

11. DEPORTED TO TIJUANA

Social Networks and Religious Communities

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Omar was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in 1980. When he was only forty-five days old, his mother brought him to the United States. He was never registered, and he never returned to Mexico during the thirty years he lived in California. His parents are U.S. residents; his siblings, his children, and his wife are U.S. citizens. Until his adolescence, he thought he was a U.S. citizen. It was only when he began to have run-ins with the law that he discovered he was not. In September 2010, he was detained and deported for not presenting himself for his immigration court hearing.

Before a judge ordered his deportation, Omar had a family, had a job, and was actively involved in his neighborhood. As a tow-truck operator, he worked with the AAA club and did contract work for the California Highway Patrol. He collaborated with the Santa Ana Police Department on a Christian grassroots program aimed at rescuing youths involved in gang activity. He had a driver's license, a social security card, and a work permit; he paid his taxes and supported his children.

When they think back to the deportation, Omar and his wife, Diana, repeat the word "nightmare." On that day, officers came to detain him at his workplace, removed him from the country, and sent him to Tijuana. He did not know anyone in Mexico, did not speak Spanish well, and did not have a single document of identification; for the first time in his life, he felt like a total stranger. The first few nights, he stayed at the Casa del Migrante (Migrant's House) shelter with many

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other deportees, all sharing similar experiences. He felt devastated, uprooted, and severed from his most significant ties: those to his wife, mother, and children.

Diana was extremely worried about crossing the border because of all the news about the violence and insecurity in Tijuana. Her sister's mother-in-law had family in the city, and they accompanied her. After finding Omar, these distant relatives gave him a place to live at their house. Diana remained in Orange County to take care of the family, and she would go down to visit on the weekends. Omar started to work at a Christian church, where despite not being paid, he received spiritual support and gained knowledge about Tijuana. This was of great value in informing his next decisions.

After nine months, the couple rented a house in Tijuana. Omar found New Life Church Tijuana. He joined Bible-study sessions and classes, went to Sunday services, and supported congregational activities. Facing obstacles in acquiring his birth certificate and the low wages in Mexico, the couple decided that Diana should work in the United States and that Omar should dedicate himself to the church.

A year after his deportation, the couple decided that their two children should go live with him in Tijuana. So while his wife worked from Monday to Thursday, taking on overtime to increase her income, Omar would be in charge of the children's education through homeschooling. In 2013, the religious leaders of New Life Church asked Omar to assume the leadership of a project of discipleship for men with a history of addiction and family problems. Initially his wife was skeptical about moving to Mexico, but she finally decided to leave her job in Orange County to reunite with Omar and their children and to participate in missionary work.

As of 2016, three years have passed since Omar was placed in charge of this program. The family's social capital, generated in the religious community, has been strengthened. Omar has been able to obtain his birth certificate and identification card. He would like to obtain a visa to cross the border and visit the rest of his family. He and his wife worry about the future of their children's education, and the oldest one has expressed a desire to return to California for high school.

According to Hagan, Leal, and Rodriguez, deportations have separated more than a million families, severely affecting the social ties of spouses and children remaining in the United States.¹ The authors indicate that one of the least-studied effects has been the decrease of social capital in immigrant and Latino communities. Because many of the deported immigrants had lived for such a long time in the United States, they were embedded in family and workplace networks. A generalized fear of raids has resulted in immigrants not going to places such as churches, schools, and hospitals. Likewise, immigration enforcement deters civic and community mobilization, such as participation in unions and religious activities.

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In place of forced return or relocation, deportees usually face solitude, depression, and emotional distress due to feelings of loss and abandonment.² In one study on deportees in San Salvador, Dingeman-Cerda and Coutin found that despite the legal rhetoric used in the United States, which presents deportation as a return to one's homeland, for many Salvadorans, deportation resembles something akin to exile: "This sense of exile is often reinforced by the reactions of fellow citizens in their countries of origin, who perceive and treat deportees as outsiders, foreigners, and/or violent criminals threatening state security."³ In the same vein, Kanstroom speaks aptly of "the U.S. deportation diaspora," which consists of "a forcibly uprooted population of people with deep, cohesive social and cultural connections to each other and to the nation-state from which they have been involuntarily removed."⁴

This study analyzes the possible recovery or reconstruction of family and social ties after deportation to Tijuana, Mexico. It describes the role of religious organizations and congregations in providing stability and a social network to deported migrants who decide to settle in this city. It emphasizes how congregations not only constitute a social infrastructure that links deportees to local institutions but also help them and their families cope with economic and emotional hardship. We deal with the role of two Catholic organizations that have traditionally given emergency support to migrants and the poor in Tijuana: the Casa del Migrante and the Desayunador del Padre Chava (Father Chava's Dining Hall). We also study the response of an evangelical congregation (New Life Church Tijuana). We raise the following questions: What kind of social or cultural resources are necessary for deportees to build new networks in Tijuana? How do religious organizations and congregations help buffer migrants against the disruption and isolation caused by their forced return or relocation to this city?

The research on religion and immigration has been principally focused on the processes of adaptation in places of destination. It has been argued that religion can play a major role for immigrants as a bridge to inclusion in their new society, providing a sense of belonging and participation, as well as a familiar cultural environment where immigrants can form new networks and make friends.⁵ Religious institutions often provide migrants with a safe haven when they go through economic hardship or political persecution.⁶

As many of the deportees in Tijuana were forcibly expelled to a city that they did not consider theirs, it is likely that the process of social integration and reconstitution of networks might actually be similar to the one experienced by refugees or exiles. Religious congregations might then act as a safeguard, providing necessary ties for the most pragmatic of activities—such as searching for work or housing—in a place that is completely unknown and where there are no prior established networks. Additionally, they might be a space for the reconstruction of important and meaningful ties between family and friends.

DEPORTATION TO TIJUANA AND FAMILY SEPARATION

Until the 1990s, Tijuana was the main border-crossing point into the United States.⁷ The route through Tijuana was not only relatively easy but next to California, where the majority of the Mexican migrants were headed. It was also the main point of forced repatriation.⁸ In the second half of the 1990s, the Instituto Nacional de Migración (National Migration Institute) recorded between 300,000 and 450,000 repatriations each year.⁹ Most migrants were apprehended by the border patrol and sent back to Mexico on several occasions before successfully entering the United States.

Since 1994, the border patrol's strategies of containment in the San Diego sector and the construction of the border wall led to Tijuana no longer being the main corridor of undocumented migration; the migratory flows were displaced toward the east. The legislative changes passed by the U.S. Congress in 1996, as well as the Patriot Act of 2002, prompted an increase in deportations and a change in the profile of individuals expelled to Tijuana.¹⁰ This change began to be documented by social organizations, such as the Casa del Migrante. Between 2003 and 2010, the shelter recorded an increase each year in the number of men who had lived more than ten years in the United States and had close relatives there.¹¹

París Pombo, Buenrostro, and Pérez Duperou found that migrants deported to Tijuana, in comparison with migrants deported to other cities, are older on average (thirty-seven years old vs. thirty-four), have lived longer in the United States, and are more likely to have children and a spouse in the United States.¹² Such characteristics reflect a long-term process of settlement and social integration of Mexican immigrants in California.

According to a survey on migration administered by El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Colef), when they are forcibly sent to Tijuana, 38 percent of men and 55 percent of women say their intention is to stay in the city.¹³ These decisions are informed by the surveillance of the border in the San Diego region, the social infrastructure for the immediate support of deportees, and the geographical proximity to California, where family and friends are established. Some deportees count on the economic and emotional support of relatives who stayed in the United States. Depending on the strength of these ties and on their immigration status, they can receive visits in Tijuana. But soon, resources are depleted and visits become more infrequent. In other cases, family separation and the weakening of ties precede the deportation; much of this is linked to periods of imprisonment and drug use.

Family disintegration and impoverishment often lead to destitution. This is particularly visible in the zone known as "El Bordo," situated along the canal of the Tijuana River. Over the years, this area has been home to between seven

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hundred and one thousand people living in extremely poor and unsanitary conditions in excavations, amid sewage, and under bridges. Another study conducted by Colef on the estimation and characterization of the resident population of this zone found that 91 percent had lived in the United States; of these, 92 percent had been deported and 8 percent had returned voluntarily. The overwhelming majority were men (96 percent). The authors of this study also found that the inhabitants of El Bordo were inhibited from entering the labor force because they had no identification documents. The absence of government programs for immediate relief and for long-term aid relegated them to perpetual reliance on civil society organizations. The authors concluded, “The feelings of pain arising from family separation after being deported to Mexico was the beginning of marginalization, which among other factors, included the use of drugs.”¹⁴

As a vast majority of deportees (around 90 percent) are adult males, their removal usually leads to the loss of the principal family income. When their spouse and children live in the United States, it also leads to the forced formation of single-parent, female-headed households. Sometimes all family members will migrate to Mexico to reunite with the deported parent and spouse. More often, the deportee will try to reenter the United States, where he will have more economic opportunities to support his family, even being undocumented. With the door closed to an authorized return, his only chance to get back home is to resort to informal networks for an unauthorized crossing. He will probably have to incur high expenses, and he could put his life in danger. In addition, he will be at risk of new detentions and spending months or years in prison, accused of reentering without authorization. Imprisonment and a second deportation would deteriorate the financial situation of the family even more.

Many deported men speak about the unconditional support received from their mother, and sometimes their wife or ex-wife, in the postdeportation crisis. In the interviews, they emphasize the contrast between the desertion of their friends and the strengthening of the bonds with their mother or partner. On the one hand, their gang *compañeros* and coworkers stop answering their calls, ignoring their pleas for assistance. On the other hand, despite the immediate physical separation from their family and periods of imprisonment, the bond with their mother is not broken. Instead, it is consolidated, as the mother helps with resources and emotional support. For example, David describes his arrival and his mother’s appearance at “the line”:

I arrived at night. I remember I arrived to Mexico and they gave us all of our stuff. I do not remember well where we were, which part of the line. I remember only passing through the swing doors and being close to the *punte México*. As I left I remember walking and hearing my name. I turned around and it was my mother, my faithful mother. She said, “Son, I was behind your bus and I knew it was your bus.” After that we went to her car and fell asleep in the car.

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In other cases, it is the wife who crosses the border to immediately assist or even stay to live with her husband. This is what happened with Octavio. When he was deported in 2013, after having lived in Santa Ana, California, for eighteen years, the hardest thing for him was to see his wife waiting for him in Tijuana.

To see her when they deported me, that same day, for me was very difficult. Something very hard. . . . I would speak to her from jail, and I would tell her not to wait, not to follow me. I'm going to a country where I don't know anyone. I have no future there. I don't know where I will be taken. I have nothing, and you have everything here.

His wife not only decided to move to Tijuana with their young children, but she also traveled several times to California to retrieve money owed to them and to sell their belongings.

Some deportees also mention receiving visits from family members—especially their children—in the first moments after deportation. Over time, these visits become less frequent. In many cases, deportation implies a long-term separation, and sometimes even a definite family breakdown, leading to greater social exclusion.

EMERGENCY HELP IN THE POSTDEPORTATION PHASE

Tijuana has dozens of organizations dedicated to helping and defending migrants. Most of them were formed during the migration flows prompted by IRCA (the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986) and during the strengthening of border control in the 1990s. In 1987, the Scalabrini religious community founded the Casa del Migrante in Tijuana to attend to a large number of men and women from Mexico and Central America who were arriving to cross the border into the United States.¹⁵ In 1990, the Casa YMCA, a shelter for young migrants, was established. In 1994, Scalabrini nuns finished building the Instituto Madre Asunta (Mother Asunta Institute), a home for migrant women and children located close to the Casa del Migrante.

Currently, many deportees and migrants in transit find temporary shelter in Tijuana while planning to cross the border or while recuperating from deportation and deciding their immediate future. Velasco and Coubès calculated that the shelters for migrants house approximately one thousand people each day.¹⁶ Both private and public institutions provide assistance with housing and food, some of them charging two dollars a day. These services offer a certain stability to the deportees. In many cases, the shelters also serve as a way for deportees to access help through public programs that would otherwise be inaccessible given their vulnerability and unfamiliarity with the city of Tijuana.¹⁷

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For the men who are deported and do not immediately return to their home communities, the Casa del Migrante is often the first stop in Tijuana. Aside from lodging, this shelter serves two daily meals and offers other complimentary services, such as phone, Internet, bathrooms, and clothing. It also offers medical, legal, and psychological assistance. Since 2009, deportees have made up the majority of the boarders.

Another organization that serves hundreds of deportees each day is the Desayunador del Padre Chava. This project of the Salesian congregation in Tijuana was originally conceived to give a complete meal once a day to the poor and homeless.¹⁸ It was founded in 1999 in a borrowed warehouse located in downtown Tijuana. In 2009, the organization acquired a piece of land close to El Bordo. There, the Salesians built a shelter with a kitchen, a dining room, a dormitory, bathrooms, and a living room. Currently, the project is run with the work of nearly forty volunteers, and it serves about a thousand people every day. According to a study conducted by Colef, 70 percent of those served by this community kitchen have been deported at some time, and on average, these individuals lived in the United States for around seventeen years. While the Casa del Migrante serves men who were recently deported, the Desayunador receives poor and homeless men and women, most of whom were deported months or years ago, with the majority (55 percent) suffering from problems with addiction.¹⁹

With the goal of providing an opportunity for deportees to gather social and material resources to settle in Tijuana, the Casa del Migrante has prolonged the time migrants can stay in the shelter to a month and a half. It has also launched a comprehensive job placement program. The program consists of helping deportees obtain a birth certificate and a voting registration card, which in Mexico serves as the main document of identification. According to the director of the program, in 2015 more than 450 jobs were provided in factories, construction, and call centers. Nevertheless, these are mainly precarious and low-wage jobs. Many of the returnees abandon them as soon as they are ready to cross the border again or when they become discouraged by the meager salary.

The Desayunador has also promoted a similar program. Since 2015, it has given shelter to around thirty interns with the aim of securing them employment, allowing them to save money to eventually rent their own apartments. These individuals do not have a time limit on when they must leave the shelter. Furthermore, an area of the Desayunador is currently dedicated to teaching computing, and many deportees participate in workshops in a technical school. Despite these services, the director of the Desayunador still regrets the very limited gains those being helped have made in employment. Many of the deportees lose their jobs because of problems with addiction or because they suffer from emotional distress owing to their solitude and family separation. Others try to reenter the United States.

The strength of Catholic organizations such as the Desayunador and the Casa del Migrante comes from their providing emergency assistance to deportees, which buffers the trauma of deportation. We might even consider that these organizations supplement public repatriation programs, which have limitations and inconsistencies. Nonetheless, the social organizations provide few opportunities for forming social networks. Indeed, in the temporary shelters and in the community kitchens, hundreds of migrants and deportees come together under extremely precarious conditions. They are separated from their families, and the majority lack social ties in Mexico.

The great diversity of migratory, educational, religious, and political experiences of the deportees receiving help from these organizations can be a hindrance to the formation of a sense of belonging and identity. Interviews with priests give an account of how difficult it is to do pastoral work in these shelters. The majority of the deportees converted to different religions or cults in the United States, including “*la Santa Muerte*” (the Holy Death), Islam, and above all various Protestant Christian denominations. The director of the Desayunador considers the greatest obstacles to the work of catechesis to be addiction, family disintegration, and the “deep psychological wounds” suffered by deportees.

LONG-TERM HELP AND RELIGIOUS NETWORK: THE CASE OF NEW LIFE CHURCH TIJUANA

While the Catholic organizations discussed in the previous section have the mission of assisting migrants and the most vulnerable, the Protestant Christian churches provide a favorable social and cultural environment in which deportees can recover a sense of belonging and participation. While the pastor of New Life Church Tijuana did not specify the church’s mission as providing material help for deportees, nearly twenty families in this congregation have at least one person who was removed from the United States.

New Life Church Tijuana belongs to an Evangelical movement that began in California, then expanded into various cities in the United States and Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. The pastor who founded and directs the church in Tijuana arrived twenty years ago from the United States with a group of missionaries, who began working in one of the poorest neighborhoods of this border city. There, they constructed their first church. Eventually they spread and built another church downtown, as well as in other cities in Mexico. They also acquired a ranch in the municipality of Ensenada, where they currently run a spiritual retreat program. Despite not considering it to be a rehabilitation center, the ranch mainly receives recovering addicts, almost all of them deportees.

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The congregation consists of around fifty families, all with mixed immigration and citizenship status. Most women were born in the United States or became citizens. Many children and adolescents in the congregation were born in the United States and typically speak English. Only one of the women was deported. She is a single mother whose children stayed with relatives in California when she was repatriated; a few months later, the children were reunited with her in Tijuana.

On weekends, visiting church members often come to New Life Church Tijuana from New Life Church churches in California, especially from the area surrounding Los Angeles. These churches perform cross-border activities with a missionary approach and provide help to communities in Mexico. Thus, religious groups come from California to help build rooms for the church in Tijuana, remodel its atrium, teach biblical interpretation, conduct conferences for youths, and donate food and clothes. Religious services are presented bilingually twice a week. Celebrations and parties, especially those held with the members from California, are also bilingual.

The deportees who attend this church arrived through diverse paths. Some of them belonged to a sister church in California, and when they were deported, they went straight to New Life Church Tijuana in search of material and emotional support. Others converted when they were in jails, prisons, or detention centers in the United States. Some were referred to the pastor and called him after being deported to Tijuana. Finally, many searched for weeks or months for a Christian church where they would feel warmly accepted and, after having tried other congregations, chose New Life Church Tijuana. The church has rooms where it can lodge four men for up to nine months while they search for work to pay for their own place. During those months they are given food and a small stipend. In exchange, they perform maintenance work in the church and participate in biblical studies.

In interviews, deportees and their wives said that they found two fundamental factors for their emotional well-being in this congregation: a new family and a religious purpose. In addition to the church's celebrations and services, about ten families regularly come together for celebrations, barbecues, and holidays such as Thanksgiving. As expressed by Cynthia, the wife of a deportee: "In the church we have found brothers, and it is like a great family because we finally have people to hang out with." In some cases, they consider this new family to be much more united and harmonious than the one they left in the United States. In the congregation, they naturally find a support group. They can identify with many of the families because of shared experiences of deportation and the process of religious conversion.

In contrast to those who go to the Desayunador, many deportees have the economic resources to support themselves in Tijuana. Some of them might have kept a business or have savings in the United States. Others may benefit from a

wife “working on the other side.” Moreover, with the support of the church and its regular members, the families of the deportees have access to an institutionalized network made up of permanent ties and important material resources. In other words, they have the social capital necessary for settlement in Tijuana.

Through our interviews, we also found that religious faith has allowed for the imputation of meaning into the deportation process. Several deportees declared that they have no intention of returning to the United States, even if the opportunity presents itself. In the words of Carlos: “I don’t think I would return to where I grew up. In the *barrio* there is evil, so why would I return there? Now I know that I am with the Lord here and I already know Him.”

The church provides multiple opportunities to participate in the religious community. Worshippers get involved in evangelization ministries, visiting the sick in hospices and shelters, feeding the homeless, and biblical studies. Thus, they strengthen their bonds within the communities and proselytize. Omar, whose story is narrated in the introduction, is currently the church’s ranch manager in Ensenada. Other deportees have left to construct new churches in various regions of Mexico. This intense level of participation allows them to feel that they belong to a very active community with a collective purpose. In addition, the church has also established civic ties with Tijuana’s broader society. For example, with the involvement of a church member who works in the local police department, it has promoted a training program for chaplains.

The deportees repeatedly express that in their congregation they have been able to “connect” with their brothers in faith, with their families, and with God. Luis states, “Being away (from the place where I was raised) has allowed me to focus on my family which is my wife, my daughter and God. It helps me be connected, and be more centered. There I was more disorganized, exposed to things that are not good for anyone.”

The number of deportees and their families integrating into the congregation of New Life Church is very low compared to migrants receiving help in Catholic organizations or deportees in severe conditions of exclusion in Tijuana. An array of factors—criminalization, structural violence, harassment by the police, lack of identity documents, and limited help provided by public institutions—usually lead many deportees to precarity and addictions.

TRANSBORDER FAMILIES

Many deportees who attend New Life Church have been reunited with their wives and children or have formed new families in Mexico. From an economic and emotional standpoint, women provide the strategic assistance for social inclusion and settlement. For example, many of them regularly cross to California to buy secondhand goods to subsequently sell in Tijuana’s swap meets. Other women

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commute to work in San Diego. While deportees stay “trapped on the border,” their families find themselves forced to develop a cross-border life.²⁰

Carolina illuminates this situation. In 2013, her husband, Luis, was deported. After three months, he tried to reenter without authorization and was detained for a year before being deported again. The second time, Carolina arrived in Tijuana with her baby, waiting for her deported husband at the border. Although he had never returned to Mexico before being deported, she had occasionally made trips to Tijuana and Rosarito during her childhood and adolescence. Because of this, she thought that her help could be key for facilitating his navigation through basic aspects of life in Mexico. “For me,” she says, “it was like, I have to be with him—to more or less show him, ‘oh, this is how you use pesos, this is how we exchange money.’ And, for him, everything was completely new. He—his mother brought him when he was five, so he doesn’t remember anything.”

During her first year of residence in Tijuana, Carolina would regularly cross the border to San Diego to study to become a medical assistant. Now she works there four days a week in a clinic for the elderly. To make it to work on time, she has to leave their house at 4 a.m., and returns at 7 p.m. Meanwhile, Luis is in charge of taking their daughter to school and picking her up. Once a month, Carolina travels to Orange County with her daughter to visit her parents, siblings, uncles, and aunts.

These transborder lives result from the difficulty in attaining a well-paid job in Tijuana. In addition to the emotional and cultural shock when they are expelled to Mexico, deportees are hit by the economic impact arising from the wage gap between the United States and Mexico. To deal with this situation, women have to keep their jobs in California or find one that permits them to cross daily, earning a better salary than those offered in Tijuana.

This is the case of Carlos, who was deported from Los Angeles in 2012 after having lived there for thirty years. During the three years following his deportation, his wife would periodically cross the border so they could see each other. After that, she moved to Tijuana with their two children so that they could be reunited with him. The working conditions and the low salaries meant that the family had to depend on her earnings. She would cross the border daily to work as a nurse in San Diego. Meanwhile, he would stay at home to homeschool the children.

The change in responsibilities transforms the family structure and gender roles. Octavio expresses it succinctly: “I practically became the woman; I was the one who would take care of the kids, wake them up early, make them do their homework on the computer, while she goes to work and makes us dinner.” It should be noted that this change of roles does not necessarily mean that men end up being in charge of the housework; this situation places a great burden on the women, frequently resulting in physical exhaustion.

For children, family reunification in Tijuana breaks their school routine. They have to move away from friends and cousins they grew up with. Enrollment in Tijuana's schools is complicated—in many cases impossible—because of the documentation that the school authorities require. Also, many students say they have problems integrating because of social stigmas and language differences. Among our subjects, all of the children were studying in the United States when their parent was deported. In some of the families, children were enrolled in a school in San Diego after reuniting with their father in Tijuana, and their mother would cross the border with them every day. Nevertheless, their wait time at the border was exhausting and had a negative impact in their performance at school. In the case of New Life Church Tijuana, the majority of the children are homeschooled. This means that the only time they have for socializing with others is at the church.

Parents thus become the teachers of their children and are made responsible for their educational advancement. As Octavio explains, “So you have to see that they’re doing the work and then you grade them.” Diana thus confirms, “We are not teachers, and I would say to Omar, ‘How would we teach them if we don’t have any preparation to give classes to our children?’”

When the children are adolescents, they often insist on returning to the United States for high school. In some cases, family members who live there offer to take the youths in so that they can study in California and have access to the opportunities offered by their U.S. citizenship. In other cases, parents are reluctant to have their children leave home so young. Finally, several young people have returned to work in the United States, often with the help of their “brothers in faith.”

EXPULSIONS AND THE LOSS OF RESOURCES

As most deportees are Latino males, Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo refer to a “gendered and racial removal program.”²¹ The authors mention several associated factors: the war against terrorism, the great recession, and disappearing Latino men’s jobs, particularly in construction and building trades. In a broader sense, these mass expulsions are related to neoliberal policies and a degrading of social welfare.²² The shrinking economic spaces in the United States have thrown many immigrant males out of work and excluded complete families from basic services and goods. This surplus population may also be expelled from the country and forcibly relocated in Third World cities.

Mass deportations have forced the formation of many single-mother households in the United States, making them especially vulnerable to deep poverty.²³ When the family is reunited in Mexico, local socioeconomic conditions—especially the wage gap between the United States and Mexico—are obstacles for economic reintegration.

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Mothers' deportation leads to even deeper family crisis and a massive loss of resources for children.²⁴ Only one member of New Life Church, Mariana, is a deported woman and a single mother. After reuniting with her four children in Tijuana in 2011, she found a job in a maquiladora, where she earned less than \$350 a month. In 2016, she was hired by a call center and now works overtime to make ends meet. As her children are homeschooled, the church is their only space of recreation and socialization: "Wednesdays and Sundays are for the church, and sometimes I have also to work on Sundays. Believe it or not, those days I begin at four in the morning and I finish at noon, and those days I go directly to the church. A friend picks my children up and drives them to the church. During the service, I suddenly feel that I am falling asleep."

In an illustrative study on the limits and weakening of networks among Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, Cecilia Menjívar shows that "social networks, particularly those based on kinship, are not infallible and can weaken under extreme conditions of poverty, when too many demands are placed on individuals."²⁵ She brings to our attention what she calls "structures of opportunity"—the ensemble of structural forces together with the set of resources shared by the particular community. Often coming from poor and divided families, some of them with instances of domestic violence, many deportees depend on a weak structure of opportunity. If they rely on family ties to survive, these become weakened very fast.

In the same vein, Pierre Bourdieu cautions that social capital should be related not only to the density of ties within a network but also—and for the most part—to the quantity of material and symbolic resources available in the network.²⁶ In this sense, the basic characteristic of social capital—just like any other form of capital, according to the French sociologist—is its convertibility into economic capital. Social capital is based on the totality of resources that the network comprises in its ensemble, and it works as a support for the individuals who belong to the network. In other words, it makes them creditworthy (or not).

New Life Church allows deportees and their families to access a dense and enduring social network that holds important material and symbolic resources. In spite of this, we observed few bridges being constructed between local institutions, employers, and Tijuana's society more broadly. This "closure" hinders access to other types of indispensable resources for social integration. We identified an absence of weak ties (which sociological research has shown is beneficial for integration) that could facilitate deportees' insertion into more diverse labor and educational networks.²⁷ Their employment opportunities remain limited by the information they exchange within the religious community, and the mutual support between "Christian brothers." Some deportees work temporarily in remodeling the church. Several end up in precarious low-wage jobs because

the social capital within the Christian community is not sufficiently bridged with that of the broader civil society.

Family reunification in Tijuana does not mean a break in ties and commitment with relatives remaining in California. In fact, one of the reasons for staying in Tijuana is the proximity of the border. While the men who were deported get trapped in Tijuana, their wives and children develop an intense transborder life, working, visiting family members, vacationing, studying, and assisting sister churches in the United States.

In this sense, deportees' families share some features of the "transnational communities" described and analyzed by multiple scholars since the 1990s. For instance, Basch, Schiller, and Blanc define "transnationalism" as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement."²⁸ Peggy Levitt considers that "transmigrants" of Miraflores (Dominican Republic) are "integrated, to varying degrees, into the countries that receive them, at the same time that they remain connected to the countries that they leave behind."²⁹ As the so-called "transmigrants," deportees keep and even cherish their language, cultural, and religious links to the communities where they grew up. Interestingly, the congregation of New Life Church Tijuana forges such links to California, in the same way that some small and homogeneous churches in the United States symbolically link immigrants to their countries of origin.³⁰

However, transnationalism emphasizes the agency and the capacity of migrants to defy state power. From this point of view, physical borders and national boundaries seem to lose relevance. Transmigrants are able to control their movements into and through the borders, contest boundaries, and control their identity.³¹ In contrast, deportees in Tijuana are confined to one side of the border. Their movements are constrained by the physicality of the border and by punitive migratory policies. Forced to a place they do not perceive as theirs, deportees express a sense of banishment.³² Therefore, they resemble more of a diaspora than a transnational community.³³

According to Kanstroom, "parental deportation can be devastating for children (many of whom are U.S. citizens) who remain in the United States. Such children often must grow up in a family broken by deportation or must move in with other relatives or friends if they wish to remain in the States. In addition, there is the less well-known phenomenon of children who are, in effect, *de facto*, deported along with their parents."³⁴

In New Life Church Tijuana we observed that children who are reunited with their deported parents are uprooted from their family and social space. Their "de facto deportation" greatly limits their educational and employment opportunities.³⁵ It is likely that in the near future, the majority of reunited children—especially

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those who are U.S. citizens—will return to California to continue their studies or to find employment. To what extent will the return of children, forced to move to Mexico because of their parents' deportation, constitute a new "weak" citizenship, uprooted and greatly damaged by deportation policies?

After being deported to Tijuana, migrants who had been living in the United States for many years usually go through several phases. First, they suffer a shock and overwhelming feelings of total loss. They search for emergency help from social organizations and family networks. During the second phase, they try to cross back into the United States. The failed attempts at reentry, and the new detention periods, result in the progressive dismantling of social networks and chronic depression. This leads in the medium run to marginalization and frequent drug use.

As argued by Ruben, van Hute, and Davids, "The return can only be sustainable when returnees are provided with possibilities to become embedded in terms of economic, social networks, and psychosocial dimensions."³⁶ In cases of forced returns or deportations, migrants find themselves facing greater challenges, owing to their feelings of a lack of performance and a very low sense of self-esteem. In the case of Tijuana, we found that some congregations can be of crucial help in reconstructing social networks after deportation.

Two Catholic organizations in Tijuana, the Casa del Migrante and the Desayunador del Padre Chava, respond to the postdeportation state of emergency. Recently they have promoted reintegration programs to help fend off greater impoverishment and marginalization of deportees. The historic commitment of these organizations to migrants' rights, and their strong links with public institutions and local civil society, are significant symbolic and social resources that could facilitate their work of assisting the integration of migrants into the city. Nevertheless, the number and diversity of the people the organizations assist on a daily basis, and the conditions of homelessness and poverty the deportees face, make it difficult to build dense social networks and to form bonding social capital.³⁷

In this study, we found that New Life Church provides an institutionalized web of persistent relations: religious leaders and established members of the church enjoy prestige and recognition in their community. They facilitate adaptation to a new place and help to reconstruct social networks. However, strong ties within this network constrain the mobility of its members. Employment and educational opportunities, access to housing and medical care, and other elements for sustainable social inclusion are confined to existing resources within a small religious community. Most of the households rely on female work and suffer economic hardship.

Tijuana has long been one of the main ports of forced repatriation to Mexico. In 2016, more than one hundred deportees arrived each day, and nearly half of them stayed in the city for short- or long-term periods. Although as of March 2017 the city had not yet witnessed the massive deportations announced by the Trump administration, thousands of deportees already struggle to integrate in a very poor labor market or to enroll their children in schools. They now compete for scarce emergency resources and for social integration with new international migrants and asylum seekers from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, stranded at the U.S.-Mexico border by fears of exclusionary migratory and asylum politics.³⁸ The arrival of these new flows has created a logistical and capacity challenge for social service providers and human rights organizations. More than thirty Christian churches, migrant camps, and improvised shelters have opened their doors to house these newcomers. As border security and racist discourse in the United States escalate, and Donald Trump declares that his administration will deport up to three million immigrants, some communities on the southern side of the border are already overwhelmed.³⁹

NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

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13. El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México*, 2016, <https://www.colef.mx/emif/>.

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31. Michael Kearney, "Transnationalism in California and Mexico at the End of Empire," in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124.
32. Brotherton and Barrios, *Banished*.
33. Kanstroom, *Aftermath*.
34. *Ibid.*, 141.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Ruerd Ruben, Marieke van Houte, and Tine Davids, "What Determines the Embeddedness of Forced-Return Migrants? Rethinking the Role of Pre- and Post-Return Assistance," *International Migration Review* 43, no. 4 (2009): 908–937.
37. Hagan, Leal, and Rodriguez, "Deporting Social Capital," 1–23.
38. From May to December 2016, more than eleven thousand international migrants, most of them Haitian citizens, arrived in Baja California hoping to enter the United States. At the port of San Ysidro, the CBP was systematically sending asylum seekers back to Mexico, allowing about forty to sixty Haitians to cross the border per day. In October, when the U.S. government began to deport numerous Haitian citizens, their family members and friends who were still waiting to cross the border decided to stay in Tijuana.
39. Haeyoun Park and Troy Griggs, "Could Trump Really Deport Millions of Unauthorized Immigrants?," *New York Times*, February 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/29/us/trump-unauthorized-immigrants.html>.