Short- and Long-term Implications

"ME DEPORTARON": CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION/ REINTEGRATION IN MEXICO'S NORTHERN BORDER REGION

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Introduction

Undocumented Mexicans living in the United States comprised the majority of the unauthorized immigrants in the country for several decades. In 2017, 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States, 4.9 million of whom were born in Mexico. According to the Pew Research Center report published in June 2019, for the first time Mexicans had declined to less than half the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population (Passel and Cohn, 2019). Undocumented Mexican migration to the United States has declined over time because those of Mexican descent left voluntarily, took advantage of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), died, or were deported back to their country of origin. This chapter concerns itself with the last group: those who were deported or self-deported and their integration or reintegration into Mexican society.

The academic literature on integration focuses on how well immigrants fare in a new country economically, socially, and culturally. A recent study of returning deportees conducted in Ghana found that in addition to difficulties finding jobs, food, and health care, these individuals also suffered the loss of personal belongings. Other challenges were negative receptions and perceptions by family members and friends in their county of birth because they saw the newly repatriated as failures who seemingly had not succeeded abroad; they struggled with stressful family relationships and endured inaccessible formal support services (Dako-Gyeke and Kodom, 2017). Mexicans repatriated to their country of origin face similar challenges, com-

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pounded by the fact that many had previously spent very little time in their country of origin; some have lived as many as twenty to thirty years in the United States.

Mexicans deported from the United States are not immigrants in the traditional sense; many of them could be *de facto* U.S. citizens, though *de jure*, they are Mexican nationals. They have limited experience in their home country and in most cases arrived there against their will. Some *de facto* U.S.-citizen deportees can recite the Pledge of Allegiance, sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," are familiar with U.S. history, and understand the structure and functioning of the U.S. government. Though legally they are Mexican nationals, they do not know the Mexican equivalents: the "*saludo a la bandera*" (Pledge of Allegiance) or "*el himno nacional*" (national anthem), and know very little about Mexican history and government.

Deportation is the formal removal of a person from the United States who is there without the benefit of proper legal documentation and is in violation immigration laws. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) manages this function and is the government agency in charge of implementing and operationalizing the deportation process. Deportations at the border are carried out by Customs and Border Protection officers, with assistance from the Border Patrol. ICE agents carry out internal deportations. For example, in cities like Los Angeles or Chicago, ICE is the agency responsible for carrying out the raids that lead to deportations.

Deportees fall into several categories, including those who are undocumented who entered the United States without the benefit of legal documents and those who came legally on a visa, but overstayed their legal time allotted. A second category of deportees consists of legal permanent residents who become excludable aliens after violating a law or laws in the U.S.; these legal permanent residents also become ineligible to receive their Social Security benefits. Individuals also sometimes choose to voluntarily self-deport for personal or family reasons, or because they think —or have been misled to believe— that if formally deported, they will be banned from re-entry into the United States. The self-deported I interviewed hoped to obtain a Mexican passport and request a visa to enter the United States legally, though it would be difficult to meet the criteria set forth by the U.S. government. Applicants for a visa to enter the United States must prove that they have ties to Mexico, provide information about their bank accounts, and

demonstrate that they have resources to spend in the United States, among other requirements.

The deportation/repatriation process can be very traumatic for individuals being removed and can be extremely hard on family members left behind. Scholars and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have shed light on the tragic circumstances that deportees face during the detention and deportation process (Martinez and Slack, 2017; No More Deaths, 2014; Kerwin, Alulema, and Nicholson, 2018). Several academics and non-governmental organizations have also documented the adversities that family members endure when a relative is deported, including economic hardships, families losing homes due to foreclosures, behavioral and mental health issues among children left behind, social isolation, and children being sent to foster homes (Martinez and Slack, 2013; Dreby, 2012; Eastman, 2017; Kerwin, Alulema, and Nicholson, 2018; O'Leary, 2017; Sampaio, 2015).

Deportation is a "gendered process," in part because the majority of the deportees are male. This means that mass deportations create a large number of single mothers trying to raise a family on a single income. Children in single-parent households are 4.2 times more likely to live in poverty than children with married parents (Dreby, 2012). Security in these single-mother or single-father families can be a major issue, particularly if the parent is in the United States without documentation. There is a great deal of fear about everyday vulnerabilities, such as going out to the grocery store, using public services, sending children to school, and visiting medical facilities (Whittaker, 2011)

This chapter focuses on the impact of the deportation process on individuals once they find themselves in Mexico, especially the challenges that they face integrating into a country they are not familiar with and their feelings of being foreigners in their county of birth. Two narratives of self-deportation are included, as well as case studies of families that shared their stories with me who have been affected by the deportation process. The chapter also includes a section on deported veterans and another on the plight of U.S.-citizen children who arrived to Mexico with their deported parent or parents. An additional section focuses on the Mexican government's response to the deportation process, and finally, the concluding section provides public policy recommendations to the Mexican and United States governments for mitigating the impact of the deportation process and the human suffering of families affected by it.

Political Context in the United States

On January 25, 2017, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13768, "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States." This order expanded the list of immigrants eligible for immediate deportation and authorized immigration officials to "employ all lawful means to enforce the immigration laws of the United States." By the fiscal year ending September 2018, 287 741 deportations had taken place; 42 percent of these were due to entry without inspection, 5 percent for aggravated felony charges, and 1.3 percent for possible terrorist ties. Twenty-six percent of these deportees were Mexicans. Deportations are not evenly spread across the nation, or even the borderlands. Since 2008, Texas courts have led the nation with the highest number of deportations. By the end of September 2018, Texas immigration courts had ordered the deportation of 60 431 people (TRAC, 2018).

Methodology

From January 2016 to September 2019, I visited several shelters in three major border cities in northern Mexico: the Father Chava Salesian Breakfast Dining Hall in Tijuana, Baja California; the Kino Lunchroom Border Project in Nogales, Sonora; and the House of the Migrant in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. This research project is ongoing and I still maintain contact with most of the people that I have interviewed. During my visits as a volunteer, donor, and researcher, I interviewed other volunteers and staff members in these organizations who shared some of the challenges and trauma that the deportees endured. I also interviewed some of the deportees at these shelters, but quickly realized that for some of those individuals who were living through the devastating effects of the deportation process, it was not the appropriate time to conduct interviews. Hence, I later scheduled interviews with deportees who had lived in Mexico a bit longer. It was better to interact with deportees who were more settled and over the initial trauma of deportation in order to ascertain the challenges they faced as they reintegrated into Mexican society. In September 2018, I organized a conference on the impact of the deportation process at the Ciudad Juárez Autonomous University. Deportees, government officials, members of NGOs,

and academics attended the conference, which also served as a data-gathering opportunity.

The majority of the interviewees will remain anonymous for obvious reasons, due to their fear of being identified; some will be given pseudonyms because they are concerned about their relatives in the United States, many of whom are undocumented. A number of respondents indicated that they were afraid that their relatives in the United States could be detected by government officials. Other deportees said that they aspired to return to the United States legally at some time in the future if possible and did not want to be identified at this point, lest their statements be held against them by consular officials during an interview for a visa.

The Impact of the Deportation Process

In this section, I describe the deportation process, starting when the deportees enter Mexico. The moment they arrive, they are welcomed and processed by the staff of the National Migration Institute (INAMI). Deportees receive a document known as the "repatriation sheet" (literally a deportation sheet) that attests to the fact that they have been repatriated. This document, in turn, allows them to access services at shelters and start the process of obtaining formal identification cards.

Once processed by INAMI, they are escorted to a shelter for a brief orientation, offered a spiritual/reflective message, and served a meal. Staff members and volunteers at shelters indicate that it is at this point, when deportees arrive at the shelters, that reality sets in, and they cannot believe what has happened to them. Volunteers and staff members indicated that the most impacted and traumatized are deportees who had been born in Mexico and taken to the United States as infants or young children. They have no experiences, memories, or family members in Mexico. Also, long-term legal permanent residents who have lived in the United States for twenty to thirty years are in disbelief, and staff indicate that the initial shock of deportation takes about three to five days to wear off. Volunteers and staff members reported seeing deportees with a variety of reactions that included staring, appearing numb without any emotion or seeming to be in a state of shock, and crying inconsolably.

At this early stage in the deportation process, the cruel reality sets in because deportees have no clothes, toothbrushes, combs, toiletries, shoes, or undergarments, and they experience an empty feeling because their basic needs are not being met. They are deported with literally only the clothes on their backs. The deportation process can be swift and dehumanizing and a person's reality can change quickly without any hope of returning to the United States because some are barred from reentering the country for up to 25 years.

Some deportees speak no or only a limited amount of Spanish and have a difficult time communicating. For assistance, they rely on other deportees or volunteers who are bilingual. Volunteers and staff members at these shelters try to arrange phone calls so they can communicate with their family members in the United States. Some volunteers and staff members indicated that during these conversations, deportees became very emotional and cried out of frustration, helplessness, and anger. Volunteers and staff members stated that it was painful to hear deported fathers and mothers talk to their children, explaining what had happened to them and where they were. One staff member at the Ciudad Juarez House of the Migrant said that it was disheartening to hear one-sided conversations of deportees trying to explain to their children that they are not sure when they will see them again. During these conversations, families exchange contact information, and those with resources send money to help the newly deported family member.

Based on my research in this area, I have learned that the longer an undocumented person has been in the United States, the more difficult it is for him or her to assimilate into Mexican society. Indeed, having a family member or a friend in Mexico tends to facilitate the process of integration. Legal permanent residents who have been in the United States for a long time tend to have a more difficult time assimilating or integrating into Mexican society; the deportation process is very difficult for them because in some ways, they had their foot in the door and, through some legal problem, were rendered deportable. In Mexico, finding work is often difficult, especially for more middle-aged adults. Younger people are finding work (and connections with other deportees) in bilingual call centers. In Mexico City, a group of deported young people from Los Angeles have created a network of support, and this part of Mexico City is known as Little LA (Univision, 2018).

Recuperating Their Personal Effects From the United States

Deportees report that they are forced to leave behind their cars, furniture, clothing, personal effects, cash, pictures, and much more because they do not have the right to return to their homes to collect their personal belongings. Some ask friends to help them get their furniture, car, clothes, and other personal effects. In some instances, friends oblige; in others, though, deportees end up losing everything they own. Mexican consular officials stated in an interview in El Paso, Texas, that deportees can visit the local office of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (SRE) in any border city and ask for the Mexican consulate to intervene on their behalf in order to retrieve their belongings. During the course of this research, however, I have not been able to find anyone who has successfully retrieved their belongings with the assistance of the SRE and the local Mexican consulate. I have heard anecdotal evidence that family members have been able to recover their belongings with varying degrees of success. Additionally, some deportees indicated that "friends" kept some of their belongings or stole them outright.

Integration: Challenges Deportees May Face

One major challenge facing new deportees in Mexico is lack of knowledge about how to get around their new host city or to find a government office to obtain their official voter registration card, the preferred form of identification in Mexico. They may not know where to go or understand what they need to ask for; they do not remember the name of the government office or the name of the document that they need. This is especially challenging for those deportees that speak limited or no Spanish.

One deportee told me that he had never been on public transportation because in the United States he always had a car. "It was so hard to make sense of the bus routes; in the States, there's a website or a bus route; here people just boarded buses, got on and off, and I had no idea which bus to take. It was very frustrating, and I felt like a fool at first. People looked at me funny when I would ask them where I should get off or which bus I should take to get from Point A to Point B."

Mothers: One, Self-deported And Another, Deported

In this section, I relay the plight of two mothers, one who self-deported and another who was deported. Reyna shared that she had been living in the U.S. undocumented for several years, long enough to have her relationship classified as a common law marriage in the state of Texas. She has two children from a previous relationship who are Mexican nationals and two children born in the United States whose father is a legal permanent resident. The relationship went awry and Reyna ended up moving to a domestic violence shelter. There, she received counseling, legal advice, and a place to stay with her children. She went to court to obtain custody of her two younger children and was denied. "The judge was biased against me because I was not legal [—their father had legal status—] and gave him sole custody." Some judges believe that children are better off living in the United States regardless of the circumstances. The sentiment that children cannot receive needed services and support outside of U.S. borders is rampant among lawyers, social workers, and judges (Glenn-Levin, 2017: 89). Over the course of several conversations, Reyna explained the complexity and challenges inherent in trying to raise children in a safe environment.

Once the judge rendered his decision, Reyna stated, "That was when I got scared because this judge learned that I was undocumented, and coupled with the fact that life in the shelter was hard for my two older children, I could no longer put them through that lifestyle, so I self-deported. I left my two younger children in the USA, and I wonder if I will ever see them again." During our conversation, she explained her situation. "My 'husband' and I had purchased a home together, and I am told that because I live in a community-property state and my name is on the mortgage and title, I own one-half of the property. How can I fight for that from here?"

Reyna asked me to find out if there were a way that she could visit her children in the United States. She asked if I had heard of humanitarian visas and wondered if she was even eligible to apply for one. Reyna was very distrustful of institutions, because, as she put it, "As an undocumented person, I avoided any institution, government office, or public service all my life; I have no experience dealing with anything related to the government." Hence, she was not comfortable approaching the U.S. consulate to see if

she could get a humanitarian visa. Her assessment was, "I know that they will ask for things that I do not have: a Mexican passport, a bank account, school records. I have nothing because I lived [illegally] in the U.S. for so long." She went on to ask about supervised visits, or if someone could bring her children to Mexico to see her, indicating that her former partner would never bring the children to see her in Mexico. "Why can't we have a place and make visits possible?" Reyna pondered.

Nora has a two-year-old son who is a U.S. citizen. She and her husband were deported and took their son with them. She would like to eventually send her son to school in the United States, but has learned from other deported families that young children under ten years of age cannot cross the bridge on their own. Nora asked, "Why can't there be a way for children to cross the bridge, have a school bus pick them up and take them to school? My son will eventually go back to the U.S., so it's better that he start his education there."

Nora felt that her U.S.-born child needed to receive services from the United States government, but that she certainly cannot take him to receive them. She also wanted to get a passport for her son at the U.S. consulate but was afraid to present herself there as a deportee. "I do not want to go there and suffer an indignity if they turn me away or treat me badly because I am deported. Do you know how I can get his passport?"

These interviews have allowed me the opportunity to establish a deeper relationship with Reyna and Nora because at the end of our conversations I promised that I would try to find out answers to the questions they asked me. I subsequently tried to help them, but have not been very successful in obtaining concrete information. However, we do email and talk on the phone regularly; they have become community activists helping other deportees in Mexico, and, in turn, they have introduced me to others who I have also interviewed.

Self-deported Single Man

Juan self-deported after he learned what happened to Pedro, his *compadre*, or co-parent —in the Catholic tradition, when children are baptized, the godparents become co-parents with the parents, or *compadres*. Pedro was

undocumented and had done really well for himself because he was a very good mechanic. When Pedro was detained, he was driving his brand-new truck with all of his tools and about US$15 000 in cash. Juan described the ordeal that Pedro went through as he tried to explain to U.S. government authorities that he had earned this cash legitimately, by providing services and getting paid in cash, and not in an illegal manner such as through the sale of drugs. Pedro showed a couple of receipts where he purchased auto parts and was allowed to call people whose cars he had repaired to prove to the U.S. government that legitimate transactions had taken place. But Pedro was able to take only about US$8000 with him; the rest he forfeited because he could not prove the origin of the money. Additionally, after he lost his car and tools, he was deported. When Pedro connected with Juan by telephone to share with him what had happened, Juan decided to self-deport:

> I felt that I had worked really hard. I had two trucks and some cash, so I started planning my departure. I towed one of the trucks and packed as many things as I could and headed to Mexico. I was scared that I'd be detained by the police for a traffic violation, or by the Border Patrol, or at the outbound inspections that U.S. officials sometimes have when one is leaving the country. The whole trip down there I was so nervous; then I got to Mexico and I felt even worse, and I felt a different type of fear: that I would be robbed, killed, extorted, or that the police would take away my things, or that I would be kidnapped. I was lucky that nothing happened to me, and now I'm here, exploring options.

Juan was working as a waiter and had found another job. He spoke English quite well, and lamented that, "Why stay over there, if Trump doesn't want us and it's going to be more difficult to 'fix' our status."

Juan shared that he missed certain things about the U.S. and was happy that he could follow the Dallas Cowboys games on TV. He said, "Yes, I could have been greedy and stayed longer to earn more, but I decided to cut my losses. My *compadre* Pedro lost it all." Juan shared that he wanted to build a home and maybe start a business.

Family Divided by the Deportation Process

In this section I focus on the plight of Victor, a young man who had been in the United States for most of his life and was enrolled in a community college.

His deportation led to many challenges; the first was that he found it difficult to interact with family with whom he had had little previous contact. He had not seen his father and sister in over twenty years and felt strange living with them in their house. Victor relayed the following family history.

His father had a job and his mother owned a small neighborhood store. They met the requirements and income threshold to obtain a visa from the U.S. consulate to visit the United States. His maternal grandmother was a U.S. citizen and Victor's family applied to become legal permanent residents under the family reunification clause. As a child, Victor had a visa to enter the United States, and his family visited the U.S. often. Over time, his father found work in the U.S. and entered with his visa on a daily basis to work. Eventually, the father suggested to the family that they all move to the United States so that the children could start school and learn English. He felt justified because the family had applied for legal permanent residency, and they were certain that it would not be long before they could legally live in the United States. The family rented a home in El Paso and the children started school, though they would visit Mexico often to shop and to check on their home in Mexico. One day, upon their return to the United States, the family encountered greater scrutiny at the port of entry, and after intense questioning, the immigration officer pulled their visas. The family illegally returned to the United States and stayed. When the father was deported years ago, he went back to the family home in Mexico; Victor's oldest sister went with him while Victor and his mother stayed, without the benefit of legal documents. For that period, the family was separated.

Although Victor graduated from high school, attended community college, and was doing well in school, he was eventually deported, too. He was initially scared, but expressed positive views about the House of the Migrant, which he said helped him a lot: "It's a really good program." Victor was very complimentary about the services that the House of the Migrant offered him and other deportees. "They fed us, gave us clothes, allowed us to use the phone to call our families, and offered help to get us to the bus station, so that we could get to our final destination. I called my mother in the U.S., who, in turn, called my sister who lives in Mexico, and she was able to send me money."

At the House of the Migrant, Victor recalled, "We were told to be careful and to look out for members of the drug cartels who would try to extort

us and steal our money. A driver from the House of the Migrant took us to the bus station with very little time to spare before the bus would leave. They told us, 'You don't want to linger there; it's a scary place. Get in, buy the ticket, and board the bus." Unfortunately for Victor, he was not able to get a ticket and had to wait for an hour before the next departure. Gang members started to harass him and started asking him to pay protection money for "using this space," something that Victor said that he did not understand. He told them that he had no money, that he had just been deported, and they harassed him even more. When he finally boarded the bus, one of the gang members boarded the bus without a ticket and extorted what little money Victor had. When the bus arrived at the next city, Victor confronted the bus driver and accused him of being in cahoots with the gang member: "Why did you let him board the bus without a ticket?" Victor told him that he was going to report him to the authorities at the bus station and to his bus company, but ultimately, he did nothing.

When he finally arrived to his childhood home, Victor felt very out of place. He had not seen his father or sister in over twenty years. It was difficult to establish rapport. He was afraid to go out and did not like to use public transportation; he said that he once got lost and ended up at the international bridge. "It was scary; I called my father to come and pick me up." When I asked if Victor was interested in completing his degree, he responded, "Yes, I'd like to, but I have no idea where to begin to explore that possibility; I don't even know where the university is here."

Victor had maintained contact with a former teacher from his middle school years in the U.S., and through her contacts in Mexico, she helped find him a job. Victor first worked as a security guard, and then later at a call center where his bilingual skills were valued and proved to be an asset. He was applying for a management position at the call center and seemed very excited about the prospects. He concluded that he did not have it as bad as other deportees, because "I have family here who I can stay with." Others are not so lucky. Victor also has a girlfriend who lives in Mexico, but is a U.S. citizen. "It's so ironic; she was born in the U.S. but prefers to live in Ciudad Juárez, though she commutes to work in the U.S. every day."

I am helping Victor explore options of enrolling at the university and obtaining transcripts from the community college he attended in the United States to see if he could transfer and receive academic credit for his classes.

Originally, he wanted to be a dentist, but he said that he does not think that he wants to pursue that career anymore: "There are too many dentists here, and they don't make as much money as they do in the United States."

Families Left Behind in the U.S.

Life is fragile for poor people, and when an immigrant's relative is deported, this can have devastating economic and legal consequences for the whole family of immigrants. Often, families are split up and family members are left behind in the U.S. Whether the deportee is the main breadwinner or the primary caretaker of the children and home, deportation poses serious challenges for families left behind. They can be left without a breadwinner, and/or without someone to care for the children. Deportees face the choice of taking their family with them to Mexico or leaving them in the United States. Mixed-family status complicates things because children born on U.S. soil are U.S. citizens.

As part of my long-term data gathering process, I interviewed Victor's mother Lidia, who has lived in the U.S. for over twenty years without the benefit of proper documentation. She misses Victor a lot because, for many years, only the two of them lived together. Lidia has had a variety of jobs in the U.S., mostly housekeeping and janitorial work. "I've been in close proximity to Border Patrol agents many times, but I just act normal and confident. Once, when I was outside my work cleaning the windows in front, they were walking by, as they do in the downtown area, and I just said 'good morning' to them. Another time, I was riding in a car with my friend, who is also undocumented, and a Border Patrol car pulled up next to us at the red light. I casually waved and smiled at them, though deep down inside I was horrified and scared to death. My friend joked that the authorities probably thought I was a *gringa* because I have dyed or bleached my hair blonde."

Lidia described how arduously she has worked and how difficult it is, at times, to live in the U.S. "I've worked very hard and made good money; I was able to pay my son's tuition at the community college and help him out. Unfortunately, he was deported. I miss him so much, because for many years he was by my side. I haven't seen my daughter in over twenty years; we just talk on the phone and now we can Skype and see each other." Lidia

noted how technology has helped ease the burden of being separated from her children. "At first, when we had land lines, it was expensive to make calls to Mexico; now with cell phones, we don't worry about the cost, now we can use Skype and even see each other."

One of the saddest parts of our conversation took place when Lidia described how another of her sons who lived in Mexico had passed away. "When I received the call telling me that my son had died, I was devastated and immediately wanted to go to the funeral. My daughter told me to calm down and that I needed to be realistic." "If you go to Mexico," Lidia's daughter had said, "you might not be able to go back to the U.S. unless you pay a lot of money to a *coyote* or take a big risk entering and getting caught by the Border Patrol." Lidia reflected, "It was sad for me to mourn my son by myself and not go to his funeral. If I had gone, I would have jeopardized my economic well-being and Victor's."

Lidia went on to say that she was living with a man; but like many other undocumented women she knows, she noted, "We stay with a man just because he helps pay the bills and the expenses." She said that many women she knew lived with violent partners and just put up with it because they could not afford to live on their own. "No one I know is with a man because they love him." She concluded by saying, "How sad, huh?"

Both Victor and his mother Lidia asked me about the program that the Border Network for Human Rights has in place that allows families to reunite for three to five minutes at the border. This program has been put on hold in recent months and during the last conversation I had with Victor, he still had not seen his mom.

Deported Veterans

Another category is made up of those (mostly men) who served in the United States Armed Forces while they were legal permanent residents, and for some reason, never became U.S. citizens before becoming excludable aliens by breaking a law or a series of laws. An outstanding example of this is the case of former Vietnam-era veterans who have made a run-down hotel their new home in Mexicali. Other deported veterans in the city of Tijuana have established a shelter, Deported Veterans Support House, also known as

the "The Bunker." These veterans had served in various branches of the military and been deployed in Vietnam, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and more. Although they committed crimes and became excludable aliens, they feel that the same government that they had defended has betrayed them by deporting them without any benefits. Since the U.S. government does not keep track of them, however, there are no reliable figures on the number of veteran deportees. However, according to a spokesperson for Bunker Tijuana, more than 1000 deported veterans live in Baja California alone (Suarez, 2014). Another source states that approximately 2000 veterans reside in Mexico's northern border states. It is interesting to note that the U.S. does allow for the deported veterans to be buried back in the U.S. with full military honors (Duara, 2016).

In Ciudad Juárez, I visited Bunker Juárez on various occasions and had conversations with several veterans. They noted that they had a very difficult time maintaining contact with their families in the U.S. because "families are afraid to come to Juárez because of the high crime rates and violence in the city." I could tell that it was painful to talk about their children; as one veteran succinctly put it, "I don't know if I'll ever see my daughter again."

Veterans in Ciudad Juárez celebrate Veteran's Day and are very proud of their service and the fact that they took an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. While they are upset with the way they have been treated, they still love the United States, are very proud of their service, and "want to come home." They avoid any negative publicity and try to help each other out as best as they can.

Presently, several bills are pending in the U.S. Congress that purport to "return our deported veterans," but they have all languished in committees. In February 2019, Representatives Don Young of Alaska and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas reintroduced their bill from the last congressional session, the Repatriate Our Patriots Act. The veterans I met asked to me do whatever I could to help raise awareness about their plight and to try to encourage Congress to act.

One deported veteran who I have met with on several occasions and have had more focused and deeper conversations with shared that when he was in the army, he started exploring the possibility of becoming a U.S. citizen and that he went to the JAG office to inquire about the process. He was frustrated and disappointed that they could not provide any information on the naturalization process. He started to explore other avenues only to

be deployed, and he obviously did not pursue his citizenship. "Getting ready to deploy is a lot of work and I felt that once I came back to the States it would be easier to become a citizen as a combat veteran, but that wasn't the case," he lamented.

This veteran has a terrific sense of humor and, though he is sad and hurting inside, he laughs at what has happened. "I felt like I was a *gabacho* [an American]," and, "As I was going through the deportation process, I thought that there would be a way that they would let me stay —after all, I was a veteran. I fought for this country." He said that the immigration officer who was deporting him tried to help him. "He asked me when my mother became a U.S. citizen to see if I could qualify as a child of a U.S. citizen and stay in the country, but my mother became a citizen later in life. He tried to find a loophole, but couldn't; so here I am." He has family members in Mexico who have helped him and finds friendship and support at Bunker Juárez where other veterans congregate and support each other. They tend to wear some of their army fatigues, and proudly display the U.S. flag at the bunker. Most indicate that they would like to see their families and receive services at the VA hospital and are hopeful that Congress will act soon.

Mexican Government Responses

The Mexican government has responded to increasing deportations of Mexican nationals from the U.S. in a variety of ways. Fifty Mexican consulates offer services to Mexican nationals in the U.S. Consular officials encourage Mexican nationals in the U.S. to download an app called MiConsulMex so that they can obtain the list of services available to them and updates on immigration policies and ways to prepare for deportation.

Mexican consular staff in the U.S. also encourage people at risk of deportation to leave a power of attorney, which gives a relative or friend authority to care for children, possibly handle their financial affairs, and retrieve property confiscated by the U.S. government. This power of attorney can also authorize a designated person to pick up the deportee's belongings; some deportees own property or homes in the United States, and the document facilitates the sale of the property. Consular officials stress the importance of leaving someone with power of attorney granting them custody of

children, because without it, some children end up in Child Protective Services and the foster care system.

Protege Tu Familia y Tu Patrimonio (Protect Your Family and Your Property)

Fifty Mexican consulates in the United States —no other country has as many consulates in any single host country— provide services to Mexican nationals. One program in particular is aimed at people at risk of deportation: "It's better to be prepared: take care of your belongings and your family's safety" is a joint effort that includes the Mexican government's Ministry of Finance; National Commission for the Defense of Consumers of Financial Services (CONDUSEF); and Ministry of Foreign Relations, through its Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME). They have published a guide for Mexicans in the United States.

The *Houston Chronicle* published an extensive guide to prepare for potential deportation that listed "Know Your Rights" information in case federal government agents arrive at a person's home and demand to enter, as well as information about social services agencies and programs available through the Mexican government (Tallet, 2017).

The Mexican Foreign Affairs office has opened Legal Defense Centers in all fifty Mexican consulates in the U.S. These centers work with local attorneys to provide legal advice and representation for immigrants of Mexican origin.

The Mexican federal government, through the National Migration Institute (INAMI), started a program called "We Are Mexicans," which seeks to integrate deportees into Mexican society (Gobierno de México 2019a). INAMI also launched the Compatriot Program, which promotes human rights and helps deportees or repatriated people temporarily find work (Gobierno de México, 2019b).

During the course of my interviews with deportees, not one of them mentioned that they have taken advantage of or benefited from any of the aforementioned Mexican government programs. Perhaps this is due to the fact that deportees are not aware of these services; the undocumented deportees tend to avoid institutions, and deportees who were socialized in the United

States reported a difficult time interacting with Mexican government institutions because of the language barrier and feeling inadequate because they sometimes did not know exactly how to request what they needed.

On July 10, 2014, the Nuevo Laredo municipal government also started a program to help deportees with housing, medical care, phone calls, and transportation to their communities of origin. Other local governments in Mexico such as San Luis Potosí have provided resources to help them return to their city of origin. This is a textbook Catch-22: many of the deportees want to stay near the U.S. because they are more likely to be able to have their relatives visit them if they are close to the U.S. border. Deportees indicate that many of them no longer have relatives in their communities of origin because they have migrated to the U.S. While it might appear altruistic for these northeastern Mexican communities to “aid” deportees, some believe that the help is really part of a hidden agenda to make sure that the deportees do not stay in these host communities. Anti-immigrant sentiments have also been detected in Mexico’s border cities and leveled at deportees (Padilla and Coronado, 2012).

U.S.-Citizen Children Living in Mexico with Deported Parents

One of the most difficult decisions many deportees must make is whether they will be deported with or without their children. A report published by Georgetown University found that the health of children in mixed-status families suffered because of the threat of separation (Wiley, 2013).

Children who are U.S. citizens and are residing in Mexico with a deported parent or parents face special challenges, especially if the children do not have dual nationality. They are denied entrance into schools, vaccinations, and other government services. Mexican consulates encourage families to obtain Mexican citizenship if they are at risk of deportation and plan to take their children with them to Mexico. Obtaining Mexican citizenship at the consulates in the United States appears to be an easier process than waiting until the family is in Mexico. At any consulate, it costs only US$13. Since the birth certificate needs to be authenticated with an apostille, which can cost up to US$295, it is costlier and more cumbersome to initiate the

process once in Mexico. For some families, the cost is prohibitively expensive; therefore, they struggle to obtain Mexican citizenship for their U.S.-born children. Misinformation also circulates in the United States and Mexico that once children obtain Mexican citizenship, they lose their U.S. citizenship, but that is not the case.

U.S.-citizen children of deportees in Mexico face educational challenges. The Binational Migrant Education Program (PROBEM) provides some support for navigating the bureaucratic process of enrolling children in schools in Tijuana. Approximately 4000 U.S.-citizen children attend public schools there. A deportee himself, Chris Najera founded a new program through the Youth Recreation and Education Center in Tijuana, specifically offering an online education to U.S. American kids in Mexico. Students must register and, in some instances, pay a high fee for the U.S.-based educational program, but it provides help to students with their online instruction. Another option for U.S.-citizen children in Tijuana is to cross the border every day to attend school; however, to do so they must either provide an address of a home in the school district or else state that they are homeless and do not have an address (Taketa, 2018, and Levinson, 2017).

Conclusion and Public Policy Recommendations

Deportees face a variety of challenges integrating or reintegrating into their country of origin. The inability to see their families left behind in the United States weighs heavily on them because they really do not know if or when they will see them again. During the course of interviews with deportees, any mention of family members in the United States inevitably led to quiet, tearful, sad, and painful moments. The interviewees' lips would quiver, tears would form in their eyes, their voices would break, and it would take them a while to compose themselves. Not being able to see their families is a real heartache and a form of punishment. Integration or reintegration has proven to be more challenging for deportees who do not speak Spanish or do not speak it well.

The deportees I interviewed were not familiar with any of the Mexican government programs that purported to assist them with employment opportunities and integration. They credited their family members in Mexico

and their relatives from the U.S. who came to visit as sources of support for their integration into Mexican society. Deportees with U.S.-citizen children in Mexico found it difficult and costly to obtain dual citizenship. The integration/reintegration process has proven to be a challenge for many because of the abrupt and harsh conditions under which they are deported and the inability of the receiving country to adequately serve them. Perhaps if both governments cooperated and developed a genuinely humane and orderly deportation/repatriation process, deportees could have an easier transition "back home," which for many is the United States and not Mexico.

Public Policy Recommendations

- One-Suitcase Policy: The United States government should implement a more humane deportation process and allow people to gather their belongings and organize their personal affairs prior to deportation. A one-suitcase policy would allow for deportees to take personal effects with them and at least have toiletries, a change of clothing, and more.
- Power of Attorney: Deportees should be allowed to leave powers of attorney, or a document authorizing a relative or a friend to sell their personal effects, close bank accounts, or deal with other personal matters. Prior to deportation, they should be allowed to privately contact their family members to inform them of their situation.
- Binational Visiting Centers: The U.S. and Mexican government should establish binational visiting centers on the border so that people can see their family members. This binational visiting center could be located at the Chamizal National Park or Monument 1 in the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez area. In Ambos Nogales (Both Nogales), a facility could be built next to the Morley or DeConcini ports of entry; and in San Diego/Tijuana, by the Crossborder Xpress.
- Respect for the rights of U.S.-born children living in Mexico: In collaboration with the U.S. government, Mexico's government should provide dual citizenship to U.S.-citizen children as well as their U.S. and Mexican passports. This would ensure that they have access to Mexican government services and can simultaneously register at the U.S.

consulate or embassy, a right of every U.S. citizen living abroad. Additionally, should any U.S.-citizen children want to be educated in their country of birth, they should be allowed to do so. Both governments must facilitate their access to a U.S. education by allowing them to cross the international bridge and arrange for public bus transportation to their respective schools.

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