

Introduction

Ángel Morales had been locked up for almost two years the day U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) pulled him out of detention and loaded him into a van for the Mexican border. He'd lived in California since he was 4. At the time of his arrest, he was a 23-year-old community college student fluent in English. According to the police, Ángel hit an officer during an immigration protest. Ángel said the charges were false. In jail, he hired a lawyer. He tried to fight deportation, but none of it took. Instead, Ángel spent 18 months in prison and 6 in immigration detention before the U.S. removed him.

Behind bars, Ángel felt he was losing his soul. Every day, guards woke the men at three in the morning to bring someone to court, flooding the cells with fluorescent lights. Ángel often saw people beaten by guards or gangs. If inmates did not sign their own deportation orders, ICE could hold them for years, even if they had committed no crimes. When Ana, a PhD student, interviewed Ángel a few years later, he told her quietly, "It was horrible. How did I survive? I have asked myself that. I don't know. I guess by the grace of God." He added, "They break you. They don't let you sleep. So, you're numb . . . You actually don't know what's going on till you just accept any offer [to leave the country], just for the sake of 'leave me alone.' So, they break you. They break you psychologically."

The day ICE set Ángel "free" (into Mexico), agents chained his hands in a box and cuffed his feet so tight he could hardly walk. When Ángel asked for his stuff, they barked that if he wanted it, he could go back to jail. Ángel got in the van.

When he got out, he was on a bridge to Tijuana. Each step felt like the longest one of his life. He remembered watching his world fall behind him, as if in a dream. When Ángel faltered, guards pushed him through the door, into Mexico.

Though Ángel tried to "return" to his birthplace in Guadalajara, he hadn't been there in 20 years, and his closest relative left was a great aunt he hardly knew. People on the street made fun of Ángel's "American" Spanish. In this place the U.S. said was his home, they insisted that he was a stranger. Ángel's head spun. He

worried, “Are they gonna think I’m the worst person in the world? Are they gonna be afraid of me because I’m a ‘criminal’? Are they gonna think that I maybe committed something really horrible? . . . If that [incarceration] happened to me in the U.S., is the same thing gonna happen to me here in Mexico?” Ángel felt deeply alone—out of place in the only place he had left.

Mentally, Ángel also felt trapped in that prison in Bakersfield, California. He constantly watched his back. He struggled to trust other people. For months, he grappled with deep depression. He explained: “You’re so used to being stuck inside four walls that you feel like you have to be inside to be protected . . . It’s two different shocks: the shock of being inside four walls and then the shock of you being free, but you don’t recognize anything . . . Your whole identity—*you*—get lost, like, ‘Okay, who am I now? What am I supposed to do?’ You get so clouded you cannot think clearly.” After prison, Ángel could barely function, let alone in a country he hardly knew. He grasped for a sense of himself.

Ángel was not alone. Most of the men we interviewed struggled with alienation. Some had been ripped from their homes in the night by armed teams from ICE. Fathers could not say goodbye to their children. Husbands and college-aged sons were locked up for years, for no crime. After deportation, they struggled to (re)build social connections and reclaim their very humanity. Some died by suicide. Others ended up killed.

But Ángel got lucky. A few months after ICE removed him, he started browsing the web. He discovered organizations in Mexico City that trained deportees for jobs and helped get them back on their feet. He moved to the capital and found work in programming. He joined an NGO that championed deportees’ bilingual, bicultural skills. There, he helped create a *new* kind of home.

BANISHED MEN

This is a book about men we banish. From 2009 to 2020, the U.S. government deported more than five million people. Almost half were Mexican. Three-quarters had lived in the U.S. for more than a year and many for more than a decade. Importantly, nearly 95 percent of the people removed from inside the U.S. were men.¹ Men like Ángel, who had lived 21 of his 25 years in the United States.

Deportation is nothing new. But starting in the early 2000s, new laws wove detention and incarceration into the act of removal. Even though less than half the people the U.S. deports have been convicted of crimes (other than crossing the border), nearly all spend a few months detained. Another 40 percent are removed after sentences in U.S. prisons or jails. I refer to this combination of detention, incarceration, removal, and border militarization as *carceral deportation*.²

Deportation itself is not *supposed* to be punishment. However, the federal government now bans deportees from returning to the United States for 3, 5, 10, or 20 years once they are removed. If migrants attempt to rejoin their loved ones north

of the border, the U.S. can send them to prison. Still, many try. At the border, they often get stopped by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), leading to cycles of detention, incarceration, and further expulsion.

Carceral deportation targets Latino men. To legitimate caging and exile, U.S. politicians, cops, and judges invoke masculine and racialized tropes of “illegal” Latino “criminals” and “rapists.”³ This language has consequences. Though roughly half of unauthorized immigrants in the United States are female, U.S. police and ICE detain, imprison, and deport men at more than nine times the rate of women. Likewise, though migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras make up about two thirds of the undocumented, they represent up to 95 percent of all deportees.⁴ To understand this gendered and racialized system, this book takes an in-depth look at Mexican migrant men.

What becomes of men the U.S. locks up and casts off as criminals? How does living through U.S. detention and prison shape their emotions, relationships, and choices about where to live and how to claim rights and resources? How does it sway their faith in their own humanity?

To answer these questions, I worked with 31 bilingual students from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) to interview 171 deported men and 15 deported women. Most of the team did interviews in Tijuana, near our homes at the U.S.-Mexico border. I also hired four paid research assistants to help me interview people in the major sending state of Oaxaca and the capital, Mexico City. All but two of the students were of Mexican or Central American origin. Half were children of undocumented parents, and almost a quarter had had a parent or sibling deported, sometimes during our research. A quarter were immigrants themselves. The students’ experiences of U.S. enforcement set the tone for the research, orienting us toward the emotions, perspectives, and love of immigrant men.

We found that carceral deportation makes men feel banished not only from the United States but also from belonging at all. Detention, incarceration, and removal beat people down both physically and psychologically. Despite key variations, men repeatedly said they felt treated like cockroaches, pigs, and dogs. U.S. carceral institutions also weakened men’s social ties. Locked up and kicked out, they lost their places as workers, fathers, brothers, and sons. Many also lost a sense of themselves.

This feeling of human banishment extends across borders as well. Men carry the trauma of U.S. imprisonment with them to Mexico. Though fewer than two in five deportees have been convicted of a crime, Mexicans often shun them as felons or assume they are members of gangs.⁵ Most of those from small towns find it hard to go back. Instead, they land in big cities or at the border—“elsewheres” that are neither “home” nor “away.”⁶ There, they linger in limbo, unsure whether to risk a return to the United States. Many endure kidnapping, robbery, arrest, extortion, police assaults, and cartel recruitment. As deported men struggle to (re)claim their lives and loves, they look less like returning migrants than like the stateless: stripped of pride and a place to call home.

BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF CARCERAL DEPORTATION

The United States has scapegoated Mexican migrants and forcibly removed them for almost two centuries.⁷ But today, removal comes hand in hand with time behind bars.

Starting in the late 1980s and 1990s, U.S. policies merged immigration and criminal law, in what scholars call “cimmigration.”⁸ In 1986, the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) required the government to expel noncitizens convicted of “deportable” crimes. In answer—and to help relieve overcrowding—immigration officials began to check inmates’ legal status in prisons and jails.⁹ At the time, however, only a few, violent crimes were considered grounds for removal.

Then, in 1996, Congress passed the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Control Act (IIRIRA), which radically increased deportations, via prisons and jails. These laws added numerous minor crimes as grounds for removal, including identity fraud, drug possession, shoplifting, turnstile jumping, and disorderly conduct—even if those crimes had happened well in the past.¹⁰ They also mandated that anyone convicted of such crimes be detained and deported. They made illegal entry a misdemeanor and reentry a felony, punishable by prison.¹¹ For the first time, IIRIRA enabled the U.S. to deport lawful permanent residents. In addition, IIRIRA reduced judges’ power to cancel deportation orders, enabling the government to remove immigrants with little to no due process.¹²

In the 2000s, more funding, technology, and programs entwined incarceration and deportation. From 2004 to 2008, Congress increased ICE funds nearly thirtyfold, to \$180 million. In 2006, ICE merged past jail-check programs into the Criminal Alien Program (CAP), expanding ICE presence in prisons.¹³ In 2008, the Obama administration introduced the Secure Communities Program, enabling law enforcement to fingerprint people as they were booked into jail and check them against ICE databases (*before* a trial or any conviction). By 2013, Secure Communities was active in every jurisdiction in the United States. When Obama suspended the program, ICE folded its operations into CAP, keeping it going in practice.

Secure Communities and Section 287(g) of IIRIRA, which trained police to collaborate with ICE, empowered local law enforcement to find and turn over undocumented immigrants. In turn, every police encounter became a chance to check papers. These programs also actively targeted migrants *outside* of prisons and jails. Under 287(g), for instance, police could question individuals suspected of violating immigration laws (until 2012) and execute ICE warrants. While some cities have resisted these practices, police in many parts of the country now routinely submit people’s fingerprints to ICE on point of arrest. Even if immigrants

have legal residency, minor violations (or no violations), or have already served their sentences, they are subject to deportation.¹⁴

Finally, stricter punishments sent deportees to prison if they tried to return. Historically, the U.S. treated crossing the border as an administrative offense, which it mostly ignored.¹⁵ IIRIRA made entry punishable. Starting in the 1990s, the U.S. also fortified urban parts of the U.S.-Mexico border, pushing migrants to remote zones in the desert where they were easier to police and more vulnerable to death.¹⁶ In 2011, CBP announced that it would more systematically charge migrants caught with unauthorized entry and reentry, under the Consequence Delivery System.¹⁷ Today, if the U.S. apprehends someone returning after a deportation, it can send them to prison for 2 years, or up to 20 if they have a record, including traffic violations or multiple deportations.¹⁸ By 2015, about 9.1 percent of all federal prisoners (17,000 people) were locked up for crossing the border, now the most common federal crime.¹⁹

These policies radically increased the number of deportations. Prior to the mid-1990s, the U.S. deported less than 50,000 people a year, 94 percent of whom had just crossed the border.²⁰ Today, the United States deport 287,000 to 432,000 people a year, roughly half from inside the country.²¹ They are contractors, chefs, small business owners, and members of deep communities. Many were brought over the border as kids. Some are lawful permanent residents. More than a third have children under 18; three-quarters of their children are U.S. citizens.²²

These men are rarely criminals. In general, immigrants are less likely than U.S. citizens to commit crimes or be incarcerated.²³ Yet, programs like 287(g) and Secure Communities encourage police to stop and arrest people for offenses like driving without a license.²⁴ While white Americans often look at such infractions as minor misdeeds, for immigrants, a traffic stop can set in motion arrest and then deportation.²⁵ Even the immigrants ICE finds *inside* prisons and jails tend to be there for minor violations or have not (yet) been convicted of crimes. From 2010 to 2013, for instance, 55.4 percent of people removed under the Criminal Alien Program had been convicted of nonviolent, nonserious offenses, and 27.5 percent had no convictions at all (in short, they were hardly criminals).²⁶ As of 2019, only 35 to 40 percent of people detained by ICE had a criminal record.²⁷ Of those, roughly 31 percent had immigration offenses, 15 percent traffic violations, and 15 percent drug offenses.²⁸ Very few had been convicted of serious crimes.

As deportations ballooned, the U.S. rapidly expanded immigration detention, too.²⁹ From 2001 to 2018, ICE doubled the number of people detained. It now locks up over 400,000 people a year, sometimes holding more than 50,000 at a time (with most there for weeks or months). Even those who give up their right to a hearing and agree to removal can expect to stay locked up at least a few weeks. As of 2021, those who refuse to sign off on their own deportations wait more than 4.5 years for their case to come before a judge.³⁰ Immigrants deported from prison may also be sent to detention after their sentences, sometimes for years.

If crimmigration is the legal framework merging prison, detention, and deportation, banishment is the lived experience: the physical and emotional harms wrought by getting locked up and then being sent off to Mexico.

A THEORY OF BANISHMENT

Carceral deportation has fundamentally changed the Mexico-U.S. immigration system. From the 1940s to early 2000s, U.S. immigration control echoed South African apartheid.³¹ Apartheid refers to the laws and legally sanctioned violence that imposed racial segregation in South Africa for most of the twentieth century. South African apartheid was also a migrant labor system. It made Black migrant workers exploitable by marking them racial “others” (considered less deserving) and by separating families. While South Africa let Black men enter white cities to work, it relegated Black women to Bantustans (Black homelands). Thus, apartheid deflected the costs of raising children to cheap rural areas where women could grow food to supplement men’s meager earnings.³² South Africa also used apartheid laws to manage surplus labor, expelling Black men during downturns and admitting them when needs for workers increased.³³ Some scholars argue that this system also deflected resistance out of white cities and into the Black periphery.³⁴

Similarly, starting in the 1940s, the U.S. let Mexican men enter the country to work, recruiting them as temporary labor on farms and in other low-wage jobs, both formally and informally. As in South Africa, U.S. laws labeled these men racially inferior to whites, less deserving of living wages, and more deserving of deportation.³⁵ Meanwhile, U.S. enforcement excluded Mexican women as “breeders,” and many stayed in sending villages, where they could farm and raise families cheaply.³⁶ The U.S. also used deportation to regulate surplus labor and threaten migrant workers who protested against low wages.³⁷

Today, U.S. immigration control still uses racial “othering,” gendered ideologies, and family separation. Yet, if apartheid aimed to *exploit* migrant men, carceral deportation strives to *erase* them.

The effect of carceral deportation is banishment. At the most general level, banishment means spatial exclusion imposed by law.³⁸ Theorist Ananya Roy, who studies urban removals in the United States, describes a more specific process of *racial* banishment. By forcing people of color to move and marking their presence illegal, she argues, U.S. laws and policing extend the logic of mass incarceration beyond the prison. When the government moves people out of public spaces and makes their return illegal, it turns their very presence into a crime. As Roy puts it, “Banishment is not the movement of racialized bodies from one place to another or what we might call displacement. It is expulsion from everywhere.”³⁹

Thus, banishment is a form of “social death.” Sociologist Orlando Patterson introduced the term “social death” to describe how slavery stripped Black people of full humanity and cast them out of society.⁴⁰ Others have used the phrase

to show how racial segregation, imprisonment, and government violence more broadly mark some people undeserving or subhuman, normalizing their social exclusion and even physical death.⁴¹ The concept is similar to philosopher Giorgio Agamben's theory of "bare life."⁴² Agamben argues that when government officials suspend individuals' legal rights, they reduce those people to mere survival, expelling them from the social and political fabric. In short, banishment attacks men's humanity, marking them outside society as a whole.

Banishment is distinct from apartheid in five key ways: (1) it is carceral; (2) it targets men; (3) it leaves men in limbo, funneling them to urban peripheries; and (4) it undermines agency. Nevertheless, in some cases (5) it can spark new modes of refusal.

Banishment is carceral. Today, policing, detention, incarceration, deportation, and border militarization work in tandem.⁴³ Deportation is entwined both concretely and ideologically with mass incarceration: the system that locks up, expels, and murders Black and Latino Americans in disproportionate numbers, especially men.⁴⁴ Detention—itsself de facto imprisonment—is part of almost all removals today. The logic of prisons also extends outside penal institutions and across the U.S.-Mexico border.⁴⁵ After removal, deportees carry both trauma from U.S. prisons and stigma as criminals, enabling Mexican cartels and state authorities to assault and mistreat them as well.

To understand deportation, scholars must study the psychic and interpersonal impacts of being locked up. Expansive research shows that even for U.S. citizens, imprisonment degrades mental health, erodes intimate relationships, cuts social ties, and imposes stigmas that make it hard to establish a life after prison or jail.⁴⁶ For migrants, the consequences of prison are compounded by forced relocation, often to unknown places, from which they cannot visit their U.S.-based families.

*Banishment targets men.*⁴⁷ The U.S. has long used gendered tropes to justify barring immigrants. In the second half of the twentieth century, under the system that resembled apartheid, the U.S. marked immigrant *women* as looming "public charges" and "breeders" of "anchor babies,"⁴⁸ reinforcing their confinement to Mexico. Under carceral deportation, U.S. leaders invoke *masculine* Latino threats (Trump's "bad hombres") to legitimate restrictions, walls, detention, and deportation.⁴⁹ Today, the U.S. apprehends men far more often than women and gives them fewer reprieves.⁵⁰ Though men are only half of undocumented migrants, they represent 9.5 in 10 deportees. Every year, the U.S. rips up to 100,000 fathers from their U.S.-born children. Yet, the U.S. public and media tend to tolerate men's removal, raising loud outcries only when separation comes to hit immigrant mothers.⁵¹

To understand the effects of this gendered violence, I focus on men. This is not just a study of "their" masculinity. Rather, I am concerned with what happens to men when *states* use gendered practices to erase them.

U.S. assaults on Black and Brown men are part of a global pattern. Today, amid jobless growth, poor and working-class men all over the world face mass unemployment.⁵² Few can attain neoliberal ideals of breadwinning masculinity.⁵³ Yet, government policies still prize paid labor and punish those who cannot find work. As a result, men struggle to find their places in politics and even in families.⁵⁴ In turn, governments now mark poor and racialized men as “terrorists” and “criminal threats,” increasingly locking them up. In the process, they rob men of citizenship, jobs, homes, and manhood.

What does it *feel* like for men to be crushed by the state? To answer this question, scholars of gender must flip their usual frameworks. Often, studies focus on how hegemonic ideas about masculinity legitimate, reinforce, and build consent to men’s domination.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, feminist scholarship on the state tends to highlight its patriarchal character and control over women.⁵⁶ Vast research looks at *women’s* agency and resistance and their emotions.⁵⁷ Yet studies say less about how states control marginalized *men* or how men resist, let alone how they feel.

Emergent research has started to fill these gaps. For instance, sociologist Lynne Haney reveals how prisons and state-imposed debt work in tandem to undermine men’s ability to parent, hold down jobs, and make sense of themselves and their place in the nation.⁵⁸ Jennifer Randles adds that government programs for poor men of color, combined with the threat of incarceration, paradoxically prevent fathers from being there for their children.⁵⁹ This book, too, looks at how U.S. policies undermine families, target men, and leave them scrambling for ways to reestablish their masculinity.

Banishment leaves men in limbo, funneling them to urban peripheries. Apartheid systems relied on a symbiosis between Bantustan and metropole, reproduction and production, home and away. This binary logic still dominates a lot of scholarly thinking on Mexico-U.S. migration.⁶⁰ For instance, studies of migrant transnationalism and return focus on people’s relationships with their hometowns.⁶¹ Yet, few deported men go back to live in their places of birth.⁶² Rural migrant-sending states are often economically stagnant.⁶³ Deportees face stigma there, too.⁶⁴ Many have trouble finding work or building social connections in rural areas. Few can truly “go home.” Instead, they tend to see deportation as *exile*.⁶⁵

Immigration scholars have also written about how migrants channel money, political influence, and social ideas across borders, known as remittances.⁶⁶ Yet, theories of the U.S. carceral state tend to stop at the border, taking for granted that mass incarceration is part of an internal state monopoly on legitimate violence.⁶⁷ Under banishment, the impacts of this system also cross borders in the suffering and alienation of deportees. Deported men “remit” psychological degradation from U.S. policing, prisons, and ICE detention.

Traumatized, alone, unable to go “home,” and hesitant to risk a return to the United States, deportees land in limbo: “betwixt and between” emotionally as they

search for a home.⁶⁸ This feeling of limbo echoes the emotional experiences of many undocumented people in the United States.⁶⁹ Men's uncertainty also shapes the *places* they go. Many deportees land in dense urban neighborhoods at the border, in Mexico City, or in state capitals.⁷⁰ Cities and border zones tend to feel closer to life in the United States. Some men also wait indefinitely at the border for chances to cross back north.

Deportees are vulnerable in such spaces. Border zones like Tijuana are emerging economic powerhouses, political flashpoints, and staging grounds for traffickers to the United States.⁷¹ As scholars like Shaylih Muehlmann and Jeremy Slack reveal, cartels and transnational gangs permeate border institutions up to the highest levels, and cartels often recruit or kidnap repatriated migrants.⁷² Mexican police also extort, abuse, and arbitrarily arrest returnees, echoing the treatment meted out by their counterparts in the U.S.⁷³ Both sets of organizations target deportees based on their isolation and their connections to the United States.

In other cities—especially Mexico City—deportees also live on urban peripheries and endure crime. Yet, Mexico's long history of centralized governance has funneled resources to Mexico City, concentrating political and economic activity—as well as civil society—in the capital.⁷⁴ Moving there can mitigate deportees' limbo. Men's carceral histories also “sort” them into different receiving sites, as I detail throughout the book. The interplay between U.S. removal and Mexican urban space then shapes their chances to act.

Banishment undermines agency. Some scholars argue that South African apartheid shunted protests to the hinterlands, offering a “geographic fix” for resistance to exploitation.⁷⁵ By contrast, carceral deportation undermines men's agency altogether. Most researchers agree that deportation inhibits migrants' ability to speak for their rights.⁷⁶ Upon removal to unfamiliar places, deportees endure social isolation, familial chaos, stigma, and state violence.⁷⁷ Facing high rates of mental illness, homelessness, and drug abuse, many struggle to maintain their baseline well-being, let alone organize or protest.⁷⁸ Banished from personhood, they find it hard to reclaim it. Yet, migrants do not *always* succumb to erasure.

Banishment can spark new forms of refusal. If migrants resisted apartheid by protesting back in their homelands, men and women transcend the limbo of deportation by finding new terms on which to exist as multinational humans. Again, Ananya Roy is eloquent: “The antonym of racial banishment is [not] . . . integration. It is a radical imagination.”⁷⁹ Deportees' reimagining goes beyond the goal of “reintegration,” described by some scholars of return migration. Rather, deported individuals reclaim humanity by reconfiguring deportation as an asset and themselves as multifaceted, multinational women and men.

Some of these new modes of action buck “legitimate” outlets for politics. So doing, they echo a broader pattern. Today, most grassroots movements arise

outside formal democratic institutions—as demonstrated in research on India and the Middle East.⁸⁰ Similarly, sociologist Jordanna Matlon shows, men excluded by racial capitalism may use “apolitical” tools like consumption to show their worth.⁸¹ In other cases—including some described in this book—men reject a violent state order or reclaim masculinity by defying the law—reinforcing the stereotypes for which they have been so maligned. For instance, they participate in organized crime, (re)cross the U.S. border, or challenge the imaginary order forged by a wall. (Ironically, their displays of violence can sometimes echo the practices of the white supremacist U.S. state). In examining these forms of action, scholars must reflect on our own role in dismissing Latino men’s anger as illegitimate, violent, or risky. Deportees’ resistance may not arrive on our terms.

METHODS: FINDING THE ERASED

How do you “find” a set of people the U.S. has tried to erase? How do you convince them to tell you their stories and build enough trust to share their emotions, when society has dismissed them as criminals? And how do you do all of this as a team of 29 undergraduates, two PhD students, and one untenured professor?

Multisited Team Research

Between January 2018 and March 2020, the Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP) team interviewed 171 deported men and 15 deported women. For context, we also interviewed 47 Mexican civil servants and nonprofit staff, 8 of whom had been deported themselves.⁸² I conducted 30 interviews, paid RAs conducted 20–50 each, and the remaining students conducted 4–5 each, for course credit. All the researchers were bilingual. Since all the students graduated and/or got jobs before the writing began, I wrote the findings. But the whole team helped uncover—and share—this story with rigor and care.

Tijuana was an exemplary place to start our study of banishment. It is consistently the largest single repatriation site, receiving between 18 to 30 percent of Mexican deportees.⁸³ It is also a chokepoint, as deportees gear up to reenter the United States, move elsewhere in Mexico, or figure out what comes next.⁸⁴ To understand this landscape, in 2017 PhD student Fátima Khayar Cámara and I interviewed more than 25 Tijuana shelter directors and NGO leaders, honing our focus and helping us meet deportees. We also interviewed 13 deported men at the Casa del Migrante, the city’s most prominent shelter.⁸⁵

In fall 2018, I took over the MMFRP, which allowed me to integrate my courses into the project. Students applied to MMFRP in the summer.⁸⁶ In fall, I taught a course on immigration and trained the team in interview methods and ethics. In winter, during an eight-unit (double) class, we traveled to Tijuana. For a week, we lived in the Casa del Migrante, in an area reserved for volunteers. During the day, students spread out to volunteer and conduct interviews in six different shelters.

For six more weeks, we returned every Friday.⁸⁷ Students did an average of 4–5 interviews each, which made up the core of their coursework. In spring, I guided the students through a preliminary analysis of the results. I repeated this whole process twice, once in 2019 and again in 2020.

After our first set of interviews in Tijuana, I wondered if the impacts of carceral deportation were different in other parts of Mexico. Was there a distinction between those who stayed at the border, moved to Mexico City, or returned to live near their hometowns? How were men shaped by the places in which they settled? I wanted to understand how people like Ángel thought about where they might live.

So, I added new sites in Mexico City, a major urban metropolis, and Oaxaca, a paradigmatic sending state. Mexico City was the nexus of national politics and a site of innovative deportee organizing. Oaxaca was the third top state of origin of deportees, after Guerrero and Michoacán.⁸⁸ I was also familiar with Oaxaca, having lived there on and off since 2004.

I hired four students from the Tijuana team to do 79 interviews at these sites, using the same questionnaire as the earlier stages of research. Ana López Ricoy and Fátima Khayar Cámara, PhD students from Mexico City, conducted the bulk of interviews there, with Fátima reaching out to NGO stakeholders and Ana to deported men. Camila Hernández Cruz and Samantha Canseco, children of immigrants from Oaxaca, helmed efforts there.⁸⁹ I spent three weeks in each place, overseeing and participating in recruitment and interviews.

Tijuana, Oaxaca, and Mexico City are not commensurable cases. Nor do they stand for every possible context in Mexico. As a border city, Tijuana had more social services and was less overwhelmed by organized crime than the eastern end of the U.S.-Mexico border. Likewise, Oaxaca was less touched by cartel violence than other sending regions like Michoacán and Guerrero. If anything, our interviews may understate Mexican state abuse, cartel recruitment, and other destabilizing elements of return. We also cannot account for deportees who make it back into the United States. The team filled this gap by interviewing people at the border who hailed from 23 Mexican states (some in cartel-heavy areas), had been deported to varying parts of the border, and/or planned to return to the United States. Taken together, the data shed light on how places can interact in an archipelago of deportation.

Getting to Know Deportees

At each site, local organizations helped us build trust. In Tijuana, we worked in six migrant shelters. Each housed 40–160 migrants at once, almost all of them deportees. Several provided meals to additional migrants as well. Given security risks at the border, shelters offered our team a controlled space for volunteering and research.⁹⁰ Working in shelters was also a strategic way to meet deportees. At the border, Grupo Beta, the “hospitality” wing of Mexico’s National Institute

of Migration, transports migrants directly from the border to shelters, so most deportees stay in a shelter at least a night after being removed.⁹¹ This approach also had drawbacks, which I consider below.

In each of the Tijuana shelters, the students and I presented our study in public spaces, where guests had to wait until dormitories opened at night. We invited every deportee who was over 18, born in Mexico, and had lived in the U.S. for more than a year to join our study.⁹² We also mingled and got to know people—often across several visits—before requesting an interview.

In Oaxaca and Mexico City, there were few such shelters. Instead, RAs and I met with every migrant-serving organization we could find and asked for referrals. We also asked family and friends, stood outside large employers, and posted ads on social media, radio, and the streets.⁹³ Ana used her experience working in a Mexico City call center to recruit employees. She also volunteered at Otros Dreams en Acción (ODA), an NGO in Mexico City, where she met activists and deported men. Samantha's and Camila's families in Oaxaca also introduced us to several people.⁹⁴

Each site's character shaped who we met. In Oaxaca, where deportation was stigmatized and NGOs sparse, we struggled to find respondents. In Mexico City, deportee advocacy organizations and employers directed us to people working for change. In Tijuana, all our interviews came through the shelters, which exposed us to more recent, poor, isolated, and vulnerable deportees.⁹⁵ Students readily noticed how shelters themselves engaged in containment, surveillance, and deterrence from remigration.⁹⁶ Tijuana's Casa del Migrante reminded some of a halfway house or a prison (minus the bars). Shelters also filtered out people who appeared drunk, on drugs, or involved in smuggling. A deportee could easily be wary of this kind of site. In early 2020, I planned to address this selection effect by adding more interviews in other spaces around Tijuana. COVID made this impossible.⁹⁷ Instead, I note the potential bias here in the text.

The Process of Gathering Stories

This book is built on data from interviews. Interviews allowed men (and women) to frame their stories themselves and to tell us about their feelings, life trajectories, and responses to state erasure.⁹⁸ In these conversations, we also learned details about spaces otherwise closed to us scholars, including border enforcement, detention, U.S. prisons, and intimate family relationships.

We did interviews in coffee shops and unused offices in shelters. We talked in each respondent's language of choice, for roughly an hour. I suggested content and supervised student work. We asked about people's family relationships, political attitudes and activism, emotional lives, and plans. Always, we spoke of deportation, detention, and prison. But I also trained students to let respondents tell their *own* stories and steer conversations to topics they felt were important and away from traumatic events.⁹⁹

Students were an incredible asset. Many had grown up in the same California neighborhoods where respondents had lived, and several had siblings or parents

who'd been deported. Most of the students were also women, and I noticed that men seemed to enjoy confiding in them, treating interviews like an intimate, confessional space.

Content varied with the interests, personalities, and connection between researchers and respondents. Many students drew out stories that I, as a white U.S. citizen, might not have heard. Interviews did not cover all topics in equal depth. Instead of insisting on uniformity, I tried to let students and interviewees take the lead. In turn, they drew attention to the emotional degradation of carceral deportation—the story we tell in this book.

Deportees' narratives of their lives are necessarily partial. As Deborah Boehm points out, their stories are hard to verify.¹⁰⁰ Recent deportees rarely have legal documents, and the information they do have can be incomplete or incorrect (as in Ángel's wrongful conviction). People disappear, lose their papers, avoid sharing unflattering information, and present personas inflected by the context of interviews (just imagine 31 compassionate young people, most of them women, interviewing vulnerable men a bit older than they). Some men refused to name their past crimes. Others exaggerated such violations. At times, students and I felt respondents had withheld part of a story: the pieces did not add up. Other times, stories changed. A mishap is telling: on a few occasions, two students accidentally interviewed the same individual, and the stories were different. Trauma affects memory and emotion. Memories fade and transform. People have distinct perspectives on the same events. Yet deportees' accounts are also the most complete—and often the only—stories we have.

The Men Who Appear in This Book

Of 186 respondents, this book homes in on 158 men, who were deported after living in the U.S. at least a year.¹⁰¹ We identify all respondents by pseudonyms. When we met, these men had been in Mexico between a day and 10 years. Half had been there more than a year. They ranged in age from 20 to 72, with an average of 35. Most were working in call centers, carwashes, factories, car repair, day labor, or selling things on the street. Half had never gone beyond middle school, and many were unemployed. They lived in shelters (in Tijuana), low-income neighborhoods, and occasionally on the street. In Mexico City, some lived so far from work that they had to commute four hours a day. In Tijuana, the men were especially transient, treating the city as just a point on their journey. Often, a man we met in a shelter one week would be gone when we returned a week later.

These men had deep U.S. ties. They came from 23 Mexican states, but 55 percent were brought to the U.S. as minors, 12 percent came as unaccompanied teens, and 34 percent as adults. They had lived in the U.S. a median of 20 years, with 83 percent having been there a decade or more. More than half were fathers with kids in the United States. Four in 10 had a partner or ex in the U.S. as well. Deportation frayed these relationships. When we interviewed the men, only 20 percent were still married to a U.S.-based partner. Another 28 percent were divorced or separated, and

44 percent were single. Just under half (41 percent) planned to return to the U.S. at some point, a quarter within the year. About a quarter chose to speak English to us, with many more mixing English and Spanish. (See the appendix for more on their demographics).

In most respects, they were comparable to deportees randomly sampled by Mexico's *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México* (EMIF, or Survey about Migration at Mexico's Northern Border).¹⁰² Just like that survey, our sample captures a *range* of deportee experiences, letting us explore variations among different people. However, the histories we gathered speak especially to the carceral: the U.S. had put all but four of our interviewees behind bars, with 83 percent detained and 65 percent spending at least a month in prison or jail (versus 40 percent in the EMIF survey). Most had been arrested on migration violations, driving under the influence, traffic violations, domestic violence, gang involvement, or drug charges.¹⁰³ Nearly two-thirds (59 percent) said this was their first deportation.

Comparing Carceral Histories

When Fátima, Camila, Ana, and I analyzed the body of interviews, we immediately saw variations based on men's histories of U.S. incarceration and detention.¹⁰⁴ Across our sample, there were men who endured relatively little confinement, men who had been detained, and men who had been incarcerated. It became clear that these entanglements were key to their paths after deportation.

I use these carceral histories as a central comparative framework throughout the book. Another scholar might compare deportees to migrants who returned voluntarily (to the extent return can happen without coercion). Comparing *among* deportees serves a similar purpose. Thus, I look at men who experienced different levels of entanglement in the U.S. carceral system: (1) brief detention; (2) longer-term or repeated detention; and (3) incarceration. I consider *all* of these experiences to be carceral. Yet, some men's histories of imprisonment are far more severe than others. Comparing different carceral experiences helps illustrate *how* policing, detention, and imprisonment erode men's sense of themselves—and sometimes, their ability to feel or make claims at all.

ARGUMENT: HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE BANISHED?

We argue that carceral deportation makes people feel banished not only from the United States but also from being human.

The force of this system—and its punitive character—is visible in the contrasts among deported men. All deportees today spend time behind bars. Still, they face distinct embroilments in U.S. policing, immigration enforcement, detention, incarceration, and border militarization. Some endure “direct” deportation, without lengthy stays in detention or prison or further run-ins with border patrol. For others, deportation is a repeated process, intertwined with months (or years) locked up, violent abuse by state agents and gangs, and multiple, failed attempts to recross.

The more extensive and severe men's time in the carceral system, the harder it gets to overcome social death. Importantly, men's carceral histories also sort them into contrasting places, funneling those most corroded by prison to more volatile spaces in Mexico.

In banishing men, the U.S. cuts them out of society and leaves them in limbo. Against the odds, some defy this dehumanization.

Cut Out of U.S. Lives and Loves

Carceral deportation inflicts social death by eroding men's spirits, relationships, and masculinity.

First, incarceration, detention, and removal degrade men's psyches. During arrest and confinement, guards and gangs beat men, rape them, and treat them like animals. Many feel that their bodies are no longer theirs. Some lose their orientation in time and space. Others talk about losing their minds, enduring anxiety, depression, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other unnamed insanity. For those who are locked up the longest, self-blame can help make sense of their fates. These men stop believing they are deserving under the law. Instead, they accept the U.S. state's story that they are criminals who must reform. For all, imprisonment is an emotional assault.

Second, confinement and removal erode men's relationships.¹⁰⁵ Deportation has always ripped migrants from their kids, homes, and jobs. Imprisonment compounds this physical separation by putting intense strain on men and their families in the United States. Prison and detention systems make it hard for family members to visit, such as by transferring men to facilities far away from their loved ones. Often, respondents described the stress on their spouses after ICE locked them up and the tension and fights that arose. Those who spent time in prison also spoke of learning to isolate themselves to stay safe. At the most severe, men lost any trust in people at all. Locking men up did not just take them from their homes in the United States. It also ate away at their ability to demonstrate love.

Third, carceral deportation is emasculating. It deprives men of roles as fathers, brothers, and sons. In the U.S., immigrant men often identify with hard work. Once they are locked up or deported, they can no longer do that. Often, participants spoke of no longer "being a man." Stripped of their roles in family, work, and community, men lose their "place" in a gendered order. In turn, many feel like they lose their place in the world.

In Limbo in Mexico

Men carry this trauma to Mexico. Upon removal, they land in spatial and emotional limbo. I use the term limbo in its fullest sense: a state of uncertainty or in-betweenness, a state of neglect or oblivion, and a state of being trapped, all at once.¹⁰⁶

It is tempting to think the U.S. deportes men "home." In fact, the men we interviewed found it nearly impossible to resettle in their places of birth. U.S. border

enforcement had blocked most of them from visiting Mexico since moving to the United States—in our study, an average of 20 years. Starting in the early 2000s, it was common for Mexican families to move to the U.S. *together*, so few respondents had a spouse or child still living in Mexico.¹⁰⁷ Instead, they built families in the U.S. After the men were removed, 90 percent of their spouses and children stayed in the United States. Men went south alone, grieving their families, distrusting themselves and others. Some, like Ángel, also faced rejection in rural hometowns—if they tried to go back at all.¹⁰⁸

In Mexico, deportees felt betwixt and between: their hearts in the United States and their bodies in Mexico. Most men we talked to thought of the U.S. as “home.” About half planned to go back north at some point. Almost all were uncertain what to do next. So, they waited, sometimes indefinitely, until U.S. enforcement eased up or they made enough money to hire a smuggler to help them across the border.¹⁰⁹ When men did try to cross, many were caught, detained, imprisoned, and/or sent back by CBP, compounding their trauma. Some settled at the Mexican border to be close to the U.S. symbolically. Others moved to Mexico City or cities in sending states. Regardless of where they went, most felt out of place.

Disorientation compounded their vulnerability.¹¹⁰ Having lived in the U.S. for years, few were familiar with Tijuana or Mexico City. Some struggled to remember Mexico at all. They tended to settle in neighborhoods rife with both crime and police. Though many gravitated to cities so as not to stand out, returnees remained visible due to their clothing, tattoos, and/or manners of speaking. Mexican police and cartels fed off this limbo: beating, kidnapping, robbing, extorting, or recruiting deported men. Such experiences reinforced men’s sense of erasure.

Being locked up, stripped of their families and masculinity, and sent to places they hardly knew fueled alienation. Men we interviewed often struggled to connect with people in Mexico. A welter of troubles put civic and social life on the back burner, including poverty, unemployment, stigma, organized crime, police and cartel assaults, uncertainty, and the loss of their spouses and children. Those with extensive histories of imprisonment suffered the most. At the extreme, they lost not only their loved ones, manhood, and homes but also their senses of self. Neither here nor there, they had little footing on which to (re)claim their places as men.

Defying Dehumanization

Yet, alienation was not inevitable. Some deportees built radical new ways of being.

In Mexico City especially, many interviewees defied dehumanization. They forged new, transnational identities as *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (neither from here nor there). By *claiming* binationality, they upended the separation between Mexican and American, criminal and citizen, home and away. In the process, they connected with one another. Several secured government resources and bilingual, bicultural work. Some organized at the grassroots to reclaim deportation. Others

styled themselves as masculine businessmen, catering to the U.S. Still others challenged the status quo by rejecting “legitimate” politics: joining gangs or cartels, selling drugs, or (re)crossing the border. Though such modes of agency may grate on certain observers, for deported men they are sometimes the only alternative.

Men’s histories in the U.S. channeled them into different places in Mexico: border, home state, or megalopolis. Those who spent time in prison tended to feel so alone and debased that they got “stuck” at the U.S.-Mexico border. Men with children in the U.S. or immediate plans to recross often “waited it out” at the border, too. By contrast, those who had not been north for much time more often went back to their states of birth. Finally, those more “directly” deported—especially if they were younger, more educated, more (relatively) class privileged or had organizing or business skills—sustained social ties and self-esteem. Often, they also moved to Mexico City. Sometimes, like Ángel, men sifted among such sites, trying the border and/or their hometown until they realized they might not survive, and only then going on to the capital.

The outcome of banishment reflected the interplay between men’s carceral histories, on one side, and the institutional resources and threats they encountered in Mexico, on the other. The border—where ex-prisoners and men in limbo met networks of organized crime—became a “hot spot” of alienation. In sending states, deportees slipped into anonymity, blending in with other returning migrants to avoid the stigma of forced removal. In Mexico City, where exiled men with lighter carceral histories and better resources met the country’s most powerful activism, they reclaimed the story of their criminality and invented themselves anew.

MAP OF THE BOOK

The first half of *Banished Men* shows how carceral deportation eats away men’s humanity. I analyze the multiple sides of this system: policing, detention, incarceration, and border militarization. The second half considers the system’s impacts on men and asks how they try to rebuild. Throughout, I compare men who’ve faced different “depths” of U.S. state violence.

Chapter 1, “Policed,” traces deportation back to law enforcement. Typically, adult men enter the carceral system during arbitrary police stops. I detail the shock and anger they feel at the point of arrest. Then, I consider boys who grow up under policing that targets Latino men. These “sons of the system” often see parents deported. As adolescents, they start getting records themselves, which mark them as “criminals.” Thus, they come of age amid longer-term trauma.

Chapter 2, “Locked Up and Broken Down,” dives into U.S. detention and prison. I show how most men enter the system angry, trying to fight deportation. But lockup “messes with their minds.” The verbal abuse and beatings reduce them to animals. Guards wield *time* as a threat. And, in prison, gangs rule with an iron

fist. Over time, men break down. Some resign themselves to their fates. Others come to accept the institutional story that they are (or were) “bad.”

Chapter 3, “Forced Out of Families,” shows how these institutions ruin relationships. Detention and prison fray social ties. After removal, men also live far from their families. In Mexico, their trauma and habits of self-protection make it hard to relate to new people. Though men tend to be deeply invested in their loved ones in the U.S., carceral deportation strips them of places as patriarchs, providers, and caregivers—in short, of places as men.

Chapter 4, “No Place Called Home,” frames deportation as more akin to displacement than to “return.” In Mexico, deported men fall into limbo. Their institutional histories structure their movements, mapping U.S. carceral deportation onto Mexico’s uneven political economy. The men most degraded by U.S. prisons find themselves stuck at the border. Meanwhile, those with more resources adopt a *strategic urbanism*, opting into Mexico City and its powerful economic and political institutions.

Chapter 5, “Banished,” illustrates how men can end up on the precipice of humanity. After deportation, many face crisis. They distrust others. They identify as “American” but cannot reach the United States. Their social isolation leaves them vulnerable to Mexican cops and organized crime, especially at the border. They struggle to advocate for themselves. Exiled from work, family, and even their manhood, few have leverage to claim their own rights.

Chapter 6, “Reclaiming Removal,” considers how some deportees forge new, bicultural identities, build communities, and reclaim deportation. I trace three paths to advocacy, the first two in Mexico City: grassroots organizing, acting as masculine businessmen, and joining organized crime. The chapter reveals the kinds of conditions that give life back to deportees, albeit not always in the fashion the U.S. might hope.

The conclusion makes a moral case against merging imprisonment and removal. These institutions assault men’s humanity and increase their vulnerability. Punitive approaches to migrants and marginal men—locking them up and throwing them out—undermine not only their manhood but also their ability to show love. To remake this system, the U.S. and Mexico must replace carceral deportation with care.