# The plight of the undocumented immigrants: Polly and Deming

Undocumented citizens are people that are foreign born and have no right to reside in the United States of America because they have not been legally registered as American citizens. As records have it, the US has close to 2 million residents that are undocumented. These undocumented immigrants undergo a lot of plights in the US. For instance, most of them do not have legit employment while others are completely unemployed. From time to time, they are discriminated against. For instance, when it comes to job opportunities, priority is given to the legal citizens of America other than these undocumented citizens. Most live in poor living conditions. Drawing reference from Lisa Ko’s, *The Leaver,* this essay is an analysis of the plight undocumented immigrants face in the United States of America; unemployment, harsh living conditions and discrimination.

The plight of the undocumented is even acknowledged by the federal government. Back in 2014, the then president of the United States Barrack Obama admittedly revealed that the immigration system in the USA is a broken one. He emphasized that henceforth, his administration would put more focus on felons, criminals, and gang members. His focus was getting criminals arrested other than the undocumented. Most of the crimes in the US are blamed on the minority group. Barrack Obama added that there was no need to harass a mom who was working so hard to provide for her children just because she is undocumented. This is confirmed in Lisa’s book when Polly goes looking for cash to support the life of her son but does not return home. The government is so focused on undocumented immigrants other than criminals. Obama’s whole focus on criminals other than the undocumented immigrants changed when Trumps administration took over and began to do away with the latter. For clarity, Lisa K’s book *The Leavers,* is about an undocumented mother living in the US who suddenly disappears, leaving behind her American-born son. Lisa got the inspiration to write *The Leavers* from a *New York Times* article published back in 2009 about an undocumented immigrant hailing from Fuzhou, China who spent one and half years in detention after being arrested at Greyhound station in Florida on her way to a begin a new job. The article inspired Ko, who later characterized Polly as that woman and her son Deming.

Nowadays, in the USA, a real-life Deming by the time they are eleven years of age, they are aware of the difficulties that their parents, especially single mothers, go through being a poor immigrant with ambiguous legal status or rather undocumented. Deming, as Lisa has made him appear, is, however, ignorant of all the difficulties that her mother Polly has to go through. This is evident as when one day when Polly does not return home from work, Deming thinks that probably she is in danger. In his scenario, Deming does not possibly think that his mother’s absence could be anything related to immigration. Deming actually thinks that her mother is in danger perhaps for a crime. He even recalls that Polly had once told him that she fancies a job in Florida. To conclude it all Deming thinks that his mother, Polly had left for the job in Florida and decided to leave him behind too (Ko, 2). Deming searched for Polly who had vanished mysteriously to no avail. From this case scenario, undocumented immigrants in the US could vanish for all any of the reasons mentioned above. Particularly, if it were a crime the scenario becomes worse. Perhaps they were not even taking part in the crime, but they were just in the nearby place of the crime, they end up being considered as part of the crime. They are considered as scapegoats for any crime regardless of the offenders in the US.

In her book *The Leavers,* Ko reveals how undocumented citizens have been turned into scapegoats by America itself whenever there are tension and anxiety in the country. The fact that they are in the US illegally makes them be blamed for all the events that go wrong in the US. Back at Deming, motherless, he is taken in by a well-meaning white couple who encourage him to focus on his schoolwork. They went ahead and changed his name to Daniel Wilkinson. Deming used to play the guitar to do away with frustrations of Polly who had vanished without a trace. In times of frustration, Deming would be reminded of how much he had been done for and that he should be grateful. Deming’s case is not different from what undocumented citizens go through. Most of them after crossing the border and into new soils, have to change their names to suit those of the locality. Additionally, most of the children who are brought up by undocumented immigrant parents end up being abandoned. This is because of the abject poverty and living conditions. They are then taken in by the whites and raised as their own children. As portrayed by Deming, the children undergo a lot of frustrations resulting from missing their biological families.

Throughout *The Leavers,* Ko depicts the many struggles among them the inconsistency of identifying with a particular culture, that both the undocumented parents and their children have to go through. For instance, Deming has to switch cultures and milieus. Lisa reveals that after a while. Deming is contacted by Michael a family member. A crisis ensues out of nowhere and Deming has to go back to China. At one point, he is brought up by his mother in America, his grandfather in China Wilkinson, then taken in by the whites and now has to go back to China. (Flores, 296) contends… “Such switching of culture leaves one confused not even knowing what to identify themselves with”. This is the predicament that the children of undocumented parents have to go through from time to time.

Moreover, KO also reveals the problem of unemployment and discrimination that the undocumented immigrants have to go through the character Polly (Wathey, 2). KO describes Polly as one woman who is driven by her own demands and dreams. Here is Poly who is striving to get a better life for her son. She does all sorts of jobs. She is selfless and does not even mind the back-breaking jobs as long as it meant providing a better life for her son. Through Polly, the reader can determine that being an undocumented citizen in the United States of America, it becomes difficult to land a decent job to raise to provide for your kids. In comparison to the legal citizens of America, the undocumented ones have to do all sorts of ordinary jobs just to survive. The whites on the other hand or rather the legal citizens of the US have to themselves white collar jobs and work in decent offices. Their children do not have to be moved from one country to another unless they are on vacation. This reveals not only discrimination but also how hard it is to land a decent job as long as you are an undocumented citizen in the United States of America

Additionally, in her book, Ko also reveals that the reasons for living in America yet being undocumented vary from one immigrant to another. Some come as refugees, others come to look for a better life as in comparison to the one they are leading in their home countries. As for the case of Polly, she immigrated to the US to escape marriage to Deming’s father (Ko,6). Polly thought that by being married perhaps she would never achieve her dreams. In the first place, she never wanted to become a mother. She had hoped that even during the emigration, she would miscarry. Fortunately, that was not the case. Deming was born and due to the harsh living conditions in the USA, she had thought of actually abandoning him at a tender age. Most of the children born to undocumented citizens face the risk of being abandoned or even the possibility of being aborted before they can see the world. The undocumented citizens do not see themselves capable of raising children in the harsh and joblessness conditions they are living in and therefore the easy way out is abandoning or abortion.

Similarly, Readers together with Deming, at the end of the story, actually find out that the mysterious disappearance of Polly was due to the deportation. This is evident when Deming connects with her mother in China. Polly tells Deming that actually he did not just disappear from his life but was detent and deported back to Fuzhou China. The cruel immigration system in the USA is what caused Deming a lot of unflinching pain of having to be brought up by foster parents.

Through Lisa Ko’s *The Leavers,* there is a revelation on how life can become difficult for the undocumented citizens in the United States of America. Deming who is the son of an undocumented citizen Polly faces abandonment, displacement and the strain of having to saddle different cultures. Polly, on the other hand, has to do all sorts of jobs including those that break her back just to provide a good life for her son Deming. Through Polly, the reader gets the plight that undocumented citizens go through such as poor living conditions, unemployment, and discrimination.

## Works Cited

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