The Post-Deportation Desperation and Refunneling of Aspirations of the Mexicans Deported from the United States

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Abstract

This article uses Carling's aspiration/ability model and the social anchoring concept proposed by Grzymala-Kazlowska to explain the post-deportation experience of Mexicans deported from the United States of America. I analyze how deported people's aspirations are shaped by US migration policies and by their families, as well as by local community obligations. The data comes from seven years of longitudinal research in a rural community in Oaxaca. I conclude that under the immobility regime produced by the US for the deported Mexicans, their aspirations of remigration evolve into desperation. Often unable to remigrate to the US, they are stuck in a limbo of desperation until they refunnel their aspirations and anchor them in Mexico. At the same time, they resynchronize their life courses with other community members.

Keywords

aspiration/ability model, deportation, desperation, longitudinal research, Mexican migration, migration aspirations, refunneling, social anchoring

Aspirations in the Age of Deportation and Deterrence

What do people aspire to after they are deported? They often want to go back, especially if they have left behind their families, jobs, and other obligations. In 2010, six in ten deported Mexicans were planning to remigrate to the United States (US).[1] Nicholas De Genova[2] writes that the autonomy of deportation, or autonomy against the "predicament of deportation . . . ensures that state power never has the last word." Other authors claim that a post-deportation remigration shows the "malleability and fragility of mobility regimes in the face of emancipatory and agentic action."[3] In a similar vein, Nancy Hiemstra[4] argues that violent deportations and criminalization of reentry do not deter people from remigration.

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Although a wish to remigrate is common, empirical research shows that not everybody who dreams of remigrating does so.[5] Quantitative research provides varying numbers of people who aspire to remigrate, though a decrease in the percentage of deported people planning to remigrate seems to have become a trend. While in the second wave of the Mexican Border Crossing Study, carried out between 2009 and 2012, only 26 percent of recently deported people declared that they would never remigrate to the US,[6] another study reported that over 60 percent of research participants declared the same in 2016.[7] Do they not aspire to remigrate? Or do they believe that they lack the ability to do so? This article uses qualitative data to explain the aspirations of Mexicans deported from the US, as well as the macro-, meso-, and micro-level barriers to remigration that they encounter.

Nowadays, people deported from the US are likely to be long-term migrants with strong and durable ties to the destination country. US immigration regulations and policies include measures to deter them from attempting to reenter.[8] In the first place, their detention by the US immigration authorities is often violent and the whole deportation process is emotionally and physically challenging.[9] Upon deportation, they receive the reentry bar time, which stipulates for how long they cannot legally remigrate. Criminal convicts can get bans of up to twenty years, and people sentenced in the US for aggravated felony are permanently barred.[10] Deported people, especially with criminal records back in the destination country, are unlikely to get a visa after the bars expire, even if they have close family members in the US.[11] If they decide to remigrate without permission, their "illegal reentry" is handled as a federal crime.[12] If they are all subject to similar deterring policies, that is, reentry bars and possible further deportation, what makes some deported people reenter clandestinely and what prevents others from doing so?

In this article, I use the aspiration/ability model[13] to analyze the data from my longitudinal ethnographic research in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The usefulness of the model, described in the following section, consists in differentiating between aspiration (i.e., a wish to migrate) and ability to migrate, as well as in paying attention to migration abilities of various kinds, immigration policies being an important but not unique barrier to realizing migration aspiration. My analysis will involve not only immigration policies, but also the role of community obligations, of the family, and of individual characteristics in shaping migration abilities. I will explain what affects individuals' decisions to remigrate to the US or to stay in Mexico. In this way, my research aims to contribute to explaining how post-deportation migration and immobility are produced. I will focus on macro-, meso-, and micro-level power relations and explain their role in the post-deportation immigration policing in the country of origin.[14]

In order to understand the dynamics of migration aspirations and abilities, I mobilize the concept of social anchoring.[15] Using within-case analy-

sis[16] of deported individuals who participated in my research, I reconstruct the location (in the US or Mexico) of their important points of reference and belonging ("anchors") and the ways in which these affected their migration aspirations and abilities.

Deportation scholarship, often produced within destination countries, provides scarce information about the deported people who do not remigrate. After deportation, people undertake various forms of mobility and immobility:[17] while some remigrate, others stay in the border cities and wait to cross the border or work (or both), return to their places of origin, or move somewhere else.[18] The question remains, however, of what affects their migration aspirations.

The barriers to post-deportation remigration have not been analyzed comprehensively. Various authors have explained the role of migration control policies that define the ability to migrate,[19] concluding that deported people are often undeterred by violent deportations and reentry bars.[20] Moreover, while the violent experience of deportation may temporarily discourage people from planning their remigration,[21] with the passage of time they may downplay the traumatic aspects of border-crossing[22] and deportation processes, which shows the importance of studying migration aspirations and abilities longitudinally. While the strict border policies limit the ability to remigrate to the US,[23] other aspects, such as strong social ties and place attachment to the US and the family members left behind there,[24] propel it.

However, the literature does not explain why some deported people with strong ties to the US avoid remigration. Other authors have often neglected the role of family obligations back in the country of origin,[25] which are also important in shaping the ability to remigrate post-deportation. A new job can also anchor a deported person back in Mexico.[26] In this article, I propose to integrate macro-level state control policies, meso-level community obligations, and micro-level family obligations and individual characteristics to explain the migration abilities of deported people.

The contribution of this article consists in explaining how the migration aspirations of deported people (1) evolve over time and (2) are shaped by the people's ability to migrate. This article grasps the dynamic aspect of aspirations insofar as it draws upon longitudinal ethnographic research among the deported men and women in their place of origin. Comprehensive understanding of the deported people's migration ability is another contribution of this research. It examines not only immigration regulations, which practically block the opportunity of legal remigration for deported people, but also social relationships that situate deported people within power structures and can affect their migration ability. In particular, I will analyze the role of the family and local obligations in Mexico and the US in defining migration abilities.

I develop my argument over three sections. The first section explains the theoretical framework of the article. I summarize the aspiration/ability model

proposed by Jørgen Carling[27] and propose a minor yet important modification in order to examine migration aspiration and ability and aspirations of other kinds. I also propose to add a third element to the model, that is, anchors that emotionally embed[28] a deported person in the destination country or the country of origin and can shape their aspirations. The second section offers an explanation of my research method: ethnography of a rural community in southern Mexico. This is where I set my agenda for longitudinal post-deportation studies, aiming to understand the intersectionality of the post-deportation experience as well as the dynamics of post-deportation aspirations. The third section begins by reconstructing the migration aspirations of deported men and women in the Mexican rural community. In this "empirical" section, I analyze cases of deported people who remigrate clandestinely and successfully cross the US border; those who are detained and deported upon attempting a reentry; those who aspire to remigrate with documents; and individuals who resign themselves to avoiding future international migration. For those with aspirations of authorized remigration, waiting turns their migration aspirations into desperation (lack of aspirations and a feeling of helplessness). I argue that refunneling of aspirations, understood as imagining for oneself a plan of action alternative to remigration, anchors a deported person in Mexico through work, family life, and community obligations. Refunneling of aspirations makes involuntary immobility[29] bearable and resynchronizes deported individuals with their community. In this section I also argue that refunneled aspirations do not necessarily contradict migration aspirations, as people remigrate after having put down their anchors back in Mexico, for instance by building a house or starting a family. I conclude the article with additional observations about how age, length of migration, gender, and immigration status in the US intersect in determining post-deportation aspirations.

Post-Deportation Anchoring of Aspirations and Abilities

I analyze the experience of people deported to Mexico by juxtaposing their aspirations and abilities, as proposed by Carling[30] and later revisited by Carling and Kerilyn Schewel.[31] Carling[32] defines aspiration as "a belief that migration is preferable to non-migration" and ability as the realization of such a wish. I propose to speak more precisely about migration aspirations and migration ability, so that the analysis can also involve other types of aspirations that people may have (regarding education, work, family, and other issues).

Migration abilities are shaped by various factors, coming from the macro-level (immigration policies), meso-level (community obligations), and micro-level (individual characteristics and family).[33] Immigration policies and their direct and indirect results are an important element shaping the ability to migrate. US immigration policies create an immobility regime[34] for the deported

individuals, which makes authorized remigration practically impossible. Unless they remigrate clandestinely, they remain confined in Mexico.

Moving to the individual level of migration abilities, deported people have already proven an ability to overcome the barriers to migration, since this is a precondition for migration.[35] However, deportation or repetitive deportation can have a deterring effect.[36] The deterring power of the immobility regime consists in a governmentality[37] that affects both the aspirations and individual migration abilities of deported people. I define governmentality as an internalization of regulations and adoption of certain behaviors by the people such that the actual punishment by the authorities becomes unnecessary. In other words, due to governmentality, or "conduct of conduct,"[38] people begin to think and behave as the immobility regime wants them to[39]—by non-remigrating, deported individuals believe that they act in their best interest, as they imagine themselves being deported again.

Migration ability is not only determined by state control, as micro- and meso-level actors also shape it. The families of deported people expect them either to remigrate or to stay in Mexico, a decision that often depends on the individual characteristics of a deported person, such as age and gender. The significant role of the family in shaping the ability to remigrate also consists in the fact that it often finances clandestine border crossings. Meso-level local obligations, related to work and community, also define migration abilities. Therefore, when analyzing post-deportation migration aspirations and abilities, not only the sovereign power of the deporting state must be taken into account, but also the micro-social or capillary[40] forms of power, manifesting, for instance, in family relations or the power of gossip and ridicule that occurs within the local community.

Family and local obligations are "anchors" that emotionally embed the deported person either in the US or Mexico. My theoretical framework, informed by an inductive approach based on longitudinal research, incorporates the concept of social anchoring into the aspiration/ability model. Its author, Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazlowska,[41] defines social anchoring as "the process of searching for footholds that allow individuals to acquire socio-psychological stability and security and function effectively in a new or substantially changed life environment." As deportation is involuntary and often an unplanned return, a deported person's "anchors" are usually located in the territory of the deporting country. The concept of social anchoring has the advantage over the well-established theories of integration insofar as it underlines psychological stability, such as emotional well-being,[42] in the highly transnational context of today's migrations.[43] Family, friends, jobs, education, home, and personal belongings are all "anchors" that may give stability and constitute identity. Deported people's migration aspirations come from a wish to be where their anchors are. However, when they lack the ability to migrate, the migration aspirations of people with "anchors" back in the US turn into desperation.

The visual concept of social anchoring uses the metaphor of unanchoring in one country and putting (some) anchors down in a different country,[44] which facilitates (re)integration. If able to develop anchors back in Mexico, deported individuals may be able to refunnel their aspirations. By refunneling aspirations I understand imagining for oneself a plan of action alternative to remigration. For deported people who have strong migration aspirations but often lack the ability to migrate, refunneling their aspirations means the development of aspirations that do not require remigration.

Refunneling aspirations has an important role for the reintegration of deported people, especially in face-to-face communities with strong social control, where deportation may link to social stigma.[45] If the refunneled aspirations are oriented toward the new place of residence, they may provide an opportunity for social mobility within the community and for counteracting stigma. Refunneled aspirations resynchronize deported people with other community members after the period of "isolation, transition and trauma" that they live.[46] By resynchronization, I mean becoming in time[47] with other community members post-deportation and "catching up" with one's peers, some of whom never migrated themselves. Deported migrants with important anchors, such as family and jobs in the destination country, again invest time and effort into putting down anchors in their hometowns, often at an older age than their Mexican peers, but the resynchronization raises their credibility as community members and diminishes their perception as strangers. The adoption of a life-course approach[48] helps us understand migration aspiration and ability.[49] In this article, I will analyze the roles of education, work, and family in the life courses of deported individuals from the researched community, as well as how deported people transnationally reconstruct their life courses. A longitudinal perspective, described in the following section, provided rich data on the transnational lives of the article's protagonists.

Longitudinal Ethnography of Post-Deportation Aspirations and Abilities

My methodology follows a three-point agenda. First, it takes into account various strategies of post-deportation geographical mobility.[50] Second, it is intersectional and involves various demographic groups, including the people who have been less represented in the research thus far, such as deported women and children. Third, my research is time-informed, guaranteeing a longitudinal perspective on post-deportation conditions.[51]

The research involves a case study of a rural municipality of San Ángel[52] in Lower Mixteca, a region of the state of Oaxaca; this is the place of origin of the men and women who participated in this study. Approximately 2,500 people live in San Ángel. The village has an economy of infra-subsistence; in other

words, "household members cannot possibly survive based on farm production and income alone."[53] Corn agriculture is the main source of jobs. On the plots of land that surround their houses, the villagers often raise poultry and goats. Not all of them work in agriculture, as some engage in construction, the grocery trade, butchery (usually running their business at home), or taxi transport, creating jobs for themselves; however, there is little potential for self-employment in San Ángel. Moreover, there is little public or private investment that would create workplaces in the region.

Like in other Mixtec pueblos, people from San Ángel have for decades been migrating to other places in Mexico and the United States.[54] The main destinations of US migration have been: California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Nebraska, New York, and New Jersey. According to Lilia Solís,[55] a colleague who has also worked in the village, 11 percent of the natives of San Ángel live in other places in Mexico, and 30 percent (about thirteen hundred people) live in the US. They are predominantly unauthorized migrants, some of whom experienced some sort of immigration enforcement upon a failed border crossing or on US territory. However, given that people often reattempt border crossing, it is impossible to estimate how many of them were officially detained, removed, and barred from reentering the US. I knew about thirty-three deported individuals who were in their hometown at some point during my fieldwork.

My ethnography of post-deportation includes various demographic groups at different stages of the life course. During my fieldwork in San Ángel, I carried out participant observation and collected the life histories of thirty-one people (twenty-seven men and four women) who had been deported from the US between 2006 and 2015. Research participants differ in terms of factors such as gender, age of migration, age of deportation, and criminal record in the US. The youngest was deported at the age of sixteen, and the oldest at the age of fifty-seven. The majority of the deported people in San Ángel were men in their thirties. When I exclude from my "sample" the people apprehended and deported during border-crossing attempts, the remaining twenty-five had lived, held jobs, and started families in the US for between six and twenty-five years.

A longitudinal research design made possible the study of life-course changes and evolving migration aspirations and abilities. I have researched the impact of deportation on the community of San Ángel over four periods of fieldwork: in spring and summer 2012, in winter 2013/2014, in spring 2018, and in the fall of 2019, each time revisiting the participants whom I had interviewed previously. Repeated visits to the "field" give a diachronic understanding of change (or the lack thereof) in the lives of the research participants. My longitudinal research allowed me to follow the life courses of the research participants, as some of them remigrated, while others on the contrary became immobile and sometimes anchored in Mexico, refunneling their aspirations.

Aspirations and Abilities after Deportation

Migration Aspiration

Deported people leave behind important anchors in the US that affect their migration aspirations. In my research, seventeen participants had families in the US, and only four were accompanied back to Mexico by at least one family member. Six remigrated after removal, and four did so in order to reunite with their partners and children. For instance, in 2012 I interviewed Andrés, a recently removed twenty-two-year-old man whose deportation separated him from his daughter and partner. By the time I revisited San Ángel in 2013, he was already back in Nebraska and has lived there ever since. Another deportee, Javier, was not as lucky as Andrés. He had lived in the US for twenty-five years, had migrated together with his wife and a small child, and had three more children born in the US. Anticipating the suffering related to family separation, he attempted to remigrate three days after the deportation. He was apprehended, detained for three months, and deported again with a ten-year reentry bar. A month later he tried again, was lucky, and went back to his house in Washington, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested him again. After the immigration judge deported him with an additional ten-year reentry bar, Javier has not attempted to cross the border again, and returned to San Ángel.

Those who—like Javier—give up on trying after unsuccessful attempts at border crossing aspire to transnationally reconstruct their families and negotiate with their partners to follow them to Mexico. However, moving this anchor to San Ángel is often impossible when their partners are unauthorized migrants and their departure for Mexico would result in their own involuntary immobility. Another topic of negotiation is visits of children with US citizenship. Despite such children's legal ability to cross the border in both directions, only one deported person is visited by his US-citizen sons over their school holiday. This is due to various factors: the economic struggles of the left-behind families, mothers' concerns regarding whether the fathers would send the children back to the US, or their new partners' resistance toward any contacts with the deported ex-husbands.

The economic standing of a deported person affects their transnational family relations. All four research participants who remigrated to the US to be with their left-behind families started working as soon as they arrived to contribute to their households' budgets. In comparison, the deported people back in San Ángel experience the same "economic suffering that led to unauthorized migration in the first place."[56] If they had savings, they often spent them before deportation on their immigration attorneys. Their families are now deprived of one earning adult's salary. For instance, the wife of Victor decided not to follow him to Mexico and stayed with their daughter in New York in spite of him asking them to follow him. Post-deportation, Victor re-

ceived alimony letters, but with his modest taxi driver's salary he was not able to provide for his daughter, which led his wife to cut him off. This is when Victor started a new relationship in San Ángel. His wife, unable to maintain her daughter in New York, left her in her mother's care in Mexico. As a legal US resident herself, she then went back to the US. This relationship was no longer an anchor for Victor, and he gave up his migration aspirations, as he was putting anchors back in Mexico, planning for his wedding, and searching for a new job.

Family left behind in the US may be seen as creating the possibility of authorized remigration. Applying for documents through US-citizen family members "is essentially the only way for working-poor Mexicans to migrate with documents."[57] While various deported men and women mentioned looking forward to their underage children applying for documents when they came of age, only two persons, Fidel and Nancy, attempted the procedure of family reunification when still in the US. After deportation, they still kindled migration aspirations.

Fidel migrated to Iowa with his wife Amada in 1996. Their three children, Eneas, Zacarías, and Noemi, were born in the US and are US citizens. In 2010 Fidel was deported following an unsuccessful attempt at regularizing his immigration status as a brother of a US citizen. His nuclear family followed him to Mexico. The couple sent the boys to local schools, but they had difficulties taking up education in Spanish, and Eneas and Zacarías decided to return to Iowa on their own. Fidel and Amada gave up parental rights to his US-citizen brother and sister-in-law, who hosted the boys. Although the couple aspired to remigrate, Fidel preferred authorized migration through the time-consuming, uncertain,[58] and virtually impossible for a deported person[59] process of family reunification with their sons. Two years after deportation, when I first met Fidel, Eneas was fifteen and could not apply for his parents until he was twenty-one. Fidel chose a six-year period of involuntary immobility in Mexico because he believed that remigration to "*el norte* with *papeles*" would secure him and his family better work opportunities and peace of mind. Fidel's post-deportation immobility exemplifies the governmentality that was aimed at the family's future upward social mobility.

Nancy was three in 1995, when her parents took her and her baby brother Cristian to the US. The family settled in Oregon, where the children went to school. At the age of sixteen, the girl suffered the first of several big losses when her mother passed away because of cancer. Her father Pedro, by this time a naturalized US citizen, applied for permanent residency for his family, and the procedure revealed the siblings' unauthorized immigrant status to the authorities. Two years after the death of her mother, Nancy received a deportation order, and her father decided to send her to San Ángel. Cristian eventually followed Nancy, as he was deported himself eight months later. They were both barred from reentry for ten years.

When I first met her in 2012, Nancy had been in Mexico for fourteen months. She was living with Cristian, her grandmother, and three other relatives. This time, Pedro chose to bring his children to the US in accordance with the law instead of organizing an unauthorized border crossing. The family was appealing against the reentry bars, and Nancy was waiting for a consular appointment. Nancy strongly aspired to remigrate to Oregon, as she had all her important anchors there. In 2012 she spoke of her stay in Mexico as instrumental and necessary if she were to remigrate with a permanent residency.

Cristian was sixteen when he was deported and had not yet graduated from high school. Post-deportation, he participated in US online schooling. In 2011 and 2012, he faced difficulties finding a reliable internet connection in San Ángel, so the siblings frequently traveled to Oaxaca City, where he could connect daily. Nancy accompanied Cristian, remarking, "I did the babysitting!" As a woman and an older sister, she took up the role of foster mother and felt responsible for Cristian's education and graduation from high school.

Desperation

Although Nancy wanted to make sure that her brother graduated from high school, in Mexico she gave up her own studies. In 2012 she was making some short-term education plans (a three-month flight-attendant training course in Mexico City) but her long-term dream was to go to college in the US. In the end, she did not do the training and saw her life as unproductive and lacking personal progress. She explained that various obligations hampered her moving out of San Ángel. Most importantly, Pedro decided that a house should be built for Nancy and Cristian in San Ángel and wanted her to personally supervise the project, which anchored the young woman in the village. When we conversed in 2013, three years after her deportation to Mexico, she was unsure whether she would get a waiver for the ten-year reentry bar. Cristian had dropped out of online schooling, and she perceived it as her own failure. However, she understood his insecurity and his belief that pursuing education would ever pay off. They were both living the desperation of failed migration aspirations. In 2013 Nancy told me:

> I almost don't do anything really, anything, and it's because of the same—I don't know what's going to happen to me tomorrow. I try to do something in order to go to school, but I don't know, I'm waiting for a reply telling me, "You're not going to return," or, "Yes, you're going to return," but I don't know what I'm going to do.

Waiting for the reentry bar to be lifted—a hope fueled by their father—put Nancy into a state of uncertainty about the future, as she "remained waiting in limbo for a final decision."[60] After having spent many years in the US, deported

people like Nancy leave their important anchors there. As I explained in the previous section, they kindle their migration aspirations. However, since they lack the ability to migrate, their migration aspirations evolve into desperation.

Nancy's migration aspirations and abilities depended not only on macro-level state power, but also on micro-social forms of power, namely the authority of her father. Her deportation to Mexico and her subsequent immobility enforced Pedro's authority over her life, not only as her father but also as a US citizen, able to travel and work in the US and hence provide economically for the rest of the family. Pedro empowered Nancy to take care of the construction project, but it anchored her in the village, preventing her from pursuing her educational plans in Mexico City. Pedro also managed Nancy's different social roles and expected her to become a foster mother for her brother. Nancy's stay in San Ángel was necessary because of her "babysitting"—her father wanted her to take care of Cristian, making sure that he would not turn to drugs and alcohol as some of his peers in the village had. Pedro continued to appeal against the reentry bar and fueled his children's migration aspirations. At the same time, he hindered their imperative anchoring in Mexico—their taking up of education, work, and family life.

The process by which Nancy lost the ability to remigrate did not occur along a single categorical axis. The identity of the *deportada*, her gender, and her age were all experienced inseparably and led to her personal disempowerment. The factors that contributed to her subordination derived from macro-, meso-, and micro-level social structures: US immigration policy, the community of San Ángel, and gendered family relations.

Despite Fidel's masculine privilege, which empowered him to decide on his family's migration to Mexico following his own deportation, his US-citizen sons felt empowered to return alone to Iowa. Unable to remigrate himself, Fidel thought he had found a solution. Together with Amada and their daughter Noemí, he moved to the northern border of Mexico. They asked Eneas and Zacarías to do the same and go to school in Texas, but the boys refused, fearing another unanchoring migration. After six months of waiting for their sons to come, the couple returned to San Ángel. Amada was pregnant with their fourth child, Hermógenes, who was born in 2011. In 2012, a year and a half after Fidel's deportation, they told me about their suffering and worries about raising the adolescents transnationally. Amada admitted that she regretted having returned and was trying to convince Fidel to attempt an unauthorized migration. However, as Hermógenes was born in Mexico, he was their only non-US-citizen child, and unauthorized migration would mean risking not only the couple's livelihood but also the baby's. Fidel's perseverance to remigrate to the US with a Green Card was causing conflict between the spouses, but he was determined to wait until 2018, when Eneas would petition for them. It was only in 2013 that Fidel consulted a legal advisor who explained to him that he had a ten-year reentry bar, which meant that he would have to

wait at least until 2020 to remigrate to Iowa. Earlier, Fidel had believed that he was not barred, as his deportation was a "voluntary departure." In fact, the family reunification procedure is very time-consuming and—especially following deportation—Fidel's ability to ever remigrate was minimal.

The economic situation contributed to the couple's desperation back in Mexico. Although they tried through different business endeavors after arrival in Mexico, they could not generate enough income to provide appropriately for Eneas and Zacarías. The couple brought new clothes with them from the US and put up a shop but did not have many clients among the villagers, who cannot afford expensive apparel. Then, they tried a car wash, but again the business was unfruitful. When I first met them in February 2012, they were taking care of Fidel's parents' small grocery store, while the elderly couple, themselves legal US residents, were in the US. Despite their dogged efforts, Fidel and Amada could not make enough money to be self-sufficient.

Those who, like Javier, attempted to realize their migration aspirations but were unsuccessful became desperate back in San Ángel. After three deportations that followed twenty-five years in the US, Javier gradually lost contact with his family in Washington. When I first met him in 2012, two years after deportation, he was still waiting for his wife and youngest child to reunite with him in San Ángel. Javier's life was put on hold as he waited for his family to arrive. In 2014, I became apprised that his wife had never come and had stopped answering his phone calls. Although Javier knew about his wife and children only from gossip and was perplexed by them cutting him off, he was still expecting them to come to San Ángel.

Javier had no anchors back in San Ángel. Thirty-nine years old when deported in 2010, he moved into his parents' house. Sharing a household budget with his parents was an economic relief for the deported man. When we conversed in 2018, he felt that at the age of forty-seven he was an adolescent again, living with his recently widowed father, who was now starting a romantic relationship with a neighbor. While before deportation, he was the owner of a house and a car, a husband, and a father of four, back in Mexico, Javier had an uninhabitable house he had never finished and was "single again." He aspired to migrate, but not clandestinely anymore. He was in a desperate limbo. In 2018, he said that he would like his eldest son, a US citizen, to "petition for him," but the young man did not even speak to his father on the phone, still holding a grudge against him after Javier left him when deported. Javier's migration aspiration did not take into account his twenty-year reentry bar, which would render his remigration impossible.

Refunneling of Aspirations

A refunneling of aspirations is a way out of desperation for those unable to pursue their migration aspirations. Refunneling of aspirations does not nec-

essarily mean that these individuals have an intentional plan of action, but rather can consist of unplanned parenthood, getting a job, or finding a vocation. Putting down anchors in San Ángel emotionally embeds the deported people in Mexico. It does not necessarily lead to giving up on migration aspirations, as the deported people can decide to migrate again despite having a job or family in San Ángel.

Starting a family anchors the interviewed people in San Ángel and resynchronizes them with the local community. During my third research trip in spring 2018, I was surprised to learn how Nancy's life had changed. She had got married and had two children. Care obligations and household chores put an end to the desperation deriving from the inability to remigrate. In 2018, she was busy in the new role of a mother and wife, and she could not find time to meet me. We finally met in the fall of 2019, in my subsequent fieldwork period. She came to see me in her own pickup truck. Now a proud mom, she showed me pictures of her daughters and told me about her husband's ambitious plans of becoming a politician. For Nancy, marriage and motherhood were not only anchors, but also ways of becoming independent from her father and achieving upward socioeconomic mobility in San Ángel. She did not pursue her education plans but instead resynchronized her life course with other young women in San Ángel.

For Nancy, Fidel, and Amada, as well as for the "suddenly single" men whose nuclear families did not follow them to Mexico, parenthood is an important anchor in Mexico, as they now become "*padres de familia*" and not merely stigmatized *deportados*. Starting a new relationship post-deportation may be a long process, however. It took Javier nine years to begin a durable relationship. When I met him in 2019, his life was not on hold anymore, as he was living together with a woman from San Ángel.

For deported men, the family anchor back in Mexico does not necessarily inhibit migration aspirations. The case of Juan exemplifies a prolonged migration aspiration. Juan was deported twice. After the first deportation, he quickly remigrated to the US, only going to San Ángel after he had been detained and deported for the second time in 2006 with a ten-year reentry bar. Aged twenty-seven, he started a family in San Ángel and had two children. Work was another anchor back in Mexico, as together with his wife, he ran a small food business and worked every day selling ice cream on the streets of San Ángel and neighboring towns. However, they could not secure financial stability. Juan compared his wage in Washington with his profits in San Ángel, saying, "What you earn there [in Washington] in one day, you earn here in ten days or eight working days . . . That's the disadvantage." In 2012, Juan told me that he wanted to remigrate to the US but was waiting for the ten-year reentry bar to expire first. In 2013, I met his wife again; she was selling ice cream over the main road in San Ángel. Relieved, she told me that it had not been long

since Juan had safely arrived at his US destination. By 2018, she and their two children had joined him, crossing clandestinely. Juan did not wait until the end of his reentry bar, because he knew that he had no legal ability to migrate as a twice-deported "criminal alien" who aspired to migrate with his family. Instead, he was able to migrate when his brother, himself a migrant, offered to support him financially, and when trusted "coyotes" assured him it was a safe moment to cross.

For women, on the contrary, starting a family and care obligations related to motherhood have a detrimental effect on their individual migration abilities. This was the case for Nancy, who gave up on her migration aspiration. This change was also caused by her chances of a successful family reunification. Although US citizens can apply for adult sons and daughters or married children,[61] this process is more time-consuming than applying for an underaged and single child. Nancy's reentry bar came to an end in 2020, but as an adult and a mother of Mexican citizens, the chances of her petition being successful have disappeared.

Post-deportation anchoring related to work is not a one-way process that leads to job security in Mexico. For instance, Javier tried different jobs and often did not work for long. For the greater part of the nine years that he spent in San Ángel after deportation, he depended on occasional jobs when builders or landowners called for help. When he worked, he earned 120 pesos (US$9 in 2012) a day. Between 2014 and 2017, when his allied political party was in power, he worked as a municipal policeman. Since he lost that job, he has been working in agriculture, helping his father who owns a small plot of land.

Securing financial stability—if possible at all—is slow, as was the case for Pancho and Tinaco, brothers deported from Oregon after several criminal convictions. The brothers tried different businesses, just like Fidel and Amada had. They bought a tortilla production lane, but as they did not open consistently every morning, they soon lost their clients. Later, Pancho bought a motorcycle taxi and used it until it broke down. In 2018, the brothers took care of cattle that they had bought and worked on a rented plot of land. In Oregon, Pancho and Tinaco's livelihood was street crime; back in San Ángel they learned agriculture as adults. Their lives resynchronized with the lives of *campesinos* and depended on the schedule of fallowing, planting, rising, and harvesting corn twice a year, according to the traditional, pre-Colombian temporality.[62] Trying different jobs within the modest economy of rural San Ángel is a testimony to agency and resilience in refunneling post-deportation aspirations.

When I returned to San Ángel in 2013, I was happy to see that Fidel had become the successful owner of a tire workshop and was always busy tending to his clients. Additionally, he had community obligations, as he was the

coach for a female football team, in which Amada played. He and Amada also had social obligations as active members of a local church. Putting down anchors refunneled their aspirations and made their migration aspirations less relevant.

Spiritual vocation, together with work, is another local obligation that anchors deported people in San Ángel. Three men, Fidel, Jácobo, and Eduardo, assumed important spiritual roles in San Ángel. Fidel and Jácobo became active members of the Catholic Church, educating children and organizing community events. Active community engagement is crucial for the congregation's survival, because San Ángel is not a parish, and the priest visits the town only on the day of the mass. Eduardo, who is a Protestant, got married after deportation and started a family with a local pastor, Yaritza. He then became the leader of the congregation and began supporting local families and proselytizing with his wife. He declared no migration aspirations.

Eduardo was retroactively deported in 2015 in relation to a drunk driving offence committed ten years before. When I interviewed him, three years after his deportation to Mexico, he interpreted his deportation as divine providence and explained that God chose deportation for him, as he otherwise would not have come to Mexico:

> I have understood that it was the time to come [to Mexico]. And that I had to give up on [appealing against the deportation order]. God knew that it was hard for me to leave the United States. It was hard for me. [When I came,] I told God that I understood his mystery. I said, "Thank you, because that made me understand . . . As a human being, I have a hard time leaving luxuries. But I know that now my calling is another."

Refunneling post-deportation aspirations into a spiritual vocation serves a few important goals. First, spiritual vocation can be a coping strategy and a rationalization of deportation—an explanation that gives a sense to it as a part of a divine plan. Spiritual vocation is also an example of upward social mobility—it anchors a person in the community and counteracts the stigmatizing stereotype of being a *deportado.* For Eduardo, deportation was a second chance[63] to begin a spiritually meaningful life. Within their religious communities, Fidel, Jácobo, and Eduardo are role models, good Christians, and shepherds for other religious followers.

Another example of becoming a role model comes from Pancho, who was formerly a member of a street gang. Back in San Ángel at the age of twenty-seven, with a short haircut, baggy clothes, tattoos that said "South Side 13," and gossip about him having murdered somebody in the US, he quickly became a role model for wannabe teenagers in San Ángel, who started graffitiing "*Sur 13*" and self-organized in a group that was believed to be headed by Pancho.[64] However, when Pancho came together with a local woman and became

a father, he started looking for a job and had little time to socialize with local teenagers. As I explained, he eventually became a *campesino*.

Conclusions

This article has added three elements to the aspiration/ability model: migration aspirations (distinguished from other types of aspirations), desperation (a consequence of failed migration aspirations), and the refunneling of aspirations, which helps individuals to cope with post-deportation immobility. I have also proposed adding the concept of social anchoring to the aspiration/ability model and have demonstrated how putting down anchors in Mexico refunnels aspirations and helps deported people to cope with desperation. I have included multiple types of aspirations, regarding family, education, work, and community obligations, which come together with social anchors either in the US or in Mexico. Immobile deported people "move forward" and actively shape the transitions in their lives when they refunnel their aspirations toward those that are centered on something other than migration. The shift to education, marriage, parenthood, employment, entrepreneurship, and other community roles such as church or gang leadership anchors them in San Ángel. Their migration aspirations may persist or disappear, but the sense of emotional comfort and belonging consists in developing Mexico-oriented aspirations that confront the predicament of deportation.

My longitudinal, life course-centered, and intersectional analysis helps us to understand how post-deportation remigration and immobility are produced by state, meso-, and micro-social powers. Migration aspiration is common among deported people who have spent a large part of their lives in the US. However, border and immigration controls create an immobility regime for them, minimizing their legal ability to migrate. The numerical minority who wish to migrate in authorized ways acquire a governmentality that prevents them from attempting remigration. Meso- and micro-social forms of power also affect migration abilities. Local community obligations anchor deported people, which may diminish their migration aspirations. On the micro-level, men in San Ángel have more autonomy to decide their own and their families' migration. Women, especially young women, may be unable to remigrate clandestinely when their mobility is controlled by (older) male family members. Migration ability also depends on family members insofar as they fund clandestine border crossing. Becoming a parent post-deportation may result in two opposite migration abilities: while fathers are expected to remigrate to economically provide for the family, mothers are expected to provide nurturing care on-site, which limits their migration abilities.

In mixed-status families, US citizens and residents are often empowered to decide their own and others' migrations. Distribution of power may reinforce or cut across the traditional hierarchies of age and gender in families of deported people. Nancy's case shows how her immobility was determined by an older family member whose male privilege was coupled with the power of holding US citizenship. The cases of Eneas and Zacarías, teenaged sons of Fidel who decided to go back to the US, or Victor's wife's refusal to accompany him to San Ángel, may all serve as examples of uprooting traditional hierarchies. Back in Mexico, reclassified as "deportees," the removed individuals remain under the power of other US classifications that define mobility opportunities in the transnational families and establish new hierarchies.

This research has provided evidence on post-deportation hardships, and as such it can serve as a plea for legal changes in the US immobility regime. The first necessary change is that the expensive and time-consuming family reunification process should be sped up. Another necessary step toward guaranteeing rights of family life to the deported individuals is to abolish reentry bars, as they hinder the possibility of family reunification. Long separation often loosens family ties and may exert influence on a family member's decision to "petition for" a deported and long-unseen parent who is often blamed for the sufferings of the abandoned family. The people who are most affected by the reentry bars are the individuals who were most integrated into the destination country—those who believe that authorized remigration will be a fast track to socioeconomic mobility. Their authorized remigration could benefit not only themselves and their families, but also their local US communities. As long as their migration aspirations persist, they remain not only spatially but also socioeconomically immobile. A ten-year bar in practice converts into a permanent ban, as deported people, after a period of desperation, eventually refunnel their migration aspirations, and their personal situations change, often rendering their authorized remigration impossible.

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Appendix 1. List of research participants whose cases are presented in the article (in the order of appearance in the narrative).

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age in 2012	Age when migrated	Age when deported	Year deported	Family in the US?	Post-deportation reentry to the US?	Planned authorized return to the US?
Andrés	Male	22	16	22	2012	Yes	Yes	No
Javier	Male	41	15	39	2010	Yes	Yes	No
Victor	Male	36	17	32	2008	Yes	No	No
Fidel	Male	37	15	35	2010	Yes	No	Yes
Nancy	Female	20	3	18	2010	Yes	No	Yes
Pancho	Male	30	15	27	2009	Yes	No	No
Juan	Male	33	15	27	2006	Yes	Yes	No
Eduardo	Male	24	15	27	2015	No	No	No

Notes

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