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Binational Politics from Intimate Scales:
Motherist, Feminist, Queer and Trans Activism by Deportees and Return Migrants in Mexico
City

By

Caroline E Tracey

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Geography

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Nathan F. Sayre, Chair

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Spring 2022

Abstract

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By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Nathan Sayre, Chair

Long a migrant-sending country, in recent years Mexico has become one of return. Between 2010 and 2018, 2.6 million Mexicans left the United States, 55% by deportation and 45% by return (Warren 2020). In response, a body of deportation scholarship has emerged (De Genova and Peutz 2010, Golash-Boza 2015, Brotherton and Kretsedemas 2018). Mexican sociologists and geographers have also begun to study return migration (Hirai 2013, Cruz Islas 2019, Rivera Sanchez 2019). Yet both literatures have systematically overlooked women deportees and returnees. Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) argue that deportation is a gendered form of surplus labor control; other texts in deportation studies point to a difficulty in finding women to interview (Dingeman 2018, Caldwell 2019). This dissertation, an ethnographic account of motherist, feminist, queer and trans deportee/returnee activism, challenges the idea that non-male deportees are ancillary to deportation and return migration as phenomena and objects of academic study. It argues that these return migrants' cultural production, community-building, and knowledge of the bureaucracies of the US and Mexico has improved long-term emplacement for all return migrants and their families, at the same time as they have developed novel practices of community-building and binational cultural production.

The introduction, "Gender, Emplacement, and Diasporic Intimacy," reviews existing scholarship in deportation and return migration studies to show how it has focused on the experiences of cis-male migrants and nuclear families. Thinking with the terms "emplacement" and "diasporic intimacy," I argue that my dissertation's nexus of sustained ethnographic methods, focus on long-term strategies of belonging in Mexico City, and perspective informed by theories of the global intimate, ethnographies of legal consciousness and bureaucracy, and queer and trans theories of migration intervenes in both deportation/return migration studies and studies of gender and migration.

Chapter 1, "Making the Great Expulsion," interprets the history of US migration policy, focusing on the gradual creation of a permanent undocumented class that included entire families, and laid the groundwork for current flows of deportation and return.

Chapter 2, "Routes from the Streets," shows how deported mothers take on the logistical labor of navigating the Mexican bureaucracy and improve the possibilities of "political emplacement" of the entire deportee/returnee community. It argues that the women's use of

intimacy as an organizing affect has enabled them to develop a knowledge of the Mexican bureaucracy so intimate that they have succeeded in influencing it.

Chapter 3, "Las Pochas," follows four women who are at the heart of a movement in Mexico City to reclaim the word *pocha*, a pejorative term for someone of Mexican descent who speaks less-than-fluent Spanish or is otherwise "Americanized." It argues that this activism diverges from activism that centers of rights to belong in the US, organizing instead around binational identity and just rights to mobility.

Chapter 4, "The Dislocation of Illegality," draws on accompaniment and activism alongside transgender deportees and returnees. It argues that while trans deportees experience intersecting forms of "administrative violence" (Spade 2015), their vectors of movement, desire, and belonging flout traditional northward narratives of LGBT migration, giving rise to organizing in solidarity with Central American migrants residing or seeking asylum in Mexico City that are unique within migration activism.

Finally, the Conclusion, "Deportee/Returnee Communities at the Start of the Covid-19 Pandemic," describes how deportee/returnee organizing changed at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the existing solidarities and activist formations I describe earlier in the dissertation prepared the community to create mutual aid networks.

At a moment in which migration is a volatile flashpoint in US politics, *Binational Politics from Intimate Scales* provides a crucial, humanistic perspective on deportation and return migration, using an ethnographic granularity to reframe not only migration flows but forms of belonging in the binational space of the US and Mexico.

For my interlocutors, with the hope that I have done well by the stories they shared with me.

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Introduction: Gender, Emplacement, and Diasporic Intimacy

"When I first got to Mexico," I had a recurring dream," Esme tells me. "I was talking with my best friend from back in the US, and I told her, *no mames*, I had this horrible dream about Mexico, and it was ugly, *neta*, it was terrible, I changed my mind, I don't want to go back—*y acto seguido* I woke up and realized that what I told her was my reality."

Esme returned to Mexico City, after having lived in the US since the age of eight, with a bag packed for a month. She was a "typical overachieving dreamer," in her words, a valedictorian with a full scholarship to college, planning to major in chemistry and go to law school. Just weeks before classes were supposed to begin, the college told her that they had discovered that they couldn't give her the scholarship as an undocumented student—but that all she needed to do was to go to Mexico and apply for a student visa. But once she was in Mexico, she was never able to apply for the visa, because she lacked a financial sponsor. She was stuck, for good.

"I hated Mexico," she says. "I hated the dirty streets, I hated commuting two hours each way, I hated that there was no running water in my grandma's house, I hated that I didn't know as much Spanish as I thought, I hated not having anyone. I hated Mexico, and I hated myself for awhile because I thought I was dumb for coming back."

By the time I met her ten years later, Esme was a lawyer specializing in accompanying deportees, returnees like herself, and their families in their return to Mexico.

Long a migrant-sending country, in recent years Mexico has become one of return. Between 2010 and 2018, 2.6 million Mexicans left the United States, 55% by deportation and 45% by return (Warren 2020). In response, a body of deportation scholarship written by both US-American and Mexican scholars has emerged. Mexican sociologists and geographers have also begun to study return migration, periodizing 1986 to 2005 as the "great migration" and the post-2005 period as the "great expulsion" (Hernández-León and Zuñiga 2016). Yet both literatures have largely focused on male deportees. This dissertation, an ethnographic account of women and gender-non-conforming deportees and returnees and their activism, challenges the idea that women and gender-non-conforming return migrants are ancillary to these flows. It argues that women and gender non-conforming return migrants' cultural production, community-building, and intimate knowledge of the bureaucracies of the US and Mexico have improved the circumstances of long-term emplacement for all return migrants and their families.

I arrived to Mexico City on January 9, 2019, to audit a semester at the UNAM, Mexico's national university, while I studied for my qualifying exams. As I was crossing the campus during my first week there, a woman approached me, looking relieved.

"You must speak English," she said in an American accent, out of breath from trying to catch me. As a blue-eyed, dirty-blond, five-foot-nine white woman, I look out of place in most situations in Mexico, and am readily recognizable as a foreigner. In contrast, she appeared to be a mestiza woman in her forties, someone who would not have drawn attention walking through the streets of Mexico. I assured her that I did speak English. "Phew," she replied. "I can't find anyone here who does."

This confused me. The UNAM is known for a particular anti-imperial politics that make it unusual to hear English spoken there. Friends had instructed me in the etiquette: don't expect anyone to speak English to you; even if your Spanish isn't perfect, showing up and speaking it

goes a long way. Didn't she know better? I thought.

Then she told me her story. A Chicana from New Mexico, she had relocated with her two children to her husband's hometown in Jalisco after he was deported two years earlier. Her kids were doing well, she said, because they learned Spanish at school. But she had no way to learn. So she was looking for the university's Center for Spanish Education for Foreigners, where she was taking a six-week Level 2 course, while staying at her sister-in-law's apartment. I pointed her in the right direction.

I never saw her again. But her story stuck with me. *Can you imagine moving to your husband's village, speaking no Spanish?* I asked my friends.

She wasn't the only one. I kept running into return migrants. Several weeks later, while walking near the busy Miguel Ángel de Quevedo metro station with an American friend, a UC-Santa Cruz graduate student also studying at the UNAM, a young man approached us.

"Where y'all from?" he asked us, his English not only completely American, but regionally accented. He had lived for years in North Carolina, he told us, until he had been deported. "It's good living here, except they don't pay you anything," he said.

Several months later, as I was buying fruit at a small produce store in the Santa Maria la Ribera neighborhood, the owner told me that he had also lived in "Carolina." And at a Shakira-themed party the following December, as I was talking to a friend of the host about my fieldwork—then just beginning—she interrupted to say that she had grown up in Chicago, brought there by her parents as a baby, and had lived there until she was twelve; her grandparents and father still lived there.

In migration activist circles in the United States, I had seen and participated in activism fighting deportation. Returning to Mexico, the rhetoric had it, was something unthinkable, a condemnation to poverty and horrific violence. As Boehm (2016) puts it, deportation "is nearly void of future imaginings, except as expressions of the future as unknown or as a definitive dead end." Yet now I was meeting those who had lived it. Their lives had continued in ways I knew nothing about from my US-centric vantage point, and they were committed to fighting the idea of return to Mexico as a "dead end," both in their critiques of deportation discourse and in their political activism in support of dignified conditions of return.

According to Mexico's 2010 census, 612,827 men and 246,603 women returned from the United States between 2005 and 2010, along with 1.2 million deportees (Masferrer and Prieto 2019). Since then, the numbers have declined—between 2015 and 2020, over 178,000 Mexicans returned to Mexico, two-thirds of them men and one-third of them women, and the majority between the ages of 15 and 44 (Fundación BBVA Bancomer/Secretaría de Gobernación 2021).

At the same time, the geography of return has also shifted. In 2010, a third of return migrants settled in just four traditional migrant-sending states—Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Veracruz. This was down from nearly half ten years before, with the central and southeastern regions of the country gradually increasing in their relative proportions of return migrants (Masferrer y Prieto 2019). While Mexico City is not considered to be a primary destination for return migrants, accounting for only 3.5 percent of returnees in 2000, this is partially a question of a jurisdictional and statistical bias: when the Federal District (now Mexico City) and the State of Mexico, which houses the so-called "periphery" of Mexico City's metropolitan zone, are added to one another, the Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México, or Greater Mexico City, receives the third highest number of return migrants, after only Michoacán and Jalisco (Gandini and Aranzalez Ramos 2019).

It is also a question of gender. 75 percent of women return migrants settled in urban areas

in 2015, compared to 66 percent of return migrant men; 42 percent of women settled in cities of over 100,000 habitants, compared to just 32 percent of men. (Gandini and Aranzalez Ramos 2019). Many of my interlocutors had come to Mexico City only after initially returning to their families' hometowns in Jalisco, Veracruz, Morelos, and elsewhere.

English-language scholarship has focused almost exclusively on male deportees, and has largely overlooked non-deportee return migrants. While scholarship by Mexican researchers has studied return migration extensively, research with a gender perspective accounts for only a small fraction of this body of scholarship. (See literature review below). But as I began to embed myself within deportee/returnee collectives, I found that the women and gender-non-conforming members of the "great expulsion" were much more than the collateral damage of a male phenomenon. They had distinct, important experiences at every stage of their return processes, from detention through workforce insertion. When I asked how their experiences as return migrants differed from those of male deportees and return migrants, their answers ranged from not having had access to tampons in their grandparents' village to being bullied by the US Border Patrol, from having to navigate the bureaucracies of Mexico and the US as a single parent obtaining double nationality for their US-born children to being sexually assaulted as an undocumented child.

At the same time as they faced these unique challenges, however, I also observed that women and gender-non-conforming deportees and returnees undertook emotional, logistical, and activist labor that supported and improved the lives of the entire deportee/returnee community. Women undertook care labor that took the form of navigating the bureaucracy, and that by necessity quickly transformed into political activism. One staff member at the organization Otros Dreams en Acción, one of my field sites, told me that when women came to the office, it was always for help with someone else's documents or case, rarely their own. Their roles also fell outside of circumscribed, heteronormative gender roles commonly assumed in migration scholarship—many were unpartnered and many were single mothers. Queer and gender non-conforming deportees and returnees also used their own experiences to help others, including showing solidarity with asylum-seeker and other migrant communities in Mexico City. Thus, while it is true that the vast majority of deportees are men and that many deportees belong to heterosexual, nuclear families, I argue that women and gender-non-conforming deportees and returnees, queer deportees/returnees, and those who do not belong to nuclear families make contributions to the emplacement of the return migrant community that are far larger than the statistical space they occupy. This work of emplacement and diasporic intimacy is the focus of this dissertation, itself the result of getting to know these women and gender-non-conforming deportees and returnees and the communities they have built, of collaborating in their organizing and activism, and of thinking through the way that theoretical frameworks from geography and other disciplines can shed light on post-deportation and post-return phenomena. It argues that their activism, cultural production, and community-building is fundamental to the long-term emplacement of the deportee and returnee community, and in turn, to the possibility of imagining a more just mobility regime and relationship between the United States and Mexico.

The Gender of Diaspora

Clifford (1994) writes, "Diaspora is always gendered...when diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than emplacement, traveling rather than dwelling...the experiences of men will tend to predominate." Existing scholarship shows that this maxim holds true for the so-called "deportspora" (Nyers 2003; for a fuller consideration of use application of

the term "diaspora" see Kanstroom 2012, pp. 8-10) of Mexico, as well as for the broader community of return migrants from the United States.¹ Existing scholarship in deportation studies has focused on displacement rather than emplacement, predominately studying the event of deportation and its immediate aftermath. In turn, the experiences of men have predominated. The literature has systematically overlooked women, pointing to the fact that over 90 percent of deportees are men and that it is challenging to find women deportees to interview, and theorizing deportation as a male phenomenon.

The field of deportation studies initially emerged in the early 2000s, at the intersection of immigration and security studies (Coutin 2015). This early literature aimed to understand and theorize the dramatic rise of immigration enforcement, detention, and deportation in the United States. Arguing that in comparison with refugee and immigration studies, the analysis of deportation is undeveloped, Walters (2002) argues for setting deportation in historical and political context: seeing it as a form of expulsion among others over time (exile, expulsion of the poor, corporate expulsion, transportation, and population transfer) that is adapted to the modern state system and is one of multiple techniques of governmentality for the management of a world population divided into states. De Genova (2002) reviews existing literature about undocumented migrants to theorize ideas of "illegality" and "deportability," writing that the fear of deportation and the production of "illegality"—not that capability of the US immigration authorities to actually deport all undocumented migrants—renders undocumented migrant labor legally vulnerable and, in turn, "cheap." In contrast to the event of deportation, "deportability" is the condition of being at risk of deportation, encompassing not only a precarious legal state but the further-reaching psychological and emotional effects of specter of expulsion. The condition of deportability has gradually increased through increased immigrant criminalization (such as connecting local law enforcement databases to federal immigration ones) and through decreasing the possibilities to cancel or suspend a deportation order. For some of the return migrants I interviewed, these psychological and emotional effects of deportability were enough to push them to leave the United States.

Kanstroom (2007) historicizes this idea of "deportability," arguing that the threat of deportation has been a legal tool to control immigrants since the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, and emphasizes the way that deportation is not only used as a tool of extended border control, but also as a form of social and labor control post-entry, while Goodman (2020) locates the origin point of mass deportation in West Coast backlash against Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth century.

Building on Walters (2002)'s calls for broader historical and political analyses of deportation, Coutin (2003)'s description of her work as "an ethnography of a legal process rather than of a particular group of people," and De Genova (2002)'s observation of the possibility that ethnographic study might replicate state surveillance of the deported, and therefore that social scientists should instead study the construction of "illegality" and deportability through law and enforcement, Peutz (2006) calls for an "anthropology of removal." Peutz and De Genova (2010) further the call for more social scientific research about deportation, with a continued focus on the state and its institutions. Drotbohm and Hasselberg (2014) term the "transnational places,

¹ In line with the terminology used by my informants, throughout this dissertation I use the term "returnee" to refer to individuals who have returned to Mexico under circumstances other than deportation, whether by choice or by another form of obligation, such as the deportation of a family member, fear of deportation, or lack of work or educational opportunities as a result of undocumented status. "Return migrants" is the umbrella term to refer to the entire community.

actors, and institutions" that constitute the "processual quality of deportation" as the "deportation corridor." Wong (2015), like Walters, argues that deportation is a form of population management in an era of nation-states.

These early theorizations of the state and its enforcement institutions have set the tone for much of deportation studies, sometimes to the exclusion of studying deportees themselves. Peutz (2006) writes that an "anthropology of removal—as opposed to the study of citizenship and its exclusions or transnationalism and its flows—requires a focus not only on the reversal of movements and rights but especially on the *transfer* of peoples by state/corporate, local/global actors" (231). She writes that while her article focuses on deportees' accounts of detention, deportation, and return, other sites of ethnographic inquiry should include "the Department of Homeland Security, the private corporations that benefit from these practices of exclusion, the transnational organizations or local networks that, in some countries, assist arriving deportees, and the activist groups that rally the opposition to deportation."

While these ethnographies are indeed important and necessary, there are now ample theorizations of the state and its mechanisms of exclusion and expulsion. My work instead focuses on deportee and returnee emplacement over the long term, taking a cue from Manalansan (2005)'s focus on the quotidian as crucial to the study of migration. Manalansan writes that a focus on quotidian life "unveils the veneer of the ordinary and the commonplace to lay bare the intricate and difficult hybrid negotiations and struggles between hegemonic social forces and voices from below." While there is significant interest in working alongside deportees and returnees, much of it follows Peutz's invocation of understanding the process of removal. I did not ask deportees/returnees directly about their experience of return, but observed their long-term practices of emplacement. I participated in deportee and returnee communities and activism as a listener, committee/working group member, and volunteer, taking on responsibilities as leaders in the community delegated them to me. This included, at one point, developing a protocol for future academic researchers hoping to work with the community.²

By writing that "at best, deportees may form what Malkki (1997:99) calls an 'accidental community,' but even then their identity as a group is tenuous and fleeting," Peutz seems to inadvertently foreclose the possibility of such research. Yet in Mexico City, there is an organized community of returnees and deportees who have adopted the experience of migration, of living undocumented in the United States, and of forced return and its aftermath as crucial aspects of their identities. These deportees and returnees and their work constitute the heart of my research. While in certain ways Mexico City is exceptional for its organized deportee/returnee community—many of whom are women and many of whom have moved to Mexico City from elsewhere in the country, some with the express purpose of participating in the deportee/returnee community and its activism—similar activism also exists in Tijuana, Guadalajara, San Salvador, and elsewhere. Recognizing this fact, and not assuming that deportees immediately disperse and become invisible within their home countries, is an important step toward improving ethnographic studies of deportation and return migration.

Secondly, the social-scientific focus on theorizing deportation flows, rather than experiences post-return, has also had the inadvertent effect of overlooking women—in effect, of

² One of the reasons that I was asked to create this protocol is that the organization Otros Dreams en Acción, in particular, has received significant attention from researchers, and—in line with Tuck (2009)'s invocation—wanted to set boundaries on the sense of extraction they had begun to feel from "damage-centered" research and to instead privilege long-term relationships with a committed set of researchers, especially those whose backgrounds included migration. Other examples research conducted by academics with long-term commitments to the organization include Varela (2019), Vera-Rosas and Guerrero (2021) and Jacobo-Suarez, Despagne and Chavez (2022).

theorizing them into insignificance. In the 2013 article "Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis: A Gendered Racial Removal Program," sociologists Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo argue that deportation is a means to remove workers that are considered excess under neoliberal capitalism, and that those workers are specifically male. This argument is undoubtedly true. Golash-Boza builds on it in her 2015 book *Deported*, where she argues that the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA)—the law that vastly increased deportations—had a gendered effect: "the number of female deportees has remained steady since 1998 whereas the number of male deportees has continued to increase. Over time, the 1996 laws have had a disproportionate effect on men, with men making up nearly 90 percent of removals in recent years," she writes. This is indeed striking given that women make up about half of all non-citizens in the United States. Yet Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo's argument has the inadvertent effect of rendering female deportees as ancillary—as collateral damage to a male phenomenon.

Scholarship about deportees' experiences have focused on two main aspects: 1) deportation's effect on the nuclear family, and 2) theorizing the immediate aftermath of deportation, largely for male deportees. Like scholarship about "anthropology of removal," these body of work started during the early 2010s and quickly grew.

The literature devoted to understanding the effects of deportation on children has largely focused on similar arguments about the negative emotional effects of the deportation of a family member. Hagan et al (2008) write that family members left behind suffer "emotional, financial, and psychological trauma as a result of losing loved ones who may have also been the primary breadwinners of the US household. Hagan et al (2010) writes that though "most international migration involves some form of temporary family separation, but for deportees and their families, the process is especially complicated and the consequences are especially severe." Brabeck, Lykes, and Hershberg (2011) write that deportation poses "intersecting threats" to families, such as extreme poverty, violence, and family separation, and that "it is not only the deported individual who bears the scars of detention and deportation; also his or her family—within the US and in the country of origin—experiences these actual or threatened separations as violations." Dreby (2012), responding to the fact that over 100,000 children had a parent deported between 1997 and 2007, uses a pyramid image to understand the consequences of deportation—and the fear of deportation—on children's daily lives, concluding that the most detrimental effect of forced separation on children was the absence of a parent, and the possible permanent change in family structure, followed by the financial effects of the loss of that parent's income. Allen et al (2013) write that children with a deported parent were "significantly more likely to displace externalizing and internalizing problems than children whose parents were not deported or in the process of deportation." Zayas (2015), in addition to emphasizing the de facto exile of US-citizen children of undocumented immigrants that often follows the deportation of a parent (see also Bhabha 2014, Thronson 2006, 2011), likewise repeats the argument that children suffer emotionally after the deportation of a parent. Caldwell (2019) and Andrews and Khayar (2020) add to this argument.

A few researchers have studied the effect of deportation on wives of (male) deportees. Caldwell (2019) interviews US-citizen wives of deportees who have relocated with their families to Tijuana, writing that "many binational couples choose to live in close proximity to the border so the spouse with lawful status in the United States can commute to work on the other side. At an earnings ratio of roughly five to one, this makes economic sense, although the daily struggle of waiting two to three hours to cross the border takes a toll." Dreby (2012), meanwhile, focuses

on the effects of deportation on women who do not relocate to Mexico. Yet a "methodological heteronormativity" underlies this work, in which "deportee" is all but synonymous with "male breadwinner" and women are presumed to be the non-deported spouse left behind. "In all families directly affected by acts of enforcement, women take on the short- and long-term financial burdens of the forced separations," Dreby writes, continuing: "moreover, men are demoralized by deportation. Unlike other fathers separated from children during migration, deportees are unable to provide for them."

While these studies are undoubtedly important, at a certain point their theoretical and methodological framework based in the nuclear family has also reified gender roles and family structures—and drawn conclusions based in those structures—that do not apply to all return migrants. While I don't discount the importance of studying the experience of migrants who occupy traditional roles structured by the nuclear family (including in its extended versions), the majority of my interlocutors fell outside of these roles, and therefore many aspects of their experiences were not reflected in existing scholarship.

In addition to the systemic overlooking of women deportees stemming from theorizations of the political-economic function of deportation, these studies also betray a bias toward the nuclear family that is persistent throughout migration scholarship, and which has been called "methodological heteronormativity" (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2018). Manalansan (2006) describes this as the "implicit normative assumptions around family, heterosexual reproduction, and marriage that abound in [migration] literature," and argues that queer perspectives can "enrich gender and migration research by unraveling under-examined assumptions about kinship, marriage, desires, and social roles." My work here responds to Manalansan's convocation, aiming to bring a feminist- and queer-informed perspective to deportation and return migration scholarship. Seeing the contributions of non-male migrants, and those who do not occupy a traditional role in a nuclear family, requires a change in perspective, conceptual frameworks, and methodology relative to existing scholarship about deportation and return migration.

I argue that in deportation and return migration studies, methodological heteronormativity is not only an effect of a bias toward the nuclear family on the part of researchers, but also an effect of method. I distinguish "method" from "methodology" by understanding one's method to be the practices of one's research, and "methodology" to be the theory of method surrounding it. A methodological heteronormativity emerges in migration scholarship that does not question the degree to which its interlocutors' experiences overlap with expectations of heterosexual marriage and family structure as a blind spot of method that inadvertently conditions one's findings. But in the case of deportation scholarship, it emerges also in the focus on the event of deportation, including often interviewing recently deported individuals, yields a bias toward the experiences of heterosexual men. It also yields an outsized focus in deportation scholarship on immediate post-return challenges, rather than understanding longer-term experiences of emplacement.

Along with studies of the effects of deportation on children, during the 2010s there was a significant increase in literature about post-deportation experiences. Much of this scholarship focuses on economic challenges and social stigma (Drotbohm 2015, Golash-Boza 2015, Onyoin 2017, Gómez Johnson et al 2019) and adverse conditions faced by deportees (Slack 2019, Caldwell 2019). Schuster and Majidi (2013), explicitly responding to the fact that while there was growing literature theorizing the policies around deportation, there was little data about what happens post-deportation, argue that deportation compounds the very factors that led individuals to migrate in the first place—including the impossibility of repaying debts, transnational ties,

shame, and perceptions of cultural "contamination." Schuster and Majidi (2015) builds on this work, writing that it is "axiomatic" that "many, if not most," deportees will leave their country of origin again, and explore the role of stigma in the post-deportation experience and its role as a reason for re-migration. Pinillos (2018, 2020)'s ethnographic research with deportees in Tijuana, particularly her focus on the process of "re-citizenizing," is uniquely relevant to my research in its focus on the bureaucratic hurdles faced by return migrants in Mexico. Other post-deportation scholarship seeks to categorize forms of post-deportation experiences. Rivera Sánchez (2013), writing about return migration to Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl (in Greater Mexico City), observes two "prototypical cases," one representing "reinsertion with re-migration." Dingeman (2018), writing about El Salvador, uses the term "segmented assimilation" to describe deportees' outcomes of what she calls "re/integration," stating that what she calls "migrant characteristics," especially degree of identification with US versus Salvadoran culture, affect the degree of criminalization deportees experience on return.

Part of the invisibilization of women deportees—and returnees, who are doubly invisibilized by the fact that very little scholarly attention has been paid to them, despite the fact that women account for a third of return migrants (Gandini and Aranzalez Ramos 2019)—likewise stems from methodology. Many articles' methods sections state that because there are so few women deportees, it was too hard to find interviewees, and therefore the authors have decided to focus exclusively on men. For example, Dingeman (2018) writes that "though the study team targeted women, they were both difficult to locate and sometimes reluctant to speak." Other examples of similar claims include Schuster and Majidi (2013), Schuster and Majidi (2015), Drotbohm (2015), Boehm (2016), and Caldwell (2019).

Nevertheless, a handful of studies have addressed the specific experiences of women deportees. Paris-Pombo and Peláez-Rodríguez (2016), discuss women's emotional responses to deportation and family separation based on interviews at a Tijuana shelter, where many of their informants ultimately chose to try to re-migrate to the United States. Drotbohm (2015) focuses on the way that gender affects the nature of the social stigmas faced by women deportees in Cape Verde. And Woo Morales (2019) examines motivations for return migration by women in the Guadalajara metropolitan area. However, the study is based on only four interviews, all of them with women in nuclear families.

To recap, my dissertation responds to a set of interlocking gaps and methodological biases in deportation studies, as well as the general lack of scholarship about non-deportation return migration. First, I argue that a focus on theorizing enforcement and removal has foregone a focus on the experiences of return migrants that has compounded the omission of women deportees and returnees. To use Clifford's vocabulary, previous studies have been focused on displacement—the causes of deportation and the experience of it—and the experiences of men have accordingly predominated. Second, I argue that there is a pervasive methodological heteronormativity present in migration studies that calls for using feminist and queer frameworks to draw new conclusions. Thirdly, I argue that these biases are, in part, a methodological problem. Many studies' methods sections also show that their data was collected brief, single-encounter interviews. With this methodology, the experiences of men predominate, because they are easier to find, and in higher numbers. Using individual interviews rather than long-term methods also focuses attention on the challenges of deportation rather than processes of emplacement—and as I describe above, the conclusions have often been redundant. As the examples of studies focused on women above demonstrate, this means that an ethnographic perspective shifts the focus and findings of the study even within scholarship in which women

are the focus. I discuss how in the following section.

Feminist and Queer Migration Scholarship

In addition to scholarship about deportation and return, this dissertation draws on feminist and queer approaches to the study of migration. Migration of women to the United States increased in the 1980s, especially from Central America, and along with it emerged a vein of scholarship that aimed to undo the "pervasive assumption that the international migrant is a young, economically motivated male" (Pedraza 1991). Drawing on Grasmuck and Pessar (1991), Pedraza (1991) argues that the link between the micro (family-scale) and macro-scale analyses of migration is the household, which is the unit that "makes decisions as to whether migration will take place, who in the family will migrate, what resources can be allocated to the migration, what remittances or household members can be expected to return, and whether the migration will be temporary or permanent" (Pedraza 1991, 308). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) builds on Pedraza's idea that migration affects female migrants differently than male ones, writing that migration can be a "radical gender-transformative odyssey," and that being a mother from a distance requires migrant mothers to redefine the concept of maternity and to reconsider what is expected of them.

At the same time as this scholarship directed important attention to the experience of female migrants, this scholarship also repeats the "methodological heteronormativity" I describe above, synonymizing "woman" with "mother" and "wife" to the exclusion of single women, single mothers, queer women, and those who otherwise do not fit into traditional roles in a nuclear family. Making space to see these alternate forms of womanhood is one of the offerings of queer approaches to the study of migration.

Queer migration scholarship, meanwhile, has had to negotiate between the the assumption of citizenship present in much queer theory (for instance, Berlant and Freeman (1993) write that "disidentification with U.S. nationality is not, at this moment, even a theoretical option for queer citizens"—a claim that both invisibilizes queer migrants, and situates the United States as the only viable nation for queer existence), and the methodological heteronormativity of much migration scholarship. Eithne Luibheid opens the article "Queer/Migration" by writing that "most [migration] scholarship, policymaking, service provision, activism, and cultural work remain organized around the premise that migrants are heterosexuals," while "queers are citizens" (Luibheid 2008). Chávez (2013) echoes this sentiment, writing in *Queer Migration Politics* that LGBT+ activists "have often argued for rights based on their US citizenship, which migrants do not possess" (Chávez 2013, 9). This has made an important aspect of queer migration scholarship arguments for why a queer perspective on migration studies is necessary, and reciprocally what studies of migrants have to offer queer theory. Queer migration scholarship has concerned itself with the way that power, geography, and other factors shape identity categories, and shows the way that all queer scholarship must think about capitalism, imperialism, and migration, and that all sexual categories must be analyzed in light of the historical and political-economic factors that shape them.³

Another key current within queer migration scholarship is work that critically analyzes immigration policies and laws that affect LGBT migrants and the state's "anxious labor"

³ Ironically, despite the fact that there is a longer and broader trajectory of queer migration scholarship than trans migration scholarship, trans migration scholarship has not struggled to define its place to the same extent. Questions of movement and mobility are fundamental to trans scholarship, even outside of studies of migration. I discuss this later in the chapter.

(Luibheid 2008) of sustaining heterosexuality. Minter (1993) points out that "until 1990, the United States was the only country in the world with a policy of excluding visitors and potential immigrants because of their sexual orientation." Luibheid (2002) brings an Ethnic Studies perspective to this history, examining how US immigration policy's organization around race, gender, nationality, and class intersected with sexuality, including in ways that would "construct new sexual identities and norms," focusing on women's sexuality.

Margot Canaday's *The Straight State* examines immigration agencies as one site of the US state's constructions of heterosexuality, writing that "It is no surprise that the Bureau of Immigration, one of the earliest federal agencies, would be the vanguard for [screening for homosexuality]. The need to guard the threshold of the nation-state prompted the development of an administrative apparatus at the border that subsequently moved to the interior" (Canaday 2009, 21). Before 1952's McCarran-Walter Act (also known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952), Canaday writes, immigration officials excluded or expelled immigrants suspected of homosexuality or homosexual activity using provisions barring those who had committed a "crime of moral turpitude" and who were likely to become "public charges" (Canaday 2009, 24). The 1952 Act introduced a provision barring aliens "afflicted with psychopathic personality" at the same time as it permitted husbands and wives quota-free entrance for the first time (Canaday 2009, 214-218). Yet the provision's "strategically ambiguous" (Yale Law Journal 1959, quoted in Canaday 2009, 247) wording proved challenging to enforce. With the law's 1965 rewriting, a provision was added to bar "sexual deviants," a wording that proved no less vague.

Within this critical, queer scholarship about immigration law and policy, asylum is particularly important. This is in part because of the complex positionality of asylum seekers. Reddy (2005) writes that they are "in the contradiction between the heteronormative social relations mandated for immigrants of color by the state's policies and the liberal state's ideology of universal sexual freedom" (Reddy 2005). Miller (2005) argues that the way that asylum requires petitioners to render sexuality—which has an unstable relationship between practices and identity—into an "immutable" and persecuted trait forces LGBT applicants to perform problematic racialized and colonial tropes. Luibheid (2008) adds that "successful asylum claims generally require generating a racist, colonialist discourse that impugns the nation-state from which the asylum seeker comes, while participating in an adjudication process that often depends on constructs of 'immutable' identity refracted through colonialist, reified models of culture shorn of all material relations."

A third important strain of queer migration scholarship is ethnography of queer migrants. Luibheid (2008) writes that this strand of queer migration scholarship "insists on recovering, theorizing, and valorizing histories and subjects that have been largely rendered invisible, unintelligible, and unspeakable in both queer and migration studies." Cantú et al (2009)'s pathbreaking study argued that because the North American terms "gay" and "queer" do not directly map on to Mexican immigrant men's understandings of their sexuality—although they increasingly circulate, largely due to AIDS activism and gay tourism—sexuality is constitutive of migration at the same time as migration is constitutive of sexuality. Manalansan (2003)'s ethnography of gay Filipino men in diaspora critiques the idea—underpinned by first-worldist bias—that queer migration is a movement from "repression" to "liberation," and instead offers that migrants' experiences and opportunities are "restructured" through migration. And Decena (2011) illustrates the way that gay Dominican immigrants in New York negotiate ideas of sexuality and social mores between their countries of birth and the United States and its diasporic communities.

Though these frameworks within queer migration scholarship include tools useful to understanding return migration, the scholarship has yet to address expulsion and return. Canaday (2009, 224) acknowledges twentieth-century deportation drives of gay men, including in bathhouses; Luibheid (2002)'s chapter "Looking Like a Lesbian" theorizes the only documented case of a lesbian deportation. But in both cases, the analysis is in the context of critical scholarship about US immigration law and policy.

A fourth strand of queer migration scholarship is that which considers "queer complicities with neoliberalism" (Luibheid 2008) and their implications for queer migrants. This scholarship builds on critiques of white, assimilationist LGBT+ politics that have used the idea of "homonationalism," in which "homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them" (Puar 2008). For instance, Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira (2008) examine the intersection of post-9/11 nationalism and lobbying for gay marriage and the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell to show how "queer subjects in the leading strata of the neoliberal world order" have been seduced into the violence of American empire, and how campaigns putatively fought in the name of LGBT equality in fact "consolidat[ed] precisely the political and material conditions they purportedly sought to contest" (Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira 2008, 121).

Scholarship about queer migrants has unfolded in parallel to debates about homonationalism in queer theory, and has converged on a similar problematic. As queer migration activism became codified as a fight, questions of homonationalism and the privatization of citizenship became front and center. Nair (2011) critiques the Uniting American Families Act, a series of bills proposed between 2000 and 2013 to extend family migration rights to same-sex couples before same-sex marriage was legalized nationally, by comparing the experiences of two undocumented migrants' deportation proceedings. Nair shows how a lesbian who mobilizes her all-American family as grounds for staying in the US draws powerful public sympathy, where the other, a single man brought to the US at the age of six, is denied public legal defense because of his status. Nair writes, "the issue of LGBT immigration separates some gay and lesbian identities...the kind that are recognizable as synonymous with class and privilege, from immigrant identities."

Part of Nair's argument is the troubling way in which it turns out that homonationalism can overcome "illegality." The fact that same-sex partnerships are now included in family migration pathways places the same-sex partners of US citizens—relative to the mobility and economic possibilities available to most individuals within the binational space of Mexico and the United States and beyond—into what Agathangelou et al call "the leading strata of the neoliberal world order" (see citation above). Meanwhile, a focus on queer migrants who are parts of "American families" hides the criminalization, incarceration, and death of those queer and trans migrants who do not have the privilege of normative family ties. Single queers are invisible to queer migration activism that understands queerness to be validated by same-sex partnership, at the same time as it demands such partnerships to conform to normative expectations.

This critique similar to homonationalism became the key critique of organizing by DREAMers, or the undocumented children of immigrants in the United States: that they traded complicity in the country's violence for the bourgeois promises of citizenship. While Dreamer activism gained widespread, bipartisan support because of Dreamers' perceived innocence and deservingness, within the immigrant community, their organizing was more controversial. In addition to the critique of Dreamers as criminalizing their parents, one of my informants lamented that after the passage of DACA—effectively a reduced version of the DREAM Act that

enabled such minors to access higher education and obtain a work permit, but no legal immigration status—there was no more momentum for immigration organizing. These critiques of the DREAMer narrative and organizing goals are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chávez (2013) points out that Dreamer activism involved "direct appropriation of LGBTQ political strategy," such as the 2010 "National Coming Out of the Shadows Day" (p. 80-81). Jose Antonio Vargas (2018) writes something similar in his memoir, *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*: "Taking a page from the playbook of the LGBTQ rights movement we believe that you cannot change the politics of immigration until you change the culture in which immigrants are seen." This tactic is in the vein of Queer Nation: not challenging adherence to the United States in the form of citizenship, but aiming to expand the boundaries of what is seen as acceptable modes of cultural citizenship. Vargas has said, "I define 'American' as someone who works really hard, someone who is proud to be in this country and wants to contribute to it...I'm an American, I just don't have the right papers" (Berestein Rojas 2011). Nair (2013) points out, however: "Forgotten in all the talk about 'coming out'...is the fact that coming out as undocumented is still a privilege for the few, mostly the very young and/or the highly qualified with unblemished records" (Nair 2013).

Trans scholar Dean Spade (2015) has best critiqued this approach to both LGBTQ and immigration activism. Spade compares the privatizing, assimilatory changes in the immigration right movement to the tendencies in trans politics that his work critiques. He writes:

Material conditions have worsened with increased immigration enforcement and criminalization of immigration, while professionalized...advocacy strategies have relied on the trop of the 'law-abiding' immigrant, dividing the populations affected by immigration enforcement between those who are 'good' and those who are 'bad' and proposing reforms that will only help those who are deemed good. 'Good' is usually defined by not having a criminal record, being willing to serve in the military, being an exemplary student and/or worker, and by having marital family ties to a US citizen" (Spade 2015, 154).

Spade also points out a concrete example of the way that assimilatory organizing by "deserving" immigrants created a few form of criminalization: among the conditions of DACA is not having committed a "significant misdemeanor." He writes that the category of "significant misdemeanor" never existed in immigration law, and therefore "represents a new category of excludable people, which is now likely to be replicated in other immigration relief programs, making less and less serious charges a basis for exclusion from immigration relief" (Spade 2015, 156).

Activism that buys into the nation's promise of happiness—whether LGBTQ or immigrant activism—risks erasing both the "unhappy queer" and the "melancholy migrant," Ahmed's "killjoy" figures who question the promise of happiness as a cultural attachment and mode of control. While the work of Chávez and Nair have offered this critique, queer migration activism within the US remains so tethered to citizenship that, as in migration activism in general, it remains a challenge to think politically in a larger context.

Part of the contribution offered by using deportation return migration as a lens onto questions of gender variance and migration is to decenter the United States—an aim that aligns with Spade's call for a trans legal-political strategy in which "the target of trans resistance should be not legal equality but the dismantling of state violence that are killing trans people," when

Spade's call is seen at a multinational scale that includes the regulation of citizenship itself as a form of state violence. However, these resonances, along with the relationship to the nation and to the family have largely been approached through a critical lens, rather than a constructive one. Ethnography offers this way in—observing and theorizing these critiques through trans deportees and returnees' lived experiences, and showing their constructive possibilities.

Gender, Ethnography, and Emplacement

My research using ethnographic methods flips these scripts—of gender, of the nuclear family, of challenge and stigma as the primary post-deportation experience. Long-term ethnography reveals the ways that women deportees and return migrants are anything but ancillary to return migration flows, and in fact carry out community-building and activism that improve the experiences of emplacement not only for women but across the deportee and returnee community.

Still, this realization did not come instantly. When I started my dissertation research in Mexico City, I recognized that my circuits and connections were leading me toward a dissertation that would focus on the women of the deportee and returnee community. But I struggled for months to justify focusing on women—as though a kind of pernicious internalized misogyny was telling me that women were, in some way, provincial. Finally, I realized that it was the nexus of gender, method, and emplacement that made the project significant. Using ethnography—defined quite simply as slow, in-depth, observant research—to study deportation and return migration brought women to the forefront, because they lead the deportee and returnee community's social and activist spaces. Long-term ethnographic research methods that focus on building trust and intimacy also lend themselves to feminist principles such as horizontality, collaboration, and relationship-building than shorter-term methods, even as there remains a rift in positionality between researcher and subject (Stacey 1988).

At the same time, my opportunities for ethnography were limited by the Covid-19 pandemic. My fieldwork was slated to take place from September 2019 to December 2020, meaning that the switch to virtual modalities in March 2020 occurred in the middle. When the pandemic hit, I was spending two days per week volunteering with Otros Dreams en Acción (whose work is the focus of Chapters 3 and 4), participating in the Grupo de Promotoras (whose work appears in Chapter 2), and conducting interviews with deportees, returnees, NGO workers, and other individuals relevant to the dissertation. I was fortunate that I had already created networks that enabled me to transition to virtual ethnography as seamlessly as was possible in that moment, and was able to continue deepening my relationships with my interlocutors, and develop new relationships over WhatsApp and Zoom. But the effect of the pandemic is nevertheless visible on this dissertation. Chapter 2 draws equally on in-person and virtual meetings; the forum that provides the opening scene was the last in-person event of my fieldwork. Chapter 3 likewise draws on work from both in-person and virtual participant observation and interviews. Chapter 4 draws heavily on several days of accompaniment of one deportee, which were my only in-person interactions with my interlocutors in the second half of my fieldwork; its second half also draws on virtual organizing and events conducted after the start of the pandemic. That chapter is the least "thick" ethnographically, because of the constraints of the time in which it was researched. Despite these limitations, however, the dissertation kept a commitment to observing and thinking with deportee and returnee emplacement in Mexico City over the long-term, rather than in the initial days of arrival.

Reciprocally, both ethnography and a focus on women added new dimensions to

deportation studies, which had failed to see the significance of the women of the community because of its focus on short time scales and surveys and one-off interviews. Instead of being focused on the event itself, conducting ethnography of the women of deportation involves watching the way that lives and activism unfold over the long-term after arrival in Mexico. Finally, in addition to cisgender women, this dissertation includes a chapter on transgender deportees and return migrants, who have been largely overlooked by previous scholarship. Across its body chapters, I aim to avoid "methodological heteronormativity" in both my choice of interlocutors—who include queer and trans migrants, unpartnered women, single mothers, and others who fall outside of the nuclear family paradigm—and my theoretical frameworks, which I describe below. One single-mother returnee told me of her time in the US:

I'm a single mother, so I worried more. A man can go to the US and know that his family is fine. I had to leave two kids behind, to work to support them. Almost all of the women I knew there were single mothers. That part made us vulnerable. Some of us vulnerable, some of us strong. But you also grow as a woman—you learn to value every moment.

Another departure from past migration scholarship in my work is the vocabulary of "emplacement." The vocabulary used for the experience of return in existing scholarship includes: "reintegration" (Rivera Sánchez 2009, Golash-Boza 2015, Brotherton and Kretsedemas 2017, Dingeman 2018, Andrews and Khayar 2020), "incorporation" (Massey et al 1987, Wheatley 2011, Rivera Sánchez 2019), "reinsertion" (Coutin 2010, Rivera Sánchez 2013, Hualde and Paris 2019), "resettlement" (Nicolás Flores 2019), and "repatriation" (Pinillos 2018, SEGOB 2019). Yet deportee and returnee activists actively position themselves as against these terms, arguing that the idea of "reinsertion" and "reintegration" generate and reify an idea that deportees and returnees will go back to being normal members of Mexican society—rather than understanding that binational identity and migration as experiences that have changed their relationship to that society—as well as assume that return migrants desire to be normatively re-integrated into Mexican society. Additionally, for individuals who migrated to the United States as children, their experience of "return" is, in fact, their first introduction to Mexican society.

Instead of settling for one of these terms, I use the term "emplacement" to refer to return migrants' process of settling in Mexico. In contrast to "repatriation," the idea of "emplacement" does not assume a normative, or in some way "natural," relationship to one's country of citizenship. Bristow (2015) writes that "the postmodern view is that a sense of belonging in place—and thus emplacement within a culture—is relative to the subject and the values that he or she holds." Emplacement is a sufficiently malleable idea to encompass individual and collective experiences of resisting assimilation through political organizing, as well as of creating novel identities and creative production. In contrast to "re-integration" and "re-insertion," it does not suggest that migrants will be subsumed into Mexican society and their experiences and identities of migration erased; by eliminating the use of the "re-" prefix, emplacement does not assume that migrants are coming "back" to anything. Instead, the idea of emplacement signals a process of putting down roots that could follow any vector of migration, that is not necessarily final, and that is an ongoing and indefinite process rather than a one-time event. I show how these processes of emplacement unfold at multiple scales and across multiple spheres and media, mediated by forms of diasporic intimacy.

In migration scholarship, an important aspect of emplacement is its relationship to

displacement. In her article proposing frameworks for the study of refugees by anthropologists, Malkki (1995) writes that recent literatures about hybridity, transnationalism, and diaspora "insist on the analytical linkage...between displacement and emplacement," including a perspective that does not demand "wholeness" of "origins, identities, communities, cultural traditions, or nationalities," instead seeing them, along with displacement and emplacement, as "historical products, ever-unfinished projects." In his analysis of the quotidian lives of gay Filipino men in New York, Manalansan (2005) likewise understands displacement and emplacement as never-ending processes that are co-productive of one another, describing how one of his interlocutors' home spaces "narrates in spatial terms the constant engagements with experiences of emplacement and displacement." In return migration scholarship, Del Monte Madrigal (2019) refers to "practices of emplacement" used by homeless deportees in Tijuana to claim space and create a sense of home. These ideas of emplacement—as relational, simultaneous and co-productive of displacement, and as a set of tools and practices developed over time—speak to the ways that "emplacement" is a more productive framework for understanding post-return migration experiences than the terms already in use. Ideas of "reintegration," "reinsertion," and the like imply a fixed understanding of society, national society, and citizenship in the country of return.

My theorization of the process of emplacement post-return is also intertwined with ideas of diasporic intimacy. Gilroy (1993) introduces the term "diasporic intimacy" while writing about cultural production in the Black diaspora: a "playful diasporic intimacy...has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity." Gopinath (1996) also writes about the centrality of cultural production to diasporic intimacy, in this case in queer South Asian contexts. Gopinath writes that it is the "liminality of diasporic experience—of being inside/outside—that is so perfectly captured and negotiated by South Asian transnational popular cultural forms such as bhangra," which he describes as a "general signifier for South Asian-ness" that "call[s] into existence a diasporic network of 'affiliation and affect' (Gilroy 1993) that cuts across national boundaries," in turn enacting a counter-public space of diasporic intimacy.

These theorizations of diasporic intimacy as characterizing cultural production are generative for thinking about the cultural production associated with *pocha* activism and community-building that I discuss in Chapter 3. Yet the "affiliation and affect" of diasporic intimacy animates the processes and theorizations of emplacement described throughout the dissertation. These are more fully theorized by Boym (1998), who emphasizes the ways that the anomie of displacement is constitutive of diasporic intimacy. Boym writes that diasporic intimacy is "not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it," and that it is therefore "dystopian by definition; it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home." For Boym, diasporic intimacy, then, is not playful or celebratory but a precarious affection rooted in the recognition of others' similar experiences of alienation. "It is precisely the common experience of dislocation that makes intimacy possible," she writes. Yet there remains an aesthetic dimension. She closes the article: "diasporic intimacy is possible only when one masters a certain imperfect aesthetics of survival and learns to inhabit exile...it has an accent—in both languages, foreign and native." This rhetorical turn speaks particularly poignantly to the return migrant community who indeed often find themselves very literally in the situation of having an accent in both English and Spanish.

Finally, Manalansan (2005), building on both Boym and Gopinath, contributes a deeper understanding of how diasporic intimacy through affect and through aesthetic production are linked. He writes:

Diasporic intimacy constitutes these struggles that showcase the different ways in which the state, public life, and the 'world' outside intrude on and permeate these seemingly bounded, private, and domestic spaces of home and how diasporic subjects confront them. The process of creating diasporic intimacy can be achieved either through counterpublic cultural productions or through the more mundane routes that translate and transform 'the habitual estrangements of everyday life abroad.' (Manalansan 2005)

In the deportee and returnee community, the intrusion of the state and the world into private communities is evident. As the literature about family separation through deportation described above attests, the trauma of the violent intervention of the state into the private sphere is one of the key experiences of dislocation that bring the community together. And as Manalansan notes, the intimacy that follows from these common experiences is expressed through both cultural production and through quotidian forms. This dissertation is about the way that deportees and returnees' diasporic intimacy animates these tools of emplacement—politically, culturally, and affectively.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 of the dissertation provides historical context for the current flows of deportation and return. I review literature about the history of migration to the United States to argue that permanent undocumented family migration is a consequence of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which re-oriented US immigration policy around "family reunification," as well as of the border militarization of the late 1980s and 1990s. In making this argument, I contextualize the deportation studies literature that I review in this introduction, showing why it emerged at the moment in time that it did. I also argue that where deportation literature presents family separation resulting from deportation as paradoxical to the aims of US immigration policy, this was by design: the 1965 represents the first time in the history of the two countries that US migration policy did not account for large-scale flows of economic migrants from Mexico, in effect creating "illegality" as a widespread condition. Coupled with the border enforcement of the 80s and 90s that effectively ended circular migration, this led to the creation of a permanent undocumented class that for the first time included entire families, and who are now the subjects of deportation and forced return.

Chapter 2, "Routes from the Streets," is about the transformation of diasporic intimacy into a form of political emplacement. The chapter follows a year of meetings held by the *Grupo de Promotoras*, a group of women deportees, returnees and employees of NGOs serving the deportee and returnee community who created a manual for newly repatriated return migrants. I was invited to attend a meeting of the group by an employee of its host organization, and later requested permission to continue attending as part of my dissertation research. The chapter builds on Boym's idea of diasporic intimacy as constituted by uprootedness and alienation, as well as on conceptualizations of intimacy from anthropology and geography, to show how the interpersonal intimacy created by the shared experience of migration and deportation enables motherist activists to develop an intimate knowledge of the Mexican bureaucracy—a form of political emplacement for the return migrant community in the sense that the activists' work creates opportunities for political belonging that did not previously exist for deportees, returnees, and their families. Where much existing scholarship focuses on the way that bureaucracy is a

form of control exerted over the poor or otherwise vulnerable, the organized deportee mothers I follow supersede this control, developing a knowledge so thorough and intimate that they have been able to influence norms, laws, and their implementation—an example of Manalansan (2005)'s "mundane routes that translate and transform 'the habitual estrangements of everyday life.'"

Manalansan's union of Gilroy and Gopinath's focus on cultural production with Boym's focus on affect is also constitutive of my analysis of pocha activism in Chapter 3. The chapter follows the women who form the leadership of the organization *Otros Dreams en Acción* (ODA), an organization located in central Mexico City that balances the "*talacha*," or grind (literally, repairing punctured tires) of helping individuals negotiate Mexican and US bureaucracies with an explicit commitment to translocal⁴ community-building through cultural production that identifies itself as pocha, and that rejects belonging wholly to either US or Mexican culture. This is illustrated by the upside-down Mexican and US flags that hang in the entryway to Pocha House, the deportee/returnee cultural center. I learned about ODA's work through the Promotoras, and began volunteering on its accompaniment team in December 2020. The conscious creation of a "pocha" identity is a form of cultural emplacement, and Pocha House exemplifies Foucault (1984)'s idea of a "heterotopia" or "third space" (in Homi Bhabha (2004) and Edward Soja (1996)'s reformulations)—a space that is outside of the world around it and that therefore complicates that world. Perhaps the signal event for illustrating this constructive, cosmopolitan translocality is the event *Florece Aquí y Allá* (Flourishing Here and There), which took place in 2019 (as well as virtually in the summer of 2021). Deportees and returnees took over the Zócalo, the central square of Mexico City's Historic Center, for a day of music, slam poetry, and testimonials. In fourteen other cities, the translocal satellites of the event held their own gatherings, connecting the migrant community across the binational space of Mexico and the United States, into Central America, and beyond.

Finally, Chapter 4 of this dissertation builds on Manalansan (2006)'s insistence that queer perspectives are necessary to migration studies, and explores the affective resonance between the ideas of "dislocation" and "administrative violence" as they are theorized in transgender studies and in migration studies, and analyzes the way that queer and trans diasporic intimacy has shaped the course of return migrant activism, even with this influence is not always visible. The first half of the chapter draws on a case I accompanied for ODA, while the second half describes virtual queer and trans migration-related events that took place over the course of the pandemic, organized by activists whom I had met through my partnership with ODA. I argue that activists' rejection of normative ideas of "reintegration" and emphasis on creating a counter-public stems from the outsized influence of queer, trans, and others in non-nuclear family situations; as

⁴ While transnationalism is a very common framework for understanding migrant experiences and migrants' production of space, especially within the United States and Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 1997, Boehm 2012, Brigden 2016, Perraudin 2016, Vogt 2018). Transnational feminists are responsible for innovating a "feminist politics of location" (Mountz and Hyndman 2006) that think critically about nation-states, geopolitics, the connections between places, and the construction of difference. Transnational feminist allows for a critical lens on the nation-state while ceding that they are still in charge of policing migrating and administering borders. However, pocha activists favor the concept of "translocal" for the way it de-centers the nation-state and reflects the fact that while migrants' connections traverse national borders, they connect specific localities, rather than nations (Rivera Sánchez 2005, Grenier and Sakdapolrak 2013, Ayora Díaz 2017). For them, using a lens that does not center the nation state is important because it creates a form of emplacement in which return migrants can maintain connections to and communities in the specific places in both Mexico and the United States where they feel a sense of home; in this way, it is also a form of de-centering the administration of borders and migration in discourse and activism about migrants' lived experiences.

Manalansan (2005) writes, "diasporic queers in particular refuse the assimilative framework." If a refusal to assimilate into what one activist called "a society filled with deficiencies" marks deportee, returnee, and pocha activism, as I argue here, that refusal is also informed by legacies of queer/trans activism and the realities of deportees and return migrants who do not have traditional family structures.

My focus on these practices of emplacement aims to draw attention to work that is quotidian and marginal while simultaneously inextricable from dominant global forces of globalization, neoliberalization, and immigration enforcement. By illuminating these practices, I hope to contribute to reimagining border and mobility politics and, in the meantime, to collective knowledge about survival—and flourishing—in adverse contexts.

Chapter 1. Making the Great Expulsion

Building on Mexican scholars' theorization of the contemporary era of return migration as the "Great Expulsion" that I describe in the introduction, this chapter places the ethnographic chapters of this dissertation into their historical context, arguing that while deportation and return migration have always existed, the current era of the "Great Expulsion" is distinct. I argue that this difference has three key dimensions. First, in sheer numbers, the scale of return-migrant flows is larger than ever in the past. Second, the presence within these return migration flows of women, childhood arrivals who have grown up primarily in the United States, and US-born children of migrants in the Great Expulsion distinguishes the current trends of deportation and return from past eras. Third, the geography of the Great Expulsion is farther-reaching than past periods of widespread repatriation, with deportations and returns originating from all over the United States, not only the US Southwest and the borderlands.

In particular, I situate the current era in contrast to the deportation drives of the 1930s and the 1950s' Operation Wetback, which are often offered as historical precedents for the current era. However, these deportation efforts focused primarily on male workers in the border region and the US Southwest, because the context of migration during those periods was different than the contemporary reality. Understanding the presence of women, childhood arrivals, and US-born children, as well as the far-reaching geography of contemporary deportation and return requires understanding how migration policy over the course of twentieth century has progressively eliminated opportunities for authorized Mexican migration, has made circular migration so dangerous as to effectively become an impossibility, and how the criminalization of undocumented status has made the threat of deportation loom increasingly large.

In certain ways, this interpretation argues against scholars who interpret family separation as a result of deportation as "paradoxical" (Boehm 2012) to US migration policy, whose stated aim since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act has been family reunification. I argue that the Hart-Celler Act was specifically anti-Mexican, and that it created the concept of and economic exploitability of the "illegal immigrant" in the caricature in which we know it today. Within this argument, I also offer a brief history of Mexico's return migration policy, showing that the context for the Great Expulsion is not only a product of United States policies, but also Mexican ones: indeed, much of the activism described in the ethnographic chapters is directed at the Mexican state, which celebrates migrants for the remittances they send home but does little to welcome them upon forced return.

From Chinese Exclusion to Criminalizing Entry

During the first half of the twentieth century, migration across the US-Mexico border was largely unrestricted. Yet the relative ease with which migrants from Mexico crossed to the United States was an effect not of an openness to migration, but of a mix of taking Mexican labor for granted in the agricultural economies of the Southwest and California, railroad construction, and the industrialization of Midwestern and Western cities, and an evolving conceptualization of whiteness that directed racialized and restrictive immigration policy at other migrants.

Until the late 1800s, US laws aimed to promote immigration, rather than to restrict it. But in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act marked the first time that the country had prohibited immigration based on race. As Lee (2002) writes, the Act also represented "the first time that

illegal immigration was defined as a criminal offense in U.S. Law.” More Chinese Exclusion Acts followed in 1892 and 1902. As Lee (2002) and Ngai (2004) both argue, these Acts are significant to understanding contemporary migration and exclusion policies because we can locate the origins of contemporary discourse about immigration and whiteness—especially non-whiteness as a justification for exclusion—in these Acts. While Chinese exclusion was not total in the way that US immigration enforcers hoped it would be—at least 17,300 Chinese immigrants entered the US through Canada and Mexico from 1882 to 1920—the surveillance, enforcement, and deportation mechanism developed to control Chinese immigration nevertheless “laid the foundations for racialized understandings of the ‘illegal immigrant problem’ and of American border enforcement and nation building at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Lee 2002).

This new policy of racialized exclusion quickly had effects for immigrants beyond just those from China. Where past Supreme Court decisions had defined whiteness as “without Negro blood,” between 1887 and 1923, federal courts heard 25 cases about the racial status of Asian immigrants seeking citizenship—specifically, Japanese and Punjabi immigrants (Ngai 2004). Japan had lifted a two-centuries-old ban on emigration in 1885, leading many immigrants to travel to the West Coast of the United States in the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1925, over 100,000 Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) had arrived to the United States (Library of Congress ND). By 1920, Japanese farmers owned over 450,000 acres of land in California (Library of Congress ND); these farmers were instrumental in the state’s burgeoning cultivation of berries, fruits, and rice (Wells 1996). However, this ascent into landownership created a new racial backlash. By 1907-08, in the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” the Japanese government agreed to stop issuing passports valid for the continental United States (Hajimu 2015); in 1913, California ratified the Alien Land Law—in turn copied by other states in the American West (Lyon 2020)—which prohibited those ineligible for citizenship from owning agricultural land or possessing long-term leases, only permitting leases of up to three years. The law remained in force until 1952.

As racialized policies constrained growers’ access to East Asian labor, they scrambled to find alternative sources of cheap immigrant labor that might pass as “white” in the evolving legal logic. In 1910, growers began importing Punjabi contract workers to the newly-irrigated Imperial Valley, the farms of the Sacramento Valley, and the lumber camps of Oregon. But the arrival of these workers—miscategorized as “Hindus” and “Hindoos”—quickly provoked a new racial panic. Reporting that 5,000 such immigrants had arrived to San Francisco during 1910, the *Survey*, a periodical published by the Charity Organization Society of New York, wrote that “Pacific coast states are suddenly awakening to a new immigration problem in a rapidly increasing influx of Hindus.” The clipping goes on to say that

The same sentiment on the Pacific coast which opposes Japanese immigration is developing quite as strongly against the Hindus...Their habits, their intense caste feeling, their lack of home life...and their effect upon standards of labor and wages, all combine to raise a serious question as to whether the doors should be kept open or closed against this strange, new stream. (Charity Organization Society of New York 1911)

Several years before the *Survey*’s “charitable” report, the *Puget Sound American*, a newspaper in Bellingham, Washington, devoted an oversized headline to ask, “Have we a dusky peril?”

Captioned with cartoons of dark-skinned, bearded men wearing turbans and a flute-playing snake charmer, the article wrote, “Bellingham workmen are becoming excited over the arrival of the East Indians in numbers across the Canadian border and fear that the dusky Asiatics with their turbans will prove a worse menace to the working classes than the ‘Yellow Peril that has so long threatened the Pacific Coast’” (Puget Sound American 1906).

Federal legislation responded to fears of “yellow” and “dusky” “perils” in the Immigration Act of 1917, which created an “Asiatic Barred Zone” encompassing Afghanistan, India, Southeast Asia, the Asian-Pacific Islands, and much of the Ottoman and Russian Empires. However, it left exceptions for immigrants who worked in professional occupations (government officers, ministers, missionaries, lawyers, physicians, engineers, teachers, students, authors, artists, merchants, and tourists), prefiguring contemporary class-based exclusions and openings.

The 1917 law also increased the “head tax” on immigrants to eight dollars and imposed a literacy test, which up to that point had been thrice vetoed. It placed restrictions on European immigrants—especially southern and eastern Europeans—for the first time, and created a long list of newly inadmissible types of immigrants, including “idiots, imbeciles, and feeble-minded persons,” persons of “constitutional psychopathic inferiority,” “mentally or physically defective” persons, the insane, alcoholics, persons with epilepsy, tuberculosis, or contagious diseases, paupers and vagrants, criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, polygamists, political radicals, and contract laborers. The categories of “constitutional psychopathic inferiority” and “mentally or physically defective” were interpreted to exclude homosexual immigrants, a category later recodified as a ban on “sexual deviants” that remained in force until 1990 (Luibhéid 2005).

Though the 1917 law did not impose restrictions on immigrants from Mexico, it did affect the US-Mexico border. Aided by the new national system of railroads constructed under seven-term president Porfirio Díaz, Mexican immigration increased significantly in the absence of Asian labor, but the head tax and literacy test also affected many would-be immigrants, who could either not afford the fee, were illiterate, or both. Concurrently, “push” factors began to dramatically increase emigration from Mexico, starting first with the Cristero Wars (Young 2015) and continuing with the Mexican revolution. Yet as these flows increased, Mexico sought to criminalize emigration. Section 26 of Article 123 of the country’s new 1917 constitution required any emigrant to have a labor contract “signed by municipal authorities and the consulate of the country where they intended to work” (Lytle Hernández 2006, 423). Because U.S. Law prohibited offering contracts to foreign laborers before they entered the United States (Guerin-González 1994, Lytle Hernández 2006), this rendered authorized labor migration virtually impossible. From both sides of the border, Mexicans were pushed toward unauthorized migration outside of ports of entry.

More important to the reality of the border region than these federal regulations were the ways that on-the-ground forces shaped local enforcement. Concurrently with the federal legislation, as McKieran-Gonzalez (2012) and Minna Stern (1999) argue, local public health officials adopted hygiene and other measures targeting Mexicans. A disinfection plant had been built at the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border in 1910, and remodeled by the United States Public Health Service in 1916 in response to reports of epidemics in Mexico; 1917 saw the imposition of a quarantine on all Mexicans entering the US, as an effort to combat the spread of typhus (Minna Stern 1999). Additionally, border cities were affected by the Mexican Revolution, such as when, in 1916, Pancho Villa executed 17 mining engineers in El Paso (Minna Stern 1999).

But even as these perceived “threats” from Mexico tended toward the increasing of enforcement, the binational reality of the lives of many of the border region’s dwellers demanded

provisions for mobility. Kang (2017) argues that between 1917 and 1924, three policy innovations—the wartime agricultural labor program, literacy test waivers, and the border crossing card—were created specifically for the benefit of border residents, sustaining the transnational character of the borderlands against the desires of those seeking restrictive immigration policy. Still, Kang and Ngai both locate the creation of the concept of illegal immigration in this time period. Because Mexican workers began to circumvent ports of entry to enter the US, Ngai writes that in the aftermath of the 1917 law, “the difference between legal and illegal immigration hardened.” This also applies to the policy innovations identified by Kang: every sanctioned form of immigration has in its absence an unauthorized opposite. Additionally, the passage of the Passport Act in 1918 made entry into the United States without inspection a criminal act. This new emphasis on “legal” entry—and Mexican immigrants’ differentiated access to it—laid the groundwork for Mexican immigrants to become codified as a race in the United States.

Yet even as Mexicans were racialized, federal legislation would not preoccupy itself with them for many years. After the 1917 legislation, as though the Asiatic barred zone were not enough, racial panics over Japanese and Punjabi workers also culminated in two Supreme Court decisions, *Tako Ozawa v. US* (1922) and *US v. Bhagat Singh Third* (1923). The Naturalization Act of 1790 had ruled that only people of white descent were eligible for naturalization (later extended to include people of African descent with the Naturalization Act of 1870), and these court cases challenged Asian immigrants’ whiteness in order to exclude them from citizenship, effectively creating the racial category of “Asian” in order to rule that Japanese and Indian immigrants were ineligible for citizenship.

The next major immigration legislation, 1924’s Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, is best known as the “National Origins Act,” because of its creation of immigration quotas for immigrants coming to the United States from outside the Western Hemisphere. While maintaining previous bars on Asian immigration, the 1924 Act set a total immigration quota of 165,000 for countries outside the Western Hemisphere—eighty percent lower than the yearly average had been before World War I. (In 1952, the McCarran-Walter/Immigration and Naturalization Act retained these quotas on Europe and imposed additional quotas on the Caribbean.) The initial quotas were set initially at three percent of a country’s foreign-born population in the United States according to the 1910 census, but a “Quota Board” was tasked with allocating the national origins quotas by 1927. As Ngai writes, to do so, the board drew on the racial categories of the 1920 census in crafting immigration policy. These categories—which would govern US migration policy until 1965, and which became the categories through which US citizens understood race—were: “white,” “black,” “mulatto,” “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Japanese,” and “Hindu.”

According to this racial schema, Mexicans remained classified as “white.” Along with other immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, they were exempt from the quotas instituted by the Act. But the exception proved to be a form of racialization itself: it was a concession made specifically to the need for Mexican labor in the Southwest (Ngai 2004, 60). During the 1920s, Mexican migration was increasing dramatically, largely due to the dislocations of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The number of migrants increased from around 20,000 per year during the 1910s to 50,000-100,000 migrants per year during the 1920s (Sánchez 1993, Young 2019). The influx of migrants coincided with the arrival of capitalized Anglo agricultural interests into South Texas, the US Southwest, and California, who enforced a racialized boundary through labor practices, landownership, discrimination, and violence (Montejano 1987, Weber 2013,

Bowman 2016). While Mexicans remained officially categorized as white in federal legislation, they were racialized through other channels. Mexicans were not white—they were laborers. This is visible in the fact that the Johnson-Reed Act also authorized the creation of the US Border Patrol. The agency's mandate to enforce Section 8 of the Immigration Act, which prohibited smuggling, harboring, or assisting an alien (Kang 2017).

In 1929, the Undesirable Aliens Act, also known as Blease's Law, created criminal penalties for unauthorized entry into the United States (González O'Brien 2018). The law was directed at Mexicans, as though a corrective for previous legislation that had left the southern border largely overlooked. It also responded to new immigration fears stemming from World War I and the war's many refugees (Ngai 2004, Weber 2013). Blease's law not only further cemented the concept of the "illegal alien" by criminalizing unauthorized entry—a fact that continues to separate US border and migration policy from that of Mexico, for instance—but the law also explicitly racialized Mexican immigrants. In 1928, Democratic representative Robert Green of Florida argued in favor of extending quotas to Mexican immigrants in addition to European immigrants because of their mixture of "white, Indian, and negro" blood, and the way that assimilating such a race would "cause a general weakening, physically and mentally, of our civilization" (González O'Brien 2018).

Shortly after the passage of Blease's Law, the US federal government—in alliance with state and local governments and law enforcement agencies—started a program of "Mexican Repatriation" that is remembered as the first mass deportation drive. During the following decade, the US deported or coerced into repatriation hundreds of thousands of Mexican nationals (and US citizens of Mexican descent). From 1929 to 1932, more than 365,000 Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans left the United States for Mexico, and the country's Mexican population dropped for the first time since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Guerin-Gonzalez 1994). As Guerin-Gonzalez (1994) writes, "In 1930...there were approximately 650,000 Mexican immigrants in the United States, over one-third of whom lived in California. Ten years later, the Mexican-born population of the United States had decreased by almost half."

Most readings of the 1930s' deportations drives interpret them as having been precipitated by the Great Depression. Weber (2013) writes, "the workers who had been so sought after during the farm boom in the Southwest and in sugar beet regions came to be seen as a potentially catastrophic economic drain after the market collapsed and unemployment skyrocketed." However, Weber also argues that the drives had been in the works for far longer—that they were the culmination of debates between political factions he calls "restrictionists" (those who sought to limit Mexican immigration) and "anti-restrictionists" (who wanted unrestricted access to Mexican labor). Weber notes that "while the rest of the nation, and much of the world, suffered through a severe agricultural depression during the 1920s, South Texas rapidly became one of the most productive farming regions in the country." South Texas and the Southwest had both nativists pushing for stricter policies at the US-Mexico border, and growers fighting for unfettered access to Mexican labor. Failing to pass nativist legislation in 1926 and 1928, Weber argues, nativists used deportation drives as a bureaucratic alternative that set the precedent for similar nationwide drives. In the Rio Grande Valley in 1929 alone, almost 20000 people were deported; by 1931, the Border Patrol and INS had shifted their focus elsewhere, including California (Weber 2013). Yet Weber concludes—with much resonance for today—that "neither side truly desired an immigration policy regarding Mexico. Anti-restrictionists wanted a labor policy that masqueraded as an immigration policy while restrictionists just wanted to throw up a wall as they searched for the next group of threatening immigrants" (Weber 2013). As in the

world of today, American lawmakers found it impossible to use policy to balance their contradictory desires of excluding Mexicans and exploiting their labor, and found it more efficacious to leave the job undone.

While these deportation drives and repatriation programs included whole families, not only solo men, much like the return migration flows of today, and therefore set a precedent for the Great Expulsion, the circumstances of unauthorized entry into the United States—including the enormous difficulty of re-entering once expelled, and the criminalization of doing so—present a significant difference. The distances traveled in deportation and return—the fact that migrants come from all over Mexico, not only from the border region—also make today's circumstances different than those of the past.

During the 1930s, Mexican repatriation policy was driven by desires on the part of Mexico's federal government to utilize *repatriados* (repatriated ones) to “colonize” northern Mexico. Casey Walsh argues that starting with the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), Mexico's federal government included repatriation as a “cornerstone” of development efforts. Walsh writes that during the 1920s and 30s, “the Mexican government responded to the harassment of Mexican workers by reiterating and publicizing its desire to accommodate repatriated workers in its irrigation zones” (Walsh 2008, 99). They aimed to use large-scale irrigation projects as a means to solve the emigration caused by the failure of the *hacienda* and *ejido* systems to provide sufficient employment, emulating the way that the US federal government had stimulated the settlement of the US Southwest (Walsh 2008, 41). In 1926, the government passed two linked federal laws: the Ley Sobre Irrigación con Aguas Federales [Law of Irrigation with Federal Waters] and the Ley Federal de Colonización [Federal Law of Colonization]. The first created the National Irrigation Commission, and the second made irrigation compulsory on lands, public or private, where it was possible (Walsh 2008, 53). This laid the groundwork for taking advantage of the labor of Mexicans who were repatriated by the deportation campaigns of the late 1920s and the 1930s, or who returned on their own because of the economic crisis. The National Irrigation Commission had created an “elaborate bulletin” with information about irrigation colonies and a “lengthy application form to be filled out by prospective colonists” (Walsh 2008, 99). After Calles, President Lázaro Cárdenas devised a development plan that combined a focus on the development of the cotton industry with a focus on the management of repatriates. Walsh writes: “Cárdenas and his advisors directed this land reform toward ‘the establishment of agricultural colonies of repatriates...preferably in scarcely populated areas; but sufficiently close to centers of population to provoke, on the one hand the reincorporation of the recently arrived, and, on the other hand, the assimilation of their useful knowledge by the regional inhabitants’” (Walsh 2008, 101).

Mexico's plans for settling *repatriados* had more limited success than hoped, however, as did the campaigns on the US side to encourage return migration. At the same time as fewer Mexicans in the United States were interested in return migration than the two governments (and the US civil society organizations promoting Mexican return migration) hoped, the Mexican government struggled to make good on its promises to provide them with land and other support. As Walsh writes, “the government's ‘need’ was for skilled agricultural labor, especially for cotton production, more than an ideological or emotional need to fulfill the patriotic promise of returning exiled nationals” (Walsh 2008, 141). This economic need also meant that the government hoped to attract not just any return migrants, but specifically those that had been economically successful in the United States and who had developed agricultural skills.

This role of the Mexican federal government has interesting resonances today, when

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has praised migrants' role in the country's economy through remittances at the same time as he has cut programs that support return migrants, a hypocrisy that has made many returnees and deportees feel taken advantage of and perceived by their countries of citizenship only for their economic value. One of the biggest challenges that contemporary deportees and returnees face is finding work, given Mexico's steep age discrimination and low wages. (After the upheavals of NAFTA on Mexico's rural economy, fewer return migrants work in Mexico's agrarian sector; those experiences are also outside the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on Mexico City.) AMLO quickly lost the support of the deportee and return migrant community when, shortly after his inauguration, he cut one of the few programs that existed specifically to support the economic integration of deportees and returnees, the Fondo de Apoyo al Migrante (FAM; see final section of this chapter). At the same time, however, as I describe in Chapter 3, some younger returnees leave the United States in order to be able to pursue higher education and professional careers. And for English-speaking migrants, globalization of the labor force has transformed the economic possibilities upon return to Mexico. Many find their first footing in "nearshored" industries such as call centers operated by US companies (Da Cruz 2018; Jacobo Suárez, Despagne and Chávez 2022), and increasingly as coders (Tracey 2021).

The Bracero Program and Operation Wetback

Both Guerin-Gonzalez and Weber argue that during the early twentieth century, US and Mexican publics and authorities wanted to see Mexican laborers as "homing pigeons" that would always return to their natal country, rather than settle permanently in the United States. The Bracero Program—the guest worker program between the United States and Mexico created in 1942 and extended until 1964, employing approximately 5 million Mexican nationals in total (Kang 2017)—embedded this solo male circular migration, long an informal feature of much Mexican labor in the United States but by no means its exclusive form, as the only authorized form of migration.⁵

Ostensibly created to make up for a farm labor shortage created by World War II, despite the fact that both the Farm Security Administration and the Department of Health showed there was no absolute farm labor shortage going into World War II (Mitchell 2012, 10), the Bracero Program was controversial from the start and was approved only on the condition that it did not drive down wages for US-citizen workers (Mitchell 2012, 30). Nevertheless, it did: between 1953 and 1959, according to Ngai (2004), farm wages rose 14 percent nationwide, but remained frozen in areas with bracero labor. According to Mitchell (2012, 196), they even fell: the piece rate paid in the 1951 tomato harvest in San Joaquin County, California varied between 15 and 18 cents per fifty-pound box; in 1958, it was 12 cents.

The Bracero Program is a major touchstone in scholarship and public knowledge about the history of Mexican migration to the United States. However, it is not a representative period in the relationship between the countries, but an exceptional one that nevertheless solidified certain patterns in ways that continue to reverberate today. First, the program was unique in

⁵ Mitchell (2012) clarifies that while the Bracero Program is most commonly referred to in the singular, it was "in reality a suite of programs over its history. From 1942 to 1943, it was governed solely by a diplomatic agreement between Mexico and the United States; from 1943 to 1947, diplomatic agreements were supplemented by Public Law 45. After the expiration of PL 45 in 1947, the program was operated by U.S. agencies on an ad hoc basis (though still governed by various international agreements). In 1951, the program was placed back on statutory footing with the passage of PL 78, a Korean wartime emergency measure, which had to be renewed every two years." From this point, it was renewed every two years until its final defeat in 1964.

history because of the high proportion of Mexican laborers came to the United States with official authorization; at no other moment has there existed guest worker authorization on a similar scale. Secondly, the program served to cement a new regime for Mexican labor in the United States, in which immigration enforcement was central, as well as an economics in which workers' subsistence and reproductive wages were de-coupled.

The program is also significant from a gender perspective. The Bracero Program recruited able-bodied, single male workers for temporary contracts. This replicated, and codified, the circular migration pathways that in the past had happened without state oversight. Such a concretization of solo male migration also enabled growers to pay their workers less than they would have had to pay domestic workers because they did not have to pay a wage that provided for both domestic subsistence and reproduction, but one in which the economies of the two were distinct: workers needed domestic subsistence (at reduced rates, because they often lived in workers' camps or spartan bunkhouses built specifically for Braceros), but their reproduction was still in Mexico, where the cost of living was much lower.

Burawoy (1976) describes this phenomenon in the contexts of Southern Africa and the United States to understand the relationship between migrant labor, migration processes, and the reproduction of the labor force. He writes, "a system of migrant labor is characterized by the institutional differentiation and physical separation of the processes of renewal and maintenance." This means that workers' and their families' relationships to the economy are split between two states and economies. While—in the schema laid out by Marx in *Capital*—the wage must consist of the "maintenance" of employee and the "reproduction" of his family, in the case of the migrant worker, the reproductive aspect of the wage is lower than it is for domestic workers, because his family lives on a different economy. "The significance of migrant labor lies in the separation of the processes of maintenance and renewal, so that renewal takes place where living standards are low and maintenance takes place within easy access of employment," writes Burawoy. This separation is enforced through "specific legal and political mechanisms which regulate geographical mobility"—such as the Bracero Program or border enforcement—and this has the effect of externalizing the reproduction of the labor force—in other words, keeping it in Mexico.

In terms of enforcement, Kang (2017) argues that the "unprecedented logistical challenges" of the Bracero Program effected a "mid-century transformation of the INS." While other accounts have characterized the agency as a pawn of southwestern agribusiness or "one of several state and nonstate actors complicit in the exploitation of ethnic Mexican workers," Kang argues that overseeing guest workers at such a large scale prompted the agency to center immigration and border enforcement, which had previously been "peripheral" concerns for the "locally-minded agency." Thus, not only did the Bracero Program codify circular migration as the only authorized possibility for migration from Mexico, it also brightened the line between authorized and unauthorized migration through enforcement. That central role of enforcement remained in force even at the termination of the Bracero Program, when from one year to the next, migration flows were rendered "illegal," and continues to define US border and immigration policy today.

In addition to the way that the Bracero Program cemented the use of solo male circular migration to maximize profits, the period of the Bracero Program also marked another period of mass deportation the prefigured the current era of expulsion. In 1954, the INS initiated Operation Wetback, in which some 1 million Mexicans and US citizens of Mexican descent from the United States. Lytle Hernández (2006, 444) argues that the figure of 1,089,583 apprehensions

during the summer of 1954 is misleading, because most of the deportations were made in Fiscal Year 1954, which spanned 1 July 1953 to 30 July 1954; only 254,096 were made after 1 July 1954. This means that the 1954 attention on Operation Wetback “can be better understood as a massive publicity campaign for what had happened the year before.”

Lytle Hernández also argues that the Mexican government played a major role in spurring the deportations associated with Operation Wetback. Many Mexican agribusinessmen, especially in the north of the country, opposed the Bracero Program because they believed that it would create a shortage of domestic labor in Mexico. They were further frustrated by the fact that many potential workers who did not qualify as Braceros—whether because of health or age limitations, or because they owned land, or lacked agricultural experience or a written recommendation from their local authorities certifying that their labor was not needed locally—crossed undocumented to the United States. “Therefore,” writes Lytle Hernández (2006, 425-426), “even though the Bracero Program delivered two million legal temporary Mexican workers to U.S. Farms and ranches between 1942 and 1964, an increasingly large number of Mexicans were working illegally outside of Mexico and within the United States during the same years.”

Anti-Bracero Program interests such as agribusinessmen pressured the Mexican government to prevent unauthorized labor migration. In turn, the Mexican government not only increased their own enforcement of the border, but also called a meeting with the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Justice, the INS, and the U.S. Border Patrol to demand that—in exchange for Mexico’s participation in the Bracero Program—the U.S. improve their border control, including returning unsanctioned bordercrossers to Mexico. As Lytle Hernández writes, “these demands for improved control over unsanctioned entry into the United States linked the U.S. Border Patrol directly to the Bracero Program” (Lytle Hernández 2006, 427). In response to these demands, the US shifted many Border Patrol agents, and all new hires, to the country’s southern border, and began a program of “Special Mexican Deportation Parties.” Prior to 1943, there had been more officers stationed along the northern border than the southern (Lytle Hernández 2006, 427). Lytle Hernández argues that this 1943 shift in the agency “marked the beginning of the U.S. Border Patrol’s intense focus upon Mexican nationals,” and that the percentage of Mexicans among total apprehensions jumped from “a roving average of 17 to 56 percent between 1924 and 1940 to a steady average of over 90 percent between 1943 and 1954” (Lytle Hernández 2006, 429).

In addition to the Border Patrol’s shift of focus to the US-Mexico border, the enforcement practices inaugurated during this period carry into today, and have contributed to shaping the Great Expulsion. After concerns that deported migrants would simply cross the border again, in 1945, the US and Mexico reached an agreement in which Mexican officials would take custody of deportees and relocate them into the interior of the country. While initially most were relocated by train, in 1951, the two countries began daily flights from California and Texas to the interior of Mexico (Lytle Hernández 2006, 430). Similar flights came to Mexico City until 2018; just as in the 1950s, they were discontinued as a result of cost-cutting measures. When they were briefly re-initiated in 2020 (only to be stopped again due to the COVID-19 pandemic), they were sent to Guadalajara instead of Mexico City, despite the fact that Mexico’s National Institute of Migration has only a small office of representation there. Deportee activists argued that it only made sense when seen from the perspective of aiming to circumvent deportee organizing and media attention. Likewise, Lytle Hernández writes that “officials involved in the forced removal of deportees to the interior steered the lifts away from Mexico City, which was the hub of Mexico’s media, and towards locations that either needed the labor or appreciated the

dollars that deportees returned with” (Lytle Hernández 2006, 434).

Hart-Celler, the Illegalization of Migration, and the Mixed Blessings of IRCA

Facing nativist pressures, the Bracero Program ended in 1964 (Mitchell 2012). The after-effects of its termination mark another key turning point in the creation of a permanent undocumented class and the contemporary reality of the Great Expulsion. 1965 saw both the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, and the creation of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). The BIP birthed the famously abusive *maquiladora*, or assembly plant, industry, by permitting US companies to operate assembly plants within twenty kilometers of the border—despite the protectionist import-substitution industrialization policies that defined Mexico’s approach to development from 1952-1970.

The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 ended the quotas that had been created in 1924 and renewed in 1952, as a response to World War II and the massive demand for emigration from Europe, as well as the renewed political alliances between the US and European countries. This improved the possibilities of immigration for many Europeans, but did so at the expense of rendering the existing migration flows from Mexico unauthorized. The Act imposed new quotas that were global and equitable—20,000 per country (Ngai 2004). This meant that Mexico had a quota identical to the rest of Latin America, despite its much larger, longstanding migration flows. Though the demand for Mexican labor had not gone away, the authorization of its flows had. For the first time, there was no authorized, or “legal,” manner to account for the large labor migration flows circulating between the US and Mexico. (Though the Act expanded the H-2 guest worker programs, these were, and remain, far from sufficient to meet demand.) At the same time, the law re-oriented US immigration policy to center on “family unification,” enabling naturalized citizens and green card holders to sponsor visas for their immediate family. Though Mexicans with family who were already in the United States benefited from this, those who did not have such ties had no recourse but to migrate undocumented.

This temporal coincidence of the end of the Bracero Program and the readjustment of the US’ quota system is a major turning point in the history of migration between the United States and Mexico. It marks the start of large-scale undocumented migration to the US. And, as elsewhere in this history, gender plays an important role. While the BIP was supposed to provide jobs that would make up for the loss of employment caused by the end of the Bracero Program, in reality the BIP’s workforce was quickly feminized: many plants preferred to hire young women, who they saw as less likely to organize and more responsive to instructions (Lorey 1999). Instead of providing employment to ex-braceros, it brought women—many of whom had not previously worked in the waged workforce—to the north of the country, and initiated them into a particularly hostile form of factory labor in which they were treated as “disposable,” as is demarcated by the dramatic increases in feminicides along the northern border, which, sadly, continue (Fernández-Kelly 1983, Wright 2006, Driver 2015).

Meanwhile, though the Bracero Program was over, US growers continued to demand farm labor, and had grown accustomed to the lower wages of Braceros relative to US nationals. As Mitchell writes, “nearly twenty years of Braceroism had recalibrated the relations of production to a standard set by indentured labor” (Mitchell 2012, 364). Later, he adds: “by the end of the program it was simply inconceivable that the industry could be restructured in any fundamental way” (Mitchell 2012, 417).

The conjuncture of this entrenched reliance on immigrant labor and the absence of immigration pathways authorized by the Hart-Celler Act is responsible for rendering migration

“illegal.” While the 1929 criminalization of crossing the border outside of a port of entry created the concept of an act of “illegal” entry, it was the passage of the Hart-Celler Act that made so-called “illegal immigration” a mass phenomenon. From Hart-Celler on, undocumented immigration has been baked in to the US economy; undocumented migration became “informally authorized” (Plascencia 2009). This is the context in which my informants migrated and lived undocumented in the United States.

To add to this conjuncture, at the same time as the US moved toward more restrictive laws with regard to non-family immigration, Mexico liberalized its longtime anti-emigration stance. From 1970 to 1976, Mexico faced an economic crisis, in which consumer prices doubled; President Luís Echeverría was forced to devalue the peso and ask for help from the IMF (Minian 2018). This crisis, coupled with the neo-Malthusian concern about population growth being raised globally, prompted Echeverría to amend Mexico’s 1936 Ley General de la Población in 1974 to focus on lowering fertility rates and regulating rather than prohibiting emigration (Minian 2018). From the 1970s on, supporting the rights of the undocumented would be imperative for the Mexican government, which would make gradual policy changes to better incorporate Mexicans abroad into its polity, such as strengthening consulates and eventually allowing dual nationality and the right to vote from abroad (Delano 2011).

This solidification of undocumented immigration as a key stratum of the US workforce also laid the groundwork for increasing border militarization and immigration controls, which gained traction and visibility starting in the 1970s. The 1960s and 1970s saw a shift in Americans’ attitudes towards immigrants, and the start of the contemporary “push and pull” between spectacles of sovereignty and workforce needs. Stagflation sparked renewed nativism at the same time as Mexican immigrants, no longer beholden to the rules of the Bracero program, began to move to cities and become more visible. The INS began establishing checkpoints on the roads north from the US-Mexico border, and in 1976, the Supreme Court decision *US v. Martinez Fuerte* determined that immigration officials could refer drivers to secondary inspection at Border Patrol checkpoints on the basis of appearing Mexican (Minian 2018). That same year, the 1976 Eiberg bill ended the ability for parents of US citizen children to waive their labor certification requirement, meaning the end of a legal path for undocumented parents of US citizens to remain in the United States (Minian 2018). And in 1977, the INS conducted a massive raid in the San Diego/Tijuana region that, by pushing migrants into the deserts to circumvent the port of entry, that raid can be seen as marking the start of the contemporary iteration of the phenomenon of migrant deaths in the deserts of the borderlands (Minian 2018).

In the 1980s, this push and pull between increased militarization and provisions for the creation of a permanent, undocumented family class continued. Public opinion about migration shifted negatively again in 1981 with the Mariel Boat Lift. Between April and October 1980—starting just a month after President Carter signed the Refugee Act, which created asylum as we know it in the US today—125,000 Cuban asylum-seekers arrived to the United States. At the same time as Mariel demonstrated that asylum would be a major part of US refugee policy going forward, it took the country and its leaders by surprise, and generated enough backlash that Ronald Reagan scaled back the asylum program nearly as soon as he took office in 1981 (Hamlin 2015). Yet the nativist backlash extended beyond only asylum, casting all immigration in a negative light.

The Mariel Boat Lift not only brought asylum-seekers into the public eye, but also specifically queer asylum-seekers. Peña (2005) writes that gay men who came to the US during Mariel had grown up in one of Cuba's most repressive periods with regard to homosexuality, and

that in Miami, "these visible Mariel gay men had an impact at the street level, on daily life." As McKinnon (2016) writes, "by the mid 1990s, the courts had heard enough sexuality- and gender-related cases to realize that there were not only gaps in the protections offered through the application of the UN refugee definition, but that it was necessary to address those gaps." In 1994, the US passed a provision stating that persecution by one's government on the basis of homosexuality counted as persecution because of membership in a social group" (McKinnon 2016). Five years later, *Hernandez-Montiel v. INS* created a precedent for "gay men with female sexuality identities" to be eligible for asylum, and in 2011 the US incorporated gender identity and expression into eligible "social groups." McKinnon argues that these changes to asylum law were made partially as part of US diplomacy, aiming to globalize a US vision of "LGBT right as human rights" through foreign policy. While these provisions for asylum have enabled numerous queer and trans asylum-seekers to gain asylum, provided they can correctly perform their oppression and gender identity and/or sexuality (Vogler 2019), the trans deportees and returnees whom I interviewed are not individuals who sought asylum on the basis of persecution. Rather, with one exception, they were childhood arrivals raised in the United States, and whose presence there was later criminalized. They are a type of queer migrant that US border and migration policy never anticipated.

Those child arrivals are, however, a type of migrant whose presence was made possible by another policy of that era. In 1982, the Supreme Court case *Plyer v. Doe* gave all undocumented children the right to public education. This opened up the possibility of the migration of whole families, not just breadwinners; Rodríguez (2021) argues that this court case created the "Dreamer" narrative, because of the wording in the court ruling that undocumented children not be prevented from contributing "in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation"; it is the decision that enabled many of my informants in Chapters 3 and 4 to attend US public schools without discrimination based on their immigration status. This right to public education is also a key difference between the United States and Mexico, where—as I show in Chapter 2—such a right is not guaranteed, with consequences for return migrants and their families: many deportee and returnee parents who have not successfully registered their US-born children's Mexican nationality struggle to enroll them in public schools; the need for a similar policy, and for transitional classes like the US' English Language Learner classes came up multiple times in my informants' conversations about enrolling return migrant children (or US-born children of return migrants) in Mexican public schools.

Four years after *Plyer v. Doe*, Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Gonzalez O'Brien (2018) writes that IRCA was unique among immigration legislation in that it aimed to recognize the necessity of immigrant labor rather than focus solely on enforcement. Yet though the law is best remembered as "*la amnestía*," for its amnesty of 2.3 million undocumented immigrants, its long-term effects have been both to contribute to making circular migration impossible—and therefore to the solidification of an exploitable permanent undocumented family class in the US economy—and to help set up the path of mounting criminalization of migration that came to define the 1990s. This is because besides large-scale amnesty, the law introduced employer sanctions for the first time, increased funding for immigration enforcement both at the border and in the interior of the country, and made stricter penalties for "harboring undocumented workers or facilitating their presence in the United States" (Gonzalez O'Brien 2018). These two factors—the criminalization of immigration and the existence of a permanent undocumented family class—are crucial conditions of possibility for the Great Expulsion.

Prevention Through Deterrence and the End of Circular Migration

Though IRCA was passed to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants to the United States, the number grew faster than ever after its passage. It also grew in different ways, becoming more feminized and including more families. Where from 1965 to 1986, 80 percent of undocumented migrants were solo men, 76 percent of whom returned home within five years (Minian 2018), the militarization of the border made crossing too harrowing for regular, repeated migration. Instead, whole families migrated, just once. Not only did undocumented children have the right to public education, their families had no choice but to use it, if they wanted a chance of staying together. Additionally, starting in the early 1980s, many Central American and Mexican women migrated to the US to look for work, both because of “push” factors such as civil wars, economic crises, and development strategies that reduced job opportunities, and because of demand for domestic workers in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Between these factors, by 1990, women and children made up one-third, rather than one-fourth, of migrants (Minian 2018). Between 1986 and 1996, the undocumented population in the US nearly doubled (Gonzalez O’Brien 2018). The Great Expulsion is not an expulsion of solo male workers, then, but of entire families who have settled long-term in the United States—and for some of whom it is the only home they have ever known.

Throughout the 1990s, the increased border militarization and enforcement begun by IRCA escalated. A key date for this is 1993-1994, which marks the inauguration of Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD). PTD increased border enforcement at common urban crossing points, re-routing migration through surrounding deserts and dramatically increasing migrant deaths in the process. Dunn (2009) argues that Operation Blockade, initiated in September 1993, was precipitated in large part by a lawsuit brought by students and staff from Bowie High School in downtown El Paso, who argued that the agency’s presence on the school campus was disruptive and that officers were racial-profiling students of Mexican descent. Displaced from central El Paso, the Border Patrol initiated Operation Blockade, focusing on the border line itself. Dunn writes that “this deterrence-displacement strategy was a profound shift from the unit’s traditional emphasis on apprehending unauthorized border crossers once they had entered the country” (Dunn 2009, 61), and that it came as a shock to undocumented day laborers from Juárez, many of whom had crossed illegally for years. Yet complaints of abuse by agents were down from El Pasoans, and with border crossing “pushed largely out of sight....in the view of most local El Pasoans the illegal crossing problem was solved” (Dunn 2009, 88).

This meant that though the operation was initially planned as a temporary measure, once sector chief Silvestre Reyes—a charismatic El Paso native and the first Hispanic Border Patrol sector chief—saw its success, he decided instead to expand the program, despite opposition from the Catholic church and both the US and Mexican governments, who told Reyes that he was “going to single-handedly torpedo the NAFTA agreement” (Dunn 2009). The program was gradually implemented across the US-Mexico Border; from 1993 to 1996, the number of Border Patrol positions grew by 98% in the San Diego sector, and by 55% nationwide.

Just as in the 1970s, when increased border enforcement and decreased opportunities for authorized migration coincided with increased migration from Mexico, Prevention Through Deterrence coincided with the migration of 11.5 million so-called “NAFTA refugees” (Grandin 2019) traveling northward from Mexico as the country’s currency collapsed and its rural economy disintegrated. Yet rather than actually attempt “deterrence,” as the collective name of all the Border Patrol sectors’ local operations announces, the policy made crossing the US-

Mexico border so harrowing that it served as a necropolitical (Mbembe 2003) test of migrants' stamina—with specific and predictable effects.

Rather than stopping migration, the policy instead made it a singular, rather than cyclical, event, and in turn cemented the permanent undocumented class as a planned segment of the economy. The percentage of undocumented immigrants working in California's agricultural industry increased from under ten percent in 1990 to forty percent by 1997, for instance (Andreas 1999). As Andreas (1999) writes, "the increased risk and cost of crossing the border [has] increased the incentive for many illegal immigrants to extend their stay and perhaps even remain permanently." Migration to the United States increased steadily throughout the 1990s, and peaked in 1999-2000 (Pew Research Center 2005b), and—as in the 1970s—immigrants' increased visibility sparked nativist backlash.

Crimmigration, IIRIRA, and The Great Expulsion

The aftermath of IRCA has been marked by a progressive criminalization of immigrants that continues to define the current era of immigration policy. This criminalization has been both more ambitious and more far-reaching than it was at any past moment in US-Mexico relations. Where González O'Brien argues that prior to IRCA, enforcement of undocumented migration was a "patchwork" affair, it was also largely limited to border enforcement agencies within their borderlands jurisdiction. Menjivar and Abrego (2012) argue that this progressive criminalization of migration can be described as "legal violence": "a strategy coded into law and which uses legal language that not only permits various forms of violence against immigrants, but on that also makes abuses possible and acceptable (Abrego et al 2017).

Post-IRCA, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, and the 1990 Immigration Act all expanded deportable offenses (Abrego et al 2017, Macías-Rojas 2018, Kerwin 2018). Macías-Rojas (2018) argues that President Clinton and Democratic senators were trying to appropriate Republican anticrime rhetoric and to "recast unauthorized migration as a crime." Immigration played a key role in 1994 federal and state elections, in part due to spiking gang violence in Los Angeles and elsewhere, which the previous Acts had rhetorically connected to immigration; for instance, California passed Proposition 187, which prohibited undocumented immigrants from accessing any government-funded social services, including public schools (The proposition was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court).

1996-1997 is the watershed year that my informants most frequently referred to when they discussed the dramatic growth of deportation as an immigration enforcement tool. Two key laws were passed in this year: the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA, colloquially pronounced "Ira Ira").

AEDPA "expanded the criminal grounds for deportation, limited relief from removal, restricted judicial review, and expanded mandatory detention" while The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act "restricted immigrants' access to public health benefits" (Kerwin 2018). IIRIRA, meanwhile, "eroded the rule of law by eliminating due process from the overwhelming majority of removal cases, curtailing equitable relief from removal, mandating detention (without individualized custody determinations) for broad swaths of those facing deportation, and erecting insurmountable, technical roadblocks to asylum." The expansion of eligible crimes was also retroactively applied: "almost as soon as IIRIRA went into effect, a steady stream of media and human rights report began to document the removal of long-term residents, including LPRs with US citizen children, based on nonviolent crimes they had

committed years (sometimes decades) in the past” (Kerwin 2018).

In addition to expanding the offenses that lead to automatic deportation (for both undocumented immigrants and green card holders), the Act severely limited judges’ discretion to grant a stay of removal. Prior to IIRIRA, non-citizens in deportation proceedings who had lived continuously in the United States for seven years, had “good moral character,” and who could show that their deportation would cause hardship to themselves or to a US citizen or legal permanent resident spouse, parent, or child, were often granted a “suspension of deportation” (Caldwell 2019). IIRIRA replaced suspension of deportation with cancellation of removal, which is only possible to be granted to non-green card holders if then can demonstrate ten years of continuous presence in the US, good moral character, no convictions for a broad range of crimes, and that their removal would cause “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” to a US citizen or legal permanent resident spouse, parent, or child (Kerwin 2018). As Caldwell (2019) documents, the bar for “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” is practically impossible. It also created three- and ten-year bars to authorized re-entry for those who have either crossed the border outside of a port of entry, or have been in the United States undocumented. Eliminating these bars is one of the main goals of the activists described in Chapter 3.

IIRIRA also increased deportations by streamlining removal processes. It established “expedited removal,” which eliminated due process in removal cases, initially only at ports of entry and gradually for more and more cases, and “reinstatement of removal,” which applies to non-citizens who had previously been deported or ordered to be removed and who had re-entered the country. Under the more recent Operation Streamline, launched in 2005 in Texas, migrants plea guilty en masse, serve time in detention, and are deported as part of their conviction (Kerwin 2018). Abrego et al (2017) argue that Operation Streamline and fast-track immigration proceedings significantly increase the number of “criminal aliens” because anyone they process is given a misdemeanor immigration conviction; “prior to Operation Streamline,” they write, “the vast majority of people apprehended on the US southern border were given a Voluntary Return, an administrative violation that carried no criminal charge.” The Act also expanded mandatory detention of both migrants considered “removable on both criminal and security grounds” (Kerwin 2018) and asylum seekers. This means that the daily detention population in the United States has increased from 9,000 in 1996 to 52,000 in 2019 (Reyes 2018, National Immigration Forum 2021).

Finally (for the purposes of this dissertation), IIRIRA expanded partnerships between federal immigration enforcement and state and local law enforcement, specifically through the 287(g) program, which allows state and local law enforcement to enter into Memoranda of Understanding to share data and enforce immigration law. Abrego et al (2017) argue that prior to IIRIRA, “there was a widespread legal and political consensus among government and legal officials that immigration enforcement was an exclusively federal authority... well over 90 percent of deportation cases originated with the Border Patrol in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas,” and that even though there are a limited number of 287(g) partnerships, the mere fact of their existence has contributed to the public understanding that all undocumented immigrants are criminals (and deserve to be processed as such in immigration proceedings).

IIRIRA and AEDPA have also been theorized as affecting low-income, trans of color migrants specifically. Not only did they expand the range of crimes for which a migrant—including a Legal Permanent Resident, or green card holder—could be deported and change the definition of the term “conviction” with regard to “crimes of moral turpitude,” they also enabled the law to be applied retroactively, to admissions of previous penalizable behavior. Gehi (2009)

writes of the way that these provisions disproportionately affect poor people and people of color:

Any admission of an aggravated felony or a crime involving moral turpitude, regardless of whether the person knew it was a crime or if the charge was dismissed in court, constitutes a conviction and renders an immigrant person deportable. Due to these changes, a problem arises for my non-citizen clients when they are questioned by an immigration officer about whether or not they have ever engaged in prostitution. According to the new definition of conviction if my client answers affirmatively, they are deportable even if they have never been convicted for prostitution, or did not know that prostitution is illegal in the United States. Sometimes my clients are coerced by immigration officers to admit to engaging in sex work in their country of origin, and then they are subjected to removal proceedings. (Gehi 2009, 321)

These aspects of the new law are particularly damaging to trans migrants because they punish "survival crimes"—even an allegation of using the "wrong" bathroom can result in arrest for such crimes. Additionally, writes Gehi, trans individuals are more likely than cisgender individuals to plead guilty, because of fear of violence in prison.⁶

Though, as I have shown here, the US has a long history of utilizing deportation as a form of migration control, IIRIRA nevertheless marked a shift in the intensity of its usage significant enough to demarcate a new era in US border and migration policy. In the aftermath of IIRIRA, deportations increased from 51,000 in 1995 to a peak of 432,000 in 2013 (DHS 2017). It is the law most directly responsible for the Great Expulsion.

After 9/11, border and migration policy changed again. The effects of 9/11 might well be understood as putting the nail in the coffin on the possibility of immigration policies aimed at supporting authorized migrant flows rather than enforcement. The fallout of 9/11 stopped a possible comprehensive immigration reform bill—including negotiations with Mexico about reforming authorized flows for the first time since the Bracero Program—in its tracks (Delano 2011) and instead concentrated resources on establishing the Department of Homeland Security, which is estimated to have cost the US \$589 from 2001 to 2011 (Carter and Cox 2011). The 2002 Homeland Security Act increased funding for immigration enforcement agencies, and deportations doubled in the ten years after 9/11, further criminalizing undocumented presence in the United States.

Beyond the restrictive policies of the 1990s and early 2000s, too, President Obama's Secure Communities Program required local law enforcement to share fingerprints with the Department of Homeland Security, resulting in the highest deportations the US had ever seen,

⁶ Though the focus of this dissertation is not asylum, it's important to note that IIRIRA and the REAL ID Act both made the process of applying for asylum, an important tool for many trans migrants, more strict. IIRIRA created a deadline of one year from the time of entry into the United States for affirmative asylum applications (applications submitted by an individual who has been granted entry into the United States, in contrast to defensive asylum, in which migrants ask for asylum at the border as a defense against deportation). This is a hurdle for trans asylum seekers because many do not know that applying for asylum is an option, or they struggle to find a lawyer sympathetic to trans issues. Meanwhile, the REAL ID Act created more stringent standards for evidence of persecution in one's home country and enabled judges to "reject an asylum claim because of the applicant's 'demeanor,' any 'inconsistency [or] inaccuracy,' or because an applicant's relatives were extorted by terrorists" (Gehi 2009, 331). Gehi states that the increased burden of proof is specifically challenging for trans asylum applicants because their "persecution is masked by legitimized practices," such as false arrests (Gehi 2009, 332).

earning him the moniker "Deporter-in-Chief." Some of my informants had t-shirts that read "Deported by Democrats" and/or "Forced to Return by Democrats," a nod to the policies of the Obama administration. Golash-Boza (2015) writes of Obama-era deportation programs that they are "a U.S. policy response designed to relocate surplus labor to the periphery and to keep labor in the United States compliant."

Amid this atmosphere of rising deportations and hostility toward immigrants, the Great Expulsion began in earnest concurrently with the Obama administration. The 2008 financial crisis and ensuing recession caused return migration to increase so sharply that migration between the US and Mexico reached a net negative (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015). This historic reversal of migration flows stems from a variety of factors: not only the increasing economic difficulty of being undocumented in the United States (and undocumented immigrants' specific vulnerability in moments of economic crisis), but also the psychological burden of living undocumented—including increased fear of deportation or of the deportation of a loved one, and, finally, the lack of higher education and employment opportunities for young people who had grown up undocumented in the United States from a young age.

In addition to the Secure Communities Program and the financial recession, the repeated failure of the DREAM Act also contributed to the Great Expulsion, particularly of young, English-dominant childhood arrivals who had been educated in US public schools, and often had excelled. As I describe in Chapter 3, a significant number of young return migrants returned to Mexico after the DREAM Act—which would have provided a pathway to citizenship for certain undocumented immigrants who had arrived to the US as children—failed to pass in 2006, 2007 and 2011. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, which passed in 2012 under Obama, later began to offer temporary, renewable work visas to individuals meeting similar criteria, but the program offers no pathway to legal permanent residency or citizenship.

These so-called "functional Americans" (Rodríguez 2013) are another aspect of current return migration dynamics that distinguish the current period of deportation and return migration from past periods of mass expulsion and repatriation. The deportation drives of the Great Depression, Operation Wetback, and the workplace raids of the 1970s largely targeted single male laborers, mostly near the US-Mexico border, many of whom had not been in the US for a long time. Until IIRIRA, extended time in the United States, as well as family ties to US citizens (including US-born children), could be used as a defense against deportation, meaning that fewer individuals who had lived undocumented in the interior of the country were undocumented. The current flows of deportation and return apply not only to male workers but to entire families living all over the United States, who have often been in the country for many years. This class did not exist in 1932, 1954, or 1978. This is what makes the current phenomena different—what makes it the "Great Expulsion."

And what of the Trump administration? In large part, it was the election of Donald Trump that pushed me to become a geographer of migration. Yet as I have educated myself about migration, I have found that my interpretation of the Trump-era policies coincides with Abrego et al (2017), who write that while Trump's immigration-related Executive Orders "have generally been understood—especially in the media—as an about-face for US immigration policy and practice," in fact they are part of a consistent trajectory of criminalization stretching from 1986 through the 1990s and to now, and especially to precedents set by IIRIRA.

The most important way in which President Trump altered US border and migration policy is by centering violently hostile anti-immigrant rhetoric as a cornerstone of his campaign and his presidency, and moving such rhetoric into mainstream public discourse and imagination.

Brown (2010) argues that in a moment of waning state sovereignty, nation-states have begun to build border walls as “hyperbolic tokens” of sovereignty that “function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise.” Trump is a master of this theatricality. And along with the obvious example of the border wall, mass deportation serves a very similar function, both within undocumented communities for whom it instills tangible fear, and for the voting public, whom it convinces of its efficacy. Trump took full advantage of this aspect of spectacle, which helps explain why—despite, for instance, severe agricultural labor shortages, even before the COVID-19 pandemic—US administrations of both parties have continued to insist on both making the border less passable and making authorized migration more and more difficult.

The most visible changes to US border and migration policy under Trump applied not to undocumented migration but to asylum. The most notorious of these is the 2018 “Zero Tolerance” initiative, which separated asylum-seeking parents from their children at the border and placed them in separate detention facilities. Other highly visible, and highly cruel, anti-asylum policies initiated by Trump include “Remain in Mexico,” in which asylum-seekers wait for their court hearings on the Mexican side of the border, and the use of Title 42 to prevent asylum-seekers from entering the US during the Covid pandemic (see conclusion).

A less visible difference between the Obama and Trump administrations is in their alternatives to detention program. While Obama deported more individuals than Trump, his administration’s policies aimed to allocate detention and deportation resources to migrants with criminal records. His Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which went into effect on July 2015; according to Marc Rosenblum (2015, quoted in Abrego et al 2017), 87 percent of the 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the US at the time of PEP’s initiation were outside the program’s priorities. Trump eliminated the PEP by executive order during his first week in office, along with multiple alternatives to detention created under Obama (discussed further in the Conclusion).

Yet even Zero Tolerance had Obama-era precedents. To curb the flow of unaccompanied minors arriving to the US-Mexico border to seek asylum, for instance, in 2014 Obama persuaded Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto to create the Programa Frontera Sur/Southern Border Program, which increased the size of Mexico’s own border patrol in an effort to keep migrants from reaching the United States (Arizona Public Media 2016, Frelick 2016). While these changes are largely outside the scope of this dissertation, I describe in Chapter 4 the recent increase in asylum claims in Mexico, and increase in non-asylum-seeking migrants whose destination country, whether initially intended or not, is Mexico. This is an effect of the Southern Border Program, among other programs that have directed US support to increase Mexico’s migration security apparatus, and has created the need for the types of solidarity I describe in that chapter.

To recap a long history, then, this section has surveyed US border, migration, and deportation policy since the late nineteenth century in order to better understand the contemporary “Great Expulsion” and what distinguishes it from past waves of deportation and return migration. Starting with the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the Supreme Court cases that legislated racial categories and moving to the increasing rules governing travel over the US-Mexico border, US border and migration policy shows a gradual criminalization of entry into the United States and a racialization of that criminalization. Twentieth-century policies solidified Mexicans as exploitable, solo male workers, and the political-economic transition from authorizing circular flows to condoning unauthorized flows that enabled workers to be further

exploited. The codification of undocumented workers as part of US economy at the same time as the border became too militarized to cross repeatedly created a permanent undocumented family class whose workers are paid migrant wages (those whose maintenance and renewal are keyed to separate economies), even when workers' families are in the US as well. However, this has created a new political problematic—that of “functional Americans” who are undocumented but are not migrant laborers. As Golash-Boza (2015) and Anderson (2016) attest, it is largely young men who fit the DREAMer age bracket but not the high-achieving DREAMer profile who are targeted for deportation. Anderson (2016) writes that “between 2000 and 2010, the Mexican origin population in the United States drastically shifted to include fewer men between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (Gandini, Lozano-Ascencio and Gaspar Olvera 2005, 75),” and goes on to suggest that “cross-referencing suggests that a great many of these young men have been deported or returned to Mexico.”

Perhaps the most significant synthesis of this history, and one that is visible in the political recognition of these undocumented young adults, is the way that US border and migration policy in fact has a history of moving towards a policy of no policy. It has created a situation in which it is more favorable to not offer forms of authorized labor migration and instead to regulate it through deportation, and to offer only temporary stopgap measures in the form of DACA, rather than seek real political solutions, no matter the emotional and logistical costs of this absence of policy for the individuals they affect. The spectacle of exclusion that by now is familiar to contemporary Americans is a side-effect of a policy of having, effectively, no migration policy with regard to Mexico.

Mexico's Current Policies

Unfortunately, Mexico also effectively has a “policy of no policy” with regard to repatriated citizens. While there are several federal programs aimed at supporting deportees and returnees, they focus almost exclusively on migrants' initial arrival. While President Vicente Fox (2000–2006) showed significant interest in migration, his successors have had much more limited interest; one of current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador's early decisions was to cut one of the remaining programs aimed at return migrants, the Fondo del Apoyo al Migrantes (FAM) as part of his emphasis on “moral austerity” (Tracey 2020), despite ongoing rhetoric on his part about the importance of migrants and their remittances. (Started in 2009 and overseen by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit and state governments, the FAM provided grants of 25,000 pesos (1,250 USD) for entrepreneurship. It was only open to those who had a proof of removal order.) While some states—Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Tlaxcala—have Secretarías de Migrantes, there is no federal approach to educational and economic reinsertion, and the federal bureaucratic program “Somos Mexicanos” has many problems that need to be addressed (Masferrer, Sánchez y Rodríguez-Abreu 2017). Masferrer and Prieto (2019) write that “in general all the initiatives...have been considered assistentialist.”

As Anderson (2016, 22) notes, four out of the seven existing federal programs aimed at supporting repatriated Mexicans are administered by Mexico's National Institute of Migration (INM). The INM was created in 1993 with the mandate of “‘planning, executing, controlling, supervising and evaluating migratory services’ and coordinating activities with other government offices dealing with migration issues” (Delano 2011); however, its work focuses primarily on migration into Mexico, and according to Delano (2011), the agency has not “played an active role in the debate about the redefinition [of] the Mexican government's emigration policies, which is mostly led by the Foreign Ministry [SRE] and the Executive.”

Delano (2011) also explains that during the 1988 Mexican presidential campaign, both frontrunners sought support from Mexicans living in the United States, and the incumbent PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)'s eventual victory, widely understood to have been fraudulent, provoked significant outcry from Mexican migration organizations in the United States, who criticized the country's emigration policies, demanded voting rights, the end of election corruption in Mexico, better consular services, and a more active presence in the US on the part of the Mexican government to better defend the rights of Mexican migrants there. This led to the creation of the Programa Paisano in 1989 (prior to the establishment of the INM, though the program now falls under the Institute's jurisdiction). Delano (2011) writes that the program "was directed toward guaranteeing by the use of information, humanitarian protection, medical assistance, and legal advice, a safe and easy return for Mexicans coming back to Mexico." The Programa Paisano was initially designed to serve circular migrant families, and continues to operate primarily during vacation times of visiting Mexico such as *semana santa* (holy week), and summer and winter breaks (Pardo Montaña 2017). The Program maintains rest stops along the border and highways, trains citizen observers to provide advice to traveling families (Anderson 2016). It also publishes a yearly *Guía Paisano*, which includes information about identity and importation documents that can be realized at US consulates, rights in the event of being detained in the US, information about highways in Mexico, and relevant government services (Secretaría de Gobernación 2020).

Following the Programa Paisano, in 1990 the Salinas de Gortari administration created the Grupos Beta. Begun as a local border initiative in Baja California to respond to the risks associated with desert conditions and organized crime, the program became federal in 2011 and expanded to nine states (Anderson 2016); there are currently 22 active Grupos Beta (INM 2019). The Grupos Beta are "groups of unarmed agents that offer assistance to migrants in their travels to the United States and that inform them about their rights and the risks they may face" (Pinillos 2018).⁷ The Grupos are charged with "surveillance" at the border—some have even received training from the US Border Patrol—to prevent abuses, crimes, and violence against migrants; they provide emergency rescue, information about migration routes, and rides to bus terminals (Delano 2011, Anderson 2016). However, Perales Garza (2013) notes that there have been repeated complaints to Mexico's National Commission of Human Rights about "irregularities" committed by these groups; Slack (2015) also notes that kidnappers and extortionists often pose as Grupo Beta agents.

The Program for Repatriation to the Interior of Mexico (PRIM), which was started in 2004 as a collaboration between the INM, ICE, and the OIM, provided immediate reception services to the deportation flights that formerly arrived to the Mexico City airport. Since 2013, the PRIM has been part of the program Somos Mexicanos (founded in 2008 under President Calderón as the Humane Repatriation Program), which operates at a variety of common repatriation points and aims to provide a more thorough reception for deportees and returnees, pointing them toward a wide variety of possible government agencies to meet various needs (Pinillos 2018). Somos Mexicanos provides an official repatriation document that can be used to provide a one-time money transfer of up to 9500 pesos, access to belongings retained by US immigration officials, lunch, a backpack, access to a phone call, immediate medical attention (if necessary), and transportation to a bus terminal, where deportees with the official repatriation document often receive up to 50 percent discounts on tickets (Anderson 2016). The programs

⁷ "son grupos de agentes desarmados que proporcionan asistencia a los migrantes en su viaje a Estados Unidos y los informan sobre sus derechos y los peligros que pueden enfrentar"

also publish the *Guía Somos Mexicanos/Guía PRIM*, which provides basic information about identity documents, information about how to receive transfers of money, how to receive public health care and receive assistance looking for work (including information about the Subprograma de Repatriados Trabajando and agricultural development programs); explains the constancia de repatriación, addresses of relevant government offices, warnings about crimes frequently committed against migrants, as well as about the desert of the US-Mexico borderlands (INM N.D.). Finally, in the states along the U.S.-Mexico border, the program Repatriados Trabajando provides a small stipend to support deportees' job search (Anderson 2016).

All of these programs focus on the initial hours and days after a deportee or return migrant's repatriation, and as such, they have been widely critiqued. Jacobo (2014) critiques their focus on "basic assistance" such as food and transport, to the exclusion of needs such as workforce and/or educational reinsertion. Balança (2016, cited in Pinillos 2018) writes that "the agreements between Mexico and its neighbor to the north...have focused on practical aspects of the process of deportation itself (reception points, hours of operation, guarantees to protect migrants' rights, etc) but have not included indications about mechanisms of support once back in Mexico."⁸

The chapters that follow take place in the present reality that the history described here has created. Chapter 2 follows mothers who were deported under the Trump and Obama regimes under the conditions of criminalization of migration described here. The protagonists of Chapter 3 are returnees who consider their experiences of leaving the United States because of a lack of access to higher education a form of forced return. Chapter 4 follows not only an Obama-era deportee, but also connections between the queer return migrant community in Mexico City and the queer migrants for whom Mexico City has become their final destination in their migratory journey. The sharp increase in migration to Mexico City in recent years is an effect of U.S. policies to constrain asylum and militarize the border. The increasingly restrictive policies of the United States have given rise to novel forms of community in Mexico. Yet, as the final section of this chapter describes, Mexico's government offers limited support to deportees and return migrants. Without substantial help from the government, the burden to organize politically and socially falls on civil society organizations—generally organized by return migrants themselves. This is the work on which this dissertation focuses.

⁸ "los acuerdos entre México y su vecino del Norte....describían elementos prácticos relativos al proceso mismo de deportación (puntos de recepción, horarios, garantías de protección de los derechos de los emigrantes, etc.) pero no incluían indicaciones sobre los mecanismos de apoyo una vez en México"

Chapter 2. Routes from the Streets: Deported Mothers and the Transformation of Intimacy

This chapter follows a group of migrant mothers and their allies in their efforts to help others navigate the Mexican bureaucracy, and to lobby for changes that will facilitate return migrants and their families in obtaining Mexican identity documents and access to education. It follows the previous chapter by both showing what life is like on the ground for women post-deportation, and by illustrating the rift between expectations bureaucratic integration is straightforward once individuals are removed to their country of citizenship, and the reality of the Mexican bureaucracy's unpreparedness to address the needs of return migrants. I describe the way that migrants must go through a challenging process of "re-citizenship" in order to become documented as a Mexican citizen. Subsequent chapters, which focus on identity formation, activism, and solidarity with migrants from Central America, build on this chapter by showing the way that return migrants, all of whom have passed through the steps of "citizenship" that I describe here, mobilize that experience toward broader ends.

"We are in a state of emergency"

Days before Mexico City's Covid-19 quarantine began, I watched from the audience as five women—four Mexican deportees from the United States and one Venezuelan with refugee status in Mexico—stood at a conference table facing Mexico's Subsecretary for Human Rights and representatives from the country's Senate and National Population Registry. The women were presenters and audience members at the Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility (*Foro Para el Acceso a la Identidad y Nacionalidad Mexicana de las Personas en Contextos de Movilidad*),⁹ which brought together Mexicans who had lived undocumented in the United States and individuals seeking refugee or asylum status in Mexico. Both types of migrants encounter obstacles to documenting their and their children's rights to be in Mexico that can be so convoluted as to be insurmountable.

"The things we're talking about today are human," said Ana Laura López, an activist in her early forties dressed in a denim coat, ankle boots, and blue beaded earrings. She had presented about having been deported three years earlier from Chicago, where she had lived for sixteen years, and about having left her teenage sons, partially because she did not have their Mexican nationality documents. "We are five migrant mothers. Many of you all have the right to have a family that is complete, that is unified, that has all of its rights. We don't. And we aren't leaving here without a response."

"Sorry if we seem abrupt, or rude," one of the other mothers added. "But we are in a state of emergency."

One of the five women was Lourdes, a 37-year-old mother of two US-born sons. In August 2019, Lourdes was deported from Los Angeles while entering on a tourist visa, something she had done for fifteen years, leaving her sons with her aunt in California and returning to Mexico until sufficient time had passed to be able to enter the United States again. In this case Lourdes's sons had accompanied her to Mexico for their summer breaks from school, and the three of them were entering the US together.

The agents confiscated Lourdes's cell phone and told her that they had found evidence on it that she had worked in the United States. Though she never had, they never showed her the evidence they purported to have found, or returned her cell phone to her. Instead, they deported

⁹ The word "citizenship" in Mexican Spanish is most commonly referred to as "nacionalidad," rather than "ciudadanía."

her from the airport along with her sons—despite the fact that they are citizens, and that Lourdes's aunt was outside the airport, ready to pick them up.¹⁰

This chapter follows the Grupo de Promotoras, a small group of women activists—of which Lourdes became a part—fighting for the rights of deportees, returnees, and their children. I also joined the group from October 2019 through the end of 2020. The group's meetings took place in-person through the March 2020 forum; starting at the end of that month, meetings moved onto Zoom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many ways, the Promotoras' activism follows in the tradition of "motherist" activism in Latin America. Starting most famously with Argentina's Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo and Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, mothers have led social movements across Latin America, most commonly searching for victims of state-sponsored or state-condoned disappearance (Guzman Bouvard 2002, Bejarano 2002, Semo 2015). Disappearance continues to be a major social issue in contemporary Mexico, and mothers' groups continue to constitute the backbone of activism related to it (Monárrez Fragoso 2002, Wright 2011, Paley 2020).

The fight of the deported mothers, however, is not disappearance but bureaucratic recognition—of their US-born children's Mexican nationality and their right to enroll in school. And in contrast to past motherist activism, in which mothers occupy a traditional role in a nuclear family, as well as what I have previously called the "methodological heteronormativity" of past scholarship regarding women return migrants (Boehm 2016, Woo Morales 2019), the key participants in deported mothers' activism are single parents, whose need to complete all the *trámites* [bureaucratic processes] for themselves and their families solo influenced their formation as activists. Despite diverging from other mother-activists in these ways, they are similar in that they, in the words of Wright (2018), "create the spaces of action for the counterpublics who not only defy the Mexican state but that also raise new possibilities for political subjects and their spaces of action." I argue that the Promotoras' mobilization of intimacy as an affect for activist organizing has enabled them to develop a knowledge of bureaucracy that itself is so intimate as to be politically powerful, with the potential to effect change not only for the return migrant community, but with the potential to benefit all migrants in Mexico.

First, the chapter provides context for the challenges faced by the children of return migrants in Mexico, explaining the bureaucratic and practical challenges faced by deported mothers in documenting the birthright Mexican nationality of their US-born children and enrolling them in school. I use ethnographic observations to add a missing element to existing scholarship about these circumstances, arguing that while such children have been celebrated by existing studies for creating a new form of circular migration through effortless binationalism, they face significant barriers to entering into Mexican society that are central to deportee mothers' activism.

Next, I give a fuller introduction to the Grupo de Promotoras, arguing that the group—which formed in response to the fact that Mexico's migration-related civil society organizations were largely male-dominated and not focused on the needs of return migrants—uses intimacy as a crucial aspect of their organizing. This builds on existing scholarship about intimacy in the US-Mexico borderlands and on the northward migrant trail, particularly Luna (2018) and Vogt (2018), and shows that their theorizations of intimacy are also applicable in the context of return migration. By intimacy as an aspect of their organizing, I mean an affect of closeness cultivated

¹⁰ See Boehm (2016, 13) for a similar case of deportation of a Mexican citizen with a valid US tourist visa, based on the suspicion of intention to overstay the visa and immigrate.

by the Promotoras as an integral aspect of their work as activists, in explicit contrast to the affect of male-dominated civil society and activist spaces, which often seem to replicate the bureaucracy itself. By affect, I follow Linz (2021, 286)'s explanation of the concept, also employed to describe its presence in Mexico City community organizing: "I understand affect as that which is immanent to the discursive and corporeal, which may well be excessive and escape articulation, yet which plays very real roles in shaping sensation, interest, attention, attachment, and feeling." Affect is a sensation that permeates actions, discourses, and relationships in a way too slippery to be caught, as though sensed in fleeting ways by all the senses and beyond them. Intimacy permeates the Promotoras' work in ways that are both deliberate and that spiral into their own emergences. Though the women set out to create a setting different from other, male-dominated civil society spaces, the tenor that they created among one another took on its own life, permutating the space's affect of intimacy ever further. Theirs is a form of diasporic intimacy made possible by the shared trauma of expulsion from the United States and necessity of navigating the Mexican bureaucracy.

The following section of the chapter focuses on the Promotoras' main project, a manual for recently deported or returning individuals outlining the routes for obtaining identity documents and access to education. This section builds on scholarship about the close relationship between the State and poor people, and the way that bureaucracy is a form of discipline and control (Merry 1990, Soss et al 2011, Gupta 2012). I argue that this scholarship describes another form of intimacy—that defined as close knowledge of a subject—and that this intimacy, coupled with a unique binational legal consciousness, are key factors enabling the group to be successful in the work it sets out to do.

Lastly, combining the two, I argue that the Promotoras have used intimacy as an affect of organizing to develop a knowledge of the bureaucracy that is so intimate as to be able to effect change within it. Beyond simple linguistic coincidence, the women's intimacy with bureaucracy would not be possible without the affect of intimacy immanent to their organizing. The affect of intimacy that has united their organizing and helped them remain committed to one another to their goals is a key aspects of their work that enables them to be so committed, persistent, and knowledgeable as to exert influence over it.

Citizenizing and Re-Citizenizing

As I describe in the previous chapter, the Mexican government's support for deportees and return migrants is minimal, and focuses on reception during the first days after deportation or return (Anderson 2016). The assumptions implicit in the lack of longer-term support for emplacement processes are that as Mexican citizens, deportees and returnees already have access to all the rights of citizens, and that they have a social safety net. One returnee activist recounted to me that she asked a representative from SIBISO, Mexico City's Secretary of Inclusion and Social Well-Being, why the agency offered recent deportees only three nights of housing. The official replied that after those three nights, deportees can go stay with their families. Yet not all deportees and return migrants have a social safety net—the network of social connections and kinship that help one survive—in Mexico. Many have lived in the United States for most of their adult lives, or since they were children, and have neither the documents to verify their identity, or the know-how to navigate the Mexican bureaucracy.

Pinillos (2020) calls the process of documenting one's Mexican citizenship after return migration "re-citizenizing" [*re-ciudadanización*], writing that "while born in Mexico, individuals who are deported do not recover their rights as citizens automatically upon their return. This

creates a particularly condemning paradox of the 'post-deportation' (Schuster and Majidi 2013) condition in Mexico: access to housing requires identity documents, while accessing identity documents requires proof of residence [*comprobante de domicilio*]. López, the deportee activist, describes the situation in blunter terms: "They're Mexican but aren't treated as such...undocumented there, undocumented here."

The most important aspect of one's re-citizenship is having a CURP [*Clave Única del Registro de la Población*], a unique identity number that is used for everything from school registration, to setting up a bank account, to getting an electric meter. Without a CURP, it's nearly impossible to access any other form of identity documents. (The easiest comparison for those familiar with the United States bureaucracy is a social security number; however, Mexicans have a separate taxpayer identification number, the *Registro Federal de Contribuyentes*, or RFC, and those fortunate enough to be registered with one of the country's social security providers have a separate identification number specifically for accessing those services.)

Besides the CURP, the basic documents that deportee/returnee Mexican citizens need to obtain in order to prove their Mexican identity are a birth certificate and an "INE," a voter ID provided by the Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute). For those born in municipalities that have digitalized their records, birth certificates can be obtained either online or at Mexico City's civil registry, commonly known as "Arcos de Belén," for the street on which it is located. The copy of the birth certificate costs seventy pesos (\$3.50 USD) if you know the *foja* and *libro*—the volume and page number where the employees will find it; if not, you have to pay another 70 pesos for the search. If the birth certificate is not digitalized, however, an individual has to either go to the location where their birth was registered—which is often not the same as the location of their birth—in order to request the physical copy, or call the municipality to request that they digitalize it.

"If they answer you, you have to ask them to upload it with a lot of tact...we had one case where they took a year in doing it, it's nothing easy," explained one member of the Promotoras at the meeting reserved for going over the birth certificate route. "Veracruz and Tamaulipas are the worst. The best is Jalisco. I'm not just saying that because I'm from there. They're really nice."¹¹

This process presents specific challenges for those deportees and returnees who were brought to the United States at a young age, do not have immediate family in Mexico, and do not know where they were registered.

"We had a case where the person was supposedly born in Xochimilco [a borough of Mexico City], so we went to look for the birth certificate and it wasn't there—in that case what do you do, why doesn't there a way to look in all the boroughs [*delegaciones*]?"¹² one Promotoras participant asked the group. These complex situations are where the Promotoras' detailed and troubleshoot routes become most helpful, and where the members of the group learned from each other in the process of writing them—and accompanying others in living them.

"Sometimes where you were born isn't where you are registered," another replied. "The civil registry should have all of this, but they don't." She gave an example of another member of

¹¹ "Y si te contestan, tienes que pedirles con mucho tacto que lo suban...hubo uno [Veracruz] que tardamos un año...no es nada fácil. Los nefastas son Veracruz y Tamaulipas...lo mejor es Jalisco, no es porque vengo de allá, pero son súper amables."

¹² "Tuvimos un caso en que la compa supuestamente nació en Xochimilco, fuimos a buscar su acta, y no está la acta...entonces que haces—cómo no existe una manera para buscar en todas las delegaciones?"

her collective, who was born in Mexico City but registered in the southern state of Oaxaca, where his family was from. "If you leave young and don't come back, you don't know."¹³ The first participant commented that the same thing had happened to her: she was born in Mexico City, but registered in her family's home state, and even in a different town than the one where her parents were from. Because she had returned to Mexico alone, she had to figure that out herself.

These obstacles to obtaining basic documents go largely unnoticed by the Mexican government, who assume that as Mexican citizens, deportees and return migrants do not face challenges beyond the normal navigation of state bureaucracy demanded of all the country's citizens. Through knowledge sharing and group empowerment, the Promotoras aim to learn how to help all the members of the deportee/returnee community in Mexico City overcome these obstacles.

At the same time, the Promotoras' *rutas* are not meant to serve the ends of a normative "re-insertion" or "re-integration" that the term *reciudadanización* might seem to imply. Rather, a constant push and pull between the Promotoras and the international non-governmental agencies that sponsored the group was the inclusion of tips and tricks that circumvented the letter of the law. For instance, a member of one of the participating collectives had gone to Arcos de Belén to request a birth certificate without knowing his CURP. Though the CURP is technically a requirement to get a birth certificate, he had explained his situation—as a deportee who had been in the United States for twenty years—to the employee of the civil registry, who had been understanding enough to look up his CURP for him. When one of the Promotoras told this story at a meeting, she followed up by calling Arcos de Belén to ask whether the CURP was "indispensable" for obtaining a birth certificate. They said it was.

Once a deportee/returnee has their birth certificate, they can get their INE, or voter card. This also presents challenges that are specific to the deportee/returnee community. To obtain an INE, an individual is required to present an "official," government-issued photo ID. However, many types of identification that are technically official are not accepted in practice: deportees and return migrants have been turned away at the INE for presenting Mexican issued at a consulate in the United States, the *matrícula consular*, a consular ID created specifically so that Mexicans living undocumented in the United States had access to some form of official Mexican ID, or a *Constancia de Recepción de Mexicanos Repatriados*, or "proof of repatriation," a document created by the Program of Repatriation into the Interior of Mexico (PRIM) of Mexico's National Institute of Migration for deportees and returnees, which likewise is technically an official document, but in practice is not accepted by the INE.¹⁴

¹³ "Tu lugar de nacimiento a veces no es el lugar de registración—el registro civil debe tener todo de eso, pero no lo tienen...si te vas joven y nunca vuelvan a venir, no sabes."

¹⁴ Obtaining the *constancia de repatriación* is itself another challenge for deportees and returnees. The National Institute of Migration (INM, by its initials in Spanish) has proven fickle about to whom it provides the document, sometimes asking for proof of deportation issued by ICE. However, not all deportees and returnees have such a document. Many deportees are offered "voluntary departure" from the United States, in which they are released from detention with the requirement that they will leave the country on their own by a certain date. One of my interlocutors explained, "The INM used to make a *constancia*, but now if you don't have [ICE's] *constancia de repatriación*, they [the INE] won't attend you—they're denying what little we have. They don't understand the different modalities of deportation—they ask for the *constancia de repatriación*, a 'normal document' that not everyone has. The problem is that if you were deported in a way they don't recognize—or want to recognize." Other forms of documentation that deportees who have taken voluntary departure and return migrants could show are plane tickets, their *matrícula consular*, or their passport stamped with the date of their return. ["INM en el pasado hizo una *constancia*—es lo que ahora no quieren hacer. Ahora si no tienes la hoja/*constancia de repatriación*, no

The majority of deportees and returnees do not have a valid INE upon their return to Mexico—whether because they lost it over the course of their time in the United States, because they left Mexico before they turned eighteen, or because they left Mexico before 2013, when the INE was created. The INE's predecessor, the IFE (Federal Electoral Institute) was created in 1990, after outcry over electoral fraud in the presidential elections of 1989; in 2013, Mexico's Chamber of Deputies and Senate decided to replace it with the INE, an autonomous entity (González Martínez 2013). Because the two agencies are considered separate, the INE does not have access to the database of the IFE.

If a petitioner does not have an official ID accepted by the INE, or only has an old IFE credential, they must bring two witnesses. One of the witnesses must have an INE with a Mexico City address. The other must have an INE with an address in the borough of the city in which the petitioner is requesting their INE. This can be a challenge for members of the deportee and returnee community who do not have close ties in Mexico.

A final obstacle that members of the deportee and returnee community face in obtaining an INE stems from the credential's dual function: its official function as a voter card, and its *de facto* function as an official, government identification card. While a federal voter card is something that activists fighting voter suppression in the United States have long called for, in the run-up to elections, the two functions of the credential end up at cross-purposes in a way that specifically affects recent deportees and return migrants. In order to prevent voter fraud, INE credentials are not issued within six months of a presidential election; however, because the INE is the only widely accepted official ID, this means that Mexicans who return to the country during such a period of suspension end up undocumented in their own country. This problem is compounded because very often, Mexican passports issued at consulates abroad are not accepted (by banks, prospective employers, or government agencies) as official.

Finally, many deportees face bureaucratic and workforce discrimination: accusations of having ditched their countrymen, a presumption that they were deported for being criminals or gang members, the familiar anti-immigrant claim that they are “stealing” jobs, and a belief that they must be receiving remittances or have large savings in dollars, though this is not generally true. Mexico does not have laws prohibiting age or gender discrimination in the workforce, meaning that deportees over forty often struggle to find work. And in the bureaucracy, what is called “*criterios de la ventanilla*” [criteria of the window] gives government agents wide discretionary latitude that in practice is often utilized to deny services.

US-born children of Mexican migrants face their own set of challenges: not a process of re-citizenship, but of citizenship. There are around 600,000 such children in Mexico (Anderson 2016). Since Mexico passed a constitutional reforms permitting double nationality in 1997, these children have held Mexican citizenship by birthright, according to Article 30 of Mexico's Constitution (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019, Cámara de Diputados 2021). But they still have to go through the process of registering that citizenship. And as scholar-activist Jill Anderson writes: “in an uncanny mirroring of their undocumented peers and siblings, U.S. citizens [born to Mexican parents] in Mexico have the right to binational legal recognition, but few resources to claim that right” (Anderson 2016).

To document the Mexican nationality of a US-born child and obtain their Mexican identity documents and identification numbers, families go through a process called “registration

te atienden—están negando a lo poco que tienen. No entienden, no saben los modalidades de deportación—están pidiendo la constancia de repatriación, una 'hoja normal' que no todos tienen. El problema es si fuiste deportado pero no la única manera que reconocen, que quieren reconocer.”]

of Mexican nationality" [*inscripción en la nacionalidad mexicana*]. Currently, the requirements for the process of *inscripción* are: a copy of the child's birth certificate that carries an apostille, a translation by a *perito* [certified expert], an official Mexican ID of a parent or grandparent of the child, and a fee that varies by state.¹⁵

It doesn't sound arduous. But at the time Lourdes and her sons were deported, Lourdes had been trying to register her sons' Mexican nationality for a decade, leaving them in California in part because she feared that she would not be able to enroll them in school without it. The process had been full of unforeseen details and uncompromising bureaucrats.

"I would go and get a birth certificate, and bring it back to Mexico, and they always told me there was something wrong with it, for some stupidly stupid reason, or they would ask for another document, and I would have to go back," she told me.

Because she had a tourist visa, Lourdes was able to go back and forth between the countries, but she had to wait until sufficient time had passed to be able to enter again as a tourist, and until she had the money to do so. Under other circumstances, Lourdes's sons' father, who lives in the US, could have helped with the process; instead, the fact that she was not in communication with him created another bureaucratic hurdle to obtaining her sons' Mexican documents—that of verifying to the Mexican government that she had sole custody.¹⁶ And while her aunt was in the United States, she neither spoke English nor drove, and was undocumented; sending her to San Bernardino, where her sons were born, to navigate government offices was out of the question. Lourdes was left to do it alone.

"People say each apostille costs 20 dollars maximum," she told me; "for me, each was 17 thousand pesos [850 dollars], because each one required a flight."

An apostille is a seal of authenticity for documents that was created by the Hague Convention Abolishing the Requirement of Legalization for Foreign Public Documents, an international treaty also known as the "Apostille Convention" or "Apostille Treaty" that was signed in October 1961 and became effective on January 14, 1965. The purpose of the convention is to specify how documents can be certified for legal purposes among the signatory countries, establishing something equivalent to the notarization of domestic documents. Instead of the process of "legalization," or in Spanish "*legalización de cadena*" [chain legalization], in which a document must be certified in both its origin country and the country in which it is to be used, an apostille provided by the country of origin renders the document valid in other signatory countries (World Organisation for Cross-Border Co-operation in Civil and Commercial Matters 2022). Mexico became part of the convention on August 14, 1995 (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores 2016).

Yet while the apostille was designed to make the verification of documents easier, for deportees and return migrants, it is the major hurdle for documenting their US-born children's Mexican citizenship. While for Lourdes, when she had her tourist visa, it was an expensive headache, for other families, the apostille renders the entire process impossible. This is because

¹⁵ The program Soy México, an agreement between Mexico's National Population Registry (RENAPO) and the US' National Association of Public Health Statistics and Information Services (NAPHSIS) initiated in June 2016, is designed to address the challenge of obtaining an apostille for US birth certificates (and in turn, a CURP) from Mexico. Through the agreement, NAPHSIS certifies birth certificates submitted to Soy Mexico online. However, the program is only available for certain US states and certain Mexican states. It also requires parents to have the original, certified copy of the child's birth certificate. (Secretaría de Gobernación 2016, Secretaría de Gobernación Estado de Veracruz N.D., Norman et al 2018)

¹⁶ See Hagan et al 2018 for an examination of the complicated bureaucracy of cross-border custody claims by return migrants.

the apostille can only be obtained at state offices in the United States, where individuals who previously lived in the United States undocumented cannot travel, due to bars to entry assigned to deportees and anyone who has accrued "unlawful presence" after the age of eighteen. For that reason, the elimination of the apostille from double nationality processes was the major demand of the Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility. One audience member at the forum, who introduced herself as a member of the Masahua indigenous community, said that she had crossed the border unauthorized a second time, just in order to obtain a birth certificate with an apostille. Though apostilled documents can be ordered through Secretaries of State and services such as VitalChek, this requires digital literacy, English fluency, the ability to make international phone calls, and a US mailing address. Without the help of NGOs, many return migrants give up.

The most consequential aspect of being unable to register a child's Mexican nationality is that US-born children in Mexico have no CURP. For children, the most immediate consequence of not having a CURP is that they are often denied access to public education. For instance, in Lourdes's case, the local *secundaria* (middle school) enrolled her older son without a problem, while four primary schools denied her younger son from registering as anything more than an auditor. The Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility was not the first event of its kind, then; it was the most ambitious proposal in a sequence of motherist lobbying to get rid of the apostille requirement.

The first win for deportee and returnee mothers was in July 2015, when Mexico's Secretary of Public Education (SEP, by its initials in Spanish)'s General Office for Accreditation and Revalidation changed its policy regarding documentation for school registration (Anderson 2016). The SEP's Normas Específicas de Control Escolar Relativas a la Inscripción, Reinscripción, Acreditación, Regularización, Promoción y Certificación de Educación Básica (Specific Educational Norms for Registration, Re-registration, Accreditation, Regularization, Continuation, and Certification of Basic Education), now states that schools are required to accept birth certificates from abroad, with or without an apostille (SEP 2017, Título 3.3). As Anderson (2016) writes, this change was "a result of years of advocacy by organizations such as IMUMI, Voces Mesoamericanas, Appleseed México and the Colectivo Migraciones para las Américas."

In 2017, because of lobbying from the Grupo de Identidad y Educación (GIE, described in Section 3 below), the SEP changed parts 5 and 6 of its Acuerdo 286, a law that regulates public education documents, such that for middle and high school revalidation processes, diplomas and transcripts did not have to carry an apostille or be translated by a *perito* (Diario Oficial de la Federación 2017).¹⁷ This was again due to continued lobbying by motherist activists and organizations that support the return migrant community, especially the collaborative Grupo de Identidad y Educación, a collaborative bringing together nineteen organizations and academic researchers across Mexico (GIE 2018). After many roundtables with authorities much like the Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility, a senator proposed a change to the law, which now reads:

5. For the processes of revalidation of studies for primary and secondary, as well as high school and higher education, neither the apostille nor legalization will be

¹⁷ This change applies to revalidation processes overseen by the SEP, which includes Mexico's National Polytechnic Institute and its regional affiliates, but not the UNAM, state autonomous universities, or private universities, which have their own revalidation processes.

required for the following documents:

- 5.1—Birth certificate or equivalent document, and
- 5.2—Certificates, diplomas, diplomas that demonstrate the studies that are the object of the application.

6. Documentation that will require a free translation into the Spanish language: The applications for revalidation of studies of primary, secondary, high school, and higher education must be accompanied by a free translation into the Spanish language of the following documents:

- 6.1—Birth certificate or equivalent document, and
- 6.2—Transcripts, diplomas, or other documents that demonstrate the studies that are the object of the application. (translation my own.)¹⁸

However, as Anderson also writes, "denying full inclusion based on the locally misapplied requirement for an international apostille on a US citizen's birth certificate continues" (Anderson 2016). Return migrant families who do not know the law, and who do not have the support of an NGO behind them, are often turned away from schooling for lack of a CURP.

Additionally, even students who lack a CURP who are allowed to enroll in schools are often limited to status as auditors. This is because while Título 3.7 of the SEP's Norms [Normas Específicas de Control Escolar Relativas a la Inscripción, Reinscripción, Acreditación, Regularización, Promoción y Certificación de Educación Básica], "Criterios Aplicables a la Falta de la Presentación de los Documentos" [Criteria Applicable when Documents are not Presented] instructs the director of the public or authorized private educational institution that they must enroll students who do not have a permanent CURP with a temporary CURP, it does not specify ensuring continuation—the ability to advance within the school and receive a diploma, and it also gives them a wide latitude in pressuring families to regularize their children's nationality. The section reads:

3.7—Criteria Applicable when Documents are not Presented: In the case of not having one or more of the documents referred to in Norm 3.3, the Director of the public or authorized private educational institution must enroll or re-enroll the student to the grade that corresponds to them in accordance with the following:

3.7.1—Birth certificate or equivalent document: the name of the student will be registered as is indicated on the enrollment application, which will be signed by the student's mother, father, or guardian, and which will be attached to the student's file.

3.7.2—CURP. In the case that a student does not have a CURP, the

¹⁸ 5: Para los trámites de revalidación de estudios de primaria y secundaria, así como de los tipos medio superior y superior, no se requerirá de apostilla o legalización de los siguientes documentos expedidos en el extranjero:

5.1—Acta de nacimiento o documento equivalente, y

5.2—Certificados, diplomas, constancias, títulos o grados que amparen los estudios objeto de la solicitud.

6: Documentación que Requerirá Traducción Libre al Idioma Español: Las solicitudes de revalidación de estudios de primaria y secundaria, así como de los tipos medio superior y superior deberán acompañarse de la traducción libre al español, de los siguientes documentos:

6.1—Acta de nacimiento o documento equivalente, y

6.2—Certificados boletas de calificaciones, diplomas, constancias, títulos o grados que amparen los estudios objeto de la solicitud.

Director of the public or authorized private educational institution should orient the mother, father, or guardian toward the correct authorities in order to process the CURP. However, the student can enter into the education services. The presentation of the CURP is not an indispensable requirement for authorizing the enrollment of the student.¹⁹

While this norm states that school directors must enroll students who do not have a CURP, and that the CURP is not an indispensable requirement for enrollment, the norm's statement that directors should "orient" families to the correct authorities in order to obtain a CURP has, in the experiences of many families, enabled school directors to harass them, demanding the permanent CURP repeatedly while neither offering support to obtain it, or being understanding when families encounter obstacles in the process of doing so.

This is what happened in Lourdes's case.

"There's a poster in the office of the *secundaria* [showing the different types of Mexican nationality or residency status]," she explained at one Promotoras meeting. "I pointed at it and said, 'This applies to my son,' and they enrolled him without any problems, and didn't ask me anything. But yesterday I had a meeting with the *primaria*, and I brought the poster in miniature on my cell phone and showed them that they can't deny him registration, and they told me they weren't denying him registration."

"Right, the problem isn't only access, often it's continuation [*permanencia*] and certification," said another member. "Or they just won't stop asking for documents."

Additionally, even if school registration does not require an apostille, registration of double nationality—the process that results in students' access to a CURP—does. This is why, now that their lobbying has achieved multiple gains within educational legislation, return migrant activist mothers have turned their fight to the process of double nationality.

The problem of US-born children of return migrants being unable to access education has, so far, not only been overlooked by the Mexican government, but by scholars as well. The most comprehensive study of child return migrants and US-born children in Mexico, Victor Zuñiga and Silvia E. Giorguli Saucedo's *Niñas y Niños en la Migración de Estados Unidos a México: La Generación 0.5* (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019), is based on over 57,000 surveys and interviews undertaken at public schools in the states of Zacatecas, Nuevo León, Morelos, Puebla, and Jalisco. While public schools make sense as a site for large-scale surveys of children, in Mexico they also betray a methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), given that conducting surveys in schools necessarily excludes those children who are unable to enter schools because of their non-normative citizenship—by virtue of not being

¹⁹ 3.7—Criterios aplicables a la falta de la presentación de los documentos: En caso de no contar con algún(os) documento(s) de los referido(s) en la Norma 3.3., el Director de la institución educativa pública o particular con autorización, deberá inscribir o reinscribir al alumno al grado que le corresponda de conformidad con lo siguiente:

3.7.1.—Acta de Nacimiento o Documento Equivalente: el nombre del educando se registrará como se indica en la Solicitud de Inscripción, la cual será suscrita por la madre, el padre de familia o tutor, misma que se anexará al expediente del educando.

3.7.2.—Clave Única de Registro de Población (CURP). En el caso de que el educando no cuente con la CURP, el Director de la institución educativa pública o particular con autorización, deberá orientar a la madre, el padre de familia o tutor para que acuda a tramitarla ante la autoridad competente. No obstante, el alumno podrá ingresar a los servicios educativos. La presentación de la CURP no es un requisito indispensable para autorizar la inscripción del aspirante.

"Mexican enough," or not having the correct documentation to demonstrate their Mexican-ness. Schools are well-known sites of nationalism (Pierce 1934, Anderson 2006 [1983]). Because part of public schooling is inculcating a sense of what it means to be a citizen of a given country, schools are also sites of assumptions about what it means to be a citizen that can negatively affect child return migrants who are US-born Mexican citizens. Yet the authors take for granted US-born Mexican children's abilities to both obtain their Mexican nationality and enroll in public schools. They write:

International migrant children who are in Mexico and were born in the United States have the right to both nationalities, which means that they can cross the border in either direction like any citizen, without the need to apply for a visa and or the risk of deportation. They enter...the United States or Mexico as members with full rights to both national societies (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019)

This understanding of US-born Mexican citizens' right to Mexican citizenship elides the bureaucratic barriers between the right to Mexican nationality and the ability to obtain it. There is a compelling vision of binational identity, but also one that my ethnographic research has shown to elude a significant number of children of return migrants, with grave consequences.

Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo do describe school "abandonment" as a consequence of migration, but attribute it to "the incompatibility between school calendars and migratory calendars. Children who arrive at their destination and for diverse reasons do not manage to register for school end up losing a full year"²⁰ (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019, 206). The authors offer neither data nor citations to back up this claim, which is rooted in an outdated vision of circular migration that their work otherwise counters. My research alongside the Promotoras suggests that school abandonment by return migrant children and US-born Mexican children is an effect of bureaucratic hurdles to documenting their Mexican nationality and obtaining a CURP. Informants shared stories of children who missed three years of school before finally finding an NGO that could help them process the children's double nationality, and of another family whose children never managed to enroll in Mexican schools and gave up, waiting until they were eighteen to return to the United States, with nothing more than a few years of elementary education.

However, Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo's only mention of these bureaucratic barriers comes in a footnote two-thirds of way through their book, which states: "on occasions the loss of school years is a consequence of the admission requirements demanded in Mexico. Documented evidence indicates that child migrants and their families frequently face bureaucratic difficulties in registering in Mexican schools, despite recent regulatory modifications approved by the Secretarial Agreement 286" (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019, 209).²¹ In one of the US-born children's case histories described later in the chapter, they mention that the interviewee faced difficulties in registering for school in the state of Puebla, and that her family considered sending her to live with a relative, either in Colorado (USA) or in

²⁰ "...la incompatibilidad entre los calendarios escolares y los calendarios migratorios. Los niños arriban a su lugar de destino y por diversas razones no logran inscribirse en la escuela que les corresponde por lo que pierden un año escolar completo."

²¹ "en ocasiones la pérdida de años escolares es una consecuencia de los requisitos de admisión exigidos en México. evidencias documentadas indican que frecuentemente los niños migrantes y sus familias enfrentan dificultades burocráticas para inscribirse en las escuelas mexicanas, a pesar de las recientes modificaciones reglamentarias aprobadas por el Acuerdo Secretarial 286"

Mexico City, to attend school (Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo 2019, 281). However, the authors do not describe what these bureaucratic difficulties were. At no point in the book do they mention the phenomenon of schools unlawfully turning away students for lack of a CURP, or that of allowing students to attend but not officially enrolling them (saying they cannot do so without a CURP)—both of which can lead to the consequences of being unable to continue from primary to secondary school, or secondary to high school.

These challenges also do not end at the level of the school. Another informant related to me a story of a school in the State of Mexico, on the outskirts of Mexico City, that demanded a CURP so many times that the parents went to the state government—only to be asked for the child's CURP in order to file a complaint. These bureaucratic hurdles are too significant to be relegated to a footnote. They are the product of a contradictory legal apparatus paired with a negative bureaucratic culture that negates the implementation of its own norms. I aim to add this crucial missing perspective to the work begun by Zuñiga and Giorguli Saucedo, highlighting the behind-the-scenes work of return migrant activist mothers and their allies to document the Mexican nationality that their children hold by birthright, and to enroll them in school.

Intimacy as an Organizing Tool

Lourdes's luck changed when she found the Promotoras. By the end of the school year, her sons had their official CURPs, and Lourdes was participating in deportee advocacy across Mexico City, including at the March 2020 forum.

"I was able to figure out all the *trámites* because of being part of the Promotoras," she told me. "If it had been me, Lourdes, alone, there's no way my sons would have their CURPs right now."

The Promotoras were founded in March 2019 out of groups participating in the Grupo de Identidad y Educación (GIE). The GIE was formed initially as a working group of the Colectivo Migraciones para las Américas, which formed in 2012 as a group of over 100 non-governmental associations dedicated to working in favor of ensuring human rights for migrant populations (Centro de Estudios en Cooperación Internacional y Gestión Pública N.D.) According to my interviews, the large organization had very few women—civil society organizations are new in Mexico, and unlike in the United States, remain dominated by men—but the majority of the few women ended up in "Identity" working group, whose agenda was shaped by lawyers from the Institute for Women in Migration, or IMUMI. The Identity working group later secured funds to branch off into their own collective, the GIE. The GIE was behind the 2017 changes to the SEP regarding revalidation of studies at the middle, high-school, and post-secondary levels. Yet while this activism directly impacted the deportee and return migrant community, the organizations that constitute the GIE range from shelters to law clinics, most of whom serve the non-Mexican migrant community in Mexico: migrants in transit and refugee/asylum-seekers.

The Promotoras formed as a sub-group within the GIE to respond both to the need for a space for women's leadership, and to work specifically on the needs of deportees and return migrants. The small size and all-female nature of the group is a stark contrast from the majority of civil society organizations in Mexico, and one that the members of the Promotoras turned into an activist advantage. The group aimed for its work to be based in the direct, quotidian experience of accompanying return migrants, and directly applicable to improving their experiences navigating the bureaucracy, striking a balance between women deportees/returnees and NGO employees. "The Promotoras represented a transformation in questions of gender, of grassroots activism, of empowerment, and forms of activism," a representative from the

organization Otros Dreams en Acción, one of the founding members of the Promotoras, told me.

While empowerment was the Promotoras' intangible goal, the group's tangible goal was the creation of a manual that would help deportees and return migrants in obtaining identity documents for them and their children (including registering the Mexican nationality of US-born children), registering children for public school, and completing high school and accessing higher education themselves.

The two goals were joined by the way in which each mobilized intimacy. As I describe above, by intimacy as an aspect of their organizing, I mean an affect of closeness cultivated by the Promotoras as an integral aspect of their work as activists, and specifically a form of diasporic intimacy born of the shared alienation of deportation and return to Mexico.

In addition to the relevance of the diasporic intimacy concept as I describe it in the introduction, intimacy also has its own usages in feminist border and migration scholarship. Boehm (2012) names as "intimate migrations" those "flows that shape and are structured through gendered and familial actions and interactions, but are always defined by the presence of the US state." Vogt (2018) uses the concept of intimacy to understand how women migrants from Central America navigate transiting through Mexico, showing at once how female migrants experience violence intimately, but also how extraordinary forms of intimacy emerge under the specter of extreme violence. Similar to Boehm's work, she uses intimacy as a lens through which to see how ties of kinship mediate transnational realities, adding chosen families to the intimate ties that connect migrants. Meanwhile, based on research with sex workers in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, anthropologist Sara Luna (2018) describes intimacy as an affective response to the border's "atmosphere of terror."

Luna's formulation resembles Boym's and others' usage of "diasporic intimacy," but takes it a step further. Diasporic intimacy at the border must be strong enough to withstand an atmosphere of violence. Though they are far from the US-Mexico border, many members of the Promotoras have passed through the terrors of the United States' deportation regime only to become embroiled in the quotidian alienations of the Mexican state's neglect of repatriated citizens, the precarity of life in Mexico City (in general and for return migrants), and Mexico's dire situation of gender violence. Bringing these theorizations together, I understand the Promotoras' affect of intimacy an effect of the terror of deportation and the alienation of emplacement in Mexico.

The first Promotoras meeting of 2020, which took place on a warm Friday morning in January, provides a pair of examples of the intimacy that animates the Promotoras' work. The first to arrive to the meeting were the group's members from the organization Deportados Unidos en la Lucha—Lourdes, Ana Laura, and three volunteers. One of the volunteers pulled together those who had arrived to take a selfie. *DUL presente!* she wrote, sending the photo to the Promotoras Whatsapp group. Within minutes, the three women who had stated that they couldn't attend the meeting had sent kiss emojis.

Once the rest of the group had arrived, Eva—who in addition to working in migration was a certified yoga instructor—led the group in a breathing exercise. Ana Laura reminded the group,

"This is a place to strengthen ourselves [*fortalecernos*]; we have to take care of ourselves because everything we confront is stressful. Being an activist is hard and it's draining. I don't even have time for friends! But I have you all. The Promotoras has become my favorite part of the week."

Because it was the first meeting of the year, Ana Laura next asked each person in the

circle to speak about what had brought her to the group, as a means of re-connecting to the group's mission. One of the members immediately started crying. She said that she had returned the previous day from Veracruz, where her father had died in her arms. She had already told the organization where she worked that she was going to take time off to recuperate emotionally, she said, but then there were nine migrants on the bus with her, and she realized that it was important to keep working, at least as much as she could. Ana Laura stood up from her chair and hugged the other woman from behind, saying, "It's so good that you're here, it's so good that you're working."

At the same time, this intimacy is not only a consequence of an "atmosphere of terror," but also a powerful tool in their organizing. Geographer Juanita Sundberg (2008) uses the term "intimate frontiers of geopolitics" to describe sites where individuals negotiate the political and cultural norms imposed by the US-Mexico border. The Promotoras' work easily qualifies as such a site. It provides, as I write in the title of this dissertation, an intimate scale from which to navigate binational politics.

A body of literature within anthropology that addresses the way that poor and working-class individuals, and those who are otherwise vulnerable in the eyes of the state, often know the state and its bureaucracies best (Merry 1990, DeParle 2004, Soss et al 2011, Gupta 2012). Merry (1990) and Gupta (2012) both focus on ways that poor and working-class individuals learn to navigate state bureaucracies. I consider this close knowledge of the workings of the state to be a form of intimacy—defined as closeness of observation or knowledge of a subject. Marshalling the diasporic intimacy of their shared experiences of navigating deportations as an affect of organizing has enabled the group to develop a knowledge of the Mexican bureaucracy so intimate as to be able to influence it.

The Promotoras' manual exemplifies the intimate knowledge of bureaucracy that the group has collectively gathered. When the Promotoras decided to form, they took out a twelve-month calendar and planned two Friday meetings per month for a full year. Each participating organization committed to sending at least one representative to every four-hour meeting (this structure means that the group's size shifts meeting to meeting, but hovers around ten core participants). During those meetings and by delegating take-home work, the group made its manual, which is constituted of "routes" [*rutas*] for procuring birth certificates, voter cards, CURPs, passports, proofs of repatriation, registration of Mexican nationality, and school registration. The goal of the manual was to simultaneously address the facts that the Mexican government did not know the needs of its deportee and return migrant citizens, deportees and returnees did not know how to navigate the Mexican bureaucracy, and neither government agencies nor deportees and returnees—and not even many civil society organizations—knew about the norms that affected return migrants.

A key aspect that has made the manual's "routes from the streets" successful is the way that the women of the group relied on expertise gained from first-hand experience, whether navigating the *trámites* themselves or accompanying others in doing so. The concept of "*acompañamiento*," accompaniment, is a key aspect of the work of migration-related civil society organizations in Mexico, where life chances—from access to identity documents, housing, work, healthcare, and education to establishing paternity of one's US-born children—depend on successfully navigating bureaucracies and persisting through roadblocks. *Acompañamiento* refers not only to the act of accompanying a deportee or return migrant through a bureaucratic process that might otherwise thwart an individual working alone, but also to the additive and recursive process of learning from each experience of accompaniment—the process

to becoming an expert in maneuvering within the branches of the bureaucracy.

One of the first surprising things to me in observing the Promotoras was that while all the participating organizations worked within the deportee and return migrant community, they each brought different types of expertise in *acompañamiento*. This expertise was made all the more remarkable by the fact that only one of the organizations that participated in the Promotoras had a lawyer on their staff. One organization was the go-to for anyone who was owed social security benefits by the United States. Another focused on family separation and getting custody of children in foster care in the US. Still another had experience in cases of school registration, and putting pressure on school directors and local authorities who were not accepting US identity documents. The manual, then, became a way of putting heads together, to collate and disseminate the knowledges that individuals had gained through their work and life experience. "We have always been defined [*nos marcábamos constantemente*] by helping each other with cases that had to do with things that we [as individual organizations] didn't have experience with," says López.

At a meeting in November 2019, for instance, a member mentioned an unusual case, in which a deportee had no identity documents besides his *cartilla militar*, or selective service registration card.

"Go to the Institute of Defense—they keep a copy of the birth certificate," another member responded. "We had a case like that too."

"Look how we all learn from each other!" exclaimed a third participant.

The resulting manual brings together the group's approach of accompaniment through clear, realistic, and grounded explanations of bureaucratic processes and empowerment both of themselves and of their communities. The close knowledge of both the US' and especially of Mexico's bureaucracies that the women of the group have developed together constitutes an "intimate frontier of geopolitics," though a very different one than that described by Sundberg. The Promotoras' so-called "routes from the streets" take back the mystified, massive, negative Mexican bureaucracy, making the *trámites* understandable for ordinary deportees and returnees.

Binational Legal Consciousness

In addition to the group's governing affect of intimacy, the other key feature that has enabled their success is their unique binational legal consciousness. Merry, writing about working-class users of the lower court system to resolve family and neighborhood problems in Massachusetts, uses the concept of "legal consciousness" to describe her informants' understandings of courts and the law and relationships to it that are shaped by class and life experience. She writes that her interlocutors "share the common American understanding that all members of society are entitled to ask the courts for help in protecting their fundamental rights" (Merry 1990, 17).

The Promotoras' members have a unique binational legal consciousness that is shaped both by the Mexican expectation of bureaucratic indifference, and the American entitlement to a functional and responsive state. The legal consciousness developed in the US gave them the conviction that they could explain the processes so clearly that recent deportees and return migrants could understand and successfully carry out necessary bureaucratic processes themselves, even in the face of an inscrutable and indifferent state. The group's focus on accessibility can be understood as a negotiation of these two legal consciousnesses.

As one member put it, "The government doesn't update its websites—people end up at the wrong addresses. RENAPO [the National Population Registry, the entity responsible for

CURPs] hasn't updated its website since before the earthquake! The 2017 one, not the 1985," she added, laughing and sighing at the same time. "But I wouldn't put it past them. In the IMSS [Mexican Social Security Institute] they still use typewriters. Because of that it became our job to update [*actualizar*] the routes and explain them to people in a clear and detailed way...it's a lot of information, and the routes keep changing."

Another explained, "You practically have to read the *Ley General de la Población* [General Law of the Population] just to get your identity documents." Recognizing this, the Promotoras read the *Ley General de la Población* so that other return migrants didn't have to. They taught one another to read legal documents (including collectively googling the terms they didn't understand), to use technology, and to find shortcuts and workarounds for tricky situations. They did so with the tools they had: their combined life experiences, personal connections, and smartphones. As López put it, "We were seeking to translate the bureaucratic information in an accessible way, to empower ourselves, and to improve our day-to-day work with the community."

In addition to this unique binational perspective, the Promotoras' class and gender are also relevant in shaping their work. Part of the reason they need to develop such a decidedly intimate knowledge of bureaucracy is because the other forms of getting things done that are available to men and to the upper-class—blunt assertiveness, for instance, influence (what in Mexico is called "*por la palanca*" [by the lever]), or simply paying for a lawyer—are unavailable to them. Merry (1993) argues that working-class women "have responded in particular force" to the opportunity to use the court system to settle personal problems, writing that "women's use of the courts is another aspect of the general pattern of relatively vulnerable and powerless people turning to the courts for help in those relationship in which they feel at a disadvantage" (Merry 1990, 178). In the absence of more efficient tools, working-class women have to learn to use the channels available to them.

Sometimes the question of making the routes accessible came up over questions that seemed so small as to be hair-splitting. Yet these moments revealed the importance of the Promotoras' binational legal consciousness to their goal of making the bureaucracy accessible in particularly specific ways. A November 2019 meeting, for instance, was dedicated to revising the *rutas* for obtaining identity documents and registration of Mexican nationality at consulates. The discussion opened with the question of whether the section of the manual should be called "*trámites que realicen en el extranjero*" [processes undertaken abroad], "*trámites que realicen en Estados Unidos*" [processes undertaken in the United States], or "*trámites en consulados*" [consular processes].

The fact that the group spent time debating these possible headings seems like a delay provoked by a narcissism of small differences. Yet the debate came from the members' knowledge that the small differences would be consequential for migrants. They were debating both using colloquial versus legal names, as well as terminology common in the United States versus Mexico, aware that the colloquial language to describe bureaucratic processes in Spanish is sometimes different in the two countries. While many of the non-migrant members of the group lobbied to use "processes undertaken in the United States" because of a lack of familiarity with the word "consulate," López explained:

"I think the word 'consular' is better because in the United States people are very familiar with the word 'consulate,' it's really common there; there's going to be more confusion if we put '*trámites que realicen en el extranjero*.' Because also, in Chicago, for instance, there are a bunch of businesses that say they do '*trámites mexicanos*' but that aren't good for anything [*no sirven*]

para nada—so people learn, 'whatever you need, go to your consulate [*acude a tu consulado*],' and they get used to the word."

Another example of this conflict was a discussion over what to call the section about registering one's children's Mexican citizenship.

"Should we call it *inscripción en la nacionalidad mexicana* [registration of Mexican nationality, the official name of the process] or *acceso a la doble nacionalidad* [access to dual citizenship]?" Ana Laura asked.

"I would say '*inscripción en la nacionalidad mexicana*' because it's more correct," said one woman, emphasizing the legal fact that US-born children of Mexicans are, technically, Mexican citizens from birth, it's just a matter of registering that citizenship. But Ana Laura differed, bringing a migrant's perspective.

"Looking at things from here [*viendo de acá*, Mexico] I would also say it's more correct," she replied, "but looking at things from there [*viendo de allá*], there's a lot of fear of losing their American citizenship—so we need to make it explicit that it's double nationality." (The common fear of losing one's US citizenship by registering one's Mexican nationality stems from the fact that Mexico did not allow its citizens to hold a dual nationality until the constitutional reforms of 1996 (Délano Alonso 2011); until that year, registering a child's Mexican nationality would indeed have required renouncing one's US citizenship. Misunderstandings, misinformation, and fear still linger in Mexican immigrant communities in the United States. Meanwhile, the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 dictates that US citizens cannot lose their citizenship for residing outside the United States or for having a second citizenship.) Eventually, the group settled on putting both titles, with one in parenthesis: *Inscripción a la Nacionalidad Mexicana (Acceso a la Doble Nacionalidad)*.

Mobilizing Intimacy to Influence Bureaucracy

At the same time as the Promotoras exemplify certain aspects of the relationship to law and bureaucracy described by Merry and Gupta, their intimacy with bureaucracy is different than those analyzed in this earlier literature of intimate knowledge of the workings of the state. Beyond simply an effort by working-class individuals to navigate the state and its bureaucracies, their work and advocacy shows that organized individuals, including the working-class and otherwise vulnerable, can work as a collective to successfully change the bureaucracy.

In the existing literature about the relationship of the working-class to the state, bureaucratic subjects' knowledge of the state is thwarted by the ways in which the state, the law, and bureaucracy maintain control over poor, working-class, and otherwise vulnerable subjects. Merry writes: "as these working-class court users seek to assert their sense of entitlement to relief for these problems [protections for property and persons, control over children, management of marriages], they find that it is denied by the courts. The court does not reject their requests out of hand but subjects them to periods of monitoring, to probationary supervision, to social services" (Merry 1990, 180). She terms this experience "domination exercised by the law" (Merry 1990, 9), and qualifies that certain forms of "resistance" exist, among them "emotional outbursts" and returning with new claims (Merry 1990, 11). Similarly, while Gupta also examines means by which poor and illiterate Indians find forms of leverage to resist bureaucratic coerciveness and structural violence, both he and Merry ultimately find those possibilities for resistance limited.

This is the key difference between my analysis of the Promotoras' intimacy with the Mexican bureaucracy and previous similar scholarship. While the Promotoras' intimate

organizing affect and intimate knowledge of the Mexican bureaucracy has succeeded in empowering its members and helping the lives of many return migrants, perhaps the most significant aspect of the group's work is the way that they have mobilized the collective power they have built to exert pressure on the Mexican bureaucracy.

The Promotoras' relationship to the behemoth of the Mexican state includes the navigation, the reframing of discourse, and the leveraging of the state against itself that Merry, Gupta, Soss et al and others describe. However, through putting their heads together, persistence, and strategic alliances (between activist mothers and NGOs with staff lawyers)—and doing all of these in a way that fosters intimacy—the Promotoras have showed that they can also successfully exert power over the bureaucracy. This success stems simultaneously from their intimacy with one another, from the intimate knowledge they have developed through writing the manual, and from their binational legal consciousness.

The group's pressure on the Mexican bureaucracy includes both activism to change those laws, such as in the changes to the Secretary of Public Education's norms and in the Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility, and mobilizing the intimate knowledge of laws and codes to obligate the bureaucracy to comply with its own rules—because even once the rules are changed, not all functionaries comply with them. Gupta argues against perceiving the idea that the problem with bureaucracy is its implementation, writing that this is a common complaint of middle-class, urban Indians toward lower-level officials or "subalterns in the bureaucracy" (Gupta 2012, 25). In Mexico such a critique, however, is unavoidable, and it does not carry the same class valences. The Promotoras apply pressure equitably, pushing everyone from school directors to the sub-director of the SEP to comply with existing norms at the same time as they lobby the senate for more changes to the law.

Additionally, while the Promotoras initially began working together with the express purpose of focusing on the deportee and return migrant community—instead of collaborating with groups concerned with issues of migration more generally—they have gradually effected change that has impacts beyond just the deportee and return migrant community, but for refugees and asylees in Mexico as well, many of whose children also struggle to be properly enrolled in schools. After the Forum for Access to Identity and Mexican Nationality for Persons in Contexts of Mobility, a Venezuelan refugee who had presented at the forum about her challenges in registering her daughter's derivative legal residency in Mexico due to being a single parent asked to join the Promotoras. At the same time as she learned to better navigate Mexico's bureaucracy, she said, the intimacy of the group was a relief in the midst of the isolation of being a migrant in a foreign country. Over the course of 2020, too, multiple groups reached out to the Promotoras to ask to learn from their work, including a collective of migrant families in Mexico's Bajío region and a collective of Venezuelan immigrant activists in Mexico City. The Promotoras' method—their intimate, focused collaboration, their "routes from the streets," and the new, empowered relationship to bureaucracy that those enable—has influence and repercussions both in Mexico's norms and laws, and in its activist circles. As women return migrants have joined together, they have effected change that has impacts beyond just them.

The Promotoras are a case of individuals who have come together to share skills with one another and make them accessible to a broader public. Mobilizing the affect of intimacy that has brought them together and kept them together, they are making demands of the Mexican state that it recognize the situation of return migrants and their families relative to its bureaucracy, and that it adjust itself to facilitate their needs. Their work demonstrates the need for migration policy

not only to be re-imagined at the site of the border, but also in the state bureaucracies of both sending and receiving countries. The chapter that follows describes a younger group of return migrant activists who similarly came together out of a need to learn how to navigate the bureaucracy of their country of citizenship, and have used creative expression, shared cultural referents, and discourses of identity formation to gradually build a community powerful enough to make demands of both the Mexican and US government.

Chapter 3. Las Pochas

It's the end of the day in "*la cueva*" (the cave), as the staff of Otros Dreams en Acción, or ODA, fondly refer to their office. The space is a third-floor walk-up in Mexico City's *Centro Histórico*, located above the Calle Victoria, a street famous for its multitude of storefronts specializing in light fixtures. Despite the name, light fills la cueva, too, flooding in from room's large, south-facing window, heating up the small space, and brightening its wooden floors and white walls covered in activist memorabilia.

Maggie Loredó, ODA's co-founder and co-director, is helping Esme, one of the organization's staff members, apply for a B-2 visa. A B-2—or tourist—visa enables non-US citizens to visit the United States for ninety days as tourists. The visas are both a class marker and a small industry in Mexico. For the country's upper class, shopping trips (and more recently, vaccination appointments) to McAllen, summer vacations in San Diego, and medical treatment in Houston are all but taken for granted.

For the rest of the country, however, they are elusive. Despite the fact that the US Department of State website says that "while the vast majority of visa applications are approved...an applicant's current and/or past actions, such as drug or criminal activities, as examples, may make the applicant ineligible for a visa," a quarter of Mexicans are denied their applications for a US tourist visa (US Department of State 2018). This is not because of any "past actions" on their part, but on the suspicion that they will use it to migrate: over half of unauthorized migration to the United States occurs through overstaying a visa (Seitz and Weissert 2019). Applicants are denied, effectively, on the basis of their class status.

For Maggie and Esme, the visa has a special significance, but also one that makes them even more suspicious in the eyes of US authorities. Both women, who are 30 and 28, grew up undocumented in the American South, and returned to Mexico after graduating from high school. For them, a B-2 visa means the right to a mobility that accords with their senses of belonging. It is the right to be *de aquí y de allá*—from here and there—words that are spelled out in purple, glitter-covered letters on the wall of ODA's cultural center, Pocha House.

Maggie has had a B-2 visa for five years, enabling her to represent ODA at events in the United States as well as to visit her hometown and meet her niece and nephew. But Esme has been denied multiple times.

"If I get turned down this time, I'm not applying again until I have my doctorate," Esme tells Maggie. "It's too much of an emotional cost every time."

Maggie gives her the side eye.

"Okay," Esme relents. "My master's."

"One step at a time," says Maggie. "Right now the step is I need you to come sit at my desk with me and help me fill this out."

They open the application and enter Esme's full name, date of birth, address, and other basic information. Then the application asks whether she has ever been to the United States before.

"Yeah, I mean, ten years undocumented, how do I deal with that?" Esme sighs.

"Your trip just took a little longer than planned," jokes Maggie.

Then the application asks for her social media handles. This is a new question; the application has gotten stricter in recent years.

"There go my ideals," Esme says. By the time Maggie asks for her answer to the next question, she has tuned out of the process and begun playing the greatest hits of Selena, dancing while remaining seated in her chair.

"Sorry, I'm a fan," she says, looking at me.

"You know, Selena really is the original pocha," reflects Maggie. "Bilingual, bicultural, and glamorous. Plus, she didn't speak that good of Spanish."

In Mexico, *pocho* is a derogatory term that refers to individuals born in Mexico or of Mexican descent who, because of migration, do not speak Spanish fluently or have adopted other elements of US culture. According to the Real Academia Española, the word *pocho* refers to rotten fruit (Real Academia Española 2022), but most of my interlocutors knew it as referring to a plant that has been ripped from its roots. I finally located that etymology in the Sonoran Institute of Culture's *Vocabulario Sonorense*. It comes from the word *potzico* in the language of the indigenous Opáta people, which refers to cutting or ripping out plants (the dictionary adds that in most cases when Opáta words were adopted into Spanish, the "tzi" sound becomes "chi") (Sobarzo 2016).

Many deportees and other return migrants, especially those who lived in the US starting at a very young age, experience bullying for being pocho from classmates, strangers, employers, and even family. Yet ODA's cultural center is called Pocha House, the result of a near-unanimous vote by the organization's membership. That vote was the start of a movement in Mexico City at whose center are Maggie, Esme, and the other members of ODA's staff—an effort to resignify the term as a creative starting point for forming individual subjectivities and bringing them together in political activism, akin to the re-taking of "Chicano" in the 1960s or the AIDS-era reclaiming of "queer," and to transform it into a subculture and an activist identity. Rodríguez (2003) writes of the importance of naming as part of political activism that it "becomes a creative and political project of inscribing individual and collective subjectivity. Naming the self, the community, the daily work of political activism becomes a dynamic and conscious social practice that testifies to the continual (trans)formation of the subject-in-progress." Maggie puts it,

"No voy a borrar, no voy a dejar de hablar Spanglish; muchas palabras tienen esta historia de reclamarlo y ahora es nuestro trabajo reivindicarlo, resignificarlo, retomarlo, como switch it."²²

For decades, activism by young Mexican-American activists focused on the right to remain in the United States. The Chicano movement, perhaps the most significant period of Mexican-American activism in the twentieth century, re-territorialized the American Southwest as Aztlán, "a nation within a nation" that was the ancestral homeland of Mexico's Aztec people. But since the 1990's, as migration flows became more diverse, the ethnic nationalism of Aztlán has come to seem, in the eyes of younger activists, both exclusive and quaint. It is well-known that César Chávez's farmworker's movement was anti-undocumented, focusing on rights for US-born farmworkers; it also squashed the Texas Farmworker Movement, led by Antonio Orendáin, which advocated for the rights of US-born and immigrant workers alike (Bowman 2005). Even recent migration activism, such as the Dreamer movement and the anti-Trump Abolish ICE protests, has focused on immigrants' right to belong to and stay in the United States.

But the United States' border and migration policy during recent decades has so fully foreclosed the possibility of authorized belonging, for so many people, that advocating to

²² "I'm not going to erase myself, I'm not going to stop speaking Spanglish; a lot of words have this history of being reclaimed and now it's our job to claim it, to resignify it, to retake it, like to switch it."

legalize the status of certain groups of immigrants—organized farmworkers, high-achieving 19-year-olds—does not help repair a broken system. The new scales and vectors of migration demand thinking bigger.

Pocha activism responds to this reality. Led by women who were raised in the United States but saw no future for themselves there, their activism eschews both Chicano claims of being native to the American Southwest and the meritocratic exclusion of Dreamer activism. Instead, pocha activism aims to rethink ideas of belonging, focusing on equitable access to mobility instead of US citizenship. It does so with a feminist perspective, at once because of the lived experiences of its activists and because of its influences from both US and Mexican feminism. Intersectional perspectives drawn from US Black feminist thought has pushed pocha activism away from single-issue migration organizing to a holistic view of the way that geopolitical power affects migrants. Meanwhile, Mexican feminism's insistence on understanding gender violence as systemic, and seeing the parallels between patriarchy at the level of the family and violences exerted by the nation-state, has shaped the way that pocha activism simultaneously exerts pressure on its own community and on the governments of the US and Mexico.

Part of the reason that pocha activism is novel is that never in the past was there a large number of young, US-raised return migrants in Mexico: the neoliberal reforms and border militarization of the 1990s that together led to unidirectional family migration and the creation of a permanent undocumented class in the United States are the conditions of possibility for pocha activism.

In 1994, NAFTA eviscerated Mexico's rural economy at the very moment that the country's currency, propped up by the government for years, finally crashed. Some fourteen million "NAFTA refugees" (Grandin 2019) migrated northward in the following decade (Pew Research Center 2005a).²³ Yet in 1994 the United States also initiated its Prevention Through Deterrence policies, which increased border enforcement at common urban crossing sites in order to re-route migration through the surrounding deserts. Where circular migration had long been the norm, the journey was now far too treacherous. Instead of individual breadwinners coming and going yearly, whole families migrated, crossing the border only once, and staying for years, if not for good (Kandel and Parrado 2005, Rivera Sánchez 2019). By the early 2000s, for the first time in US history, there was a large, permanent undocumented class, and a generation of children growing up English-dominant, "functionally American" (Rodríguez 2013, Caldwell 2019) and with no future in the country.

This large-scale family migration also coincided with a significant shift in the geography of Mexican and other Latinx settlement. Maggie, Esme, and many of ODA's members grew up in the American Southeast. "Somos puros brownnecks!"²⁴ one member exclaimed in a groupchat of returnee southerners created to welcome a new returnee from rural North Carolina—a joke on the idea of southerners as "rednecks."

Between economic recession in California, labor market saturation in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami following the large-scale amnesty of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and the industrial restructuring of the meat processing industry in the

²³ It's also important to note that these migration flows diversified, stemming not only from the border region and traditional sending states such as Jalisco, Michoacán, and Zacatecas but from the south of the country and indigenous communities as well (see Masferrer y Prieto 2019)

²⁴ "We're all brownnecks!"

US Southeast, many Mexican immigrants began to move from the Southwest, Texas and California, to the American Southeast (Kandel and Parrado 2005). Between 1990 and 2000 the Hispanic population in the nonmetropolitan Southeast grew 19 percent (Kandel and Parrado 2005). In Arkansas alone, the state's Latino population quadrupled during the 1990s, only to double again by 2010 (Guerrero 2017). By 2000, for the first time in US history, more than 50 percent of the country's nonmetropolitan Latino population lived outside of the five southwestern states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado (Cromartie and Kandel 2002).

Perla Guerrero writes in her book *Nuevo South* that this internal migration of Latino immigrants took place as word gradually spread through immigrant social networks that the South was full of work opportunities that didn't check papers, that housing was cheap enough that families could live alone, and that the nonmetropolitan south was a place of *tranquilidad*, tranquility (Guerrero 2017). The migration coincided with economic transformations in the region. The agricultural industry of the American Southeast transitioned from tenant farming and permanent employees to majority-Latinx contract labor starting in the 1980s; by 2000, 80 percent of migrant farm workers in Georgia and 90 percent of farmworkers in North Carolina were Latinx (Odem 2010). Many others worked in the poultry industry, where the proportion of white workers dropped from 70 to 30 percent between 1980 and 2000, and which is now 44.4 percent Latino (Kandel and Parrado 2004, Fremstel et al 2020).

This shift means that many of the members of ODA's community grew up in areas of the country that had limited history of Latinx organizing relative to areas with more longstanding immigrant communities. The major epicenters of the Chicano Movement were all in California, Texas, and the American Southwest, as well as Chicago. The farmworkers' movement, most powerful during the 1960s, was largest in California and Texas. The Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s was born in Tucson, Arizona, and blossomed in Los Angeles. "Because most of us are from the South, we don't have that whole 'Chicano Power, Chicano Pride' identity," says Maggie.

The absence of this history also contributes to return migration flows. In the Southwestern states, past organizing has translated into a legacy of policies that, to a certain degree, protected the undocumented—such as local DREAM Acts that enable undocumented students access to in-state tuition and sanctuary city policies that maintain local policing separate from immigration enforcement. Texas and California allowed undocumented high school graduates to access in-state tuition at state universities starting in 2001, for instance (Migration Policy Institute 2015, Center for Public Policy Priorities 2017).²⁵ Even in the Southwestern states such as Arizona that have implemented anti-immigrant policies, the long history of organizing means that there are large Latino and immigrant organizations as well as social networks. Instead, most of the pochas grew up in a region marked by years of racial cleansing and that still had "sundown towns." Georgia, where Maggie and many of the other members of ODA's community grew up, has some of the country's most restrictive laws with regard to higher education access for undocumented students. In 2008 the state's Senate Bill 492 prohibited any public college or university from giving undocumented students in-state tuition; in 2010, the state banned enrollment of undocumented students at its top five campuses (Migration Policy Institute 2015). The South was a region where, as Esme put it, "When you turn eighteen, we'll keep your parents for their labor, but if you want to be more than a pair of arms, there's no place for you."

Maggie was born in San Luis Potosí, a state located in the semi-arid Altiplano in north-

²⁵ By 2016, public colleges in 21 states offered some form of tuition equity (see Gordon 2016).

central Mexico. The first time I visited the state, what struck me most were the license plates: it appeared that fully half of them were from Texas. Maggie, too, first immigrated to Texas, at the age of two. Her mother brought her to join her dad, who had already been in Dallas for a year.

In 1998, when Maggie was eight, the family moved to Dalton, Georgia, a town of 30,000 also known as the "Carpet Capital of the World." They chose to relocate to Dalton because an aunt had brought Maggie's older brother, then twelve, there. Though the county was mostly white, Dalton itself was fast becoming a center for immigrants. The proportion of white students in the town's school district dropped from 80 percent in 1989 to 21 percent in 2015, while the proportion of Hispanic students increased from 1 percent to 40 percent during the same time period (Zúñiga and Hernández León 2017). Perhaps fittingly, Dalton has also been the site of significant research about Mexican and Latinx immigrants in the public school system (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2003), specifically by Rúben Hernández-León and Victor Zúñiga, whose findings led them to begin researching child return migrants' experiences in the Mexican school system as well.

Maggie graduated from the town's Southeast High School in 2008. During her junior and senior years, she did everything she could to go to college, sourcing recommendations from teachers and her supervisors at the many places she had volunteered and seeking out scholarships. But 2008 was the year that the state of Georgia barred all public colleges and universities from giving undocumented students in-state tuition. To be able to go to college, she would have to return to Mexico. Within a month of graduating, she was in her grandparents' village in the mountains, where, as she writes in the book *Los Otros Dreamers*, "people still wash clothes in the river on a rock, take a shower with a bucket, and heat water on a fire" (Anderson & Solis 2014).

After six months, she moved to the city of San Luis Potosí to get a job and begin college. But while she was in her country of citizenship, it took Maggie five years to figure out the process of "revalidation" of her US high school diploma required to study at a Mexican university. At the time, the process included obtaining an apostille (seal of authenticity) that can only be granted in the United States, meaning that Maggie had to ask her brother to travel to Atlanta for her, and an official translation, meaning that she had to pay a certified translator for something they could easily do themselves—but even figuring out these steps proved to be a major challenge.

In 2012, a friend sent her a link to a call for stories from returnees. She submitted her writing to the editor, Jill Anderson, who was collaborating with photographer Nin Solis to create the book *Los Otros Dreamers*. Jill had begun forming a network of returnees across Mexico. One of them, who was also from Georgia, guided Maggie through the revalidation process, and she was finally able to start college in 2013. "If it hadn't been for the community it would have taken even more years," she says. Improving the revalidation process was one of ODA's first goals; thanks to the work of Maggie and others, the Mexican government has now waived both the apostille and official translation requirements.

Jill, the editor of *Los Otros Dreamers*, was born in Utah and raised in Texas, and moved to Mexico in 2006 to work at a Quaker guesthouse while finishing her PhD dissertation. In 2012, she and one of her two Mexico-born daughters were in a café in Tabacalera, their central Mexico City neighborhood, when her daughter noticed that the two young men at a neighboring table were speaking American-accented English. The men told them about the high concentration of offshored call centers in the neighborhood, which hire deportees and return migrants for their native English. Jill applied for a post-doctoral position at the UNAM to research return

migration, and began collecting the stories that later became *Los Otros Dreamers*. The book was the first to visibilize Mexico's returnee community; perhaps more importantly, it was also the first time that many returnees outside of call centers learned they weren't the only one. "A lot of us were going through deep trauma when that book was made—and it was the tool that got us through it," Maggie said recently at the launch of the book's second edition.²⁶

After Maggie's story was selected for inclusion in *Los Otros Dreamers*, Jill invited her to come to Mexico City for the official book presentation in September 2014. Maggie made her first trip to Mexico City, and met Jill and the other 21 of the contributors who also came. Eventually, Maggie and Jill's friendship led to the creation of ODA.

The following year, Jill organized an event with the organization Iniciativa Ciudadana called "De Aquí y De Allá: Encuentro Jóvenes Sin Fronteras" that included Mexican deportees and returnees, Central American activists, and students with DACA who were visiting Mexico on advance parole.²⁷ Maggie returned to Mexico City for the event. During the course of the week, Jill asked her if she would join her for the *Los Otros Dreamers* book tour in California, encouraging her to go through the B-1/B-2 visa process.

"I got it five years ago today!" Maggie exclaims during our interview. "October 7, 2015." She filled out the application in late September and the US embassy assigned her an interview date. She was still living in San Luis Potosí, so she came a day early and spent the night at Jill's house.

"The interview was at 7:30 am," she says. "I remember I woke up at 5, I was in the metro at like 6 in the morning; I got to the embassy at like 6:30 and they let me get in line. The interview itself lasted only ten minutes, but for five of them I was waiting because the person that interviewed me had to consult with her supervisor. So I was sitting there convinced I wasn't going to get it. I wasn't the strongest candidate—I was working at Domino's Pizza earning 3,000 pesos [150 dollars] a month, I was still in school, I had ties to the US—so I thought the chances were pretty low. But for some reason I was able to connect with the interviewer; I told her about the book, that I was going to California to present it—and so at the end she gave me a ten-year visa and said, 'I know that you'll give the appropriate use to this visa.'"

"I went back to Jill's house in shock, I couldn't believe I was going to go back to the US after eight years. She says I had a poker face—she opened the door and saw me and said, 'They didn't give it to you.' And then we just started celebrating. We bought the ticket [to the US] that day."

Before they were *pochas*, many of the women of ODA identified as Dreamers. The Dreamer movement, organized by young undocumented students who would have been granted a pathway to citizenship by the DREAM Act, was largest-scale immigrant movement in the recent US past. Unlike the Chicano Movement, Dreamers did not base their demands for the right to remain in the United States based on territory, but on a meritocratic ethos of citizenship.

Initially proposed in 2001, the DREAM Act would have created a pathway to citizenship for individuals brought undocumented to the US as minors who had finished high school, registered with the selective service (if male), and who were "of good moral character." The act failed to pass in 2006, 2007, and 2011.

Yet the organizing in its support turned the undocumented young people it aimed to serve

²⁶ The book is available here: <https://www.blurb.com/b/10681149-lxs-otrxs-dreamers>.

²⁷ More information about the event is available here: <https://gmies.org/encuentro-de-jovenes-migrantes-deaquiyeallla/>

into a significant political force within the United States. They mobilized an activist strategy that emphasized the ways in which they not only complied with the cultural bases of American citizenship, but exceeded them. They were straight-A students, supported and cared for their families, volunteered, and fought tooth and nail to show Americans who took their citizenship for granted that they deserved it too. In 2010, four Dreamers occupied Arizona Senator John McCain's office; in 2013, the so-called "Dream 9" auto-deported to Mexico in order to arrive together at the Nogales, Arizona port of entry and ask for political asylum. They did so wearing caps and gowns, the unofficial symbol of the Dreamer movement (Nicholls 2013, LatinoUSA 2015).

Though the DREAM Act never succeeded, in 2012, President Barack Obama created Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which has functioned as a stopgap measure in the absence of a comprehensive pathway to citizenship. The program enables individuals meeting the same criteria as the DREAM Act to obtain a work permit and to receive a temporary social security number that can help them access institutional financial aid and in-state tuition (Malik 2015). Unlike the pathway to citizenship proposed by the DREAM Act, DACA is only a two-year program, and one that—as the Trump administration made clear—is at risk of being canceled at any time (McEvoy 2020, Shear and Cochrane 2020).

The women of ODA's leadership didn't get DACA, meanwhile, because they had already returned to Mexico by the time the program was created. Some experienced its passage with grief, because they had narrowly missed an opportunity to stay in the US with their families.

"I came back in 2011 after the DREAM Act failed to pass, with the idea that I would be able to have my life in Mexico, and would be able to go to the US to visit my family," said another 30-year-old returnee and member of ODA's *vocería* (members of the community who commit to participating in activist training and taking on leadership roles). "Then DACA passed in 2012, and I was like, I'm here in Mexico and can't go back. Fuck. Yeah, that year was sad. Now it's been ten years since I last saw my family."

But some return even with DACA. At one ODA intake, a 21-year-old returnee from California pulled out his DACA permit, one document among many that he had meticulously organized in a binder.

"I just didn't see the point of staying," he said. "It doesn't really do anything. And I never felt comfortable there, being undocumented."

Other members of ODA's community never identified as Dreamers because they didn't qualify: they didn't finish high school, perhaps, or they had had run-ins with the law, or they were simply too old. Though the Dreamer movement gained widespread, bipartisan support, it also drew critique for dividing the immigrant community. "Historically, legislators and immigration advocates have parted the sea of the undocumented with a splintered staff—working brown men and women on one side and academically achieving young brown people on the other," writes Karla Cornejo Villavicencio in *The Undocumented Americans* (Cornejo Villavicencio 2020). One deported mother explained that divide to me from a personal level: "The Dreamer discourse was, 'We didn't commit the crime, our parents did.' They criminalized their own parents. But everything I did, I did it for my kids."

These divisions can both persist and begin to be repaired once back in Mexico. In Mexico, Dreamers' native command of English and educational capital often enables them to enter the professional workforce in Mexico, whereas older deportees or those without stellar educational records can face limited job prospects. But the experience of return also shows return migrants across the Dreamer-deportee divide how much they have in common.

Call centers are a particularly important site of this kind of relationship-building. In her article "Tagged as Criminal: Narratives of Deportation and Return Migration in a Mexico City Call Center," Jill Anderson writes that "straight-A students find themselves working alongside ex-convicts, after having shared both US American high school culture and the trauma of return to Mexico" (Anderson 2015). More recently, she reflected on the way that this influenced the creation of ODA.

"This was a constant topic of conversation in the call center community: straight A students were working side-by-side with former gang members, realizing they had a lot in common. And those people were also the '*otros*' who weren't included in the Dreamers or in DACA's rules—there are a lot of people in *Los Otros Dreamers* who never would have qualified for DACA or the DREAM Act. I started to realize that the Dreamer term, and the Dreamer fight, is based on creating rules so that some people can get through the loophole, not about rethinking how migration works."

The realities that return migrants encountered in call centers shaped the way that ODA has made overcoming the binary of "good" and "bad" immigrants a key aspect of its work, in explicit opposition to Dreamer discourse.

"He visto muchas realidades," Maggie puts it. "Llevo años sin identificarme como Dreamer."²⁸

Esme was born in Iztapalapa, a large borough in the southeast of Mexico City that has urbanized rapidly and haphazardly through internal migration since the 1970s—her own family moved there from the state of Puebla—and is now best known its high rates of crime and poverty and its annual Passion Play on Easter. Like Maggie's, Esme's story of migration is one of the 1990s flows to the US Southeast. She crossed the United States border with her mom and sister at the age of eight (her dad was already in the US), and grew up in a small town in South Carolina where she was, in her tongue-in-cheek words, "the typical overachieving Dreamer," and also "the smartest and the prettiest."

As soon as I met Esme, I was charmed by the way she spliced together Spanish, colloquial English with a light southern drawl, and the legalese of both languages. "A veces es un big-ass challenge,"²⁹ I wrote down, verbatim, in my notebook at the first meeting I attended where she was present, in October of 2019. Still, out of all the personal Spanglishes I have come to know, Esme's remains my favorite.

"We lived in the middle of nowhere, South Carolina," she tells me. "When we arrived, there were very few Mexicans. There were two other Mexicans in my third grade class. In elementary school and part of middle school no tenía con quien identificarme."³⁰ Starting in middle school I was in a gifted and talented program, where everyone was white except a couple of African-Americans. Then the Hispanic community grew and we had a *misa en español*,³¹ and later a choir in Spanish with guitars.

"In high school I was cool. I don't know if this is unusual, but my gifted and talented friends were the cool people, they were cheerleaders, they were on the sports teams—cuando llegué a high school,³² everybody already knew who I was. Because I was both valedictorian and

²⁸ "I've seen a lot of realities. It's been years since I identified as a Dreamer."

²⁹ "Sometimes it's a big-ass challenge"

³⁰ "I didn't have anyone to identify with"

³¹ a mass in Spanish

³² when I got to high school

Mexican! Eso implica un poco de racismo,³³ because it was like they thought it was strange that you could be both, pero también todos los³⁴ cool kids on the soccer team were Mexican by then, which added to my coolness. Y también por ser catequista I was popular with parents, like, 'si Esme va a esa fiesta, puedes ir.' Así eran las cosas en un Southern county high school."³⁵

As a junior, Esme was admitted to the South Carolina Governor's School, a public boarding school open by competitive application to juniors and seniors in the state—or, as she puts it, "una escuela de ñoños."³⁶ Though she struggled—"no tenía las herramientas de los hijos de senadores o neurocirujanas,"³⁷ she says, adding that "it was like going back to 2000," because there was only one other Mexican at the school, and she didn't see many immigrants in the surrounding community—she graduated, and was offered a scholarship to college.

During the summer before she was set to matriculate, the college contacted her and said that they had discovered they couldn't give her the scholarship as an undocumented student. But if she went to Mexico and applied for a student visa, they said, they would give her another, equal, scholarship. She flew to Mexico with a bag packed for a month. But Esme was never able to apply, because she didn't have anyone who could write her a financial sponsor letter, which is a requirement for a student visa.³⁸

"De repente estaba exiliada, no sabía quien era. I had thought I knew who I was. Buena hija, cool in the community, tenía un novio que toda la community quería—en el sentido de que they cared about him y that other women wanted him. Estaba loca, amiga,"³⁹ she tells me, adding, "I wouldn't say those things are important to me now, but they were then."

But now all of that was gone.

"All of that, 'oh, you're Esmeralda'—De repente no tenía una identidad. Ya no era valedictorian, no era la novia de Julio, no era tan bonita—porque entre la depresión y no tener cross-country, I gained a lot of weight—era en medio de una ciudad de millones de personas en lugar de mi pequeña comunidad. It was horrible and it sucked. Literalmente odiaba México. Literalmente."⁴⁰

She went through a "longass depression phase" that included several years of substance abuse. Things started to get better when her mom returned to Mexico to be with her. "My depression didn't go away," she says, "but my mom returning meant that I didn't die, literally or figuratively."

Then, a hungover revelation changed her life.

³³ *that implies some racism*

³⁴ *but also all the cool kids*

³⁵ *also for being religious...if esme is going to that party, you can. that's how things were*

³⁶ *a nerd school*

³⁷ *I didn't have the tools that the children of senators and neurosurgeons had*

³⁸ Another reason that undocumented students in situations similar to Esme's might end up exiled in Mexico is that while undocumented minors are not criminalized for their presence in the United States, after an undocumented minor passes the age of eighteen years and six months, they begin to accrue "unlawful presence"; by the time they turn nineteen, they have already accrued a ten-year bar on authorized entry into the United States. The bars—known as "*castigos*" in Spanish—came into effect with 1997's Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), the law that also drastically increased deportations and limited judges' discretion in granting stays of removal based on longstanding residence in the US or family ties.

³⁹ *suddenly I was in exile, and I didn't know who I was....good daughter...having a boyfriend that the community loved/wanted—in the sense that...I was crazy, friend.*

⁴⁰ *suddenly I had no identity. Now I wasn't valedictorian, I wasn't Julio's girlfriend, wasn't as pretty—because between being depressed and not having...I was in the middle of a city of millions of people instead of my small community...I literally hated Mexico. Literally.*

"I went to one of those parties that lasts three days, and on the third day I woke up, completely hungover, and I realized, like, what the fuck am I doing, I'm 23—que ni siquiera es tan grande, pero en mi mentalidad de Dreamer, era inaceptable—and I told myself, 'Voy a la UNAM.'"⁴¹

As a law student at the UNAM, Esme focused on questions of gender. In her mind, studying migration law was for defending immigrants in the United States, but she was no longer there, or Central Americans in Mexico, but she didn't have a connection to that community. She didn't know that she could work in the service of her own community of returnees and deportees. That changed one day when she went to a forum about migration law.

"They were announcing, Maggie Loreda, Dreamer, gives her testimony'...I thought, ay, no, otra triste historia."⁴² There's nothing juridico⁴³ I can gain from that testimony. But I'm already here, so let's just hope the others are better.

"And then I heard Maggie, and I was shocked. Of course it was sad, because all our stories are, and of course she used her story to move people—I remember being teary, I remember the nudo en mi garganta—but⁴⁴ at the same time reclamándoles a las autoridades, a los otros ponentes, reclamándoles todo, it was crazy, me sorprendió tanto su posicionamiento político, but I also realized that for mucho tiempo I had not dealt with my duelo, I was doing a million things plus one, and doing everything to get a visa turística o de estudiante. Up until that time I had completely hidden that I was a pocha or a returnee. And here was Maggie saying that que no importaba si agarrara un avión mágicamente mañana, nadie iba a remediar lo que nos había pasado, nothing could take back that pain, those eight years. Nada iba a regresarnos esa separación o esos años de loneliness o crisis de identidad, pero sí podríamos usar nuestros historias para tratar de que nadie pasara por los mismo. I had to go talk to her afterwards, just to be like, who is this person que me hizo que me cabeza explotara."⁴⁵

No one can tell me who was the first to start self-identifying as pocha, but I'm pretty sure it was Leni.

In addition to returnees who come to Mexico alone after graduating from high school, some returnees end up in Mexico because their parents make the decision to return when they are still minors. This is the case for Leni, the assistant coordinator of Pocha House.

The first day I met Leni, she had organized a Pocha House brunch themed as an American school lunch: Campbell's tomato soup and grilled cheese cooked on an electric burner, potato chips, and milk. Xime, Pocha House's coordinator, who was born and raised in Mexico City, had never tried tomato soup.

Leni was born in Chiapas, the poorest state in Mexico, in 1994, the year that NAFTA took effect and the Mexican banks crashed. Her parents were Christian missionaries, making

⁴¹ which isn't even that old, but in my Dreamer mentality was unacceptable...I'm going to the UNAM.

⁴² another sad story

⁴³ legal

⁴⁴ the knot in my throat

⁴⁵ Calling out the authorities, calling out the other speakers, calling them out on everything...her political position surprised me so much, I realized that for a long time I had not dealt with my pain, I was doing a million things plus one, and doing everything to get a tourist or student visa. Up until that time I had completely hidden that I was a pocha or a returnee. And here was Maggie saying that it didn't matter if she could magically get on a plane tomorrow, no one was going to make better what we had gone through. Nothing was going to give us back being separated from our families or those years of loneliness or identity crises, but we could use our stories to try to make it so that no one had to pass through the same thing. I had to go talk to her afterwards, just to be like, who is this person who made my brain explode.

very little money. "My mom says we were living in a house made out of sticks," she says. She got sick as a toddler, and the family went into debt. Her father asked for permission to take a year-long leave from his church post in order to go to the United States.

One year turned into fifteen. Her father arrived first to a small town in Florida that, Leni says, was "basically just orange pickers, ranchers, and rednecks." But he was able to find a church, the state's first Latino Christian church, and through the other immigrants there, befriended a retired *coyote* who agreed to make his final trip crossing the rest of the family. A church in South Texas sent clothes and helped outfit the coyote's car with car seats for Leni and her baby sister. Leni grew up calling the coyote "*abuelo*," grandfather, knowing neither his role in their family, nor that she was undocumented.

In 2010, when Leni was sixteen, her parents sat down with their four children—Leni, her sister, and two boys born in the United States—and told them that they were going to return to Mexico. They returned to a village in the state of Veracruz, living in a small house with a dirt floor.

"My parents came back to almost nothing. It turned out that the relative's bank account where my parents had been sending money was empty. The family was even in debt for our little piece of land. I felt a lot of shame—like we had wasted the fifteen years we were in the US."

Back in Mexico, Leni couldn't enter high school, a common problem for returnee minors. Where many young adult returnees struggle to revalidate their high school transcript to go to college, for younger returnees, entering Mexican public schools can be a major challenge.⁴⁶ Eventually, because her dad knew the town's mayor, Leni was able to register for school "por la palanca"—by influence; literally, "by the lever." She went on to attend the University of Veracruz, in the state capital of Xalapa. She applied to study international business, aware that there are far more applicants than spaces in Mexico's public universities, and hoping that her fluent English would help her get in.

"I never aligned myself to the money side, and I didn't even really fit in. But studying international business helped me understand that my migration experience was part of a system—it was where I learned about the failure of the banks, about NAFTA. I finally understood that it wasn't just my parents' decision to migrate and to return. I started to understand my shame, and I wanted to feel like I wasn't the only one," she says.

Then Ayotzinapa—the disappearance and presumed murder of 43 students from a rural teachers' college in the state of Guerrero—happened. It was Leni's first protest.

"The facultad de humanidades⁴⁷ was leading it, and there was so much simbología, reclamo,⁴⁸ so much pain and anger, and I just fed off that energy—it was my first time understanding that we live in this f-ed up system, but that you can take it to the streets."

After the protest, Leni wanted to find out more about the facultad de humanidades. One

⁴⁶ The highly centralized Mexican school system requires proof that a student has graduated from both primary and secondary school in order to advance to high school. As I describe in the previous chapter, this is a common problem for US-born minors; while Mexico's Public Education Secretary specifies that school directors are required to enroll students who do not have a CURP, a unique identity number given to Mexican citizens, in practice many refuse. In contrast, the 1982 Supreme Court decision of *Plyer vs. Doe* states that US public schools cannot discriminate against children based on their immigration status. See the Mexican public education secretary's norms here: <https://sector2federal.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/normas-especc38dficas-de-control-escolar-relativas-a-la-inscripcic393n-reinscripcic393n-acreditacic393n-promocic393n-regularizacic393n-y-certificacic393n-en-la-educacic393n-bc381sica.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *College of Humanities*

⁴⁸ *symbolology, anger*

of her professors encouraged her to look into anthropology. She added it as a second course of study.

"I only did two years, but it was super powerful. On the first day, one of the professors asked us, 'Why are you here?' She emphasized the responsibility of anthropologists to study and produce work that would help society. That was the first time I felt comfortable saying that I had lived undocumented in the US and that I wanted to know about my community."

She also came to pocha identity through studying anthropology. An older man who sold coffee and *té maté* at the humanities faculty—who Leni says was her first friend in the faculty—started asking her where she was from.

"I would say, 'México!'" she says. "I would tell him I was born in Chiapas, that I had family in Oaxaca, that my family lived in Veracruz; and I started to get really frustrated, like, 'Why are you asking me so many times?' By that time I was sharing openly that I had lived in the US, but he was asking where I was *from*, and I was answering Mexico, which is true."

But the man didn't buy it—because of Leni's pocho accent. "I didn't speak Spanish as well at that time," she says. Finally, she told him about her background. "It led to good conversations."

Then she came across the word pocha.

"Pocha is rotten fruit, it's something *arrancada de sus raíces*⁴⁹—and I was like, this is what I am, within the *capas y colores de mexicanidad*,⁵⁰ and so I started taking it on as my identity."

Months later, Leni's mom called her to the television, saying that there were "people like her" on the news. It was Maggie being interviewed. A year later, Leni won a competition and got to speak about return migration in front of the senate, her first time traveling to Mexico City without her parents. Jill Anderson was in the audience. Afterwards, she approached Leni and told her about a protest that was coming up at the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores on May 1, 2017.

"I had no money, but my mom was supporting of me going, so she gave me a little," Leni says. "I went to the protest, I met Maggie, and basically, the following week I moved to the city." Maggie was moving to Mexico City from San Luis Potosí at the same time. If Maggie and Jill's friendship led to the creation of ODA, Maggie and Leni's friendship made reclaiming pocha the affective center of its activism.

"Basically the second time I hung out with Maggie, we were exploring the city, and I told her I wanted to make a YouTube channel called 'Pocheando with Leni,'" says Leni.

Instead, the two collaborated to make an Instagram page and a podcast called "Pochas, So What?" that aim to use their conversations about their experiences to find fellow pochas from across Mexico. They share pocha stories and moments ranging from the time Maggie brought a twelve-pack of Taco Bell chalupas through customs to bring to friends in Mexico, to a cameo from Leni's mom recalling the time she cooked an All-America pancake breakfast for workmen helping them in their house, only to return to the kitchen and find that they had gone to buy tortillas.

Just before Maggie moved to Mexico City, she and Jill had signed the paperwork to constitute ODA as an *asociación civil*, the Mexican equivalent of a non-profit organization.

They had decided to found ODA while on the 2015 *Los Otros Dreamers* book tour in

⁴⁹ *ripped out from its roots*

⁵⁰ *within the layers and shades of Mexican-ness*

California. The book's 3,000 printed copies were coming to an end, but the two agreed there was more work to be done. "It was the right time and the right moment," says Maggie. "But we didn't know what it was going to turn into."

At the time, they began running a collective. But both were working full-time, Jill had two daughters, and Maggie was still living in San Luis Potosí, working as an online interpreter. They also both resisted the idea of the collective becoming an *asociación civil*, both because of their other commitments and because of implications of running an NGO. But then Trump was elected, and they realized that they were going to need a more formal structure from which to organize, both because they anticipated the arrival of more deportees and returnees, they wanted to better represent the existing, invisible community in Mexico, and because they needed a fiscal and legal structure to sustain the work. "So it's basically Trump's fault that we're an NGO," says Maggie.

After signing the paperwork in March 2017 and Maggie's move to Mexico City in April, they began working out of a small office loaned to them, and writing their first grant. Later that year, they were able to hire Xime, who is still the coordinator of Pocha House, and another returnee as the coordinator of accompaniment. ("Accompaniment" is a common branch of Mexican NGOs that helps people navigate bureaucracy.) In December of that year, they rented Pocha House's space overlooking Calle Victoria in the Centro Histórico. They chose the location to be close to call centers and government offices, but to be able to provide a different type of space nearby—one that was comfortable and supportive (Flores Marcial 2020). After renting the space, they created a poll on Facebook to decide on its name. "Pocha House" won nearly unanimously.

Now warm and lived-in, Pocha House is sunny and colorful. A graffiti-inspired mural, blue and black on a white background, is painted next to the entrance. Inside, upside-down US and Mexico flags, connected by a graphic of clasped hands, hang from the room's central *viga* as a flag of bi- and anti-nationality;⁵¹ the purple, glitter-covered letters spelling out "de aquí y de allá" hang above a whiteboard. Coffee and cookies are available in the corner. The space hosts regular poetry slams, weekly English classes known as "Inglés pa' el barrio,"⁵² and celebrations of Day of the Dead and Thanksgiving alike. Similar to the spaces created by Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida described by Rodríguez (2003), Pocha House is a space that fosters creative individual expression and simultaneous collective representation as necessary bases for political action—a space where "not only individual 'subjects-in-process' emerge but where the collective subject of 'community-in-progress' is also given an open venue for expression, self-representation, and self-discovery" (Rodríguez 2003). In Xime's words,

"La gente llega y así de, 'no ma, aquí me siento en casa, puedo hablar Spanglish, puedo ser mi misma, a huevo soy pocha.'" ⁵³

To get to this point, however, ODA had to go through a reality check. Based on Jill's organizing of call center workers and Maggie's experience with revalidation, when Jill, Maggie, and the two original staff members opened Pocha House, they thought that they were mostly going to see cases of revalidación de estudios. Instead, the first people to walk into the space

⁵¹ In their article about Pocha House, Vera-Rosas and Guerrero (2021) write: "Though the flags function to a certain degree to claim these countries, these symbols of the nation are hung upside down. This 'decorative' choice renders visible both the claim and the critique of Mexico and the United States...the flags upside down express a sense of disidentification."

⁵² Vera-Rosas and Guerrero (2021) translate this as "English fo' da' hood."

⁵³ *people come and they're like, No way, I feel at home here, I can speak Spanglish, I can be myself, 100 percent I'm a pocha.*

were two men who were homeless, had substance abuse problems and criminal records, and had been deported years before.

"Desde el privilegio nunca habíamos imaginado eso," says Xime. "Nos sorprendió la falta de redes de apoyo de la familia, del estado...nos pegó fuerte."⁵⁴

All that year, ODA's staff and vocería dedicated themselves to advocacy. "Vivíamos en foros," continues Xime. "Hasta que hubo una reflexión de qué, realmente, estábamos sacando de estos foros."⁵⁵

Then, in fall 2018, the first Central American migrant caravans arrived to Mexico City. City officials converted the Ciudad Deportiva, a stadium complex built for the 1968 Olympic Games, into a shelter, and many NGOs set up booths to talk with migrants and offer services.

"Pusimos una mesa en que compas de la comunidad comentaban sobre sus experiencias con asilo, detención, deportación, el impacto en sus hijos," says Xime. "Aunque hubo el OIM y IMUMI—organizaciones más grandes, con más recursos—nuestra mesa era mucho más vivencial, por las historias reales, la voz propia. Eso nos marcó mucho."⁵⁶

At that point, ODA shifted its advocacy from forums to the streets, and intensified its focus on the arts and culture. This culminated in *Florece Aquí y Allá*, a translocal artistic celebration of multinationality and the struggle for it, on July 6, 2019. ODA community members took over the Zócalo (Mexico City's central square) with an events tent and the temporary installation of a 50-foot-diameter mandala made out of seeds and paper. Each axis of the design's rotational symmetry was the stalk that bloomed into a yellow flower and was labeled with one of the event's demands: Seguridad e Inclusión, Mantener familias unidas, No encarcelar migrantes.⁵⁷ Across Mexico and the United States, other communities and organizations hosted parallel events. "Ocupar el Zócalo no fue poca cosa,"⁵⁸ says Xime.

Still, not everyone is on board with being pocha.

"Before ODA, I had no idea what I was," another returnee told me. "I hadn't thought about my own identity. I didn't ever identify because as a Dreamer because I wasn't very involved in that activism. Now, I identify as a returnee."

As a pocha? I asked her.

"I was bullied so badly in the university that I can't get used to it," she said. "The professors would say *albures* and since I didn't know about them, I would respond, and the whole class would laugh." (*Albures* are intricate double-entendre plays on words that involve sexual innuendo—something like a linguistically complicated counterpart to "that's what she said" jokes.)

Another returnee told me that she was slowly coming around to being called pocha because of being involved with ODA. "I associated pocha with something negative. I'm not a Chicana because I didn't live in California or the Southwest; I don't identify as a Dreamer because I was six when the DREAM Act was being drafted—I remember it clearly, because my sister was struggling to go to college—whereas by the time I graduated high school, there was

⁵⁴ *from our positions of privilege we had never imagined that. We were surprised by their lack of family support networks, support from the government...it hit us hard.*

⁵⁵ *we lived in forums. Until we had a reflection on what we were really getting out of those forums.*

⁵⁶ *We set up a table where members of the community talked about their experiences with asylum, detention, deportation, its impact on their kids...even though the IOM and other organizations were there, bigger organizations with more resources, our table was a lot more active because of the real stories. That affected us a lot.*

⁵⁷ *Security and inclusion, keeping families together, not incarcerating migrants*

⁵⁸ *Taking over the Zócalo was no small thing*

DACA and I identified as a DACA-mented student. But now, I'm like, naw, there's no other way to put it. I'm a pocha."

ODA now wears lightly the fact that intersectional feminism, inspired by the work of US American Black feminists, is fundamental to pocha identity and activism. Pocha House's 2020 workshops included Introduction to Black Feminism, Queer Approaches to Studying Migration, Trans-Inclusive Feminism, and Body-Positive Twerking. The organization's staff, volunteers, and committees are almost all women. And though standard Spanish rules dictate that as soon as a man is present, masculine endings are used, at ODA the use of feminine speech (using "nosotras" for "we" even when there is a man in the room) or *lengua inclusiva* (inclusive language, or the use of ambiguous gender endings such as "amigüis" or "abogades") is the norm.

Yet this was a hard win. When ODA's June 2020 calendar was published with the organization's logo printed in rainbow, showing allyship with Pride month, Maggie remarked that even just a year beforehand, such a simple gesture would have been impossible—it would have encountered too much pushback from the community.

One day, I asked Xime and Esme how the feminist turn came about. Xime responded without missing a beat.

"Fue cuando llegó Esme."⁵⁹

Esme pushed her curls of hair out of her face.

"Sí, pues, Maggie is always talking about my chinos rebeldes, mi cabeza rebelde que incomoda a ODA."⁶⁰

Even after the conference where Maggie "made her head explode," Esme says, she wasn't ready to get involved with ODA. "I had just started a relationship that wouldn't end well, estaba muy en mi onda feminista,"⁶¹ and like, I had to figure out a way to eat, you know?" She didn't visit Pocha House until one Saturday when Maggie called her and invited her to an event.

She started to participate, "but with one foot out," because she was still completing her social service requirement to graduate from college, volunteering in the UNAM's human rights law clinic. But she and Maggie got along, and Maggie invited her to apply to ODA's mobility program, which aids members of the ODA community in applying for B-1/B-2 visas. But when she was declined, she distanced herself again. "I was mad at life," she says. "I wasn't mad at Maggie but I didn't want to see them for a bit. I'd put hope in the system to no estar exiliada,"⁶² and instead it was like everything I had done in eight years—working, going to law school, winning law competitions, mis servicios sociales—no importaba."⁶³

Everything changed at the end of that year, when Esme went to an ODA event sick with a cold that she'd had for three months. Maggie set up an appointment for her with a doctor who gives discounted treatment to the ODA community.

"By that time I was dying and I didn't know it," says Esme. "Y el día que fui al appointment, peleé con ese wey, que siempre apagaba el teléfono cuando peleamos. Y llegué con los doscientos pesos que le debía, pero me di cuenta que me faltaba los cinco pesos para regresar en el metro."⁶⁴ So I was thinking, what do I do, come out to the doctor and tell her I have nothing,

⁵⁹ *It was when Esme got here*

⁶⁰ *Yes, well, Maggie is always talking about my rebellious curls, my rebellious head that creates problems for ODA*

⁶¹ *I was doing my feminist thing*

⁶² *to not be exiled*

⁶³ *my social service hours—didn't matter*

⁶⁴ *and the day I went to the appointment, I fought with my boyfriend, who always turned off his phone when we*

or I die."

Instead, as soon as the receptionist saw Esme, she was alarmed. As soon as the doctor saw her, she said, "You can't come here in the middle of an asthma attack! There's nothing I can do for you right now." At that time, Esme didn't even know she had asthma. The doctor told Esme to go directly to the specialist ER at the *Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias* (INER), 23 kilometers away in Tlalpan, the most southern borough of Mexico City.

"Eso era el momento en que más había sentido sola desde mi retorno. Estaba yo ahí, muriendo sin saberlo, tragándome mis inside tears. No tenía ni los cinco pesos para el metro, el wey no me contestaba; me había separado de mis redes de soporte por el vato; mi mamá estaba en Iztapalapa, así que no era una opción. And then I remembered ODA. So I called Maggie and asked to borrow money for the Uber. Instead me dijo, 'te pago el Uber y yo también voy a tomar un Uber y te veo ahí.'"⁶⁵

It turned out that Jill lived closer to the INER, so she went instead. She was there when Esme arrived.

"She helped me walk, helped me with the paperwork, and fed me—I remember she had brought this orange infused chocolate from the States. After they treated me, she asked if I wanted to stay the night at her house, and I said no, so she took me to my house, but she sent me food the next day." After that, Esme was bonded to ODA in a new way.

"Of course it was life changing to know there were other people who had the same experience of return," says Esme. "But cuando esto pasó, it really changed the meaning to saber que no estoy sola; que neta⁶⁶ I would never have to feel lonely again, que por fin un barrio me respaldaba, neta⁶⁷ ODA saved my life, literally and figuratively."

Shortly thereafter, Maggie sent Esme the announcement for the job she now has, as ODA's coordinator of accompaniment. Esme says that the fact that she applied had a lot to do with what Maggie and Jill had done for her when she was sick. She hesitated before taking the job for two reasons: that she wants to litigate, and that she worried she would have to leave feminist fights, since the majority of the deportee and returnee community is male. "Pero a pesar de esas dudas, pensando en ODA desde el momento que los conocí y todo que hicieron por mi, incluso siendo mis amigas, fue así de okay, pues di...and damn I can feel the change in my life—la estabilidad emocional, económica, los diplomados, los viajes."⁶⁸

Instead of leaving behind feminist fights, Esme set to work changing the culture of ODA and forever feminizing pocha activism.

Xime remembers the precise turning point as a women's committee meeting moderated by Esme.

"De repente estábamos hablando de nuestras vidas, nuestro día-a-día, cosas de violencia,

fought. And I arrived with the 200 pesos I owed her, but I realized I didn't have the 5 pesos for the return trip in the metro.

⁶⁵ *that was the moment I felt most alone since my return. There I was, dying without knowing it, swallowing my tears. I didn't have the five pesos for the metro, my boyfriend wasn't answering, I'd separated myself from my support networks for the relationship; my mom was all the way in Iztapalapa so she wasn't an option. So I called Maggie and asked to borrow money for the Uber. Instead she said, "I'll pay the Uber and I'll also take an Uber and I'll see you there."*

⁶⁶ *to know that I'm not alone; that for real*

⁶⁷ *that finally a community had my back, for real*

⁶⁸ *but despite those hesitations, thinking about ODA since the moment I met them and everything they had done for me, including being my friends, I was like, okay, let's do this...the emotional and economic stability, the extra diplomas, the travel*

cosas muy íntimas. Y creo que literal de ese momento empezamos a correr los machos de Pocha House. Se fortaleció el comité de mujeres, hasta que literalmente cerramos Pocha cuando hubo reuniones del comité de mujeres, para que serían un safe space. Y todos los machos se sentían incómodos, poco a poco."⁶⁹

Esme adds that many of the women who participated in the women's committee already identified as feminists, or were in the process of educating themselves as such. The women's committee conversations dug into the way that deportee and returnee women experienced gender upon arriving to Mexico. Many of the women I interviewed told me that in the United States they were constantly aware of being undocumented, a problem that loomed so large that they didn't think about questions of gender as much. But upon arriving to Mexico, a country that has an average of 11 murders of women per day (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2020), where 24.6 percent of women experience physical or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (UN Women 2016), and where 58 percent of Mexico City women report having been groped in public (Senthilingam 2017), the fact of being a woman took on new importance.

The women's committee members' experiences of being women intersected in important ways with those of being a migrant. That intersectionality set their experiences apart from the men who, at the time, dominated ODA's *vocería* and other community spaces. The intersectional perspective also separates *pocha* feminism from mainstream Mexican feminism, which has seen a resurgence of trans-exclusive radical feminist discourse in recent years, and has struggled to incorporate perspectives of race, colorism, and class into its fights.⁷⁰

"Nos empezamos a incomodar, porque los espacios de *vocería* y de la comunidad eran controlados por vatos. No es que no te dejaron hablar, pero sí, eran muy vatos esos espacios," says Esme. For example, she says, when there were poetry slams, all of the slammers were male. "Luego yo fui encargada con el slam de Florecer y dije, ni madres, no voy a hacer un slam de puros vatos, entonces invité a varias morras a escribir poemas. I even told them, even if you don't want to write a poem, just pick a poem. But I want you to be on stage."⁷¹

"Por todo esto," Xime explains, returning to the question of the male-dominated *vocería*, "establecimos que no íbamos a admitir ningún tipo de violencias, menos de género—hasta que la *vocería* se descompuso. Antes, cualquier persona podía ser representante de la comunidad," says Xime. "Y ahora dijimos, no puede ser la persona que pegó a su mujer no mames. Y empezamos a cambiar la cultura. Hubo unos momentos incómodos, muy incómodos, pero necesarios, y los machos se fueron."⁷²

⁶⁹ *suddenly we were talking about our lives, our day-to-days, experiences of violence, really intimate things. And literally from that moment we started to run the machos out of Pocha House. All the machos felt uncomfortable, little by little.*

⁷⁰ For an example of these divisions, consider a statement released by the Afro-Mexican feminist group Afrofeminas about why they were not going to participate in the March 9 "Women's Strike," a heavily publicized nationwide event (whose organizers later were revealed to be ardently trans-exclusive). They wrote: "There is no representation or visibility of our positions, and this makes our main claim as racialized women, which is racism, obvious, since it isn't given any importance. The biggest rift is between white people and people of color. What we have is a movement that tells us to unite, to march together, but at the moment of truth it cares little about us, and our demands even less" (Afrofeminas 2018). Similar critiques of mainstream white and mestiza Mexican feminism have been expressed by indigenous feminists.

⁷¹ *we started to get uncomfortable, because all the spaces were dominated by dudes. It wasn't that they wouldn't let you talk, but those spaces were really male... Later I was in charge of the slam at Florecer and I said, no fucking way, I'm not going to have a slam of all dudes, so I invited some girls to write poems.*

⁷² *Because of all that, we established that we weren't going to admit any type of violence, including and especially gender violence—to the point that the vocería fell apart. Before, anyone could represent the community. But now we*

"El compromiso con la comunidad ya no era lo mismo—like,⁷³ if you weren't cutting it, you weren't cutting it," says Esme.

On March 8, 2020, over 80,000 women gathered in the center of Mexico City for the annual women's day march. While there is a march every year, this year, the stakes were different. In the month leading up to the march, Mexico City had seen two high-profile and gruesome feminicides. Feminist WhatsApp groups and social media pages announcing the march instructed attendees to wear green and purple—colors that have been associated with International Women's Day since 1908—along with hats and plenty of sunscreen.

Green and purple also have specific permutations in the context of Latin American and Mexican feminism. The *marea verde*, or green tide, which began in Argentina in the early 2000s, has made green bandanas the symbol of the movement to legalize abortion, and the feminist movement by extension (Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir 2019). And spring in Mexico City also coincides with the jacaranda bloom. (After the 2020 Women's Day march, aerial images began to circulate in which the marching women and the trees in bloom blended together, the whole city awash in green and purple. "This is our feminist spring," the *Marea Verde México* wrote on their Instagram.)

Before the march, the women of ODA got together to make their own purple bandanas, which showed the word *pocha* next to the feminist symbol. They made a WhatsApp group and a spreadsheet recording the full name, age, and emergency contact of every participant. Xime instructed everyone in the WhatsApp group to download the app Life360, so that the location of anyone in the group was visible to the others at all times.

On the day of the march, the *pochas* met up, with their green and purple bandanas and their protest signs, in front of the Teletec call center, one of the city's largest, which faces the Monumento a la Revolución. Esme, wearing purple lipstick to match her *pocha* bandana, held a megaphone to teach the group their protest chants. Alongside the feminist slogans that are popular in Latin America—"Alerta machista! América Latina será toda feminista!"—they chanted consignas *pochas*: "¿Dónde están las mujeres deportadas y retornadas? We are here! ¿Dónde están las *pochas*? We are here!"⁷⁴ (A year earlier, a returnee woman attending the march alone had heard the *pocha* chants and followed them to the source, meeting the community for the first time, only to become a member of the *vocería* within months.) Jill had brought her daughters, who are 5 and 12, bilingual, and dual Mexican and American citizens, as "the littlest *pochas*." Leni, hidden beneath a yellow and navy blue baseball cap, had perhaps the most *pocha* of all the protest signs—from the way it brought migration into the day's discourse about femicide down to its missing accent on the first-person, future tense verb conjugation:

Si en el DESIERTO sobreviví, No dejare que me maten aquí.⁷⁵

In some ways, ODA's feminist turn seems inevitable, because the organization's critique of citizenship and nationality is so fundamentally feminist. Their work follows in the line of Chicana feminist thought that sought to critique nationalism—including Chicano nationalism—

were saying, it can't be someone who beats their wife, no fucking way. And we started to change the culture. There were some uncomfortable moments, very uncomfortable, but necessary, and all the machos left.

⁷³ *The commitment to the community had changed.*

⁷⁴ *alert, macho! All of Latin America will be feminist!; pocha chants: where are the deportee and returnee women? where are the pochass?*

⁷⁵ *if I survived in the desert, I'm not going to let you kill me here* [according to mainstream Spanish grammar conventions, the "e" at the end of "dejaré" should carry an accent.]

and the ways that it has reifies patriarchal power (Pérez 1999, Alarcón 1999, Rodríguez 2009). In Maggie's words,

"Citizenship, and home, and family—these concepts restrict a certain liberation for people. Like if you have this citizenship you have to be all-in for that county, and that leads to a nationalist and patriarchal approach."

In contrast to migrant activism that emphasizes the right to belong in one's destination country, *las pochas* de-emphasize the nation; drawing on the work of Latin American feminists, they critique its very existence as a masculine construct. Pocha activism is transforming migration activism from US-centric rights claims on citizenship and belonging to a fight based on equitable access to mobility and the right to choose for oneself where one belongs. Pocha activism endeavors to understand and address the structural forces that both limit mobility and that create diverse positionalities among migrants, and to conceptualize its activism in a way that is fundamentally inclusive. As Maggie says:

"Mobility doesn't force you to be or think or belong in one place. It gives you the freedom to decide. Giving people mobility isn't imposing anything on people. Not every deportee or returnee wants to return to the United States. People should be able to make those decisions. Fighting for mobility is just fighting for having the option." This vision is at the core of the ways that understanding return migrant activism enables a more just re-envisioning of border and migration politics: by de-centering national belonging, *pocha* activism offers a an organizing principle for migration demands that transcends borders.

Yet these feminist politics of mobility remain threatening to the state. Days before I submitted the final version of this dissertation, I saw Maggie and three other members of ODA's community in my new home city of Tucson, Arizona. They were on the Visa Justice Tour for which Maggie had been helping Esme apply for a visa, speaking at colleges and universities in Texas and Arizona to raise awareness about the importance of mobility for the return migrant community. (The tour had been pushed back two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic.) We met at a street fair at Tucson's Galeria Mitotera celebrating Tucson's indigenous community.

Maggie told me about how much ODA had grown, expanding from *la cueva* into an entire rented house and increasing its staff to twelve people. Then she placed the tour sticker, which read "Mobility for All. Support Visa Justice," and featured an illustration of a man and a woman digging up the US-Mexico border wall and planting a seedling in its place, on a streetlight pole next to a sticker that read "Tucson against Gentrification" and another supporting the Colibrí Center for Human Rights, a well-known Tucson organization that fights migrant death in the surrounding desert. Scanning the sticker's QR code led to a post listing the demands of the visa justice tour. Along with slides asking for "creation of the US Embassy and Consulate directives that require officers to consider temporary family reunification of returned and deported individuals as a positive discretionary factor at the time of issuing non-immigrant visas," "immediate creation of waivers for automatic bars for those seeking both immigrant and non-immigrant visas" and "elimiate the 3 and 10 year pars for unlawful presence and illegal re-entry," the demands included a personal request: "issue a tourist visa to the two members of our team that were denied by the US Embassy in Mexico City to join us in our upcoming delegations." The slide showed an image illustration of Esme, along with one other member of the ODA community. Despite, or perhaps because of, the ways in which she had devoted herself to supporting the deported and returned community, her B-2 visa had been denied once again.

Chapter 4. The Dislocation of Illegality: Gender Variance and Deportation

One of the chapters of the book *Lxs Otrxs Dreamers*⁷⁶ is a testimony by a deportee named Gia Sophia Rodríguez Cervantes, who was deported from Phoenix, Arizona in 2011 at the age of twenty. Rodríguez Cervantes writes, "All that paperwork—the IFE, my birth certificate, my high school papers—has been so hard. Walking around, I wished there was one place I could go that would guide and understand me. I was deported but most people don't know what that really means" (Anderson et al 2021). A paragraph later, Rodríguez Cervantes continues, "Being...a transgender person is harder than anything. The frustration. To be a woman. She knows who she is, she knows herself, she has confidence, but no one understands her. You're hidden" (Anderson et al 2021).

This chapter discusses the experiences and activism of trans men and women in the deportee and return migrant community. While these members of the community are small in number, I argue that they have had an outsized influence in shaping the political demands and community vision of deportee and returnee activism, including forging solidarity with Central American migrants and asylum-seekers in Mexico City. To start, Jill Anderson and Maggie Loredó write in their introduction to the second edition of the *Lxs Otrxs Dreamers* that Rodríguez Cervantes' invocation was part of the impetus to create Pocha House. For many deportees and returnees—trans and cis—Pocha House became the space that Rodríguez Cervantes had longed for. Behind the creation of Pocha House and the rise of pocha feminism, then, is this behind-the-scenes contribution by Mexico City's small but significant trans deportee/returnee community. And at the same time as Pocha House is a safe space for navigating the experience of deportation or return (and the associated bureaucratic processes), then, it is also a space in which trans deportees and returnees can receive support for the emotional and bureaucratic processes of gender transition. This was true even before the organization's feminist turn that I describe in the previous chapter.

In the chapter, I argue that the processes of citizenizing and of gender transition—in its legal and bureaucratic aspects—are resonant as experiences of dislocation and its redress. While navigating the Mexican bureaucracy, deportees and returnees face similar forms of "administrative violence" (Spade 2015) as transgender bureaucratic subjects do. At the same time, the activism of trans deportees and returnees confounds both the "homonationalist" (Puar 2008) and first-worldist leanings of queer migration scholarship and the metaphors of travel prominent in trans scholarship. More than any other form of return migration activism, activism by and for trans migrants has expanded deportee/returnee activism to encompass and welcome queer and trans asylum-seekers in Mexico. Trans deportees and returnees have marshaled the twin, resonant forms of dislocation of deportation and gender variance into new forms of solidarity that scramble established metaphors of movement and desire to imagine new ideas of home and belonging.

⁷⁶ For the book's reprint, the title of *Los Otros Dreamers* was updated for gender inclusivity. Though the use of the term "Latinx" has sparked vigorous debate in the United States, in activist and queer circles in Mexico, including at ODA, *lengua inclusiva* (using x, e, or i in the place of a masculine plural) has been adopted without a fight, not only as a political action but also as a playful decentering of the presence of the masculine in everyday speech, and a way to signal intimacy in non-male-dominated spaces. As I describe in the previous chapter, this is particularly true

Dislocation and Queer Migration

The word "dislocation" provides a productive theoretical framework for this chapter because of its multiple senses. In migration, the word "dislocation" is used largely in a Polanyian (1944) sense, describing how the rise of market society (or, in the contemporary world, the adoption of neoliberal reforms (Harvey 2005) "jeopardized the social fabric and was the root cause of unprecedented social dislocation" (Malik and Kugler 2013)). Accordingly, migration scholarship about Mexico and the United States tends to use the word to describe the way that economic recessions push people to migrate (Ferris 1984, Massey et al 1987, Gutmann 1997, Lorey 1999, González 2004, Wasserman 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly, it also appears in scholarship about deportation (Khosravi 2018, de Genova and Peutz 2010, Anderson 2014, Boehm 2016).

But what is productive about the term is that it implies something larger than simple displacement. This is clear in its use in Glissant (1989)'s *Caribbean Discourse*, in which colonial economic dislocation is only a small part of a larger project of cultural dislocation—what he characterizes as "total dislocation" and "the dislocation of worlds." "The French Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade," Glissant writes. Inda and Rosaldo (2002) similarly write that "the world can no longer be viewed simply as a matter of one-way, western cultural imperialism" or "just in terms of core-periphery relations," and offering the concept of "dislocation" as a replacement framework for approaching the anthropology of globalization.

Dislocation has a separate philology in trans scholarship. Halberstam (1998) writes that many trans narratives "combine a profound sense of dislocation with a brave attempt to make do with the status of unbelonging." Keegan (2013) writes that the films *Transamerica* (2005), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) all pair geographic dislocation and "dysphoric dislocation" "in a process of thematic mirroring" that symbolizes "the trans person's movement toward self-acceptance and into an integrated, newly gendered personhood."

These senses of dislocation come together in queer-of-color scholarship. Marlon M. Bailey writes in *Butch Queens up in Pumps* that "the stakes involved in cultural belonging are high. Black LGBT people face many challenges as a result of their exclusion from Black families and other forms of belonging that bring attention to the social, psychological, and spiritual ramifications of dislocation" (Bailey 2013, 86). T. Jackie Cuevas also uses the word "dislocation" to describe a sense of unbelonging in one's gender while analyzing the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (Cuevas 2018). And my analysis here carries particular influence and inspiration from Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (Ahmed 2010). While Ahmed does not use the term dislocation, her analysis identifies another affective resonance, between "unhappy queers" (queer children who will not inherit the cultural norm of "family happiness") and "melancholy migrants" (immigrants who do not buy into the project of national happiness), as figures who cultural attachments to happiness. These similar senses of unbelonging, I argue, are forms of dislocation.

Ahmed's focus on the affect of unhappiness, and my own focus on dislocation and return migration separate this chapter from much of the existing body of scholarship exists about queer migrants in the United States. While I respect, read, and draw on the work of these scholars, scholarship about queer migrations, like much migration scholarship, it is focused on migrants' rights to belong in the United States—questions such as LGBT asylum-seekers, pre-gay marriage fights for keeping gay families intact, and the Dreamer movement's appropriation of LGBT

political strategy. The northward vector that underlies this political activism, and the theorizations and affects attendant to it, do not illuminate the current realities of return migration and solidarity with migrants who choose to settle in Mexico rather than continue northward to the United States.

The experience of dislocation has fomented the deportee and returnee community's activism. Balibar (2004) writes that "critical consciousness" seems to be "closely associated" with dislocation. Butler writes that "a certain dislocation of perspective is necessary for rethinking global politics" (Butler 2009, 47). But gender non-conforming deportees and returnees experience a double dislocation, along with multiplied bureaucratic processes and administrative violences, but also a doubling of the critical consciousness that dislocation sparks. Trans deportees and returnees' political consciousness has shifted the work of deportee and returnee activism, at the same time as, returning to the Boym (1998) quotation discussed in Chapter 2, this double dislocation has also fed into the intimate processes of emplacement enacted by the community, such as the creation of Pocha House. This chapter argues that the acute resonance between the dislocation of gender and the dislocation of deportation has played a crucial role not only in the creation of diasporic intimacy among return migrants in Mexico, but also in the forms of solidarity they have forged with migrants for whom Mexico is a destination country.

Administrative Violence at the IMSS

One Monday morning, I took an Uber to an IMSS—the Mexican Social Security Institute, one of the country's public healthcare providers—Family Medicine Unit in the working-class north of Mexico City, to accompany Rocky, a trans man in his late twenties, to a doctor's appointment. Rocky had been deported from Arizona three years earlier, after having been brought to the state as a toddler. The appointment was a routine visit to pick up his antidepressants, but this time he also planned to ask about access to trans health services. He had been on testosterone, or "T," for several months, buying it over-the-counter and having the staff doctor at the pharmacy near his house inject it, but hoped to get it for free through the IMSS, as well as to access gender confirmation surgery. My presence had two functions: first, as an observer in the room to decrease the likelihood of medical discrimination and to help Rocky file a complaint should one be necessary; and secondly, as a pinch-hitter in the event that his Spanish fell short.

The IMSS, or *Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social*, was founded by presidential decree in 1943. The IMSS serves those who are employed in the formal sector—private companies pay into the IMSS—but who do not make enough money to pay for private health insurance. (Another public health provider, the ISSTE, or Social Security Institute for State Workers, serves government employees.) The *Unidades de Medicina Familiar* (UMFs) provide basic, routine care to IMSS beneficiaries. The UMF where I met Rocky was inaugurated in February of 1956; in line with the workings of the IMSS itself, it evokes a Latin American socialist style: a four-story building made of tan brick, concrete painted green, and large windows. Of the gold color letters that spell out the building's name in a svelte sans-serif font, both M's are missing, leaving only their oxidized traces on the facade. Above the words hangs a relief of the IMSS logo, a stylized eagle sheltering a new mother, sculpted by Mexican muralist movement member Federico Cantú (IMSS 2017).

As we entered the building, the security guard stalled us, asking why I was accompanying Rocky. Showing him my printout of the Mexican Health Secretary's LGBTTTI Protocol⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The initials in Spanish stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Travesti (an identity that

(Secretaría de Salud 2020), I explained that according to the document, LGBTTTI individuals have the right to be accompanied to their appointments by someone they trust. To my surprise, he turned friendly and waved us through.

"What just happened?" Rocky asked me as we climbed the stairs. Though he grew up speaking Spanish at home, like many other young deportees and returnees, Rocky arrived to Mexico to discover his fluency far more limited than he had expected. His job at an offshored American call center means that he spends his workdays on the phone with clients in the United States, and socializes with other young, English-speaking deportees and return migrants.

I explained what had happened, adding my surprise that the guard had let me in so easily. "They like seeing tall white people," Rocky explained, continuing, "I was supposed to have green eyes like yours! My great-grandfather was a tall French guy, my great-grandma was an Indian. I didn't get the height or the eyes, just the skin." He held his arm next to mine to show that his was also very light. "And you speak Spanish better than me! How unfair."

Our respective phenotypic traits became important shortly thereafter, when the doctor struggled to understand Rocky in terms of both gender and nationality. The doctor called us into the consultation room, a small space with tiled brown walls. He sat behind an aged computer; a single black chair faced his desk. Behind a curtain was an examination table and another door. Rocky took the chair; I leaned against the doorway. Rocky leaned forward to pass the doctor his IMSS card, the pocket-sized folder tracking his medical history. It was pink, indicating that he was enrolled as a woman.

"Rocky," the doctor said. "What is it short for?" he asked in Spanish.

"Roxana," Rocky said. He turned to me and shrugged. "Yep, my parents named me Roxana." The doctor's eyes darted between the two of us as we spoke in English.

"Where are you from?" the doctor asked. Rocky understood the question as pertaining to the name "Roxana," his comprehension muddled at the same time as it did not occur to him that the doctor would see him as anything but Mexican.

"Germany?" Rocky replied, with an unsure tone, looking at me to confirm the name's origin. "Right?" he asked. I shrugged.

The doctor looked at me, and then at Rocky.

"*Germans*," he said under his breath, with a slight nod, as though of understanding. He looked at his computer and told Rocky that only one of his medications was in stock, but that they would call him when the other was available.

"I also wanted to ask you about this," Rocky said, pulling a box of injectable testosterone from his backpack and setting it on the doctor's desk. The doctor recoiled slightly.

"No, this is highly controlled. You would have to make another appointment to ask for a referral to an endocrinologist."

"I also want to have surgery on my chest," Rocky blurted out.

"Are you a man or a woman?" the doctor responded.

"He's trans," I interrupted.

"But are you a man or a woman?" the doctor repeated. He became increasingly agitated—confused by the impasse between his assumptions about Rocky, and what Rocky was

translates to transvestite but is recognized as a gender identity), and Intersex. Lewis (2012) writes that the term "intertwines a (homo)sexual subjectivity among subjects birth assigned as male with a feminine presentation. Some *travestis* live in many ways socially as women. Such a definition is provisional and does not pretend to be complete; what is most apparent is that *travesti* oftentimes traverses the Anglo-American divide of gendered identities and sexual ones, and hence does not translate easily to 'transgender.'"

trying to communicate. We realized later that the doctor had understood Rocky to be a cisgender man, despite his pink IMSS card, and later presumed, when he began asking about trans health, that he was a transwoman hoping to transition. Finally—only once Rocky had described his genitalia—the doctor seemed to understand the situation, but was unable to answer whether the IMSS covered plastic surgery for gender confirmation. He repeated that first Rocky needed to be referred to the endocrinologist, gave Rocky his prescription to take to the pharmacy downstairs, and sent us out the back door.

I was slightly shaken by the doctor's inability to finesse his confusion. But Rocky brushed it off, saying, "Pretty cool that I passed as a man."

Administrative Violence and Trans Mobilities

In the book *Normal Life*, scholar Dean Spade develops the term "administrative violence" to refer to the way that illegibility to the state because of gender variance can result in consequences that have grave effects for trans individuals (Spade 2015). Spade defines the concept as the way that failure to fit correctly into modes of state civilization (that is, by defying established categories of governmentality, namely gender) leads to criminalization, harassment, and neglect. Trans individuals are vulnerable to bureaucratic systems of population management because they are "unfathomable to the administrative systems that govern the distribution of life chances," Spade continues. By not fitting "correctly" into the organizing categories of "male" and "female," they are denied access to public services as well as criminalized, leading to further administrative violence via the law enforcement and carceral systems.

Health care—and perhaps especially nationalized health care—is a site at which failure to perform gender correctly can lead to administrative violence. Stanley (2011) writes that "among the most volatile points of contact between state violence and one's body is the domain of gender." Yet in this case, Rocky was imperceptible as a Mexican citizen before his gender became a source of confusion, suspicion, or violence. This is because post-deportation, citizenship operates with a similar administrative violence. The fact of not fitting correctly into the administrative category of "Mexican"—the only category available to the forcibly repatriated—has consequences that also often result in reduced life chances. Thus, I argue that "administrative violence" is a concept that also applies to deportees' and returnees' experiences of re-citizenship. Though the rights to identity, housing, and dignified work are enshrined in the Mexican constitution, deportees often live for years without access to these basic human needs, due to the bureaucratic hurdles they face in obtaining Mexican identity documents. In trans deportees and returnees, these forms of administrative violence intersect and interact.

As I have described elsewhere, among the key challenges for newly repatriated deportees and returnees is obtaining one's INE, or voter credential, which is the official identification in Mexico (referred to by the initials of Mexico's National Electoral Institute). Until 2014, the INE was called the IFE (Federal Electoral Institute); it was dissolved and reconstituted as the INE, an autonomous entity, as part of Mexico's efforts to have free elections (González Martínez 2013). Because the INE was created as a wholly separate institution, it does not have access to the IFE's database. Therefore, if an individual left for the United States prior to 2014 or as a minor, they have to process their INE from scratch. This entails three requirements: another form of official identification, two witnesses (individuals close to the person who can attest to their identity and who hold INEs of their own), and a *comprobante de domicilio*, or proof of residence.

All of these can be difficult for recent deportees/returnees to obtain. Official identification is a challenge because officials in Mexico City often do not accept identification

from the United States, refusing not only American documents such as drivers' licenses, but also Mexican documents issued by consulates, such as the *matrícula*—an identity documented invented specifically to provide undocumented Mexicans in the US with a form of official identification (Délano Alonso 2011)—and Mexican passports that denote that they were issued at a consulate. Other deportees have encountered the circular situation of being unable to obtain a birth certificate without an ID, and unable to obtain an ID without a birth certificate (Caldwell 2019). Second, finding witnesses is a challenge for deportees/returnees who do not have a social network of friends or family—for instance, those whose entire families have migrated to the United States or who live in other parts of Mexico, or, in the case of LGBT migrants, who do not have a close relationship with their families of origin. Likewise, those who do not have those social networks struggle to find housing, and therefore to obtain the *comprobante de domicilio* necessary for an ID. The lack of an ID, in turn, prevents individuals from obtaining work and housing. These bureaucratic hurdles are further complicated by the discrimination many deportees and returnees face, which resembles anti-immigrant xenophobia: that they are stealing our jobs, are too Americanized, don't speak Spanish properly, have betrayed the country, or are all criminals.

For trans deportees and returnees, these processes and discriminations duplicate and intersect. Explains Esme Flores, Coordinator of Accompaniment for the organization Otros Dreams en Acción, "in Mexico, one's right to identity depends on the INE. It's a fundamental battle for the whole deportee/returnee community, but in the case of trans individuals, it turns into a problem all over again—you have to do its long bureaucratic process a second time."⁷⁸

Spade writes, "the target of trans resistance should be not legal equality but the dismantling of systems of state violence that are killing trans people." Deportation highlights the way that citizenship operates similarly in a globalized world—as a regime of haves and have-nots that exists, of course, by design. And with the wrong encounters with neglectful or indisposed bureaucrats, it can have similar life-or-death consequences as administrative violence stemming from variance from established categories of gender. Trans deportees face a double vulnerability: the administrative violence penalizing failure to fit correctly into the administrative category of "Mexican" at the same time as they face the administrative violence of illegibility to established categories of gender.

Curiously, in contrast to the assumption of citizenship that I describe as subtending much US queer theory, mobility is a fundamental analytic in trans scholarship. Starting from the obvious fact of the fact that the prefix "trans-" means "across," "over," or "beyond," movement is fundamental to understanding trans identities. Prosser (1998)'s *Second Skin*, a study of trans autobiography, established the idea of a narrative tradition within trans literature. Prosser's work centers on ideas of the "body narrative"—"the story the transsexual weaves around the body in order that this body may be 'read'"—and "home" that remain present in later trans criticism, and which will prove useful for thinking about trans return migration. For example, Prosser characterizes body modification (both medical and non-, such as tattoos and piercings) by trans individuals as a form of "(re)making the body/skin in order to feel at home in it," and observes that trans autobiographies often frame gender-affirming surgery "as a return: a coming home to the self through body" (even if, as Prosser notes a page later, it is a "romanticized ideal of home). Thus, the idea of "return" is fundamental to trans theory in a way that it is not in queer theory. Prosser even characterizes gender transition as similar to immigration: "an appropriate analogical

⁷⁸ This is also true for school revalidation—trans individuals have to go through the full process a second time when their names change on their identity documents.

frame for the transsexual's writing of transition as a journey may be that of immigration: the subject conceives of transsexuality as a move to a new life in a new land, allowing the making of home." He quotes a line that speaks to this from Leslie Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues*: "Strange to be exiled from your own sex to borders that will never be home" (Feinberg 1993).

Keegan (2013) draws on Prosser's literary criticism to analyze the "transmigratory 'journey' as a literary and more recently a cinematic and televisual trope," arguing that the transgender subject as "moving body" implies "a body that journeys from negative to redemptive affect, from psychosis to mental health, from self-hatred to a celebration of liberal individuality, from a position of political mourning to one of requited 'national love' (Ahmed 2004)." This analysis echoes the work of Aren Aizura, whose chapter "The Persistence of Transgender Travel Narratives" (Aizura 2012) examines the idea of "safe return" in transgender narratives, asking "What does this travel metaphor import from Euro-American geographical narratives about the shaping of the (colonized) world into a center...and a periphery or elsewhere—a destination and a home to which to return?" Aizura argues that cultural production often frames gender transition as "'coming home' to one's new body," and "synchronizes" this journey with a return to one's geographical home. Additionally, Aizura shows ways that this idea manifests itself in workplaces, such as guidance for transitioning employees to take "a short holiday" and "return in their new name and gender role." In addition to the class privilege and colonial imaginaries embedded in the idea of these vacations, this also presents gender transition as a "one-way trip" that neatly avoids any sense of indeterminacy.

Like Aizura, Bhanji (2012) takes aim at an unproblematic idea of the trans journey home. "I write because I am frustrated by transsexual theory's failure to take into account racial and ethnic differences without resorting to imperializing gestures...To what 'home' does the trajectory of transition, the act of border-crossing, lead the already in-between diasporic, gender liminal subject?" This question is heightened even further in the context of deportation, when one's "return home" is something forced and violent. Bhanji draws on diasporic theories, especially Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Desire* (Brah 1996), to push back against the idea of trans journeys as uncomplicated homecomings. Additionally, Bhanji points to Halberstam (1998)'s use of Chicana thought to trouble ideas of "home" and "border." Halberstam (1998) writes that trans journeys' metaphors are "laden with the histories of other identity negotiations, and they carry the burden of national and colonial discursive histories." Thinking with Anzaldúa (1987) and Cuevas (2018), one can imagine a borderlands gender identity in which one dwells in the prefix "trans," rather than making a decisive, domesticated passage from one legible category to another.

Indeed, such critiques and questions are present trans borderlands and migration scholarship. Lewis (2012) observes that in most scholarship about the resonance between "trans" in a mobility sense and a gender identity sense is "situated on the moment of crossing." Lewis asks: "But what of those who stayed put or grown [sic] up in these sites and are also trans?" Like Aizura's critique of trans narratives' failure to accommodate indeterminacy, the idea of remaining in the borderlands, rather than decisively crossing them, troubles narratives that desire a coherent, linear journey. This question is relevant in thinking about trans forced return migration, in which the "return" at hand is not the triumphant, safe journey that dominant trans narratives imagine, but at odds with that imagined vector.

Vartabedian Cabral (2013), writing about Brazilian *travesti* migrants to Europe, describes her use of the term "migración trans," or "trans migration," to refer to the way that geographic mobility and "corporeal itineraries" co-produce one another. "When I speak about travestis"

migrations I am not only referring to their spatial displacements, but also their transit through the limits of a corporeal territory" (Vartabedian Cabral 2013, translation mine). This more open-ended sense of trans vectors can shed light on trans return migration because of the way it examines the conjuncture of two forms of trans migration rather than seeking parallelism.

Drawing on these critiques of dominant tropes of "transmigratory journeys" and safe return home, this chapter seeks to contribute to understanding the experiences of trans migrants who experience forced return. How do trans narratives of gender transition as "safe return" transform when "return" violent and forced? How does return influence trans deportees' and returnees' corporeal itineraries? These migrants live out theoretical critiques of one-way journeys and safe returns home at the same time as they contradict northward-oriented assumptions of queer/trans longing.

At the Registro Civil

In recent years, Mexico City has become a center of both trans culture and a bureaucratic sanctuary for gender-related legal processes, both relative to Mexico and to surrounding countries. This is, of course, amidst a context of violence. In 2018-2019, Mexico was second to Brazil in absolute numbers of murders of trans and gender non-conforming individuals among Latin American countries (Statista 2020). The nearby countries of Honduras and El Salvador have the world's highest murder rates for transgender individuals (Chase 2019).

In addition to the Health Secretary protocol, Mexico City's *Ley de Identidad de Género*, approved in 2012, gave trans adults the right to change their gender and name on their birth certificates, whereas previously they had to demonstrate that they had undergone gender reassignment surgery; in 2015, a bureaucratic process to do so was established. Under the protocol established by the *Ley de Identidad de Género*, the requirements for changing one's gender bureaucratically as an adult in Mexico City are: a recent copy of a birth certificate, an official ID (the INE) and a proof of residence. (As I discuss elsewhere, these present bureaucratic hurdles for people in situation of mobility, whether return migrants or asylum-seekers.) As of 2021, twelve other states have adopted the *Ley de Identidad de Género* as well: Coahuila, Colima, Chihuahua, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sonora and Tlaxcala; of these, two (Jalisco and Oaxaca) grant minors of age access to procedures to change their gender and name on their birth certificates (López Pérez 2021)). (Mexico City's *Ley de Infancias Trans*, meanwhile, has been stuck in legal limbo since 2019 (López Castro 2021).) Unlike in the United States, where moral panic over trans rights and especially the rights of trans children has largely been fomented by the Christian right, much of the protest against the *Ley de Identidad de Género* has come from trans-exclusive radical feminists (Moreno 2021).

As I describe below, because of these resources—and given the increasing difficulty of receiving asylum in the United States—the city has become a destination for trans migrants, especially from Central America. During Almendra (2020)'s fieldwork at the La 72 shelter, the only shelter along the migrant trail at the time that had a dedicated area exclusively for LGBT+ migrants, all of the trans women residents had decided to apply for asylum in Mexico.

It took Rocky (with my accompaniment) three tries to obtain his new birth certificate. When we first went to the *Juzgado Central* (central court), the representative looked over his documents and told him there were two problems: his birth certificate was more than six months old, and the address on the internet bill he was using as his proof of residence did not match the address on his INE, which was his grandparents' house in Metepec, an hour outside of Mexico

City, because he had lived with them when he first arrived to Mexico. To rectify that problem, he either needed to get a proof of residence from his grandparents' house, or a signed letter from his landlord verifying that he lived at his address in Mexico City.

It would be easier to visit his grandparents, Rocky decided, than to ask his landlord for a favor. In any case, he had to go to Metepec to get a new copy of his birth certificate. (For most bureaucratic processes, the Mexican government requires birth certificates whose date of issue is less than six months in the past, for the simple reason that they gain revenue each time an individual requests a birth certificate.)

"Are you doing anything today?" Rocky asked me. We got in a taxi to take a bus to Metepec. On the way there, he told me that he hadn't visited his grandparents in over a year.

"They know I'm gay—I mean, that I like girls," Rocky said, correcting himself and explaining that he hadn't seen them since he had begun transitioning to live as a man. "So I have to tell them. But they're open about everything. I guess because it's Mexico. Things are just better here."

This wasn't the first time he had expressed such a sentiment. As we left the IMSS weeks before, I had given him my printout of the LGBTTTI protocol and said,

"It's a decent protocol. People do seem to be getting trans healthcare through it, it's just a matter of persistence. Like everything here."

Rocky replied: "I feel like it's more open here, you know?"

Rocky's comparison between Mexico as "open" and the United States as conservative not only has to do with Mexico City's status as "*la ciudad arcoiris*" ("rainbow city") as Alix Almendra put it to me in a conversation, but also with ways in which Rocky's experience as an undocumented immigrant intersects with conservative grains of US culture. Upon arriving to the United States as an undocumented immigrant, Rocky's father had joined a particularly conservative Christian church. His search for community and a sense of belonging as an undocumented immigrant in the United States pushed him toward a more conservative moral code than that of his family in the State of Mexico.

A variety of scholars have documented the conversion of Mexican and other Latino immigrants from Catholicism to forms of Protestantism or other missionary forms of Christianity (Rodriguez 1993, Feline Freier 2009). In addition to the politics of the Catholic church, there are also a variety of more personal, spiritual reasons why missionary branches of Christianity appeal to immigrants to the United States. In her book *Buddha is Hiding*, an ethnography of Cambodian immigrants in Oakland, California, Aihwa Ong writes that for newcomers to the United States, the Mormon church—another missionary Christian religion—"represent[s] the white bourgeois image and values that epitomize success in the majority society": Like other forms of Protestantism, the church emphasizes "individual divinity" and "capitalist rationality" (Ong 2003). She also writes that the Mormon focus on family reunification in the afterlife appealed to immigrants whose relatives had died in war, or from whom they were separated by immigration.

Within the Latino community, Aguilar (2008) writes that in Kansas Meatpacking towns, Jehovah's Witnesses and the United Methodist church "have learned to establish contact with the Hispanic community, addressing the spiritual and material needs of newcomers, such as free English classes." In her 1992 ethnography of Mexican immigrants in Corvallis, Oregon, Theresa McArdle writes that the Jehovah's Witness church enables immigrants to decrease their sense of social isolation by building community—including through missionary work—as well as to develop a sense of personal advancement that is particularly rewarding in a context of linguistic isolation and the confinement of living undocumented (McArdle 1992). This combination of a

sense of community and a sense of safety and personal gratification also appears in Laura Belmonte's work about the rise of Protestantism among Mexican immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century (Belmonte 2016). For Rocky, however, the fact that missionary Christianity had helped his father find a sense of community and a foothold in the United States had the effect of rendering his experience of being a young queer person even more oppressive, and in contrast, his experience in Mexico one of a feeling of liberation.

Once we arrived in Metepec, we found the Civil Registry and waited in line to request a new birth certificate. Rocky gave them his old copy and paid the 60-peso fee for a new copy. They told him to come back the following day to pick it up.

From there, we took a taxi to his grandparents' house. It was a large house with separate living quarters for his father's three siblings—two aunts and one uncle—that had been designed by the uncle, an architect. We ate breakfast while waiting for his uncle, who had the electricity bills to use as Rocky's new *comprobante de domicilio*, to return from a meeting. Once the uncle returned, Rocky and his grandparents moved to the living room to talk simultaneously about the fact that he was transgender, about his psychiatric diagnoses, and about the fact that worried them the most—that he had not visited in a year.

His grandparents struggled to understand the difference between the lesbian identity that Rocky had previously had, and the bisexual transgender identity he now had. But while they struggled with the details, they supported him in living the way that he felt most comfortable.

"We had a friend whose son was gay," his grandmother told him, "and he found a partner and got married and he's happy with his life, which is the most important thing."

"We know that your father doesn't accept these things because of his religion," said his grandfather, agreeing with his grandmother that they wanted Rocky to live in whatever way he most felt comfortable.

Meanwhile, Rocky's uncle paged through the binder where Rocky kept all his bureaucratic documents, including his mental health diagnoses.

"We can't hold it against her"—also not fully understanding Rocky's explanation of being transgender, and continuing to use female pronouns to refer to him—"that she hasn't come visit in a year. She needed to take that time to figure things out for herself, she was passing through a lot of difficult things—getting diagnosed with major depressive disorder, making these decisions about her sexuality, and leaving her country, it's not like she decided to leave on her own, they obligated—"

"They deported me," Rocky interrupted.

Rocky's uncle continued by agreeing with the grandfather that Rocky's dad's religion prevented him from being open about Rocky's sexuality and gender identity, as well as his struggles with depression. He pointed out that Rocky's mom suffered from bipolar disorder and had been hospitalized many times, but that because it wasn't something openly discussed in the family, she had never received thorough treatment. He took an intersectional point of view, helping Rocky's grandparents understand the way that the upheaval in Rocky's life caused by deportation interacted with the factors of mental health and gender and sexual identity, and that his process of emplacement in Mexico was also one of self-discovery and learning to feel at home with himself. On the flipside, as well, Rocky's uncle understood the way that Rocky's parents' undocumented status interacted with other factors to cause his father to be more conservative, and to prevent his mom from seeking better psychiatric help. "His papers aren't in order either, and that causes a lot of stress, and limits what you can do," he said.

While Rocky's family in Metepec did not fully understand what he meant when he

explained that he was transgender—a problem compounded, as it had been at the IMSS, by his halting Spanish—his identity was also not of particular concern to them. His experience with them was similar to the way he described being transgender in Mexico in general: "As long as you're a good person here, that's what matters. In the US it's like you have to hide it." While Rocky did not transition until arriving in Mexico, he had been a visibly queer person for all of his adult life in the United States, and his experience was one of feeling acceptance, both by others and himself.

What struck me most about accompanying Rocky through the Mexican public health system was the way that his reflections on being trans and being deported aligned. Early on in the day, he had told me that he had a ten-year bar on returning to the United States (per the rules established by IIRIRA), but that even if it were possible to return once it expires, he wouldn't want to. "I don't want to go back, you know? I feel more comfortable here," he said. At the same time, he liked to live "in the most American way possible": he had picked his apartment building because its windows, doors, and other prefabricated elements looked exactly like those used in suburban American construction; he had also found cable TV in English.

I heard from multiple deportees and returnees in their twenties that returning to Mexico, despite being something that they had feared and that was challenging, had been good for their mental health; the stress of living undocumented had weighed heavier than they realized. In Rocky's case, the feeling of comfort also had to do with his gender identity.

"In the US, I didn't know I was trans," he told me. "I felt really confined and didn't know what was going on. Then I found a friend at the call center where I work, another trans deportee, who told me about dysphoria—I didn't know that word, and it made so much sense for describing how I felt about my body. I started to get to know myself a lot more. I felt way more depressed over there. Also, the process is easier here. There, I wouldn't have been able to get T or get the psychiatric help I need—it would have been too expensive. I feel like I was put over here for a reason." He added: "And if I had known there was a deportee LGBT community when I got here three years ago, I would be even further along in the process of transitioning."

Rocky's comments seem to suggest that his deportation has cultivated a "trans return migration" that spans both forms of safe return—geographical mobility to one's home, and a coming home to one's "correct" gender. As his comments indicate, in some ways this is true. Yet Rocky later clarified to me that he did not want to return to live in the US, but that he would like to be able to return as a visitor, joking that perhaps he could take advantage of having changed his name and physical appearance to be granted a tourist visa. Of course, he could not—even once the ten-year bar passes, as a deportee he is unlikely to ever be granted a US visa of any kind. Similarly, when I commented to another activist that I had met a number of young returnees who told me they had benefited from distancing themselves from their families, she told me, "if people need to get away from their families that's one thing, but if they're forcing you to be away in terms of a policy, that's the state intervening in your life inappropriately." What differentiates trans deportees and other forced returnees' "trans migrations" from dominant trans narratives is the way that they are crossed by state coercion.

Mexico Scrambles the Vectors

In recent years, Mexico has transformed from a migrant-sending country to one of return and reception (Varela 2019). These massive shifts in migration flows confound past vectors and discourses of northward movement. These new realities call for new observations, theorizations, and interventions. This is especially true for queer and trans migrants. Much past scholarship

about queer and trans migrations in the Americas has focused on movement north to the United States, and especially on asylum (McKinnon 2016, Vogler 2019). As I describe above, queer migrations scholarship documents how lesbian and gay asylum seekers are required to perform a narrative of a "backwards" and oppressive home country, while framing the US as a place that will welcome them openly, even when they do not identify with such a story; Cantú (2007) documents how stereotypes of Mexican "machismo" are present in reports written by international LGBT NGOs and affect asylum claims. Lewis (2012) writes that

although the realities of persecution of gays, lesbians and trans people in several parts of Mexico cannot be denied, the explanations of the same too frequently hinge on reductive arguments that homogenize Mexico as 'other' to a 'civilized' and 'progressive' United States. Mexico thus represents, in such discourse, a backward place, immersed in its oppressive traditions, timeless and unable to change.

Thus, traditional south-to-north, third-to-first-world queer migration narratives would have it that queer migrants seek passage to the United States. But queer and trans return migrants who decide to return to Mexico, and queer and trans deportees who find themselves more comfortable in Mexico, defy that vector. Instead of a unidirectional northward flow, queer migrants from all over the world—whether El Salvador and Russia, like the migrants I met at the shelter Casa La Banda, or return migrants like Rocky and Cristina, a returnee who is the director of a trans cultural center—increasingly coincide in Mexico City. They are scrambling normative vectors of movement from "migrant-sending" to "migrant-receiving" countries, from "third world" to "first world," "global south" to "global north," at the same time as their desires defy normative geographies of queer liberation.

While (as I describe above) trans migrants and return migrants disrupt the parallel geographic and gendered "safe returns"/homecomings, the twin, co-produced dislocations of trans identity and migration mean that trans migrants have created forms of solidarity that are both models within migration activism and that have uniquely intimacies because of their conduits of queer kinship. Trans migrants' "corporeal itineraries," and the way that they interact with state and other violence, bring trans return migrants and migrants for whom Mexico is a country of destination together in unique ways.

For instance, one trans returnee who received help from ODA in revalidating her US education and receiving English teacher certification, Cristina has become a program coordinator of a trans cultural center in Mexico City—a position she says she wouldn't have felt comfortable applying to without the resources with which ODA had provided her. She sees her activism as applying skills that she developed in activism in the San Francisco Bay Area for migrants in Mexico City, who have access to far fewer resources. She told me:

I got into activism as a LGBTQI migrant in San Francisco. It's like another schooling. When I got to the US I used to clean houses. Then I was working at the airport, just living the American way—because the American Dream doesn't exist—when one of my friends, a trans woman sex worker, was murdered. Of course the media portrayed her as just another disposable life. So I started to raise my voice and come out of my bubble.

Christina emphasized that becoming an activist made her realize the privileges she had.

LGBTQI people migrate because of persecution and haste. We have things in common, but our stories are also different. Like how we get to the border. I'm from Mexico City, I took a bus to Tijuana and one night my friend said, 'let's cross the border,' and we did. Migration is not the same for a person who is here in Mexico City and who has extremely easy access to the border as for a transmigrant from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, or Costa Rica, who have to cross multiple countries, multiple borders, who are victimized and re-victimized—many of our sisters and brothers from my community have paid with their lives for the desire to escape from their countries.

Almendra (2020)'s work speaks to these realities. In the experiences of transit of Central American trans* women it's important to locate a forced exit, not only from their countries of origin, but from...their families, neighborhoods, communities, schools," she writes. "These displacements spread themselves (in time and space) beyond borders, and articulated themselves with the historic transnational migration processes of the USA-Mexico-Central America region. This scenario produces lives in displacement as a condition of existence."⁷⁹ As in the case of deportation and other forms of forced return migration, the movement of Central American trans migrants is one that is forced, and forced across borders.

These realities have become all the more present in recent years, as both increasing migration flows and decreasing opportunities for asylum or other forms of migration to the US have transformed Mexico into a country of destination for migrants. In 2021, a record-breaking 131,488 people filed asylum petitions, an 87 percent increase over 2019's 69,000 (Resendiz 2022)—and a shocking 38 times 2015's 3,400 applications, which was itself a record at the time. "The current scenario of regional migration puts forth a new challenge with Mexico as a country of refuge," writes Almendra (2020).

In Mexico City, Cristina emphasizes, there are more laws protecting trans people than there are in Central America, other countries such as Peru, and even other parts of Mexico. Her work, then, includes both advocacy for trans rights beyond Mexico City, helping those in Mexico City access existing resources, and educating broader audiences about trans issues. She aims to use the resources and privileges she gained as an activist in the United States to support trans Mexicans and migrants. She explained:

In the US activists have many more resources, and a sense of community—having connections to places that are doing amazing things motivates people, whereas in Mexico you're motivated by a sense of responsibility, because you see the need, and it's harder because there's so little funding and a lack of a sense of communities.

Cristina's work is emblematic of the novel forms of solidarity between return migrants and

⁷⁹ *"En los tránsitos de las mujeres trans* centroamericanas es importante ubicar una salida forzada, no sólo de los países de origen, sino de...la familia, el barrio, la comunidad, la escuela. Estos desplazamientos fueron extendiéndose (en tiempo y espacio) más allá e las fronteras y articulándose con los procesos migratorios históricos transnacionales de la región Estados Unidos-México-Centroamérica. En este escenario se producen vidas en desplazamiento como condición de existencia."*

migrants for whom Mexico is a destination that is unique to queer communities and that I argue stems from shared experiences of double dislocation and interlocking administrative violences. In May 2020, both Cristina and Esme, ODA's coordinator of accompaniment, participated in a Zoom dialogue about trans migrants in Mexico City, in which they spoke about the bureaucratic processes both of “citizenizing” (Pinillos 2018) and gender transition. More than for non-trans migrants, the bureaucratic experiences of trans return migrants, asylum-seekers, and other migrants for whom Mexico is a destination country overlap. Additionally, Cristina pointed out that shared experiences of violence at the hands of migration authorities and by other detainees in detention centers, also brought their experiences together.

This collaborative work continued in June 2021, when ODA hosted a “Semana de Disidencias Sexogenéricas y Jotería” (Week of Sexual and Gender Dissidence and Faggotry). The week included seven virtual events, three of which included partnerships with the trans cultural center run by Cristina and one in conjunction with an LGBT+ migrant shelter. First, Cristina led a workshop on trans history and culture that many non-migrant audience members who wanted an opportunity to gain a basic knowledge, with questions including topics as basic as the difference between gender and sexuality, such as, “Are trans women considered lesbians?” The following day, Rocky and a trans woman employee of Mexico’s Civil Registry, among others, participated in a workshop called “Trans-Forma tu Nombre,” which explained the processes required to bureaucratically change one’s gender and legal identity. This workshop attracted return migrants, asylum-seekers, and trans Mexicans who also needed to learn about the bureaucracy. In the third event, “Borderless Kitchen”—an Instagram live cooking class that had been hosted by Leni and other ODA members throughout the pandemic—a queer asylee staying at the LGBT+ migrant shelter Casa La Banda and waiting on his permanent residency card from the INM taught listeners how to make Honduran *comida catracha*, while also telling his story of migration and the ways that it was related to queerness. In another example of the *semana de jotería* bringing together return migrants and migrants for whom Mexico is a country of destination, Maggie and Leni joined the livestream as well, and shared their memories of eating Honduran food in the United States, where their communities included Central American immigrants as well as Mexicans—and how it felt like an unfortunate surprise to find that cuisine largely absent in Mexico City.

In some ways, this scrambling of vectors responds to the critiques of trans “safe return” narratives described above. Mexico—where the southward vector of violently coerced return and the truncated northward vector of a destination that is not the “north” that many migrants initially imagined—becomes a site of both self-actualization and of emergent, novel solidarities that are unique even within the larger migrant community. Trans scholar Lucas Cassidy Crawford’s article “Transgender Without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender” (Crawford 2008) describes a different form of scrambling the vectors, arguing that “rural gender-fucking people” whose lives challenge traditional queer narratives of moving from the countryside to the city, and in turn from the “wrong” to the “right” body, find unconventional modes of trans existence. Crawford argues that their “imperceptibility” vis-a-vis the gender binary and their decisions to stay in non-urban areas are valid ways of living queer lives that are entirely different from being “in the closet,” even and especially as they disrupt “the teleology of coming out and transitioning.”

“How do geographical or nationalist metaphors of transgender community—empire, citizenship, nation, home—both reflect and reify the apparent need for a transgender person’s geographical (urban) relocation?” asks Crawford. This question can easily be asked of migrants,

simply by replacing the parenthetical “urban” with “northward.” The unidirectional narrative of northward queer migration is similar to the queer/trans narratives that Crawford critiques—narratives of moving from hinterland to metropolis, coming out, and receiving, in some way, cultural asylum. Trans deportees who find themselves at peace in Mexico, returnees who make the decision to migrate southward, and those whose northward movement is cut short by the violence of border militarization but who manage to establish themselves anyway resemble their rural counterparts in transgressing the geographic expectations of queer/trans movement. They prove that queer and trans lives are also possible in the global south, and even—in certain cases—more desirable. (In a demonstration of tacit understanding of the resonances between “rural gender-fucking” and migrant vector-scrambling, the LGBT+ migrant shelter Casa La Banda was established with help from a delegation of radical faeries, a well-known queer community in rural Tennessee.)

Prosser (1998)’s chapter about trans-exclusive feminism and the idea of “home” in trans activism suggests that these common-narrative-fucking, vector-scrambling experiences, in fact, are a form of home themselves. He writes: “Leaving the haven of assimilation achieved in transsexual passing, the queer/posttranssexual/transgendered transsexual comes out and creates home in the transgender community. This is the significance of transgender’s trade-in of passing for being read: the comfort of genetic-sexed belonging for the platform of a political subjectivity.” Just as a fundamental part of pocha identity is the ever-unfinished process of transforming one’s sense of belonging from “*ni de aquí ni de allá*” (from neither here nor there (Anzaldúa 1987)) into “*de aquí y de allá*” (from both here and there), along with a simultaneous critique of the idea of the nation, Prosser suggests that solidarity in dislocation and the recognition of the impossibility of perfect trans vectors and “safe return” are themselves grounds for senses of home.

This sense of resolution with the unfinished resonates again with Almendra (2020)’s work as well. Almendra writes of her interviewees that “they know that no place exists where they will never be discriminated against, but they are searching for a place where they aren’t considered abnormal, where their lives are not at risk, and where they have access to gender-affirming treatments.”⁸⁰ They learn along their migration routes that Mexico City might be such a place, and conflate their geographic arrival there with the arrival at “an experience of total femininity”⁸¹—at the same time as they understand that both goals are idealized. Thus, they project imagined, fixed homes both geographic and gendered, even as they know that their vectors will fall short. As Prosser continues: “If the drive of conventional transsexual narratives is nostalgically toward home—identity, belonging in the body and in the world—and that of queer performativity away from it—resisting domestication, upturning the grounds of identity politics—then transgender would seem to contain important ambivalences about home and territory, belonging and political affiliation.

The key differences between the theorizations from trans studies cited here is the reality of exile. Exile appears in the work of Romesburg (2012), who builds on Prosser’s work while analyzing the biography of gender-bending, borderlands-dwelling performer Rae Bourbon to engage directly with the idea of exile as constitutive of trans senses of home. Romesburg writes that for those whose experiences of gender is one of “transgender ambivalence” (Prosser 1998)

⁸⁰ “*Ellas saben que no existe el lugar en que no haya discriminación para ellas, pero buscan un lugar donde no se les atribuya una anormalidad, no se ponga en riesgo su vida y tengan acceso a tratamientos para modificar su cuerpo.*”

⁸¹ “*una experiencia femenina total*”

rather than a unidirectional vector toward “arrival” at one’s gender, exile is “a simultaneously coercive and volitional separation from both origin and settled destination.” Romesburg continues:

For transpeople as exilic subjects, traveling is “a strategy for living with the exilic condition” (Basu 2004: 131, Prosser 1998: 177). Home, in this context, might be understood as the place of belonging in which an exile can find refuge and recognition. This “home” directs the strategies of movement, circumstances of displacement, and feelings about them for exilic traveling subjects. [Home as] not a space or a consciousness but a profoundly interrelational process of associations with others and access to multiple points of contact and departure. This queer translocal mobility, at once nostalgic and disavowing, required shifting affinities, myriad escape hatches, and capacities for flexibility drawing upon multiple cultural and social resources (La Fountain-Stokes 2008). (Romesburg 2012, 123).

While Romesburg characterizes his subject’s relationship to the borderlands as “exilic”—and while Prosser, Feinberg, and others describe gender dislocation and trans subjectivity using language of migration, the analogy of dislocation is distinct from the double dislocation lived by trans migrants, both in situations of forced northward movement and coerced return. While Rocky may feel that he was put in Mexico for a reason, for instance, unlike Rae Bourbon, he had no say in the matter. There is nothing “volitional” about his exile. Instead of the opportunity to choose “to identify with a kind of transnational cosmopolitan citizenship over borderland belonging” (Romesburg 2012), deportation creates a global regime of haves and have-nots, with some—those who hold US passports and green cards—enjoying a “flexible” (Ong 1999), cosmopolitan post-citizenship regime of mobility and others living in an equally post-citizenship regime marked by forms of administrative violence that intersect to limit access to the rights supposedly conferred by membership in a nation.

This unequal mobility regime exists, of course, by design. Worldwide, exclusion from citizenship is a means of racialized labor control (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), and the United States’ relationship to Mexico in particular is one of maintaining a flow of “imported colonialism” (Ngai 2004), whether enacted through selective absence of immigration enforcement (Lytle Hernández 2010), formal contracts such as the Bracero Program (Mitchell 2012), or making the process of border-crossing so harrowing as to foster a permanent, precarious undocumented class (Andreas 1999, De León 2015). Restricting US citizenship is a means of neo-colonial consolidation of political-economic power and resources. The activists whose work is described throughout this dissertation know this well, and those who experience a double dislocation know it in perhaps an even more acute way. The ideas of “double dislocation,” “interlocking administrative violences,” and “novel forms of belonging and solidarity” that I describe here, then, are not metaphorical: they are descriptions of lived experiences that aim to capture the theoretical interventions that trans migrants’ experiences of border violence and the criminalization of migration demand.

This chapter has focused on a small but transgender significant community within the deportee and return migrant community, arguing that they have contributed an outsized role in shaping the community’s activist and community commitments. This community commitment and political visioning supports the broader argument of this dissertation—that understanding

return migrant activism helps imagine a more just regime for border and migration policies—by showing the ways in which desire and sense of belonging do not necessarily flow northward. Rather, community is constructed out of many vectors and conditions of possibility, and just as individuals who do not fit neatly into the state's administrative categories nevertheless deserve to be guaranteed the rights it promises, those who do not fit neatly into its expectations of mobility deserve the opportunity to belong where they desire.

Conclusion: Deportee/Returnee Communities at the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Though it went unnoticed by most Americans, May 19, 2020 marked an important change in US immigration enforcement. Rather than arriving to border cities such as Tijuana, Reynosa, and Ciudad Juárez, ICE Air's chartered flights began arriving at Mexico City's Benito Juárez International Airport (CBP 2020). Every Tuesday and Friday, two flights, each filled with up to 133 people, began to disembark in the very same terminal where American tourists arrive in Mexico. Observed by representatives from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), the deportees deplaned in a quiet, orderly line, wearing surgical masks and holding shrink-wrapped meals (presumably because the meals cannot be consumed without removing the masks). They made their way to a bus parked outside that will take them to the city's bus terminals, where they could catch other buses to their home cities. They were not tested or quarantined upon arrival (Associated Press 2020).

For years, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has directed deportations to locales distant from the border through ICE Air, as a means of deterring migrants from attempting to cross again (Henson and Daniel 2019, Miroff 2019). Deportation flights arrived in Mexico City until 2018, when the agency began sending all flights to border cities instead, despite staggering numbers of the newly deported there being kidnapped (in order to extort their families in the United States) (Cervantes 2019). In December of 2019, flights to the interior of the country briefly restarted, but this time landed in Guadalajara (Henson and Daniel 2019, ICE 2019), a decision that deportee organizers said only made sense if officials were intentionally circumventing Mexico City's well-organized deportee community—Mexico's INM has only a small "office of representation" in Guadalajara, whereas the agency is headquartered in the capital.

The flights to Guadalajara were canceled at the start of the Covid-19 crisis, presumably to avoid spreading the virus. Yet Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)'s May 19 press release justified restarting the Mexico City flights with that same goal: "The overarching goal of these repatriation flights is to reduce the spread of COVID-19 into the U.S. and reduce the strain on Mexico's resources along the border" (CBP 2020). The press release states that CBP "has observed an increase in Mexican nationals who make repeated attempts to enter the U.S. illegally and bypass public health measures," and that these migrants increase the risk of Covid exposure to the American public. Whether or not this is true—activists on the ground in South Texas say border crossings are down significantly—this time around, Mexico's government was allowed to pick the flights' destination. It chose Mexico City. Amid so much uncertainty, deportee organizers believed this was a hope in the dark: a safer, better-resourced place for forcibly repatriated Mexicans to touch down.

The collective *Deportados Unidos en la Lucha*, or DUL, operates out of a three-bedroom apartment in Ciudad Nezahualcoyótl, a city of between two and four million people—many of them internal migrants from Mexico's countryside—that borders Mexico City to the east. DUL was founded by two Obama-era deportees, Ana Laura López and Gus Lavariega, to provide new deportees with logistical support in finding shelter, acquiring Mexican identity documents, and getting jobs. They focus on aiding deportees over 40, who often have families, lack a command of English (disqualifying them from common return-migrant jobs like teaching English and working at offshore call centers for US companies), and face workforce exclusion because of the

country's severe age discrimination.

Suddenly, all that work changed. Shelters began denying new arrivals; government offices closed. Deportees who had already been in Mexico for some time have lost their jobs. When all of the upcoming orders for Deportados Brand, the silkscreening business that supports the work of the collective, were canceled, López and Lavariega transformed DUL's apartment-office into a sewing workshop, employing members of the community to sew low-cost cloth masks.

On April 25, 2020, a month into the start of Mexico City's shelter-in-place order and three weeks before deportation flights started arriving in Mexico City, Lavariega went to the city's nearly empty airport to pick up someone he had never met. A family member of a young man who had recently been deported to Ciudad Juárez had contacted DUL, seeking help in finding their relative safe harbor in pandemic Mexico. The deportee had made it to Guadalajara by bus, but was out of cash and had nowhere to stay. His family wanted to send him money, but couldn't because he lacked a Mexican ID. López looked into helping him get his voter ID, the basic ID in Mexico, but the offices were closed indefinitely. The country had also stopped processing passports, the other official ID. Finally López recommended that his family reserve him a hotel room and buy him a plane ticket to Mexico City online. In the meantime, she found a shelter that was willing to receive the new deportee, and that had space for him to quarantine alone for fourteen days. But while having surmounted so many obstacles was cause for relief, it was also cause for concern.

"We've received six cases since the quarantine started," López told me on May 15. "So the question is—where are the rest?"

While everyone in the United States and Mexico has been rendered vulnerable by the ways that Covid-19 has been handled and not-handled by the two countries, citizenship has proven itself to be one of the many fault lines determining and creating vulnerability. Those who are forcibly denied the right to stay home by the processes of detention and deportation have been rendered particularly so. At all levels of the detention and deportation process, the threat of Covid-19 infection has been magnified in a way that officials seem to have condoned, at the same time that they have used the virus to undermine processes of immigration and asylum. Detention centers and jails have staggeringly rapid rates of disease transmission, due to close quarters, limited access to hygiene and health care, and, in some cases, restrictions on alcohol, which limits the amount of hand sanitizer available. In a webinar hosted by Physicians for Human Rights on April 23, Dr. Scott Allen, cofounder and co-director of the Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights at Brown University, likened ICE's failure to empty immigration detention centers to a decision to shut down all sectors of the economy except bars.

"The tinderbox we were worried about is happening," said Dr. Allen, adding that while we frequently think of centers of confinement as walled off from society, they are not: staff go in and out daily, potentially carrying communicable disease with them (Allen et al 2020). (On June 22, ICE contractor CoreCivic reported that over 100 of its Arizona employees had tested positive for Covid-19 (Prendergast 2020).) Further, since many detention centers are located in rural areas, they can easily overwhelm local health-care systems.

Individuals detained in ICE and ICE-contracted facilities overwhelmingly fall into two categories: asylum seekers and apprehended undocumented immigrants awaiting deportation proceedings. 1996's Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) both made detention mandatory for the duration of asylum proceedings and vastly expanded the

infractions for which asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants could be rendered deportable; since its passage, immigration detention in the United States has expanded from a daily population of 8,500 to 45,000 (Reyes 2018).

In 2013, ICE implemented an algorithm, the Risk Classification Assessment, which allowed detainees deemed not to be “flight risks” or “dangers to the community” to be released with ankle monitors until their court dates—an alternative to detention that costs \$4.50 a day instead of over \$200 (Department of Homeland Security 2015, Benenson 2018). Starting in 2015, pregnant and nursing mothers and families with young children qualified for the Family Case Management Program (FCMP), in which social workers helped families find lawyers and housing, as well as get to their court hearings (Women’s Refugee Commission 2020). Five days after taking office, however, Trump signed an executive order ending these programs, calling for “termination of the practice commonly known as ‘catch and release’” (Executive Office of the President 2017). On June 20 of that year, the FCMP closed, opting instead to hold children in desert tent cities at a cost of \$775 per night (Ainsley 2017). By June of 2018, the risk classification algorithm was “modified” to no longer suggest the option “release” (Sonnad 2018).

On April 28, ICE had tested 705, or 1.76 percent, of its 40,000 detainees, with a 60 percent positivity rate (Martin 2020). The first Covid-19 death in ICE custody took place on May 6: Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejía, 57, who was being held at Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, had come to the US from El Salvador in 1980 with his mother and sisters, fleeing civil war. He had underlying health conditions, including diabetes, and used a wheelchair due to the partial amputation of his right foot. He’d had a bond hearing three weeks earlier, on April 15, at which Judge Lee O’Connor had denied him bond, calling Escobar Mejia a “flight risk” (Morrissey 2020). On May 13, a second detainee, Oscar Lopez Acosta, held at Morrow County Correctional Facility (an ICE-contracted county jail) also passed away from Covid-19. One week earlier, the county health department had stated that fifty of the facility’s eighty inmates were infected with the virus (Columbus Free Press 2020).

There are Supreme Court precedents for communicable disease being considered “cruel and unusual punishment”—not to mention the fact that civil detainees such as asylum seekers are protected from anything that looks like punishment under the fifth and fourteenth amendments’ due process law. On March 16, the ACLU and the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project sued ICE on behalf of detainees at the Tacoma Northwest Detention Center, who had gone on hunger strike and spelled out “SOS” with their bodies in the prison yard, demanding the release of detainees at high risk of illness or death from Covid-19 (Detention Watch Network 2020). Lawsuits directed at other facilities in other states followed (Langona 2020). Yet as of the end of May, ICE had released just 900 detainees (Riordan Seville and Rappleye 2020).

At the border itself, the Trump administration turned to Title 42, an 1893 quarantine law (US Congress 2011 (42 USC § 264), Kladzyk 2021)—enacted when the colonial US Marine Hospital Service was put in charge of quelling yellow fever in Cuba and South Texas to help ensure US control of those regions—to deport asylum seekers, overriding 2008 laws statutorily exempting children from expedited removal proceedings and stating that border officials must transfer unaccompanied minors from countries that are not contiguous with the United States to the US Refugee Agency within three days (Montoya Gálvez 2020). In April 2020, just 58 unaccompanied minors were so transferred, compared to 2,273 in February (Montoya Gálvez 2020). And Trump has used pandemic as pretext to not only effect his long-desired asylum ban but also change ordinary immigration policy: his “Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants of Present a Risk to U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-

19 Outbreak,” signed April 22 for sixty days, only to be extended sixty days later to remain in effect until December 31, targets the ability of naturalized citizens to request green cards for their siblings and parents (Trump 2020). This is widely known to be a longtime fantasy of Trump advisor Stephen Miller. (This proclamation was repealed by President Biden in February 2021 (Biden 2021).)

Mexico also suspended its asylum proceedings. (Between 2017 and 2019, as poverty and violence increased in Central America and asylum in the United States became increasingly impossible, the number of asylum petitions filed in Mexico climbed from 14 to 70 thousand (Semple 2021).) On April 16, forty organizations filed an amparo, a legal tool used to suspend an action violating laws or rights, against the Instituto Nacional de Migración, for its failure to protect the health of migrants and asylum seekers (Comunicación FJEDD 2020). Rather than moving asylum seekers to safer, socially distant shelter from which to continue the asylum process, the INM responded by deporting all but 106 of the 3,759 individuals held in its sixty-five detention centers (Pradilla 2020).

Such deportations have had a direct effect on the spread of Covid-19. In early May, Guatemala’s Foreign Ministry reported that 117 cases, or 15 percent of the country’s total, could be traced to four deportation flights from the US (Carcamo and O’Toole 2020, Dickerson and Semple 2020). The Guatemalan airport quickly transformed into an encampment of deportees, as the government requires that arrivals test negative for Covid before leaving. And those who do go back to their villages, even with certificates of health, reported Reuters, face threats of lynching, immolation, and social exclusion (Menchu 2020). In Mexico, deportees are returning to their home communities without passing through a quarantine or even being tested; some communities have closed to outsiders completely, leaving repatriated community members with nowhere to go.

While they are some of society’s most vulnerable in the face of the pandemic, deportees were also, in certain ways, more prepared than anyone for sheltering in place. Being unable to see loved ones and communicating virtually is nothing new for the deported community. As many other communities scrambled to figure out how to support one another for the first time, organized deportees and returnees, who have lived most of their lives outside of citizenship and survived the violence that comes from lacking it, already had logistical, financial, and emotional mutual aid infrastructure in place.

Across town from DUL, in Mexico City’s Centro Histórico, the staff of Otros Dreams en Acción leapt into action to adapt their programming both to virtual modes and to the new circumstances of the pandemic. They called all of the organization’s clients to find out who was particularly vulnerable due to illness, loss of work, or vulnerable dependents, and asking what they needed in order to survive the quarantine. Staff and volunteers distributed pantry goods and masks to other community members across the Mexico City metropolitan area. Group therapy sessions moved online. The organization covered rent and medical costs for those who had lost work. As they observed that community members were anxious about their undocumented family members in the United States, they also searched for resources to help them.

At ODA, Pocha House’s coordinators realized quarantine was also an opportunity to bring together members of the US and Mexico’s migrant communities through its cultural programming. Though geographically distant, separated by a violent border and unequal regimes of citizenship and mobility, they were ironically now as close to each other via Zoom as anyone else. ODA began inviting not only Mexico’s deportee and returnee community but their families

and friends in the United States to its virtual programming. Attendees at the first meeting of the Pocha House book club, for instance, logged in from places from San Luis Potosí and Tijuana, in the north of Mexico, to Fresno, California and Charlotte, North Carolina.

On Mother's Day 2020, Mexico's May 10 holiday coincided with the US's second-Sunday observance. The holiday is celebrated lavishly in Mexico, and the fact that many members of the deportee and returnee community are separated from either their mothers or their children—or both—can make it emotionally wrenching. ODA's Women's Committee decided to devote its May budget to a virtual celebration of the holiday. The organization turned over its social media to honor those transnational relationships for the day. A member of the community collected photographs of committee members and their mothers, with messages to their mothers such as "you even crossed borders for me" and "aunque estamos lejos, siempre las tengo en mi corazón" (Although we are far away, you are always in my heart). Committee members, their mothers, and their children came together for a brunch over Zoom, with food delivered to participants regardless of the side of the border on which they found themselves.

As the women's committee members texted their thanks to the member who had made the video, writing with ample weeping emojis how grateful and moved they were, she turned the thanks around. "Solo les quiero decir gracias," she said. The replacement of real life with Zoom had enabled an important connection for her. "Desde que me vine I haven't been able to celebrate Mother's Day with my mom in a super special way and this year I will."

ICE explicitly justified its continuing deportations as a strategy for stemming the spread of Covid-19, claiming that its deportation flights are filled with individuals who have attempted to cross in the United States irregularly, "bypass[ing] public health measures." Yet the agency's certainty that fortifying its apparatus of exclusion and expulsion will also fortify public health overlooks the ways that this apparatus exacerbates the spread of contagious disease. It overlooks the way that the wildfire spread of Covid-19 within centers of confinement is a risk not only to those held there—who by law must be protected from threats such as pandemics—but also to staff, and to the communities and families they go home to at night. The continuing deportations of individuals who have lived for years in the United States, or who have spent months in detention waiting to be denied asylum, does nothing to prevent Covid-19 from coming into the United States; on the contrary, it has facilitated the virus's transmission to communities across the globe.

A border militarization strategy cannot be a public health strategy, because Covid-19 does not differentiate between citizens and noncitizens when it crosses borders. A nationalist strategy cannot be a public health strategy, because the space of the nation and the geography of its citizens are not overlapping. There's no real strategy for stopping the spread of Covid-19 that doesn't treat migrants and the undocumented and others in vulnerable situations as human beings, that fails to offer them resources, care, and safe places to stay. The abdication of such responsibilities—the continued use of immigration detention and deportation, the United States' failure to include noncitizens in CARES Act payments, the US and Mexico's suspension of asylum proceedings—has made the world's most vulnerable even more so, and endangered everyone in the process. Strategies that take care of the privileged alone have served only to deepen inequality; they have enabled Covid-19 to find not only the weak points in the human body but the weak points in states. Those countries that emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic with lower mortality and less economic devastation will undoubtedly be those that responded with attention and concern for the poor and undocumented.

This dissertation has argued that close observation of the political, creative, and community-based strategies of emplacement used by deportee and returnee activists provides important new perspectives for re-imagining a more just migration and border regime in the binational space of the US and Mexico. Chapter 1 argues that the current moment of the "Great Expulsion" is a novel stage in a long process of continual border militarization, politics of expulsion and exclusion, and criminalization of migrants. Understanding this history is important for understanding the ways that it has created the novel conditions of possibility for the on-the-ground work described in the subsequent chapters: motherist deportee activism, *pocha* returnee activism, and trans deportee/returnee activism in solidarity with Central American migrants and asylum-seekers in Mexico. Chapter 2's depiction of the migrant mothers and allies fighting for their families' place in the Mexican bureaucracy and public education system shows the need for the Mexican government to adequately respond to the needs of the return migrants of the Great Expulsion, at the same time as it argues that communities considered poor or otherwise vulnerable before the state can use intimacy as a tool for organizing powerful enough to not only utilize the law to their advantage, but to influence it themselves. Chapter 3's discussion of *pocha* activism and its focus on mobility justice, theorized through a translocal and feminist lens, decenters the United States and the right to belong there in migration activism, offering instead a vision in which individuals have equal access to mobility regardless of their nationality of origin, and have the right to choose the places to which they belong. Chapter 4 adds a queer and trans lens to this work, showing how the resonance between the administrative violences exerted by the state against trans individuals and those exerted against return migrants has influenced trans migrants' outsized role in envisioning return migrant organizing and necessary solidarities with other migrants and asylum-seekers in Mexico, as well as how return migrant activists' ideas of mobility justice and the right to choose where one belongs enable trans return migrants to scramble the linear narratives of transition that have been critiqued in trans theory. These contributions are important even beyond the queer and trans migrant communities, especially for their solidarities with Central American migrants, whose long-term presence in Mexico is growing due to US restrictions on asylum, and who face significant discrimination by both the Mexican state and by members of society at large.

For me, as a geographer, writer, and migration activist, getting to observe and participate in this organizing and these communities was transformative for shaking off a feeling of hopelessness with regard to migration and the US-Mexico border. At a time when the United States remains politically gridlocked and stymied by failures of imagination and an inability to communicate across political parties, and in which immigration and the border have taken on particular polarization, the possibilities for positive change can feel scant. Yet following the work of the deportees and returnees described here helped me to see that novel forms of organizing, creating, and identifying are flourishing within the worlds that US immigration restrictions have created, and that have both the political will and the imagination to think outside of them. Making the demands and visions described here a reality will take years of work from not only within the community, but also from US-citizen and non-migrant activists, journalists, and lay voters. My hope is that this dissertation helps make the possibilities of change real enough for readers for some to commit their time and energy to these efforts as well.

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