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Chicanx in Paradise:

*Deportee Enclaves in Cancún, Mexico*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Chicana & Chicano Studies

by

Christian Durán

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Chicanx in Paradise:

*Deportee Enclaves in Cancún, Mexico*

by

Christian Durán

Master of Arts in Chicana & Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Chair

How do deportees navigate a return to Mexico after removal? What challenges do they face in Mexico upon return and how do many of them end up in Cancún working in the tourism industry? In this research study, I interview ten deportees, part of a growing community in Cancún who work in the tourism industry as intermediaries between American tourists and the Mexican businesses that cater to them. The ten men and women who I interview each detail a harrowing journey through Mexico in search of employment opportunities and a sense of security while experiencing discrimination and culture shock after being returned to a country that they see as foreign. These men and women detail a deep sense of alienation and rejection in Mexico but are forced to find ways in which to survive in their new context. Deportees make use of social networks in order to migrate within Mexico, to find housing, employment, and a sense of belonging in a country that is foreign to them. However, the human capital they have acquired after spending a significant amount of time in the United States has given them the possibility to convert that capital into economic opportunity in a city like Cancún. The

opportunities open to them as intermediaries between a significant tourist population and the hotels and businesses that cater to them, while commissioned based, offer deportees a chance to be paid in dollars and find ways in which they can capitalize on their knowledge of the English language and American culture in order to extract money from that industry. There is a growing number of deportees who make up these communities in Cancún and while the members of these communities live in states of precarity and danger, deportees continue to migrate there in search of work.

The thesis of Christian Durán is approved.

Robert Chao Romero

Ruben Hernandez-Leon

Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

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I also thank my wife and children who have had to sacrifice countless hours in support of my work. I thank them for their support and for assuming responsibilities for the benefit of our entire family.

Above all, I would like to thank each of the participants in my study, the men and women who agreed to meet with me and share their stories, allowing me to capture their lives for my thesis. The few months I have spent in Cancún have allowed me to see the amount of work you put in every single day and the resolve you demonstrate to make things work out in a country many of you have never called home. Through depression, oppression, hardship and precarity, you persevere and you inspire me. I dedicate this to you and for so many other deportees whose stories are yet to be told. This project also belongs to Mario whose life ended tragically crossing the border. The pain and struggle your family experienced in your absence is not in vain, and will instead inspire other forced deportees who find themselves in similar situations. Gracias raza, y pa'adelante!

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*“I feel at home when I see the dollars.”—Lorena*

**Preface:** *The faces we meet.*

When David was two years old, he was carried across the U.S./Mexican border in his mother’s arms. She had borrowed a birth certificate and a little girl’s pink camisole for her son so as to fool border patrol. David’s father, a seasonal worker for nearly ten years, traveled back and forth from their small ranch in Durango to the United States before David’s mother, fed up with her husband’s absence and aware of the increasing difficulty of crossing the border, decided to pick up the remains of their life and travel north to reunite with her husband. David made it to the United States because of his mother’s resolve, and he grew up in Santa Ana, California, undocumented. He would spend nearly twenty years of his life in the US. His life became a series of fascinating contradictions. He was, according to his siblings, a happy child despite a turbulent life at home—his older brothers were both gang members with extensive criminal records. I was told that David was a friend to other children from different ethnic backgrounds whose immigrant parents, like his own, often kept to themselves. He was an avid student who did well in school. All of this changed when he found out that he was undocumented. It was then that any prospects for college or career went out the window for him and where gang life and the life his older brothers had been engaging in for most of his life, seemed like the only option. Eventually, this life led to his incarceration.

I met David shortly after he finished a two-year sentence in 2000. I had been dating his younger sister and we met while I visited with her family at their mobile home in Santa Ana. I first thought it intimidating to meet this *Sureño*<sup>1</sup>, straight out of jail, this hardened gangster, but soon realized that he was a funny, outgoing, and considerate person who was caught up in a precarious situation. He and I got along and, in within that year, we eventually became friends. We didn’t hang out much outside of his family gatherings when his sister and I dated, so I didn’t know much about his personal

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<sup>1</sup> Mexican prison gang in Southern California with strong ties to the Mexican Mafia.

life outside of that context, but we would talk every once in a while, and I gained some insight into his world. In 2002, I noticed that he became distant and seemed preoccupied with something he admitted he didn't want to talk about. Years before, his older brother, who had already been shot five times as a result of gang violence, had already been incarcerated and was serving a double-life sentence. He had been in contact with his older brother for a few weeks and I believed their communication had been the source of his stress. It was during this time that he developed Bell's Palsy, a condition he believed was caused by significant stress. I was worried about him and had heard rumors that he was in some kind of trouble, so I went to see if there was anything I could do to help.

His room was dark and uninviting and my discomfort grew when I saw that David was wearing a bulletproof vest while he quietly loaded a revolver. His blue Pendleton was draped over the side of the bed. He saw the bewilderment on my face and his nervous laughter made his crying even more discomfoting. While he continued loading the gun, he asked the two young women in his room to go outside so he could tell me what was going on. These two young women had moved in to his mother's house in Santa Ana weeks before and, judging from the constant stream of *friends* I witnessed coming in and out of his room, I suspected that he had been prostituting them, though I never confirmed my suspicions to be true. I later learned that he was dealing Crystal Meth and Speed from his mother's house after he enlisted me to help him find an 8-ball of Meth he had dropped in his home, something that worried him because his mother babysat an 8-month-old baby who had already learned to crawl and could possibly find it. My involvement in this part of his life was peripheral and I often felt that there was a lot about him that I didn't know even though we were friends.

After these young women stepped out of the room, he proceeded to tell me the story. There was someone after him, someone who'd been given the go-a-head to end his life. We talked through it, my friend David and I, and I struggled to keep pace with the explanation he offered. That evening, I received a crash-course in the carefully crafted rules of engagement between gang members when

there was, according to him, “shit going down”. Something involving an incident with his older brother in prison which resulted in a debt that needed to be paid. The particulars of this story are withheld in order to protect the people involved. After this conversation, however, I feared that it would be one of the last times I would ever see David—I was not far off.

Months later, David was on an immigration van heading to Tijuana, another deportee about to embark on a long journey—an involuntary departure to a country he didn’t intentionally care to know, much less live in. It wasn’t the enemy he expected, who ended his life in the United States, but the ever-looming threat that plucks men, women and children from their homes and families who did the job. It would be years before I spoke to or saw David again in the United States until we met up again in Mexico as part of my study. Immigrants tend to disappear like that, from our lives, from our communities; the familiar faces we meet and grow up with and then see no longer. David was deported because, when he was sixteen, he accidentally discharged a firearm in his own room—no one was hurt but he was gone, labeled a criminal and removed as part of the increasingly punitive and predatory immigration policies operating in the United States.

Several years later, while I was in the middle of conducting research on deportee communities in Mexico, I stumbled upon an old childhood friend on my computer screen. As I was watching a documentary about the lives of young deportees working at a call-center in Tijuana, I was struck by a familiar face—my old friend Mario. Mario and I went to middle-school together and for a brief time, we even went to the same high school. We weren’t close friends, he was two years ahead of me, but I knew him and his younger sister was a close acquaintance. What I didn’t know about Mario was that he was undocumented. I was surprised to see him in this documentary and I thought that his experience might give me some perspective on my research. Unfortunately, when I attempted to reach out to him I was saddened to find out that he had passed away. He was found dead of an apparent heart attack in his apartment in Tijuana, Baja California.

Mario's mother would later explain to me that he died from an acute myocardial infarction as he was getting ready to head off to work. The story she shared with me, her son's story, was tragically detailed; including how he fell into a deep depression after being deported, about his financial and socio-cultural struggles in Tijuana, drug abuse and his desire to be close to his family—he had a young daughter and a wife in Orange County—regardless of the fact that he didn't know anyone at the border, made me feel that Mario died of a broken heart. His mother spoke to me through her pain, and was able to contextualize his story as one of resolve, including his inventiveness and resourcefulness in a foreign country he didn't know.

Mario had found himself alone and struggling to survive as a call-center employee in a border town, working one of the few industries in Mexico that capitalizes on a deportee's cultural, linguistic and social capital. It is Mario's story that initially set me on this research journey and I thank his family for their kind words, for sharing his story and for their ability to continue on after such a tragic loss. Mario is one of thousands of men and women who struggle to find their way in Mexico after deportation and this work is, in part, a recognition of that struggle and an attempt to share a relatively unexplored but contemporary and dire issue. It was Mario, an immigrant whose parents dreamed of a brighter future in the United States, who set off my research journey that is encapsulated in this thesis. It was Mario's story that prompted me to contact my old friend David and see where he was, to see how we was getting along in Mexico as a forced deportee.

It took me a while, but I found David through Facebook. He had been living in Cancún for a couple of years and as we spoke, he described to me a circuitous journey through Mexico after his deportation, a journey that finally led him to the Mayan Riviera, working in the tourism industry catering to foreigners from all over the world, including and especially those from the United States. We had several conversations over the phone and as I learned more about the details of his life since his deportation, I became increasingly interested in his phenomenal journey, especially since I learned

that there were many more like him, specifically, in Cancún. Men and women living in a veritable *paradise* and working in the tourism industry a sort of community made up of deportees, of Chicanos or “pochos”, as he put it, hustling and working to make a living in an unforgiving market, riding the waves of tourist demands during peak and slow seasons. What David described to me in our conversations sounded like the creation of support networks of deportees within the region. Eventually, David became a gatekeeper of sorts, introducing me to other people in Cancún whose stories were similar to his and who are part of this burgeoning community of deportees.

David and Mario, two of my friends whose lives briefly intersected mine, are two in a growing number of people who came to the United States at a young age, who were raised here and who, through a spate of punitive and unfair policies in the US—increasingly so in the anti-immigrant era of Trump—find themselves back in Mexico, disoriented and alone. This involuntary and forced diaspora of Chicax people is not the end of the story, though it may often be framed that way—a tragic end to a dream, the hope of past generations for a better life in El Norte dashed by an often-violent removal, a departure from friends, family and the only place they’ve called home.

This thesis explores what happens to these men and women after they return to Mexico, a country many of them hardly even remember or don’t know because of their years living in the United States unable to travel because of their undocumented status. Many questions drove my curiosity, including deportee strategies of survival and their use to overcome obstacles to reintegration in a country they departed from as children. How do forced deportees navigate issues of housing, employment and language upon their return? Does labor factor into this reintegration, and finally, is there a community to support this reintegration? Is there a community of other deportee exiles and if so, what role do other U.S. “American” deportees play in the creation of community and reintegration into Mexico? I primarily explore these and related issues in this thesis.

## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

U.S. immigration policy since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reaching back to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 has been a tool for social engineering and control. Subsequent policies have targeted people who are on the periphery of normative nationalistic ideas of belonging. The Immigration Act of 1917 (The Literacy Act) barred people from Asian countries, homosexuals and people with intellectual disabilities. The Johnson-Reed Act set additional quotas on the number of migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who could come to the U.S. Subsequently, Mexican's, who as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1838 had lost half of their territory, became targets of this punitive immigration system in the 1920s during the Great Depression when a U.S. sponsored Mexican Repatriation program resulted in the forceful deportation of hundreds of thousands of men and women. Additionally, in 1954, *Operation Wetback*, a project of the Justice Department whose name blatantly demonstrates the racial and xenophobic agenda of U.S. immigration policy, led to the deportation of over one million Mexicans (Navarro 2005).

Childhood arrivals who lived in this country for most of their lives and are deported as adults are the subject of this research project. They make up a specific population within the migrant populations of the United States as they are, by all accounts, except on paper, social and cultural citizens of the US. They are caught in a web of intersections in which political, social, public and private forces either help or hinder their mobility after they have been deported to Mexico. Many of these deportees return to their countries of origin disoriented and without a plan because they have grown up in the United States, unable to travel back to their country of origin. Many have not been there since they were children and they never planned on returning.

In other research, deportees are described as suffering from a sense of unfamiliarity with their country of origin as they are faced with overwhelming despair about what the future holds, a sense

that an oppressive government has significant power over their lives in both the US and, in the case of this study, Mexico and its role in acclimating deportees back into society (Brotherton & Barrios 2009; Coutin 2010; Golash-Boza 2014; Peutz 2006; Schuster & Majidi 2013; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2004). These researcher's describe subjects who experience varying levels of stigmatization associated with being a deportee and who share a profound desire to return to the U.S.

In my own research, conducting interviews with deportees working in Cancún, elements of despair, pain and helplessness surface as people recount the dangers and pitfalls of deportation. Subjects feel alienated from their country of origin and often describe being discriminated against in Mexico (See Table 2). Many claim to have been seen as and treated like criminals, as failed migrants and outsiders. However, in the experience of this researcher, these feelings were often tempered by a sense of audacious hope and an incessant drive toward something *better*, a better paying job, a new car, a business venture, and home ownership (See Figure 1). These are aspirations which mirror their own



Figure 1 Home shopping with David. Photo by Christian Durán

parent's dreams of prosperity when migrating from Mexico to the United States. These elements surface in the interviews and they demonstrate a reliance on a burgeoning community of deportees who help one another navigate this perilous return. I questioned if, within what I can only describe as a bleak representation of the lives of

deportees, there was a community whose social and cultural capital became a tool for reintegration into Mexico, if members of these deportee communities utilized their human capital in order to maneuver and finesse difficult situations after being deported. After all, these are the children of migrants who made similar journeys into the United States after leaving homes and families in Mexico,

children who were witnesses to their own parent's struggles to survive, who were passengers in their own parent's perilous journeys, who were directly affected by the decision to migrate, with all of its pitfalls and difficulties. They are the children of migrants, migrants themselves, though involuntarily, whose upbringing took place in the United States making them feel more American than Mexican. They are the children of migrants. Involuntary migrants who are setting off on their own journeys of discovery into Mexico. In this study, I will attempt to describe how deportees navigate a return to Mexico and how one of Mexico's most visited tourist destinations, Cancún, is playing a significant role in their reintegration and in the appearance of deportee communities created in response to labor demands, economic needs and engagements with Americans traveling to vacation in Cancún.

Cancún, as a tourist hub, draws deportees from different parts of Mexico because of its demand for English speakers who serve as intermediaries between Mexican businesses and North American tourists. In this study, I will examine the lives of deportees in Cancún through the personal narratives of men and women who are part of these *deportee communities*. I will compare these communities with the concept of ethnic and immigrant enclaves as outlined by Waldinger, Wilson and Portes (Waldinger 1993; Wilson & Portes 1980) which describe migrant populations as part of international labor flows that settle into an increasingly globalized world, these "individuals who migrate with the intention of selling their labor power in places of destination" pursuing the advantages of an industry that necessitates the human capital that deportees possess (Wilson & Portes 1980). I will attempt to expand their analysis to include return migration to Mexico by men and women who came to the United States as children and who are deported as adults analyzing their reintegration into a foreign country they never thought they would have to make.

However, in order to understand the dynamics of Cancún as a place, one must understand how tourism, immigration, and precarity function to create deportee communities in sites of global tourism. By looking at these different dimensions within Cancún, we can begin to piece together a



picture of how deportees use their human capital to navigate a return to Mexico. Through in-depth interviews, it is possible to show how deportees use their inventiveness and resourcefulness, engendered, in great part, by their own in-betweenness as Chicax people, to survive. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) and Pacheco (2014) refer to them as people existing in a state of *nepantla*—a cultural, emotional and cognitive borderland, as Chicano/a people, who have had to straddle the physical and psychological borders of belonging in the United States and Mexico in order to not only survive, but thrive as part of a deportee community.

This study will look at the intersections of immigration, the context of reception in Mexico after deportation, the tourism industry in Cancún and the demand for labor that it produces, deportee communities and precarity. The research will focus on interviews I conducted with participants in this tourist ecosystem and will detail my findings which point to the creation of a deportee community in Mexico. The historical and political context of migrant returns will be analyzed in relation to migrant's own social networks and the socio-cultural capital they possess. I will also look at how the migration industry, vis-à-vis Cancún's tourism industry, taps into deportee's as a bilingual labor force. I will argue that by forming communities in Cancún, deportees primarily seek to regain some of the economic stability they had in the United States, and through this process, they also establish symbolic, as well as social and cultural, continuity in Mexico by reproducing practices carried over from their time in the U.S. It is a way of recreating a sense of home in a foreign country.

Unfortunately, while these communities benefit from solidarity and opportunities that are set aside for English speakers in Mexico, their existence is also precarious, both in terms of employment and personal safety. In Cancún, this precarity is a result of a neoliberal market as well as extreme social inequality within the liminal space of leisure and excess alongside extreme poverty which is also

played out along racial divides, among other fault lines—for example age (ageism and child labor) (See

Figure 2). In order to explore some of the intricacies of Cancún as a place, and the role of deportees within it, I will briefly begin by taking a look at the immigration system in the United States as a means of control and policing that continues



to send many people back to Mexico *Figure 2 Child vendors take a break from working in the heat. Photo by Christian Durán*

through the process of deportation. I will also look at Mexico's own inadequate systems for receiving these very same migrants. The experiences of these forced migrants depend on several different factors, among them; the social, familial and economic networks they are connected to, their sites of reception, their educational levels, and their familiarity with Mexican society.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review: *Return migration in the Face of Forced Deportation*

Immigration in the United States has long been a contentious issue for people on opposite sides of the debate. In increasing numbers, people who return to Mexico voluntarily, or under compulsion by US authorities, are caught up in the ebb and flow of migration caused by an interrelated system that makes the movement of populations necessary to both US and Mexican economic interests. Most recently, President Trump, running on a campaign of fear, ignorance and xenophobia, has adopted an aggressive posture towards Mexican migrants, vowing, for example, as part of his political platform, to end DACA protections for childhood arrivals and instill terror within migrant communities in the homeland by building a multi-billion-dollar wall in order to prevent further migration. He has also vowed to increase deportations among any and all undocumented immigrants regardless of criminal backgrounds or a lack thereof. This is just one of the more recent attacks on Latinx migrant communities in a historical series of attacks on minorities that goes back several hundred years.

The historical record of migration between Mexico and the United States paints a very distinct picture. At least until 1986, migration between the two neighboring countries had been circular and frequent, as thousands of migrants came looking for seasonal, often agricultural and construction, work. Emerging out of what Douglas Massey describes as “delicately balanced social and economic processes” responding to complex changes within the political economies of both countries, this migration system functioned without much turbulence between 1965 and 1982. These migration patterns followed what Massey describes as predictable paths in accordance with well-established scientific principles (Massey et al. 1994). In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which provided amnesty relief for nearly five million undocumented residents in the United States. However, this bill also ushered in a new age of immigration reform which aimed

to punish employers for hiring undocumented immigrants. The purpose of this bill was to curb undocumented migration to the United States, but the effects were quite the opposite. Massey's analysis indicates that, after 1980, successive rounds of recession and inflation in the United States had led the American public to look for a scapegoat to their own perceived shortcomings. Measures like IRCA intended to discourage further migration by providing relief for many of the undocumented migrants already living in the United States while simultaneously increasing investment in immigration enforcement. However, IRCA had some unintended consequences. Millions of migrants who had, up until then, participated in circular migration patterns, were now discouraged from returning to Mexico (Massey et al. 1994). With increased enforcement, seasonal workers who traveled across the border as part of this circular migration no longer went home after coming to the United States for work. They opted, instead, to settle in the United States and send home for the rest of their family members in order to avoid permanent separation from their wives and children. Since then, strict border policies and increased policing created what some have creatively referred to as a *jaula de oro*<sup>2</sup>, locking people into a life in the United States. For many of the respondents in my research, this age of increased policing forms the background for their own migrations. Border policies and policing made sure that they would never return to Mexico after coming to this country as young children. For many, increasingly restrictive border enforcement was what prompted their migrations to the United States as parents were forced to make the United States their permanent home. Essentially, parents feared that a return to the United States for the next work season had become nearly impossible with increased border enforcement and many of the young men and women that I interviewed were brought here at a young age. They only have vague memories of a brief childhood in Mexico and have grown up most of their lives in the U.S.

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<sup>2</sup> A golden cage.

Christopher, for example, a 31-year-old respondent now working in Cancún, recalls how his parents would “come back and forth” traveling to the United States for work, until one day, his parents just said, “You know what? You’re going too.” He was so young that he didn’t really know where he was going. “We didn’t know we were going to the US,” he recalls, “we were just little kids. We thought that we were going on an adventure” (Christopher, personal communication, July 09, 2019). Decades have passed since the passage of IRCA. Subsequent to that policy, there have been several enforcement efforts including by state government, targeting migrant populations, among them California’s Proposition 187 (also known as the Save Our State [SOS] initiative) in 1994 which attempted to prohibit undocumented immigrants from receiving health-care and public education, among other services. This initiative was defeated as a result of its unconstitutionality and resulted in mass student protests throughout the state. SB 1070 or the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhood Act in Arizona was introduced in 2010 and encouraged racial profiling of Latinx people in the Southwest. These enforcement attempts have directly affected the lives of respondents in this study.

Couple this with the formation of ICE after the September 11, 2001 attacks and exponential investments in border enforcement and detention facilities, now part of the prison industrial complex, the US government has ensured that while immigration to the country has subsided, detentions and deportations have remained constant averaging 136,781 people per year, according to ice.gov (See Figure 3).

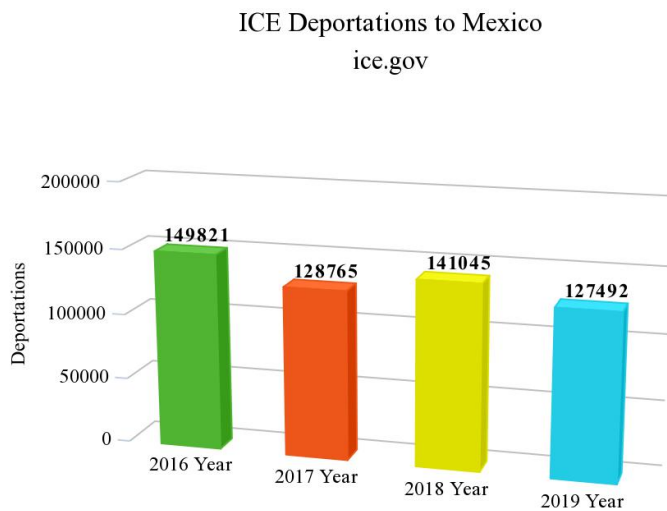


Figure 3 Deportation figures for the past four years. Source: ice.gov

Given current politics, the number of deportations will likely increase as President Trump has declared his intentions to expand the prioritization of criminal undocumented migrants for deportation in favor of going after every undocumented person regardless of whether or not they have a criminal record<sup>3</sup>. One ought to remember, as well, that illegal entry, falsifying documents, or even claiming to be citizen of the United States is considered a criminal offense and therefore, when these numbers reference people with criminal records, they include those whose crime was one of necessity. Additionally, these figures do not take into account those who, like many Dreamers<sup>4</sup>, become discouraged by a lack of opportunities, and decide to take their chances in Mexico.

As a result of changing demographics in immigrant deportations, traditional sending states, usually in the Central-Western parts of Mexico, places like Aguascalientes Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, Nayarit, San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas, which are predominantly rural have seen less return migration (Masferrer & Roberts 2012). These stats have been the main focus of the Mexican Migration Project

(MMP) though studies do show that these trends are changing (Tuirán et al. 2002). This change is reflected in the work of Masferrer and Roberts (2012) which shows a decrease of returnees to traditional migration states from 53.6% of “total returnees in 1995 to 43.4% in 2010; and although we had, in 2010 a dramatic increase in returnees, the declining trend persists with 37.7% of returnees to

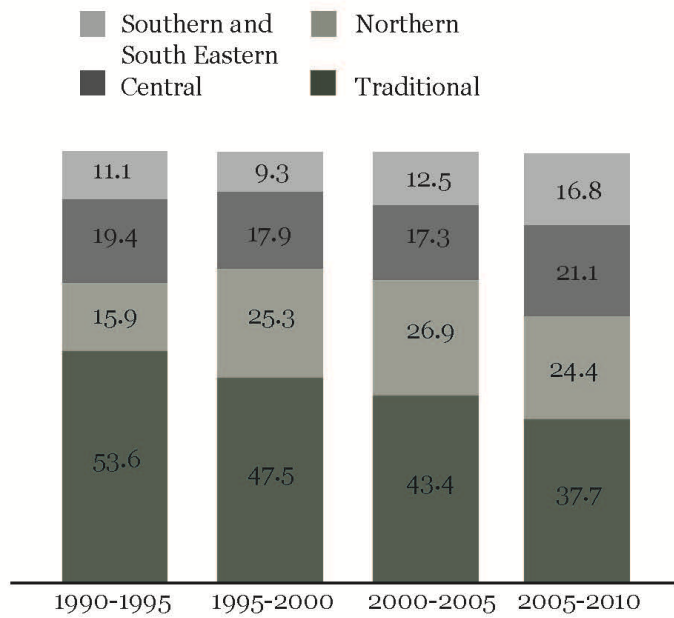


Table 1 Source: 2000 and 2010 censuses and 2005 Population Count

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/us/politics/dhs-immigration-trump.html>

<sup>4</sup> Dreamers get their name from the DREAM Act, a bill that aimed to grant legal status to young immigrants brought to the country by their parents.

traditional sending states” (See Table 1). According to 2010 Mexican Census information, the number of return migrants to Mexico between 2005 and 2010 had increased from 244,426 to 994,474, as did the increase in deportations. It is within this amalgam that we can locate the subjects of this study.

The individuals who once left Mexico, and in the case of this research project, the men and women who came here as children, return as cosmopolitan migrants with new experiences, traditions and values that they use to navigate a modern and globalized Mexico very different from the one their parents left behind. Some of the most significant and striking differences that returnees display compared to their Mexican national counterparts are their ability to speak English, their affinity for diversity and American culture, and the ease with which they are able to connect with and relate to American tourists. Essentially, these deportees have been transformed by their experiences living and growing up in the United States.

With the presence of this growing population of deportees and expatriate populations in Mexico in mind, my study looks at the deportee communities in Cancún, Mexico who make up part of the 396,798 people living in Quintana Roo who are employed in the tourism and service industry, and who make use of international tourism as an economic generator which creates opportunities for Mexicans (and now deportees) to “benefit from their cultural and natural assets without having to migrate [further] in search of a better life” (The Business Year, 2018). These opportunities are seized upon by a deportee population whose own cultural capital plays a significant role in their internal migration after deportation.

As part of this research project, and taking into account the intersectional aspects of migrant lives after a long residence in the United States, after deportation, I examine theories on migrant networks, ethnic *enclaves* as well as ethnic economies in order to elaborate how “the role of social capital [helps] migrants achieve cross-border and social mobility (Massey et al. 1987; Waldinger, 1993; Wilson & Portes 1980)” (Kim 2018). How do migrants take advantage of their social networks,

whether in the United States or Mexico. Deportee social networks, both family members and friends, that have been maintained throughout their lives are now, during deportation, activated as migration facilitating networks. My research examines how deportees are able to tap into networks that are already available, whether through labor and labor demands for migrants looking for employment in Mexico? Also, what characteristics of deportees facilitate migration, what Jeann Kim calls (2018) “migration-facilitating capital” to further describe the variety of economic, cultural, social and other resources that enable migrants to access multiple forms of authorized and unauthorized passages into their desired destinations” (2018). Additionally, a look into the role of migration facilitating actors, members of what Ruben Hernandez-Leon describes as some of the actors within the Migration Industry’s “ensemble of entrepreneurs, firms and services which, chiefly motivated by financial gain, facilitate international mobility” [in this case mobility from within Mexico for deportees], settlement and adaptation, as well as communication and resource transfers of migrants and their families across borders” (2013).

Hernandez-Leon’s theory can help to further understand the context within which this growing population migrates internally after deportation. A multi-dimensional view of this phenomenon which looks at the individualistic human-capital centered perspective of migration as well as how the migrant-*sending* and migrant-*receiving* state can often determine a migrant’s experiences (Kim 2018) in Mexico is necessary in order to get a better picture of shared migrant practices in Cancún and the men and women who participated in this study.

### **Deportee Stigma**

In most other parts of Mexico, coming from the United States can be a sign that you have done something wrong, that you are, quite possibly, a criminal and, at the very least, that you are a failed migrant. There is a belief by other researcher’s (Wyman 1993; Golash-Boza and Cecilia Navarro), that people in Mexico will ‘look down upon a ‘failed’ migratory project and suspect and



stigmatize the predominantly Spanish-speaking immigrant population and the English-speaking native population” (Hernandez-Leon, Zuñiga & Lakhani 2020). This stigma has a direct effect not only on the reception that a deportee faces when returning to Mexico, but also on their prospects for employment in specialized sectors. In a country where coveted positions in the private sector are often reserved for people with connections inside specific industries, a lack of cultural and social understanding can mean the difference between getting a job or not. In Cancún, however, the symbolic power of the North, especially as a migrant-*sending* state, is often enough to get some people employed, no questions asked. However, internal migration to Cancún is not often a deportee’s first instinct as many of them hope to return to the United States, or at least have settled in border towns in order to stay close to home. Many deportees describe a sense of confusion and admit to not having a plan after deportation. My research project benefits from looking at the trajectories of deportees after removal to see what prompts a migrant to travel to Cancún, what actors are mobilized and what skills are put into play in order to secure employment once there.

### **A Turbulent Welcome**

What happens to deportees after they return to their countries of origin and how prepared are Mexican institutions to receive them? Many of the respondents in my study describe traumatic and difficult situations that detail the many pitfalls of deportation and return. As part of what Zuñiga and Saucedo refer to as the 0.5 generation, the men and women in my study are attempting to reintegrate into Mexican society after a long residence in the United States. A lack of cultural and linguistic proficiency and an unfamiliarity with institutional and bureaucratic processes make for a disorienting and, often dangerous, return. This is especially true in a country where political corruption and cartel violence have helped create law enforcement agencies known more for their criminal involvement than for the role they are supposed to play in protecting the public. Deportees, as some of the most

vulnerable populations within Mexican society, are extremely susceptible to violence in most circumstances.

What are some of the factors shaping deportee's return to Mexico and the reintegration that is necessary for them to settle into a place that is, on paper, their place of origin, but still extremely foreign to them? According to Golash-Boza and Navarro, two of the most important factors are the context of reception in their country of origin and the strength of the ties that they have to both their homeland—in this case Mexico—and to the United States (2019). Is it possible to analyze the return migration of deportees utilizing the same frameworks used to conceptualized the flow of Mexican migrants moving North? The respondents in this study were forced to migrate into Mexico as part of the deportation process while their parents, in most cases, migrated to the United States because of economic necessity and chose to embark on that journey with at least some level of mental and material preparation. As such, deportee's reception into their country of origin varies depending on several factors and these factors come to light through the narratives of deportees who have creatively navigated that return. Many do not often have a plan once they arrive in Mexico, and only a few describe a pre-existing sustainable network of friends and family who are able to help soften the blow of repatriation. Instead, many begin to rely on the existence of other deportees they've never met until after deportation for information on jobs and opportunities in Cancún. What then, is the context for return migration in Mexico?

Countries like Jamaica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, much like Mexico, cultivate strong social stigmas of criminality against deportees and make it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. A country like Brazil, on the other hand, has shown little to no stigma associated with deportation (Golash-Boza & Navarro 2019). Golash-Boza and Navarro, in their study on Dominican deportees who are working in the call-center industry acknowledge that reintegration is often made more difficult for those who have spent decades in the United States when they have few ties to their

country of birth (2019). Maribel Romero's work (2012), also looks at the call-center industry in Tijuana as a place where industry capitalizes on the abilities of deported youth based on their linguistic and cultural knowledge. Brotherton and Barrios have, in their own research, written about the socio-psychological crisis that affects Dominican deportees in their home countries after removal (2009). These studies detail a deported population that is reeling from what they feel is a:

*Betrayal at the hands of the US government as [they] saw themselves stripped of what they thought were their inalienable 'rights', confusion as they tried to understand their new statelessness and the permanence of the removal process, and trauma as they experienced a 'massive dislocation' of their social life (Alexander 2004) over which they had little control (Carlson et al. 2000) (2009).*

Often, what this disruption and the stigma associated with deportation results in is a population of deportees relegated to working outside of formal primary markets and in precarious jobs. Mexico, which has often been a sending country is similar to the United States in the posture that it takes toward deportees. This type of migrant transit and reception in Mexico has increased over the years and become even more complex, requiring that the country re-evaluate its approach to migrants, especially those who are Mexican nationals but have little to no social or cultural ties in the country after being deported (Bobes & Montaña 2016).

The level of disorientation that is felt by deportees after removal is described by Nicolas, during an interview in Cancún:

*I mean, you grow up in California...and you're a Mexican...but obviously, when you come...to Mexico, you talk Mexican to a Mexican who was born over here and lived in Mexico his whole life and you have an accent...They ask you, 'Where you from?' And I'm like, 'What do you mean, where you from? I'm Mexican!' And they're like, 'No! You're not Mexican.' So, now I realize that I have an accent, so the hardest thing is to be accepted (Nicolas, Personal Communication July 07, 2019).*

And it is not just the accent that makes deportees stand out in Mexico. When I spoke to Alex, a 43-year-old tourism employee who is in charge of training sales people at the airport, he explained to me that, while he is currently considered middle-management, things haven't always been easy for him. The fact that he drives a new car, that he has enough capital to purchase imported beer when he invites

his co-workers to his house for a *carne asada*, and that he is preparing to get married and purchase a home in Cancún, belies the difficulty he experienced when he initially arrived in Mexico. He describes to me the trouble he had after returning to Mexico because of his appearance. In particular, the tattoos that marked him as a *Sureño*<sup>5</sup> after he returned to his family's town in Chihuahua, Mexico:

*I'm going to look for a job, but I have a tattoo on my hand...when I was like, filling out the application, they look at you and because of my tattoo, they were like, 'no'...We have that, as Chicano's, we have that stigma where they look at you still like that...They stereotype you because you have tattoos...They would look at you different, and you feel different (Alex, Personal Communication July 07, 2019).*

Alex's experience helps to show how a deportee's sense of belonging in their country of origin is directly affected by the reception they receive when back in Mexico. If someone who has just been put through the process of deportation after having grown up in the United States comes to the realization that they are not considered American enough to stay in the US, but then they are returned to Mexico where they are also made to feel as though they do not belong, one can imagine the psychological trauma that this may cause in the long-run—this sense of not belonging, neither here nor there (*ni de aqui, ni de aya*). The idea that deportees are *re-integrating* into Mexican society, then, mistakenly presupposes a return to a place of origin, a home, a place where a Mexican national, a deportee, should feel familiar. Some may even justify deportation by seeing it as a return to normalcy for someone who was living an *illegal* or irregular life in the United States, a temporary intruder in a country that does not belong to them, something that deportation must then resolve by restoring the deportee to their proper place.

For researchers and activists working on immigration issues, on the other hand, much of the work has been focused on keeping migrant populations in the United States from being deported. We fight for migrant rights in the United States, seeing deportation as a defeat and a loss. We often tend to view the migrant journey as one of northward mobility, one whose ultimate destination is the United

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<sup>5</sup> Mexican prison gang in Southern California with strong ties to the Mexican Mafia.

States. This US-centric focus might explain why very little research is conducted on return migrations to Mexico and on deportee integration after removal. It might help to explain why Mexico is so inadequately prepared to deal with this particular population. My research project will, therefore, contribute to the conversation about what happens to Chicano's after deportation, once they have been forced to leave their hard-fought homes in the United States—such a central part to the Chicano identity—and forge a new future in Mexico. I am interested in exploring, as the mural on the Tijuana/US border painted by Acción Poética boldly states, “También de este lado hay sueños,” how deportees are asserting their lives in the face of a government that is not ready, and often not willing, to help them with opportunities after deportation. It is important to look, also, at Cancún, as significant in the process of deportee reception, as it is a global city where the economies of multiple nations intersect and where the concept of borders become blurred as international visitors, Mexican natives, and deportees (whose experiences and identities are transnational) interact.

Until recently, Mexico did not have a policy or law to deal with issues of return migration. In fact, until 2011, the 1974 Ley General de Población was used as a guide on how to deal with migrant rights in the country (Bobes & Montaña 2016). With an increase of permanent migration to Mexico by Central Americans, Haitians, and deportees, the country has had to develop policies and practices to deal with the influx of new residents. But perhaps more directly related to the experiences of the participants in this research study upon return, aside from the failures of government institutions, is the way in which other residents of Mexico view and treat them once they are back in the country. Within the discursive construction of identity in Mexico, for example, there is a type of undesirable immigration, that is, immigration of the lower classes, of an indigenous and Central American variety which manifests itself historically (Salazar 2006) and in the day-to-day interplay of the socio-political world (Gonzalez et al. 2013). Discrimination against migrants, therefore, may be selective and based more on ethnic profiles; nationality, and/or socio-economic status than on simply coming from

another country (Bobes & Montaña 2016). The men and women I interviewed were childhood arrivals the United States, children of migrants who left Mexico because of economic hardship. Many respondents cite instances when they were perceived other people's frustration with them in Mexico over their misuse of language or their lack of understanding about social and cultural norms. Some have even said that people treated them like criminals for the simple fact that they spoke English and were perceived to have been deported.

One must also remember that while there are various different reasons for migrating, Mexicans often associate migration with the movement of people from Mexico to the United States in search of work. This movement is viewed negatively because of the effect it has on the communities and families left behind (Bobes & Montaña 2016). One of the positive attributes associated with migrants living in the United States is the economic benefits migration can offer sending states through the remittances their migrants send back home. I can see, therefore, how people in Mexico can come to view a deportee as a failed migrant, someone who no longer provides that potential income to family in Mexico, and who instead, becomes a burden to the state. This may contribute to the ill-treatment deportees experience in Mexico and while the Mexican government is, at least on paper, in favor of protecting the human rights of immigrants, especially when they are mistreated in the United States, very little is done to protect and aid them once they have been deported. According to CONAPRED, 60% of Mexicans believe that the human rights of migrants are rarely, if at all, respected compared to other groups (CONAPRED 2011). According to that same study, only two other groups have it worse in Mexico, and those are members of the LGBT community and people who live with a disability (Bobes & Montaña 2016).

To what degree, then, is a deportee viewed as a part of Mexican society when they return to their country of origin? Are they Mexican only in a legal sense, citizens with specific rights and obligations? Or are they seen as members of a community with civil, social and political rights (Bobes

& Montaña 2016)? Are they, instead, viewed as outsiders who have lost the right to being treated fairly for having left their country to live in the United States? Are they *pochos*<sup>6</sup> who are now a drain on society? In order to understand the reality of return migration for the men and women who have been deported, it becomes imperative to understand the symbolic construction of nation and national identity present in Mexico (Bobes & Montaña 2016) and how this directly affects the type of experiences that deportees have when they return to Mexico.

Organizations working with refugees and migrants in Mexico have noted<sup>7</sup> that there is a great chasm between what the law states are the rights of migrants and the reality that many people face in regards to the application of the law. Whether police, other law enforcement officials, or people working within the social and political institutions citizens must access in order to participate in society, help facilitating integration makes a world of difference for a deportee. Whether that is making sure that those very same rights the law promises are afforded, or help acquiring the proper documentation to access services and employment, a system racked with corruption comes to form part of the oppressive elements deportees often deal with after returning to Mexico. When a deportee, who, according to the law, is a Mexican citizen, finds him or herself back in Mexico and has to deal with people yelling at them on the subway, “Fucking deportee! Cholo! Killer!” (Marco, Personal Interview, July 06, 2019) it becomes obvious that the term *re-integration* is deceiving and a challenge in an environment that is hostile to their very presence. They are seen as outsiders and not as co-nationals who are coming *home* (Marco, Personal Communication July 06, 2019). Faced with this kind of discrimination, how do deportees navigate a return to Mexico and what characteristics are they able to capitalize on in a place like Cancún, where the tourism industry has created a geographic site tailored

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<sup>6</sup> An often-derogatory term used to describe someone of Mexican descent who lives in the United States. It denotes something that has gone bad or spoiled.

<sup>7</sup> Casa del Migrante (Bobes & Montaña 2016).

to the needs and sensibilities of international tourists, including thousands of Americans, making for an interesting and transnational dynamic?

### ***Tourism and Cancún***

The tourism industry in Mexico is an engine of economic development. It has, for years, monopolized the country's resources and focused the attention of government entities whose hope is to tap into international sources of capital. A development program that has been in place since the turn of the century has created a robust tourism industry and a service economy that is one of the most important generators of capital for the country, to varying degrees, depending on each state's touristic offerings and the degree to which each state can guarantee the safety of the tourist. Many of these projects have centered around the creation of a nationalistic and cultural identity (See Figure 4).



*Figure 4 Patron at Mayan Museum in Cancún. Photo by Christian Durán*

Mexico's complex indigenous and mestizo past as well as a cadre of social scientists and entrepreneurs have been mobilized, since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to unearth the country's cultural history. This cultural legacy is then transformed, as if through a process of transubstantiation, into

touristic opportunities and experiences for consumption by foreigners, including a large Mexican-American population in the US, with enough capital to travel to exotic destinations like Cancún. Mexico's rich cultural identity has been a staple product of the tourism industry and thousands flock to the country's pristine beaches, cobbled stone streets, and colorful festivals in order to consume it. In some cases, other Mexican-American tourists, with a romanticized vision of their own *mestizo* roots, with all its complexity, travel to reconnect with an indigenous past. One need only watch promotional



tourism videos of Cancún to see how Mayan culture and art is used to draw travelers to Mexico, how the white sands and turquoise waters are advertised as virgin beaches, untainted by the modern world, how they are touted as havens for cosmopolitan travelers weary of work.

There is an undeniable cultural element in the act of traveling. It is movement motivated by the search for authenticity. It is similar to what Betty Weiler describes as, “travel motivated primarily by the search for the first-hand, authentic and sometimes intimate contact with people whose ethnic or cultural background is different from the tourist’s” (Weiler & Hall 1992). As thousands of tourists visit Mexico every year, they bring with them an influx of Americans and American capital. This insertion of capital through the vehicle of tourism makes very specific cultural demands on the locals and they, in pursuit of the elusive and finite tourist dollar, mobilize to create spaces of culture. In Cancún, for example, people assume cultural roles, piecing together histories that will entice tourists, histories that will sell, facilitating local participation in a global economy (See Figures 5 and 6).



*Figure 5 Mayan ritual at Mayan Village in Xcaret Park. Performed daily at 3:00 p.m.*

Tourists visit these places, bringing their big city paychecks, and are granted access to amenities and experiences locals, who are relatively poor, are often excluded from. They later return home with a self-made conception of the other that both validates their modern lives and fixes the



*Figure 6 Mayan girls keeping track of purchases at Mayan artisanal shop*

racialized other in a conceptual diorama to be revisited whenever capital allows.

In Mexico, where tourism has become a central industry, culture is a commodity, and in spaces of cultural tourism, locals may be quick to “exploit new economic niches open to them for the ‘commoditization’ of themselves and their artifacts” while still remaining at a disadvantage in selling themselves to tourists who are hierarchically positioned as the determining voice of what is marketable, what is of economic value and what is not (Van Den Berghe 1994). In essence, capital drives the industry, and consequently, it drives the construction of a commodified cultural and nationalist identity. It provides the means and methods of leisure that propel crowds to these cultural sites as well as the impetus behind the commodification of culture on the part of actors employed to realize the tourist’s expectations of both its spaces and its people. Tourism, as Van Den Berghe (1994) notes, represent the last “wave of exploitative capitalist expansion” of the world system as developing nations are, every day, being “rediscovered” as a rare and curious “tourist resource.” Mexico’s acquiescence to tourist demand plays an important part in the development of this industry.

FONATUR, or the Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo (National Fund for the Advancement of Tourism), which was founded in 1977 (the decade Cancún began to see major developmental growth), is the governmental organization that oversees the investment and financing of long-term projects within the tourism industry and they have been integral to the growth of the city as the flagship project of Mexico's tourism industry for the past 40 years (See Figures 7 and 8). According to FONATUR, the tourism industry is a detonator for progress and development. Cancún, which is the most recognized Mexican tourist destination in the world, is their premier project.



Figure 7 Cancún in the 1970s, photographer unknown

Located in the Mayan Riviera, Cancún is home to luxurious resorts, hotels, world renowned golf courses as well as small boutique businesses and has become a burgeoning location for online businesses like Airbnb. Among the many other reasons why Cancún has become such an important destination

for both tourists and businesses alike is the fact that this once coastal fishing village has become a major destination for US travelers and is directly tapped in to the United States economy. Millions of tourists flock to this destination yearly and international businesses have seen the economic potential of that yearly migration. International entrepreneurs have capitalized on the ease with which they



Figure 8 Present day Cancún. Photographer unknown

are able to start a business in this development hub. For example, while it takes approximately 270 days to obtain a building permit in China, it only takes 69 days in Cancún, and while it would take someone approximately 119 days to start a business in Brazil, in Cancún, it could take as little as nine days. Cancún has seemingly opened itself up to foreign investors, foreign businesses and foreign eyes.

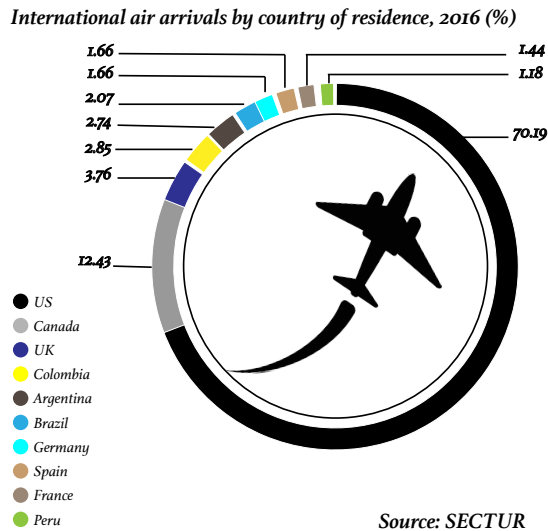


Figure 9 Origin of international flights to Cancún, 2016

Many of the visitors who come to the city as well as the enterprises that capitalize on its cosmopolitanism come from the United States. If one were to look at figures from 2006 (See Figure 9), 70.19% of all international flights arriving in Cancún were coming from the US. Cancún is growing daily. New construction, among them the highly contested Mayan train (a proposed 1000-mile rail system connecting Mexico City with several tourist sites through Yucatan

and Quintana Roo), tourist projects and new businesses are growing beyond the limits of the hotel zone and we are going to see exponential growth all the way down the Mayan Riviera (See Figure 10).

The growing number of people benefitting from the tourism industry and the yearly flood of tourists and tourist capital into the country has turned Mexico into a “land of



Figure 10 Construction workers in Cancún. Photo by Christian Durán

opportunity” for those with the capital and connections to engage in investment. Tourism’s

contributions to the country's GDP in 2016, for example, totaled 165.9 billion dollars, equivalent to 16% of the country's total GDP, and supported nearly 8.6 million jobs.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predicts that this figure will rise 2% per annum totaling more than 18% of the Mexican workforce. A high demand for migrant labor and the possibility of earning more money abroad than in home countries have both been important factors in migrant movement throughout the world. Cancún, in this case, is creating opportunities for people

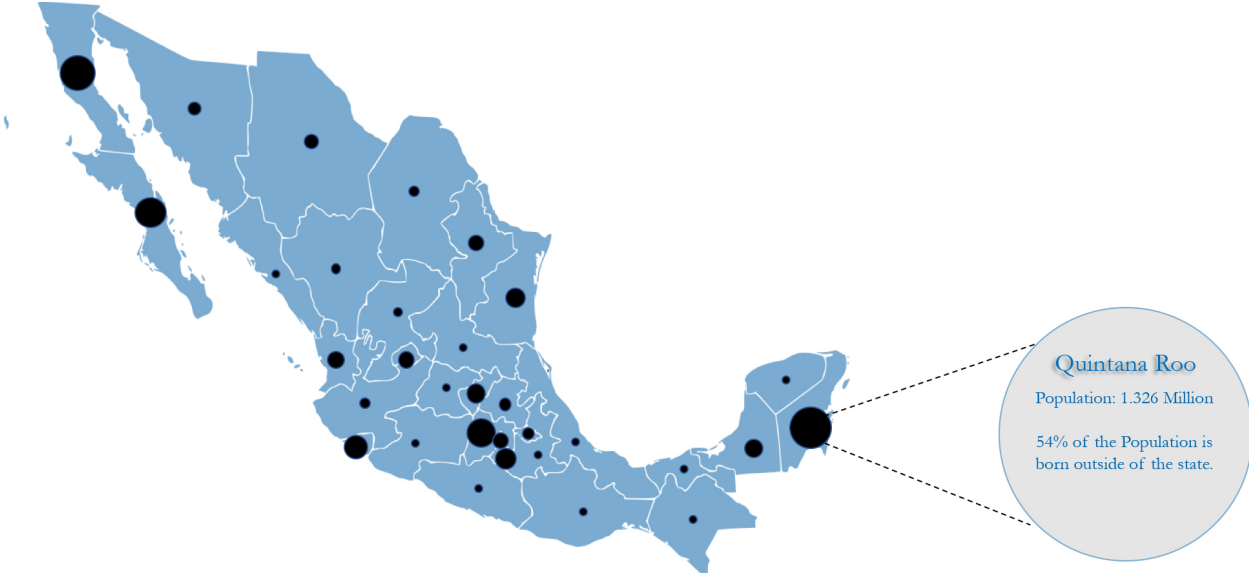


Figure 11 Quintana Roo population born outside of the state

in other parts of Mexico to work in the tourism industry, an industry that is directly tapped into international economies. Chicana deportees, among those within the interior of the country who are seeking employment, are gravitating to Mayan shores in order to capitalize on those opportunities. It is no surprise that half of Quintana Roo's population of about 1.3 million people, is made up of residents born outside of the state. The tourism industry is a powerful magnet for people struggling to find work in other parts of Mexico, recent deportees included (See Figure 11). This congregation of internal migrants from Mexico, of national and international corporations that flock to this beachside town, tourists and deportees alike, make Cancún a dynamic and interesting place to study, especially as a site of *re*-integration for deportees.

However, places like Cancún create great inequalities within Mexican society. This is made obvious in the structural disparity in wages, resources and services that laborers in the service industry often receive (Infante & Rosas-Acevedo 2013). Companies, both foreign and domestic in Mexico, see the economic potential of Mexican land, history, and peoples, and they have moved toward a long-term plan for the commercialization and exploitation of those resources. Much like Los Cabos (Lizarraga 2008), most of the businesses dedicated to real estate in highly touristic sites are from the United States as are many of the businesses that occupy commercial and beach space in the hotel zone. Industry leaders in the Mayan Riviera are attuned to what the tourists want and tailor tourist experiences accordingly. Recently, Miguel Quintana, the General Director of Experiencias Xcaret, a leader in Cancún's tourism industry, recognized that "tourists want lived experiences...they want to interact with culture, people, and nature and be part of the destination" (The Business Year 2018). Tourism, in Mexico, becomes, aside from just an opportunity for leisure and relaxation, an experience of cultural consumption.

Cancún, Quintana Roo, is, along with Los Cabos and Baja California, recognized as an Integrally Planned Center (CIP), with the support of FONATUR. In this system, the state is given the task of creating a plan to develop the tourist area. The first step is the acquisition of land which, in the case of Cancún, took place in the early 1970s. Immediately after the acquisition of land, the state developed a strategic development master plan and the construction of the first hotels began. Once construction was started, the state could begin to advertise Cancún as a viable tourist destination and a travel option with economic potential. When hotel occupancy capacity was exceeded, private investment added to the development of Cancún (Mexico's first CIP).

However, Cancún is, as Robinson (2008) describes, a zone of capitalist accumulation not completely regulated by the state. This is especially true in the regulation of specific job markets within the tourism industry which offer workers different ways to capitalize on the tourists desire to consume

culture. Workers, faced with the demands of day-to-day life in Mexico, find ways to subsidize their income often by capitalizing on their contact with visitors. Cancún is remote, in relation to the economic hubs of Mexico, and yet it brings in a significant amount of capital through the exploitation of the human and natural resources that it provides in the service and tourism industry (Sassen 1999).

As deportees travel to Cancún in order to take advantage of the many jobs created by touristic development, a growing community sharing similar experiences of deportation and an upbringing in



Figure 13 Playa delfines, one of the few public beaches left in Cancún, photo by Christian Durán

the United States comes together to create social and economic networks. If we examine Cancún, however, in its social and economic dimensions pertaining to its labor populations, it is a place where inequalities are constantly being articulated. Nowhere is this represented more clearly than in the encounter between tourists

and locals. Tourists come to Cancún and benefit from an international and upper-class position which is a stark contrast to the lives of the locals they encounter on the beaches, restaurants, and resorts,

workers who are positioned in a way as to cater to tourists' demands and desires, and who are laboring in order to provide for their own basic necessities (Torres & Momsen 2005). For those who have visited Cancún in the past,



Figure 12 Guard station outside of a luxury hotel, photo by Christian Durán

there is a marked difference between the hotel zone and the city of Cancún outside of its limits—luxury and poverty juxtaposed and in extreme proximity. Manuel Navarrete (2012), calls this the

“entanglement of power and inequality” which is seen in the segregation and spatial exclusion of residents. For example, there are only a few public beaches (See Figure 13) where local residents can enjoy the beach in Cancún, most of the beaches are treated as private property and policed by hotel guards (See Figure 12).

During one of my stays in Cancún, I wanted to meet a respondent in the hotel lobby where I was staying in order to conduct an interview but was told that I would have to pay \$120 dollars for a



*Figure 14 Luxury boutique protected by armed guards in Cancún, photo by Christian Durán*

day pass that would allow him to come on the premises. Before accessing any hotel’s lobby, most pedestrians and drivers entering the premises off of Punta Nizuc, have to go through a security check point. Access to these resorts and the privilege of walking on their pristine beaches, the same beaches that bring

countless tourists to Cancún, is very often reserved for international tourists who are from a higher-class, who are often American, and who are mostly white. Locals, mostly internal migrants, indigenous peoples, and/or deportees, who work in the service industry—the same workers who clean the rooms and lobbies of these hotels—those who maintain the businesses in these zones, are forbidden from entering (Ortiz & Campos 2018). These processes of exclusion create in Cancún what Gonzalez (2013) calls a “dual city” or what Oehmichen (2010) refers to as a “shore city”. Quite often, this level of segregation and exclusion is seen across class, racial and ethnic lines (Castellanos & Paris 2005). According to Oehmichen (2013), this type of tourism development encourages polarization to “the extent that it generates social segregation and racism” (See Figure 14 & 15). Davis (2006) calls this



type of development leading to the migration of both indigenous and lower-class laborers as well as tourists and their capital, “late colonization.” Ortiz and Campos add that this is “due to the effect that it has had in the displacement of local populations to marginal and less urbanized areas, which has caused segregation and residential precarity as housing and services become more expensive” (Ortiz & Campos 2018).



When indigenous *Figure 15 Construction workers in Cancún. Photo by Christian Durán*

migrations to places like Cancún were studied in the 1970s, movements from rural places into developing sites were seen as a result of industrialization and urbanization (Cardenas 2014). Now, I am attempting to look at the globalizing effects of tourism on places like Cancún where upper-class visitors from the United States engage in travel and tourism (Ortiz & Campos 2018). My findings indicate how this movement prompts migration, not only of indigenous populations, who travel there to work in the service industry, but also of recent deportees who see this as an opportunity to make use of the social, cultural and linguistic capital they gained in the United States.

The services and systems of production in Cancún require the exploitation of a labor force and the precarization of workers' living conditions as many are pushed to the periphery of the city, away from the protection tourists enjoy from the crime and poverty visible outside the hotel zone



*Figure 16 Disparate policing in the hotel zone. Photo by Christian Durán*

(Therborn 2013). There is an obvious disparity between the policing that takes place in the hotel zone compared to the zones outside of the tourist areas (See Figure 16). Pushed to the outskirts of Cancún, migrants settle in places where there is a lack of public services and over-crowding. Ortiz and Campos

describe this as the very image of “economic polarization, social and spatial at a local level, created by the globalization of leisure, recreation and retirement economy” (2018). When deportees travel to Cancún in search of work, they end up working in close proximity to the luxury of the hotel zone, but living in remote areas of the city, along with all the other men and women working in the service industry and while they often benefit from their ability to speak English by securing jobs that offer better economic opportunities, they are still subject to the same levels of precarity as any other worker in the service industry. Deportees occupy a third space as they are relegated to living outside of the hotel zone; dealing with insecurity, both physical and economic, but relating socially and culturally with the men and women they cater to in the hotel zone, the ones who travel there from the United States and stay in the luxurious beachside resorts, resorts they may have also been able to visit when they worked in the U.S., if only they would have had the ability to travel.

The power of the tourism industry as an engine of development cannot be overstated, of course. Studies show that tourism generates a significant economic impact in places like Cancún

compared to other productive industries within Mexico (SECTUR 2013). This is due, in large part, to the demand for labor that touristic sites like Cancún can generate. The industry creates jobs in remote places where there is, alongside places like the hotel zone—in all its luxury—high levels of underdevelopment (Ehvelazco 2011). In Cancún, the new economies of leisure and consumption as well as foreign investment have created, what Ortiz and Campos refer to as “centripetal forces in regional economic development” (2018). Cancún employers rely on the internal migration of indigenous populations who come to work as part of the service industry, but they are also counting on and have tailored their recruiting practices to target deportees who understand North American culture and who can speak English.

Additionally, as Massey (et al. 1987) has noted, when employers are unable to attract native workers, they often “turn to immigrants and...initiate immigrant flows directly through formal recruitment.” Migrants with indigenous roots settle on the outskirts of Cancún and are bused in, on company buses, to the hotel zone daily, along with deportees. These settlements of migrant workers at the “margins of urban spaces, apart from the tourist zone” are spaces where the labor force that keeps Cancún operating lives and where new arrivals become integrated into the formal and informal job markets of this tourist hub (Ortiz & Campos 2018). What then, are some of the traits that these employers look for and how do deportees fit into this equation? For many of the deportees I interviewed, the simple fact that they speak English is enough to secure employment as soon as they come to Cancún.

## Chapter 3

### *Data and Methods*

Having come to this country as a child immigrant, the stories highlighted in this work are very personal to me. I admit that I have maintained an often romantic, if not nationalistic, idea of Mexico as my country of origin (the US has been my home for the past thirty-five years. I was privileged and fortunate enough to have become a permanent resident in the mid 1980s through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), but it would be another twenty years before I chose to become a United States citizen. My father grew up in Mexico City in the 1960s, saw the student uprisings first hand as a young boy and was deeply affected by the political turmoil of his time. He made sure to instill in me a love for country and perhaps it was this inculcation which made me think that, despite having grown up in the US, I was Mexican, *Chilango*<sup>8</sup> to the core. Yet, I grew up here, in the US. I could not help but be influenced by American culture, by its expectations and assumptions, by television and radio, music and movies ushering me into adulthood. I loved Mexico from afar and still do, perhaps because as a dark-skinned Mexican, I was never meant to feel completely at home here, I've been a perpetual foreigner all my life. I used to dream of a future retirement in the country that saw me grow up for the first five years of my life, but after visiting Mexico City as a grown man, I see that that is not my home anymore. Even there, I feel like an outsider. And therefore, an immediate return to my home country is just not in the cards. Fortunately, I do not fear having to return as I am positioned safely behind the security a Naturalization Certificate can afford.

I say this to make it clear that while I see parts of myself in the lives of the men and women who I have spoken to in this study, those socio-cultural affinities that make us both a type of hybrid, a cognitive citizen of *nepantla*, and an obvious other both in the United States as well as in Mexico, I am not in their shoes and I cannot fully understand or decipher the psycho-social implications of their

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<sup>8</sup> A slang demonym for someone belonging to or who has been born in Mexico City.

journeys back into Mexico. I am not attempting to detail the processes of deportation and re-integration with all of their complexity, but to help shed light on this reality and to provide an avenue through which people's stories can be told.

In this research study, I look at the lives of David and several other deportees, all part of a sample size of ten participants (N=10), who work in Cancún's tourism industry (See Table 2).

Respondent Table

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Age at Departure</i>	<i>Years in U.S.</i>	<i>Age at time of Interview</i>
Alex	Chihuahua	3	32	43
Christopher	Puebla	5	23	31
David	Torreon	2	19	37
(German*)	El Salvador	9	32	46
Hugo	Mexico City	12	25	40
Lorena	Veracruz	2	22	25
Marco	Veracruz	10	17	29
Miguel	Sinaloa	16	30	50
Nicolas	Guerrero	4	36	42
Toribio	Sinaloa	12	17	42
Valerie	Mexicali	4	33	43

Table 2 Table of Respondents

Note i Average age of Respondents at time of Departure from Mexico is 7.7 years of age. Average amount of years spent in the United States is 26 years. Average age of respondents is 39 years old.

\* German is a Salvadoran National and is included in this study because of the way he was recruited into the Tourism industry.

David, following countless misadventures throughout the Mexican Republic, found his stride in Cancún and has become a sort of mentor for other deportees who have traveled there looking for work. Their lives are fraught with challenges, and their stories, I am sure, will resonate with others

who are undergoing the same trials. I had the opportunity to interview David during the Summer of 2018 and then again, the Summer of 2019. The men and women he introduced me to came from different parts of Mexico to Cancún after being deported from the United States. They share similar aspirations and trajectories and express a desire to stay in Cancún for the foreseeable future, especially because of the possibility to earn a living in *dollars*. An ability to tap into American capital makes them feel at home.

Of the ten interviews used in the elaboration of this study, only two of them are from women and the absence of this gendered perspective, I feel, needs to be addressed. As Golash-Boza and Navarro note (2019), of the six-million people deported from the United States since 1997, 98% are sent to Latin America, and out of that percentage, over 90% are men. My research reflects that trend as it was difficult finding female employees in the tourism industry who were also deportees. With appropriate time and resources, I am sure that future research can yield much more information on this demographic. As a sole researcher with limited funding who is also male, it becomes increasingly difficult to find women who are willing to participate in a research study with a male researcher they have never met—especially in a country where women face exponentially higher rates of violence. It was especially difficult finding female respondents using the process of snowball sampling facilitated by David, a male respondent. In a country racked by gender violence, it becomes difficult to convince a female to meet with a stranger for an interview—especially after work as the sun is beginning to set. The female respondents I was able to interview were kind enough to share their stories with me only after David vouched for me and the validity of my research. I am sure that it would have benefitted me to have worked alongside a female researcher who would have made that process more comfortable and inviting for female respondents. I hope to continue this research in the future with additional resources in order to tap into the storehouse of knowledge female deportees in places of tourist concentration will be able to unlock.

The empirical material for this study comes from fieldwork conducted in Cancún, Quintana Roo over the period of two summers, 2018 and 2019. As stated earlier, my primary contact has been David, a childhood friend who I found working in the tourism industry. Through him, I have been able to connect to a growing number of deportees in a similar situation. Interviews for both respective summers were conducted one-on-one. For 2018, I prepared a series of questions focusing on four integral parts of the deportation experience. I wanted to gain an understanding of respondent's social networks in the United States and so, the first part of the interview dealt with the initial migration to the United States by the respondents and, in most cases, other members of their family. I briefly asked about siblings and parents who may still reside in the United States in order to establish whether or not they still had social and familial ties in the US who offered their support. We talked about the circumstances surrounding the respondent's deportation and the experiences they may have had in detention. If the respondent is comfortable with the interview, I also ask about the reasons for their incarceration, if it applies, and their experiences while detained. It is important to analyze the experiences respondent's had with law enforcement to see how that shapes expectations coming to Mexico and if, when reintegrating into Mexican society, the respondent felt comfortable relying on the help and protection of law enforcement or any other governmental institution.

The second part of the interview deals with the initial return to Mexico and the difficulty of that experience. Questions in this section involve asking about plans for reintegration, whether family members in the United States and in Mexico helped with the resettlement process as well as trace the geographic trajectories of respondents as they return to urban hubs looking for employment or if they return to ancestral regions of Mexico to connect with family members. The decision-making process of the respondent during this phase of return is often traumatic and crucial to their own success and therefore, a lot of time is spent looking at these experiences. It is also important to focus on this process as it is here that one can begin to trace similarities and patterns, places where individual

migrant networks intersect as well as see how internal migrations are motivated and facilitated, either by family, social, industrial or professional networks and how these journeys are navigated by deportees (See Table 3).

### Respondent Migrations after Deportation

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Arrival in US</i>	<i>Internal Migrations after Deportation</i>
Alex	Chihuahua	California	2
Christopher	Puebla	New York	3
David	Torreon	California	4
(German*)	El Salvador	California	1
Hugo	Mexico City	California	2
Lorena	Veracruz	Texas	1
Marco	Veracruz	North Carolina	1
Miguel	Sinaloa	Oregon	2
Nicolas	Guerrero	California	1
Toribio	Sinaloa	Oregon	2
Valerie	Mexicali	Texas	2

*Table 3 Internal migrations after deportation*

*\*German is included in this study solely for the purpose of highlighting his recruitment process.*

The third part of the interview deals with deportee resettlement in Cancún and the process of securing housing and employment. This phase of the interview process focuses on the advantages of an upbringing in the United States as well as the difficulties of securing a job when one is a deportee and more often than not, considered a criminal for being deported. Here, there are several foci, Cancún (as a transnational place), the deportee as a transnational subject, and the tourism industry as an engine



of development that produces a demand for the socio-cultural and linguistic capital that these deportees possess.

Deportees are asked to describe their job search, their working conditions, their housing structure and difficulties associated with each of these aspects of resettlement. In this section, one can get a better understanding of the advantages that many of these deportees enjoy in Cancún, a place where the primary and secondary job markets are very distinctly marked out and their experiences can show how they are positioned as intermediaries between these two distinct, though symbiotic relationships.

Finally, I ask the respondents to reflect on their own positionality in Cancún. I ask questions about belonging and what they plan to do moving forward. I also ask if they feel at home in Cancún, or what it is about Cancún that they enjoy, what about this geographical location draws them there, and what, if anything about it makes them feel at home. I also ask whether they plan on returning to the United States. I ask questions about the social networks they have developed in Mexico and their friend groups in order to analyze the possibility of reintegration into Mexican society, or if deportees are relying on the deportee communities in Cancún as a way of self-segregating, as a means of mutual protection and a way of providing for other deportees and of establishing a sense of symbolic continuity after being kicked out of the United States by surrounding themselves with people who share characteristics with them that go beyond simply being co-ethnics.

These questions were repeated for the second round of interviews during the Summer of 2019, however, there was more of an emphasis on exploring the characteristics of employment in Cancún. Interviews with respondents were open-ended, which resulted in interviews lasting 1-2 hours. Each of the ten interviews was transcribed by me after returning to the United States and the sound file promptly deleted so as to protect the identity of the respondents. Names and specific details

pertaining to the respondent's employers were either withheld or changed in order to avoid any unintended injury to the respondent as a result of my research.

Given the delicate nature of deportation and the geographical distance between the respondent and myself, I relied heavily on the help of an intermediary. David, my childhood friend working at the airport as an OPC—someone whose job it is to have direct contact with the tourist—was integral to this research as he facilitated many of the initial introductions between the respondents and myself. After my initial interview with David in 2018, we sat down and I explained to him the purpose of my research. I asked if he knew of any other deportees who might be willing to sit with me and go over their stories so as to establish the structure for the snowball sample I use in subsequent interviews. There was no shortage of potential candidates as most people I interviewed worked in the industry, were deportees, and knew many other people who had also been deported. The difficulty lay in getting respondents, who were overtaxed with work and had odd job hours, to the interview. What helped in this process was the amount of time that I spent in Cancún, locating possible participants and setting up interviews. For the 2018 and 2019 summer research, I spent approximately three to four weeks in Cancún. In order to acquire approximately five to six interviews, it was necessary for me to stay in my research site for that long. Most respondents only get one day off from work and I tried to schedule as many interviews as I could on those days.

Issues emerged during this process as I did not have direct initial contact with the respondents. How was I to incentivize the interview, for example? I had, during my first trip to Mexico, approached a few workers who I suspected may have spent some time in the United States, either because of their mastery of English or because of mannerisms I perceived to have been gained in the US, but, for the most part, people either denied having lived in the United States, or became defensive and started asking if I was part of law enforcement. They were extremely suspicious of my work and didn't want to talk to a stranger about their experience as deportees. I knew then that it would be difficult to

secure enough respondents for a sizable sample. David was extremely helpful and became essential to the research. He was able to vouch for me and the validity of my work with several co-workers and I was able to interview them.

I gave David five hundred pesos, the equivalent of 25 dollars at the time of the interview, for his participation, but asked that he please not tell any of the potential respondents about the money. My close relationship with David served as a guarantee that he followed my instructions. That, and the fact that it was still very difficult to secure respondents who voluntarily came to the interviews without any promise of compensation, assured me that the interviews would continue disinterested. Respondents, upon completion of the interview, were surprised to receive monetary compensation for their time. One respondent did let one of his friends know about the interview and informed him that I was giving out compensation for it. I met with this respondent for the interview and found that the answers he gave to my questions were very rushed and he did not want to elaborate on many aspects of his journey back into Mexico. It quickly became obvious that he participated in the interview mainly for the money. It was difficult, as I said, to secure respondents because of work schedules (some operate two or three side hustles to maximize their earnings). Given that fact, it became difficult to interview a large number of people. With additional resources, a more comprehensive research study would be possible.

Scheduled interviews took place in a location that would be accessible to the respondent so as to minimize any inconvenience or interruption to their commute. To this end, I chose to stay outside of the hotel zone. Would I have chosen to stay in a resort, respondents would not have had access to the hotel, or to any place that was not brimming with tourists and eavesdroppers. Instead, I rented a condominium outside of the hotel zone, near a Chaudraui (a supermarket whose parking lot is used by employees in the hotel zone as a place where they park their cars and load onto resort buses that take them to their work sites). After work, they are dropped off at these same parking lots and it was

there that I would meet them, introduce myself, and proceed to conduct the interview. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on the respondent's choosing and level of comfort. All of the respondent's referenced in this study chose to conduct the interview in English, or Spanglish, when explaining the technical aspects of their job. After the interviews, I explained to them a bit about my work and asked if there were any details about their experiences that they would have liked to share. The extensiveness and depth of the interview left few things unsaid and I was satisfied with the information these respondents provided. A note on the photographs used throughout this study. I chose not to include images of research respondents in order to protect their identities. However, while I was in Cancún, I felt that it was important to highlight some aspects most people would miss if visiting this place on vacation. Most of my images are candid, highlighting aspects of the city I found were important in documenting some of the findings discussed in this work and that would help contextualize the theoretical concepts elaborated here. All images were taken candidly and chosen by the author for their significance to the research.

## Chapter 4

### *Commercializing Chicanismo*

*So, a Chicano is basically the ones who were born out here?  
Cuz' I'm considered a pocho, my parents took me when I was a kid.  
And that's a Pocho and Chicano, right? —Christopher*

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe *social capital* as the “sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” The relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition, for the deportees that make up my study, is formed as a result of their upbringing in the United States and their experience with deportation. Social capital theory, as a lens of analysis, has contributed significantly to studies on international migration by helping to explain what attributes and characteristics of individual actors facilitate their movement. For deportees, social capital is of significant importance because of its convertibility. By this, I mean that a deportee’s social and cultural capital can produce social and economic benefits to them, especially along the journey back into Mexico (Harker, Mahar & Wilkes 1990). Among these benefits, and according to the findings in these studies, bilingual deportees are able to access jobs within the tourism industry in Cancún which are reserved for people who are able to speak English, who can relate to the tourists who visit this international cosmopolitan city, and who can connect with them on a cultural level. These jobs pay in dollars, as opposed to many of the other jobs in the service industry (ie. restaurant and hotel jobs which do not require employees to be bilingual). The potential for earnings in a living in dollars is attractive to deportees who are used to making significantly more money than what many jobs in Mexico offer.

While Douglas Massey (1987) theorizes that, “Immigrants carry as many as three kinds of resources with them when they leave; financial capital, human capital, and labor power,” he argues that “it is in their capacity as workers that immigrants are most widely considered.” However, if instead of focusing on migrant movements from rural spaces to more urban hubs, we applied Massey’s

idea to cosmopolitan migrants who have grown up in the United States and are now forced to migrate into Mexico as deportees and make ends meet, we can begin to understand why Chicana are not only valued by hotel chains in Cancún for their physical labor, but also for the social and cultural capital they embody as Americans. As such, for deportees moving from the U.S. back into Mexico, the human capital that they gain in the U.S. will have a direct impact on the type of employment they can acquire in Mexico. This capital takes on a new level of significance, especially since the work of tourism intermediaries requires that very social and cultural capital. It is, in essence, a job requirement.

Deportees gain their social capital through membership in interpersonal networks created by a common experience in the United States and then convert this capital into other forms of capital in order to secure a position within Cancún's job market. These shared characteristics among deportees, where a familiarity with English and the U.S. can turn into a marketable trait and where this marketability can lead to prospects for employment, sets them apart from their Mexican national counterparts. This same capital increases the likelihood for internal migration once back in Mexico, while simultaneously boosting the migrant's expected net returns after migration. A deportee's ties to both the United States and Mexico create complex networks that operate on multiple levels. As Massey, Goldring and Durand (1994) have noted, the ties of friendship and kinship that migrants possess prior to their migration very rarely provide any economic advantages, in and of themselves, in that migration. However, when someone decides to migrate, those ties can become "a resource that can be drawn upon to gain access to foreign employment and all that it brings" (Massey et al. 1994). As we shall see with the deportees I interviewed throughout this process, as more and more migrants come to Cancún, and with each act of migration, the network grows, raising the odds for future migrations. However, I recognize that migrants are not atomized individuals and they are still very much affected by forces outside of their control, forces even outside the scope of their close social networks. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen (2013) acknowledge that in a migration trajectory,

specifically one that is transnational, the possibilities for movement vary and are the “result of an interplay between culture, gender, legal status, class and negotiating power,” vis-à-vis actors and regulatory entities along the migrant trail. For this, it is necessary to look at the motivating factors of migration and the entities that interact with migrants along their journey.

Ruben-Hernandez Leon defines the Migration Industry as the “Ensemble of entrepreneurs, firms and services which, chiefly motivated by financial gain, facilitate international mobility [in this case, deportee mobility within Mexico], settlement and adaptation, as well as communication and resource transfers of migrants and their families across borders” (Hernandez-Leon 2013). Internal migration after deportation through Mexico is similar in the sense that a lot of these deportees make calculations based on the opportunities their own social capital provides them, the avenues that are open to them through the regulation of national institutions, and the recruiting practices of industry actors in Mexico, and specifically, in Cancún.

It is necessary to focus on several different factors motivating the internal migration of deportees within Mexico. The human capital they possess which opens doors in places like Cancún, the industry actors who facilitate that movement, even the criminal organizations (including corrupt enforcement agencies) who target deportees and hinder their chances for settlement in more rural parts of Mexico, all affect a migrants decisions. It is, as Massey suggests:

*Entirely possible for individuals to engage in cost-benefit calculations, for households to seek to minimize risk and overcome barriers to capital and credit; for both individuals and households to draw upon social capital to facilitate international movement; and for the socioeconomic context within which migration decisions are made to be determined by structural forces operating at the national and international levels, often influenced by migration itself (Massey et al. 2013).*

A deportee’s resourcefulness is central to their *re*-integration in Mexico and their successful navigation of that process after deportation. The factors that dictate their movement and their ability to find employment and settle in Cancún, how they build social networks based on their mutual recognition as deportees and former residents of the United States, are further elaborated in their personal

narratives, narratives that will be discussed in the following sections. There is, however, one particular element worth discussing here that I believe draws deportees to Cancún.

The ability to speak English in Mexico is usually the result of higher levels of academic achievement, of access to English classes or international schools. Even then, an ability to speak English is not the same as the acquisition of or familiarity with American culture and what this acquisition means when two people from similar backgrounds are communicating with one other. Deportees who return to Mexico after a long residence in the United States speak English *and* have internalized American culture. While their parents, the ones who made the initial decision to migrate to the US, often come from the lower economic classes, the deportees I interviewed for this research, having grown up in the United States, possess American social, linguistic, and cultural abilities that surpass those of their Mexican national counterparts. They are, essentially, bearers of a *cosmopolitanism* (Igarashi & Sato 2014) that facilitates economic mobility within Mexico's tourism industry.

Igarashi and Saito (2014) define cosmopolitanism as “an orientation of openness to foreign others and cultures.” Main figures in the study of cosmopolitanism write about it positively (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Delanty 2009) as a way of solving economic problems and as a way of accessing economic opportunities. This is certainly true for a lot of the deportees I interviewed. I focus here on the cosmopolitanism gained not necessarily through academic qualifications, as theorists like Larequi and Wininger do (2003), although this can also be the case for many of the deportees I interviewed since so many of them were able to achieve higher levels of academic success than their parents, even just by obtaining a GED (See Table 4). Of the ten people I interviewed, seven received a High School Diploma or a GED equivalent, and nine completed some high school coursework.



## Respondent Education and Employment

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discrimination in Mexico</i>	<i>Discrimination in US</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Alex	Yes	No	Junior High	OPC Supervisor
Christopher	Yes	Yes	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Driving Service
David	Yes	Yes	GED	OPC
(German*)	No	No	H.S. Diploma	OPC
Hugo	Yes	No	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	OPC
Lorena	Yes	Yes	GED	Sales
Marco	Yes	Yes	H.S. Diploma	OPC
Miguel	No	Yes	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Taxi Driver
Nicolas	Yes	Yes	H.S. Diploma	Promoter
Toribio	Yes	Yes	GED	OPC
Valerie	Yes	No	GED	Travel Agent

*Note ii German is included in this research solely for the purpose of highlighting his recruitment experience*

*Table 4 Education and Employment*

I, instead, will focus primarily on the acquisition of cosmopolitanism as part of *habitus* (an embodied state) and through the consumption of foreign commodities (an objectified state) by deportees raised in the US. The growing number of employment opportunities in an ever-increasing globalized world that require interactions with people of multiple nationalities (Igarashi & Saito 2014), are tailored for cosmopolitan employees. Mexican deportees who were raised in the United States are uniquely suited to take advantage of the opportunities made available to them in Cancún as a cosmopolitan site, and a place uniquely adapted to deportee's cosmopolitanism. In fact, individuals who are able to thrive in

in this new globalized context need to “know a world language—almost certainly English” (Meyer 2007).

Don Weenink (2007) has written that in a globalized age, cosmopolitanism becomes a new source of power. A change in context converts a deportee’s cosmopolitanism into a source of economic power. In the United States, the subjects of this study were limited by their undocumented status, or by the mistakes they made which led to their incarceration. This usually barred them from employment. As part of a large migrant population in the United States with similar experiences and limitations, they had to compete for jobs with others like them. In Mexico, where they are now documented, where they can vote and participate in all aspects of society, where they no longer have a criminal record, opportunities are now open to them in some industries Mexican nationals are not always equipped to occupy. This power stems from the fact that the West continues to define the global standards within which the world operates. Deportees who have grown up in the US acquire cosmopolitanism as cultural capital through both deliberate inculcation in the US educational system as well as unconsciously (Bourdieu 1983). When they are back in Mexico, deportees are more culturally suited to interact with the tourists visiting Cancún. They are, as some have described, “third culture kids,” comfortable in multicultural settings (Hayden & Thompson 1995; Useem & Downie 1976). In Cancún, this cosmopolitanism is transformed into profits within the labor market since the “institutionalized state of cultural capital is conceptualized [Bourdieu 1983] as ‘the condition for legitimate access to a growing number of positions, particularly dominant ones’” (Igarashi & Saito 2014). These positions are being filled by deportees in Cancún and as the tourism industry grows, there is no visible end to the demand for more bilingual and cosmopolitan labor. As the deportee population continues to grow throughout Mexico, and in Cancún in particular, a community of deportees is slowly growing and developing in complexity. These deportee communities, these

enclaves, grow in relation to economic and cultural needs. I look at *enclave* theory in order to expand and analyze its structure in relation to the deportee community in Cancún.

### Deportee Enclaves

Roger Waldinger (1993), in his redefining study on ethnic enclaves, cites the dictionary in order to define the term enclave in order to determine the viability of it as a lense for analysis. According to the dictionary, an enclave is defined as “a country or an outlying portion of a country, entirely or mostly surrounded by the territory of another country.” If, for the purpose of this study, we expand this definition by not focusing on the hard borders of countries, but think about the idea and image



Figure 17 David and friends. Photo by Christian Durán

of a nation within a nation, we can begin to conceptualize how deportees, being in their very nature, more American than Mexican, can be considered an cultural and economic enclave in Cancún (See Figure 17). If we further examine the analogous relationship between different

countries, and apply it to the condition of deportees living in Mexico, we can begin to make the argument that deportees, regardless of the fact that they share in a common place of origin with other co-nationals, are in fact a distinct population, surrounded by a country they do not see as their own. Literature in the field tends toward focusing more on the idea of an enclave economy as a sector which, according to Waldinger, has “virtually no connections with the domestic economy” (1993). Cancún, which receives countless tourists from the US and Europe every year, relies heavily on the economic potential of foreign visitors and therefore, can be seen to represent an economy that is significantly disconnected from other sectors of the Mexican economy. Perhaps Cancún’s economy

is better understood as entangled in both national and international forces that help to create and maintain this geographic site as a globally recognized tourism hub. Can deportees, who live and work here, really be considered part of an enclave? I argue that they can, if instead of engaging in arguments over geographical requirements, we adopt the term *deportee enclave* in order to describe the number of growing deportees who occupy a third space; an economic, laboral, social and ontological space in Mexico that, while not fixed, is separate and distinct.

This study looks at the primary and secondary labor markets in Cancún to see how deportees operate in-between them. The primary market, at least described by Wachtel (1972) corresponds to the center economy and has, “the positive characteristics of stability for promotion of high wages and good working conditions.” On the other hand, the secondary market is racked with uncertainty and precarity, and its defining characteristic is job instability (Piore 1975). As Wilson & Portes note, many immigrant workers, and indigenous workers who move to Cancún will, “concentrate in the secondary labor market. With the exception of those who gain access to the primary sector [in this case, English speaking deportees], immigrants will share all the characteristics of peripheral employment, including low prestige, low income, [and] job dissatisfaction” (1980). The lines between primary and secondary markets are not as clear cut as this study makes them sound, at least not in a place like Cancún where deportees have access to jobs not available to a large part of the Mexican population, jobs with the potential for higher wages, yet still precarious and uncertain, dependent on the fluctuations of the industry. Deportees in Cancún gain access to jobs with higher wages because of their social and cultural capital, yet they are still relegated to living in the peripheral parts of the city, along with all other workers in the secondary market. Deportees who are successful in the primary market have access to employment opportunities denied to those in secondary markets, and some even become recruiters for other deportees; training them, supporting their advancement within the industry and finding ways to benefit economically from their sales (Portes & Bach 1985).

It is possible to observe the growth of robust migrant social networks extending out toward tourist sites like Cancún and Los Cabos through Inegi reports (2015). However, it becomes difficult to track the exact number of migrants to Cancún who have also lived for extended periods of time and have been deported from the United States. Yet, for whoever has visited Cancún as a tourist, it is quite easy to run into people working within the tourism industry who have spent time in the United States and speak perfect English—many of them are deportees. It is possible to trace the dimensions of human agency deportees engage in during the process of settlement. The associationism in the labor market and the collective practices of cultural reproduction that take place within deportee enclaves, as well as the “day-to-day negotiations of self-expression within society...the tendency...to associate with other immigrants (Velasco 2005: Escala 2016) in order to face the difficulty of travel and adaptation in new places” are ways in which immigrant populations, deportees in this case, try to impose a “sense of their participation in these enclaves with their own logic of survival and cultural reproduction” (De Certeau 2007). Ortiz & Campos’ study on enclaves looks at indigenous groups; Náhuatl, Huichol, Mixtec and Popoloca groups who use their language in order to communicate with friends, neighbors and co-workers after migrating (2018). Additionally, Olvera and Muela’s study on Texas youth with shared incarceration experience linked to street gangs, shows how deportees’ cultural practices work as articulations of community that facilitate communication and action (2016). In their study, they look at members of the prison gang Tango Blast, and how, after deportation, members of the gang create a social network that recreates esthetic practices, among them, particular hair cut styles and tattoos, which play an important part in creating solidarity and the “reconstruction of a sense of belonging as well as a means of interacting with” destination communities (2016). I will extend this analysis to include deportee communities in Cancún who also tend to associate with one another, reproducing the type of social relationships and cultural practices they engaged in when living in the United States. Interestingly, Ortiz and Campos’ research also explains that trust is established in

immigrant enclaves even between people who don't typically get along in other contexts (Nahuatl and Zapotec women) (2018). An example of this in my research is seen when I interviewed a supervisor in charge of other tourism industry professionals working in three of Cancun airport's four terminals. He still considers himself a *Sureño*, but has started mentoring and training other young deportees as part of his job, some who are *Norteño*<sup>9</sup> gang members—Sureño rivals—who have also been deported. Within this new context of survival, the old dividing lines fade as new alliances are created along different fault lines. Ortiz and Campos suggest that it is within this very context, that of globalization and neoliberal politics that the enclave serves as a frame for understanding any articulations between the local and the global, especially when we look at places that participate in the accumulation of global capitalism through the use of their natural and human resources, as is the case in Cancún (2018).

Cancun's deportee enclaves enjoy access to opportunities in the primary job market because of two factors; their ability to speak English and a cultural proximity to tourist consumers—most of them American. The men and women I interviewed view themselves as outsiders in Cancún, and in Mexico. They see themselves as people who have more in common with the American's who visit Cancún's shores than with the Mexican's they live next door to. Given the amount of disparity that exists in Cancún, the growing chasm between the opulence of the hotel zone and the extreme poverty on display just a few blocks away, there is a lot of insecurity for people on the outskirts. Deportees, regardless of their status as intermediaries between the primary and secondary markets, between locals and tourists, still live with increased levels of precarity in Mexico. Danger and precarity become elements of a life in Mexico for many deportees the moment they set foot in their country of origin.

### **Precarity**

According to Kunst (2015), *precarization* is defined as the “neo-liberal act of governance that governs through social insecurity, flexibility, [and] a continuous fear arising from the loss of stability.”

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<sup>9</sup> A Mexican prison gang with ties to the Nuestra Familia criminal organization with origins in Northern California.

As part of this research study, my findings describe a deportee community that, while having experienced discrimination and violence in other parts of Mexico, now has access to economic and employment opportunities in Cancún that other Mexican nationals do not. This employment, however, within the tourism industry in Cancún, does have one significant element that creates a precarious situation for industry laborers—the fact that most, if not all of the jobs with a potential for higher earnings—comparable to the earnings one would get in the United States—are all commission based. This adds an element of conditionality which is directly tied to the formal and informal conditions placed on migrant labor by institutional actors as well as a migrant’s own ability to make a sale, to connect with tourists and gain their trust—to effectively get them to buy in to their products (Krissman 2005). Deportees are thus at the mercy of a sometimes-unforgiving market, one with peaks and valleys of tourist activity—seasons of plenty and seasons of want. As Nik Theodore suggests, these “regimes of precarious employment have a number of features including weak regulation and enforcement of worker protections, low wages, poor working conditions and racial segmentation” which contribute to precarity in migrant enclaves (2003). Hotels that offer employment to deportees strictly on a commissioned-based pay scale benefit exponentially from countless hours of free labor. Deportees work odd hours, six or seven days a week, oftentimes going a month or two without pay during the slow season in pursuit of the finite dollar (deportees are paid in dollars, meaning that the exchange rate is often in their favor—one of the few advantages they have over other migrant workers).

Most of the respondents in this study are classified as Outside Personal Contacts (See Table 4), or OPCs as they are known to one another. They are the men and women you meet at the airport as soon as you enter the terminal, those you meet at the street-side kiosks, and the people who approach you in the hotels, the smooth talkers who speak perfect English and try to convince you to attend a time-share presentation in exchange for attractive discounts on tours and amusement



Figure 18 OPCs outside of the mall. Photo by Christian Durán

parks (See Figure 18). My research shows that an OPC ‘s job is to build trust with tourists by relating with them on a linguistic and cultural level. They hone their abilities as intermediaries between the big hotel chains that employ them and the tourists who spend their money while on vacation. Their prospects for a better living increase exponentially as they settle into the rhythm of Cancún. OPCs go so far as to invest some of their own commission in order to entice tourists into attending these presentations (the discounts offered to the client are often subsidized by the OPCs own commission). The reason for this investment? If just one *white* married couple from the United States attends a time-share presentation after being referred by an OPC, that OPC stands to earn up to 500 dollars. If a Black married couple, they could earn up to 150 dollars (David, Personal Communication, July 09, 2018). There is much to be said about the tourism industry in Cancún and its posture toward Black tourists, which are considered less favorable because they “statistically” don’t investment money in time-shares and therefore aren’t worth as much as other potential customers. I also found that Asians and Middle-Eastern travelers are hardly ever approached by OPCs because they are told not to waste their time on people who will most likely not buy a time-share. These are subjects that should be



explored, though I will not be focusing on that in the space of this study. What I will say is that most of the deportees I interviewed disagree with this ideology and claim to actually enjoy the diversity tourists bring to Mexico. They, as David, suggests, “get along with everybody who comes here” (David, Personal Communication, July 09, 2018).

The possibility for significant earnings depends on the sale. There is no safety net for these OPCs if the couple never shows up to the presentation, if, as is most often the case, they are convinced by other OPCs working for a different hotel (sometimes the hotel where they are staying) that if they attend a presentation elsewhere, they are going to be swindled, kidnapped, or even murdered. Gaining the trust of the tourist is an OPCs job and seeding mistrust against other OPCs is also a significant part of their job, it is the nature of competition in this market. In the following sections, I will show how deportees deal with these levels of uncertainty, a result of market fluctuations and unpredictability—things like the Covid-19 virus and its effects on the livelihood of thousands of tourism employees is a prime example.

Guy Standing (2011) calls these types of migrant workers, the *precariat*, a new class of laborers who share a sense that their “labor is instrumental...opportunistic...and precarious.” The people I interviewed in Cancún, however, and perhaps because of their own cosmopolitan and somewhat neoliberal views on success, do not blame the industry or their employers for this precarity. Instead, they expressed a constant desire for self-improvement (many listened to motivational speakers and self-help gurus every morning before going to work). They want to *do better* and they see, on the horizon, that economic achievement beyond what they could have hoped for in the United States, is possible for them in Cancún.

## Chapter 5

### *Personal narratives and the complexities of reintegration*

#### *A Forced Return and a Failed Repatriation*

I will, in this section, look at the personal narratives of several deportees in relation to the practices of sending and receiving states to show how (1) migrants creatively navigate hardships upon arriving in Mexico and (2) how they eventually come to the decision to move to Cancún in order to pursue new economic opportunities. In looking at these personal narratives, we will learn about the pitfalls of a return migration and see how these motivate mobility, either by presenting challenges or opening the door to opportunity. Through these narratives, we might also begin to see the fault lines within Mexican institutions and analyze how ill-prepared they are in settling and integrating these citizens back into the country.

When David was deported, he didn't have a plan. He was born in Torreon, Coahuila and while he still has family members living and working in that town, he tells me that reaching out to them when he was deported was not an option since he had left at such an early age and built a life in the United States without keeping in touch with that part of his family. His mother and siblings still lived in Santa Ana, California, and he had just become a father. These familial ties prompted him to stay in Tijuana, Mexico—a place worlds away from the life he had up until that moment, albeit only a few hours away from the place he had always called *home*. He was able to find a job at a resort in Ensenada because he spoke English. He was introduced to this job opportunity by an uncle in Rosarito who had been prompted to help David by David's mother, who made a phone call, asking her family for help. He stayed with his uncle and aunt, but the stigma associated with deportation reared its head as soon as he moved in. It came across in conversations his aunt would have with him about how he had to change his life around, that he had to stop being “bad”. He would overhear his

aunt advising her son not to hang out with her nephew, saying, “See son, that’s why you should always behave” (David, Personal Communication July 09, 2018).

During the interview, David recounts how the stigma he experienced extended beyond his family, but even in the encounters he had with police officers in Tijuana who would extort him on a weekly basis for not having proper documentation and how this harassment culminated in a terrifying incident at his place of employment. The resort where David worked, without his knowledge, was owned and operated by a member of a drug cartel. One day, while David was at work, the Mexican Marines showed up and arrested every employee for questioning. Based on his appearance and his charismatic disposition, David was well-known at the resort and people always referred to him by his nickname—one that could easily be misconstrued to have significance within the world of organized crime. His tattoos and shaved head did not help his case. It was, therefore, assumed that he was involved with the drug cartel that ran the resort. This led to regular visits from investigators and police officers at his home. All this pressure escalated until one day, David woke up with the barrel of a gun pressed into his mouth. He was kidnapped from his home by military personnel, interrogated and tortured for two days, only to be released into the street wearing nothing but his underwear. He was subsequently monitored by local and federal authorities. What ensued adds to David’s harrowing experience and sets off his migration journey into Mexico’s interior. David explains:

*Well, the thing was, that when that went down with the cartels in Ensenada, I was actually already saying goodbye to my family because I thought that I was going to get killed. And when they gave me the opportunity, that they gave me a few seconds, I was afraid that they were going to come back. I called straight up to my family, and I tell them, ‘Where else can I go?’ They told me, ‘Where you were born, Durango!’ I left everything. I left a car, I left everything inside the house. I left everything behind...I had to run from them, or else I was going to get killed (David, Personal Communication, July 09, 2018).*

Other respondent’s shared similar experiences, stories of close calls with criminal organizations, of constant harassment from authorities. In this sense, a community of deportees as a support network becomes increasingly important and necessary. Olvera and Muela’s study details how these alternative

networks resist a society that is both foreign and hostile. The possibility of finding a sense of belonging in a community of deportees, helps these force migrants resist the drugs as well as the offers of conscription by criminal organizations. As Olvera and Muela state, “these economies of resistance are alternatives for material survival from the margins, we must draw attention to the fact that they also generate other types of incentives linked to values such as solidarity, collective work, critical awareness and a sense of belonging” (2016). Initially, though, respondents who had yet to discover this community in Cancún shared a sense of dread and desperation as they did not have a plan of action as soon as they arrived in Mexico. Lorena, a 25-year-old deportee who was born in Veracruz, but moved to Houston at the age of two, remembers thinking:

*I didn't know anything...I just knew I was scared because everybody, literally, when you are crossing the border, people already know why you are crossing the border and especially when they see an immigration officer...everybody is staring at you...I called my dad, my dad was like, 'Don't do anything, don't talk to anybody, because they are going to know you are coming from the states...I had dollars...I didn't even want to buy anything. I didn't want them to know I had dollars...Like, I literally felt like in the movies, like, when Mexicans are coming to the States and they don't know anyone and they don't speak the language and I was like, it's the opposite, we don't speak the language, we don't know anything about...here (Lorena, Personal Communication, July 09, 2018).*

This level of disorientation in and unfamiliarity with Mexico is shared by all of the respondents in this study and demonstrates the levels of danger that deportees report feeling as soon as they cross the border into Mexico. Carlos, a 31-year-old respondent from Puebla shared a similar experience as he recalls how:

*[It] was scary bro...I realized that I was going to come back to a place that I had no idea of. I mean, I was born here and everything, but everything I learned...I learned over there...my way of thinking...of doing things...I said, 'Alright, you're going back to Mexico...What am I going to do? How am I going to survive? Where am I going to work?' So, at the end...I remember [telling the judge], 'Is there any way you can send me to another planet? Because where you are sending me, I don't know nothing.' It sounds funny, and people laugh when I said it, 'Send me to the moon, Mars. I'll be happy there because I might be able to see some Americans there' (Carlos, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019).*

This hyperbolic plea, to be sent to another planet or to a foreign country as opposed to being deported is a reaction to removal that was shared by another deportee, Nicolas, a 42-year-old deportee from

Santa Ana, California. Many of the deportees included in this study share similar experiences of incarceration and deportation (See Table 5).

### Respondent Deportation Experience

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gang Involvement</i>	<i>Incarceration</i>	<i>Deported/Voluntary Removal</i>	<i>Deportation(s)</i>
Alex	Chihuahua	Yes	Yes	1
Christopher	Puebla	Yes	No	1
David	Torreon	Yes	Yes	1
German*	El Salvador	No	No	N/A
Hugo	Mexico City	Yes	Yes	1
Lorena	Veracruz	Yes	No	1
Marco	Veracruz	Yes	Yes	1
Miguel	Sinaloa	Yes	Yes	1
Nicolas	Guerrero	Yes	Yes	3
Toribio	Sinaloa	Yes	Yes	1
Valerie	Mexicali	No	No	3

Table 5 Incarceration and deportation

Nicolas is a *Sureño*<sup>10</sup> living and working in Cancún’s tourism industry. He shared with me an interchange between the judge and himself during his removal proceedings:

*It’s like this, like I told the judge. When I was trying to fight for my papers and they were trying to deport me. I said, ‘It’s like you judge, sending someone that’s lived all their life right here, to England. They might know all their language, but that’s about it. I might know how to speak Spanish, but you’re sending me to a foreign country. I don’t have no one. I don’t have nobody. It’s that simple.*

Aside from the very real dangers of being an outsider in a place like Tijuana, and the initial vertigo of being in an unfamiliar place without a plan, there are often obstacles to mobility that must be

<sup>10</sup> Mexican prison gang in Southern California with strong ties to the Mexican Mafia.

negotiated in order to find a place to settle after deportation. Valerie, a respondent who spent most of her life living on the US/Mexican border, grew up in the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo area and had to decide what she was going to do after deportation, whether to stay close to home and family, or take her chances in the interior. When crossing the border was much easier, Valerie became a transnational and transborder resident. She would often cross the border to party with friends and just finesse her way back into the U.S. by behaving and claiming to be a U.S. citizen. After deportation, she decided to try to make it on the border in order to stay close to her children. She took into account her own employment history as an exotic dancer and contemplated whether that would be a viable option in Mexico. “I’m overweight,” she stated during our interview, thinking that she wouldn’t be a very good candidate for that profession:

*I’ll probably become a prostitute. Because in Mexico there is no such thing as just stripping, as just being an exotic dancer. There’s no such thing here. You are an exotic dancer and a prostitute. That’s it. So, I have to weigh out my options and if I was able to handle myself for the first three months it was because money was coming in...Not to mention my family was helping me out through the whole time. My sister Tania, my mom were there for me and have always been there for me (Valerie, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018).*

Even deportees who, as a result of their education, professional development and experience in the U.S., have a plan and an objective once they are forcefully returned, still find it difficult to establish a sense of economic continuity when back in their country of origin. For Valerie, the family ties she had in the United States helped soften the blow of deportation, but even their help proved to be detrimental in Laredo, Mexico. Valerie’s experience in Mexico was fraught with danger and precariousness, danger brought about by the help she was receiving from her family in the United States, help that made her stand out in an impoverished community. I will discuss my findings further when I discuss the dangers and precariousness inherent in a return to Mexico as disclosed by the respondents of my study.

I also interviewed Hugo, a 45-year-old respondent from Oaxaca who migrated to Los Angeles in 1987. He moved to Seattle, Washington at the age of 17 where he became an entrepreneur, selling

restaurant supplies to local businesses in Washington—supplies he acquired through deals he had made over the phone and online with his suppliers in Mexico. Hugo speaks perfect English and he is married to a Navy veteran in the United States. Despite his savvy business acumen and the fact that he had already established a successful business in the United States, he recalls how difficult it was for him to re-establish his already existing business once back in Guadalajara, Mexico because of the change in context, that of him being in Mexico as a deportee:

*My distributors used to send me merchandize to Washington. I wanted to...start a business there. Or at least send merchandize to Los Angeles from Guadalajara. But I couldn't because they didn't know me. I mean, they knew me over the phone, but when I was there in person and said, I am the person who you've been dealing with, the one you've been sending merchandize to...they didn't trust me...I went and looked online for the companies who sent me merchandize...and I went to meet with them. I told them, 'I am Hugo, I am the one you've been sending the pots and pans to.' But I...couldn't convince them. I mean, they would sell to me, but they didn't trust me so they didn't give me the prices they gave me before over the phone. I told them, 'Look, open up your web-page and look for me.' But I saw it in their faces that they didn't believe me. I couldn't start my business. I was there for a year in Guadalajara. They offered me a job as a waiter, but I felt discouraged, so I didn't try any longer. I moved to Oaxaca (Hugo, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018).*

Lorena was deported after her child was physically abused at an ex-boyfriend's house. She had let the child's father take care of him for a few days while she visited her sick mother in the hospital, but after picking him up, noticed that the child was not behaving normally. Lorena was undocumented and did not get the best representation in court and through a series of unfortunate events, she was charged with the endangerment of a child and deported. She returned to Veracruz after deportation and recounts how her aunt suggested she move to Cancún in order to get a job simply because she spoke English. Her aunt tapped into her own social networks in order to help her niece, who, in turn, made the decision to move to Cancún after not being able to find employment in Veracruz:

*So, it was like, my tía, she has a friend...And she was like, 'I have a nephew over there and I heard he's doing good. I'm going to contact him and see if he has anything for you, or if he knows somebody, you know? Spread the word.' And...he told me to contact him and whatever. So, I contact him and he was like, 'Yeah, you speak English?' and I was like, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Well, come to the office.' So, I go and it was a call-center, you know for the vacations and stuff. They gave me the interview and basically, I was hired and the next day, I started working. Like, I got here on a Saturday, on*

*Monday I went to the interview and Tuesday, I was working* (Lorena, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019).

The decision to move to Cancún isn't always instinctual and there are several factors that play a part in that internal migration after deportation. Calculations are made by the deportee, and considerations are made regarding the social and transnational networks that they are tapped into. Additionally, the recruiting practices of big companies in Cancún affect the decision making processes of deportees throughout Mexico. As Sørensen & Gammeltoft-Hansen (2013) have noted:

*We assume that human mobility requires knowledge, skills, time and financial investments—assets that individual migrants often lack. The prospective migrant takes the decision to move or not, depending, among other things on (particular) information of political, social and economic conditions in the country of origin, entrance regulations in the country of destination, and access to transnational social networks and supportive products and services along the spatial migrant trajectory.*

My research has found that deportees who've managed to secure employment in Cancún become intermediaries in the recruiting and hiring process of other deportees who migrate internally to Cancún. Fred Krissman (2005), in his work, has pointed to the importance of intermediaries in the development of migrant networks and the facilitation of migrant flows, especially in terms of selectivity, temporality and direction. The intermediaries who work for the big hotel chains in Cancún have begun to recruit other deportees by tapping into their own social networks. Through the interviews I've conducted, I have even spoken with deportees who were informally recruited while still serving time in prison (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019). For the purposes of this study, I am including the narrative of German, a 46-year-old deportee who was born in El Salvador but raised in Mexico until the age of eight. Despite the fact that he is not a Mexican National, his narrative demonstrates how the recruiting practices of tourist industry professionals are tailored and aimed at recruiting English speakers at the border, places where deportees and transnational subjects are found. German describes how he and his siblings moved to Indio, California and after living there for nearly 30 years, he made the decision to move to Cancún. German's story is particular in the sense that he was not deported. He, a business owner in the high desert, had recently gone through a divorce



and was spending a few days in Tijuana with his brother and nephews when they were approached by a stranger on the beach who had heard them speaking English. German recounts how a this man approached them and asked:

*'Hey guys, do you guys speak English? We are looking for speak English people, come over to Los Cabos, work over at the time-share, have you guys heard about time-share?' 'Yeab,' I said, 'they pushed me into it.' 'Well, this is going to be here in Mexico, come on.' I was already divorced, you know? I thought, 'You know what? I'm going to give it a try.' They were like, 'Hey, we are going to pay you guys breakfast.' This was at a hotel, it's a resort...They gave me the full speech and everything. 'We are going to pay you housing, we are going to pay you the flight tickets, and this and that.' And I'm all like, 'Wow, sounds good.'...So, I said, 'You know what? I'm going to try it. I'm going to give it a try. So, I moved to Cabo (German, Personal Communication, July 06, 2019).*

The person who approached German in Tijuana was demonstrating recruiting strategies that are becoming more common amongst managers, many of them deportees and returnees themselves, who are traveling to places like Ensenada, Tijuana, Rosarito and other border towns looking for English speaking deportees to come and work in Mexico's resorts. Ruben Hernandez-Leon, writing about the Migration Industry notes that, "In some cases, in-group membership offers the chance to commodify solidarity." In this case, both deportees and deported recruiters "commercialize the solidarity they share," in this case as Chicax deportees, in order to use their position in a kinship, village, or "coethnic network—and the trust that comes with it—for personal monetary gain" (Hernandez-Leon 2013; also see Spaan 1994). Before finding their way to Cancún, and even in the rural parts of Mexico, deportee's cultural and social capital is often used to gain employment and that human capital that they carry with them is exploited. At different levels, employers find ways of capitalizing on this experience, either by putting people in middle management positions or by tasking them with duties (among them translation) that go above and beyond the requirements of the job without proper compensation.

In an interview with David, he briefly summarized for me the many different jobs he held in Mexico and how his social and cultural capital as a deportee helped to facilitate the internal migrations he made to different regions of the country prior to moving to Cancún:

*I started working in a factory for pants...making like, Levi's and Arizona [jeans]...That was an ok job, not that hard. Then, like I said, salaries are really, really, really low here in Mexico. I left that job and I started to work in the fields, planting tomato. So, I really went down to my roots in Mexico to actually know what it was to plant a tomato. So, I went to another factory, we were working for Ralph Lauren and we were working for Tommy and we were working for GAP and that was another type of job (David, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018).*

In many of these positions, David served as a translator and a go-to person when managers from the United States visited the plants in Mexico. The work was heavy and exploitative. However, David saw the potential for better wages because of his bilingualism. When I asked him how he came to the decision of moving to Cancún, David explained that it was his father's idea. You see, his father-in-law had been living in Cancún and had visited their home in Durango where David lived with his wife and his recently deported father. David remembers:

*They were telling me, 'What I [was] doing in the rancho,' that I should 'go to Cancún.' But the main thing about Cancún was that it was my dad's, what's it called, like dream to go live over there. So, my dad was putting that in my mind, putting that in my mind. That, 'let's get on our feet, let's go to Cancún, we're going to make a better living over there based on we're both bilingual.' My father was bilingual too (David, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018).*

David's father had been deported a few years after his son because of a DUI and had fallen into a deep depression which led to alcohol abuse, culminating in a fatal stroke that took his life before he was able to accomplish his dream of moving to Cancún with his son. He did, however, plant that idea in his son's head and that is how David eventually made it to Cancún.

For other deportees, like Hugo, the entrepreneur from Washington who was unable to re-establish his business after failing to convince his Mexican suppliers that he was the same client who bought from them in the states, he was motivated by that entrepreneurial spirit when he decided to open a small restaurant out of his home in Oaxaca. He named this restaurant "Little In-N-Out," and sold hot dogs and hamburgers to people in his new-found community. He confesses that he had never operated a restaurant before, but that he worked in plenty of them and believed he could make the business work. For a while, things were going well. That is, until his neighbors began to complain about the constant smoke his restaurant was generating. Hugo was forced to close the restaurant.

However, right before he closed shop, Hugo had a chance encounter with another deportee who had been visiting family in Oaxaca. This deportee had already been working in the tourism industry in Cancún and offered Hugo an alternative to the life he was living in rural Mexico. Hugo recalls that:

*A client of mine from Cancún came to the restaurant and told me there was money to be made here in Cancún. He asked if I spoke English and I said, 'Yes!' So, he asked if he could order in English and I said, 'Of course brother!' He ordered in English and he said, 'Bro, if you speak English, why don't you go to Cancún? You could make more money there.' But in that moment, I hadn't thought about coming to Cancún. It wasn't until I started having problems with my neighbor that I said, 'Well, where should I go?' So, I got the idea to come to Cancún. I got here, I asked where the hotel zone was. They said, 'Take route 1 or route 2 (See Figure 19), go to the hotel zone.'...The first hotel I saw was the Holiday Inn, I went in...asked for an application. I filled it out, turned it in, got an interview. They asked if I spoke English. I told them I was coming from the United States and they said, 'Boom! you got a job' (Hugo, Personal Communication, July 08, 2018).*

Hugo is nearly fifty-years-old. In Mexico, this can sometimes be a hurdle to employment for someone



Figure 19 Bus routes that feed into the hotel zone. Photo by Christian Durán

who is trying to find employment.

According to the Association against Employment and Workplace Discrimination by Age or Gender in Mexico, 55% of private and public sector companies post, as a requirement for employment, that prospective candidates be, at the

most, 35 years of age. Additionally, only 10% of these companies even consider applicants with a maximum age between 48 and 50 (Alcantara 2017). He is, as I am, surprised at the ease with which he was able to find employment in Cancún's tourism industry. A high demand for intermediaries in that industry has created an extra-ordinary opportunity for deportees regardless of age.

Berg and Tamagno (2013) have noted in their contributing chapter to *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration*, that, "as a human phenomenon and a global process, international migration flows appear, disappear, and re-appear over time in space according to

numerous circumstances.’ I argue that this is also the case when we consider internal migration within Mexico from rural towns to more cosmopolitan places like Cancún with its direct link to the US and other *first-world* economies (2013). Migrants, after all, will continue to migrate anywhere in the world as long as there is a demand for their labor. Given these migrant’s hardship when returning to Mexico, and the lack of assistance they receive from the Mexican government, my research has found that deportees are having to creatively maneuver a return, either by tapping into their own social networks and/or being able to seize upon opportunities for employment and migration when they arise. Either way, many are making their way to Cancún in search of economic opportunity.

### **Internal Migration: Road to Paradise**

As stated previously, deportees don’t often have a plan when they are forcefully returned to Mexico. Alex (43) from Chihuahua, when asked if he had a plan after deportation responded by simply saying, “I didn’t know about the life. I really didn’t speak Spanish, you know? I started learning. I still don’t know a lot of words in Spanish, it’s kind of hard... I live out here by myself” (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07 2019). Alex has no family members living in Mexico. His daughter, a 22-year-old college student in California, is the only family he can really count on. Aside from that, he is on his own in Mexico and has had to learn to navigate a return without any family networks to support him. Alex moved to Cancún after an acquaintance suggested that he would have a brighter future there. He had met this person after being deported. This person, another deportee, counted on more economic and social capital than Alex and had secured a house in a nicer area of Cancún. As a result of their connection as deportees who shared a similar experience of removal from the United States after a long residence there, this man offered Alex a place to stay in Cancún so that he could get situated. Alex recalls that his friend:

*Called [me] when I was in Parral, Chihuahua... And he was like, “You want to come over here and work? A lot of people speak English over here.” So, I saved up a little bit of money and then I lived with him when I came here, so I didn’t pay a lot of rent when I came here. But I was living like, in a rich area, a little rich... They got money, you know. It’s like a family. But I didn’t want to live*

*there, because I wasn't used to it. From there, I moved here, actually. I used to live right up the street. Actually, I used to call it 'the shack' (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019).*

Either at the behest of family members, friends, or chance encounters with other deportees along the migrant road, the interviews that make up the bulk of my research show that deportees are making their way to Cancún using whatever tools they have at their disposal. Perhaps it is the promise of a better life that drives many to make that trip. Or perhaps it is a way to reconnect with something familiar that makes Cancún attractive to this particular group of people. Before Hugo had to close shop in his “Little In-N-Out” venture, he had sold his business in the U.S. and bid farewell to the life he had there. Before a fellow deportee suggested that he move to Cancún, Hugo had been seeing a therapist for several months. In these sessions, Hugo was diagnosed with severe depression. He admitted that he couldn't help but think about the life he left behind in the United States. He remembers how, “[I] cried, [I] was angry and treated everyone and everything badly because I couldn't do anything here!” In Hugo's case, the economic capital he had after the sale of his business and the relationship he maintains, to this day, with his wife, a retired Navy officer in Seattle, has been instrumental in facilitating his movement throughout Mexico and eventually to Cancún.

Similarly, Nicolas, the 42-year-old *Sureño*<sup>11</sup> from Santa Ana, California who tried, on several occasions to cross back over the border into California, his family has helped support his settlement in Mexico. Nicolas's mother purchased a ticket for him to go live in Zihuatanejo, where she has a home. He decided not to stay there long as he was having a really hard time finding employment. Instead, Nicolas opted to move to Cancún and, again, his family was able to help him with that passage (Nicolas, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019). These avenues are opened to deportees either by the capital they carry over with them after deportation, or through the avenues for migration that

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<sup>11</sup> Mexican prison gang in Southern California with strong ties to the Mexican Mafia.

companies and other migrants are already creating. One thing, however, is getting to Cancún and quite another is finding employment.

I asked Alex how one would go about finding work in Cancún, and he explained that most of the job postings are online, on sites like Facebook, and recruiters fish for potential employees through these sites and the social networks that are already in existence there. If someone is looking for work, they will receive a direct message from companies who troll these websites for interested candidates (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019). I asked him what the likelihood is of securing employment if you speak English, and he, as a manager who is in charge of the hiring process, answers that it is in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. That you will most likely get a job, “real quick!” It is just a matter of whether or not you can perform, if you can sell yourself to the tourist. But the opportunity is there, Alex assures me.

“Let him build a wall!” Alex says when talking about Donald Trump, “we’re here anyway. We are working for dollars. And we know a lot of people getting deported, we know that. We know because we see it, we see it first-hand. We know because they pull-up here!” (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019). More and more, deportees are ending up in Cancún, and like Alex, they are becoming intermediaries not only to the tourists they serve, but also to other deportees who are looking for work in Mexico. Migration intermediaries, as agents of the hotels operating in the zone, are facilitating this movement by offering would be employees at border towns, paid travel and lodging in order to get them to Cancún. And as many of these men and women embark on this journey, not as atomized individuals, but as “members of families, households, and sometimes larger communities, social groupings that allow for *collective* strategies, which at times may dovetail with those of individuals and at other times be at odds with them” (Massey 2003). The fact that deportees are separated from their families by an increasingly impenetrable border, makes Cancún’s economic and

socio-cultural proximity to the United States a significant motivator for internal migration away from the US/Mexican border and other rural places within Mexico into this cosmopolitan beachside town.

The physical dangers existent in other parts of Mexico that do not have direct access to touristic sites as economic generators, act as push factors as well. For example, Marco, a 29-year-old deportee who moved from Veracruz to Cancún after a brutal machete attack at the hands of a cartel mob, recalls his perilous return to Mexico. He had been working at a petroleum plant in 2016 when, minutes after his shift ended, the plant exploded, reportedly killing three people—though Marco assures me that figure was really in the hundreds. After this tragedy, Marco was recruited by a group of *Huachicoleros*<sup>12</sup> who worked for a local family with ties to the PRI. His job was to help steal motor fuel from state operated pipelines. Things got so bad that he was looking for a way out.

Marco had an aunt and uncle who lived in Cancún, and when they traveled to Veracruz to meet this nephew of theirs who had left as a young child to the United States and had finally come *home*, they asked him, “*Mijo, do you want to work?*” to which Marco responded, “Hell yeah, I’m sick and tired of being locked up over here. I don’t want to be here!” After this exchange, Marco’s aunt suggested, “Look *mijo*, over there in Cancún, if you speak English, they’ll give you work. And there’s plenty of work, of all kinds. What I can do is offer you a place to stay in my home for a bit, so that you can get settled and save up some cash” (Marco, Personal Communication, July 06, 2019). Marco didn’t take long to decide and he tells me:

*That’s when I spoke to my dad. I said, ‘Hey, look, I want to go with my aunt and work. I want better opportunities. I know how to speak English and I know that that is going to help me out there.’ And so, my aunt came back to Cancún, for about a week, and after that week, she went back to Veracruz to get me and we came back. Here, she gave me a place to stay* (Marco, Personal Statement, July 06, 2019).

The pursuit of opportunities, a job with economic benefits comparable to something in the United States and an affinity for American culture prompt deportees to seek other avenues in Mexico

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<sup>12</sup> A person dedicated to the theft and illicit sale of motor fuel.

after deportation. The allure of the dollar and a proximity to Americans is enticing to those who miss being at home in the United States. Cancún offers a semblance of home. Still others, as Alex suggests:

*Get Stuck [at] the border. Maybe drugs...Call-centers, everywhere. There's so many of us. I mean, the system, the system is taking us out of there, you know? But if they don't see the opportunity that we have, then they will end up dead, or on drugs, whatever, you know? But you cannot reach out to everybody. But, here, there's a lot of work, a lot of work; hotels, call-centers, airport. I mean, I think the best part, that I tell a lot of them, is that the airport is one of the best places because we get the cream of the crop. We get that, we get, hmmm, air conditioning (laughs) (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07 2019).*

The social networks that migrants are able to tap into help in this movement, as do the migration networks that exist as a result of labor demands. However, it is the migrants themselves who must be able to recognize the human capital they carry and see its convertibility into earnings within a global market in order to take the necessary steps toward Cancún, toward a community of people with shared trajectories and origins, an *enclave* of deportees. Many arrive at this conclusion with the help of the social and family networks they maintain after deportation, even those networks that are mobilized as a result of their migration (See Table 6). All of the respondents in my study maintain social relationships with family and friends in the United States. These social networks often serve as sources of social and economic support. When I

last visited David, his sister had come to visit him from the United States. She had been sending money periodically to help her brother in tough situations and had even convinced her husband to sit in through a few time-share presentations in order to help her brother with a few



Figure 20 David giving his sister a tour of Cancún

hundred dollar commission checks (See Figure 20). Additionally, seven of the ten respondents in this



study have family who live and work in Mexico. For some of the respondents in this study, it is at the behest of family in Mexico that they get the idea to move to Cancún to look for work.

### Respondent Family Networks

<i>Name</i>	<i>Married/ Single</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Family in U.S.</i>	<i>Family in Mexico</i>
Alex	Divorced	Yes(US)	Yes	Yes
Christopher	Engaged	No	Yes	No
David	Married	Yes(US)	Yes	Yes
(German*)	Divorced	Yes(US)	Yes	No
Hugo	Married	Yes(US)	Yes	Yes
Lorena	Single	Yes(US)	Yes	No
Marco	Married	No	Yes	Yes
Miguel	Married	Yes(Mex)	Yes	Yes
Nicolas	Married	No	Yes	Yes
Toribio	Married	Yes(US/Mex)	Yes	Yes
Valerie	Single	Yes(US)	Yes	No

Table 6 Migrant family networks in the U.S. and Mexico

### Birds of a Feather: Deportee Enclaves

After returning to Mexico, deportees feel lost and out of place. They reach out to family members in the United States as well as friends, often through social media outlets. Many opt to stay near the border in the hopes of remaining connected to family and friends. For many, the United States is the only home they've known and regardless of being born in Mexico, the country is as foreign to them as an alien planet. My research findings indicate that Cancún, and other tourist places like it, offer a proximity and a semblance to the life many had in the U.S., and deportees take advantage of that fact as they flock to its shores looking for economic opportunity. They form a part of a

community of deportees, an *enclave*, that becomes a support system and an engine for social and cultural reproduction. I asked David why he liked working in Cancún and how it compared to his time living and working in Tijuana, Durango or Zacatecas:

*What I like about it? It's more like, Americanized. It's like, more me. When I'm talking to the homies at the airport, we are talking in English and we're like, reminiscing back in the days. There's stuff like that, and you feel like, how do you say it? It feels like a good bond, it feels more like home (David, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018).*

David had already been in Cancún for four years after spending nearly fifteen back in Mexico. Yet, when asked if he felt Mexican, he answered, “I still feel Americanized, man! It’s just now that I’m in Cancún, that I’m starting to see all these white people, black people, all kinds of people, like back in the days, so you feel comfortable, you know?” (David, Personal Communication, July 07, 2018). As a tourist site, Cancún offers a semblance of the life they had in the United States. The job of an OPC, surrounded by other people who like them, are also Americanized and speak English, becomes more than an employment opportunity, it is also a tool for social and cultural continuity. Hugo had a similar response when asked what he liked about working in Cancún:

*What I like about all this is that my mind tells me, or it feels like I am back in the U.S. Because since everything is in English, and the tourist is American, I mean there are Mexicans, of course, but we serve more American tourists, and Canadians. I feel like, like I am not suffering from depression, like I mentioned before, because my mind thinks that it's still in the United States (Hugo, Personal Communication, July 08, 2018).*

More than just a way to trick the mind into thinking that it is back home, this realization made by deportees about the potential of Cancún making them feel like they are home, demonstrates that Cancún’s economy, so closely linked to the United States, is a direct challenge to the notion that Mexico and the U.S. are separated by hard geographic and cultural borders. In this cosmopolitan site, those borders are blurred, and deportees are noticing. Additionally, these men and women recognize one another in Cancún, and it is not just the fact that they speak English, but that they share common experiences from the United States and throughout their journeys back into Mexico. Valerie, who

had spent some time behind bars, tells me that she and David became friends when she overheard him talking about a *spread*<sup>13</sup> and she recognized the prison term. David responded with:

*'You know what a spread is!?' Nobody knew what it was. 'And how do you make it?' 'Oh, you make it like this and like that, and like that.' And then he's like, [whispering], 'You've been in the Pen, right?' And I'm like, 'This motherfucker!' I'm like, looking. 'That makes two of us!' (Valerie, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019).*

Cancún offers deportees a place where they are surrounded by people with similar backgrounds. I asked Christopher, a 31-year-old deportee from Puebla, if he meets and spends time with a lot of people from Cancún. I wanted to know if, after having come to Mexico, he's made friends with a lot of locals. But he tells me that most of his friends are from "up there," people who were raised in the United States (Christopher, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019). He was raised in New York after his family migrated from Mexico. He remembers growing up with a lot of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Working at the airport gives him an opportunity to be around that community once again, even after being deported without any possibility of returning. Christopher has used his position as an OPC as a tool to reconnect with friends and family back home. Whenever there is a large event going on in Cancún, either for Spring Break, or Carnival, he reaches out to his friends in the states and invites them to come down. He offers them discounts on tours and vacation packages, enticing them to come and visit him. This grants him, at least temporarily, an opportunity to feel close to home. Christopher explains:

*My boy was out here last week. Bro, I had a vacation like I was a tourist...But they come out here and they want to show you that love...I'd tell them, when they want to come out here, 'Yo, don't rent a hotel, stay at my house...All you need is a bed and an air conditioner.' You aren't going to watch t.v. You're pretty much partying all day. 'Good looking out, bro' And they'll come. They rent a car and stay at my house. And that's what I want to do, since I already have my house that my mother-in-law is putting on, I'm going to get my house and I'm going to rent it to tourists (Christopher, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019).*

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<sup>13</sup> An improvised prison recipe. A mashup of several different ingredients.

Cancún becomes not only a place where new friendships are forged with other deportees, but where family relationships are being maintained through the vehicle of tourism. I spoke to Alex about who the people were who made up his circle of friends, who he hung out with, and he stated they are mostly people:

*From work. Mostly from work, because they speak our language, you know? I mean, I'm from Southern California, we like doing Carne Asada. We get together, we BBQ, play oldies, music, you know? And sometimes, there are promoters who are from Mexico, that speak English, they're not used to that. They look at us different when we listen to oldies, they're like, 'What is that?' It's just our style, from California, that we are just listening to oldies and rap...Funk, you know? R&B, or whatever. So, it's just kind of different, or they see us talking, me and you, and somebody's here, they're like, 'What are they talking about?' Or you know, just because we are talking, you know our slang, diferente...This is all you have. That's all you have, or as close as home, you know, that you are going to feel (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019).*

Deportees are creating spaces for themselves in a foreign land, even simply by infusing the place with their own sense of style, their own musical sound, expressing, in Mexico, a Chicax sensibility. Another *Sureño*<sup>14</sup>, Nicolas, shares Alex's affinity for Carne Asada with friends from California. He tells me that a few days before our interview, he had been hanging out with David and some other co-workers:

*David was like, 'We should have a BBQ, so we went, and we are all cool. But all we talked about was work, but we didn't see it as work. We were just talking shit. But that's our life now, we breathe and live work (Alex, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019).*

David and Nicolas come from the same neighborhood and were both members of the same street gang. As members of the same social network, David took it upon himself to help Nicolas reintegrate into society in Cancún, he's taken him under his wing. Nicolas has taken that responsibility onto himself and is doing the same for the people back home, those who are being deported, or are on the verge of deportation. He tells me that:

*We get together, as far as like, you know homies that got deported. Because, like I said, we all get discriminated on, so we can kind of understand each other and stuff like that. And we try to help out. I try to help out homies that just got deported and stuff like that. You know, when they call*

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<sup>14</sup> Mexican prison gang in Southern California with strong ties to the Mexican Mafia.

*me...But I can only do so much and I can only do so much for people who want to change and do something better with their life* (Nicolas, Personal Communication, July 07, 2019).

My research has shown that, as migrants return to Mexico, they look for economic opportunities that get them closer to the life they had in the United States. My findings indicate that, aside from the pursuit of economic benefits, deportees describe feelings of displacement that are mediated by a return to normalcy, a symbolic continuity once they are integrated into the deportee communities in places like Cancún. Cancún offers an approximation to normalcy because of its role as an international hub with direct economic, social and cultural connections to the United States. Deportees travel there and receive help and guidance from other deportees who have already managed to secure employment and housing. They create a social network with origins in spaces of work which extends into a deportees personal life. What my research has shown is that, for many of these deportees, these social relationships create a community of deportees whose distance from family and friends in the United States is ameliorated by the social and cultural ties they are able to establish with other deportees, thereby providing a sense of continuity, even in Cancún. They are a labor force that is simultaneously favored and exploited by large hotel chains offering them work with the potential for greater earnings compared to other migrant workers in the secondary job market. By offering to pay them solely on commissions, however, they take advantage of this workforce. This economic fact contributes to the precarious nature of their employment keeping them from fully accessing the security of primary sector jobs, jobs that are reserved for foreign investors and those at the very top of the tourism industry in Mexico.

As a result of this precarity, deportees rely on one another and the economic, social and professional connections they build, in order to increase their prospects and as a means of social and psychological survival. During times of scarcity, for example, deportees rely on family members to provide aid from the United States, or they invite family members to visit Cancún.

When family members visit Cancún, deportees have learned to capitalize on their presence by having them attend time-share presentations, pretending to be random tourists in order to give their deported relatives the benefit of a commission check. Along with these survival strategies, my findings indicate that deportees look for ways to work with one another in order to make money directly from tourists, either by offering discounted vacation packages to those who do not want to attend time-share presentations, on the side, apart from the formal processes in place from their employers. These informal strategies help to supplement an often irregular flow of capital from their strictly commission based jobs. For example, deportees have access to vacation packages and discounts which they purchase from other providers, sometimes, other deportees. They purchase these tickets at discounted prices and re-sell them to tourists for a profit. This practice, known as *machaca*<sup>15</sup>, provides relief during times of scarcity. Other deportees sell SIM cards to tourists who don't have cellular service in Mexico. They rely on deportee networks in order to expand their markets. A network of deportees is needed for this level of organization and that is a significant benefit of the deportee enclaves that exist in Cancún. However, the realities of a life in Mexico, for many of these deportees, are still, often dangerous and uncertain. Aside from the physical dangers of violence and crime, is the precariousness of an industry that relies on foreign capital which contributes to uncertainty.

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<sup>15</sup> Machaca refers to meat that is shredded or cut up into pieces. Deportees call this practice machaca, because the income they gain from the sale of these tickets is broken up into little pieces here and there.

## Precarity: Always Running

I meet up with David over Carne Asada outside of his home in the outskirts of Cancún, far from the safety of the hotel zone, in a home that is smaller than a two-car garage in California. David has been working in the hotel zone for the past five years. We are both enduring the heat and humidity without the benefit of being near the beach, or of having an air-conditioner. We look out on an empty lot, overgrown with tropical vegetation, littered with other people's trash. There is an occasional pedestrian looking in our direction as we stand in front of this small one-bedroom home (See Figure 21). This is Cancún, though not the Cancún I've seen advertised on television, or in the travel agency websites that asked me for thousands of dollars for the privilege of walking on white sandy beaches, looking on out turquoise waters. We are in a place far removed from that luxury, a place where the



Figure 21 Neighborhood in the periphery. Photo by Christian Durán

majority of the service workers who work tirelessly catering to foreign visitors live. We are both drinking Bohemia's as he reminisces about all the things he misses from his time living in Santa Ana, California, where we both grew up. He is using a

makeshift grill, truly a *rasquache*<sup>16</sup> piece of

art fashioned from an old car rim and some bent rebar. I notice that his neighbor's door knob, which

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<sup>16</sup> Rasquache is a term of Mesoamerican Nahuatl origin which initially had a negative connotation in Mexico as being an attitude that was lower-class, impoverished, and having bad taste. This definition was later redefined by a Mexican and Chicano art movement, *Rasquachismo*, transforming social and economic instabilities into a style and a positive creative attitude.

is only four steps away from David's own front door, has police tape wrapped around it. I ask, and almost immediately wish I hadn't.

David proceeds to tell me that his neighbor had been murdered. His neighbor was a young man of about twenty, from Oaxaca, who had lived in the United States for a while. He had been deported back to Oaxaca, but was not able to settle into his place of origin. He had come to Cancún in search of work and landed a job working for one of the resorts in the hotel zone. This young man had been, according to David, given a small advance to get him on his feet. Apparently, another neighbor, a local, found out in conversation that this young man had acquired five-thousand pesos, the equivalent of about \$250 dollars, as an advance, and after gaining his trust, the neighbor found his way into the young man's home, stabbed and killed him in his bathroom, making off with his money and valuables. I am taken aback by the story, but perhaps more shocking to me was that David had been taking a shower just on the other side of the wall he shared with his neighbor and had heard everything as it happened. He was, himself, getting ready to go to work and heard his neighbor pleading for his life. He admitted that he was too afraid to help, afraid to come outside and check on him, too afraid to even call the police. I shrink back from the door way and he steps in, pushing me toward it, encouraging me to look through the window. I peek through the blinds that have been left open and am immediately taken aback. Blood was spattered on the walls and floors of this small disheveled home. Evidence of a struggle and the sanguineous evidence of extreme violence are on full display here. I ask how long ago this happened. David tells me that it has already been two years since the incident. Two years and the home is still abandoned, the crime scene remains, and David is reminded daily of the risks he runs by working in the hotel zone, of being an outsider, a Chicano worker, who, during the tourist season, makes more money than his neighbors. "What am I supposed to do?" David asks. "I have to keep working to get out of here" (David, Personal Communication, May 28, 2018). Deportees are Mexican nationals, on paper, but they are a people who stand out in



Mexico, whose otherness can be both beneficial when it comes to obtaining employment in Mexico that requires their levels of cosmopolitanism, but can also be a source of danger. This reality is especially dangerous for women.

Valerie, another respondent, was kidnapped and held for ransom in Nuevo Laredo after being deported. She suspects that she became a target because she stood out in Mexico as someone who had lived and still had ties to the United States:

*The thing is that...I was renting a nice house...My family would come every weekend, my daughter, my step-dad and mom. And you know we would have Carne Asada's, cookouts and everything. You know? People misinterpret this. I was working as a teacher at Harman Hall (teaching English), and I had two jobs. I was working at night times, at a hotel. Kind of like a hostel. I was working there, only part time...And during the day, I would work at Harman Hall. I got kidnapped from the hotel. They knew a whole lot about me (Valerie, Personal Communication, July 09, 2019).*

Valerie now stays at home most nights with friends, mostly Mexican women, and is weary of going out. She admits that she is shocked by the fact that she doesn't know too many other women who are deportees and work in the tourism industry. The fact that most workers in Cancún's tourism industry are men may create barriers to integration for women like Valerie who are also part of that community, though face the prospect of gendered violence and must, therefore take additional precautions when associating with men in Mexico. Valerie is highly aware of the dangers that exist for many women in Mexico and although these dangers have a direct impact on her ability to make money (OPC work requires spending a lot of time out on the street )(See Figure 22), traveling to



Figure 22 OPCs outside Coco Bongo. Photo by Christian Durán

pick up tourists from their hotels in the mornings, she has found a way to start a business of her own, selling vacation packages online, through Facebook, often to other deportees who turn a profit by

selling to tourists, *machaca* work. She has found a way to mitigate the precarity of her position as a woman in tourism by conducting most of her business online and by maintaining connections with other deportees, like David, who refer clients to her for a piece of the profit without having to leave her home.

Faced with uncertainty, Deportees continue to work in Cancún as the job market continues to grow. However, the precarity of this type of employment leads many deportees to create alternative methods of making a living, often depending on an informal network of deportees hustling to make it, relying on each other, not only for economic stability, but for a social and psychological respite from the alienation they have felt in Mexico.

I recently spoke to David and asked if the worldwide fears stemming from the outbreak of the Coronavirus had disrupted the tourism industry in Cancún. I was saddened to hear that David had left his job at the airport and had been looking for a job with a fixed salary, no matter how paltry. He wanted to trade the commission work he had been doing for the past five years in exchange for the security of a steady paycheck, regardless of the fact that it didn't promise high returns. Every hotel he applied to wanted to hire him, but as a sales associate, as an OPC. Why wouldn't they hire him for non-OPC work? Is the role of the OPC set aside for deportees who are best equipped to deal with tourists in Cancún? He speaks English and the work of an OPC is tailored toward men and women like David. Widespread global panic about the Coronavirus resulted in a significant drop in flights to Cancún, culminating in airlines contacting tourists at their hotels to tell them that they needed to leave immediately (See Figure 23). Hotels have closed down and thousands of employees have been left without work. With empty beaches and police drones keeping everyone off the streets, this once thriving industry is on hold for the foreseeable future. The effects of this virus will be significant, as many of the service workers in Cancún are left at the mercy of the situation, without any help from the major hotels who once benefitted from their labor. It is uncertain how long this is going to last,

or what strategies of survival deportee communities in Cancún are going to implement in order to make it. What is certain, however, is that the industry will continue to rely on this stream of deportee labor and, compared to other employment sectors in Mexico, Cancún continues to be a destination for deportees brimming with promise.



*Figure 23 Last Southwest flight out of Cancún. Riviera Maya News, April 06, 2020.*

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### *Chicanx in Paradise*

“Familia! Welcome to paradise!” David calls out to us as we walk through the terminal. This is the third time that I’ve visited him in the past three years. The first time I visited him, it was only as a friend and a tourist. For the past two years, I’ve come back as a researcher. This time, I bring him a Dodger’s coffee mug, some Dodger’s pens for work, and a Dodger’s jersey he had been asking for since last year. I am here for a second time to conduct interviews and try to make sense of Cancún and the community of deportee’s who live here. But, every interview opens up new avenues of inquiry, new questions. How do people get here? How do they manage to survive? And why, of all places, do they come to Cancún? But as I ask these questions, I think about the questions deportees must ask themselves and the urgency with which they must look for answers when they return to Mexico afraid, persecuted, and alone.

The answers to these questions begin with the varied experiences of each deportee in the United States and in Mexico after deportation. However, once deported, my research has shown that social and family networks are activated in the lives of deportees and the social and cultural capital that they carry become important in determining their internal migrations in Mexico in search of work. The factors that motivate these movements are both personal and external to the deportees who end up in Cancún. Among these factors are;

- 1) The mobilization of social and family networks after deportation;
- 2) The human capital that a deportee possesses;
- 3) Their ability to convert that capital into employment, into a salary; and,
- 4) The creativity with which a deportee overcomes obstacles in the face of a government’s failed response to these migrants (often dependent on issues of class, sex, and even on how they look, all contribute to the experiences described I this study).

Deportees go through a removal process that disrupts their entire lives in the U.S. Their otherness is reified through the process of deportation as they are sent back to a country as foreign to them as the moon. Quite often, they are never recognized as members of the communities they return to in Mexico and this adds to their feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Mexicans see them as criminals, as failed migrants and the state does very little to make their transition easier.

However, global markets in Mexico, and Cancún's tourism industry in particular, require the labor of cosmopolitan workers, those migrants who have gained a familiarity with English and American culture after growing up in the United States. These deportees learn to commercialize that human capital and use it to find work. They are aware of the potential they have to make money in touristic places frequented by Americans and decide to migrate internally within Mexico in search of economic opportunity. This amassing of people in places like Cancún creates communities motivated by economic need, though sustained by social and cultural ties to other deportees. These deportee enclaves benefit from their social and cultural proximity to the tourists visiting Cancún from the US in order to make a living while simultaneously creating bonds with other deportees that provide some level of economic and social security in a place that is thousands of miles away from the only home they've ever known.

A dependence on the service industry and the rise and fall of the tourism trade with its seasons creates job insecurity and precarity for many of these migrants who are learning how to operate through informal markets in order to survive times of scarcity. In places like Cancún, where extreme poverty exists alongside extreme luxury, the latter being reserved only for international travelers who have access to capital and the former being the day-to-day reality of indigenous workers, secondary market laborers, and the deportees who find their way to Cancún who have to navigate the pitfalls and dangers of life in Mexico.

My research has found that these deportees become intermediaries on multiple levels. They are intermediaries between the tourist and the Mexican companies that cater to them, they are intermediaries between the businesses that hire deportees and the new deportees arriving in Cancún, and they continue to be intermediaries between the United States (home) and Mexico (this place that is a place of origin and a place as foreign to them as another planet). This existence, of living in-between, this third-space, produces a community that is also in-between, those deportee enclaves which are sites of integration and survival—places where deportees recreate a semblance of home and a connection with a life that once was.

What will happen when deportation escalates and the internal migration in Mexico of deportees looking for work in places like Cancún grows to the point that it becomes a recognized and frequent phenomenon? As has been suggested in other studies, migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of migration creates the social structures that sustain it (Hugo 1981; Taylor 1986; Massey 1990, Massey, Goldring & Durand 1994; Massey & Zenteno 1999). Will this community grow? What steps will be taken to ensure the successful *re*-integration of a labor force that is needed within the ever-growing globalized industry where borders are constantly being disrupted and transgressed by big business? How will deportees help to shape industry in places like Mexico? Subsequent research in this field will definitely yield interesting data.

The day after I arrive in Cancún, David calls to thank me for the coffee mug. Apparently, a young couple from Los Angeles had flown in to Cancún and saw David drinking from it. This connection they shared, an affinity for the baseball team, sparked a conversation and that conversation led to a successful time-share presentation leading to a sale. David would earn almost six-hundred dollars that week on just one sale, he could breathe easy for another month, his bills would be paid, and he would make enough money that week to organize a Carne Asada welcoming me to the Mayan Riviera for the third time. We would hang out that weekend, drinking beers, eating good food, and

laughing about things we remembered from back in the day and he could sleep easy, at least for that month.

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