However, there are only a few studies offering on-the-ground analyses or empirical research in cities and schools on the organizing for sanctuary or the outcomes of such struggles (see Serrano et al. 2018; Ochoa Forthcoming).

With notable exceptions (Coutin 1993, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008; Chinchilla et al. 2009), immigration scholars and even those researching Latina/o immigrant activism and undocumented youth movements have rarely focused on these sanctuary struggles during the 1980s or in the present. This is the case even though as early as 1985, San Francisco had declared itself a City of Refuge for Central American refugees (see Ridgley 2003). This relative lack of scholarship has limited understanding of transnational organizing for immigrants and against US imperialism, including the activist roles of Central Americans in the case of the 1980s sanctuary movement (Perla and Coutin 2013). Considering more recent sanctuary struggles also enhances knowledge of the multi-generational forms of what Flores and Benmayor (1997) term “cultural citizenship”, such as the ways immigrant and second-generation Latinas/os claim space and demand rights to belong in cities and schools (see Ochoa Forthcoming). Likewise, as I argue in this article, honing in on responses to sanctuary struggles enables an analysis of the multiple dynamics impacting transformative possibilities.

### 3. Theoretical Framework: Sanctuary and an Intersectional Approach

Sanctuary alone does not address the root causes of migration such as US imperialism, global inequality, and environmental degradation. Neither does sanctuary radically transform exclusionary policies and practices. However, in the context of what Cacho (2012, p. 6) refers to as being “ineligible for personhood—as populations subjected to laws but refused the legal means or the moral credibility to contest those laws,” I argue that by affirming the right to be regardless of country lines and state-sanctioned approval, sanctuary provides spaces of belonging and hope. Sanctuary also enables space for continuing to push for change. In these ways, struggles for sanctuary have the potential to disrupt the status quo by de-naturalizing borders, nation-states, conceptions of citizenship, and ways of being.

However, as with other social justice movements, the state has responded with absorption (or cooptation) and insulation (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 106), coupled with a resurgence of white supremacist organizing. In one of the few studies on the recent sanctuary struggles, Serrano et al. (2018) observe such absorption and insulation through a process they characterize as “a symbolism of sanctuary” rather than “deploying sanctuary” (170). Through a content analysis of email messages and documents posted on institutional websites at two California public universities from May 2018–December 2018, Serrano et al. (2018) find that while there were indications of some support for students to re-apply for DACA based on their status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, much of what they observed were “rhetorical calls for unity and messages that reinforce

narratives of American exceptionalism” with little attempt to serve the pressing material interests of undocumented students and communities (180).

These patterns reflect similar processes in La Puente where city and school district officials also engaged in “a symbolism of sanctuary” without material support or institutional changes. Building on Omi and Winant (1994) and Serrano et al. (2018) distinctions between “a symbolism of sanctuary” and “deploying sanctuary, I use an intersectional framework that considers the interlocking manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy in hindering the struggle for sanctuary. Coined by Crenshaw (1993) and employed by scholars such as Collins (1990) and Hooks (2000), rather than give primacy to one system of oppression such as race and racism, an intersectional approach allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the multiple dynamics controlling community activism and reducing the possibilities of substantive change. Using an intersectional lens, I organize this article along a continuum of seemingly supportive discourses, supposedly neutral institutions to more blatant manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy.

### 3.1. Neoliberal Discourses and the Diversity Ideology

Since Frankenberg (1993) and Bonilla-Silva (2006) foundational work deconstructing how power-evasive and color-blind racism is used to rationalize the social structure, scholars have illustrated the frames, stories, and “discursive repertoires” common in the US in the post-civil rights era (Frankenberg 1993, p. 16). These more “subtle” discourses stand in stark contrast to Jim Crow racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p. 3) or blatant forms of sexism and homophobia; yet, by minimizing historical and systemic inequalities they still reinforce hierarchies, justify established practices, and maintain the current social structure (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 2006). They are also reactions to larger social movements.

Such contemporary discourses include neoliberal narratives that focus on individual rights, collapse differences, and assume equal choice (Omi and Winant 1994) and diversity ideologies that emphasize inclusion, representation and acceptance (Embrick 2011; Mayorga-Gallo 2019). The “diversity ideology creates space for minor acknowledgement of structural inequality in the abstract” (Mayorga-Gallo 2019, p. 1790), but the emphasis remains on integration into the existing structures of society, thereby supporting the status quo. As such, the diversity ideology is “a co-optation of calls for race consciousness” or power aware frameworks (Mayorga-Gallo 2019, p. 1790). While key in mapping out the role of ideologies, most of this scholarship centers on whites’ perspectives, leaving out the ways groups of color may also adopt such hegemonic beliefs (for an exception, see Vasquez 2014).

In the struggle for sanctuary, predominately Mexican American and Chinese American elected officials in this study adopted neoliberal discourses, including the diversity ideology. They “promote[d] a false universalism” and “ignore[d] specific issues and policies differently impacting groups” (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 152), and they embodied the diversity ideology by “portray[ing] themselves as supporters of racial and gender equality, while simultaneously mak[ing] no real substantial changes in their policies and practices” (Embrick 2011, p. 544). Rather than investing funds in supporting community members and the public good, resources were funneled into more policing during a Know Your Right workshop. On the surface, elected officials appeared to support the intersectional and concrete sanctuary resolutions presented by the Puente Coalition, but by preventing change, justifying inaction, conflating differences and erasing groups, they reinforced hierarchies and maintained white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy.

### 3.2. Institutionalized Policies and White Heteronormative Patriarchal Space(s)

Building from Ture and Hamilton’s concept of “institutional racism” in 1967, scholars have long documented how the racial, gender and social order are institutionalized in policies and practices that are oftentimes invisible and perceived as neutral (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1996; Embrick and Moore 2020). Such everyday policies and practices are normalized as the “tradition” and the best or most efficient ways of running organizations (Oakes 1985).



Extending this analysis, sociologists have more recently developed what Moore (2008) characterized as “white institutional spaces” in relationship to elite law schools. Such spaces are organized by a combination of “deep racial structures, racialized everyday practices, and racial ideologies and discursive frames” (5). Thus, white spaces are “the institutional operation of one of the pillars of structural white supremacy” (Embrick and Moore 2020, p. 1937). However, “White spaces are not always characterized by the absence of people of color, rather they are spaces where culture is deployed in ways that secure White racial interests and subordinate non-Whites” (Brunsm et al. 2020, p. 2002). As Sampson and Bertrand (2020) have documented in relationship to school board meetings, rules as customs advance whiteness (4). In this case, “normative structures and institutional practices” at the city and school district excluded community participation and maintained whiteness, despite the predominately Latina/o and Asian American population (Sampson and Bertrand 2020, p. 5). My work illustrates how given the normative everyday practices and policies that shape how city council and school board meetings are organized, they are white spaces that maintain whiteness and exclude participation of communities of color, even when the communities and elected officials are no longer white. Moreover, I extend the important analysis of “white spaces” to white heteronormative patriarchal spaces to highlight how institutions maintain and reproduce heteronormativity and masculinity, as they intersect with whiteness.

### 3.3. White Supremacist Groups

Numerically, there has been a dramatic rise in white nationalist hate groups over the past several years (Southern Poverty Law Center 2020). In 2019, the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) documented 940 hate groups in the United States—a 55% increase in such since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (2020). Scholars studying white supremacist groups over time have documented how, depending on the political climate, such groups and individuals mask their beliefs and intentions, living “double lives” and “reframing their rhetoric to appeal to mainstream conservative whites” (Futrell and Simi 2017, p. 76). Thus, the numeric and more visible appearance of white supremacist organizations may reflect the “racially charged political climate” that Trump enabled (Futrell and Simi 2017, p. 76). Donald Trump’s inflammatory language, exclusionary policy proposals and flagrant mocking of diverse groups of people normalized a climate of hate across the United States (Giroux 2017). Muslims, Blacks, Latinas/os, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, LGBTQ+ community members, and immigrants, especially from Mexico and Central America were blatantly targeted. Given the history of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy in the United States, it did not take long for violent discourses to once again become mainstream (Giroux 2017).

In the La Puente area, when emboldened Donald Trump supporters began disrupting public meetings in neighboring cities while donning Trump paraphernalia and anti-immigrant placards, both elected officials’ reticence to “deploying sanctuary” and the normalization of white heteronormative patriarchal spaces were made explicit. Expressing concerns that a Community Know Your Rights Workshop would be met with hostile displays or a take over by Trump supporters, elected officials responded by exerting more institutionalized forms of control. This involved employing additional police officers which instilled further fear among undocumented community members, making what was to be a community space what I refer to as an anti-sanctuary sanctuary space that reinscribed white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy.

## 4. Research Background and Methodology

Using a case study approach, this article focuses on the dynamics occurring in one city and school district as a way to understand the contemporary struggle for sanctuary and the multiple factors influencing community activism and constrains to institutional change. Located in Los Angeles County, La Puente is a predominately working and lower-middle class Latina/o city with about forty thousand residents. Eighty-five percent of residents

are Latina/o—the vast majority are Mexican and Mexican American. However, there is also a sizeable population of Central Americans. At 11% of the population, there is also a growing Asian American and Pacific Islander community. The remaining La Puente residents are White (3%) and Black (1%). Forty-one percent of residents are immigrants, and eighty-one percent speak a language other than English at home ([U.S. Bureau of the Census 2018](#)). Sixty-two percent of adults have received a high school graduation or higher, and the median household income in 2017 dollars was \$60,000. According to the U.S. Bureau of the [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(2018\)](#), eighteen percent live below the poverty line. At the time of the struggle for sanctuary, four of the five city council members were US-born Latinas/os—the majority identifying as Mexican American and one as white.

Most La Puente residents live within the Hacienda-La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD) boundary—one of the largest districts in the Eastern San Gabriel Valley at roughly 18,000 students. Like the city, about eighty percent of students are Latina/o and fifteen percent are Asian American and Pacific Islanders. Twenty percent are English language learners—primarily Spanish-speakers—and over seventy percent are on free and reduced lunch ([California Department of Education 2018](#)). From the time of its unification in the early 1970s, the wealthier community of Hacienda Heights has been unequally represented on the five-person school board. At the time of the organizing, four of the five board members were from Hacienda Heights. Two were Mexican American, two were Chinese American, and one was white.

The Puente Coalition consisted of a core group of about fifteen people primarily from La Puente. From November 2016 through May 2017, the Coalition met regularly—oftentimes twice a week—to strategize, draft resolutions, mobilize community members, do press work, and lobby elected officials. We also attended and spoke at city council and school board meetings. All members are Latina/o, the majority of Mexican descent. Almost all are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and several college students identified as DACA-mented, based on their status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. Most have deep ties with the school district—many as graduates, some as parents with children in the district, and a couple as employees of the district.

This article is based on participant observations that I completed from November 2016 through May 2017. During that period, I participated in the Puente Coalition meetings held in members' homes, the public library, and the community center. I also attended the bi-weekly city council and school board meetings where I was a frequent speaker during the public communication sections of the meetings.

Along with my notes from these meetings, I analyzed transcribed recordings from city council sessions, newspaper articles, and the resolutions and petitions submitted and voted on for sanctuary. The analysis for this article focuses on these materials which I individually coded, wrote memos on and then cross-checked for interpretation during the interview-stage of the research. Beginning in April 2017, I conducted thirty-five face-to-face in-depth interviews ranging in length from 70–120 min with community members and elected officials involved with local struggles for sanctuary. As a participant in these struggles, I drew from my notes and networks and also relied on referrals from other participants. In addition to questions about their involvement, I also asked for reflections on the organizing, city and school board meetings, and outcomes.

This case study approach and the use of resolutions, petitions and notes from meetings enables an in-depth, nuanced and on the ground understanding of the multiple dynamics impacting avenues and possibilities for change. Thus, I draw heavily from these materials to illustrate the research findings.

Throughout this article, I use Latina/o not to conflate the heterogeneous experiences of the range of people included in this panethnic category but instead to be inclusive and use a term employed by community members. At the time of this writing, Latinx is increasingly used on colleges and universities to disrupt gender binaries, but during the organizing, it was not used by the community members who are the focus of this work.

## 5. Pushing for Sanctuary and the Community Resolutions

The Puente Coalition advocated for what we referred to as “broad and inclusive resolutions” with concrete and actionable practices and policies for implementation. Some members drew on feminists of color such as [Crenshaw \(1993\)](#) and called for an “intersectional” approach to account for people’s multiple identities and the interlocking systems of power and inequality. The collective understanding was that if community members only advocated for immigrants, they were forcing people to select one identity—giving primacy to immigrant status over other aspects of peoples’ backgrounds.

Given the many communities overtly impacted by Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and ensuing presidency, the Puente Coalition followed organizers in the nearby city of Pomona and in the resolution named groups who were explicitly targeted:

A Resolution . . . to support and denounce tactics used to intimidate our City of La Puente Residents who are Immigrants, People of Color, Muslims, LGBTQ People and People with Disabilities; and reaffirming the City’s commitment to diversity and safeguarding the civil rights, safety and dignity of all our residents.

Three pages of historical and political connections contextualizing the need for sanctuary came after this opening.

Similarly, the Coalition emphasized various struggles in our on-line petition and in the resolution presented to the Hacienda-La Puente Unified School Board. The petition called for “declaring HLPUSD a sanctuary/safe zone district that would protect disabled, immigrant, LGBTQ, Muslim, and female students from the stated threats of the incoming presidential administration”.

Community members such as the following who signed the petition and spoke at packed city council and school meetings echoed the broad and collectivist ethos of the grassroots resolutions:

I’m signing because I have family and friends that are undocumented. I’m queer and a person of color, all mentioned identities are among those that are at threat under the new presidential regime. As an alumni and a member of those communities under threat, I’m signing as a responsibility to help protect those identities and others that are current and future students at the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District.

(Antonio R.)

I’m signing because as a member of the LGBTQ community I had it easy. I was very well supported by my friends and family. Not everyone else has the same opportunity to be themselves without hate. Also, as a proud Latina I refuse to let families be separated (even though mine wouldn’t, my family that immigrated here did so legally).

(Bianca M.)

During the public communications sections of these meetings, speakers often began by proudly proclaiming their targeted identities as a form of resistance to the overt attacks and in solidarity with others. This included undocumented students and Queer alumni. One student’s statement to the city was emblematic:

I identify as undocumented—a DACA-mented student since 2012. But, in the face of this election of Donald Trump, a lot of us are in fear that the privilege that we’ve been granted can be revoked . . .

In a school district where La Puente and Latina/o families have long felt ignored and where there has been little public discussion of immigration status and sexuality, there was a feeling of vindication as one after another community member advocated for the resolution and against a hostile national climate where such groups were blatantly assailed and excluded ([Ochoa Forthcoming](#)).

During a press conference before the La Puente sanctuary vote, a rallying call by members of the Puente Coalition became, “We are a city of Puentes [bridges], not paredes

[walls].” This framing was directed at city council members in reference to the city’s name and in opposition to Trump’s campaign promise to expand a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

Just as important to the framing of the resolutions were the concrete and actionable steps. There were six directives in the sanctuary resolution to the city:

**Section 1.** That the La Puente City Council calls upon all City residents and all City Departments and employees to speak out against acts of bullying, discrimination and hate violence and to stand up for those who are targeted for such acts.

**Section 2.** That the La Puente City Council opposes immigration raids and calls upon the federal government to continue the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, and to impose a moratorium on immigration raids in order to protect the civil rights of immigrant communities until such time as the U.S. Congress implements immigration initiatives that are fair and humane and that recognize the economic and cultural contributions.

**Section 3.** That in accordance with State and Federal laws, City employees, including members of the City of La Puente and Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department shall not enforce Federal civil immigration laws and shall not use city monies, resources or personnel to investigate, question, detect or apprehend persons whose only violation is or may be a civil violation of immigration law.

**Section 4.** That the City would provide additional training to City employees, officials, and agents to ensure that the civil rights of all who live, work, and shop in La Puente are protected.

**Section 5.** The City will seek and then secure funds to support immigrants in La Puente.

**Section 6.** That City Council shall create a task force responsible for developing and recommending strategies that ensure the civil rights, safety, and dignity of all La Puente residents are maintained.

As with the community resolution for the city, the four and a half page Puente Coalition resolution for the school district also had concrete actionable items (these are bolded for emphasis): (1) **distribute** translated copies of the resolution to all schools and organizations involved in monitoring the implementation of the resolutions; (2) **protect** the confidential information of all students, families, and school employees adversely affected by future policies; (3) **ensure** equitable treatment; (4) **training** for all district employees; (5) **prepare** an implementation plan; and (6) **establish** an advisory committee. For the school district, the Puente Coalition drew upon resolutions passed by Montebello, Bassett and San Bernardino Unified School Districts, along with the United We Dream Tool Kit.

Likewise, Puente Coalition’s preceding petition urged the board to “make a strong statement to assuage the fears and uncertainty in our community” by committing to:

1. Protecting the information of students and families from inquiries by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] or any government agency into the legal status or religious affiliations of students and their families;
2. Pledging not to cooperate with ICE in the detention of students and HLPUSD employees;
3. Protecting and supporting LGBTQ, women and disabled students and staff and carrying out the laws that support them (including bathroom laws);
4. Developing trainings for parents as well as for classified and certificated employees;
5. Developing and implementing an ethnic studies curriculum that addresses race, class, gender, and sexuality throughout the curriculum.

By including bathroom laws and ethnic studies in our petition, the Coalition sought to expand conventional constructions of sanctuary and lay the groundwork for immediate and longer-term goals.

Overall, the rationales underlying the broad, inclusive, and concrete approach reflected (1) the political climate; (2) an inclusive and intersectional framework and action plan that



not only considers racism or xenophobia but also sexism, heterosexism, Islamophobia, and ableism; (3) the usage of Women of Color feminists' frameworks for thinking about identities, structures, and discourses (see [Crenshaw 1993](#)). Finally, by drawing upon sanctuary resolutions passed in local cities and school districts, the Puente Coalition was connected to larger movements.

## 6. Symbols of Sanctuary and Anti-Sanctuary Contexts: From Neoliberal Discourses to Extreme White Supremacist Activities

Given the display of community support and the words of affirmation from some of the city council, anticipation was high that the Puente Coalition resolution would pass in La Puente. But, the motion failed 2-2, with a fifth councilmember absent from the meeting. As community members searched the chamber for explanations, the mayor filled in the gaps, "I applaud the efforts within the community to protect the immigrant populations who come here seeking a better life for themselves and their families. I deeply support the rights of everyone in our vibrant community." However, she continued, "I am concerned about the budgetary nature of Sections 4–6, of this resolution . . . I am prepared to stand and support this resolution tonight with modifications to this section." After eliminating calls for training, securing funds for immigrants, and establishing a task force, the council supported the resolution 4-0.

As with the city, the Puente Coalition successfully persuaded the school board to vote on a resolution. However, rather than adopt the community resolution, district officials drafted their own scaled down resolution that lacked substantive actions. During the public communications section of the board meetings, community members advocated to include material changes such as trainings for staff members and establishing a committee of residents to disseminate information, monitor challenges, and ensure a safe climate. Nevertheless, without altering their resolution, the board voted to "commit to ensuring all district campuses are safe zones and safe havens".

The sanctuary victories were bittersweet. Twice, community members observed how the actionable items holding the city and school district accountable were scratched from the resolutions. Without providing details, elected officials justified eliminating employee trainings and establishing committees by arguing that there were budgetary constraints. Yet, after declaring sanctuary, the city did not alter the over forty percent of the city budget allocated to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. This inaction and justification revealed the neoliberal focus on policing over programs for the public good and how the city's sanctuary resolution was symbolic.

Even in this case with a strong base of organizers and seemingly supportive elected officials, community members encountered discourses, practices, and a growing white supremacist movement that together lessened community power and possibilities of change. In varied ways and degrees, these dynamics were detrimental to the community members the resolutions sought to support, hindered community organizing, and reinforced the very systems of power and inequality the Coalition challenged locally.

### 6.1. Neoliberal Discourse and the Diversity Ideology

While pushing for sanctuary, the Puente Coalition encountered three recurring and related responses from seemingly supportive city and school officials: "We don't need it," "We're already doing it," and "We support all students." By first claiming lack of funds to institute changes and then minimizing the need for change and assuming a universal experience of all students, these narratives are part of contemporary neoliberal discourses that diminish differences in power, privilege, and exclusion; homogenize struggles; and mask the historical and structural foundations of inequality rooted in white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy (see [Frankenberg 1993](#); [Omi and Winant 1994](#); [Bonilla-Silva 2006](#)). The vote for sanctuary and the narratives espoused by La Puente and HLPUSD officials offer an image of support with a nod toward an awareness of a hostile climate. As such, they reflect what [Embrick \(2011\)](#) refers to as "the diversity ideology" in that officials appeared to support community demands, but they eliminated any opportunity for

“substantial changes in their policies and practices” (544). Rather than “deploy sanctuary,” elected officials offer an illusion or “symbols of sanctuary” (see [Serrano et al. 2018](#)). An analysis of the city and school district’s resolutions and the ensuing discussions reveals how discourses of minimization and homogenization justified inaction, placated community pressure, and perpetuated white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy.

#### 6.1.1. Minimization and Gaslighting

Several city officials expressed surprise by the resolutions for sanctuary and community concern that they would not pass. They referred to La Puente as an “immigrant friendly city” that was opposed to Trump. As evidence, one high-ranking staff member cited graffiti in the City belittling Trump. Perhaps intended as supportive, this framing minimized larger threats, the need for sanctuary, and even the work of community organizers. It downplayed the fears of community members, and it failed to account for differing realities and concerns community members have based on distinct positionalities and experiences by immigration status, race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and ability.

Underlying the narrative that sanctuary was not needed locally was the belief that “we’re already doing it.” This was glaring in the school district’s resolution that proposed no actionable changes or concrete steps. The wording in the nine components of the District’s resolution is bolded for illustration:

1. All students have a right to an education regardless of any differences, including immigration status. The District **will continue** to advocate for and embrace all students as full members of our school community.
2. District personnel shall treat all students equitably in the receipt of all school services, including but not limited to, free and reduced lunch program, transportation, and educational instruction. Further, the District shall promote learning and protect the safety and well-being of all students consistently and non-discriminatorily as required by law.
3. The District **will continue** to take any and all actions authorized by law and District policies to provide equal opportunities and safe learning spaces for all of our students.
4. District schools **will remain** safe and supportive spaces for students and families, free from intimidation, hostility, or violence, including threat of deportation.
5. The District shall not share information that could put a student’s security at risk.
6. District teachers, staff, and board members will model the behavior we hope to teach including listening before speaking, seeking mutual understanding, treating one another with respect, communicating honestly, and avoiding inflammatory rhetoric.
7. The District **will continue** to listen to the needs of all of our students and families by hosting meetings and engaging in conversations so that we can learn from those who are impacted before we assume what actions to take.
8. The District **will continue** to teach tolerance and inclusion in our schools, set clear and high expectations for how we treat one another, and encourage and equip our educators to address difficult issues concerning race and discrimination.
9. The District **will continue** to create a sense of belonging for all and aim to foster a broader understanding of our commonalities and differences.

With language such as “will continue” and “will remain,” the district’s resolution maintained business as usual, indicating that transformation within the school district was not needed.

Another form of minimization was when school officials publicly diminished community outrage. On 9 February 2017 weeks after the board had voted on safe haven, members of the Puente Coalition attended the meeting to urge the board to institute actionable steps on their resolution. Earlier that day, a local teacher learned from one of his students that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was at the student’s home forcefully demanding entrance to search for an undocumented family member. A local immigrant rights organization confirmed that ICE had been conducting raids throughout the region targeting people with existing orders of deportation. Over 100 people were apprehended.

This information made action on the part of the school board even more urgent, and several Puente Coalition members expressed this during the public communications section of the board meeting. During a short recess in the meeting, as I was asking a district employee in the lobby how the District was implementing the sanctuary resolution, I was told to “calm down.” Such forms of gaslighting minimized the severity of the issues. They diverted attention away from the school district and cast community members who were pushing for change as the problem for refusing to accept the status quo by allowing threats to undocumented immigrants to pass without action.

#### 6.1.2. Homogenization and Collapsing Differences

Along with minimizing community concerns by not proposing any changes, the district’s nine points in their resolution seen above focused on “all students.” Relevant selections are included here again and bolded for illustration:

1. **All students** have a right to an education regardless of any differences, including immigration status. The District will continue to advocate for and embrace **all students** as full members of our school community.
2. District personnel shall treat **all students** equitably in the receipt of all school services, including but not limited to, free and reduced lunch program, transportation, and educational instruction. Further, the District shall promote learning and protect the safety and well-being of **all students** consistently and non-discriminatorily as required by law.
3. The District will continue to take any and all actions authorized by law and District policies to provide equal opportunities and safe learning spaces for **all of our students**.
7. The District will continue to listen to the needs of **all of our students** and families by hosting meetings and engaging in conversations so that we can learn from those who are impacted before we assume what actions to take.
9. The District will continue to create a sense of **belonging for all** and aim to foster a broader understanding of our commonalities and differences.

While there are a couple of places where the word “differences” appears in the district’s resolution, the emphasis is on all students. Yet, not all students and families are equally impacted by the political climate. Numerous studies illustrate how targeted students and communities fear for their livelihood and have high levels of stress, including post-traumatic stress ([Raff 2017](#); [Ramakrishnan and Shah 2017](#)). Likewise, the district has a long history of disparate treatment and unequal educational outcomes among students and families by race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and ability (see [Ochoa 2004](#); [Coreas et al. 2020](#)). Within this context, such reference to all students reduces the specificity of concerns, homogenizes experiences, and erases a pattern of exclusionary treatment.

In altering the community resolution, the La Puente Mayor—supported by the council—followed a similar form of collapsing differences by replacing “Muslims” with “religious minorities.” In constructing the resolution, the Coalition intentionally included Muslims because of the on-going forms of Islamophobia that have intensified since 9–11 and with the actions of the Trump administration especially regarding travel bans to the United States. However, by substituting Muslims with religious minorities, the City Council erased the specific inequalities and fears encountered by Muslims and lumped them with all religious groups which may be in the minority numerically in the US but typically do not face persecution. This false equivalency is emblematic of neoliberal discourses that ignore systemic policies and practices of exclusion and assume that all are the same (see [Omi and Winant 1994](#)).

As members of the Coalition pushed the school board for material changes such as training for educators, one of the most vocally supportive board members defended the district resolution from the dais with: “We’re already doing it”. He described how a local non-profit organization that focuses on building coalitions on behalf of Asian American and Pacific Islanders was already doing what community members were advocating for

in the district. This board member's argument temporarily quelled community concerns. However, it was later uncovered that the organization was not providing teacher or staff training. Instead, the organization was paying the district to use adult education classrooms for monthly clinics assisting people with citizenship. In December 2016, the district asked the organization to host a Know Your Rights session for community members, but reportedly no teachers attended and it was a one-time arrangement. During a phone conversation with a member of the organization, they clarified that "citizenship is not connected to sanctuary at all".

By claiming that this non-profit was doing the work that the Puente Coalition was pushing, the school board member collapsed the experiences of legal permanent residents with undocu- and DACA-mented students—homogenizing the experiences of all immigrant students and families. This false equivalency erased the specific differences between these groups, thereby minimizing the unequal realities for undocu- and DACA-mented students who currently have no path to citizenship and who in community and public meetings expressed concern about the impact Trump's administration would have on their livelihoods.

### 6.1.3. Erasure

Part of the neoliberal narrative was an erasure of macro-structural factors and historical patterns, including the roles of US imperialism in compelling migration. Instead, as reflected in the comments by the La Puente mayor presented earlier, migration was framed as an individual choice and American exceptionalism was touted: "I applaud the efforts within the community to protect the immigrant populations who come here seeking a better life for themselves and their families. I deeply support the rights of everyone in our vibrant community".

Puente Coalition's initial petition and resolution to the school board used the language of "sanctuary/safe haven". This naming rooted this struggle in a longer history of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement for Central Americans, and it also connected the activism to nearby community actions pushing other city council and school districts to declare sanctuary. However, at the school district, school officials rarely used "sanctuary," and eventually, their January 26th resolution made no reference to it. Instead, "safe haven" was used. This change mirrored the language used by other districts and California State Superintendent of School Tom Torlakson in his December 2016 urging of school districts to declare themselves "safe havens" (Yamamura 2016). This softer language may have been a reaction to Trump's threats to withhold federal funds to governments that declare themselves "sanctuaries" (Jones 2017). While this shift in language allayed community pressure, it erased the larger connection we had to contemporary struggles for sanctuary as well as to the 1980s sanctuary movement opposing US intervention and supporting Central American asylum seekers.

Furthermore, while the Puente Coalition intentionally crafted and advocated for intersectional and inclusive resolutions, gender, sexuality, and ability were missing in city and school district discussions. The focus was on immigrants in general. Thus, the ways anti-immigrant policies intersect with other forms of oppression was ignored, and the voices and concerns of LGBTQ community members were also sidelined.

The messages underlying all of these dynamics was that community input and material changes were unnecessary. Either sanctuary was not required because of community political views, or if it was needed elected officials were already addressing it. As Mayorga-Gallo (2019) has described, such elected officials appear to be progressive by supporting inclusion and touting acceptance. They then used such narratives to rationalize inaction. By maintaining the existing order with an illusion of support for community members in name only the status quo was preserved.

## 6.2. Institutionalized Exclusion, the Perpetuation of White Heteronormative Patriarchal Spaces and Anti-Sanctuary Practices

Similar to the use of discourses by seemingly supportive officials, the Puente Coalition and the larger predominately working class Latina/o community encountered other barriers. In this case, the limits to community participation were embedded in the very format and physical layout of the city and school board meetings, a police presence, and English-only policies. Even when spaces for greater participation could have been extended, they were still denied. Such spaces are not only “white institutional spaces” (Moore 2008, p. 5), but they also perpetuate white supremacist heteronormative patriarchal taken-for granted policies, practices, and norms in city and school board chambers that are often cast as neutral. So, even though the area’s current city council and board members are Latina/o and Asian American, the established norms, policies and practices remain exclusionary.

The structure of conventional city council and school board meetings constrain community participation (Sampson and Bertrand 2020). Community members are positioned as audience members expected to passively sit in rows facing front and observing elected officials conduct business. The constraints were glaring during the vote for the community resolution in La Puente. After the community resolution failed and the mayor proposed accepting it if the actionable items were eliminated, one of the city council members who the Puente Coalition had been working with to pass the community resolution responded to the mayor’s change:

I think that Sections 4 and 5 can be eliminated because there are organizations that are already out there that are pursuing things of that nature . . . and then number 6—I believe she [the Mayor] mentioned—which shall create a taskforce responsible for developing, for recommending strategies, civil rights for La Puente. That taskforce could be an ad hoc committee, or it could be a participant with limited time, and we could probably do that at a later date.

As if looking for community approval, this same councilmember ended his comments with “if that’s okay.” However, there was no structured opportunity to stop the meeting for the community to caucus, gauge community sentiments, and participate in a dialogue. During meetings, community input is relegated to the beginning during public comments. Thus, as the city council voted, community members were left sitting in rows across from councilmembers without any formal form of participation and at the mercy of council and board member votes.

The size of the two meeting chambers also restricted community participation. Community attendance was overflowing when sanctuary was being discussed—with standing room only, and many people had to wait outside of the chambers at the city hall and school district office. Chamber doors were kept open, but neither arranged for overflow rooms. This still made it difficult for all in attendance to observe city and school business. Inhibiting community attendance limited community knowledge and the ability to apply further pressure as some community members were excluded from observing decisions that would directly impact them.

Furthermore, the city council and school board did little to alter policies ensuring that the voices of community members most impacted were heard. The city council preserved the three minutes per person speaking-time allocated during oral communications, but as has been their practice, the City provided no translation. Puente Coalition member Manuel Maldonado voluntarily translated for community members who addressed the council in Spanish, but little additional time was allocated for translation. During his comments before the council vote, one council member addressed the audience in both English and Spanish. However, these were the only times Spanish was spoken or any form of translation was provided during the city council meetings. This lack of translation excluded the Spanish-speaking community from fully engaging in a resolution that in many cases applied directly to them or their family members.

In contrast, simultaneous Spanish-English translation is provided at school board meetings through headsets and a district-hired interpreter. But, the school board’s policy



restricts time for public comments to just 15 min per topic regardless of how many community members register to speak. At the urging of community members, a few more minutes were provided for the meeting when the District's safe haven resolution was on the agenda. Nonetheless, because of the number of people hoping to advocate for sanctuary, several were forced to relinquish their time. Instead, they approached the podium in clusters representing specific interests such as Latina immigrant mothers, high school students, and college students. They stood in solidarity and alongside several speakers. Even with this approach, the few speakers were still forced to scale back their comments to a couple of minutes each.

Another way the school district controlled community involvement was through explicit displays of institutional power and authority that reflected anti-sanctuary spaces. At school board meetings, this sense of control was most apparent during the public comments section of the meetings—the only space provided at these meetings for community participation. During this period, a school board member is tasked with monitoring speakers' time. Along with shouting when the time is up, focusing on time keeping may limit the board member's ability to fully listen to the ideas and concerns brought to the board. This power dynamic in regulating time can also fuel an unnecessary adversarial climate between the community and school board members.

A more obvious display of institutional power and authority is the normalization of police officers in city and school spaces. At least one armed uniformed police officer is a constant presence at city council and school board meetings. At the school board meetings for sanctuary, his presence was especially intrusive as he stood next to a table where community members completed request-to-speak cards at the meeting. In several cases, the police officer even collected these cards, perhaps giving the misperception that he was literally charged with policing who would address the board. During open communications, he stood just feet away from the podium. At one meeting where dozens of community members attended and spoke for sanctuary, he moved closer and closer toward the podium. At one point when ten Latina mothers stood near the podium during their allocated speaking time, the uniformed police officer—towering a foot above them—was just inches away. Similarly, when I exceeded my 2–3 allotted minutes, the police officer leaned between the microphone and me and began pounding on the podium. The exertion of state and masculine power embodied in a Latino uniformed police officer who supported institutional practices over Latinas advocating for the welfare of youth and families was not lost on community members. A teacher in the district even used part of his allocated time to critique this intimidation tactic and how it negatively impacts community participation.

Emerging in the context of "tough on crime" policies and fueled by a culture of fear, public sites such as city halls and schools have increasingly adopted security tactics such as police officers, metal detectors, and zero tolerance policies (Beres and Griffith 2001). Justified as mechanisms for public safety, given the racial disparities in treatment and the linkages between the police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), many Black and Latina/o communities do not equate the police with safety. A police presence, especially the actions of the officer in this school board example, had a chilling effect. His actions were an explicit display of regulating community participation, and his sheer presence invoked fear and signaled who belonged at community meetings.

Denied any official connections to the city council or school board, the Puente Coalition struggled to find a space and a mechanism to disseminate information to community members. Once the community achieved sanctuary in the city, Puente Coalition organizers aimed to continue the momentum and incorporate more participants by scheduling weekly meetings away from members' homes to more accessible community spaces. However, securing such a space was a struggle. After deciding to meet in a room in the city's community center, organizers were required to pay a \$40 fee for each meeting. Suddenly, the struggle to find a more public meeting place became the focus. This took time and energy away from the crucial issues and slowed momentum. The city's commitment to sanctuary was also questioned, since the Latina/o group who pushed for it was financially

prohibited from meeting in a community space. After being shut-out, coalition members contacted the Los Angeles County Supervisor, and with here assistance were eventually able to secure a meeting room in the city library.

City council and school board members also denied pathways for community participation and decision-making when they removed calls for a task force and advisory committee in the respective resolutions. These changes to the resolutions—occurring behind closed doors and with no transparency in the case of the school board, controlled the community's contributions and access to knowledge. With already limited pathways for participation, such actions and justification kept community members in place.

The school district restricted the dissemination of relevant information to community members in ways that also impeded knowledge and support. When the Puente Coalition organized Know Your Rights workshops in spring 2017 and DACA renewal sessions in fall 2017, members contacted the school district for support sending this information to students and families via established district mechanisms such as newsletters, robocalls, and postings on marquees. At the Coalition's recommendation and with continual pressure by members of the teachers' association, the school district eventually disseminated their own information regarding their safe haven resolution and other relevant policies to school sites and community members. However, these materials were initially distributed only in English and not sent to all families. It was left to community members to urge school board members and the superintendent to translate materials and make all information accessible.

White heteronormative patriarchal spaces are built into the foundations of US institutions. Seemingly neutral city council and school board policies and practices prevented full participation of the working-class Latina/o and especially Spanish-speaking community members and Latina mothers advocating for change. By continuing with business as usual, the city and school district revealed how they were more invested in projecting an image of sanctuary than actually "deploying sanctuary" and institutionalizing change (see [Serrano et al. 2018](#)).

### *6.3. Absorption and Anti-Sanctuary Actions over Growing Fears of White Supremacists: The Simultaneity of Discourses, Organizational Practices, and White Supremacist Activity*

The Puente Coalition had little control over the process of advocating for the community sanctuary resolutions with elected officials, since this process is institutionalized in the running of city and school politics. Undeterred initially, the Coalition continued meeting, monitoring national and local changes, and lobbying city and district officials through emails, texts, phone calls, and at public meetings in order to see the community demands come to fruition. Observing little follow through from the city and school district, the Coalition began organizing its own community-based workshops. The experiences during the following workshops punctuate how neoliberal discourses, institutionalized exclusion and the greater visibility of extreme white supremacists coalesced in the making of a blatantly anti-sanctuary space.

Notwithstanding pronouncements that the school district was doing things in support of their safe haven resolution, two months had passed and with the exception of the work from the teachers' union, there were still no trainings for staff and faculty. Determined to host a Know Your Rights (KYR) workshop, the Puente Coalition had tentative plans for 1–2 workshops in March and April 2017. However, once again, securing a place was difficult. After weeks of trying, several members committed to organizing a KYR workshop agreed to collaborate with the Los Angeles County Supervisor's office and the City of La Puente.

Over the course of several promising meetings with representatives from each of the organizations, the decision was made to co-create a supportive space in the community center's courtyard where information and other resources would be shared, and smaller workshops would occur in the surrounding rooms. Organizers discussed inviting youth groups to perform to help make it a community event, and the Puente Coalition saw it as a chance to bring the community together in a public display of support—to embody

and enact the original ethos of the community resolution. It was to be a Community Know Your Rights gathering rather than just focusing on individuals.

However, local anti-immigrant forces were becoming more emboldened, and this had a chilling effect on plans for the KYR workshop. Anti-immigrant forces started attending other cities' community meetings in their red Make America Great Again (MAGA) hats and other pro-Trump paraphernalia. Two weeks before the scheduled 4 May 2017 event in La Puente, they disrupted a KYR forum hosted by Democratic Congressperson Grace Napolitano in the neighboring working class Latina/o city of El Monte. Led by an extreme white supremacist identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center, about 25 people protested the forum with shouts and threats of calling ICE, leading the El Monte mayor to abruptly end the event (Yee 2017). Earlier in the week, Democratic Congressperson Judy Chu in neighboring Monterey Park had cancelled an event based on similar concerns (Yee 2017).

The La Puente mayor considered cancelling the KYR event too. She contacted the Los Angeles County Sheriff, and the sheriff recommended the following changes in case of similar disruptions: (1) moving the event to the gym for better control; (2) having police and private security; and (3) canceling the youth performances for safety. Other recommended changes included (1) distributing a Code of Conduct flyer prohibiting harassment, weapons, noisemakers, and banners; (2) cancelling the breakout sessions to have more control over the space; and (3) eliminating a KYR video from the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) because it was perceived to represent police officers negatively. Suddenly, what was to be a more celebratory and affirming event was becoming punitive and reactive. Furthermore, the rationale for cancelling the CHIRLA video was neoliberal. It equated the concerns of police officers with the concerns of undocumented families—despite their unequal access to state power and institutionalized forms of belonging. As the planning continued, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's recommendations were implemented, and the Los Angeles County Supervisor's Office took greater responsibility in contacting speakers and finalizing details.

On the day of the KYR workshop, I arrived 15–20 min early. There were about 100 plastic folding chairs facing the stage in the large community center gym—in a set-up similar to city council and school board meetings. In the back were several round tables for people to meet individually with lawyers. Informational tables that included materials and people from the Mexican Consulate and the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center were along two walls. The gym floor was covered in dark green plastic to preserve the varnish, making the windowless room drabber. Outside, there were two police cars in the parking lot and five uniformed Los Angeles County police officers standing at the front entrance to the community center. By the 6:00 p.m. start-time, the police, lawyers, and city and school district officials outnumbered the attendees.

Hoping more people would arrive, the event started late. By the time it began, about thirty people were seated—ten were area city and school officials who sat together in the front row. A group of 5–7 city officials stood in the back of the room at the entrance to the gym. Five-six armed police officers stood together at the other corner in the back near the roundtables reserved for the confidential consultations with immigration lawyers. Private security officers conspicuously dressed in black and with wires attached to their ears stood in the corners of the gym. Sitting in the middle of the room, I struggled to hear the introductions of all of the school and city elected officials. The first panel included several speakers on education. The raised stage and the formality of some of the speakers' presentation styles contributed to an awkward distancing between the formal presenters and the community members. Manual Maldonado, representing the Puente Coalition, was a moderator and interpreter. Fortunately, his knowledge of the community and demeanor helped to enliven the space. Afterward, Benjamin Wood, a local organizer from the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center gave a KYR workshop. He was the only speaker to step down from the stage and stand with the attendees, facilitating a less hierarchical and more community-centered, interactive and personal presentation.

Despite providing an opportunity for community members to receive legal advice from lawyers and local organizers, the event was a failure. I received an email from a community-based organizer offering his analysis:

In my opinion, a big part of the problem is the involvement of the government. Once the Supervisor's office gets involved, as well-intentioned as they might be, it opens the door for other government agencies—from the school districts to the sheriff's department—to also be involved. And while the school districts can be extremely helpful in mobilizing their parents and students, we saw that that was not the case at this last event. Even the Supervisor's office, useful as they were in getting volunteer attorneys, were not able to use their budget for promotion etc. to get a large crowd.

Basically, what I'm saying is that I think the grassroots and community organizations can do a better job on their own. A better job of mobilizing, of creating a welcoming atmosphere, and in setting a community-based agenda for the event and for the movement.

As my written reflections following the event suggest, the initial ideas, people, and goals were absorbed by the concerns of elected officials, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and in reaction to the MAGA supporters:

"Why are the police here," a young child standing near me asks her mom. The police took over the Community Know Your Rights Event under the pretense of protecting the community from detractors. While there were no visible Trump supporters shouting down the speakers, they effectively infiltrated the event by taking control away from the community and making the event a police state with twenty armed officers and 6–8 private security.

Police cars and motorcycles filled the front entrance, and the city abided by all of the sheriff's recommendations—removing aspects of a vibrant and humanizing community space. The children performers the organizers had envisioned were denied participation, and the event was moved from an outdoor quad with break out rooms for dialogue to a vacuous gym with talking heads.

While lawyers gave of their time to meet one on one with community members, they were put in the back of the gym and forced to compete for listening space over the speakers' microphones at the front of the room. Police officers loomed over those meetings within earshot.

Even the CHIRLA know your rights video was pulled by the City because of concerns for how the police were depicted. The energy, excitement, ideas and the sheer labor of the predominantly Latina community planners were also sidelined in the name of security.

Dedicated organizers and educators did all they could to share information and their passion for justice, but some community members were literally driven away from what was to have been a collective learning and affirming space.

This sidelining of community interests and Puente Coalition's intersectional and inclusive approach was detrimental. As we later learned, when some families saw the police cars in the parking lot and police officers standing outside of the community center, they left. They were kept away by this anti-sanctuary space and unable to access information and support at an event that was supposed to be for these purposes. Also, organizing this event took time and energy away from the Puente Coalition. Collaborating with city officials who then partnered with the sheriff's department for this workshop resulted in diminishing the group's power by absorbing the labor, connections, and ideas into an event that did not reflect the ethos of the group. Rather than working autonomously outside of the local structures of power or even continually pushing elected officials for substantive changes, this attempted collaboration kept members of the Coalition working with elected

officials. It furthered the status quo and allowed elected officials to use the Coalition and the KYR event as evidence that the city was taking action as a so-called sanctuary city.

## 7. Conclusions

In response to the political climate and inspired by organizers throughout California, Latinas/os in La Puente coalesced as the Puente Coalition. As part of a larger and evolving sanctuary struggle, the group pressured city council and school board members to pass sanctuary resolutions with material changes. Public attacks by 2016 President-elect Donald Trump on communities by race, gender, sexuality, ability, and nation, along with knowledge of historical inequalities and women of color theories, informed the group's intersectional both/and framework. During a time of heightened fear and uncertainty, the group's mobilizing united community members, disrupted business as usual, and helped to create space for communities often on the margins in the city and school district to publicly proclaim identities and share experiences.

However, reflecting the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideologies and the power of the state, this community activism was met with various forms of resistance from neoliberal diversity discourses by seemingly supportive elected officials, entrenched institutionalized policies, and the growing visibility of white supremacist groups. In a few short months after the 2016 presidential election, the flagrant actions of emboldened MAGA followers was on display in nearby cities. Sanctuary-supporting community members stood strong, but the MAGA climate sent a chilling message. The City and Los Angeles Supervisor's Office responded by partnering with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department turning what was to be a collectivist and celebratory Community Know Your Rights gathering for undocumented immigrants into an anti-sanctuary space with more police officers and politicians than community members.

Nonetheless, even before such overt actions, the predominately working-class Latina/o and Spanish-speaking community members were excluded from community spaces and meaningful participation by white heterosexual patriarchal spaces and elected officials who on the surface appeared supportive but who instead accepted prevailing diversity ideologies and stopped short of instituting any substantive changes. Elected officials used neoliberal arguments to justify inaction, and the La Puente mayor claimed there were no funds for training or a community task force. Yet, funds were available to hire police and private security officers for the KYR workshop and 40% of the city budget devoted to police remained intact.

This extended example provides a cautionary tale about the role of the state in co-opting and absorbing community pressure. It reveals the multiple manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy—both the more seemingly subtle or covert forms and the blatant action by white supremacist organizations. Together, these dynamics minimized, contained, and aimed to absorb community activism and possibilities of change. They also maintained limits on who belongs and sustained intersecting hierarchies of race, immigration status, gender, and sexuality.

Using an intersectional lens allows for a nuanced understanding of the overlapping processes at work that placated, undermined, and outright excluded participation by race/ethnicity, language, gender, and sexuality. Such a lens also better prevents the erasure and homogenization of multiple identities and distinct realities as occurred by elected officials in this study; and it reveals the ongoing need for empirically-driven scholarship that is attentive to naming and deconstructing the multiple manifestations of white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy.

As a product of and existing within the interlocking processes detailed in this article, there were limits to the Puente Coalition's ability to organize. By reacting to the socio-political climate and trying to push the city and school district to adopt sanctuary resolutions, once resolutions were passed—even if just symbolically—it was more difficult for the group to shift focus. Then, its energy and ideas were expended on finding a meeting place and working with the City on the KYR workshop. Nevertheless, the group's activism,



the lessons learned and relationships built provide a base for community members to continue organizing.

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