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Amor No Tiene Fronteras: How Emotional Bonds Impact the Re-Migration Intentions of Mexican Deportees

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

David Husson

Committee in charge:

Professor Abigail L. Andrews, Chair
Professor David S. Fitzgerald
Professor Rihan Yeh

2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

Dedicated to those who were so generous as to share their stories with us researchers, and to all those who find themselves in similar circumstances.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE iii

DEDICATION iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS vii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 2: DEPORTEES WITH STRONG EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S. 27

CHAPTER 3: DEPORTEES WITH MODERATED OR COMPROMISED EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S. 51

CHAPTER 4: DEPORTEES WITH WEAK OR ABSENT EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S. 82

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION 109

REFERENCES 122

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Amor No Tiene Fronteras: How Emotional Bonds Impact the Re-Migration Intentions of Mexican Deportees

by

David Husson

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Abigail L. Andrews, Chair

Deportees, more than other potential migrants, are particularly likely to have strong family connections to the United States. It is important to study deportee decision-making because of the unique nature of deportees' connections to the U.S. and to family members living there.

While it is known that familial connections play a large role in deportee migration motivation, the complexity of this motivation remains underexplored. Why do some deportees with family in the U.S. attempt to cross the border, while others do not? How does the emotional nature of familial bonds affect the decision to re-migrate? How does deportees' experience with the American carceral system affect their emotional connection to family, and thus their motivation to re-migrate?

My main argument is that deportees who have outwardly similar cross-border family connections are inclined towards different migration decisions depending on their level of emotional attachment towards family members in the U.S. Affectual connection to family appears to take precedence over practical considerations, issues of stigma or status, and over notions of national affiliation with the U.S. or Mexico. These emotional ties appear especially strong when the deportee in question has one or more young children in the U.S.

In some cases, emotional connections can be severely strained and degraded by lengthy incarcerations. Not only is this breakdown of family ties extremely painful for the parents, children, and other family members; it likely also has a corrosive effect on overall societal stability.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, major studies have demonstrated the importance of family connections to the U.S. in predicting the likelihood that potential Mexico-U.S. migrants will attempt to cross the border. Migrants with more connections to the U.S. are more likely to attempt a border crossing. This conclusion is supported by the work of Douglas Massey and Kristin Espinosa at Princeton, who published the benchmark quantitative investigation of Mexico-U.S. migration. Massey and Espinosa's model indicates strong support for social capital theory: having a spouse and children who have been to the U.S, and/or having kids born in America, significantly increases the odds of repeat migration.[1] This pattern is observable even among migrants who originally come from states other than Mexico. Cardoso et al, in a quantitative survey of Salvadoran deportees, specifically found family separation and the presence of family in the U.S. to be the most important factors affecting deportees' intent to remigrate.[2]

Articles based on the later Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS) further support this idea, while adding important context about the nature of these connections. Daniel Martínez, Jeremy Slack, and Ricardo Martínez-Schuldt explicitly acknowledge the "powerful pull of family and home" that many deportees experience. The authors make use of the term "unauthorized permanent residents" to describe a population who have spent a large amount of time in the U.S and consider the United States their home. The MBCS goes a step further than previous studies by demonstrating that deportees who consider their "home" to be in the U.S. are

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[1] Massey, Douglas S., and Kristin E. Espinosa. 1997. "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 970-977.

[2] Cardoso, Jody Berger, Erin Randle Hamilton, Rodriguez Nestor, Karl Eschbach, and Jacqueline Hagan. 2016. "Deporting Fathers: Involuntary Transnational Families and Intent to Remigrate among Salvadoran Deportees." *International Migration Review* 197, 213-216.

2.6 times more likely to attempt a return within the week compared those who consider their "home" to be elsewhere.[3] This is hugely important because it breaks from the rational choice, cost-benefit models that underpin other quantitative studies. By demonstrating that the subjective concept of "home" has a measurable, statistically significant effect on deportees' future crossing intentions, the study convincingly shows that affectual ties and emotional factors must be a consideration in this area of research.

However, there are still a number of important, open questions on the subject that need to be further explored. Why do some deportees with family in the U.S. attempt to cross the border, while others do not? How does the emotional nature of familial bonds affect the decision to re-migrate? How does deportees' experience with the American carceral system affect their emotional connections to family, and thus their motivation to re-migrate? The qualitative analysis presented within this paper seeks to fill gaps in understanding left by previous (and ongoing) research on these kinds of questions.

My main argument is that deportees' emotional and affectual ties to family in the U.S. often manifest as the most important motivations for re-migration, and appear more powerful than issues of stigma or status. It is the emotional connection that deportees have with family members across the border that, more than anything else, seems to compel many of them to re-migrate. This is particularly true for deportees who have young children in the U.S. The feelings of missing their families and wanting to be with them appear as more important than issues of self-image. Yet being closely related to persons in the U.S. by blood is not enough to induce re-migration; the emotional connection must be strong as well. While not all deportees have strong emotional connections to family in America, those that do seem much more inclined to re-migrate than those that do not have such ties. Indeed, deportees who appear inclined *not* to re-migrate are often the same deportees who lack strong emotional bonds to family across the border. There are also deportees somewhere in the middle; those whose degree of emotional attachment to family in America is uncertain; their intentions around re-migration are likewise often unclear. While it is more difficult to reach definitive conclusions about this group of deportees, studying their decision-making processes still helps in understanding the overall spectrum of migratory motivations.

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[3] Daniel E. Martínez, J. S.-S. (2018). Repeat Migration in the Age of the "Unauthorized Permanent Resident": A Quantitative Assessment of Migration Intentions Postdeportation. *International Migration Review*: 12-16.

Deportees' expressions of desire to return to their families in the U.S. are consistent with prior quantitative studies' conclusion that social ties significantly increase the likelihood of migration. However, the deportees we interviewed rarely expressed their nature of the social and familial connections as being materially important, instead focusing on their emotional significance. Not only did deportees deprioritize cost-benefit calculations, they sometimes bypassed them altogether, committing to return before even considering the difficulties of crossing, the viability of life in Mexico, or potential risks of a return attempt. All of this being said, the affectual connections that motivate re-migration can be severely strained and degraded by experiences with the American enforcement regime, especially lengthy incarcerations. After interviewing several deportees who had spent various amounts of time in prisons or detention centers, it became clear that incarceration had a particularly destructive effective on the emotional aspect of familial bonds. This degradation of emotional connections often results in less motivation to re-migrate, as these individuals are less interested in reuniting with family in the U.S.

Granted, the feelings and statements expressed to me by migrants in the course of my research are not necessarily a direct report of everything going on in the interviewees' mind. The interview process itself is a social practice that can motivate people to respond in certain ways. For example, it's conceivable that deportees' continually express their longing for family because they believe it will be seen by outsiders as the most legitimate reason for returning to the U.S. As Hilary Parsons Dick points out in her book *Words of Passage*, Mexican migrants are very much aware that the American academic establishment produces a narrative about them that is viewed as authoritative by both the American and Mexican public. The people she interviewed possessed this awareness and likely tailored their answers to both appeal to American academic sensibilities, and to make themselves seem like sources of reliable information.[4] The same can be said for the migrants in this study, who knew they were being interviewed by university students, and knew that their accounts might end up in academic publications. This is not to suggest that interviewees were "lying" or intentionally misleading researchers, but rather to acknowledge that individuals may be selective in what they emphasize when they know they are being recorded.

Parsons Dick offers another possible explanation of why the migrants interviewed for this project were so focused on familial connections. She argues that, for many Mexicans, emphasizing the importance of family is a way to express one's authentic Mexican personhood. According to Parsons Dick, the sacredness of family and familial duty is considered an essential aspect of being a proper Mexican, especially in contrast to the perceived "immoral" looseness of families in America.[5] As such, the individuals interviewed for this project may be repeating their longing for family to indicate that they remain proper Mexicans. They may want to show that they've not succumbed to the perversions of the North and abandoned their family duties;

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[4] Parsons Dick, Hilary. 2018. *Words of Passage: National Longing and the Imagined Lives of Mexican Migrants.* Austin: University of Texas Press: 80-82, 100-101.

[5] Ibid: 6, 128-129, 133.

instead, family separation was forced upon them and they desire only to be reunited with their kin.

Parsons Dick's analysis of migrant attitudes towards family and nationality complicate attempts to pin down clear-cut motivations for re-migration. Nonetheless, I hold that the repeated expressions of longing for family reunification by the deportees interviewed for this paper are significant in their own right. While I acknowledge that these expressions may be impacted by the interview environment, it's also vital to recognize the possibility that interviewees *are* being straightforward, and that they do mean exactly what they say, at least in many cases. There are numerous reasons to believe that many deportees are not overly influenced by the factors Parsons Dick identifies. For one, many deportees acknowledge the mistakes they've made and issues they've had that resulted in their deportation. Sometimes, this includes criminal convictions. Rather than painting the rosiest picture of themselves possible, these interviewees are honest about their past transgressions, making it more likely that they are also honest about their emotional connections to family across the border. Additionally, many deportees interviewed for this project identify more as American than Mexican, belying the idea that expressions of family connection are motivated by a desire to appear authentically Mexican. Of course, interviewees may simply be saying that they identify as American because they're being interviewed by American students. But given that many of them grew up in the United States and resided there for long periods of time, their identifying as American seems credible.

The idea that deportees retain an American identity after being deported is a central theme of Beth Caldwell's book *Deported Americans*. She backs up this concept with examples, presenting numerous interviews with deportees who explicitly identify as American. They often have friends, partners, and families in America.[6] This is certainly consistent with what interviewees expressed during the research conducted for this paper. However, while many deportees I interviewed did express a sense of national identity, this identity appears more flexible than the strong feelings that characterize familial connections. The feelings and emotions of wanting to reunite with family members came up far more often in interviews than did issues of national identity. It may be easier for a deportee to relinquish the idea of being American than it is to relinquish their desire to reunite with their families. For many, being a parent or sibling represents a deeper, longer-lasting emotional bond than does the more ethereal concept of being specifically American or Mexican.

Ultimately, I return to the central argument presented in this paper: that deciding to re-migrate appears to often be heavily influenced by emotional ties, and that the resulting desire for family reunification seems to frequently outweigh both material concerns and more intangible concepts of identity. Both this statement and the evidence supporting it are fair game for cross-examination under the lenses of various social scientific disciplines. Yet the bottom line is that expressions of longing for family and desire to reunite with family members arose more often in interviews for this project than did any other considerations, and in many cases were offered as the primary motivation for re-migration.

A second key aspect of this argument is that these affectual and emotional family connections that generally induce re-migration may be broken down by the process of deportation and the carceral systems deportees encounter. Through the course of our interviews, it became abundantly clear that spending time incarcerated had the greatest negative effect on the emotional bonds between the person behind bars and their families. The lack of close contact and clear communication between those detained and their family members makes it incredibly difficult to maintain strong affectual bonds.

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[6] Caldwell, B. C. (2019). Deported Americans: Life After Deportation to Mexico. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 49-51.

In an effort to better understand the effect of the carceral experience, this paper follows in the footsteps of a recent study by Abigail Andrews and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. Their work examines how deportee fathers attempt to continue parenting after being deported to Mexico. Andrews et al focus on men due to the prevalence of male deportees, and like this study, they make use of qualitative interview data collected at various shelters in Tijuana. The authors find that the ways that these men attempt to continue parenting depends, to a large degree, on their experience with the actual process of deportation.[7] Men who had experienced long and arduous stints in detention or prison during the process had a much harder time continuing to connect with their children. Men who had been incarcerated prior to be deported, and who had weathered lengthy prison sentences, were often unable to continue parenting in any meaningful way. On the other hand, men who were being deported for the first time and who had spent only a short time in detention were much more focused on remaining connected and even attempting to reunite with their families.[8]

Andrews and Khayar-Cámara ascribe these differences to a few key factors. Clearly, the length of time an individual spends incarcerated seems to strongly influence the degree to which they are able to maintain emotional bonds to family. The authors additionally report that deported fathers often experience shame, depression, and stigma over their loss of status as the family breadwinner and patriarch. While such feelings can be a motivation to re-migrate, they can also result in the individual turning inward and feeling ambivalent about their role as a parent. Like Caldwell, Andrews and Khayar-Cámara also point out that deportees may be in limbo between the U.S. and Mexico, feeling neither fully American nor fully Mexican. Such uncertainty around one’s identity only further imperils the relationship these fathers have with family members who may more solidly identify with the United States.[9]

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[7] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 1.

[8] Ibid: 2.

It’s unsurprising that all of these factors have an effect on deported fathers’ decisions on whether to attempt a return to the U.S. In focusing on this particular aspect of their decision-making, the conclusions of my own study largely align with the findings of Andrews and Khayar-Cámara. Deportees who had experienced long stays in prison or detention expressed much more ambivalence about their relationships with their families, and as such, were often less determined to return to the U.S. However, while Andrews and Khayar-Cámara cite a range of factors to account for this, including the breakdown of emotional and material ties, the stigma and shame of reduced status, and the uncertainty of national identity, this paper identifies affectual and emotional bonds as being the most commonly expressed determinant of a deportee’s intention to re-migrate. To be sure, the various factors listed above are not mutually exclusive, and they interact with and influence each other. A loss of status, for example, could result in an individual drifting away from their family commitments, thus degrading their affectual connection. Yet those interviewed for this study tended to bring up emotional bonds, feelings of missing and wanting to be with their families, earlier and more frequently than they did concerns about status, stigma, nationality, or material well-being.

Andrews and Khayar-Cámara’s focus on individuals deported from the U.S. to Mexico makes their study particularly relevant to this paper. However, other research on deportees’ post-deportation intentions in other parts of the world is also important to consider. Liza Schuster and

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[9] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 4-5.

Nassim Majidi have published several papers on the experience of Afghan deportees who have been sent back to Afghanistan from various countries in Europe and Central Asia.[10] Schuster and Majidi point out that whatever condition had induced a person to migrate in the first place is likely still in place following their deportation, meaning that deportation hasn't reduced the initial push towards migration. They then assert that, more often than not, deportation results in additional inducements to migrate: financial obligations, transnational ties to those in the country from which the person was deported, and the stigma of being a deportee. The ultimate result in that many deportees end up re-migrating, either to the same country from which they were deported, or to another where they feel they'll be able to achieve their goals.[11]

Schuster and Majidi's first key point, that deportees may have financial obligations that they can't meet after being deported, to some extent tracks with traditional economics-based explanations of migration. Not only are wages in the destination countries often higher, the migration process itself is often expensive and results in debts that can only be repaid if one is employed at these higher wage rates.[12] This is an issue in Mexico-U.S. migration as well, and it was occasionally raised by MMFRP interviewees. However, I encountered this less frequently than I did issues of affectual family ties, leading me to see this as a secondary, rather than primary, form of motivation to re-migrate.

Schuster and Majidi do discuss these kinds of transnational ties, and it is here where the greatest parallels exist between their work and this paper. Like Cardoso, the authors argue that deported parents are especially likely to re-migrate, as parenting from abroad is extremely difficult. This is particularly true if the deportee has been left destitute by the deportation process.[13] Schuster and Majidi also acknowledge that deportees may attempt to re-migrate to reunite with a spouse or partner, or even a family member such as a sibling or older parent. They offer the further insight that if migration from a certain country or area of a country is very common, a deportee may be induced to re-migrate because all the people they used to know in their nation of origin may have since migrated themselves.[14] All of this resonates with what we observed in our interviews in Tijuana. Though Schuster and Majidi are researching Afghan, rather than Mexican, deportees, the dynamic of transnational familial ties is strikingly similar. For both groups, these emotional connections represent a major motivation for re-migration.

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[10] Schuster, Liza, and Nassim Majidi. 2013. "What Happens Post-Deportation? The Experience of Deported Afghans." *Migration Studies:* 1-4.

[11] Ibid: 1-4. Worth noting that in the case of Mexican deportees, there are very few options other than returning to the United States (though some migrants have made it to Canada).

[12] Ibid: 5-8.

Like Andrews and Khayar-Cámara, Schuster and Majidi state that shame and stigma around being deported can be a strong inducement towards re-migration. There is a sense of failure attached to being deported, with the possibility of re-migrating and establishing oneself in the destination country seen as the only way to overcome this perceived failure.[15] While such perceptions and feelings may be common among Mexican deportees, this issue did not come up in this paper’s interviews with the same frequency or intensity as did the longing to be reconnected with children and family. Though the effects of shame and stigma cannot be understated, they manifested as secondary to the motivation of family reunification, at least among the interviewees in this project.

The complicated mix of stigma, status, and longing for family that deportees experience is also explored by the authors Tanya Golash-Boza in her book *Deported* and Deborah Boehm in her work *Returned*. For Golash-Boza, who interviewed deportees in numerous countries including Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, the feelings of shame around deportation, and the emotional connections to those left behind, are all tied together in a web of feelings that pushes the deportee to want to return. Attachment to the place from which one was deported is a combination of all these factors.[16] Deborah Boehm likewise conceptualizes the experiences of deportees as being an interwoven assortment of both material and abstract losses. She writes of individuals being "dispossessed" of not only their jobs and living arrangements, but also of their families, nationalities, and futures. These dispossessions blend together to create an identity around deportation.[17] In the case of both Boehm and Golash-Boza, the complex web of factors affecting deportees is intentionally acknowledged; the authors don't seek to isolate certain factors because they are aware that the factors overlap and interact. While this effectively paints a more comprehensive picture of the deportee experience, this paper maintains that paying particular attention to specific factors can also be useful. In this study, the emotional ties that deportees had to family on the other side of the border seemed to take prominence over other factors. There may be multiple interpretations of why interviewees so repeatedly raised the issue of missing their families, but the fact that they did so remains significant. Additionally, separating out specific factors affecting deportee decision-making may be helpful in any attempt to craft more just immigration policies; such considerations will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

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[13] Schuster, Liza, and Nassim Majidi. 2013. "What Happens Post-Deportation? The Experience of Deported Afghans." *Migration Studies*: 8.
[14] Ibid: 9-10.
[15] Ibid: 11-12.

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[16] Golash-Boza, Tanya Maria. 2015. *Deported: Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor, and Global Capitalism.* New York: New York University Press: 225-227, 235.

[17] Boehm, Deborah. 2016. *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation.* Oakland: University of California Press: 76, 80, 85-87.

Methods:

The data for this study consists of fifty in-depth, semi-structured interviews gathered by myself and other participants in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP), based at UC San Diego, between 2018 and 2020. Of these interviews, twelve are excerpted in this paper. The MMFRP is a year-long program conducted under the direction of the UCSD Department of Sociology. Students learn about migration from Mexico, as well as interviewing techniques and ethics. Multiple weeks are spent in the field, mostly in Tijuana, Mexico, volunteering and interviewing individuals at migrant shelters.

Various shelters in Tijuana partnered with the MMFRP for this purpose. Tijuana is a logical place for this work, as large numbers of individuals are deported into Mexico via Tijuana. Many spend at least a few nights at migrant shelters in the city.[18] The respondents were all deportees, the vast majority of whom had been deported only a few weeks or months before being interviewed. In limited cases, in order to gain a broader perspective, I interviewed individuals who had been deported a few years prior.

Students in the MMFRP lived at the Casa del Migrante shelter for a week, building relationships and trust with the residents, and returned periodically in the following weeks to conduct additional interviews. The time spent volunteering and socializing in the shelter helped students connect with those they were interviewing, and it appeared that many individuals were more open to being interviewed after getting to know the students. Interviewees were clearly informed as to the nature of the project and the fact that they were being interviewed. No interviews were conducted without the express consent of the interviewee, and no personal or confidential details were retained. All names and other identifying details have been changed in the interview excerpts in this paper.

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[18] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 6.

It is fair to ask why this paper looks only at deportees, and not at other potential migrants such as asylum-seekers from Central America or the Caribbean. When it comes to the question of migration motivations, deportees must be studied as a distinct group because their reasons for crossing may differ in important ways than those of other migrants. Deportees often have significant familial connections to the United States, and in particular, many have children still in the U.S. This study also focuses on male deportees, as the vast majority of deportees are men, and this project was unable to get enough female respondents to make any coherent argument about their experiences.[19] Nonetheless, the situations of asylum-seekers and female migrants are obviously important, and perhaps this paper can inspire future research in these areas.

The respondents for this study were selected using what author Robert Weiss refers to as "convenience sampling." Access to the shelters was facilitated by the MMFRP, and the individuals interviewed were those myself and the other researchers managed to strike up a conversation with during our time at the shelter. While a sample of convenience does have some drawbacks in terms of its representativeness, this is not an issue in this study for a few reasons. First, the group being studied arguably faces, in Weiss's words, "similarity in dynamics and constraints."[20] While we were only able to interview deportees in Tijuana, we can logically suppose that deportees in other border cities face at least some similar dilemmas. Of course, some dynamics may vary: the economy may be better in some places than others, the dangers of crossing might be lower or higher in some areas, etc. Still, the dynamics and constraints that are or are not similar may be identified and used to consider how generalizable the data may be.

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[19] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 1
Boehm, Deborah. 2016. *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation.* Oakland: University of California Press: 100.

[20] Weiss, Robert S. 1995. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Quantitative Interview Studies.* New York: Free Press.

Second, as Dr. Mario Luis Small points out, statistical representativeness should never be the main focus of a qualitative study with such limited sample size. Instead, the goal should be to identify processes or phenomena not before observed, or at least not before analyzed in that particular moment in an in-depth way. By looking at the decision-making processes of deportees, itself an interior process that requires qualitative interviewing to explore, this study gains insight into phenomena that have not yet been sufficiently explained. Additionally, we made use of Small's "sequential interviewing" technique by refining interview questions as we began to see patterns of behavior. This allowed us to hone in on specific insights.[21]

It is important to consider that this project, like all projects, is part of a larger conversation. Part of the goal is the complementation and complication of other, ongoing research in the field. While I chose to do qualitative research, this doesn't mean that quantitative research is unimportant. In fact, both kinds of research can feed off of and inform the other. Much of the background literature reviewed for this paper involves survey data that can be statistically analyzed. This is great, but for those researchers to have any idea of what kinds of survey questions to ask, it is helpful to have insights into the dynamics what they are investigating. This is where qualitative research, like that from this project, can be immensely useful. Additionally, the information presented in this study has immediate, practical utility beyond just complementing other research. The conclusions advanced here support policies that prioritize keeping families together, as well as policymaking innovations that would facilitate such actions.

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[21] Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need? On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography.*

At the time of this writing, the MMFRP data pool contains over 100 interviews, collected by UCSD students and archived on the university's servers. This is too many interviews to analyze in sufficient depth for this project, so I began my analysis by paring down the number of interviews I planned to examine. Each student researcher includes a summary memo at the top of the transcript of each interview they collect; by reading through these memos, I was able to isolate interviews in which the respondent discussed what they planned to do next. Interviews in which the respondent talked about their possible future plans were of clear interest to me, as I aimed to look at reasons an individual might or might not re-migrate. Interview data also includes whether the interviewee was a deportee, as opposed to an asylum-seeker or first-time migrant. Since my project focused on deportees, I excluded interviews with non-deportee respondents. These steps allowed me to narrow my data down to 50 interviews. While this was still too many for truly in-depth analysis, it was an appropriate number for me to begin coding around more specific parameters.

I followed the "flexible coding" approach described by Deterding and Waters,[22] which involves organizing and reducing the data by beginning with broad concepts and then moving to more narrowly focused ones. Though I did not use the most powerful computer programs mentioned by Deterding and Waters, I did take advantage of electronic storage software to organize my data and cross-reference different analytical concepts. I initially divided the 50 interviews into 3 groups based what the respondents said they aimed to do next: the first group was comprised of those who said they wanted to re-migrate, the second was those who said they did not, and the third was those who weren't sure or were unclear about their intentions. This grouping took interviewees at their word, being based solely what an individual said they sought to do. However, I then cross-referenced these groups with possible indicators of how serious a deportee might be about re-migrating. These indicators included: whether the person had taken any concrete steps toward re-migration, whether they had specific plans about how to re-migrate, how frequently they raised the topic of a possible return, and their emotional comportment when discussing desire to go back to the U.S. These additional analytic codes gave me clearer insight into which interviewees seemed most inclined to re-migrate. A deportee who had all of these characteristics (said they wanted to return, had a plan to return, had taken steps toward a return, talked often about return, and displayed emotional desire to return) would be classified as very highly inclined to return, while deportees who had fewer of these characteristics (or displayed the opposite) would be categorized as progressively less inclined to re-migrate. This system helped me refine the 3-catergory grouping I had initiated earlier. If an interview contained 3 out of the 5 analytic codes above, that respondent was classified as strongly inclined to re-migrate. If the interview contained 2 out of the 5 codes, the respondent was classified as having unclear inclination, and if the interview contained 1 of these codes or less, the respondent was classified as being inclined not to re-migrate.

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[22] Deterding, Nicole M, y Mary C. Waters. 2021. «Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach.» Sociological Methods & Research 708-739.

A key aspect of Deterding and Waters approach to coding is the use of previous literature to inform one's research, in contrast to prior coding approaches that emphasize purely inductive analysis.[23] Following their lead, I drew on phenomena identified in the literature as being potential motivation for re-migration to determine additional analytic codes, such as: the possible financial advantage of migrating, the stigma of being deported, the loss of social status resulting from deportation, the feeling of being American, and emotional attachment to kids and/or other family members in the U.S. During this phase of the analysis, I also noted the frequency that these topics were raised, the specific comments that an individual made about each issue, and the emotions displayed when discussing each possible motivation. By doing so, I sought to understand the relative strength of each motivating factor. For example, if an individual mentioned family connections briefly and without much emotion, or even dismissed family as an issue entirely, I inferred that desire to be with family was not playing a significant role in their decision-making process. Yet if a respondent repeatedly raised the topic of family, discussed their family in detail, and displayed intense emotion while talking about their family members, I inferred that the issue was a significant motivating factor. In the case of desire for family reunification, if an interview had all 3 codes (frequency of mention, discussion in detail, and display of emotion) I considered that respondent to have strong emotional/affectual connection to family in the U.S. Respondents whose interviews had 2 of these codes were classed as having moderate emotional ties, while those whose interviews had 1 or 0 were considered to have minimal or seriously degraded emotional connections to family. By cross-referencing these codes with indicators of a respondent's inclination to re-migrate, a pattern, or what Deterding and Waters call an "emergent theme" became apparent.[24]

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[23] Deterding, Nicole M, y Mary C. Waters. 2021. «Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach.» Sociological Methods & Research 714, 730.

Categorizing interviewees based on their level of emotional attachment to family is difficult, because emotional connection is psychologically complex and arguably impossible to quantify. Emotions are qualitative by nature, and scholars may be rightfully uncomfortable assigning numerical values to people's emotional characteristics. Nonetheless, my project requires some method of operationalizing degrees of emotional attachment in order to find patterns in the data. While it would be nonsensical to suggest that a person is "twice as" or "three times as" emotionally connected as another, it is possible to deduce that some emotional connections are stronger and more deeply felt than others. It's not possible to say numerically exactly how much more deeply or strongly, but descriptors such as "strong," "moderate," or "weak" can be applied, assuming there is data to support these rankings. Degree of emotional connection is a type of variable that is described in mathematics as an "ordinal" variable. It doesn't make sense to apply numerical values to these variables, but it is possible to say that some are "more" or "less."

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[24] Deterding, Nicole M, y Mary C. Waters. 2021. «Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach.» Sociological Methods & Research 729.

This is where the open-ended nature of the interview data really came into play. The coding process detailed above helped me begin to sort the interviewees, but looking at exactly what respondents actually said is what allowed me to decide whether an individual's emotional ties were strong, weak, or somewhere in between. If a deportee described their emotional connections to family across the border as very central to their motivation to re-migrate, I could reasonably consider their emotional bonds to be strong, or a least stronger than those of deportees who did not mention their families as much in these discussions. Interviewees who placed their emotional ties as central in their decision-making also tended not to talk about other, more practical considerations as much, giving me the impression that their emotional connections overrode all other factors. This is further evidence of the relative strength of the emotional ties of these individuals. Conversely, some other deportees did not place their emotional bonds nearly as centrally in their thought processes around potential re-migration. These deportees were much more likely to bring up other, practical factors that they were considering in making their decisions. I could presume from this evidence that the emotional ties of these deportees were relatively less strong. Through this form of analysis, I placed each interviewee on a spectrum of strength of emotional connection, ultimately dividing this spectrum into three categories. These categories are inherently qualitative, and reflect only degrees of "more" or "less," rather than values that could be measured numerically. While I describe the analysis above in relation to emotional attachment, I used the same process to look for evidence of other migration incentives; for example, I examined the interviews to see how centrally each deportee placed financial motivations and/or national affiliation in their decision. However, I highlight the way this analysis worked in regard to emotional attachment because this area is ultimately where I saw the most expression by the interviewees.

Each of the various possible motivations for re-migration suggested by the previous literature appeared in at least a few interviews. Both the financial incentive to re-migrate and the wish to return due to identifying as American were motivating factors mentioned at least once by about a third of the interviewees. A loss of social status, and the stigma of being deported, were only mentioned by a few deportees. In contrast, the majority of respondents made at least some kind of comment about how they missed family members in the U.S. As noted above, these comments varied widely. Some deportees only mentioned their families in passing and seemed to be emotionally intact without them, while other deportees were distraught at not being able to see their family members and spent the entire interview discussing them. The significance of these desires for family reunification only became clear when the codes for these topics were cross-referenced with the codes for inclination to re-migrate. After doing so, I found that the respondents who had the strongest emotional connections to family in America were many of the same respondents categorized as most inclined to re-migrate.

Findings:

With the codes detailed above, this study identified 13 individuals who appeared strongly inclined to migrate. Of these, 10 were described as having very strong emotional connections to family in the U.S. These individuals repeatedly raised the issue of missing their family members, detailed their relationships with their families, and spoke with great emotion when discussing their separation. These numbers would be even larger if the rigor of the coding process was slightly relaxed. There is inevitably some degree of variation when classifying individuals based on qualitative interviews. Though it is technically possible to code for almost every occurrence, such as whether or not a person was crying as they spoke, or whether they were smiling or frowning, it is still also necessary to trust an interviewer's perception, as there are always details lost in the transcription process. Yet even accounting for some variation in how the codes were applied, the pattern in this project's data is clear. No potential motivating factor for re-migration showed up with as much frequency or intensity as did missing one's family, and no other factor correlated as closely with the interviewees identified as being strongly inclined to re-migrate. The corresponding other side of this pattern also manifested in the data: Of the 12 deportees coded as being inclined *not* to re-migrate, 8 also were categorized as having minimal emotional connections to family in the U.S. It's true that there were instances of respondents who did not fit this pattern, including a couple of deportees who appeared inclined to re-migrate for practical and financial reasons rather than for family reunification. However, there were no interviewees whose responses directly contradicted the overall pattern. For example, I did not come across any individual who expressed intense longing to reunite with family in America, but at the same time seemed inclined not to re-migrate.

With a foundational pattern established, I moved on to some subsequent, related questions. I was particularly interested in what kinds of family ties resulted in the strongest emotional connections, and why some deportees maintained these strong emotional connections while others did not. Of the 10 deportees who I categorized as both having strong emotional connections to family in America *and* being highly inclined to re-migrate, 8 had a young child or children that they mentioned multiple times in their interviews. This suggests that deportees feel particularly close to their children, especially if those children are younger than high-school age. These data are potentially confounded by the fact that these deportees also had a wife or long-term partner, to whom they also expressed emotional attachment. Yet upon close examination of the interview transcripts, I found that these individuals brought up their children more often than they did their partners, and were often more emotional when speaking about them. The degree to which young children may impact a deportee's emotional attachment is a subject worthy of further study, but the data in this paper certainly suggest that a link is present: deportees with young children do appear to have stronger emotional connections to them than they do to other family members.

These connections to young children form a clear pattern in the interview data, but they don't explain everything. There were some deportees without young children who expressed strong emotional connections to other family members. Conversely, there were even a couple deportees who did have relatively young children, but did not appear to feel an intense affectual connection to them. In my efforts to explain these outliers, I was inspired by the aforementioned research of Andrews and Khayar-Cámara on deportees who had experienced incarceration. Whether or not an individual had been previously incarcerated, and for how long, is information that is recorded for every respondent interviewed as part of the MMFRP. It is also a subject that often comes up organically during the course of the interviews. After cross-referencing this data with my previous coding on strength of emotional connection, I found that deportees who'd spent long periods of time behind bars appeared to have weaker emotional connections to family members in the U.S. None of the interviewees I categorized as having the strongest emotional connections had spent more than a year locked up; many had spent only a day or two in detention before being deported. On the other side of the equation, just over half of the interviewees categorized as having little or no emotional connection to family members in the U.S. had spent multiple years in the carceral system. The pattern suggested by these data is backed up by the contents of the interviews. Several deportees indicated that their relationships with their partners, children, and other family members had broken down during their time in prison and/or detention. Often, these respondents implied that the degradation of their emotional ties was a direct result of being locked up.

Summary:

Deportees who appeared strongly inclined to re-migrate brought up their emotional ties to family on the other side of the border, and their longing for family reunification, more often and more intensely than they did other factors that might affect their decision on whether to re-migrate. In many cases, these deportees explicitly stated that their emotional connections to family in America were a major motivation for re-migration. This was especially the case for deportees with young children in the U.S. These affectual and emotional family bonds appeared to take priority over other considerations when it came to the question of whether to attempt a return to the U.S. Underscoring the importance of affectual ties in this decision-making process, deportees who seemed inclined not to re-migrate often expressed relatively little emotional connection to family members in the U.S. Certainly, the data may be interpreted differently by scholars in different disciplines. Nonetheless, this study argues that the repeated expression of desire for family reunification is significant, especially in terms of evaluating whether a person is likely to attempt re-migration.

The second important conclusion reached in this paper is that, as powerful as emotional connections to family can be, they are often undermined by the carceral experience. Through the course of our interviews, it became abundantly clear that spending time incarcerated had the greatest negative effect on the emotional bonds between the person behind bars and their family. The lack of close contact and clear communication between those detained and their family members makes it incredibly difficult to maintain strong affectual bonds. This breakdown of family ties is not only extremely painful for the parents, children, and other family members; it also has a corrosive effect on their long-term well-being. Several studies indicate that even the threat of a parent's deportation results in negative trends in measures of children's mental health and academic performance.[25] Actual family separation intensifies these effects; children who are separated from one or both parents are more likely to have issues with psychological and physical health, as well as reduced academic success.[26]

Chapter Structure:

The remainder of this paper is divided into chapters focused on particular examples of deportees who exhibit the kinds of emotional connections to family in the U.S. detailed above, specifically: those who retain strong emotional connections, those whose emotional ties are compromised or uncertain, and those whose emotional connections bonds are absent or severely degraded. Chapter 2 examines excerpts from interviews with deportees who retain strong emotional connections to their families across the border. These deportees appear determined to return to the U.S, regardless of cost or practical feasibility. The interviewees featured in this chapter are 4 of the 10 respondents who I coded as being having strong emotional bonds with family *and* being highly inclined to re-migrate. As described in the Findings section, these characteristics overlapped significantly. Within the Chapter 2, I demonstrate that this overlap is not coincidental; several of the interviewees state that their desire to reunite with family across the border was the main reason they sought to re-migrate. Looking at the interview transcripts in an in-depth manner is a vital component of this sort of qualitative research, and more completely illustrates the respondents' decision-making processes. Of course, choosing which interview excepts to include in each chapter was not easy. Deterding and Waters recommend that, during the coding process, researchers take note of transcripts in which the interviewees are especially articulate and expressive. I followed this advice, identifying what the authors describe as "aha" moments that are particularly representative of patterns in the data. My goal was to select excerpts that are not only eloquent, but also convey the thoughts and feelings of other members of the group to which a respondent belongs. In the case of Chapter 2, I selected the excerpts that most articulately portrayed the thought processes common among those deportees who both retained strong emotional ties to family in America, and were highly inclined to re-migrate.

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[25] Brabeck, Kalina, and Qingwen Xu. 2010. "The Impact of Detention and Deportation on Latino Immigrant Children and Families: A Quantitative Exploration." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 341-361.

[26] International Human Rights Law Clinic; Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity; Immigration Law Clinic. 2010. *In the Child's Best Interest? The Consequences of Losing a Lawful Immigrant Parent to Deportation.* Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley School of Law: 5-9.

Chapter 3 reviews the cases of deportees whose emotional bonds are compromised, but still intact to varying degrees. These individuals are often stuck in limbo, uncertain of whether they should try to re-migrate, and undecided on whether it is worth the risk. This group of deportees exhibited the most variation in their thought processes, and are to some extent the most difficult to logically categorize. This is because these are the deportees that can't be described as strongly inclined to re-migrate, nor inclined not to re-migrate. Instead, they form a middle group that includes anyone whose intentions are, for whatever reason, unclear. Some of these individuals are dealing with certain situations, such as severe poverty, that prevent them from taking action. Others simply haven't yet figured what they want to do. They may be learning in one direction or another, but remain unsure. The members of this group are important to study despite this considerable variation, because many of their emotional connections to family members in the U.S. exist somewhere between strong and weak. This is consistent with what would be expected given the tendencies of the other groups, indicating that these bonds remain important factors in the decision-making processes of most deportees. Put more concretely, these deportees' emotional ties to family tend to be compromised as the result of relationship trouble, legal issues, or other problems, yet are still somewhat intact. Given that their bonds with family are in some degree of turmoil, it's unsurprising that their migratory intentions are also uncertain. As with the deportees in Chapter 2, I chose the excerpts for Chapter 3 that I considered both most eloquent and most representative of this group's situation.

Chapter 4 examines the situations of deportees whose affectual bonds to their families have been severely degraded, often as a result of incarceration. Most of these deportees have no intention of crossing the border. Some may express an idle desire to do so, but ultimately are not prepared to take on the risks of re-migrating. The interviewees featured in this chapter are 4 of the 8 respondents who I coded as being having minimal emotional bonds with family *and* being inclined *not* to re-migrate. A couple of these deportees simply had no family members in the U.S, so it makes sense that their migratory decisions did not take cross-border familial bonds into account. Yet the others did have family, including close relatives, children, and former partners with whom they'd once had strong emotional ties. These connections had since broken down, often as a result of long periods of incarceration. Several of these deportees describe how the experience of being locked up resulted in the deterioration of their relationships. For inclusion in the chapter, I selected interview excerpts that expressed this reality, and that best reflected the experiences of other group members as well.

The variety in migrants' thought processes detailed in these chapters highlights the spectrum of decision-making processes that myself and the other researchers observed throughout our time talking with deportees. Regardless of the direction an individual appears to be headed in regarding re-migration, the importance of emotional connection in making this decision is a consistently observable pattern. It's additionally important to note that this study cannot say for certain what actual decision any migrant will end up making; it can only report on how migrants are framing their thought processes and on the directions in which a person seems to be leaning.

Following these chapters, this paper explores the significance of the data, and how I came to my main conclusions. I explain what the information here means, and how it contributes to the ongoing conversation around migrant intentions. Most importantly, I include a discussion of what my results indicate on a practical level; how this data, in concert with other studies, could point the way towards innovations in policy.

CHAPTER 2: DEPORTEES WITH STRONG EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S.

Note: All names of participants within are pseudonyms. Some small details may have been changed to protect participants' identities. Some interviews are lightly edited for clarity.

The migrants whose interviews are excerpted in this chapter appear strongly inclined to attempt a return to the United States. The clear pattern observed among these migrants is that they are inclined to re-migrate because they maintain powerful emotional attachments to family members across the border. These interviewees consistently indicate that they aim to re-migrate *because* the family members to whom they have the strongest emotional connections are still in the U.S. This inclination is often compounded by migrants no longer having family members in Mexico to whom they feel emotionally connected. The bottom line is that these interviewees appear most strongly influenced by the family members they are most emotionally close to. Several of these deportees seem to have especially close emotional ties to their children, particularly if the children are relatively young (below high-school age). These individuals seek to migrate to be with the family members that they miss and care about most, and often times these family members are their kids. For many interviewees, this consideration appears to take precedence over other possible motivations, such as material self-interest, abstract concepts of national identity, or societal stigma of being deported.

Some of these other motivating factors do overlap with deportees' emotional connections, or play roles in shaping their overall decision-making process. Interviewees do sometimes express affinity for the U.S, or at least for the location in the U.S. where they lived. These expressions could be viewed as indications of national identity; of identifying as American rather than Mexican. However, it is essential to note that many individuals explain that they identify as

American *because* their families are there, rather than because of other more nationalistic concepts. Additionally, deportees in this chapter do occasionally raise issues of practical or financial importance when describing their decision-making process. Certainly, many deportees are attempting to make the most pragmatic choices they can. Yet this pragmatism is often driven by the ultimate goal of family reunification, rather than material self-interest. Multiple interviewees demonstrate a willingness to discard this pragmatism should it hinder rather than help their objective of re-migrating.

The majority of deportees who appear strongly inclined to migrate had not spent long amounts of time incarcerated, a notable distinction compared to some of the other interviewees. This pattern is consistent with the previously-cited findings of Andrews and Khayar-Cámara, who argue that long periods behind bars degrade the relationship between the person incarcerated and their family members. In other words, it is likely that the lack of long prison terms experienced by the deportees in the chapter has helped them in maintaining strong emotional connections to their family members.

Gabriel:

Gabriel, a 30-year-old deportee originally from Puebla, Mexico, is a quintessential example of an individual expressing a commitment to return to be with family. I chose to highlight excerpts from my interview with Gabriel in this chapter because he clearly articulated an emotional attachment to his children, a factor that seems to powerfully motivate many deportees who appear inclined to re-migrate. As with other interviewees who seem determined to re-migrate, Gabriel's kids are quite young, and he asserts his desire to be with them as they grow up. Gabriel's interview also reveals how his identity as American is determined by his social and familial connections, as opposed to something more abstract or intangible.

Quiet and reserved, with a shaven head and wearing a wrinkled track jacket, Gabriel generally seemed to mind his own business while at the shelter. Still, he readily agreed to be interviewed, and was open and forthcoming during our conversation. Though Gabriel was born in Mexico, his mother took him across the border to California when he was only nine years old. He grew up in Los Angeles before moving to Orange County, which is where his wife and children are living now. His two children are still babies; the oldest one is only about a year old. He considers himself American rather than Mexican, mainly because of his experiences and familial connections in the U.S.

> Interviewer: Do you consider yourself Mexican, do you consider yourself American, or do you consider yourself Mexican-American, or…?
>
> Gabriel: Well, I consider myself American because I grew up over there… I don't know nothing over here. I don't know nobody, *I have nobody here. My kids are over there*, so… I consider myself American.
>
> Interviewer: You don't feel at all at home here?
>
> Gabriel: Not really. Not really, but… I guess it is, for now.
>
> (emphasis added)

Gabriel clearly expresses his identity as American, and it's vital to note why he sees himself this way. Gabriel doesn't indicate a particular concern for an abstract idea of nationhood; rather he considers himself American because America is where he grew up and where his family is. These tangible connections are what Gabriel indicates is most important. He explains that he has "nobody" in Mexico; neither friends nor family with whom he might have an emotional connection. To be sure, his affinity for the physical locations and daily routines he knew in America may contribute to why he considers the U.S. home. These affinities likely overlap with his feelings of missing his wife and kids, and augment his conviction that the U.S. is his home. Nonetheless, it seems that the presence of his wife and kids in the U.S. is one of the primary reasons, if not *the* primary reason, that he sees the U.S. as home. Gabriel repeatedly mentioned his family, especially his children, when asked about his motivations for potentially re-migrating.

> Interviewer: What are the main reasons that you want to go back?
>
> Gabriel: *Cause my family's over there, my kids are over there*, everyone is over there. My future, my, my life's been over there. I been over there since I was nine, right now I'm thirty, so it's basically my whole life. I went to elementary like I said, graduated high school and… I'm here now (laughs).
>
> Interviewer: How long have you been married?
>
> Gabriel: Like… Six years.
>
> Interviewer: And how many kids do you have?
>
> Gabriel: Two… One is one year and about to be 3 months… And the other one is about to be two, in May. Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: So pretty young.
>
> Gabriel: Yeah, they're babies. Yes… They're barely starting to talk, the other one is barely starting to walk… Yeah, but I'm here… I won't be able to enjoy those moments.
>
> (emphasis added)

In the excerpt above, we can see how Gabriel's affinity for the rhythms of life in the U.S. and his longing to be with his family overlap. He mentions that he's spent most of his life in America and that he went to elementary and high school there. Yet Gabriel does not hesitate in naming his family and children as his first reason for wanting to return to the U.S. He even brings up particular instances in his kids' life that he is afraid he will miss as a result of being deported.

Gabriel's demeanor also changes markedly when he brings up his family. Normally reserved, even taciturn, Gabriel's voice becomes charged with emotion. It wavers and his eyes are downcast. At times, he appears close to tears. He takes pauses to steady himself during these parts of our conversation; he appears determined to remain as stoic as possible, though it's clearly difficult for him. All of this leads me as a researcher to believe his expressions of emotion are raw and genuine, and that he is being forthright about his motivation for wanting to re-migrate.

Another indication is that Gabriel declares his intention to return despite not having a clear plan of how he's going to do so. Gabriel appears determined to go back to the U.S. no matter what, mainly because his family is there. The fact that Gabriel seems to have already made up his mind, without considering possible downsides, indicates that strong emotions are dictating his decision-making. As my interview with Gabriel progressed, it became apparent that these emotions stem from the presence of his family, especially his wife and children, in the U.S, and are compounded by his not having any family in Mexico.

> Gabriel: But I'm planning to go back cause I don't have nobody here. Yeah, all my family, my kids, over there. My mom, my brother, my aunts, uncles, everyone.
>
> Interviewer: How long have you been at this shelter?
>
> Gabriel: Since Saturday morning.
>
> Interviewer: So this is all pretty recent…

> Gabriel: Yeah, it is recent.
>
> Interviewer: Right… How long do you think you'll have to stay here?
>
> Gabriel: Hopefully not long.
>
> Interviewer: If you were to go now, would you try to go with other people, or by yourself, or?
>
> Gabriel: Well, if the other people know the way, I'll probably go with the other people… But, if not, I'ma try and find the maps and all that, the ways, so I could do it myself.

Gabriel seems committed to re-migrating, even though he doesn't yet know exactly how he'll do it. That he doesn't consider staying in Mexico long-term to be an option suggests that his motivations to return, motivations that center around his children, are extremely powerful. That his children are still in the U.S, in combination with the fact that he has no family Mexico, makes the pull of re-migration essentially irresistible. It is somewhat difficult to separate these two motivations, especially since they compound; connection to family in the U.S. is especially important *if* one doesn't have family in Mexico. Yet many deportees, including Gabriel, display particularly intense emotions when discussing their children, who are often still in America. The emotional nature of the connection is vital; Gabriel brings up his children more often than anyone else, seemingly because his emotional ties to them are particularly strong.

Gabriel isn't thinking about where he can ultimately earn more money, or what might be most materially beneficial for him personally. Instead, he focuses his pragmatism on figuring out how to re-migrate; that he will do so he appears to have already decided. Nor are these just idle aspirations. According to Gabriel, he's already to spoken to his former work supervisor back in the U.S, who has promised to loan him money to facilitate a return trip.

> Gabriel: Well, I talked to my boss… He said he'll lend me like, 5000 dollars, like to go over there so I'm trying to look for a budget that is in that position, so I could go back. Cause, he knows I'm a good worker, so… When he found out, he was like, "Oh my God." Yeah, so… It's kinda hard, but… It is what it is.
>
> Interviewer: Would you consider hiring someone to guide you through?
>
> Gabriel: It's 10,000 dollars… 10,000 dollars… But if they give it to me for five, I'll probably hire them.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel like it'd give you a better likelihood of making it?
>
> Gabriel: Yeah… It's more secure if they know the way they're taking you...
> Interviewer: Are you at all concerned about, not necessarily the mountains and all that, but just getting caught?
>
> Gabriel: I'm concerned a little bit cause I got time over my head… But not a lot… I've been to jail, so I already know the whole get-down over there.

Gabriel claims he's already begun looking for a crossing option within his budget. If indeed he has secured this loan and is already looking for guides, it would demonstrate that he's actively engaged in trying to return, not just dreaming about it as seemed to be the case with some of the other migrants we interviewed. In contrast to those interviewees, who will be discussed in the next chapter, Gabriel appeared to be taking action to make his return happen. This is the case despite the fact that he knows he'll be incarcerated if caught, another sign of his dedication to re-migrating.

That Gabriel has been to jail before is noteworthy in itself, as this paper identifies long-term incarceration as destructive to familial bonds, and thus perhaps to migratory motivation. Based on the interviews conducted with other migrants, I might expect Gabriel's emotional connection to his family to have deteriorated if he'd spent a long time in prison. Yet Gabriel's time behind bars was relatively short compared to some of the other migrants we interviewed.

His longest stretch in the carceral system was six months, served in county jail rather than state or federal prison.

While the thought of spending six months locked up is daunting, it is still a much shorter amount of time than some of the other interviewees spent incarcerated. Judging by his remarks about missing his family, and his emotional demeanor while discussing them, it appears that Gabriel maintained strong feelings for his family during his time in prison. Gabriel also did not spend any significant time in immigration detention. Unlike other deportees who lost connection with their families during multi-year prison terms, Gabriel's emotional ties to his family remain strong. Overall, Gabriel is emblematic of a pattern of decision-making that will become clear as this paper progresses: deportees who retain strong emotional connections to family members in the U.S. appear more inclined to re-migrate. This is especially true if the family members are young children, and if the deportee lacks close emotional ties with anyone in Mexico. Lastly, it's important that the emotional connections with these family members in the U.S. have not been degraded by long stints in prison.

Bernardo:

Bernardo, a 40-year-old man born in Michoacán, is another deportee who seems highly inclined to re-migrate. He expresses a number of feelings similar to other deportees in similar situations, reinforcing the idea that these factors are common among this group. Like these others, Bernardo has a young child who he misses deeply and is extremely concerned about. He displays intense emotion when discussing her and emphasizes how much he wants to be with her. As with other deportees, Bernardo's situation is made worse by the fact that he has no family in Mexico. Bernardo also makes statements about his identity that mirror those of several other deportees like Gabriel: He feels that he is American, and specifically Angeleno, but he doesn't cite ideas like "the American dream" or ostensibly shared American ideals as the reason why. Instead, he explains that he is American because all of his connections are there and everyone he knows is in America. This focus on social and affectual ties in relation to where one belongs appeared common among deportees, especially those inclined to re-migrate.

Bernardo had been living in the U.S. since he was 4 years old, and at the time of the interview, had been in Mexico for only 6 days. He had spent all of his life in Los Angeles, and so considers himself American. The pain of his deportation is fresh, and Bernardo expresses considerable frustration at the fact that he was deported despite having grown up in the U.S.

> Bernardo: I grew up in L.A. all my life. Since I was 4 years old. I went through preschool, elementary school, high school… Then all of the sudden I'm right here in Mexico. Just because I didn't have papers but I grew up over there all my life, you know? So what's the difference?
> […]
> It's like, I was just thinking tonight in my room, when I was taking a shower, all my family came back to my mind… I couldn't help it, you know, I'm still remembering… So, I try my best, but… Sometimes just, I just go to my room, hide and stay there, think about it, and cry alone, you know? Cause I got family over there… This life is not my life, this life is different...

Like Gabriel, Bernardo has lived almost his entire life in America, and knows very little of life in Mexico. Also like Gabriel, Bernardo's longing for the familiarity of his routine in the U.S. seems to overlap with his feelings of missing those who he is emotionally close to. His affinities for both his way of life in the America, and for the people he knew there, combine to produce his sense of frustration and anger at being deported. It's worth noting, however, that the instances in which Bernardo says he feels most upset are specifically when his family in the U.S.

comes to mind. Though he may miss his experiences of school and work in the America, it is thinking about his family that actually makes him cry.

Though Bernardo claims that his former job didn't ask for his papers, he also reports that immigration officers apprehended him while he was at work. Now that he's in Tijuana, he is staying at a migrant shelter because he has very little money. Bernardo explains that both of his parents died only a few months apart, shortly before his deportation. He tells the interviewers that everyone he loves is being taken from him, and he seems fixated on how much he misses his daughter. Though Bernardo's daughter isn't quite as young as Gabriel's children, she is still young enough that Bernardo expresses concern about her and wants to be there for her. I did not learn her exact age, but I got the impression that she is around 8 or 9. His intense focus on reuniting with his young daughter is consistent with the pattern seen throughout this group of deportees: emotional connections to young children are particularly strong, and can be powerful motivation to re-migrate.

> Bernardo: I do get happy seeing you guys around here. Being able to imagine me over there (in the U.S.)… But it's hard, it's complicated, because I just want to run and scream, and kick, and do stuff… *I just want to run, go home and tell my daughter, "I love you, mija…" I just want to go back, I just want to be with my family, just go see my daughter, it's really hard.*
>
> Interviewer 1: Do they know that you got deported?
>
> Bernardo: Yeah, but they moved from L.A. because of that recently.
>
> Interviewer 2: Because the mother (of your daughter) is not documented either, or because…?
>
> Bernardo: No, you see, we never got married, when I got arrested, they all moved, they got scared. They were like, "We gotta leave." Some of them went to Texas. Others to Seattle, and then San Jose… So I'm like… My whole world fell apart. I lost everything in one second.
> […]

> All my family is back there, all of it. I'm out here solo, I'm ridin' solo. I'm just trying to be optimistic. Adjusting to it is very hard… Now I'm right here in Mexico, trying to go back there (to the U.S.), but I want to do it the right way.
>
> (emphasis added)

Having only just been deported, Bernardo seems to still be processing his situation. He appears highly motivated to re-migrate, but claims he'd prefer to do so legally. At the time of the interview, he was still adapting to life the shelter and hadn't yet looked into the feasibility of getting a visa. What is most apparent is the way he frames the interview around how much he misses his family and his daughter. Though he is without money or a job, he doesn't talk much about needing to return for monetary reasons. Nor does he say much about his national identity, other than to agree that he feels American. What he does repeatedly bring up is his family, in particular his daughter, and how much he wants to reunite with them.

While it is impossible to know exactly what is going in Bernardo's mind, his voice is strained when he talks about his family, and he sounds desperate, almost frantic. Perhaps Bernardo will succeed in returning legally. If that doesn't work out, it's unclear what his next move will be, but he does appear extremely motivated to cross. If Bernardo does end up re-migrating, one way or another, it seems presumable that the emotional pull of family will be a major impetus for his return. Bernardo is especially focused on going back to be with his young daughter, an expression of attachment similar to that of other deportees with young children.

Mauricio:

Mauricio is a young Mexican male who, though he had previously crossed covertly through the deserts of Arizona, insists he wants to return to the U.S. by legal means. Excerpts from Mauricio's interview are included here, not only for their eloquence, but also because they illustrate the importance of emotion, as opposed to just closeness in blood relation, in the strength of bonds and their inducement towards re-migration. While deportees are often affectually attached to many of their close blood relations, this is not always the case. The particular family members to whom they feel most emotionally connected are those who most influence their migratory decision-making processes. In Mauricio's case, he lacks strong emotional connection to all of his family members except his sister. Yet his bond with her is strong enough that he wants to return to the U.S. to be with her.

Only 23-years-old, Mauricio had been living and studying in Phoenix for about a year before being deported. He had been back in Mexico for just a few weeks when the interview was conducted, and looked saddened by his situation, gazing at the ground and scratching his head while he spoke. This was especially the case when he talked about his sister who lives in the U.S. Mauricio explained that she is the one member of his family he still feels close to.

> Interviewer: Do you have family in Mexico?
>
> Mauricio: Yes, but everyone already has their own family, they've already formed their families… I'm the youngest of all, I just have the support of my sister who is in the United States.
>
> Interviewer: Where are they? They're in Tijuana or …?
>
> Mauricio: No, they're in different states, one is in Michoacán, the others are in Mexico and another is in Guerrero, they're all in different states. The truth is, I don't have support from them or anything, my family has always been separated, each one on their own, not supporting each other… The only support I am receiving is from my sister.
>
> Interviewer: What is the most important reason you want to go back?
>
> Mauricio: *To be with my sister because she is the only one who is there, and we have always been closer together, always taking care of each other and she is the important reason why I want to return…* Because I lost contact with all my siblings and I have never lost contact with her…

> She is the person closest to me, in case of any emergency or whatever, if something happens to me or it happens to her, they tell me and *she counts on me and that's how we are, that is the most important reason for me, we don't have other relatives, just her, the only family was me for her.*
>
> (emphasis added)

Everything Mauricio says indicates that he truly misses his sister and wants to re-migrate to be nearer to her. That Mauricio is motivated to return to be with his sister, as opposed to with his wife and/or children, makes his situation slightly different than some of the other migrants we interviewed like Gabriel and Bernardo. Nonetheless, Mauricio appears most driven by an emotional connection to a family member, and as such fits the overall pattern of deportees whose connections to those across the border play an outsize role in their decision-making. Mauricio's circumstance also provides some insight into how the nature of these connections may influence a potential migrant's thought process. Mauricio actually has more family members in Mexico than in the United States, but he's fallen out of touch with most of them and does not feel emotionally close to them. His sister is the one he still feels a strong connection to, and so her presence in the U.S. is what's motivating him to return there. The strength and closeness of a person's connections matter in terms of how they make their decisions.

It's true that Mauricio is interested in the practical opportunities afforded by the U.S. as well. He had been studying computers while in Phoenix, and wanted to continue in order to get a better job. However, Mauricio didn't talk about this goal nearly as much as he lamented missing his sister; it does seem that his connection to her is a stronger incentive to re-migrate than are concerns about his studies. Of course, we cannot know everything he was feeling, and it may be that he was emphasizing his family connection to frame his situation in a sympathetic light. Yet his emotions appeared to me to be quite genuine, as he displayed an overall melancholy comportment and his voice tremored as he spoke, especially when he was talking about his sister. Furthermore, he was already making moves toward re-migrating with an urgency that would seem unnecessary were he only thinking about his studies.

Like Gabriel, Mauricio claims to have some actual plans to initiate the return process. He had been speaking with the legal aid workers at the shelter, and had the names and numbers of some lawyers he planned to contact. He explains that the reason he's stayed in Tijuana, and at the shelter specifically, is because he feels there are more resources available there to help his cause.

> Mauricio: I do have interest in fixing my situation, in fact, I have that list of lawyers that I told you about, and I am interested in how to be able to fix my situation so that in the future I can travel again, but legally.
>
> Interviewer: If you're not successful with the lawyers, could you… Do you have other options?
>
> Mauricio: I really don't know… I will try to do everything possible to fix everything so that I can travel without having to hide from Immigration…
> I am also investigating, on my own, immigration lawyers who can provide me with support, advice… More than anything to know if can fix my case, because I do see it as a bit uncertain.
> In fact, I have the name of the lawyer, information about the lawyer who represented me in court when I went to the county court, I have his number and everything to talk to, to advise me or to see what he can do…
> […]
> I hope to fix my situation more than anything, that's why I'm here in Tijuana, I haven't moved from here for the that reason, I want to fix my situation and I think that here at the shelter they'll give me the necessary support to be able to fix it.

As I conducted the interview, I felt dubious as to Mauricio's chances of "fixing" his situation, though I kept this thought to myself. Whether Mauricio himself is optimistic or not regarding his legal options is unknown, but he does seem to be making a concerted effort to contact legal professionals. That he is even taking this action sets him apart from some of the migrants we'll hear from in later chapters, who are interested in re-migrating but aren't actively pursuing a way to do so. It was obvious that Mauricio wanted to keep the conversation centered on the possibility of returning legally; he wasn't willing to discuss extra-legal options, though neither did he completely rule them out during our interview. In any case, Mauricio made clear that his main reason for wanting to return is to be with his sister, who is already in the United States. Recognizing that Mauricio may be highlighting this motivation for the benefit of the interviewer, I nonetheless hold that his emotional connection appeared very real, and that Mauricio fits the pattern of deportees whose decisions around re-migration are most influenced by these kinds of emotional family ties.

Darío:

Darío is a deportee, who, like Bernardo, says he spends a lot of time thinking about his family and feels lost in Tijuana. Darío's interview reveals many of the same themes that unite many of the deportees inclined to re-migrate. As with many in this group, he has young children who he longs to be with. He indicates that the well-being of his children is his main concern, and that they play an outsize role in his decision-making process. At the same time, Darío is trying to make the most practical choices he can. He is a clear example of a deportee whose pragmatism overlaps with his emotional inclinations. Darío wants to make logical, sensible choices, but they are all about what is best for his children, not necessarily what is best for himself. His pragmatism is not based on what will benefit him personally; rather, it is about how he can ensure his children are safe and in the best position they can be.

Darío is 41 years old, and grew up in his home state of Guerrero before coming to the United States at the age of 16. Though he was older than Bernardo when he arrived in the U.S, he's spent the last 25 years living there and declares that he feels more at home in America. Darío was arrested during a traffic stop, and is angry because he says he was treated like a criminal despite not having a record. He's considered bringing his wife and children to Mexico, but decided against it after appraising the conditions there. He explains it would be unfair and potentially unsafe for his family in Mexico, and that it's better for them to stay in the U.S.

> Interviewer: So how did you get here?
>
> Darío: Well, after being arrested, I arrived at this shelter because… Well, I was confused [about where to go] because 25 years of being [in the U.S.]… I am Mexican, but all this is strange for me because 25 years is a long time and… Well, I had nowhere to go and they brought us to this shelter… I left and then went to visit my father and mother in Guerrero to look for work, but things are worse there… I thought to work and take my family [there]. But then, I'd be taking my family to a world that is difficult for them… And they don't deserve it because they're American citizens, I think that things shouldn't happen like that for their safety, so no, I haven't brought them. I've gone 4 months here without seeing them with at all.
> […]
> I spent a month going to court, and then to another court. What they want is to kill you psychologically…
> I have a family that needs me… How is it possible that they say they care about the children and then… they take away…? The children… want to be with their parents.
> […]
>
> Interviewer: What would you say helps you reintegrate more into society in Tijuana?
>
> Darío: Well, what's helping me is only the desire to live as a decent person *and to have my family again; I think that if I didn't have anyone else, it wouldn't be worth fighting for*, because sometimes you come to think, "Where are you going, where are you going? Why fight if anyway one day you die, the world ends?" Sometimes so many things come to your head that you say, "I'm here, I can't go back, I have no money." *I think that my children are what has helped me to get out of where I have been…*
>
> (emphasis added)

Darío says that misses his family and children terribly, and brings them up repeatedly throughout the interview. Though he was tempted to bring them down to Mexico to be with him, he's extremely pessimistic about their prospects in Mexican society. He seems resolved that they should remain in the U.S. According to Darío, his children attend school there and already have their lives established in the United States. Darío claims that thinking about his children is what keeps him motivated and what makes him feel like life is worth living. His hope that he'll be reunited with them in the U.S. is what keeps him going. It sounds like Darío has had some very dark moments, and that being away from his family has been truly damaging to his mental health. Despite this, he remains determined to make practical choices that are best for his children. As such, he refuses to bring his children to Mexico; the only real chance he has of being with them again is for him to re-migrate. Clearly, if we take Darío at his word, his family and children are a major incentive for him to return to the U.S.

> Interviewer: And your family, you're still in touch with them?
>
> Darío: Yes, right now I talk to my wife every day, she even sent me three messages, with my children… they are the ones who miss me the most, and now technology is more advanced than before, but for me it is not so good in a way… Not saying it's not good that you can communicate with your loved ones, but for me it is difficult… Because I prefer not to see too much because the memory makes me realize that… I want to go [back], whatever it takes, so I don't think things through… Hopefully they do understand, but that's why it affects me…
>
> Interviewer: How do you think that your relationship with your children and with your wife has changed since the moment you arrived here?
>
> Darío: They talk to me every day the same as if I were there, I think that it has not changed, I think that they value a little more what they had when I was there… My fear is sometimes the time… I think that if it changes… things with the wife, I feel that maybe it might not like before, because she is learning to be live her life, and she is learning to get ahead without me… Yes, there may be a problem, maybe separation, because we are no longer going to share the same ideas, and so before that happens, I have to do something…

> Interviewer: What are your plans for the future?
>
> Darío: Well, just see if I can apply for a visa…

Though Darío expresses longing for his family, he also says he's concerned with what will happen to their relationship if he is away for too long. He explains that communication with his family is emotionally challenging because it makes him overly aware of what he's missing. At the same time, he worries that his wife will learn to adapt to his absence that his place in the family will evaporate. In another, more convoluted section of the interview, Darío admits that he's afraid of being thought of like a deceased family member; someone who people remember fondly, but who they've accepted as being gone forever.

> Interviewer: Where would you say that you feel at home?
>
> Darío: For me, it's on the other side (in the U.S.) because I spent 25 years there, I got there when I was 16, a kid… Although I am a foreigner according to them… I feel more at home there, because there people know me… And well, that's why, here nobody knows me…
>
> Interviewer: You already had your life there.
>
> Darío: Over there is my future… Where I exist is there in the United States. I don't intend to cross right now because I don't want more problems in my record, if one day I do it will be legally… And if they deny me that option, I will look for another, but who knows what will happen.

Darío appears strongly inclined to re-migrate, though we don't know what he'll ultimately decide to do. He tells the interviewer that he wants to do it legally if possible, but he explicitly leaves open the possibility of other options. This is an example of the limits of pragmatism; he'll make the choices that are best for his family, but he's aware that these choices may put him in a difficult situation. By all indications, Darío is trying to make choices as sensibly as possible, to avoid putting himself at risk. Yet it seems quite possible that he'll do whatever it takes to make it back to the U.S, as that is where his emotional connections are pushing him.

* * *

Throughout this chapter, we've explored interviews with deportees who appear highly inclined to attempt a return to the U.S. The pattern among these deportees is unmistakable: They are inclined to re-migrate *because* they maintain powerful emotional attachments to family members across the border. This is especially true if the deportee has young children. Though other factors did contribute and overlap, these interviewees were remarkably consistent in identifying family reunification as their primary motivation. Gabriel is the most clear-cut example of a deportee who seems determined to re-migrate by any means necessary. The rest of the interviewees did have more practical concerns that influenced their decision-making processes; for example, several indicated that they hoped to return legally. Yet they also repeatedly raised the issue of how much they missed their families, often without any prompting from the interviewer. Indeed, some interviewees spoke of little else.

As described earlier in the methods section of this paper, deportees who I categorized as having strong emotional ties to family in the U.S. expressed that these bonds were central in their motivation to re-migrate. This doesn't necessarily mean that emotional ties are the only factor these individuals consider; indeed, some of the interviewees in this chapter do mention other concerns, such as the legal risk of attempting a return. However, for most of these deportees, the pull of family seems to override these other considerations. Practical concerns that might otherwise dissuade an individual from re-migrating are overwhelmed by the deportee's emotional desire to return to their family. The manifestation of this pattern across this group of interviewees is what led me to categorize them as having strong emotional ties to family across the border.

The excerpts chosen for this chapter were selected because they are emblematic of patterns visible throughout many of the interviews collected by students and researchers during the MMFRP. Though not every interviewee expresses the exact same sentiments, the degree to which many of them brought up their emotional connection to family members in the U.S. was noticeable and striking. Specifically, migrants brought up these connections when speaking about their motivations for potentially re-migrating. As noted in the introduction, 13 deportees in this study coded as being highly inclined to re-migrate; of these, 10 also display strong emotional connections to family members across the border. This is a full 20% of the 50 interviews analyzed for this project, and should this proportion manifest across a larger sample, would be substantial. With the sample size used in this paper, I cannot say whether this group indicates a statistically significant pattern among Mexican deportees overall, but it certainly a question worthy of further research. Within my 50-interview sample for this project, this overlap of 10 deportees is an absolutely noteworthy proportion.

While I did not analyze every interview within this group of 10 to quite the same depth as I did the 4 interviews I ultimately excerpted in this chapter, I did examine them beyond just the coding process. In other words, I looked closely at what the interviewees were actually saying, in order to determine whether there was a causal relationship explaining the overlap of 10 deportees coded as being both highly inclined to migrate *and* as having strong emotional ties to family in the U.S. As detailed in the methods section of this paper, I was already playing close attention to deportees' descriptions of their family bonds in order to determine the strength of these connections. Looking at this testimony again, I noted that all of the deportees within the overlapping group of 10 expressed being motivated to re-migrate *because* of their desire to reunite with family across the border. While this analysis did require me to take deportees at their word, and is possibly prone to some errors in interpretation, it compellingly suggests that there is more than just random correlation between those highly inclined to re-migrate and those with strong emotional ties to family in America. That a full 1/5 of the total deportees who make up the sample for this project say that they want to re-migrate because of their connections to family is undoubtedly an important finding. This proportion might not seem particularly large in isolation, as it is obviously a fraction of the total number of interviews analyzed. Yet if these numbers are indicative of the proportion among Mexican deportees overall, this pattern would represent very large quantities of people.

The 4 interviews in this chapter were chosen from the aforementioned group of 10 due to their articulation of themes common across the group. The expressiveness and emotion of these interviewees when describing their family bonds is apparent, and reflects the sentiments of the larger group. Of the interviewees in this chapter, 3 had young children to whom they felt particularly close. Of the 10 deportees in the larger group, 8 had young children; the 3 highlighted here were selected from that group of 8. Other factors common across the larger group appeared to compound these deportees' inclination to re-migration, for example, a lack of family to whom they felt close to in Mexico also seemed to increase inclination to attempt a return. Likewise, deportees who had spent significant parts of their lives in the U.S. appeared more eager to re-migrate. These factors are difficult to detangle, and it is likely that they reinforce each other. Still, the key element of strong emotional connection to family in the U.S. emerged time and time again, regardless of the presence of other factors. And while none of these factors are restricted only to this group of deportees, they do appear more intensely and consistently among them.

The hope of returning to the United States “the right way” (crossing legally), is an aspiration us researchers encountered frequently during our interviews. This is unsurprising; every person we interviewed knew firsthand, by virtue of their deportation, the danger of being considered “illegal” under U.S. law. It’s logical that these individuals would aim to avoid these pitfalls by crossing legally. Yet this may be an instance in which some interviewees were tailoring their narrative to the audience. Several of the migrants we spoke with had previously traversed the border illegally, implying an awareness of how difficult it is to actually get a visa. If migrating legally is doable, why had these migrants crossed illegally in the past? The answer is that arranging a legal crossing is often impossible, a fact that many of those we interviewed may already know. It makes sense that the deportees we talked with would refrain from telling us, American students they barely knew, any illicit crossing plans they might have. Still, we have no reason to believe that our interviewees were anything other than honest when discussing their potential motivations for re-migration.

None of the migrants interviewed for this chapter had spent excessively long amounts of time incarcerated relative to some of the other deportees we spoke with, nor did any of the deportees in the larger group of 10. Gabriel had been in and out of county jail, but his longest stay was six months. Darío spent some time in immigration detention before being deported, but had not been to a long-term prison facility. To be clear, the potential trauma of even a short incarceration should not be minimized. But compared to the multi-year terms that some of the other interviewees had served, those highlighted in this chapter spent relatively little time behind bars. This is significant because prior research connects lengthy prison sentences to a degradation of familial closeness. The patterns observed in this chapter are consistent with that conclusion. The migrants whose interviews are excerpted above have had relatively short carceral experiences, and were able to maintain their strong emotional ties to family.

Gabriel and Mauricio distinguished themselves among our interviewees by claiming that they're already taking action to initiate re-migration. Gabriel says that he's secured financial backing for the endeavor, and Mauricio is reaching out to lawyers. Whether a deportee has taken action towards a return is one of the analytic codes I used to identify those inclined to re-migrate, along with a statement of desire to return, a plan to return, frequency of discussion about return, and display of emotion when talking about return. I coded Gabriel and Mauricio as having all of these indicators. Granted, even though Gabriel and Mauricio's actions imply a dedication to the idea of returning, their actual knowledge of the process may be quite limited. This is an intriguing facet of their thought processes; they seem strongly inclined to re-migrate despite not necessarily understanding the practical feasibility of such an undertaking. It appears that their decisions are guided by their emotional ties to those in the U.S. Perhaps these interviewees cannot emotionally fathom any course of action other than a return. This isn't to suggest that they will or will not succeed in re-migrating. However, that they're leaning towards this course of action without having all of the pertinent logistical information further underscores the emotional basis of this choice.

Bernardo and Darío seem closer to being stuck in limbo compared to Gabriel and Mauricio, though not to the degree of some of the migrants highlighted in the next chapter. They haven't yet begun making specific plans for their next move, and appear distraught by their situation. Yet they still code positive for 3 of the 5 indicators of inclination to return. Bernardo and Darío might not be as proactive as Gabriel or Mauricio, but they still seem highly inclined to re-migrate and express extremely strong desire to reunite with their families. Their emotional ties to family members in the U.S. came across as powerfully as with any other migrant we interviewed. Neither had any qualms declaring that their families are major influences in their thought processes.

CHAPTER 3: DEPORTEES WITH MODERATED OR COMPROMISED EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S.

This chapter explores interview excerpts from deportees who have experienced some degree of emotional separation from their family members in the U.S. As a result of this separation, many of these deportees are undecided about attempting a return to the U.S. Additionally, several of these individuals can be described as being "stuck in limbo," in the sense that while they may be inclined towards a decision on whether or not to re-migrate, they've been unable to actually move toward a definitive course of action. The evident pattern here is that migrants who have begun a process of emotional separation from their family members in the U.S. are more likely to get stuck in limbo after being deported. Many had experienced some kind of estrangement from their family members, even before being deported. This means that reuniting with family is not just a matter of crossing the border; there are other forces that may have already been contributing to a breakdown of familial connection. These circumstances of disunity seem to contribute to some interviewees wondering whether re-migration is worth the trouble. Some have spent time incarcerated, an experience that can both degrade familial connections and increase a person's concern about the risk of being sent back to prison. Furthermore, some of these interviewees still have family to whom they feel close in Mexico, which may lessen their inclination to return to the U.S.

Some of these interviewees are struggling to balance the emotional and practical factors that may be pulling or pushing them to make a certain decision. Choosing not to re-migrate might make sense from the perspective of material self-interest. Yet the individuals in this chapter express uncertainty about their next move. The emotional connection they have to family members in the U.S. is strong enough that they are considering another crossing attempt, despite the physical danger and risk of apprehension. At the same time, these interviewees haven't yet taken actual steps towards re-migration, indicating that perhaps their emotional inclinations towards a return are not as powerful as those of the migrants in the previous chapter.

Deportees that can be considered to have uncertain migratory intentions formed the most amorphous group in the coding process, as anyone whose decision-making process appeared unclear or incomplete ended up in this category. Yet there were still commonalities that stood out. The majority of deportees with uncertain intentions also displayed moderate levels of emotional connection to family, and the testimony of these deportees supports the idea that compromised emotional ties directly impacted their decision-making processes. The interview excerpts in this chapter were chosen because they are particularly eloquent representations of the phenomena I observed most frequently in the larger interview pool. There are deportees who seem to be leaning towards re-migrating, but are unsure due to some kind of ongoing dispute they had with their partner or other family members across the border. Some of these interviewees have young children, and like those deportees in the previous chapter, seem particularly emotionally tied to their kids. Others appear more likely to stay in Mexico, but do express some desire to re-migrate, and are keeping their options open. Often, these deportees have older children, or former partners that they would like to see again. However, there may be practical considerations getting in the way of a return to the U.S, and these deportees don’t express the same intense longing for family reunification as do those in Chapter 2. Finally, there are migrants who have spent multiple years incarcerated. Their sentences may not have been so long as to completely destroy their emotional connections to family, but long enough that these connections are strained and not as powerful as they once were. This could be the case even with deportees who did have young children, as their time behind bars eroded their affectual ties.

Antonio:

Antonio, a 35-year-old man originally from San Luis Potosí, is one of the interviewees who has young children and expresses an intense desire to reunite with them. However, his marriage was unraveling even before his deportation, and his family is moving imminently to the eastern U.S. As a result, Antonio is struggling to decide whether or not to re-migrate. On one hand, he really wants to be able to see his kids; everything he says indicates that he still feels a real connection to them. Yet his relationship with his (ex)wife is in turmoil, and he not sure he'd have access to his children even if he does return to America. As such, Antonio is in a state of limbo, not sure what the best path forward is.

Antonio first came to the United States in 1999, and crossed back and forth over the next decade, leaving his wife in Mexico. In 2010, his first child was born, and he decided to bring both his wife and his new son to U.S. so that he wouldn't have to keep crossing. In the following years, he had two more children, before being deported in early 2019. He'd had some kind of dispute with his wife prior to his deportation, and they had separated. He is clearly emotional when speaking about her, and struggles to keep from crying when discussing her. It seems she has a lover that he didn't know about, a reality he is still processing. He is angry with her and blames her for reporting him to ICE, though it's not at all clear that she actually did.

> Antonio: El primero de diciembre – de 2018, la descubrí pues que tenía un – (empezando a llorar), tenía una amante. Por redes sociales, y ya nos separamos. Pero pues desgraciadamente me andaba buscando el ICE […] Le preguntaron si sabía dónde estaba yo y – ella dijo que – le preguntaron a donde yo vivía y ella dijo que no sabía. Entonces ya le contaron que si sabía a donde me encontraba en ese momento ella ya contestó que tal vez me encontraba en tal parte trabajando y ya llegaron a mi trabajo […] No sé la intimidaron para que dijera. No sé.

> Antonio: On the first of December - of 2018, I discovered that she had a - (wiping back tears), she had a lover. Through social networks, and we parted ways. But unfortunately, ICE was looking for me […] They asked her if she knew where I was and - she said that - they asked her where I lived, and she said she didn't know. Then they asked if she knew where I was at that time, she answered that maybe I was working, and then they arrived at my work. I don’t know if they intimidated her into saying that. I don’t know.

Though Antonio is separated from his wife and says that he’s done with her, he is obviously still in a lot of pain when thinking of her. Some emotional attachment remains, and it’s possible he will attempt to reconnect with her; according to him, they had already reconciled once after a previous falling out. It is possible that Antonio’s remaining emotional connection to his wife could be a motivation for re-migration. In this case, however, the attachment is complicated by the fact that Antonio’s marriage was falling apart even before he was deported. It’s very difficult to predict what will happen with the relationship in the long run. Antonio is conflicted; though he’s angry with his wife and separated from her, he still has strong feelings for her, a reality that complicates his decision-making process.

Antonio also indicates he misses his children a lot, and is upset about how long it has been since he’s seen them. He’s recently learned that his wife is moving to North Carolina with the kids, and he’s distraught at the idea that his children will be so far away. As shown by the coding of the data and by the examples in Chapter 2, deportees with young children often seem especially emotionally connected to them. Unfortunately for Antonio, the likelihood of him seeing his children in the future is unclear. The world he once knew and the life he once had is imploding, and there is little he can do about it. Given how recent of all these changes are, it’s not surprising that Antonio is undecided about his next move. Antonio didn’t talk about his kids quite as much as some of the other interviewees, but his tearful demeanor demonstrates that he does truly miss his kids and longs to see them. However, his options to do so are extremely limited.

> Entrevistador: Viste a tus hijos cuando estabas detenido?
>
> Antonio: No. No ya (llorando). Ayer fue 12 no? Dos meses de no mirarlos. El 12 de diciembre fue la última vez que los miré. Y ya – diciembre, enero, ahorita febrero: dos meses. Ya no les he visto más de que les hago puras llamadas y así.
>
> Entrevistador: Me decías que pensabas quedarte aquí para verlos – o… cuéntame que piensas.
>
> Antonio: Tenía pensado quedarme aquí para buscar la manera de quien me los trajera aquí a la línea, para verlos. Pero… mi ex ya no está dispuesta. Se está mudando a otro estado. Entonces ya – no sé tal vez que me quede.
>
> Entrevistador: Y porque quería – porque ella se quiere ir a otro lado.
>
> Antonio: Ella se va para North Carolina porque ella tiene su amante… Y eso es lo que – a veces – (empezando a llorar). Pues me pongo triste y – (tratando de no llorar). Es muy difícil. Pues ya poder verlos como yo planeaba, quedarme aquí. Yo no va a poder ir a ver.
>
> Entrevistador: Cuándo descubriste que ella se iba a ir a otro lado.
>
> Antonio: Ella me mandó un mensaje anteayer diciéndome que mandara por unas cosas que había dejado allí… Entonces, ayer fue que me dijo que se iba para allá. Y… pues ni modo, todo está fuera de alcance.
>
> Entrevistador: Has platicado con tus hijos por videochat?
>
> Antonio: Sí, ayer en la tarde. Casi todos los días. Las niñas tan chiquitas no saben. Sólo me preguntan que – que dónde estoy. Les digo que en México, pero nomás les da risa por no saber. El grandecito pues sí ese ya entiende más. (tratando de no llorar).

> Interviewer: Did you see your children when you were detained?
>
> Antonio: No. Not at all (crying). Yesterday was the 12th, no? Two months of not seeing them. December 12th was the last time I saw them. And now - December, January, now February: two months. I haven't seen them, so now I just call.

> Interviewer: You were telling me you planned to stay here to see them – or… tell me what you think.
>
> Antonio: I had planned to stay here and find a way for someone to bring them here to the border, to see them. But… my ex is no longer willing. They are moving to another state. So now - I don't know, maybe I'll stay.
>
> Interviewer: Because she wanted to - because she wants to go somewhere else.
>
> Antonio: She is going to North Carolina because she has her lover [there]… And that's what - sometimes - (about to cry). Well, I get sad and - (wiping tears, trying not to cry). It is very difficult. To be able to see them as I planned, to stay here… I won't be able to.
>
> Interviewer: When did you find out that she was going somewhere else?
>
> Antonio: She sent me a message the day before yesterday telling me to send for some things she had left there... So, yesterday she told me she was going. And… no way, everything is out of reach.
>
> Interviewer: Have you talked with your children by video chat?
>
> Antonio: Yes, yesterday afternoon. Almost every day. The little girls don't know. They just ask me what - where I am. I tell them that in Mexico, but it just makes them laugh for not knowing. Well, the big one already understands more. (wiping away tears).

Antonio's display of emotion during this conversation underscores his shock and distress at the news that his family is moving away, and that he won't be able to see his kids. No matter how the situation might or might not have worked out with his wife, it's readily apparent that he still cares about his children and wants to be able to see them. In the cases of certain other deportees, including some highlighted in the previous chapter, this longing to be with one's children might be enough in itself to induce re-migration. Yet for Antonio, the circumstances are, again, complicated. His children are not simply waiting on the other side of the border, ready to welcome him back into a unified family. Instead, they are moving across the country, thousand of miles away, to live with their mother and her new partner. Antonio does not yet know how, or if, he’ll be able to fit into his children’s lives. This kind of uncertainty precipitates Antonio being stuck in a state of indecision. Nonetheless, while he’s unsure of his future plans, his kids are never far from his mind. Later in the interview, he explains that his desire to see his children is the whole reason he’s been staying in Tijuana instead of returning to San Luis Potosí.

> Entrevistador: Entonces ahora qué vas a hacer?
>
> Antonio: Pues – tal vez este … si es verdad que ya se va, pues ya. Me retiro de aquí en unas dos semanas me voy para mi tierra. Pues de hecho también tenía pensado ir a visitar a mis papás y mis hermanos están todos allá en San Luis Potosí.
>
> Entrevistador: Te quedarías aquí en Tijuana o ya no?
>
> Antonio: No, pues, es que – mi idea era quedarme para ver a los hijos para buscar la manera que los trajeran a verlos de vez en cuando pero pues ya me salieron con que van para otro estado y – pues no, pues ya. A lo mejor ya no, ya no me quedo aquí.

> Interviewer: So now what are you going to do?
>
> Antonio: Well - maybe... if it's true that she's leaving, well… I'm going to leave here in about two weeks and I'm going home. In fact, I had planned to visit my parents and my brothers, who are all there in San Luis Potosí.
>
> Interviewer: Would you stay here in Tijuana or not anymore?
>
> Antonio: No, well, it's just that - my idea was to stay to see the children, to find a way to bring them to see them from time to time… but now that they are going to another state… well, no… I'm probably not staying here anymore.

Still reeling from the news that his wife and kids are moving to North Carolina, Antonio is trying to figure out his next move. He’s been living in Tijuana, thinking that he could arrange to see and speak to his children at the border. Now that he’s learned they will be moving far away, he explains, his motivation for staying in Tijuana has disappeared. He appears unsure about the best path forward, but says that he's planning to visit his parents and siblings in San Luis Potosí. This is significant, as it indicates Antonio still has family members in Mexico who he feels emotionally close to. This distinguishes him from the interviewees in the previous chapter and others like them: deportees whose inclination to re-migrate is strengthened by their lack of close emotional connection to relations in Mexico.

In contrast, Antonio's parents and brothers still live in San Luis Potosí, and he feels enough affectual connection to them that he wants to visit them. These emotional ties may also be why he still considers San Luis Potosí "home," another distinction from the deportees in the previous chapter who feel their home is in the U.S. It's also the case that, though Antonio has spent a lot of time in the U.S, he was an adult when he first moved there. This is in contrast to some other interviewees who came to America as kids. Nonetheless, it's important to note that Antonio's brief mention of home comes up when discussing family ties, implying that his sense of place is at least somewhat influenced by where the people he's close to are living. The complexity of Antonio's emotional bonds, and their geographic spread across borders, contribute to the difficulty of Antonio's decision-making process. Though Antonio is planning to head to San Luis Potosí for a while, this does not mean he will stay there forever, or that he has given up on reuniting with his children. Antonio seems resigned to being in Mexico for a while longer, but is allowing for various future possibilities.

> Entrevistador: ¿Te volverías a estados unidos?
>
> Antonio: Por ahorita, no.
>
> Antonio: Por qué no tengo manera de cómo arreglar una visa o un permiso. Entonces, si me cruzo ilegal pues, corro el riesgo de que me dejen un tiempo encerrado. Por eso no, pues por ahorita no. Tal vez en un año me vuelvo a animar ya – si no encuentro la manera de arreglar una visa, pues – me aventaría otra vez

> por las montañas o por el desierto, lo que sea. Pero ahorita, por lo pronto no pienso en eso.

> Interviewer: Will you go back to the United States?
>
> Antonio: For now, no.
>
> Interviewer: Why?
>
> Antonio: Because I have no way of arranging a visa or a permit. So, if I go across illegally then, I run the risk of being locked up for a while. That's why not, not for now. Perhaps in a year I will re-encourage myself - if I don't find a way to arrange a visa, well - I could go again through the mountains or through the desert, whatever. But for now, I don't think about that.

Antonio suggests that he’s making a pragmatic choice – for now. He knows that he risks going to prison if he tries to cross, and he harbors hopes of obtaining a visa so that he can visit his children legally. At the same time, he is leaving open the possibility of an illegal return sometime in the future, if the visa doesn’t work out. As detailed above, Antonio’s situation is difficult because his family was already beginning to fragment, even before he was deported. Antonio had already separated from his wife, underscoring that his familial connections were under strain prior to his deportation. Unlike some of the interviewees in the previous chapter, Antonio is *not* expressing a determination to re-migrate no matter what; he may try at some point, but he’s leaving that decision for the future. The disintegration of his family, in combination with the fact that he still has close family in Mexico, is likely fueling his uncertainty.

Nonetheless, Antonio still expresses a lot of emotion when discussing his family and especially his kids. It’s apparent from his emotional attachment to his kids and his thoughts about the future that he does retain a desire to reunite with his family, or at least his children. How that desire will be affected by the passage of time is unknown, but it does seem that Antonio wants to see his kids in the not-too-distant future. Antonio's situation is an example of how persistent emotions around affectual ties to those across the border can be complicated by familial collapse, leading to a state of indecision.

Sergio:

Sergio is another deportee who is still trying to figure out his next move. He is 72, significantly older than Antonio, and originally from Guadalajara. Sergio's emotional ties to his family in America are arguably very intact for a deportee unsure of whether or not to re-migrate. Sergio did not indicate that he had any disagreements with his family, or problems in his relationships with his wife and children. However, Sergio's children are grown up, and he doesn't display the same kind of intense emotional desire to reunite with them as do many other deportees with younger children. Though he certainly would like to be with his kids, he doesn't express as visceral a need to be there for them. This highlights the degree to which having specifically *young* children results in an especially intense emotional bond that may soften as the children grow into adults. Situations like Sergio's can be difficult to quantify via coding, but are important to consider, as several other deportees of similar age also displayed these softened emotional connections. I don't consider his emotional ties to family to be compromised, but I do categorize them as moderated: still very much intact, but not inducing the same intensity of desire to reunite.

Sergio was already 49 years old when he first crossed into the United States, but he brought his wife and four children with him, and they have all lived in Southern California for the past 23 years. His wife and kids are still in the U.S, but none of them have legal status and cannot visit him in Mexico unless they move permanently. Though his kids are now grown up, he still expresses a strong desire to see them. He also seems very worried about his wife, who he says he misses terribly. Sergio's case is intriguing because he expresses a mix of practical and emotional concerns; his situation shows how these concerns can interact and influence each other. On one hand, he feels an intense affectual bond to his whole family, and longs to be with them for that reason alone. On the other hand, he says that he is most practically concerned about his wife, who like him, is getting older and more in need of caretaking. Though there's no indication that he misses his children any less than his wife, he is not as worried about their well-being, as they are already adults with jobs and families of their own.

> Entrevistador: Ahorita ¿Cuáles son sus planes?
>
> Sergio: Mire, yo, mis planes estoy todavía confuso. Todavía tengo confusiones por ejemplo a mi me gustaría estar otra vez con mis hijos, les hago mucha falta.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Dónde están ellos?
>
> Sergio: Ellos están ahí en Santa Ana. En el condado de Orange. Ahí en el otro lado. Entonces pero la oportunidad, son muy escasas las posibilidades. Inclusive se habla de que si a mi me volverían a detener se habla de que yo iría a la prisión federal y no se sabe que tiempo me van a dar. Esa por un lado. Lo otro es que sale muy caro, muy caro. Yo allá tendría como para pagar mi traslado o el cobro que me hacen las personas que hacen esa función, pero pues en realidad es acabarme el capital y yo mejor prefiero que lo poquito que haya mejor se lo gasten mis hijos o no mis hijos si no que mi esposa; más bien mi esposa es la del derecho y mi esposa la atienden ahí está con mis hijos, mi hija mi hijo, ellos la ayudan.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Su esposa no tiene pensado venir acá?
>
> Sergio: Ella en sus momentos de ahora si que de nostalgia que nos ponemos los dos a platicar pues que me está mal decirlo pero pues lloramos los dos. Porque ella, pues, le hago falta. Para una cosa o para otra: que para llevarle agua, llevarla al doctor, comprarle su medicina, comprendes? Estamos muy unidos en ese sentido y este, y pues sí me dice "yo si no hay otra posibilidad de que tu te puedas venir pues yo mejor me voy para allá" pero pues también aquí estoy viendo que, que no tengo recurso económico, por eso estoy buscando trabajo y no tengo recursos económicos como para decirle "ok ya tengo para una renta de una casa o un departamento" pero en un momento dado, empiezo a trabajar y si me va bien

> en el trabajo, yo me la traigo. Y si no este, pues le haría la lucha. Como le digo, estoy indeciso.
>
> Interviewer: Ok. And right now, what are your plans?
>
> Sergio: Look, me, my plans… I'm still confused. I'm still unsure, for example I would like to be with my children again, I really miss them.
> Interviewer: Where are they?
>
> Sergio: They are there in Santa Ana. In Orange County. There on the other side. So, the opportunity, the possibilities are very slim. There is even talk that if they would arrest me again, it's said that I would go to federal prison, and it's not known how long they would give me. That on the one hand. The other thing is that it is very expensive, very expensive. I would have enough to pay for my transfer or the fee that the people who perform that function charge, but the fact is, I would run out of money… I'd prefer that what little I have goes to my children to spend, or if not my children, then my wife… Rather, my wife is the one who should get it, and my children can care for her… My daughter, my son, they help her.
>
> Interviewer: Is your wife not planning to come here (to Mexico)?
>
> Sergio: Sometimes, we get nostalgic when we talk, and it is wrong for me to say it, but we both cry. Because she, well, she needs me. For one thing or another: to bring her water, take her to the doctor, buy her medicine, you understand? We are very united in that sense, and well… Yes, she tells me "if there is no possibility that you can [cross], then I better go there," but here I have no economic resources, I'm looking for a job and I don't have the financial resources to say "Ok, I already have a house or an apartment…" But at some point, I'll start working and if my job goes well, I'll bring her here. And if not, then I'll try [to return]. As I say, I am undecided.

Sergio explains that he and his wife are used to helping each other out with everyday tasks, including health-related necessities like doctor's visits. He says that since his wife is getting older, he is particularly anxious about her needing his assistance to manage. According to Sergio, his wife offered to move to Mexico to be with him, but he has no job or long-term housing in Mexico. To an extent, these can be seen as issues of material practicality; problems that could be resolved with sufficient money or tangible resources. But they are rooted in

Sergio's emotional connection to his wife. The reason Sergio is worried about these practical matters is because he cares so much about his wife. Sergio evaluates the situation pragmatically, but his choices are ultimately still determined by his emotional connections. He contemplates future possibilities logically, but he is not motivated by material self-interest; his main priority is to care for his family, especially his wife.

> Entrevistador: ¿Sus hijos no tienen papeles?
>
> Sergio: No tienen, están de manera ilegal también.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Usted cómo cree que se acomode su situación familiar? ¿Usted se imagina que sus hijos se vengan para México?
>
> Sergio: No. No porque pues ya ellos ya tienen hijos allá, excepto uno que no se ha casado.. pero los que ya están casados pues ya tienen una familia, ya tienen sus hijos que han crecido ahí, ya tienen unos 14, 15 otros tienen menos pero ya para ellos es muy difícil, sería muy difícil traerlos y hacer que sus hijos se adapten al medio ambiente de acá. A seguir el estudio, a muchas cosas. Y creo yo que aquí la única posibilidad que veo yo para estar yo con mis hijos o con mi esposa es que yo me vuelva a cruzar.
>
> Interviewer: Your children don't have papers?
>
> Sergio: They don't, they are illegal too.
>
> Interviewer: How do you think your family situation fits? Can you imagine your children coming to Mexico?
>
> Sergio: No. No, because they already have children there, except one who has not married ... but those who are already married already have families, they already have their children who have grown up there, who are already 14, 15 years old… Others are younger, but it would be very difficult for them, it would be very difficult to bring them and make their children adapt to the environment here. To continue their studies, to do many things. *I think that the only possibility that I see for myself to be with my children or with my wife is that I cross again.*
>
> (emphasis added)

Even if Sergio’s wife did join him in Mexico, their children would be unable to visit, since they too are undocumented. While the fact that they are self-sufficient adults means he is less concerned about having to care for them, it does not change that he still misses them and longs to see them. Figuring out the best way to care for his wife may be Sergio’s priority, but his emotional ties to his children also remain at the top of his mind. Sergio says that the only way he could to be with his children again is if he re-migrates, and this is important enough to him that he is seriously considering it. He does not have the mindset of some of the interviewees in the previous chapter, who seemed determine to re-migrate by any means necessary. Yet he indicates that attempting a return to the U.S. is a real possibility, motivated by his wish to be with his wife and children.

> Entrevistador: Unas últimas preguntas para entender cuáles son sus sentimientos hacía México y hacía EEUU: ¿Dónde se siente usted más en casa?
>
> Sergio: Pues… estoy todavía feliz porque estoy en mi país. Quiero ser positivo y sentirme feliz, aunque… créame que si deseo estar allá en EEUU otra vez. Aunque me ande escondiendo, pero estoy junto con mi familia… Pero esa es la única, el único objetivo que me llevaría a mi para allá. La única razón por la cual estoy incómodo es porque estoy solo… No somos nada si estamos solos.
>
> Interviewer: Some last questions to understand what your feelings are towards Mexico and towards the US: Where do you feel most at home?
>
> Sergio: Well… I'm still happy because I'm in my country. I want to be positive and feel happy, although… believe me, I do want to be in the US again. Although I am hiding [there,] I am together with my family... But that is the only one, the only objective that would take me there. The only reason I'm uncomfortable is because I'm alone... We are nothing if we are alone.

Sergio remarks that he still thinks of Mexico as his country, and still feels positively about it. However, he says that being reunited with his family is more important to him than being in Mexico, even if returning to the U.S. means living in hiding. That Sergio would rather live under constant threat in the U.S. than as a free citizen in Mexico illustrates how strong the pull of family can be. It also shows how affectual connections can eclipse material self-interest and national identity. All that being said, Sergio does not yet appear to have concrete plans to re-migrate. He says that he's still mulling over various options, including having his wife join him in Mexico, though he doesn't sound very optimistic about this possibility. That he hasn't yet taken definitive action towards any particular option underscores the degree to which he seems stuck in limbo, trying to juggle his practical and emotional concerns.

That Sergio is already 72 years old adds an interesting complication to the pattern of decision-making observed in this study. Compared to other migrants we interviewed, he expresses more worry about the physical health of himself and especially of his wife. His age may also influence his fear of being incarcerated, though Sergio does not appear to have spent much time detained previously. He claims he's considered paying for a coyote, but is worried about the cost and about being sent to prison. For someone of his age, even a relatively limited prison term could become a de facto life sentence, especially if his health were to deteriorate. Moreover, some other deportees, also older in age, expressed similar concerns about extra risk of re-migrating in their later years. Though this doesn't alter the trend of migrants' decisions being most impacted by their emotional connections, it is another important factor to consider. Sergio certainly misses his children, but he doesn't sound overly concerned about their well-being since they are already adults. This is in contrast to some of the other interviewees, who fear being absent during their children's formative years. Though Sergio's decision-making process may differ in this respect, he still fits the overall pattern of being highly influenced by the emotional nature of his familial connections.

Armando:

Armando is 35, was deported after being in prison, and has struggled with drug abuse and legal trouble, though he claims to be sober now. His situation is similar in some respects to that of Antonio: Armando's family was fragmenting even before his deportation. Yet in contrast to Antonio, Armando's familial breakdown seems to have resulted from his legal issues and subsequent time in prison. Armando's interview highlights how spending time in prison can degrade an individual's emotional ties to their family. Additionally, it demonstrates how practical and emotional considerations can overlap, especially for deportees at risk of being reincarcerated. Armando really doesn't want to go back to prison, and he knows his bonds with his partner and child are damaged. However, he still longs to be with them, specifically with his young son.

It's clear that Armando's emotional connection to his family remains at least partially intact. His ex-girlfriend and his son are living in the United States, and he says that he misses spending time with them. Armando's son is still young, only 10 years old, and Armando explains that he wants to be around as his son grows up. As with other deportees, Armando seems particularly attached to his son because of his son's young age. He claims that he is no longer in love with his ex-girlfriend, but that they still care for each other. Though Armando may no longer have romantic feelings for his ex-partner, they also seem to still be emotionally attached.

> Interviewer: Who was the woman you had a child with? Are you still close to her?
>
> Armando: We talk, well… she yells because, she doesn't even talk to me. She yells and I just listen… I start making excuses as to why I didn't call, this and that. So… [I should] just contact more, more of doing it for the kid. The kid… You know.

> Interviewer: And she was from?
>
> Armando: Wisconsin, Milwaukee… First, it was great and an adventure and all that, but… She was loyal, she stayed through all my prison terms and she's a great mom… And she was a great girlfriend and all that, but I'm down here, and been in prison, and I said, "Look, move on…" And it hurts like a bitch. It hurts like a bitch when I think about it… I'm not in love with her but… I got love for her. Always will, you know? She's the mother of my kid, you know what I'm saying? She's… She's freaking awesome […]
> And I hate that I'm not watching him (his son) grow… Missed opportunities, and now I'm reflecting and all that and the more I think about it… If I can't do anything about it or change the situation, I try not to think about it or live it.

Armando's relationship with his ex-partner appears quite complicated; though he expresses affection for her, it's also clear that his time in prison induced their separation. He explains that she mostly just yells at him whenever he gets in touch with her. Her anger makes sense, as she may have hoped Armando would be a present and contributing parent. Instead, he ended up in prison and ultimately was deported. Any parent expecting not to have to raise a child alone would likely experience similar frustration. Yet there isn't much Armando can do at this point. Once he went to prison, he became physically unavailable to his family and unable to truly fill the role of a father. Armando implies that his recognition of this reality led him to break up with his partner. He suggests that their split was in the best interest of her and their son, and that it's better for her to "move on." He seems to have accepted that his past crimes may cost him a close relationship with his family. At the same time, Armando is still traumatized by the separation and holds out some hope of reuniting with them in the future.

According to Armando, one of the reasons he wants to remain in contact with his ex-girlfriend is so that he can talk to his kid. He laments that he might not be around as his son grows up. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, previous literature on deportees posits that a loss of status can be an inducement to re-migrate.[27] In Armando's case, one might expect him to worry about the loss of his status as a father. Armando does appear distraught over his current inability to be present as a father, but he frames this as a loss of connection between him and his son, rather than as a loss of his symbolic status as patriarch. While loss of status may play a part in Armando's distress, it seems to stem much more from how he misses his son than from how his own identity has changed. Certainly, it is possible that the multiple emotions Armando is feeling overlap, and compound his overall wish to reunite with his son.

Armando has been drifting from shelter to shelter since his deportation, and acknowledges that there is no one in Mexico he feels close to. As noted with other interviewees, a dearth of emotional connections to people within Mexico can exacerbate deportees' sense of isolation, and thus their inclination to re-migrate. This pattern appears to hold true for Armando, but his desire to return to the U.S. is complicated by his legal issues and by his difficult relationship with his ex and son. Armando says his mother and sister are also still in the U.S, and his relationship with them appears stronger and less compromised than that with his ex-girlfriend and their son. He remains in touch with them, and remarks that they worry about his well-being now that he's in Tijuana.

> Interviewer: How did your family feel about you getting deported, sent here?
>
> Armando: They didn't want me to.
>
> Interviewer: How so?
>
> Armando: Cause they said, "The way you are, the state you was raised in, the people you hang around with… the way you carry yourself, speak and all that…

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[27] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 4-5
Schuster, Liza, and Nassim Majidi. 2013. "What Happens Post-Deportation? The Experience of Deported Afghans." *Migration Studies*: 9-10.

> you’re not gonna fit, not in Tijuana…” They're like “We know you're not gonna fit in. We know you're not.” And I said, “I’ll be fine.” …And they were right. I didn't fit in, haven't been able to settle down… I have no, no friends.

Though Armando’s family apparently anticipated his difficulty adjusting and tried to get him to fight his deportation order in court, he says that doing so would have been pointless. He explains that he has multiple felonies on his record in the U.S, and did not want his family to waste money on legal battles they would almost certainly lose. He comments that it would be cheaper to just pay a guide to smuggle him back across into the U.S. This sense of futility seems to contribute to Armando being stuck in limbo in Tijuana. He maintains a desire to re-migrate, and ultimately to reunite with his family, or at least to be there for his son. Yet he’s had serious problems with the law in the past, and he knows he’d likely be sent to prison for a long time if he is caught in the U.S

.

> Interviewer: So your family didn't try to get a lawyer or anything?
>
> Armando: No… they wanted me to, [my mom] said “Look it up, see what happens” and I said “Ma, sis, I don't want to be here all day looking things up and cross referencing with other cases. There's no way, no how. It'll cost you guys a lot more money… it'll be a lot cheaper if you pay to bring me back…” But yeah, there's no hope… I have aggravated, I’ve been convicted, not once, but numerous felonies that even if I got one off my record I still have 6,7 other ones. So, there's just no way, no how. So I just signed. It was like an open and closed case.
> Interviewer: Alright, what are your plans for the future? Do you think you'll be going back to the US?
>
> Armando: I’d like to. God willing. God willing. I don't want to go back to prison right away. I don't. But I would like to (cross), but if I don't, I’m gonna be down here. Make the best of it. Go hard.

Like many other deportees, Armando is wary of being sent back to prison. Though he never elaborated on exactly how long he spent behind bars, his time incarcerated was definitely more than a year. Having been to prison before, Armando is likely particularly reluctant to risk being re-incarcerated. He also indicates that his time in prison contributed to his breaking up with the mother of his child. Nonetheless, he remains in contact with this ex-girlfriend and their son, as well as with his mother and sister. Armando is thus a quintessential example of a deportee whose practical and emotional concerns overlap, and whose uncertain emotional connections to family increase the difficulty of making a definitive choice about re-migration. While his emotional ties to his family members may have been damaged by his prison term and deportation, they are still intact to a significant degree, and seem to be the major reason he wants to return to the U.S.

Armando declares that he has not adapted well to life in Mexico, and does not have affectual connections to anyone there. His desire to re-migrate is probably augmented by his struggle to adjust to life in Tijuana, and his lack of close ties to people there. It is unknown whether this factor, combined with his desire to reunite with his family, will be enough to convince him to re-migrate. He appears to be leaving the possibility open, but also to have accepted that he may be in Tijuana for at least a while longer. Armando has so far been unable to make any definitive decisions around re-migrating, as he weighs the risk of going back to prison against the compromised, but still intact emotional pull of family in the U.S.

Roberto:

Roberto is 55 years old, having crossed into the U.S. when he was 10, and had lived in Los Angeles for the vast majority of his life. Roberto has had drug and legal problems, and once spent about two years incarcerated. Like Armando and many other deportees, Roberto says that his time behind bars contributed to the breakdown of his relationship with his (ex)wife and their children. Though these children are now adults, Roberto would still like to reconnect with them. He also has a much younger daughter from a more recent girlfriend. Unsurprisingly, he expresses a particular desire to re-migrate to be with his young daughter. Roberto exemplifies a common pattern among deportees who have spent some time in prison, but still have emotional connections to family in the America: His practical concern about being sent back to prison competes with his emotional desire to return to the U.S. Though Roberto spent most of his life in California, he doesn't seem overly bothered by the prospect of losing his American identity. In fact, Roberto claims he only wants to be able to cross the border to see his kids, and would happily keep living in Mexico as long as he could regularly visit his children in the U.S.

Roberto had been in Tijuana for several months at the time of the interview. While friendly, Roberto comes across as very serious and purposeful, getting straight to the point during our interview. He is casually but neatly dressed, in a sweatshirt, jeans, and clean basketball sneakers. He shows no hesitation about being interviewed, and dives right into his life story with little prompting. Roberto explains that his family and his children remain in the U.S, and though his relationship with them is frayed, he says he would like to reunite with them via a legal return. Roberto had significant issues with drug abuse in the past, though he maintains that he's now sober and healthy.

Nonetheless, he intimates that these issues played a role in the collapse of his familial unity. Partly as a result of his drug problems, Roberto has also been in and out of prison, though he not had to serve several-year sentences like some interviewees in later chapters. The consequences of this lifestyle manifested in his separation from his first wife, and the degradation of his relationship with their children. He doesn't seem interested in reconnecting with his ex-wife, but he does express affection for his older children. Despite the rocky nature of their relationship, Roberto still feels an emotional bond with these children and hopes to see them again. In contrast to Armando, who was separated from his ex but still felt affection for her, Roberto seems to be completely over his ex-wife emotionally. It’s been many years since they were originally together, and Roberto appears to fully accept that his time in prison, away from his family, has cost him that first relationship. However, in a pattern seen repeatedly among these interviewees, Roberto finds it harder to let go of his emotional connection to his older children. He knows that they’re now adults, and that they have mixed feelings about him, yet he still seems to feel some responsibility to them. Though a complete psychological analysis of the parent-child bond is beyond the scope of this paper, it’s clear that these kinds of ties result in a stronger emotional hold on many deportees than do romantic relationships.

Roberto now has another partner and child, both of whom are still in the America; he’s in touch with them, but hasn’t seen them since his deportation. His connection to them appears stronger than his connection to his ex-wife and older kids. In particular, Roberto indicates his desire to reunite with his young daughter, and to be there for her as she grows up. Such feelings are very much consistent with those of other deportees, who also displayed especially powerful emotional ties to younger children. Roberto also has a sister in the U.S. who he remains close to. Despite the fact that some of his relationships with those in the U.S. are more fractured than others, he says he wants to re-migrate because he feels extreme loneliness in Mexico. As imperfect as his emotional ties to those in the U.S. may be, they far surpass the complete lack of emotional connections Roberto has to anyone in Mexico.

Interviewer: How long were you in the States?

Roberto: 45 years

> Interviewer: 45 years. Wow! Most of your life. This is the longest one we have heard so far.
>
> Roberto: Yeah. I don't know nothing from here, so, you know what I mean? All I know is over there. The States.
>
> Interviewer: In what place were you in the States?
>
> Roberto: First I was in Watts, South Central [Los Angeles] …The projects, or whatever you wanna call those places. Then, I moved to South Gate, and from South Gate I moved to -- well, there was a lot of movement in my past... Me and my sister…
>
> Interviewer: Are you still in contact with your sister?
>
> Roberto: Yeah, she's the one who helps me out. Whenever I need money, or when I need -- I don't really ask them for nothing because they got enough problems over there, you know what I mean? And I'd rather work here.
>
> Interviewer: Where is your sister living right now?
>
> Roberto: Los Angeles.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, so she's in the States. Is she a citizen?
>
> Roberto: Yeah. Everybody is in the States, I mean, all of my family, except for two uncles and one aunt are over there… I don't like being here. Well, I do now, but not to live. Not to stay here all of my life. I probably would work in the States and live here because it's cheaper here… When I came here, you know … I didn't want to be here. I wanted to take my life. I never told nobody this because I don't know nobody here. I don't have no family here. I don't have friends here, family, so you feel alone. I feel alone sometimes and I get depressed, you know? But here, it's like this house (the migrant shelter) -- first of all, [without] this house I don't know where I would be. You know? I came here, they brought me here, and this is like… not jail, but a rehab to me. You know? It's a rehab. To me, it's a rehab. If I don't come here, I'm not comfortable…

Roberto explains that his loneliness while in Tijuana has caused him major depression and desperation. He laments that though he has no friends in Tijuana, no one he can talk to. Still, he seems to have found some solace in the services provided by the migrant shelter, and is grateful for the support of the shelter staff. At the time of the interview, Roberto had his own place in Tijuana and was no longer living at the shelter, but he came back frequently to volunteer. Interestingly, despite his initial despair at being in Mexico, Roberto says that he's accepted the idea of continuing to live there as long as he can travel to the U.S. to see his family. He declares that his main priority is being able to see his kids. As with many other deportees interviewed, Roberto's most powerful motivation for returning to the U.S. is the emotional connection he still feels to his children.

> Roberto: I'm working on… as a matter of fact, [name of shelter staff], is the one that helped me out to get my papers going for immigration.
>
> Interviewer: For a Mexican ID?
>
> Roberto: Yes… But I'm not gonna stay here. I'll probably be here a couple more years, but I'm going back to the States, but not the way other people do it -- through the hills (illegally), nah. That's not me. I'ma go straight through the line (legally). I mean, I got kids over there. I got three kids and my sister who… like she can help me out… I would say about, if everything goes right, and we're still in this world, in three years I'll leave here. Three or four years, but I'ma go the right way … I'm not gonna jump … the [wall] or go through the hills [because] you never know what's gonna happen out there, you know? What if I get kidnapped?
>
> Interviewer: You want to do the paperwork and wait your turn?
>
> Roberto: Yeah, wait my turn. I mean, go the right way, not the other way.
>
> Interviewer: And you've already spoken to the lawyer and stuff about this, right?
>
> Roberto: Oh, about my status here or over there?
>
> Interviewer: About your plans to return and how long it will take.
>
> Roberto: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I mentioned it. Like today, to [shelter staff], to them, to the administrator, everybody, that I'm not gonna stay here … I wanna have my papers from over there. That way, I can come here and back. Like that, yes. Work over there, and live here, yes. But now, I don't even have no way to go back to the States and go visit my kids, you know what I mean? *That's the only reason I'm doing it, because of my kids. If I were single with no kids, I'd stay here.*

> Interviewer: Where are your kids staying right now?
>
> Roberto: Los Angeles.
>
> Interviewer: With who?
>
> Roberto: Their mom.
>
> Interviewer: With their mom? Okay.
>
> Roberto: Well, yeah. I've got two -- my ex-wife and my girl. I've got two kids with my [ex]-wife and with my girlfriend I got one little girl. She's only four years old.
>
> (emphasis added)

This discussion highlights a couple key factors in Roberto's decision-making process. First, despite living in the U.S. for 45 years and feeling adrift in Tijuana, he says he is okay with living in Mexico as long as he can cross into the U.S. to see his family. This belies the possible expectation that Roberto would want to return to the United States because of his affinity for the physical location. While it is likely true that Roberto would feel more comfortable in L.A. than in Tijuana, his primary concern definitely appears to be family reunification. At the same time, Roberto's idea of living in Tijuana, but visiting his kids in the U.S. suggests that though his emotional connection to them remains strong, the relationships are not so close that he would actually expect to live with his children full-time.

Second, Roberto claims he is committed to returning to the U.S. legally, but it is not clear that he fully understands the process or the potential difficulty of obtaining a visa. Though he has mentioned his desire to the shelter staff, their ability to help him is limited. Though the shelter does make considerable effort to put its residents in contact with legal aid organizations, it is up to the individual to ensure that their case moves forward. In this respect, Roberto's situation is somewhat similar to Mauricio's, which was detailed in the previous chapter. But while Mauricio had only been in Tijuana for a matter of weeks, and already had the names of lawyers he planned to contact, Roberto had already been there for close to year and still hadn't actually reached out to any lawyers. Such may indicate the difference in their circumstances. Mauricio, young and without any significant experience incarcerated, is eager to re-migrate, whereas the older Roberto, who previously spent 2 years in jail and has struggled with drug abuse, is moving more slowly.

This is not to say that Roberto will definitely fail in his endeavor; indeed, it is entirely possible that he will follow up with the right people and pursue the process to a successful conclusion. Despite the differences in Mauricio's and Roberto's situations, they share some common characteristics. Both seem most motivated to re-migrate to see family members; in Mauricio's case, his sister, and in Roberto's, his kids. Perhaps as a result of the difficult experiences he's had with drugs and prison, Roberto is more beaten down by world, and more wary of the risks involved with returning to the U.S. But ultimately, if he ever does go back, it seems that it will be to see his kids, not for any personal gain, or for any lingering affinity towards America as a physical location.

* * *

The deportees whose interviews are excerpted in this chapter are either unable to make a decision about re-migration, or are struggling to take concrete steps towards a course of action despite claiming to have specific intentions. Since a variety of situations contribute to these migrants being stuck in limbo, it can be challenging to define them as a group. However, there is a key characteristic that all of these interviewees have in common; they have all experienced some degree of emotional separation from their family members in America. This suggests that these deportees may have uncertain migratory intentions as a result of ambiguity in their emotional connections. Sometimes these affectual disconnects are a direct result of the deportation process, but often they began while the individual was still in the U.S. As evidenced throughout the chapter, there are several situations that may precipitate an emotional separation. In some cases, this can be as mild as a deportee's children growing up and starting families of their own. In others, the interviewee may have had more extreme issues like drug abuse and/or time incarcerated, which in turn resulted in a breakdown of familial unity.

Of the 50 interviews analyzed for this paper, 25, or exactly half, were coded as expressing uncertain migratory intentions. This is the largest group, compared to 13 interviewees coded as being highly inclined to re-migrate, and 12 being inclined not to remigrate. That undecided or uncertain deportees comprise the largest single grouping is not surprising, as any lack of clarity about their intentions would put them in this category. What is more meaningful is that this grouping correlates with the coding for moderated or compromised emotional bonds: 18 of the 25 deportees who appeared unsure of their intentions to re-migrate also displayed a moderate degree of emotional connection to family in the U.S. Again, it's unsurprising that the group of interviewees coded for moderate emotional ties is large; any deportee who didn't clearly have strong or weak emotional connections ended up in this group. But the degree of overlap between the coded groups is noteworthy. The sample size used in this paper is not big enough to be statistically representative of Mexican deportees as whole, but should this pattern hold for larger sample sizes, the correlation would be significant.

Because many different factors can result in compromised or moderated emotional connections, the deportees whose emotional ties are in this state form a relatively amorphous group compared to those with definitively strong or weak emotional bonds. As with the previous group of deportees who coded characteristics overlapped, I made sure to closely examine the words and expressions of the 18 deportees who had both uncertain re-migration intentions *and* moderated emotional ties. Due to the more varied circumstances of this group, identifying causal relationships among these deportees was not as straightforward as with other overlapping groups. Deportees did not always clearly state that they were unsure of returning *because* of their compromised emotional bonds. It was particularly important to think about how these interviewees phrased their responses. If a deportee was asked about their potential return plans, and then began describing some kind of dispute they'd had with their partner and/or trouble communicating with their children, I could reasonably deduce that these relationship issues were impacting their consideration of re-migration, even if the deportee did not say so explicitly. This kind of dialogue, in which an individual would describe relationship issues with their family while still expressing affection for them, arose very frequently among this group of 18 interviewees. I was not coding specifically for this kind of relationship situation, though in retrospect, perhaps I should have been. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of compromised emotional connections to family, for whatever reason, was readily apparent across this group.

Another way in which these compromised or moderated emotional ties manifested was in how centrally these deportees placed their families in their reasons to potentially re-migrate. While most interviewees in this group did mention their families as one of their major motivations to possibly return, their desire to reunite with family did not seem to override other considerations to the same extent as with the deportees in the previous chapter. For some of these deportees, the fear of being sent back to prison and/or the monetary costs of re-migrating are enough to give them real pause when it comes to contemplating a possible return. To be clear, some of these individuals may ultimately to decide to attempt to cross anyway. But they appear uncertain, and the fact that their emotional connections don’t immediately overwhelm their practical concerns results in their categorization as those with compromised or moderated emotional bonds.

The interview excerpts in this chapter were selected to be as representative of this group as possible. These excerpts articulate the circumstances I observed most commonly led to emotional separation between deportees and their family members across the border. These circumstances were: relationship issues with a partner or ex-partner, spending time incarcerated, and/or having kids who are now adults with their own families and livelihoods. These circumstances are not mutually exclusive; for many deportees, these issues manifest together and compound the individual’s sense of emotional separation. Of the 18 interviewees coded as having both unsure migratory intentions and moderate emotional bonds, 9 had spent at least some time behind bars. The majority, 11, had at least one relatively young child (high school age or younger). I did not code for relationship issues, but my impression from reading the interviews is that some form of dispute with a partner or ex-partner was very common. As noted above, these disputes could arise in the course of daily life, or could be precipitated by incarceration.

Within this chapter, Sergio is the deportee whose emotional connections appear most intact. His relationship with his children and his wife remains strong, and he appears to genuinely miss his family. Yet because his children are already grown and self-sufficient adults, he does not feel the same need to be there for them as might if they were still young. This doesn’t mean that he cares about them any less, but it is still a form of emotional separation; the difference between needing to be with someone, versus feeling that they are okay on their own, is quite significant. And while Sergio may be an outlier in this chapter, I did encounter numerous other deportees in similar circumstances. These individuals still cared deeply about their adult children, but didn't feel the need to always be with them. His kids aside, it is true that Sergio feels the need to be with and support his wife, and this does seem to make him more inclined to re-migrate than the other interviewees in this chapter.

In the cases of Antonio, Armando, and Roberto, it is evident that their emotional connections to family in the U.S. are more degraded. All of them are separated from their first partner, a process that seemed to have begun even before they were deported. Though they all claim to still care for these partners, the fact that they are estranged from them underscores the emotional separation that has occurred. All of these deportees also have young children, and it is their kids that seem to exert the strongest affectual pull. Nonetheless, there's been a process of separation from their children as well. For Antonio, this breakdown is intensified by the imminent departure of his ex-wife and their children to North Carolina. Though Antonio appears to truly want to be with his kids, their move across the country threatens to make this impossible. Additionally, Antonio still has family to whom is close in San Luis Potosí, and he intends to visit with them before making any further decisions. For Armando and Roberto, deportation worsens an already compromised relationship with their children. While they express genuine longing to reunite with their kids, they also acknowledge that their previous issues with crime had already damaged their emotional connection to their kids.

None of this means that these interviewees won't ultimately end up re-migrating, but at the moment, they appear stuck in states of indecision and inaction. As with the deportees in the previous chapter, this reality was common among the migrants interviewed. The excerpts chosen for this chapter were selected not because they are unique, but rather because they represent a pattern that showed up again and again in the interviews. This pattern is clear: these migrants had experienced some degree of emotional separation from family members in the U.S. These separations are not so total that these deportees had lost all desire to re-migrate, but they are enough to cause hesitation and indecision. In some cases, these separations were the consequence of deportees having spent time in prison, away from their families. In others, emotional separation occurred simply because the deportee's children had grown up and started families of their own. The result is that many of these deportees are stuck in a state of limbo, unsure about whether they should re-migrate, and unable to take concrete action in that direction.

CHAPTER 4: DEPORTEES WITH WEAK OR ABSENT EMOTIONAL TIES TO FAMILY IN THE U.S.

The deportees whose interviews are excerpted in this chapter lack strong emotional connections to family members in the U.S. They also indicate that they are not inclined to re-migrate. This combination of characteristics was common among deportees interviewed for this project. This correlation suggests that a dearth of strong emotional ties to those across the border results in significantly less motivation to re-migrate. Moreover, some of these interviewees specifically cite their emotional separation from those in the U.S. in their choice not to attempt a return. Some of these deportees have no family members in the United States, or only distant relatives. Others do actually have ex-partners and even children living in the U.S, but are estranged from these family members and no longer feel close to them. Often, this is a result of the deportee having served a lengthy prison sentence during which the lost contact with their families. In certain cases, the interviewee may even feel that they would be unwelcome in their family were they to hypothetically return. Longer experiences with incarceration were common among this group of interviewees, and several explained that their time behind bars had played a major role in the disintegration of their familial relationships. Some deportees who have family in the United States, but still aren't planning to re-migrate, say that this decision makes sense because their family members are self-sufficient and don't need or want the interviewee's support.

Deportees with little or no emotional connection to those across the border, and who are inclined not to re-migrate, often demonstrate a high degree of flexibility in their personal sense of national identity. For the most part, these individuals express a higher level of comfort with the idea of living in Mexico. Some have spent only a few years in the U.S, and still identify as Mexican just as much as they do American. Others have spent the majority of their lives in the

U.S, but are open to the idea of staying in Mexico and embracing their Mexican identity. A few even explain that they like living in Tijuana because American culture is prevalent, and it reminds them of places they lived in the U.S. This indicates that these deportees do miss certain places in America, but not enough to re-migrate. These individuals retain their overall senses of identity, but their lack of strong emotional ties to those in the U.S. allows them greater flexibility in how they express these identities.

Some deportees with weaker emotional ties to family in America explain that, though they do have some desire to return to the U.S, it's just not worth the difficulty. For example, those who have adult children often say that while they would like to travel to the U.S. to see their kids, the legal risk is too great. These concerns may be increased if the interviewee has been previously incarcerated, and so is particularly reluctant to risk being locked up again. In addition, these deportees' children or other family members may themselves be U.S. citizens and thus able to visit the deportee instead, especially if the deportee is still living near the border. The interviews indicate that while certain deportees do still have some emotional ties to the U.S, these ties are not so strong as to induce them to re-migrate. These relatively weak emotional connections permit more room for practical considerations, such as weighing the risks and costs of a return attempt. These deportees appear to have decided against re-migrating, and have made peace with the idea of living in Mexico, most likely for the rest of their days. Some are already making plans of how they are going to build new lives for themselves in Mexican society.

Benjamín:

One deportee who wants to build a life in Tijuana is Benjamín, a 24-year-old man originally from Veracruz. Benjamín is an example of a deportee without any real emotional bonds with those in the U.S. This absence of connection means that Benjamín's decision-making process revolves around other considerations. He seems generally focused on matters of economic practicality, opting to stay in Mexico because he believes doing so will ultimately benefit him more than trying to return to America. Other deportees in previous chapters have also considered practical issues, but these practicalities were usually related to their emotional connections. In contrast, Benjamín's dearth of emotional ties to the America leaves him mentally free to choose the course of action that is most materially beneficial for him.

Benjamín was deported after living in the Southern United States for three years. He says he's decided that re-migrating is not worth the effort, and he believes he will stay and work in Tijuana. Unlike the deportees highlighted in previous chapters, Benjamín actually fits the rational choice/economic self-interest model of migration incentive described earlier in the literature review. His motivation for crossing in the first place was to earn more money than he would have been able to in Mexico. Such a motivation is not uncommon, but it is striking how singular it was for Benjamín. In the interview conducted by a member of the MMFRP research team, Benjamín explains that he worked as a cook in the U.S, a job at which he made more than he would have in Mexico. Benjamín was even able to send money home to Veracruz, and his job provided him free accommodations:

> Entrevistador: ¿Que hacías en ese tiempo en Estados Unidos, que realizaste?
>
> Benjamín: En el tiempo que yo estaba en los Estados Unidos, yo trabajaba como cocinero en un restaurante. Por mi parte yo digo que me pagaban bien...no se si está bien o mal o... pero yo digo que si está bien porque… cuando mandaba dinero pa México es una suma que no lo ganaba yo aquí en México. Pues a mí me pagaban $3,000 dólares mensuales, pero yo no pagaba renta, no paga nada.

> Interviewer: What were you doing when you were in the United States, what did you do?
>
> Benjamín: When I was in the United States, I was working as a cook in a restaurant. For my part, I say that they paid me well... I don't know if it is good or bad or... but I say that it is good because… when I sent money to Mexico, it is a sum that I wouldn't earn here in Mexico. They paid me $3,000 a month, but I didn't pay rent, I didn't pay anything.

Benjamín told the interviewer that he pretty much worked constantly while in the U.S. Though he became acquainted with some individuals at his work, he did not spend a much socializing. Due to his intense work schedule, Benjamín did not develop long-lasting relationships in the U.S. This sharply differentiates Benjamín from some of the other interviewees, who had close friends, long-term partners, and even children from their time in America. His lack of U.S. connections may stem partly from his relatively short time in the U.S. He was only there for three years, and was intensely focused on working as much as possible.

> Benjamín: Cuando llegue a los Estados Unidos, lo que yo hacía cuando me dieron el trabajo en un restaurante era: De mi casa a mi trabajo y así todos los días, no más era mi rutina. De mi casa a mi trabajo, no más eso, de mi trabajo a mi casa porque yo trabajaba aproximadamente 12 horas diaria.

> Benjamín: When I got to the United States, what I did when I got a job in a restaurant was: from my house to my work, and every day that was just my routine. From my house to my work, nothing else, from my work to my house, because I worked approximately 12 hours a day.

Benjamín does not have any family members living in the United States, and he does not have children or a partner there. In fact, he says that he does not have children or a partner at all. He apparently used to have a girlfriend back in Veracruz, but does not plan on reuniting with her because he wants to focus on working and achieving goals such as getting a house. He does also have some family in Veracruz, a fact that likely made it easier for him to decide to stay in Mexico. It’s not surprising that Benjamín is electing to stay, given that his family is still in Mexico, and he has no emotional connections to anyone in the U.S. Nonetheless, even his family in Veracruz appears to be taking a backseat to his economic ambitions; he does not have any plans to visit them, and explains that he wants to work in Tijuana. He seems consistently concerned with his economic situation.

> Entrevistador: ¿Tenia familia en los Estados Unidos?
>
> Benjamín: No.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Nada más era usted?
>
> Benjamín: Sí, no más que yo.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Estás casado, soltero?
>
> Benjamín: Soltero.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿No tienes hijos?
>
> Benjamín: No… Tengo novia… No, todavía no pienso ... [Ella es] de Veracruz, pero no pienso juntarme con ella… Como le digo, primero, lo importante es tener todo tener una casa y todo terminar todas las cosas y que tenga todo…
>
> Interviewer: Did you have a family in the United States?
>
> Benjamín: No.
>
> Interviewer: Was it just you?
>
> Benjamín: Yes, just me.
>
> Interviewer: Are you married? Single?
>
> Benjamín: Single.
>
> Interviewer: You don't have children?

> Benjamín: I don't… I have a girlfriend… No, I don't think I do anymore... [She is] from Veracruz, but I do not plan to get together with her… As I said, first, the important thing is to have everything, have a house and everything, finish everything and have everything…

As might be expected of an individual his age, Benjamín is still in the process of planning his future. His main goal at the moment is economic stability. It is worth noting that while Benjamín fits the rational choice/economic self-interest models of immigration theory, he himself is not necessarily "selfish" in the colloquial sense. In a more meandering, less quotable section of the interview, he explains that much of the money he earned in the U.S. went toward an operation for his mother, who had some sort of medical issue. The reality is that the course of his life thus far has been determined by his monetary situation, and so he views economic success as the key to moving forward. He hopes to open a business in Tijuana and ultimately hire his own employees.

> Benjamín: Yo quiero poner un negocio propio, quiero tener un negocio propio y emplear a alguien para que trabaje.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Aquí en Tijuana?
>
> Benjamín: Sí, aquí en Tijuana
>
> Entrevistador: Aquí lo quiere, ¿eh?
>
> Benjamín: Lo quiero... quiero emplear a alguien que… entonces lo que yo voy a seguir trabajando, voy a buscar manera de cómo hacer más dinero, porque… bueno… Toda la vida es para mí es dinero, toda la vida es dinero porque cuando uno nace, es dinero, y cuando muere, también es dinero, entonces para la vida es dinero y… Quiero hacer eso.

> Benjamín: I want to start my own business, I want to have my own business and employ someone to work.
>
> Interviewer: Here in Tijuana?

> Benjamín: Yes, here in Tijuana.
>
> Interviewer: You want it here, eh?
>
> Benjamín: I want it ... I want to employ someone to work… so I'm going to continue working, I'm going to find a way to make more money, because... well... All life is money for me, all life is money, because when one is born, it is money, and when one dies, it is also money, so for life it is money and… That's what I want to do.

Unlike many of the interviews in the previous chapters, Benjamín seems to have no real emotional attachments to the U.S. He does not have any family in the United States, and spent most of his time there at work. Though the interviewer did not specifically ask about national identity in this case, we can presume that Benjamín identifies more as Mexican than as American, since he's lived the vast majority of his life in Mexico. For him, the U.S. represented an economic opportunity and nothing more. Benjamín has since calculated that trying again is not worth the risk. While this may have been a difficult decision, it was not an emotional one, in the sense that Benjamín is not drawn to cross due to affectual ties to people in the U.S.

Benjamín's decision-making process clearly differs from that of many other deportees, but it is essential to note that the same variable plays a key role in different choices around re-migration. Whereas some deportees are pulled to re-migrate because of their strong emotional ties to those in the U.S, Benjamín feels more free to decide against a return, because he lacks those strong emotional connections. Such situations are opposite ends of a spectrum of affectual connection, and underscore the importance of these connections is determining migration decisions. Certainly, other factors are also part of these processes, and there are various secondary factors that impact one's level of emotional attachment. The bottom line, though, is that this level seems to have an outsize influence on whether or not a deportee aims to re-migrate.

Dante:

Benjamín had lived only a short time in the U.S, and never developed any close relationships there, but other deportees had actually built strong connections in America, only to see them disintegrate over time. These migrants, despite living in the U.S. for significant periods of time and having built relationships there, had since experienced deterioration in these relationships to the extent that they no longer felt any desire to try and return. Dante, a 34-year-old man originally from Tamaulipas, is one such individual. Dante's interview reveals that his past criminal activities, and the prison term that resulted, are mostly responsible for the breakdown in his emotional connection to his family. Additionally, Dante suggests that his family has no need for him, because they are financially stable on their own. This isn't quite the same sentiment expressed by deportees with grown-up kids, but it is similar to some extent. Dante's belief that he doesn't need to be there for his children's well-being helps him accept his emotional separation from them.

Dante had spent 13 years in the U.S, in New Jersey and Texas. He had been married to a woman from Michigan and had 4 children. However, the relationship had ended when he went to prison for attempting a bank robbery, and at this point, he was mostly estranged from both his ex-wife and children. In a pattern reminiscent of other interviewees, Dante's emotional connection to his family had been destroyed by his life of crime and subsequent prison term. Indeed, Dante's physical absence from his family while he was locked up led to the degradation of their emotional connections. His wife ultimately moved back to Michigan with the children and began a new relationship with another man.

> Entrevistador: ¿Estás casado?
>
> Dante: O... Divorciado
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Y ella? ¿Vive allá?
>
> Dante: Sí, ella es de Detroit Michigan.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Y tienes hijos?
>
> Dante: Cuatro.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Mujeres? hombres?
>
> Dante: Una niña y tres hombres.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Tienes contacto con ellos?
>
> Dante: No.
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Para nada?
>
> Dante: [Shook head no].

> Interviewer: Are you married?
>
> Dante: Uh... Divorced.
>
> Interviewer: And her? Does she live in the U.S?
>
> Dante: Yes, she is from Detroit, Michigan.
>
> Interviewer: And do you have children?
>
> Dante: Four.
>
> Interviewer: Girls? Boys?
>
> Dante: A girl and three boys.

Interviewer: Are you in touch with them?

Dante: No.

Interviewer: Not at all?

Dante: [Shook head no].

The interviewer noted here that Dante's answers, which had previously been longer and more detailed, became very short when he was asked about his family in the U.S. Dante did not specify exactly how long he'd actually been in prison, but he made clear that his conviction and incarceration caused a major separation in his emotional connection to his family. That he was then deported seems to have been the final blow that makes reuniting with his family impossible, although their relationship was already severely compromised. While some deportees have families in San Diego or Los Angeles who can conceivably visit them in Tijuana, Dante's family is in Michigan, extremely far away. The practical difficulty of seeing his family deepens his sense that attempts at reconciliation would be futile. Furthermore, there's little indication that Dante and his family actually want to see each other. Dante appeared reluctant to talk about his ex-wife and kids, and in a later section of the interview, implied that he no longer actually considered them family.

> Entrevistador: ¿Porque no piensas regresar a los Estados Unidos?
>
> Dante: *Una, porque no tengo familia*. Dos, porque cuando están una sentencia máxima de 8 a 10 años si tú regresas … Y pues, tampoco tengo a nadie [allá] entonces por qué voy. Tal vez en un futuro, pero no creo porque no quiero estar encerrado allá… Porque tengo 34, salí joven ahorita, para poder trabajar, una casa o negocio, otra familia… Entonces salí a una edad que *todavía puedo rehacer mi vida…*

> Interviewer: Why don't you plan to return to the United States?
>
> Dante: *One, because I have no family*. Two, because when there is a maximum sentence of 8 to 10 years if you return… And, well, I don't have anyone [there] so why would I go? Maybe in the future, but I don't think so because I don't want to be imprisoned there… Because I'm 34, I left and I'm still young right now, I can work, get a home or business, another family… So, I left at an age that *I can still rebuild my life…*
>
> (emphasis added)

It is clear from this exchange, that like Benjamín, Dante believes that the risks of returning to the U.S. outweigh any possible benefits. Unlike Benjamín, he did actually create meaningful relationships in the U.S. that might be expected to influence his thinking. Yet these relationships have soured so much that he chooses not to consider them in his decision-making process. Despite having just spoken with the interviewer about his ex-wife and children, Dante describes himself as having "no family." The decision of whether to return has become a purely instrumental choice. Dante explains that in Mexico he has the chance to "rehacer," or literally "redo" his life. This indicates that Dante wants to make a clean and complete split from his past, and start over in Mexico. All this being said, he is still human and does seem to still have some feelings for his children. In a later part of the interview, we learn more about why reuniting with them feels so impossible.

> Entrevistador: ¿No te da ganas de regresar a ver a tu familia tus hijos?
>
> Dante: Yo ya no puedo regresar porque ella.. tiene una persona y esa persona va a hacer todo lo posible para que ella no se separé de él. Si yo me acerco al estado donde están ellos, ¿qué crees que pase?
>
> Entrevistador: ¿Te denunciarían?
>
> Dante: Mmmh. Él me denunciaría, diría "ay aquí anda un muchacho que hace poco robó un banco, acaba de salir de prisión y no quiero que los haga daño, por

> favor pueden chequear," y voy pa prisión. ¿Entiendes? Y, sí, yo le digo "Son mis hijos yo quiero verlos," "Sí, pero yo ya no quiero estar contigo," "Nadie está diciendo que quiere que estás conmigo, nomás quiero ver a mis hijos," pero como te lo acabo de explicar... Su novio no va a entender… Va a haber problemas, y para evitar eso pues mejor no más me quedo [aquí]… Pero mi hermano tiene un poco de contacto con ellos, y a veces mandan fotos.

> Interviewer: You don't want to go back to see your family and your children?
>
> Dante: I can't go back anymore because she... has a man and he will do everything possible so that she won't be separated from him. If I go to the state where they are, what do you think will happen?
>
> Interviewer: They would reject you?
>
> Dante: Mmmh. He would reject me, he would say "here is a guy who recently robbed a bank, he just got out of prison, and I don't want him to hurt them, please can you check," and I'm going to prison. You understand? And, yes, I tell her… "They are my children, I want to see them," "Yes, but I no longer want to be with you," "No one is saying you to be with me, I just want to see my children," but as I just explained to you... Her boyfriend is not going to understand… There will be problems, and to avoid that, I better just stay [here]… But my brother has a little contact with them, and sometimes they send photos.

This conversation indicates that Dante does retain some affection for his children. However, it is not so intense that he feels the need to be with them. The threat of his ex-wife's jealous boyfriend, and the potential legal problems of returning, are more than enough to dissuade him. In this part of the interview, some of the deeper psychological separation Dante feels from his family also becomes apparent. His time in prison and resulting physical absence from his family seems to have led his ex-wife to cut him out of her life entirely. While it is not possible to know what the children might have preferred, they didn't have much choice in the matter, since they remain in her custody. By moving to another state and beginning a relationship with another man, Dante's ex-wife has made it extremely difficult for him to remain a part of his family's life. Of course, she is well within her rights to make these choices, and there are still potential actions Dante could take to reconnect with his kids. Yet he seems to see himself as effectively having been replaced by ex-wife’s new partner. His self-esteem appears very low, and in other parts of the interview, he describes himself as ugly and destitute. All indications are that Dante has not only accepted his family’s rejection of him, but has also rationalized it as being precipitated by own personal failings and inadequacies. The result is that Dante doesn’t consider himself worthy of reconnecting with his children, and may even feel that they are better off without him.

It's conceivable that someone with greater attachment to their kids might not so completely accept their ex’s actions as a rejection of their familial role. Certainly, it is not uncommon for ex-partners to battle over the fates of their offspring. Dante, though, has already been separated from his children for a long time, due to divorce, incarceration, and now deportation. He appears worn down to the point of acknowledging that trying to reunite with his family would be futile. That Dante has already spent significant time behind bars also likely exacerbates his fear of being sent back to prison. He’s accepted the idea of not seeing his kids, even though he’d like to if circumstances were different. When the interviewer asks him about child support, Dante offers reassurances that his kids are fine because his ex-wife makes plenty of money.

> Dante: Ella es mánager de una fábrica de un negocio donde hacen cascos de fútbol americano. Anda ganando entre $6,000 a $7,000 por semana. ¿Tú que crees que me necesita? No me necesita… Osea mírame, ya no quiere saber nada de mí, okay… Eso por eso mis hijos yo no me preocupo porque yo sé que ellos están bien. Ellos están bien.

> Dante: She is a factory manager of a business where they make football helmets. She's making $6,000 to $7,000 per week. What do you think, they need me? They don't need me. I mean look at me, [she] doesn't want to know anything about me

> anymore, okay… That's why I don't worry about my children because I know that they are fine. They are well.

Of course, I cannot know if Dante is saying this because he fully believes this, or if he is trying to assuage some deep-seated guilt he feels. Dante is already emotionally separated from his family and has decided against re-migrating, so claiming that his ex-wife and kids are financially stable allows him to rationalize this choice. Whether or not his family really is “fine,” his belief that they are means he can excuse himself from his responsibilities as a parent. Ultimately, it is evident that Dante does not see a role for himself among his family in the U.S. In this exchange, Dante makes self-deprecating remarks, and says that he would end up an outcast if he were to return to the U.S. He appears convinced that he would be rejected if he tried to reunite with his family, and that they might even report him to the authorities.

Though Dante has taken a very different path than Benjamín, the end result is similar: Both have considered the possibility of re-migrating, and have decided it is not worth the trouble. Indeed, both would risk being sent to prison if they were to cross again and get caught. Arguably, Dante may have some semblance of affectual connection to his kids in the U.S, whereas Benjamín has none. But even Dante’s connection appears fairly weak, and in both cases, the process of deciding not to return seems to have been made on a mostly pragmatic basis.

Enzo:

Like Dante, multiple deportees said that they felt free to start over in Mexico because the family members they had left behind in the U.S. were not in need of their support. Enzo, a 56-year-old man from Mexico (unclear where exactly) was one such deportee. Enzo is older than Dante or Benjamín, and had spent most of his life in Southern California, having immigrated to the U.S. when he was only 5. Given that Enzo spent more than 50 years in America, it might be expected that he'd be reluctant to leave the U.S. However, many of Enzo's experiences in the U.S. were negative, his time there being marked by continuous legal problems and numerous terms in prison. As a result of these issues, Enzo seems to have lost whatever affinity he may have once had for the U.S. In fact, Enzo remarks that he prefers life in Tijuana. Any practical concerns Enzo might have about re-migrating are essentially moot because he has no desire to return to America. Enzo is an example of a deportee who seems to be truly at peace with the reality of living in Mexico.

In contrast to Dante, Enzo claims to still have a positive relationship with his children, who are now adults. However, Enzo's various legal issues and stints in prison did result in a significant degree of emotional separation from his kids. He was often absent when they were growing up, and he is estranged from their mother. Though the well-being of his children is important to him, he doesn't miss their presence, perhaps because he never spent a lot of time with them in the first place. That Enzo is even on good terms with his children at all is somewhat surprising, but their affectual separation does manifest in the fact that Enzo doesn't feel any pressing need to be with them. This attitude likely helps him accept the idea of staying in Mexico. In the interview, Enzo emphasizes that his children are now adults with their own jobs and families, and that he is confident they are self-sufficient and stable.

> Interviewer: So, you said earlier that you don't really want to return to the United States, is that correct?
>
> Enzo: Yeah, I don't. I don't. I have my reasons… I'm burned out there. I had a lot of issues with cops. I don't like cops. I'm working on it you know… Out here I don't have to [deal with] that. I sleep good at night knowing my kids are all good. They got businesses going, they got married, they got their kids, they got their houses… I don't want anything to do with California.

> Interviewer: Are there any other reasons?
>
> Enzo: No man, that's it. That's it. I don't want to get caught up with any friends from over there no more. The homies. I don't want that life anymore. I'm done.
>
> Interviewer: So, would you say most your ties are over here now?
>
> Enzo: Yeah, my life is here now. I like it here. I was born here. And I'll pass away here.

Despite having lived so long in the United States, Enzo seems to be comfortable staying in Tijuana. In fact, he appears relieved to able to leave his old life behind. Knowing that his kids (and grandkids) are doing well helps him embrace his situation. Enzo maintains that other than his family, most of his social connections are now in or near Tijuana. For example, he explains that he has a girlfriend in Rosarito. Though Enzo doesn't have any family in Mexico, his positive attitude towards being there seems to be helping him forge new connections. Since Enzo already had some emotional separation from his family in the U.S, he's less distraught about being apart from them then some other deportees. This separation also appears to have helped eliminate any lingering affinity for America as a place. He's having no problems relinquishing his American identity, and seems optimistic about his fresh start in Mexico. Interestingly, though Enzo has a good relationship with his children, he does express a modicum of shame due to not being around for them when he was in prison. When they try to send him money, he sends it back.

> Enzo: You know, my daughter, she's got two babies. I'm like, "I don't need the money," I sent it back. She sent it back. We sent it back like six times. I can't take it. She keeps sending. I tear up the receipt, I'm like, "It's fine." I don't feel comfortable. I wasn't there in her life, I was in jail. That was wrong.

Enzo makes clear that he has various regrets about the life he used to live when he was in California. Understanding his decision-making process around choosing not to return to the U.S. is thus more complex than it may seem. Rationally speaking, it's true that Enzo is weighing the pros and cons of re-migration when he mentions being "burned" in the U.S. Certainly, his explanation is straightforward, and his choice is logical. Nonetheless, there is an emotional aspect also at play. For Enzo, the opportunity to start a new life in Tijuana is an emotional release, a break from a difficult past. He seems happy to be Mexico, and eager to begin his life anew. This would be a difficult outlook to have if he still longed to be with his family in the U.S, but because he has already experienced some emotional separation from them, he can embrace having to stay in Mexico. He still cares about his kids, but he indicates his confidence that they are doing well without him there. Given his negative experiences in America, Mexico seems like a bright alternative, and the break from his family allows him to see it this way. When Enzo says he was born "here," in Mexico, he reveals that there is an element of homecoming to his deportation that he has chosen to appreciate. This appears to be a situation in which the emotional and rational factors of his decision-making are in concert rather than conflict.

David:

David is another deportee whose story is like Enzo's in many ways. He is also an individual whose relationships with his family broke down over the course of his time in prison. However, while Enzo seems truly happy to be in Tijuana, for David it is more of a compromise. His emotional ties to family members in the U.S. are still present to some degree, and he does seem bothered by his inability to fully reconnect with them. Yet David did not like being in prison, and avoiding reincarceration is the single most important reason he's decided to stay in

Mexico. David exemplifies an individual whose fear of being losing his freedom is more powerful than any emotional ties he still has to those in the U.S.

David is 47 years old and originally from Sonora. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was 2 years old, and grew up in East Los Angeles. He went to prison at the age of 19, and has spent most of his life incarcerated. He was glad to be deported because it meant getting out of prison, though it seems that he still identifies with L.A. and with Angeleno culture. Nonetheless, avoiding a return to prison is his top priority. Given how long David spent in the carceral system, it's not surprising that his worldview is shaped by that experience. While he may not like Tijuana as much as he liked Los Angeles, it is still far better than being locked up.

> Interviewer: Why did you decide to stay here in Tijuana?
>
> David: Because I like it here and it's like being in L.A. And I know if I go back, try to cross, I'll get deported or I'll go back to prison with a life [sentence] again…

David is making the best of his situation, but it is noteworthy that he likes Tijuana because it reminds him of L.A. rather than for its own merits. When the interviewer asks him where he feels most at home, David gives a somewhat convoluted answer. While he maintains that he feels at home in Tijuana, he also still feels a pull towards the U.S. because of the family he has there. To some extent, this echoes the expressions of other deportees, some of whom are determined to re-migrate. Yet for David, his emotional connections to family in the U.S. are not so strong as to overwhelm his concern about being sent back to prison. Even when explaining that his true home is with his family, he can't help but bring up his time in prison as an experience he needs to avoid repeating.

> Interviewer: Where in the world do you feel more at home?
>
> David: Well, right now I feel more at home here in Tijuana, because I was in prison for that long and I didn't feel at home in prison at all, and I feel at home right here. I feel like being here is like being in L.A. because everybody is bilingual here and we know each other… But I know my home is over there with my son and my grandkids and my ex-wife or whatever, because even though me and my ex-wife ain't together, she is still part of my life because we have a son, we have grandkids…

David's relationship with his ex-wife and son is complicated and problematic. It's clear that the relationship suffered due to his absence while he was behind bars. According to David, he and his ex-wife had technically remained together during his prison term because they thought it would be good for their son, but their affection towards each other had dissipated. All the while, David claims, his ex-wife had been saying negative things about him to their son. David does not appear interested in reuniting with his ex-wife, and harbors some resentment toward her because of the way she portrayed him to their son. According to David, his son has essentially disowned him because David wasn't around during his childhood. David claims to have accepted this, but it's apparent that he is troubled by the situation and would like to rectify it.

> Interviewer: How is your relationship with your ex?
>
> David: It's not really good. She talked to me a few times when I got out, she wanted to come to live with me, I told her it's not a good idea, I want to live by myself, whatever happened between us a long time ago is good.
>
> Interviewer: Did you keep the relationship going while you were in prison?
>
> David: Yes, we did, but as soon as I got out it's like, "Ok, you do yours and I'll do mine", we did it for the sake of our son, but he is good now, he can go on his own, he has a job, he's a grown man now, don't have to worry about it.
> […]
>
> She does the talking for me and tells my son, "Hey, your dad said this and that", [he says] "Oh, he was never there for me, I don't want to talk to him." It hurts me,

> but I already got over it… but if I had a chance legally going back to US with no problems, [I would.]
>
> Interviewer: Do you have contact with your son?
>
> David: No. I know where he's at and everything, but he says I'm not his dad because I was never there for him, and his mom kind of brainwashed him.

Though David says that he is “over” his son’s lack of communication, the way he describes the situation betrays that he still struggles with the rejection. David has a habit of downplaying his emotions, so the fact that he’s even admitting his son’s rejection “hurts” is, in itself, significant. His unhappiness with the situation is also betrayed by the anger he expresses towards his ex-wife, who he claims “brainwashed” their son against him. Regardless of the veracity of this claim, the exchange above highlights how incarceration induces the breakdown of familial bonds. Because David was in prison while his son grew up, he had no influence over how he was portrayed or how his son felt about him. Even if David’s ex-wife did not, in fact, say all the negative things he claims she did, David’s absence spoke for itself. His son never had the opportunity to grow close to David, and now that his son is an adult, he views David as essentially irrelevant to his life. Yet as a parent who may have once dreamed of a strong father-son relationship, David remains upset by his son’s rejection of him.

All this being said, David’s consternation is not so intense that he feels the need to risk re-migrating to talk to his son in person. David clearly implies that returning to the U.S. would be the best way for him to reconcile with his son and other estranged family members. Yet for David, it’s just not worth the danger of being sent back to prison. After such a long time incarcerated, David’s emotional connections with his son and family simply aren’t strong enough to justify the risk of re-migration. He is resigned to staying in Mexico, and is working on accepting the absence of contact. This acceptance may help David feel better about staying in Tijuana and moving forward with his life, but it remains a difficult process for him.

> Interviewer: I would like to ask about your family and your social relationships since you've been here. How is your family relationship now?
>
> David: Not really good, ever since my mom passed away my brother and my sister they argue, my dad argues, they argue for money or for whatever was left. Whatever happened between them two I don't know because I was in prison, but something happened between my family that they don't want to tell me, and they've been arguing ever since…
>
> Interviewer: Do you still have contact with a lot of family over there?
>
> David: Yes, especially with my dad. I video chat with him.
>
> Interviewer: Have they ever visited you over here?
>
> David: [shook head no]
>
> Interviewer: Do you miss seeing them?
>
> David: I do I miss them, but I got over that, knowing that I'm never going to see them, so I was like, "whatever."
>
> Interviewer: Why are you like "whatever?"
>
> David: Because I don't want to like [smacks teeth] set myself up for failure, expecting them to come and stuff… because I was expecting them to come during Christmas, and my brother was supposed to send me like shoes [...] and he said he would send me a lot of things, but he never did.
>
> Interviewer: So how do you think you cope with not having your family around?
>
> David: I think I'm coping good, by going to church and just having friends from work because I can relate to them, because they were deported too or the girls that I'm with have been deported too…
> [...]
> I'm doing alright right now, I mean I wish I could see my family, but I can't. I'm not going to set myself up for that anymore, if I can't see them, oh well.

David tends make understatements, saying, for example, that his relationships are “not really good” instead of saying that they’re bad, saying “whatever,” or “oh well,” when describing his problems, and stating that he is “over” some of the troubles he describes. Nonetheless, it’s obvious that he is still somewhat conflicted about his relationships and wishes that circumstances were better with his son and some of his relatives. These are the kind of sentiments that could potentially affect his decision-making process around whether to try and return to the U.S. It would likely be easier for him to see and communicate with his family members if he did return. He seems to acknowledge this when he says that he knows his home is “over there,” and that if he could go back legally, he would. As with many deportees, the emotional pull of the U.S. is in tension with the practical considerations keeping him in Tijuana. Ultimately, for David, pragmatism wins out. He has already been in prison for far too long, and has a high likelihood of being reincarcerated if he attempts to return. Though he hopes for a better relationship with his son, he also takes comfort in knowing that his son is now an independent adult. All in all, it makes more sense for him to stay in Tijuana.

David’s decision to stay in Mexico is possible because his concern about the possibility of being reincarcerated outweighs the emotional pull of his family in the U.S. His long prison term did irreparable damage to his relationships with his family, and this emotional separation lessens his inclination to re-migrate. During David’s time behind bars, his connection with his partner broke down, his son disowned him, and his parents and siblings had conflicts they won’t even tell him about. He is physically apart from them, but, perhaps more importantly, he feels emotionally separated from them as well. As a result, he does not feel the intense longing to reunite with family that some of the other interviewees express. Certainly, he is conflicted; he is still in touch with many of his family members, and indicates that he’d theoretically return to the

U.S. in the absence of legal consequences. Yet in reality, this is impossible, a fact that David seems to have accepted. David is okay with staying in Tijuana, a choice made possible by his emotional separation from his family.

* * *

This chapter has presented interviews with deportees whose emotional connections to people in the U.S. range from almost nothing, to longstanding yet degraded. However, all of them had significant emotional separation from their U.S. connections. As a result, these interviewees do not plan to re-migrate. Their reasons for not considering a return to be worthwhile vary, but in every case, their emotional separation from those in America facilitates their choice against re-migrating. In other words, these deportees are free to decide against re-migration *because* their emotional connections to family in the U.S. are weak or absent.

Another way to phrase this phenomenon is to say that these deportees did not place their emotional bonds to family at all central in their process of deciding whether to re-migrate. In the cases of other deportees, the emotional longing to reunite with family could override practical considerations, but among this group it was exactly the opposite. For the deportees in this chapter, any lingering emotional ties they might still have to family in the U.S. are subsumed by other considerations that they deem more important. For many, these practical concerns center around the legal risks of re-migrating. Some did express an idle, possible desire to return to the U.S. in a hypothetical world devoid of legal consequence, but obviously did not see the risk as worthwhile in reality. That any emotional incentives these deportees had were so clearly overwhelmed by practical considerations led me to categorize them as having weak emotional ties to family across the border.

As with the other interview excerpts in previous chapters, the excerpts in this chapter were chosen because they are representative of what many deportees expressed throughout the interviews collected by MMFRP researchers. Deportees who experienced significant emotional separation from family in the America, or had minimal emotional connections across the border to begin with, expressed far less inclination to re-migrate compared to deportees who retained strong emotional connections. This was true even of certain individuals who had various family members in the U.S. In these cases, the migrants in question are of course still technically related to these family members, but no longer feel emotionally connected to them. It is the emotional/affectual nature of the connection that matters. A lack of strong affectual connection meant that migrants made a decision about re-migrating without being influenced by emotional ties. Often, these individuals decided against a return.

Of the 50 deportees whose interviews were analyzed for this paper, 12 were coded as being inclined *not* to re-migrate. Of those 12 individuals, 8 were also categorized as having weak, absent, and/or severely compromised connections to family members in America. The 4 interviews excerpted in this chapter were selected from this group of 8, as they came across as being most representative of the factors influencing the larger group. The key factors observed were: long terms of incarceration that degraded relationships, having adult, ostensibly self-sufficient children, and/or a lack of close connections in the first place due to spending only a short time in the U.S. More than half of the 12 deportees inclined not to re-migrate had spent time in prison. In fact, 7 out of the 8 interviewees who were both inclined not to re-migrate and who had weak emotional ties to family had also spent at least some time incarcerated. Many declined to state exactly how long they'd spent behind bars, but I got the impression that prison sentences were generally longer and for more serious crimes among this group. At least one of them had been in prison for longer than 10 years before being deported, and at least three others had spent more than 2 years locked up. Additionally, only 3 out of the group of 8 had young children, contrasting with the other groupings of interviewees, in which having young children was much more common.

The deportees I chose to highlight in this chapter reflect these realities, and spoke with particular eloquence when describing how the current status of their relationships with family in America affected their decision-making processes. As with the previous groupings of interviewees, I did make certain to examine the larger group of 8 deportees with overlapping characteristics, not just the 4 that ultimately featured in the chapter. Looking closely at what the interviewees actually said, it became clear that their moderated emotional ties to family allowed them more flexibility in their migratory decisions. These deportees were less likely to have their practical considerations overridden by strong emotional ties, a pattern seen with all 8 deportees in this group. As before, the sample size analyzed here is not big enough to make any statistically reliable statement. However, should the pattern hold in a larger, quantitative study, it would most likely manifest as statistically significant. It’s true that there were a few deportees who were inclined not to re-migrate despite still qualifying as having moderate emotional ties to those across the border. However, there were none whose characteristics ran directly contrary to the pattern presented here. Specifically, I did not encounter any deportee had very strong emotional ties to family in America, yet was definitively inclined not to re-migrate.

Benjamín had only been in the U.S. for a short period of time, during which he had worked constantly, and had never developed emotional connections to anyone there. For him, deciding whether or not re-migrate was a purely practical decision, and he says that staying in Mexico will be more beneficial for him. Though many deportees interviewed for this project had developed stronger emotional ties than Benjamín while in the U.S, the overall characteristics of his situation do not seem entirely uncommon. I did encounter other migrants whose emotional connections to those in the U.S. were similarly fleeting, and who did not factor these connections into their decisions about whether to re-migrate. Benjamín accurately represents this subset of deportees whose relative lack of emotional connections across the border simplified their decision-making processes.

The situations of Dante, Enzo, and David are more complicated, as each of them at some point in the past had deeper and more meaningful emotional connections to family in the U.S. However, various events, choices, and misfortunes have degraded these connections, and resulted in a considerable degree of emotional separation. These interviewees each admitted falling into a criminal lifestyle and being incarcerated, which in turn led to the breakdown of their relationships with their partners and families. Enzo seems to have rebuilt his relationship with his children, while both Dante and David remain mostly estranged from their offspring. Certainly, there will often be variations between the circumstances of each deportee. Yet in all of these cases, the interviewees indicated that they did not feel a pressing need to be with their children, or their other family members in the U.S. What is consistent across these individuals is that their time in prison caused emotional separation from their families, and this separation has weakened their inclination to re-migrate to the extent that they've ultimately decided against it.

It is among these deportees that the effects of the carceral system are most obvious. Interviewees, who once had partners and children with whom they felt intense emotional bonds, found these relationships breaking down once they entered prison. Unsurprisingly, this effect appears most acute among those whose time in prison spans years or even decades. This length of physical separation from one's family results in irreparable emotional separation as well. It is true that some formerly long-incarcerated deportees retained a degree of affection for their families; though these deportees are inclined to stay in Mexico, they are not entirely at peace with this choice. The interviewees did express varying degrees of emotional attachment to family in the U.S. Yet in all of these particular cases, and in many similar ones, these attachments were not so overwhelmingly powerful as to induce re-migration. Many deportees who had spent long periods of time behind bars were, understandably, very concerned about the possibility of being reincarcerated should they attempt a return. For these interviewees, holding on to the freedom they have in Mexico is their top priority. Any residual emotional connections these individuals may have to family in America are not enough to justify the risk of re-migration.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Summary of Main Argument:

This paper examines interviews with recently deported men in Tijuana, in order to begin answering some key questions around motivations for re-migration that are thus far underexplored in previous literature. Prior research makes the convincing case that one of the most important predictors of whether a deportee will re-migrate is whether the migrant in question has family in the country from which they were deported.[28] Yet while many deportees with family across the border do indeed return, others do not. One of the key questions asked by this project is: Why do some Mexican deportees with family in the U.S. attempt to re-migrate, while others decide not to? Addressing this question necessitates a couple more in-depth inquires: How does the nature of these deportees' familial bonds affect the decision-making process around re-migration? And how does these deportees' experience with the American carceral system affect their familial bonds, and thus their motivation to re-migrate?

This study finds that deportees expressed the most inclination to re-migrate when they retained strong emotional and affectual ties to their family members still in the United States. The emotional/affectual nature of these bonds is key: a deportee could have family members to whom he closely related by blood, but to whom he does not feel a strong emotional connection, in which case his inclination to re-migrate might be lessened. Conversely (though less commonly), a deportee could know someone across the border who is technically a more distant relative, but who the deportee feels emotionally close to, in which case his inclination to re-migrate might be strengthened. The degree of emotional attachment a deportee feels to family members in the U.S. appears to play an outsize role in deportees' decision-making process around whether to re-migrate. Recognizing this helps answer the question of why some deportees with family in America attempt to return there, while others do not.

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[28] Massey, Douglas S., and Kristin E. Espinosa. 1997. "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 970-977.
Cardoso, Jody Berger, Erin Randle Hamilton, Rodriguez Nestor, Karl Eschbach, and Jacqueline Hagan. 2016. "Deporting Fathers: Involuntary Transnational Families and Intent to Remigrate among Salvadoran Deportees." *International Migration Review* 197, 213-216.

This insight also adds specificity to the discussion around re-migration motivations. Prior research on this subject suggests numerous reasons that some deportees re-migrate; these include not only emotional attachment, but also place attachment, national identity, the stigma of being deported, and one's status as a patriarch.[29] The literature defines these concepts with differing degrees of clarity, and the extent to which each concept factors into the choice of any given deportee will obviously vary. Certainly, it seems that each of these plays at least some role in at least some cases. However, in the interviews conducted for this project, the theme of emotional connection arose far more frequently than anything else. The deportees who most missed their family members back in the U.S, and who most longed to be with them, were those who seemed most inclined to re-migrate.

Given that one of the founding research questions for this paper focuses on why deportees in outwardly similar situations are inclined towards different choices, it made sense to group interviewees into categories based on both their inclination to re-migrate and their degree of emotional connection to family in the U.S. As has been shown in the previous chapters, the categories of inclination correspond to the groupings of deportees by degree of emotional connection (put another way, the degree of emotional separation from their family a deportee has or has not experienced). The first group of deportees maintain strong emotional/affectual attachments to their family members in the U.S, have not experienced much emotional separation from them, and appear more inclined to re-migrate. The second group of deportees retain some degree of affectual connection to their families in America, but have also experienced some emotional separation from them, and are struggling to make definitive choices about re-migrating. The third group has much less emotional connection with their families across the border, and have experienced significant emotional separation from them. Their relationships with these family members are severely compromised, and these deportees are inclined *not* to re-migrate.

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[29] Massey, Douglas S., and Kristin E. Espinosa. 1997. "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 939-999.
Daniel E. Martínez, J. S.-S. (2018). Repeat Migration in the Age of the "Unauthorized Permanent Resident": A Quantitative Assessment of Migration Intentions Postdeportation. *International Migration Review*: 12-16.
Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 4-5.

It is important to go a step further and examine why some deportees manage to retain such strong emotional ties, while others do not. The in-depth, qualitative nature of the MMFRP interviews allows this study to go deeper into what circumstances seem to impact deportees' degree of cross-border emotional attachment. In the majority of cases I encountered, deportees with family in the United States had felt emotionally close to these family members during at least part of their lives; for some, events had transpired at some later point that resulted in significant emotional separation from their families. These processes of separation complicated and reduced the affectual attachment these deportees felt towards their family members, sometimes to the extent that deportees didn't care to reunite with their families in the U.S.

The existence of a young child (or children) was one factor that seemed to lend particular strength to a deportee's emotional connections. Deportees who had at least one child of high-school age or younger living in the U.S. appeared especially emotionally attached to that child, and expressed intense longing to reunite with them. This, unsurprisingly, tended to make these deportees more inclined to re-migrate. The majority of deportees highlighted in chapter 2 fit this description. In fact, a significant majority of the larger group coded as being both highly inclined to re-migrate, and as having strong emotional connections to family, did have at least one young child in the U.S.

In contrast, a deportee spending multiple years in prison appears to be the factor that most negatively impacts the deportee's degree of emotional connection to family, and is the event that seems to result in the most significant emotional separation. This observation is consistent with previous research that details the destructive effects of incarceration on familial unity.[30] An imprisoned individual's inability to be physically present in the life of his child and/or partner often also makes it extremely difficult for them to emotionally present. Communication with family members is made much harder, the stress of the carceral environment leads to social withdrawal, and increased burdens fall upon the partner of the person locked up. Most of the deportees interviewed during the MMFRP who indicated that they were not planning to re-migrate also spoke of having been incarcerated, often for years or decades. Many of these interviewees explained in detail how their relationships with their partners and children had broken down while they were behind bars. These deportees pointed to their absence from their families' lives as the reason for the breakdown of these relationships. The emotional separation from their family members that these deportees described appeared to be the main reason many of them are not interested in re-migrating. Most of the interviewees highlighted in chapter 4 of this paper fit this pattern of decision-making.

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[30] Andrews, Abigail, and Fátima Khayar-Cámara. 2020. "Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation." *Social Problems:* 1-5.
Brabeck, Kalina, and Qingwen Xu. 2010. "The Impact of Detention and Deportation on Latino Immigrant Children and Families: A Quantitative Exploration." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 341-361.

Prison time may have the strongest effect in damaging deportees' emotional connections to family, but other events can also contribute. Romantic relationships that are already on the rocks prior to an individual's deportation seem likely to be further compromised by the deportation process. If the individual has children as a product of the romantic relationship, it follows that their connection to these children will also come under strain. Antonio, whose interview is excerpted in chapter 3, is an example of this phenomenon. He had already been separated from his wife when he was deported, but his removal from U.S. makes reconciling with her much more difficult. Additionally, he cannot see or spend time with his kids. Resigned to being permanently apart from Antonio, his wife had decided to move herself and the kids to the east coast, further complicating Antonio's efforts at reconnection. As stated in chapter 3, Antonio's situation was selected as an example because it is similar to the circumstances of many deportees encountered throughout the project. Relationship strife that might be considered a relatively normal, if unfortunate, aspect of people's lives becomes a larger problem when deportation is added to the mix. Divorce and break-ups are hardly uncommon in modern society, but as long as both parties can travel freely, they can plausibly retain strong emotional connections to their children. This can be rendered impossible if one of the parents is deported, resulting in emotional separation from not only the (ex)partner, but from the children as well. These kinds of situations appeared quite common among deportees interviewed during the MMFRP.

Beyond factors that directly impact deportees' degree of emotional attachment to their family, there are also variables that are not directly related to emotional connection that can still sway an individual's decision regarding re-migration. It's vital to note that these kinds of influences were not brought up as often or with the same intensity by the interviewees as were factors related to family in the U.S. For this reason, I argue that influences *not* regarding connection to family across the border are often "secondary" in their impact on migratory decision making. Nonetheless, these factors are important to understand because they can still have a significant effect. They may have greater weight if the deportee in question retains relatively little emotional connection to family in the U.S, or if these connections are compromised to the extent that the deportee is in a state of indecision. Such "secondary" factors can include a deportee's concerns about being sent (back) to prison, and the presence (or absence) of family in Mexico.

Several of the deportees in chapters 3 and 4 express considerable apprehension about the possibility of being incarcerated should they try to re-migrate; Antonio, Armando, Dante, and David are particularly representative of this concern, which they cite as a major discouragement from crossing. Some of the deportees highlighted in chapter 2, especially Gabriel and Darío, also indicate that they are worried about being locked up. However, they do not seem as concerned as those in the other chapters. For the deportees who appear more inclined to re-migrate, the risk of prison is a real concern, but is not necessarily enough to dissuade them from attempting a return. Their emotional connection to their family members in the U.S. seems to be enough to overpower their worries about imprisoned. In contrast, deportees who have undergone emotional separation from their families across the border may determine that the risk of prison outweighs the pull of family. These deportees are already unsure about their decisions, or are inclined not to re-migrate. For them, the danger of being locked up is more likely to sway them against a return attempt.

Another secondary factor that could push a deportee towards one choice or another is the presence, or absence, of family connections within Mexico. An individual whose emotional connection to family in the U.S. is compromised, but who has no connections at all in Mexico, may learn towards re-migration because even some connection is better than none. Yet if the same person *does* have family in Mexico to whom they still feel close, this may induce them to stay in Mexico and avoid re-migration. The aforementioned Antonio from chapter 3 exemplifies this pattern; his ex-wife and kids are moving to North Carolina, and he's decided to visit his parents and siblings in San Luis Potosí. This doesn't mean that Antonio won't still decide to re-migrate in the future, but he's avoiding that choice for the moment and taking refuge with his close family in Mexico. Numerous other interviewees displayed similar patterns of thought regarding their migratory decisions. Conversely, several deportees who do not have family in Mexico mentioned this dearth of connection as a reason they do, in fact, aim to re-migrate.

It's clear that deportees' decision-making processes around re-migration are a complex mix of factors, including some that directly affect a migrant's emotional ties, and some that come into play more distinctly. However, this study maintains that deportees' degree of emotional connection to family in the U.S. appears to have the most significant impact on re-migration choices. Events that directly impact these emotional connections, such as being incarcerated for several years, thus play an outsize role in migratory decisions. Previous research has established that deportees who have family in the U.S. are more likely to re-migrate, yet did not explain why some migrants in such situations did, while others did not. The revelation that emotional connection appears to have a primary effect helps to address this question, and leads to more concrete details about why deportees make different decisions around re-migration.

Limitations:

The structure and methods of this study do result in certain limitations. However, I hold that these limitations do not invalidate its conclusions; rather, they point the way for future and continued research on this subject. This is a qualitative study, which allowed me to delve deep into interviewees' thought processes, but also limited the total number of participants that could be included. Those interviewed are representative of males recently deported to Mexico, in the sense that they share these characteristics with others in Tijuana and other Mexican locales. However, the in-depth nature of the study meant that I could not interview enough deportees to have a *statistically* representative sample size. What this study does provide is insight into deportees' decisions-making processes, which is useful in itself, but can also inform studies in the future. For example, an upcoming quantitative study could use this information on the emotional nature of family bonds to ask more targeted and useful questions in a large-scale survey. The authors of the Migrant Border Crossing Study have already started down this road by asking deportees where they consider "home."[31] Based on my research, I suggest adding similar questions that focus specifically on affectual and emotional connections to family in the U.S.

This study was also limited to male deportees in Mexico, for reasons of practicality. Though there have been female deportees interviewed in the course of the MMFRP, I did not have access to sufficient interview data of female participants to feel comfortable drawing any conclusions about their decision-making processes. Understanding more about the motivations of female deportees, and the gender dynamics of the deportation process, is an ongoing research endeavor, and one that I hope will continue to grow. Yet I am unable to address these topics within this particular study, and so I defer to other scholars on this important work.

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[31] Daniel E. Martínez, J. S.-S. (2018). Repeat Migration in the Age of the "Unauthorized Permanent Resident": A Quantitative Assessment of Migration Intentions Postdeportation. *International Migration Review*: 12-16.

Finally, since the MMFRP is based in Mexico, I was only able to interview Mexican deportees. There are many Central Americans and migrants of other nationalities in the shelters in Tijuana, but they are generally not deportees. With few exceptions, persons deported by the U.S. are deported to their official country of citizenship; thus, Mexicans are deported to Mexico, Hondurans are deported to Honduras, et cetera. This being the case, it made sense for me to focus exclusively on Mexican deportees, since these are the individuals I could interview. I do envision that similar research projects could be conducted in any or all of the nations to which people are deported, resulting in a more complete picture of the deported population worldwide.

Policy Implications:

Such insight precipitates further questions, including those of practice and policy. How should policy take advantage of this research to be more effective and humane, and what further research is necessary to move the process forward? From a humanitarian perspective, the phenomenon of migrants repeatedly attempting to cross the border through extra-legal methods is a major problem. The act of crossing is itself highly dangerous; migrants often die or are injured from extreme heat in deserts, extreme cold in mountains, from drowning in rivers or canals, and from lack of sufficient food or water. Migrants attempting to cross are additionally at risk of kidnapping and/or exploitation by smugglers and bandits who exert control over migratory routes. Even if an individual does manage to cross successfully, they may suffer from the psychological trauma of the process.[32] That a deportee may feel the need to subject themselves to this undertaking multiple times is heartbreaking and ethically unacceptable. This situation also takes a severe toll on the family members of person who is deported and potentially attempts to re-migrate. The deportee's absence from their family places a financial burden on the remaining family members. It furthermore results in intense mental stress for these family members, especially for the kids of a deported parent. Such children exhibit anxiety, depression and scholastic difficulties following the deportation of a parent.[33] The cycle of deportation and re-migration is an ongoing humanitarian issue in immediate need of amelioration.

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[32] De León, Jason. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail.* Oakland: University of California Press.

Even from a purely practical viewpoint, the pattern of deportation and re-migration poses serious problems. The American authorities tasked with providing security along the nation's borders must contend with an influx of previously deported persons who pose no actual threat to the country, but are re-migrating for reasons of family reunification. The more time, money, and effort that border enforcement personnel spend chasing and apprehending these harmless migrants, the less resources they have available for any actual security issues that may arise. Processing and detaining these individuals also burdens immigration courts and costs the government money, all of which must ultimately be covered by taxpayers. Deporting people that are likely to re-migrate ends up unnecessarily straining the nation's immigration system and inflating the border enforcement budget.

Given these issues, having fewer individuals compelled to attempt unauthorized border crossings is a goal that should appeal across the political spectrum. While most presidential administrations have attempted to dissuade potential migrants via harshly punitive measures, any success has been temporary at best. A more logical, and far more compassionate strategy would be to avoid creating repeat migrants by not deporting those who are likely to re-migrate. Identifying the characteristics of those deportees who are likely to re-migrate requires examining deportees' decision-making process, which is exactly what this study has done. Looking at the intricacies of the decision-making process can reveal important information that would otherwise be obscured, such as the factors influencing deportees' degree of emotional attachment to their family members in the U.S. Recognizing the primacy of emotional connection in deportees' re-migration decisions should help lawmakers and researchers come up with policy changes that reduce both human suffering and waste of government funds. Certain policy innovations are already apparent; I suggest them here in an effort to spark progress toward their implementation.

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[33] International Human Rights Law Clinic; Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity; Immigration Law Clinic. 2010. *In the Child's Best Interest? The Consequences of Losing a Lawful Immigrant Parent to Deportation.* Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley School of Law: 5-9.

To start, the U.S. government can reduce deportations of those likely to re-migrate by simply curtailing the scope of its deportation programs. While this a less exacting approach, in the sense that it would not specifically avoid deporting those primed to re-migrate, it's undeniably logical that fewer deportations overall would mean fewer individuals highly inclined to return ending up outside of the country. An intelligent way to reduce the scale of deportations is to restrict immigration authorities' focus. Instead of going after any and all migrants who may be undocumented, these authorities should target only the small percentage of individuals who have committed violent crimes or who otherwise represent an actual security risk. This is not a new idea; some semblance of this concept has been employed by Democratic administrations such as that of Barack Obama in the past. Yet implementation was flawed; while authorities may have been directed to prioritize violent criminals, they ultimately also rounded up huge numbers of other individuals whose only "crime" was their lack of papers.[34] The basic idea of only going after violent offenders remains worthwhile, but it must be put into practice more strictly. Rather than just "prioritizing" those few migrants with serious criminal records, authorities should be truly restricted to pursuing *only* this small percentage of the immigrant population.

In addition to reducing the number of deportations as a whole, the U.S. executive branch should also permit immigration courts more freedom to suspend or overturn existing deportation orders. In other words, immigration courts should have greater authority to prevent authorities from deporting undocumented individuals, specifically if they determine that the person in question has significant familial connections to other U.S. residents. This is where the research and conclusions of this paper can be particularly useful. It is apparent that persons with significant emotional connection to family members in the U.S. are more inclined to re-migrate if deported; identifying these individuals before they are deported and nullifying their deportation orders could prevent an enormous amount of human suffering, and save the government considerable resources. Immigration judges should be able to weigh the familial attachments and emotional connections a person has, and decide that their removal from the country may be too harmful to allow. Though immigration courts have had some elements of this power at certain times, their authority fluctuates depending on the administration in charge at any given moment.[35] In the long run, solidifying the courts' ability to make such rulings will require separating the immigration court system from the executive branch of the federal government.

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[34] Thompson, Ginger, y Sarah Cohen. 2014. «More Deportations Follow Minor Crimes, Records Show.» *The New York Times*, April 6.

Preston, Julia. 2016. «Low-Priority Immigrants Still Swept Up in Net of Deportation.» *The New York Times*, June 24.

[35] Baibak, Rebecca. 2018. «Creating an Article I Immigration Court.» *University of Cinncinati Law Review* 997-1018.

These courts should operate as an independent judiciary, as do the majority of other court systems throughout the nation. This would allow them to operate free of the political pressure of whatever presidential administration happens to be in power. Studies such as this one, that detail the danger and futility of breaking up families in the name of immigration enforcement will continue to emerge. The immigration system must be able to consider such research and employ it when making judgements for the good of the country and all who live in it.

Border enforcement hardliners may not be swayed by the humanitarian arguments presented herein, but the fact remains that many undocumented residents are closely related to U.S. citizens, who cannot be deported. Deporting the undocumented parents, siblings, and spouses of U.S. citizens does not just harm the individual deported. It also wreaks havoc upon the lives of those remaining in the U.S, who are an important part of modern American society. The United States has experienced demographic shifts throughout its history, and our diversity has always been one of our greatest strengths. Issues of immigration cannot be addressed by xenophobic politics that ignore the reality on the ground. Instead, we need fair and humane action based on solid research. Studies such as this are only small pieces of the puzzle, but taken together, they can show the way toward a more just and compassionate nation.

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