

**Violence that Builds Sovereignty: The Transnational Violence Continuum in
Deportation from the United States**

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Abstract

Building upon an abundance of theoretical literature describing the role of deportation in the assertion of nation-state sovereignty, this article asks how deportees experience state sovereignty. Its conclusions are informed by an “ethnography of removal” drawing on 62 interviews with 25 Mexican deportees interviewed in their communities of origin in Oaxaca after “3D” (detection, detention and deportation) removal. Acknowledging deportation as an example of legal violence, the paper describes various other types of violence (physical, structural and symbolic; executed by state agents, private contractors, other deportees, criminal organizations, and communities of origin) that produce US sovereignty at the level of individual experience. “3D” deportation causes suffering, embarrassment and fear. The paper shows how US borders are externalised on the micro and meso level without the involvement of state actors as deportees, invested with a new governmentality after being violently deported, exercise border controls over themselves and refrain from returning to the US.

Keywords: deportation, violence, sovereignty, externalisation of borders, deportation violence

Introduction: Violent deportations

I met Augustín in 2012, three years after his deportation from the United States, in his home town of San Ángel¹, a Mexican village in rural Oaxaca. Augustin was 16 when he attempted to cross the border in 2009. It had been three years since he had last seen his father, who had already migrated to the United States. Together with his mother, Elena, Augustín had planned to reunite with his father and find a job. Augustín and Elena attempted to cross the border clandestinely with the help of a *coyote*. However, they had barely climbed the border fence when the US Border Patrol (USBP) arrived and quickly “returned” them to Mexico. They kept trying for a further three weeks before finally managing to cross the border. After days of walking through the Sonoran Desert, they reached the highway and were picked up by a caravan that had been waiting for them. Exhausted but relieved, they were heading for Phoenix, Arizona, when the USBP arrived and inspected their car.

Augustín: The patrol was following us. They made us get out of the car. I was carrying a cell phone in my bag. The people from La Migración [USBP] thought that I was the coyote. They beat me. They handcuffed me, threw me to the ground and kicked me.

Agnieszka: Did they beat you a lot?

Augustín: No, not a lot. But yes, my nose bled. That was the last time that I tried [to cross the border].

The USBP operates up to 100 miles from the border inside US territory. Its agents sometimes trail border-crossers, detaining them only after long, exhausting and dangerous desert walks designed to maximise the migrants’ suffering and frustration and discourage them from future attempts to cross the border (De León 2015). After apprehension by the USBP, and the immigration hearing, detention and deportation that followed, Augustín made no further attempts to cross the border, instead deciding to return to his place of origin. Elena, desperate to be reunited with Augustín’s father, kept trying for another month, despite the risks involved as an unaccompanied woman in the Mexico–US borderland (extortion, lagging behind the rest of the group when crossing the

¹ The names of the town and of research participants are pseudonyms.

desert, kidnapping and sexual violence perpetrated by border mafias, *coyotes* or fellow migrants) (Slack and Whiteford 2018; Vogt 2013). In the end, she managed to cross.

Augustín is one of 5 million people to have been deported from the USA over the past 15 years. The USA deports over 300,000 people annually (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2019, 113), the second biggest number of deportees in the world after Saudi Arabia. A record number (433,034) were deported in 2013 during the administration of former President Barack Obama. More recently, Donald Trump's presidency brought the renewal of aggressive workplace immigration raids, the separation of families detained after crossing the border, and an unprecedented increase in the number of people held in immigration detention (Rumbaut, Dingerman, and Robles 2019). Another new development under the Trump administration has been an increase in the detention of migrants without a criminal record but with pending deportation cases. In November 2020, when this article is being published, it is difficult to predict how the US deportation policies will evolve during Joe Biden's presidency.

Back in 2016 during his first presidential campaign, Donald Trump promised to deport all unauthorised immigrants in order to put "America first" and "Make America great again" (e.g., Los Angeles Times 2016). While anti-immigrant discourse is directed at voters (Slack, Martínez, and Whiteford 2018; Chavez 2012), deportation exemplifies the deployment of sovereignty against non-citizens. This article focusses on the latter. It highlights the experience of migrants deported from the United States to Mexico (their country of citizenship), with a particular focus on the cases of people who have experienced so-called "3D" deportation, which (apart from the immigration hearing) consists of detection, detention and deportation (expulsion). The aim of the paper is to explain *how Mexican deportees experience the sovereignty of the departing state through various types of violence*. Informed by an "ethnography of removal" (Peutz 2010) and seeking to avoid methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) in deportation research (De Genova 2018), it explores *both "3D" deportation and deportees' experience back in their communities of origin*.

Anti-immigrant policies have high human costs. Recent allegations relating to the sexual harassment of female detainees in the US immigration detention centre in El Paso (Kriel 2020a; 2020b) and the controversy around the involuntary and irreversible sterilisation of detainees in a Georgia detention centre (Lambe 2020) have demonstrated just how dehumanising the US deportation machinery can be. Conscious of the need for

more testimonies from those who have experienced US deportation violence, I present in this paper the first-person accounts of Mexican men and women deported from the US. I unpack what other authors have called the violence of “removal” (the term for “deportation” used in American law) (Hiemstra 2012) or “legal violence” (Menjívar and Abrego 2012) and analyse the different forms of subjective and objective violence experienced by deportees. Though my research participants have not always been able to find the words to speak about their emotions and experiences, I hope this article will serve as evidence of the United States’s cruel and dehumanising use of deportation during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

This research is a theoretical and methodological contribution to the study of deportations. Its methodological contribution consists in its ethnographic focus on people who have been deported and the communities to which they return (cf. Hiemstra 2012; 2019). I analyse deportees’ own accounts of deportation and explain what sense they make of the state operations that targeted them. The paper’s theoretical contribution consists in its explanation of the links between deportation and state sovereignty, focussed not at the macro level (cf. Walters 2002; De Genova 2010) but at the level of the deported individual. My analysis of the different stages of deportation proposes a catalogue of the various types of violence (physical, structural and symbolic) experienced by deportees. I explain how different factors, including gender, ethnicity and class, affect the experience of violence.

I develop my argument over four sections. The first section explains the theoretical framework of the article. In this section I conceptualise deportation violence and define the various types of violence that come together in the lived experience of removal. I explain how deportation exemplifies the fragmentation of sovereignty and how US borders are externalised through deportation to Mexico. The second section offers an explanation of my research method: an ethnography of a migrant-sending/deportee-receiving community. The third section reconstructs the experience of deportation as lived by people from San Ángel. This section is divided into five parts corresponding to the different stages of deportation. In the fourth section I explain how the experience of deportation becomes an element of folk epistemology and how this may affect decisions about whether to migrate. I conclude the article with additional observations about the fragmentation of US sovereignty in communities such as San Ángel.

Deportation violence and sovereignty

Certain actors, including transnational organizations (e.g. corporations) and individuals (e.g. migrants), challenge the idea of nation-states as omnipotent sovereigns controlling their territories (Sassen 1996; J. Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Powerful destination countries, entangled in the globalized capitalist economy (Chalfin 2010; Ong 1999), negotiate their sovereignty by regulating the flow of migrants who constitute a disposable source of labour (De Genova 2004; Golash-Boza 2015). They also externalise their borders (Collyer 2007), as in the offshored refugee camps which represent loci of fragmented sovereignty and the negotiation of state power (Jones et al. 2017).

The literature on deportation directly, and perhaps too straightforwardly, links deportation and its mere possibility to the reproduction of state sovereignty (Walters 2002; De Genova 2010). Taking an ethnographic perspective, this paper seeks to explain how, if at all, deported Mexicans experience US sovereignty. This perspective, with its focus on meaning, highlights “the actual outcomes of the rule” (Chalfin 2010, 3) and thus will be helpful in terms of studying the macro-level problem of sovereignty at the most intimate level.

In order to understand the individual experiences of contemporary deportees, it is first necessary to explain the legal context of their removal. In the USA, the conflation of the figures of “migrant” and “criminal” (Zilberg 2011; Macías-Rojas 2016) has legitimated the deportation of millions of individuals, including non-citizens and, more rarely, citizens viewed as either “impostors” (Lind 2018) or “enemies” posing a threat to “national security” (Ngai 2004; for an example from the UK, cf. Prabhat 2019) or “the economy” (Carreras de Velasco 1974). The conflation of immigration and criminal law has been identified by Cecilia Menjívar and Leisy Abrego as legal violence that has the “ability to capture physical, structural, and symbolic violence as these are made possible through the law” (2012, 1413). Legal violence is a consequence of regulations and policies that render people “illegal” and “deportable migrants” (De Genova 2004). Deportation violence is, therefore, a type of legal violence. In this article, focussing on the experience of the people who have been deported, I unravel the concept of legal violence by analysing the physical, psychological, structural and symbolic forms of violence experienced by deportees.

Violence is not restricted to the physical form that we usually envisage when we hear the word. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004, 1) have noted,

“violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim”. Slavoj Žižek distinguishes subjective and objective violence. While subjective (e.g. physical, psychological) violence is “performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (Žižek 2008, 1); the subject (or perpetrator) of objective violence is not easily detectable. Objective violence frequently underlies, and contributes to, subjective violence. Generally, two types of objective violence can be distinguished: symbolic and structural. Johan Galtung’s (1969) concept of structural violence describes the reciprocal relationship between social status and vulnerability to violence. Paul Farmer (2004) understands structural violence in terms of “the social machinery of oppression” that produces violent conditions, while Philippe Bourgois (2001, 7) defines it as:

[the] political-economic organization of society that imposes conditions of physical and emotional distress, from high morbidity and mortality rates to poverty and abusive working conditions. It is rooted, at the macro-level, in structures such as unequal international terms of trade and it is expressed locally in exploitative labor markets, marketing arrangements and the monopolization of services.

Unauthorised Mexican migrants are exposed to violence as a result of their place in the social structure on both sides of the border. They undertake dangerous clandestine migrations in an attempt to escape poverty in their places of origin. When they manage to cross the border, “the structural violence of U.S. immigration laws and the details of the Department of Homeland Security’s border and workplace inspection enforcement policies” can expose them to deportation violence (Bourgois 2013, xiii; cf. Nevins 2006).

According to Pierre Bourdieu and L  ic Wacquant (1992), symbolic violence is the most powerful form of domination, since it is perpetuated with the complicity of its victim. Symbolic violence is based on a compliant acceptance on the part of its victim of the world around them. It has powerful effects, because “of all forms of ‘hidden persuasion,’ the most implacable is the one exerted ... by the order of things” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 168). Symbolic violence inculcates the behaviour typical of certain identities (Lukes 2005); what people believe to be true (e.g. that they are “illegal”) will have real social consequences (for instance, they will accept their removal order), regardless of its ontological status (Merton 1968).

What I call deportation violence is an example of “the violent performativity of bordering practices designed to exclude ... the ‘Other’” (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 731). It comprises the various types of violence (cf. Figure 1) that physically and emotionally affect a deportee.

[Figure 1 here]

Social inequalities exert an influence on deportation violence. Gender (Vogt 2013), class and ethnicity intersect not only when it comes to detainability (De Genova 2016) and deportability, but also when it comes to the experience of violence during deportation. Gender plays an important and complex role. Violent clashes are more frequent among male immigration detainees (Radziwinowiczówna 2020), but women are more exposed to sexual harassment by ICE guards in detention (Kriel 2020a). How immigration hearings are experienced depends on the gender of both deportee and judge. Economics also exerts an influence upon deportation violence: those who can afford to post bail will avoid the violence of immigration detention. Detainees who are able to appoint an immigration attorney are more likely to postpone or avoid deportation or, at least, to better understand the legal process to which they are subject. Ethnicity counts here as well: while Mexican migrants who speak Spanish may be able to access an interpreter for free during the immigration hearing, those who speak indigenous languages and no English are more likely to be excluded from understanding the legal reasons behind their deportation. This paper highlights the extent to which the experience of deportation violence is conditioned by questions of gender, economics and ethnicity.

The vignette with which this paper opened offers an example of physical violence perpetrated by agents of the state as sovereignty is enacted at the level of the individual experience of deportees. Similarly, as I explain below, immigration courts, immigration detention facilities and other deportation infrastructure such as deportation planes and buses (Walters 2018) represent spaces where sovereignty is violently reinstated through the experiences of individual deportees. Violence produces sovereignty at the level of individual experience not only during the *de jure* deportation process, but also afterwards. The lived experience of deportation lasts longer than “removal” itself (Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015, 551) and violence may continue to be an element of the experience of Mexican deportees long after their expulsion (Boehm 2011; 2016; Khosravi 2018). The violent experience of deportation continues to fragment sovereignty at the level of the individual experience of deportees even after they are returned to Mexico; the “laws of

the powerful country have a ‘spillover’ effect” (Menjívar and Abrego 2012, 1396) and “US immigration enforcement policies are not confined spatially or temporally by US territorial borders” (Hiemstra 2012, 306). At the micro-level, the sovereignty-building process involves the transnational creation of new subjectivities. While on US territory, certain groups are subordinated as “illegal migrants” (De Genova 2002); south of the US border, removed migrants are subordinated as *deportados* (deportees), continuing to experience US legal violence as they internalize this identification and accept the emotions (e.g. embarrassment) and behaviours (e.g. refraining from unauthorized re-entry in the US) associated with it.

I propose to examine deportation in terms of the fragmentation of US sovereignty. The externalisation of borders has been researched in terms of the implication of other states in the bordering practices of powerful destination countries (Adepoju, Van Noorloos, and Zoomers 2009; Zaiotti 2016; Seelke and Finklea 2017; Vogt 2017). This paper’s contribution is to shift the focus to the micro level of individuals and the meso level of communities of origin. I aim to contribute to the literature on the phenomenological dimension of border studies (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009), focussing on deportation and post-deportation through the lens of governmentality (Besserer 2014; Coleman 2008). Governmentality, or the “conduct of conduct” (Gordon 1991, 48), produces self-surveillance (Foucault 1991, 2009), as “individuals act in particular ways without the government overtly pressuring them to do so” (Hiemstra 2014, 574). Although much of the existing literature questions the deterrent effect of detention and deportation (Hiemstra 2012; 2019), my research in Mexico shows that violent and repeated deportation may prevent repeat migration. The US border is externalised as individuals internalise bordering processes and decide not to re-enter the US. The reproduction of such governmentality is a bordering practice (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012) and an example of the offshoring and outsourcing of borders (Bialasiewicz 2012).

Research site

I gathered my ethnographic evidence during fieldwork in a rural municipality of San Ángel, which is located in the region of Lower Mixteca. Migration from San Ángel has been predominantly unauthorised – a consequence of the unavailability of US visas for poor Mexicans (De Genova 2004). Poor indigenous people from rural Mexico are likely

to be undocumented in the United States. This structural violence is translated into physical, psychological and symbolic violence en route to the US (Vogt 2013), in the borderlands (Slack and Whiteford 2018), within the territory of the United States, during deportation, and afterwards (Menjívar and Abrego 2012).

I started my research in San Ángel in 2012 and have so far conducted four periods of fieldwork, each time revisiting participants whom I have interviewed previously. I collected the life stories of 25 individuals (22 men and 3 women) who had undergone “3D” deportation between 2006 and 2013, and whom I contacted with the help of knowledgeable people in the town. 6 informants were detained after failed attempts to cross the border without authorisation; 19 were detained after 6 to 25 years’ residence in the US. In order to better explain the situation of deportees, the next section presents in more detail the experiences of five participants (four male, one female): Acacio, Augustín, Camilo, Javier and Jennifer. Their cases are not exceptional, but rather representative of my research participants’ experiences during deportation.

Violence in the lived experience of sovereignty

Detection

Apprehension by the US authorities (either at the border or within the US) can involve physical violence (Slack, Martínez, and Whiteford 2018), as was the case for Augustín. Jennifer, who attempted a border-crossing at the age of 19, witnessed physical violence. USBP agents stopped the group she was crossing the border with as they awaited transport to Phoenix after a long and exhausting walk through the Sonoran Desert. Their guide and other border-crossers escaped when the guards arrived, leaving Jennifer and two Brazilian females motionless with fear. Two men from her group decided to stay, unwilling to abandon the young women they had befriended on the trek through the desert. When the USBP agents realised that the rest of the group had escaped, they attacked one of the male border-crossers.

Jennifer: I’m telling you, they beat him, threw him to the ground and began to beat him. They held the gun to his body. We were afraid, and we didn’t know what to do. A girl from Brazil asked him, “Why are you beating him if he didn’t do anything?” [The agent] got angry, stood up and put the gun to the girl’s forehead. We were scared.

Border policing that pushes border crossers into desolate desert areas (De León 2015) creates zones of impunity for USBP's violence. Media on both sides of the border report on violent abuses by USBP agents (for an overview, cf. Chavez 2012, 67), but the actual extent of the violence remained uncharted until 2013. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) produced a report on the use of violence only after a group of US Congressmen demanded an investigation into the fatal shooting of a 16 year-old boy on the Mexican side of the border (Carroll 2018). According to the report (U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Office of Inspector General 2013, 6–7), USBP agents killed 20 individuals between 2010 and 2012. The report classified 63% of complaints about the conduct of the Customs and Border Protection agency (which oversees USBP) as “possible allegations related to excessive force”. “Physical abuse (punching, kicking, pushing) during apprehension, and use of an electronic control device, baton or pepper spray” were classified as “excessive force”. However, racial profiling and “improper detention” were not. It is impossible to say how many border-crossers who had experienced violence did not make an official complaint – in any case, Augustín did not.

Apart from physical violence, detention involves psychological violence caused by the stress of arrest, conditions within detention facilities and separation from family members. Symbolic violence is also at play during this first stage of deportation, as arrested people are taken into detention immediately, without being given the opportunity to pack necessary belongings or change clothes (one of research participants was caught by the ICE when fixing sewage pipes in his house and many months later was deported to Mexico in smelly clothes). Jennifer's narrative also provides an account of the affective side of criminalisation during arrest by the USBP:

Jennifer: They treated us like criminals; they took shoelaces off our shoes, they tied our hands and tied our feet. They registered us. The other girl said: “That is close to undressing us,” she said. And there we were. We were sitting in the sunshine and [the USBP agents] were sitting in the shade, observing us. Afterwards they yanked us to lift us. They took us to the trucks ... I mean, we felt bad because when [the USBP] were taking us [to the truck], there were some people in the gully. I guess they went to the countryside. They were there together with their family. [The USBP] led us that way; I felt bad because they treated us as if we were criminals. One went ahead with a gun and the other was at the back with a gun.

This experience instantiates the performative nature of many homeland security measures (Hiemstra 2014). In Jennifer's visual narrative, coercion, bodily constraint, criminalisation and the terrifying use of firearms are humiliating as well as traumatising because they were witnessed by a family on a carefree day trip to the gully. A sense of humiliation plays an important role in symbolic violence. As I will go on to explain, symbolic and other forms of violence are also at play in later stages of the deportation process.

Immigration hearing

Apprehended in Yakima, Washington, aged 39, after having lived in the US for 25 years, Javier was detained in the private Tacoma Northwest Detention Center (NWDC). His immigration hearing took place inside the centre. The father of three US-citizen children, he hoped to demonstrate to the immigration judge that he needed to stay in the US to support his daughter, who was suffering from kidney disease. Javier's spouse provided medical evidence and the girl wrote to the judge. However, the judge paid no attention to the evidence he presented.

Javier: "I can do with you whatever I want", she said. I told her, "I am showing you my evidence, I have medical certificates that my daughter is ill and you don't want to see them". [She told me,] "Leave it here, I will see them later". I replied: "How are you going to see it if you are... (what do you call it?) deporting me?"... [She] didn't want to see it, and just deported me.

State sovereignty fragments in the immigration court. In the experience of deportees, this is another humiliating stage in the deportation process. When I asked Javier how he felt when the judge told him she could do whatever she wanted with him, he answered:

Javier: A, uhm... I felt uhm ... As we call it humiliated, because in a way it lowered my self-esteem, that's how I felt. I felt bad, angry, I wanted to cry, but well... Well, I felt bad.

During his deportation, Javier also felt hurt ("The judge did not behave well, she did not behave well"). Sleep deprivation was another form of physical violence used against the

detainees – the night before the hearing the guards did not let them sleep and Javier felt very tired during the hearing. Being deported by a female immigration judge exacerbated a sense of power imbalance for this male deportee. Javier’s deportation followed a three-month jail sentence for an intimate partner-violence conviction. He believed that the judge was prejudiced against migrants with criminal records involving domestic violence. Humiliated by the judge’s words, Javier sought to negotiate his agency by asking her to return his documents to him so that he could send them back to his wife.

The judge’s declaration that she could do whatever she wanted with Javier is a further example of psychological violence in the deportation process. Javier felt that he had no way to legally defend himself. He would only be able to avoid further detention and perhaps to stay in the USA if he appealed against the removal order, but the judge set a high bail of USD12,000. His family tried but was unable to raise the sum, meaning Javier would have had to appeal against the deportation order from detention. He accepted the deportation order because he had no confidence of mounting a successful appeal, and because he wanted to avoid spending any more time in detention. Instead, he planned to once again cross the border clandestinely in order to be reunited with his family.

Menjívar and Abrego note that, “targeted by (mis)representations, immigrants often internalize their status, accept these conditions as normal, and may even feel deserving of mistreatment” (2012, 1391). I asked Toribio, who was deported after having lived in the USA for 13 years, why he decided not to appeal against his deportation order. He replied: “A Hispanic who has a [criminal] record like me... No... How can one defeat them? It’s very complicated” (Slack, Martínez, and Whiteford 2018, 3). The adoption of certain identities (e.g. “criminal” or “illegal”) and a related set of ideas and behaviours is a consequence of the symbolic violence to which migrants are exposed in the US and which some internalise even before migration.

Detention

Immigration detention, another site of fragmented sovereignty, is an important element of the experience of “3D” deportation. Here, too, various types of violence merge. Detention is often the longest stage of the deportation process. Detained migrants whose deportation has been ordered by an immigration judge remain in detention until their removal to the country to which they are being deported. In 2016/17, an average stay in detention was 34 days (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). Among my research participants

from San Ángel, the period spent in detention varied from two days to three months; the majority were detained for a month.

Pre-removal immigration detention abounds in symbolic violence involving humiliation and embarrassment. Non-citizens are dehumanised and criminalised through coercive measures such as the use of biometrics (obligatory medical check-ups, fingerprinting) and discipline (frequent head-counting, collective responsibility) (Hiemstra 2014; Radziwinowiczówna 2020).

Javier: They gave us ... a hepatitis [test], I think, and some had already had it [in criminal prison or another immigration detention site], they had already given it to them, so they said, “No, they have already given it to me, I can’t inject myself twice”. [The doctor] says, “No, you have to take it; if you don’t want to, you’ll go to court again, you’re gonna go to the hole”. [The hole is] like a dark room, so they accept the injection again.

Female detainees are subject to additional, often invasive medical check-ups, including pregnancy tests. Routine procedures such as strip searching, identified by feminist scholars as amounting to sexual violence (Davis 2003), are humiliating for female detainees (“Jennifer: They ordered us to undress; they checked our ears, our hair. They checked everything!”). Women’s reproductive health is neglected in detention, with pregnant detainees receiving insufficient care. In the US carceral system, Angela Davis and Cassandra Shaylor (2001, 15) argue, “increasingly repressive models, and ... rampant ... racist ideologies ... [lead to] routine sexual abuse and harassment”. This conclusion seems valid for immigration detention too. Sexual violence perpetrated by guards against female migrants and even forcible hysterectomies leading to the loss of reproductive capacity are examples of physical and psychological forms of gender based violence enacted in immigration detention.

Detainees of all genders experience and witness physical violence perpetrated either by staff or by other detainees. For example, Javier’s fellow detainee was accidentally shot and injured by a guard in NWDC. Physical violence is also a feature of clashes between detainees, as Jennifer, detained in a private detention centre in Florence, Arizona, explained:

Jennifer: There were bad people but, as long as we didn’t pick on them, they didn’t bully us.

Agnieszka: How do you know that they were bad?

Jennifer: Because they ... argued for no reason. Several times they argued with other [women] from Tijuana. And they said vulgar things to each other. They even fought!

ICE detention sites are zones of phenomenological threat (Radziwinowiczówna 2020) where people anticipate and fear violence. Fear is created by keeping people ignorant about their exact location, while detainees are often intimidated by the size of detention centres.

Acacio: I think you would be scared if you went there. A lot of people! Yes, it's enormous. Imagine that it is all this town, about 800–1,000 people ... And when we were going to eat, we had to be quick because, unless you lined up, there wasn't enough food for you.

Acacio had never been imprisoned before. At the age of 18 he migrated to Oregon, where he reunited with his parents and siblings. He was detained at the age of 24 after being stopped by the police for a racially-profiled roadside inspection. He was then transferred from the local jail to the NWDC, where an immigration judge ordered his deportation. Discouraged by the oppressive and dangerous conditions in the detention centre (cf. Golash-Boza 2015), Acacio refrained from appealing against the removal order in order to be released as soon as possible. "I was sad and I only wanted them to throw me out into Mexico. I didn't want to be in jail. One feels so bad in jail. You can't get used to it", he told me. He was deported two days later.

The state commodifies violence in private detention centres, which create unbearable conditions for detainees (Hiemstra 2019). Outsourcing immigration controls to private companies implies the expansion and dispersal of sovereignty through the involvement of parastatal actors (Amoore 2006). Rights monitoring is often ineffective in for-profit detention centres, with the high turnover of detainees (Kriel 2020b) preventing personnel from being held to account. Private immigration detention centres are sites of the multiplication of the structural violence experienced by undocumented migrants throughout their transnational trajectories (Vogt 2013). Concrete examples include insufficient food for the detained population and, more recently, the unavailability of Covid-19 tests for detainees exhibiting symptoms.

Expulsion to Mexico

Mexican deportees are removed to Mexico by bus or – if detained far from the border – by plane. Expulsion, given its non-voluntary nature, always involves coercion. This is reflected in the material dimensions of the removal process: deportees are handcuffed, restrained using ankle and waist chains (Hiemstra 2014), and escorted by Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System (JPATS) marshals:

Acacio: In fact, they torture us psychologically when they frighten us. When they threw me back to Mexico, they made me board the plane wearing a chain [round the waist]. You can't raise your hands because they tie them. You get tired. That's how they treat the majority of people.

In deportation vehicles, the deportees are constantly under surveillance, their bodies disciplined (Radziwinowiczówna 2016). Handcuffs reinforce the symbolic violence that forms the lived experience of US sovereignty. The weapons carried by JPATS marshals materialise the possibility of physical violence against the deportees. Here again, a zone of phenomenological threat is created and deportees are criminalized.

Post-Deportation

Deportees from San Ángel said that they felt unsafe in the Mexican border area, especially when they were deported at night as is the case for 20% of the people returned to Mexico from the United States (Slack, Martínez, and Whiteford 2018, 5). Camilo, who was deported in 2011 aged 23, was forced to ask his US-based relatives to send him money so that he could leave the dangerous city of Reynosa in Tamaulipas:

Camilo: The [agents] of the Mexican Migración [...] took us to the bus station and they told us that, if we have [money], we'd better go to some other place, because it is very difficult there. If [we didn't have money], they would give us a document, so that they [our relatives] could transfer money to us and we could buy a ticket and return to our place of origin.

Agnieszka: Why was it difficult [in Reynosa, Tamaulipas]?

Daniela [Camilo's mother]: There are many robbers there.

Camilo: Yeah, thieves.

Daniela: Coyotes.

Camilo: Coyotes, too.

Deportees may be exposed to physical violence in border towns (Radziwinowiczówna 2019), where they are easily recognizable due to their clothing (they are usually wearing the clothes they were apprehended in) and the transparent sealed plastic bags issued by the DHS (De León 2013). Another element of the transnational violence continuum is the symbolic violence to which deportees are exposed in their communities of origin. The stigmatising reaction of villagers in San Ángel and the embarrassing re-categorisation of some returnees as *deportados* (Hiemstra 2012) or criminals exemplifies the adoption of US categories on the other side of the border.

Jennifer: Sometimes they say, “Look, the *deportada* comes, they deported her”.

Javier: Sometimes there are people who go round and say untrue things: “They throw him out for one reason or another”. People make things up.

Menjívar and Abrego write that “immigration laws today create a new axis of stratification that ... significantly shapes life chances and future prospects” (2012, 1383). Deportation renders this process transnational. Locals in San Ángel tend to suspect all deportees of being former offenders. Purported gang members and deportees who return with tattoos and haircuts signifying gang membership (which they may only have obtained as a survival strategy while in prison or detention) are identified by the villagers as “criminal deportees”. They become the subject of gossip and stories that frequently have no basis in fact. Criminal activities (e.g. drug dealing and consumption or theft and gang violence) attract the curiosity of the community, with some locals viewing deportees as a potential danger to social cohesion in the town. Through mockery and gossip, the community attempts to re-instate social control over individuals who, while in the US and therefore beyond the community’s reach, joined street gangs (Radziwinowiczówna 2014).

The externalisation of borders

Of the 25 deportees interviewed in San Ángel, 6 had returned to the USA at some point and 3 were back in the United States by 2019. In 2012, I interviewed two men who had been removed after re-entry, and two more who had re-entered the USA after deportation but by the start of my research had voluntarily returned to San Ángel (one of these two had again returned to the USA by 2019). While the success stories of those who were able

to cross kindled the imagination of many people in San Ángel, the apprehension and detention experienced by others frightened and discouraged them.

Javier's case is an example of an individual's decision to give up on returning to the US. Deported in 2010, he left behind his wife and children, his job and everything he had built in the USA over the course of 25 years. Suffering as a result of separation from his family, he twice attempted to return, but on both occasions he was caught and detained. Altogether he spent nine months in private immigration detention centres. In 2011, he returned to San Ángel with a 20-year re-entry ban; he has not tried to cross the border since, and has lost contact with his family in Washington. In 2019, he was living with his elderly parents and experimenting with the cultivation of new plants on a small plot of rented land. His story exemplifies the contestation of the predicament of deportation by deportees themselves (De Genova 2018), but also of a gradual internalization of border controls (in the sociological sense of the internalization of norms) and the construction of deportation regime-related governmentality.

Violent deportation, the criminalization of re-entry, the securitization of the southern US border and the increased prices charged by coyotes discourage Mexican deportees from returning to the USA. Although their (im)mobility plans evolve, with some deportees deciding to migrate again when confronted with structural violence in their places of origin (Hiemstra 2012), quantitative research confirms the grim "effectiveness" of deterrence. In 2010, six in ten Mexican deportees were planning to return to the United States (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012, 24), but this number has been decreasing ever since. Another study shows that, in 2013, only 23% of Mexican deportees planned to re-enter the USA immediately after being deported (Velasco and Coubés 2013, 11). In San Ángel, fear of detention discourages not only some deportees, but also voluntary return migrants and people with no prior history of migration. Members of the transnational community of San Ángel gossip about *deportados* and the violence they have experienced or witnessed. This transnational witnessing of violence builds governmentality in the community. Fear prompts those who would otherwise migrate to give up on resisting borders. This is how US borders are externalised, as individuals execute border controls over themselves without any further involvement on the part state actors being needed.

Conclusion

This article has examined the sometimes-hidden and oftentimes-violent effects of laws that produce migrants' illegality and lead to their deportation. I have sought to describe how US sovereignty is produced transnationally in the individual experience of Mexicans who have undergone the "3D" deportation process. I have also underlined the importance of extending analysis of the deportation process to include what happens post-deportation, given that experiences of structural and symbolic violence back in Mexico are sometimes predicated upon legal violence produced by US deportation policies. I have argued that deportation violence mediates the translation of sovereignty from the macro level of a nation-state to the micro level of deported individuals.

Various meso-level actors – both state and non-state – play a role in deportation violence, extending state sovereignty from the top down – from the macro level to the level of individual experience. Examples include: other deportees in detention; private contractors used by the US federal government; *coyotes* who abuse vulnerable deportees; and deportees' communities of origin who ridicule them after their "return". Through the transnational violence continuum, US sovereignty is produced in a fragmented and powerful form through the individual experiences of the people whose mobility questioned it in the first place.

The transnational continuum of deportation violence consists of various forms of violence (Boehm 2011). Various kinds of violence occur in immigration detention, which is where the participants in my research were most likely to experience violence. Inspections and medical check-ups are examples of symbolic violence underlining non-citizens' otherness. Physical and psychological violence inflicted by other detainees and guards is also common. Upon arrival in Mexico, deportees are "sent" to dangerous parts of the borderlands (Radziwinowiczówna 2019), and often returned to unsafe communities of origin (Boehm 2011, 2016). *Deportados* return to the same structural violence "that led to unauthorized migration in the first place" (Boehm 2013, 227), facing further financial hardships, including the need to repay loans taken out to pay the *coyote* (Hiemstra 2012). When deportable in the USA and when being deported, they are criminalised, with symbolic violence becoming part of their experience. Symbolic violence produces their further subordination after their return to Mexico, where they are criminalised and gossiped about in their communities of origin.

Back in countries of origin, US legal categories are reproduced as the status of deportees becomes synonymous with vulnerability and they are mocked, denied jobs (Schuster and Majidi 2013), and subjected to extortion. Fear, along with the identifications created through legal violence that re-classifies certain community members as *deportados*, once again produces US sovereignty at the level of individual experience. With the increasing militarization of the US border, some return migrants who have not been deported are nonetheless labelled “deportees”. The unexpected arrival of any “returnee” is suspected to be as a result of deportation, with residents with no experience of migration assuming that, given the expense and danger involved in re-migration to the USA, migrants would be unlikely to return to Mexico voluntarily. The adoption of US categories by deportees’ communities of origin can resemble a witch hunt, building upon symbolic violence (as in San Ángel) or even eventuating in physical violence, as, for example in El Salvador, where deportees are often suspected of involvement in transnational gangs and persecuted by the police as a result (Zilberg 2011).

US sovereignty fragments in the countries to which people are deported. The transnational violence continuum builds US sovereignty at the level of individual experience in two interconnected ways. US borders are externalised as deportees “continue to live out [their] removal abroad” (Peutz 2010, 403), re-classified as *deportados*. Another element of the externalisation of US borders involves the production of deportation-related governmentality. Fear may contribute to the deployment of a technology of the self, involving the decision to refrain from re-entry to the US. Migrants who give up on migration after being violently deported exemplify the enactment of US sovereign power at the level of transnational subjects. The use of fear and embarrassment to keep deportees, voluntary-return migrants and other citizens immobile is something that often escapes the attention of scholars and media. Yet it represents the most intimate, micro-level way of policing “aliens” and deserves further research. This research might be carried out not only in Mexico, but also in many other parts of the world where the immobile wait for departure.

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