

## *The art of coming home.* Labor reintegration experiences of deported migrants from United States

### *The art of coming home.* Experiencias de reinserción laboral de migrantes deportados de Estados Unidos

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#### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the experience of deportation and labor reintegration of a migrant woman who has settled in the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl, State of Mexico since 2016. Using a qualitative methodology and a biographical approach, we recovered the voice of our informant and her subjectivity on the experience lived in the United States, as well as the actions taken to self-employ in an urban context. The findings warn that among the deported migrant population, it is necessary to change the gaze from north to south for a successful reintegration into the labor market, without necessarily implying what they consider their home in that country. Likewise, the role of the migrant person as agent and of human, social and political capital as resources for the implementation of initiatives that promote individual and collective labor reintegration of deported migrants is highlighted.

Keywords: deportation, labor reintegration, Deportees Together in the Battle Organization, return, migration.

#### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es analizar la experiencia de la deportación y reinserción laboral de una mujer migrante que se ha establecido en el municipio de Nezahualcóyotl, Estado de México desde 2016. A partir de una metodología cualitativa y un enfoque biográfico recuperamos la voz de nuestra informante y su subjetividad sobre la experiencia vivida en Estados Unidos, así como de las acciones emprendidas para autoemplearse en un contexto urbano. Los hallazgos advierten que entre la población migrante deportada es necesario cambiar la mirada del norte al sur para una reinserción laboral exitosa, aunque ello no

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necesariamente signifique que pueden despojarse del que consideran su hogar en ese país. Asimismo, se destaca el papel de la persona migrante como agente y de los capitales humano, social y político como recursos para la implementación de iniciativas que promueven la reinserción laboral individual y colectiva de los migrantes deportados.

Palabras clave: deportación, reinserción laboral, Colectivo Deportados Unidos en la Lucha, retorno, migración.

## Introduction

I keep saying that I'm here [in Mexico], but my home, what I call my home, I even feel bad because I don't know what to say, is it my home, is it not my home? It's hard to decide, but my home is in Chicago. I do keep seeing my home in Chicago. I am adapting here, but my conception of, what I understand as, home, is in Chicago (Laura, State of Mexico, January 2020).

Analyzing the processes of deportation of Mexican nationals from a historical perspective makes it possible to understand, for example, that the cohort that returned to Mexico during the Great Depression (1929-1934) did so in conditions that are not entirely unconnected to those who returned during the Obama and Trump administrations since the massive and hurried return to Mexico of thousands of people during those years was also linked to situations of unemployment, hunger, xenophobia, and deportations (Alanís, 2005). For this reason, this article first presented a brief fragment of the interview with Laura, a migrant woman deported from the United States—whose case is extensively analyzed in the development of this article—in order to put into context some of the implications that U.S. immigration legislation has had and continues to have on the lives of migrants, particularly in the face of the implementation of violent actions that seek to “monitor and punish, exclude, deny, reject, and deport, [...as well as] protect the border and criminalize the other” (Castañeda, 2012, pp. 301-312).

Deportation, as Padilla (2012, p. 212) indicates, is “an example of how U.S. immigration laws create lawbreakers and criminals”. Returning with that label, often in vulnerable conditions, does not make reintegration in Mexico's arrival contexts easy, where migrants will have to design strategies to incorporate themselves into the dynamics of those places. In some cases, this is temporary. In others, it is permanent due to the conditions in which the forced return occurred, the sanctions associated with it, and the many vulnerabilities that illegal entry into that country entails.

This work aims to present the experience of deportation and labor reintegration of a migrant woman who has settled in an urban area of the State of Mexico. This is in the face of a scenario in which the criminalization of migration has caused “migrants to go from being workers, fathers, mothers, and children, to being criminals, [thus] acquiring a new subjectivity with serious consequences for their lives and those of their families” (Castañeda, 2012, p. 309). An example of this is family separation, which in the case of some deported migrants, recreates constant struggles between the search for reintegration in Mexico and the hope of returning to the United States to be in what they consider their home.

Hence the notion embodied in the title of this work, “The art of coming home”, taken from the work by Storti (2011, in u.s. Department of State, 2017), in order to specify, as established by this author, that home is not strictly the physical place that a person inhabits, but the space associated with all people, actions, feelings, emotions, and signs that make people feel at home. This is how Laura, the informant of this work, expresses it. It is about everything that makes a life, since “it’s your life that’s there” as she refers to her home in Chicago, Illinois, United States.

The question to answer through the case presented in this work is how to interpret the labor reintegration processes of the deported migrant population in urban contexts of arrival in Mexico. To this end, the article is divided into four sections. The first section presents the methodology used and the techniques for collecting and analyzing the information. Subsequently, the primary conceptual references for understanding the processes of labor reintegration are presented. Based on Laura’s narrative, the third section describes and analyzes her deportation experience and the reintegration processes in the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl, State of Mexico. Finally, the main conclusions of this work are presented.

## Methodology

According to Castles (2012), understanding the relationship between methodology and methods is necessary to the extent that they are generally confused or used as if they both mean the same thing. While methodology subscribes to research logic and is linked to the theory of knowledge, methods are the techniques used to collect and analyze information or data.

In other words, in line with Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 15), “methodology designates the way to approach problems and look for answers”. In this respect, this qualitative research starts from a phenomenological perspective since the aim is to understand people’s actions from their point of view or how they define their world. In this case, the approach is from the deportees’ actions from the United States to reintegrate into the labor market and settle in Mexico.

Within the different qualitative methods, there are those considered from the biographical perspective (Pujadas, 1992), and among these are autobiographical narratives, which due to their particular characteristics can be seen as an appropriate method for this research, given that they recover elements of the life history that were chosen within the very construction of the research, with variables clearly defined in the interviews (Santamarina & Marinas, 1994). These variables allowed for the incorporation of the informant’s voice and his or her subjectivity and assessments.

Autobiographical narratives make it possible to know aspects of people’s lives relevant to the research objectives and show the socio-cultural constructs of men and women around the experience of deportation in their own words. However, Velasco and Gianturco (2015, p. 136-139) point out that using this method in studies on international migration makes it necessary to consider the difficulty of capturing the life experience constituted by places so diverse that they refer to different contexts of meaning. These meaning contexts are different from the situational context of the production of the life story and will determine its fluidity, depth, and breadth.

Secondly, the interaction of time and space in migrants' biographies implies that the experience of time is accompanied by one that is fragmented in geographical terms and social relations. These are expressed in the "here" and "there" to account for simultaneous and significantly connected events. Finally, the authors of this work point out the difficulty of recording lives in secrecy conditions since memory—as the main resource for reconstructing life stories—is a faculty that forgets, particularly when it comes to situations with a negative emotional charge.

Based on the above, two special features justify the selection of the case of Laura. Firstly, she is a migrant woman who is not originally from the State of Mexico but who sought to settle in the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl because of its proximity to Mexico City and the work opportunities it offers. Methodologically, as Rivera points out (2013, p. 56), the analysis of this type of case makes it possible "to distance oneself from research that considers as units of analysis and reference only a place of origin and a place of destination to study the migration process, and consequently assumes that the return necessarily occurs to the place of origin". Secondly, Laura is a returned migrant of high social and political capital and a great initiative that has made it possible for her to convert this capital into collective actions.

In this case study, the need to learn and understand the problem at hand from the proximity to the subjects and the contexts stands out. This work highlights the potential that in-depth analysis has for understanding social processes through the voice of the study subjects, whose specificity is not always separated from the possibility of establishing similarities with what has been observed in other cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

The first contact with Laura was made in November 2017 through the transnational organization Institute for Social and Cultural Research and Practice (Spanish: *Instituto de Investigación y Práctica Social y Cultural*, Ipsoculta). In that year, a little more than twelve months after her deportation, Laura was starting to develop a productive project. In January 2020, it was possible to contact her again to deepen the knowledge and understanding of her experience during her deportation, but mainly to learn about the scope of her productive project as a strategy for reintegration into the workplace.

As a consideration, it is important to point out that various media have documented the actions promoted by Laura after her deportation, so although it is challenging to maintain the anonymity of the informant, the authors of this article have her consent to make use of and analyze the information that was provided them.

## Basic Premises on Deportation and Return to Work

Conforming to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), forced return refers to the "compulsory return of a person to the country of origin, transit, or a third country, based on an administrative or judicial decision" (OIM, 2006, p. 61), among which deportation is one because it is an act of the State to send an alien out of its territory.

According to Castañeda (2012, p. 308), this action resulting from applying a public policy becomes real when migrants embody it and experience it. Deportation is constructed as an act that expresses and activates the violence and coercion contained in immigration legislation. At the same time, the author argues that the dynamics and the magnitude of these events correspond to specific economic contexts. These economic contexts are social feelings and discomforts, and specific political interests, such as those observed in the different stages in the history of Mexico-United States

migration, with economic crises and anti-immigrant positions that assign specific features to the return flows between both countries (Durand, 2013; Massey, Pren, et al., 2009; Massey, Durand et al., 2009).

In the subjectivity of migrants, deportation can be represented in a set of diverse experiences, among which Beltrán (2019, p. 138) identifies deportation as a tragedy; a preview of plans for return; a test of life or faith; a consequence of individual errors; a fair legal process; or an experience of mistreatment and human rights violations. In the opinion of the authors of this article, these experiences are not exclusive of each other since, in the course of their process, deported persons may identify and acknowledge having lived through more than one.

The event of deportation to the place of origin or another place is followed by reintegration, which the IOM defines as the “re-inclusion or reincorporation of a person into a group or process, for example, of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin” (IOM, 2006, p. 62). Among its types, it distinguishes social, cultural, and economic reintegration, some of which are of interest for this work for their in-depth study in the economic sphere and labor processes.

By definition, social reintegration refers to the process of reintegrating a migrant into the social structure of his or her country of origin, which includes both personal ties (family, relatives, neighbors) and civil society (civil associations, autonomous groups, and others) (IOM, 2006). In other words, social reintegration is closely linked to the presence of social capital among these people, insofar as it is a useful resource that is accumulated and reconverted to develop diverse practices that make it possible to resolve and attend to daily needs (Gutiérrez, 2004).

Following the analytical proposal of Gutiérrez (2004), the resource as capital is expressed in individual, family, and collective forms. The first is implemented individually and independently by people, distinguishing themselves, for example, when looking for a job. In contrast, the collective is expressed in an institutionalized manner and in other forms of organization, which, in this case, can facilitate the social reintegration of the deported person.

On the other hand, according to the IOM (IOM, 2006), cultural reintegration has to do with the readoption of the values, ways of life, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of the country of origin by the returning migrant. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the readoption of these elements is not always straightforward, much less automatic, so it can result in what some authors (Storti, 2011, U.S. Department of State, 2017) have called reverse culture shock, to refer to the impacts on the subjectivity of the returnee of adapting to the culture of his or her country after having been away from it for a while. This could be a time in which not only the place and its people changed, but also the person who is returning and who will have to reintegrate into a life that may even be newer than the one he or she has left behind (Sanz, 2016); or into a living space that may not only be alien to him or her, but that no longer constitutes the home or house of the returnee (Storti, 2011, U.S. Department of State, 2017).

In this process of reverse readjustment, once back in the country of origin, the person experiences a process similar to that experienced in the foreign country, with moments of exhilaration upon encountering a new culture or re-encountering their own. These crises are derived from feeling alien or foreign, and from the times of recovery, adjustment, and adaptation. According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (2013), these moments mean that, in the conjunction of feelings and associated emotions, first

with the emigration and later with the return, the person experiences highs and lows that can be related to the sensation of being on a roller coaster. In the estimation of the present authors, these moments are cyclical because with the return, particularly to a space not associated with the construction of the home, people can experience diverse crises, like processes of recovery and constant efforts of adaptation.

According to Storti (2011, U.S. Department of State, 2017), some elements that can make this process more or less tense have to do with the form of the return (voluntary or involuntary), its planning (expected or unexpected), the age, the time spent abroad, the degree of interaction with the foreign culture, and the degree of interaction with the culture of the country of origin. The above factors as a whole can be explored among the deported migrant population, whose return has been both involuntary and unexpected after a long period in the United States, which made it possible for them to build life projects and strengthen their belonging in that country more than in Mexico.

In another vein, economic reintegration, which is what this article prioritizes, has to do with the reintegration of the migrant into the economic system of his or her country of origin, in order not only to guarantee his or her livelihood but also to encourage the use of the knowledge, skills, and assets acquired abroad to promote the development of the places to which he or she returns (OIM, 2006). From this approach, it would seem that the position of the migrant as a promoter of development is limited both to his or her economic contributions while abroad as an active migrant, associated with the figure of the collective migrant (Moctezuma, 2008), and also to his or her return to the country of origin, with the assumption of the use and benefit of the knowledge and skills acquired. However, the above is not always possible due to the characteristics of the labor markets in Mexico, since “not everyone finds a place or a way to exercise their labor skills. The most heartfelt complaint of migrants is that they do not live off what they know how to do” (Salas et al., 2019, p. 16).

Despite the leading role assigned to migrants as promoters of development, it should be noted that “returned migrants are not a target population in the design of a migration policy or a social policy itself” (Rivera, 2011), since in practice, what has been promoted are isolated and improvised initiatives that do not always seek reintegration, such as the “Somos Mexicanos” strategy or the “Repatriados Trabajando” program, whose scope in terms of placement and labor integration was minimal during the time they were implemented (Jardón et al., 2019).

Specifically, labor reintegration is defined as the “post-return process during which migrants not only return and rejoin the community that they had left but also seek to continue with their working life through activities aimed at finding employment or setting up small businesses in the place of origin” (Anguiano-Téllez et al., 2013, p. 117). Some thoughts on the concept make it possible to perceive that reintegration does not necessarily occur in what was originally the place of departure. Simultaneously, the returnee population may value the search for opportunities in other spaces to apply their knowledge and develop their skills. Furthermore, although it is one of the practices most frequently turned to by returning migrants, the setting-up of small businesses does not always have the expected success and financial return (Jardón et al., 2019; El Colegio de Tlaxcala A. C. & Gobierno del Estado de Tlaxcala, 2017). In this sense, the assumption is that facing the many difficulties associated with reintegration into the workplace or entrepreneurship “requires imagination, inventiveness, and capital, both economic and human” (Rivera, 2011, p. 330).



The reintegration into the workplace of returned migrants, seen from the perspective of migration as a process in which the return is neither definitive nor permanent, makes it possible to understand that re-migrating constitutes an ever-present possibility if labor reintegration—in this case, in Mexico—does not represent the satisfaction of their family and individual needs and expectations. However, in other cases, it may be a process that is more oriented toward settling down (Rivera, 2011, p. 328; 2013, p. 72). It is this last type of reintegration that this article focuses on interpreting based on the case of Laura. To this end, the position of this work corresponds to the understanding of migration as a cyclical and open process, in which the possibility of emigrating again will always be present, even among those migrants who were deported with a ban on re-entry to the United States for life.

In this context, models have emerged that are oriented toward promoting the social, labor, economic, political, cultural, and family reincorporation of the returning migrant population in Mexico. From a comprehensive perspective, the proposal by Rendón and Wertman (2017, p. 33) is based on three complementary approaches: *i*) rights; *ii*) social readaptation-risk, need and response capacity; and *iii*) network management.

The rights-based approach is intended to provide a framework for respecting, protecting, and taking active steps to implement laws, policies, and procedures, including allocating resources to pursue this migrant population's rights, such as the right to nationality non-discrimination, and non-criminalization. As has been documented by various civil society organizations like the Institute for Women in Migration (Spanish: *Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración*, Imumi), Institute for Studies and Dissemination of Migration (Spanish: *Instituto de Estudios y Divulgación sobre Migración*, Inedim), Without Borders (Spanish: *Sin Fronteras*), and Ipsoculta, the above is a set of fundamental rights that are not always guaranteed.

The second approach of this reintegration model is based on the consideration that the level of care a returned migrant receives must be adjusted to his or her level of risk. In other words, it is assumed that migrants in more vulnerable conditions require intensive levels of care, unlike returnees who are not in this situation. In this approach, risks are associated with negative personal and contextual situations that make it more likely that people will develop emotional, health, or other problems, as is generally the case among deported migrants in the face of stress, anxiety, and attrition associated with the removal process or so-called "voluntary departure".

In addition to risk, the principle of necessity aims to identify static (assigning vulnerability, but not changing) and dynamic (being susceptible to change) risk factors, which constitute objects of intervention for reintegration. Lastly, the principle of responsiveness is based on establishing that cognitive-behavioral and personality characteristics influence the willingness to respond to care types.

Finally, the network and community intervention approach postulates the generation of social capital of the returnee due to the relational vulnerability concerning different social networks. For example, the non-incorporation into strategic sectors means resorting to jobs with low income, limited stability, no assistance, and no social security due to a lack of knowledge of social and governmental support or aid programs.

From a practical point of view, this model recovers diverse conceptual elements from those previously established. It prioritizes the migrant person as a subject of rights while recovering the duality of structure and agency. It also places the person in their immediate environment and context, from their recognition as an agent, with resources, characteristics, and strengths that provide them with the capacity of

response and action for their reintegration into living spaces. In other words, this work recognizes the importance of understanding the social context of reference to explain actions and practices based on the contexts in which they are developed and manifested (Andrade, 2010).

Consequently, there is a need to identify the mechanisms that facilitate the processes of labor reintegration. It is also essential to recognize the scope of government support among the returned migrant population, particularly when considering that the vulnerability associated with a forced return not only makes access to stable jobs difficult but has also devolved into a particular emphasis “on self-employment, the generation of enterprises and businesses that do not address the disadvantages arising from wage labor and job insecurity” (Masferrer et al., 2017, p. 4).

## Process of Return in the State of Mexico

Addressing this issue in territories such as the State of Mexico is important given its position as a producer of international migrants and returned migrants, among whom are men and women who, in many cases, were forced to return. This work points out that their reintegration into the labor market is not always easy or immediate. In some cases, it is not even desired given the expectations of returning to the United States, despite having been deported (Jardón & Baca, 2018).

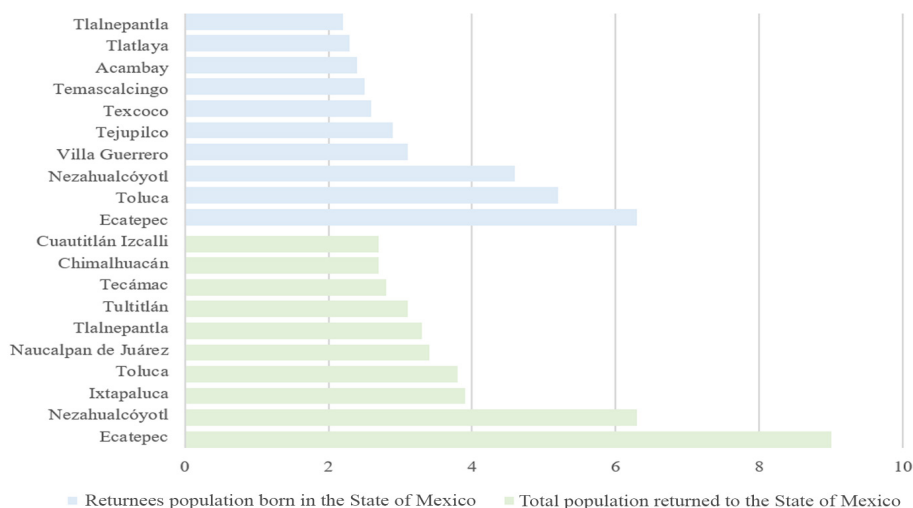
To identify the contexts of return and deepen the analysis of the labor reintegration processes of the migrant population returned voluntarily and involuntarily in the State of Mexico, this work uses as a reference the proportion of housing with migrants who were returning to Mexico in 2010. There is a striking presence of municipalities with a migratory tradition, located in the southern region of the State, with the main examples being Luvianos, Tejupilco, Coatepec Harinas, Texcaltitlán, Santo Tomás, Malinalco, and Ocuilan (Consejo Nacional de Población [Conapo], 2012).

Another approach is found in the 2015 Intercensal Survey (Inegi, 2015), which made it possible to distinguish the association between place of return and place of birth. Among the total population returned to the State of Mexico—which includes those born in other states—the municipality of Ecatepec was the principal place of settlement, followed by Nezahualcóyotl and Ixtapaluca, as well as other municipalities that are mostly located in the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone (Spanish: *Zona Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México*, ZMCM). Not so among the returned population originally from the State of Mexico, who were more often found in municipalities with a migratory tradition, such as Tejupilco, Tlatlaya, and Villa Guerrero (Figure 1).

In other words, this process makes it possible to explain that while the municipalities with a migratory tradition are spaces for the reception of the majority of their original population that at some point emigrated, urban contexts tend to register a greater dynamism or exercise a greater level of attraction among the population that was not born in the State. The above is explained by their proximity to Mexico City and the opportunities that these spaces can offer, despite the growth of the informal economy in the suburban area of the State of Mexico.



**Figure 1: Percentage of returned population by State of Mexico municipality of settlement, 2015**



Source: created by the author based on the Intercensal Survey (Inegi, 2015)

Finally, to get as close as possible to the forced returnees, this work relies on migrants' flow returned by U.S. immigration authorities indicated in the Migration Survey on the Northern Border (Spanish: *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte*, Emif Norte). This survey results show that the municipalities in the State of Mexico with the most significant number of people returned to this state were Ecatepec, Toluca, and Nezahualcóyotl, during the 2008-2018 period. Municipalities such as Ixtapan de la Sal, Tejupilco, Tenancingo, and Ocuilan, located in the south of the State of Mexico, also had large numbers of returnees (Table 1).

Based on this process, as indicated above, the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl was chosen because it is a context of return among the population born in the State of Mexico, although with a more significant presence of those born elsewhere in the country. This makes it possible to understand the logic of what Masferrer (2014) maintains in terms of a return that may occur elsewhere. Furthermore, this is a municipality whose population mobility is dynamic and diverse (Rivera, 2013, p. 64), which means that social and family support networks are not always present to facilitate the processes of forced return and reintegration of this population.

### Crossed Perspectives. Between Reintegration in Mexico and the Hope of Returning to the United States

“You can stop people, you can impose limits on them, but they will find other ways”. This phrase, coined by Taylor (2008, in Novosseloff & Neisse, 2011, p. 28) to talk about the history of control of and access to the Berlin Wall, makes it easier to somehow understand the limited effectiveness and counterproductive effect of walls that have been built to protect, separate, reject, and deny the existence of the other. This ambivalence can be seen in the possibility of avoiding them, which in turn results in the creation of a sector “without”: “without papers, without status” (p. 29).

**Table 1: Percentage of Mexican population returned by u.s. immigration authorities organized by municipality of origin, 2008-2018**

County	Year										
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Aculco							6.2	6.8			
Calimaya									5.0		
Chalco											21.4
Cuatitlán Izcalli											
Ecatepec	4.4		3.2	5.3		7.4			5.4	10.1	5.4
Ixtapan de la Sal							7.6				
Morelos											
Naucalpan		6.6									
Nezahualcóyotl			5.2					8.5		10.3	
Ocuilan										6.0	
Tejupilco					7.4	6.0					
Tenancingo				6.0							
Tlalnepantla	13.7										
Toluca	21.5	20.9	19.6	16.7	17.7	14.5	14.6	5.8	9.7		17.2
Zacazonapan	7.7	4.8									
Zinacantepec					5.0						
Total returned population originating from the State of Mexico	24,302	25,532	21,270	18,593	20,684	12,635	8,175	7,610	9,168	7,323	8,534
Proportion compared to the total at the national level	4.3	4.7	5.1	5.2	5.9	4.2	3.8	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.4

Source: created by the author based on the flow of returned migrants (Emif Norte, n.d.)

This process, which is not unrelated to that observed in the wall that separates Mexico and the United States, has resulted in various measures to control irregular migration. The above, in some cases, has resulted in the death of people trying to get around it, as well as in the inclusion of those “without” among the many who have managed to cross it, or in the deportation of many others whose dream is now on the other side of the wall. In order to understand this process, this section presents the case of Laura at length. To this end, some fragments of her narrative are introduced through textual quotations from the interviews that made it possible to reconstruct her migratory and labor reintegration process in Mexico.

For Laura, migration has been a constant in her life. Although she was born in Veracruz, Laura was registered and lived for seventeen years in Mexico City, where she met her ex-husband, with whom she emigrated to Jalisco and lived there for approximately eight years. After their separation, the economic situation of Laura became increasingly complicated, so she maintains that at that time, her only option was to leave for the United States, leaving her four children between the ages of one and nine in the care of her mother.

Supported by her social networks and with the intention of reaching Chicago, Illinois, Laura tried to cross for the first time through Nuevo Laredo in late 2000. However, due to the danger of the crossing, she chose not to try and return to “the ranch” to wait for another coyote. In April 2001, with the help of a U.S. acquaintance, Laura traveled to Tijuana, a border city from which she made three attempts. The first time, she says she was immediately returned; while the second time, she was in a detention center for approximately one week. Nevertheless, her determination, the desire that “her children will never again live in misery”, and the thought that “she

could not return like this” led her to make a third attempt, which is when she managed to cross over and reach Chicago. In her narrative, Laura states the following:

My ex-husband is from the state of Jalisco, so I went to live there, in a small town, a very small ranch. Because of personal situations and domestic violence, I was left alone with my four children at that time, and my financial situation became dire. Somehow my only option at that time was to go to the United States. Basically, every person in these small towns leaves, and the person who invited me, who paid for my coyote, was in Chicago. That’s why I went to Chicago because we leave depending on each town, and then we get settled in the United States. I made the first attempt through Laredo, but it was hazardous. I went back to the ranch and waited to get another coyote, and that’s how I left for Tijuana. When I got to Tijuana, I made the first attempt to cross, and I was sent back. I tried again days later, they arrested me, and I was in a detention center for about a week. Once they let me out, I decided that I would not return because I did not want my children to suffer and lack for anything again. I could not return like that. I had to try. On the third attempt, I managed to get through, and that’s how I arrived in Chicago.

Being in that city, for Laura, as for many migrants, the plan was to stay only one or two years to save money and return. However, her stay in the United States lasted for approximately fifteen years, during which time she began another relationship and had two more children. During her stay in Chicago, Laura’s life was “as normal as that of any other migrant”. Just one month after arriving, she started working at Unique, a chain of second-hand stores, a job in which she remained for more than ten years doing diverse activities.

Although Laura indicates that her life was like that of any other immigrant, she also recognizes that her story changed when in 2010 she began to study for the General Education Development (GED) Diploma, equivalent to high school, in addition to already having a greater command of the English language. These resources made it possible for her to begin her involvement as an activist, particularly when in 2011, the store she was working at was sold and the new owners began downsizing, retaining senior staff with knowledge of store administration and management, and the ability to train new employees.

The visibility of Laura as an undocumented immigrant from this “without” group was made clear by the effect of the E-Verify electronic verification program, whose main precedent is the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which required employers to examine the documentation of each newly hired worker to prove his or her identity and eligibility to work in the United States, and which led to the creation of Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification. Later, with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), the Basic Pilot Program was introduced, and in 2007 its name was changed to E-Verify, which over time acquired new functions and tools to validate information (E-Verify, 2018).

In an update in 2011, the so-called E-Verify Self Check allowed Laura’s employers to announce that there would be a document verification the following year. This warning, but also the ban on speaking Spanish—supported by initiatives such as English Only—and other practices of harassment and pressure toward staff who are mostly women, of Mexican nationality and undocumented status, led Laura to begin training through the organization Arise Chicago, where she attended a workshop on

labor rights and started a union campaign in her store, in order to seek the protection of the workers' rights and defend the fact that people with seniority in the workplace did not have to participate in the document review.

However, the campaign promoted by Laura did not achieve its objective, probably as a result of the decline of unions and collective bargaining in the United States (Zepeda, 2016; La Botz, 2018), since, in this case, only the most senior workers could vote. Thus, in January 2013, the request for documents began in order to update the information of the mostly undocumented workers. This fact caused Laura and her co-workers not to return to work at the store because they would be "caught". As a result, they filed and won their lawsuit with the National Labor Relations Board. However, this was symbolic, Laura says, because they won their right to return to work, but the employers also had the right to review their documents.

A month after Laura became unemployed, she managed to get another job through a placement agency, though she acknowledges that it was not easy because of the E-Verify program. However, already aware of the rights that allow her to have another perspective and recognize labor abuse situations, after six months, she decided to stop working, live off her savings, study, and participate more actively as a volunteer in organizations such as Centro Romero Chicago. Laura taught literacy classes in this center because the experience with her co-workers at the Unique store allowed her to become aware of the abuses and greater difficulties that migrants experience when they cannot read and write.

Mujeres Latinas en Acción was another organization in which Laura became involved, first through counseling because of the psychological violence that she suffered from her husband, and then as a participant in the courses given by that organization to train women to "use their current skills to start a business". The free services provided by the organization made it possible for her to take various courses on leadership, entrepreneurship, and computers and become an instructor of the workshops on labor rights at Arise Chicago, where she first acquired knowledge on the subject.

The involvement of Laura in Arise Chicago led her to become the education coordinator in 2015 and to be put in charge of the labor law workshops. Hence, she continued her training with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (OSHA). With this, Laura stopped volunteering with the organization, and her work in the organization became her last job for almost four years.

Although she was paid under a scholarship scheme because she had no documents, for Laura, "it was the dream" because she went from receiving the minimum hourly wage during the ten years she worked at Unique to \$21 an hour at Arise Chicago. Furthermore, "she was doing other things that she never imagined" because in her workplace, she was paid for courses on community organizing and unionism at the University of Illinois, and she was in charge of the workweek at the Mexican consulate in Chicago.

While Laura considered that she was living "the dream" at work, she also says that her personal life "was tumultuous and she felt cornered because she wanted to get out of that relationship, but not having documents did not make it easy". The idea then emerged that the organization would help her by asking her to work for them. To this end, as can be read in the narrative about the immigration trajectory and the deportation of the informant of this work, Laura had to return to Mexico to begin

her process, which did not happen because, at the airport, she was approached by immigration and deported in June 2016 with a twenty-year penalty.

While speaking with the organization, the idea came up that they would help me and ask me to work for them. I always say that I also believed the story that they only deport people who make some mistakes or commit crimes, and I said, well, I haven't committed any crimes, I always paid my taxes, I don't have so much as a speeding ticket. I thought I had more things in my favor than against me. What I didn't remember at that time, what I had forgotten, were the two times I was caught at the border. I needed to leave the United States to start the process. I knew it was risky. I bought a ticket to come to Mexico in June 2016 to start precisely that process. So, I arrived at the airport, checked my bags, went through national security, and when I went to board the plane, the immigration police were at the gate. It wasn't a raid, nor were they asking for the documents of anyone else. They were there for me. When they saw me, they approached me and asked me for my documents. I showed them my passport and my boarding pass, and they told me that I had to accompany them. On our way to the office that they have inside the airport, the agent asked me if I had ever been deported, and I said no, and he began to ask me more things. I told him that I wasn't going to answer anything, that I didn't have to answer him, but when I arrived, I couldn't refuse to have my fingerprints checked. When they checked my fingerprints, it was evident that the record for the two times I was caught at the border came up and that those two times counted as deportations. Let's say it was the excuse they used to give legal backing to what they did in my case because the primary reason for my deportation was likely my activism, and I think that when I started the union campaign, it was the same company that pointed the finger at me. However, Chicago is a sanctuary city. You can't be deported so easily, but somehow the circumstances were perfect. In a federal zone, the sanctuary city thing doesn't come into play. So, they stopped me there; I foolishly signed, I didn't think clearly, I don't know, so many things went through my mind at that moment. I foolishly signed that I was accepting deportation. They put me back on the plane, and I was leaving with the deported status and a twenty-year ban on returning to the United States. That is where everything changed completely, and arriving here, it was a matter of 'what am I going to do now?' I mean, I came with the idea of doing this. I had the idea that I was finally going to fix my papers and, well, the most painful thing was that I thought that I was going to see my children again. In my case, the first two years were the most difficult. It is still difficult, but now I am in a process. I have to think things over, I have to accept things, and my life cannot be ended by deportation.

Despite being in a sanctuary city, the above happened, a city that welcomes migrants and works to maintain its policies and programs for their incorporation regardless of their immigration status (Cruz, 2019). The legal basis for Laura's deportation is found in the 1996 Law, with provisions that establish civil penalties for illegal entry and authorization to fingerprint captured migrants. Therefore, when migrants are arrested and sent to a detention center, as was Laura's case, they are left with a police record (Castañeda, 2012, p. 309).

The experience of Laura shows that immigration control policies have focused on expelling the population that is permanently established in the United States, with deportations that for these migrants mean more than the loss of an income in dollars, since they regularly lead to the separation of families with mixed immigration status (Peña, 2017).

While it has not been easy for Laura to be back in Mexico, she also recognizes that deportation cannot end her life. This is why she has sought to reintegrate into the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl, State of Mexico. She lived there before migrating to Jalisco, and it “opened its doors” for her when she returned in 2016. However, she also has many ties to Mexico City because after she was deported, it was in the institutions of this city where she began to look for support. There, she managed to obtain the help of the Unemployment Insurance Program of the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion (Spanish: *Programa Seguro de Desempleo de la Secretaría del Trabajo y Fomento al Empleo*, Styfe), with an amount of 2,100 pesos per month for six months.

In December 2016, as can be read in her narrative, Laura and other beneficiaries of the program were summoned to formalize the reception of their support. At the event she attended, besides realizing that she was not alone as there were several deportees, she was invited to be part of the Presidium, since her participation as an activist in Chicago made it possible for her to meet several public servants, two of whom were present at the event.

To start something, I had to stay in a strategic city like Mexico City. So, I stayed here and started to see what else was out there and began to learn about the programs that existed at that time to serve our community. I went and applied to one of them, which is the unemployment insurance program of the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion, the Styfe. I applied, and they called me and made an appointment for December 6 of that year, supposedly to give me the benefit. So, I went, and because it was an appointment to take one’s picture, they called many people who had been deported. That’s when I realized that I was not alone. There were many of us. When I arrived, a politician from Chicago, whom I knew, because of the same work I was doing with the organization, was there. The person who was at that time the secretary of labor, Amalia Garcia, was also there. I also knew her from my time in Chicago. When she saw me there, she asked me what I was doing there. I told her, and she said, “I’m very sorry, Laura”. They invited me to come to the Presidium, then she mentioned me and said that she was very sorry that I am here because she knew about the work that I was doing over there, but welcomed me to Mexico. That got the attention of some of those present, and when the event was over, they asked me, “Hey, but what were you doing over there then?” We stayed there talking about what happened to us in Mexico, what we had done there, and I observed many similar things in our experiences. The difficulties in getting our identity documents—which is one of the basic needs to adapt—and the fact that we were separated from our children. Right there and then, I told them, “Let’s see, I have this experience from Chicago. We can organize ourselves. We can make a group and bring attention to what is happening here in Mexico”. I took phone numbers and names, and the next week I was calling them. Our first meeting was outside the Franz Mayer museum on December 16, 2016, and from there, this was born.



This event, but particularly the human and political capital, made it possible for Laura to connect with other migrants, mostly from the State of Mexico, with whom she created *Colectivo Deportados Unidos en la Lucha* (DUL). As an organized group, they began to sell candy in different parts of Mexico City to obtain income and make people aware of the construct of the deported migrant as a criminal, murderer, rapist. To this day, this construct results in Laura receiving hateful messages referring to migrants as “lazy anti-patriotic thieves” and other expressions that, for a time, made her ashamed to say she had been deported. Often a return on the grounds of deportation redirects forced migration into a spiral of further social degradation, in which people are criminalized, and the return symbolizes a second banishment (Márquez, 2013, p. 160).

Alternatively to these activities, Laura worked as an English support teacher at the preschool and elementary levels at a private school in Nezahualcóyotl. She obtained this job with relative ease both because of her knowledge and her management skills. However, it was a job that did not meet her expectations in terms of salary and activities performed, in addition to the “discomfort” associated with being asked to cover up her tattoos, which are “a sign of criminality and risk to citizens” (Albicker & Velasco, 2016). All of this influenced her decision to leave that job to dedicate herself to her activities in the DUL Collective, which Laura considers “her cause, her life, and her family”.

Restarting her life, reintegrating herself, and supporting other “pals” through this “solidarity network of friends” are some of the meanings that Laura finds in the collective. Dedicated to this activity, along with her “pals”, she went from selling candy to selling T-shirts with motifs and messages linked to migration. Thus, based on the knowledge acquired in the courses on entrepreneurship and leadership that she took in various organizations in Chicago, she “had the groundwork” to present to Styfe an initiative for self-employment, as part of the initiatives of this agency in June 2017 to develop productive projects.

To this end, the Deportados Brand project was set up in collaboration with four other migrants. They obtained a 115,141 pesos budget to purchase machinery and begin working in the silk-screen printing industry (Secretaría de Trabajo y Fomento al Empleo, 2018). Since then and to date, Laura has worked in her workshop, which in her opinion “has been converted from a productive project to an enterprise, where we are self-employed and hope to become entrepreneurs and establish ourselves” with products that are no longer only marketed in Mexico, but sent to various parts of the United States, particularly to Chicago.

At the same time, the products offered by Deportados Brand have been diversifying, which shows the capacity of inventiveness, courage, and adaptation of Laura and Gustavo, the current managers of the business. Among these, besides T-shirts, they sell bags, mugs, caps, stickers, and clothes. They have recently started a new stage as a sewing workshop, which coincides with the effects on their finances caused by the crisis associated with the COVID-19 health emergency. This situation also tested their ability to reinvent and adjust by making facemasks to respond to market demand.

Among other strategies, Laura is convinced of the need to establish links to expand their business scope, so she contacted the municipal president of Nezahualcóyotl to give them an opening to sell their products. Today, in addition to being invited to certain events at which they are allowed to sell, they have designed the “Neza” line. This line presents models such as “NezaYork” and “Minezota”, through which they seek to use “the pride of being in Neza” to highlight positive aspects and change the image

of the place, in addition to living with and helping the people of the municipality. In this regard, Laura states the following:

We also have communication with the municipality of Neza, and they allow us to sell every so often. They also invite us, from time to time, to their events to sell our products. As a result of all of this, our Neza line emerged because many people used to say, “Oh, not Neza!” They didn’t even want to come here, so I said, “No, here we are” and it is a neighborhood that has welcomed us. The reality of many deportees is that we are in the State of Mexico. I mean, most are from Ecatepec and Nezahualcóyotl. Here in Neza, we have also approached the municipal president in the city hall. Regarding the *Deportados Brand* —because we are here now— we now have our own line of designs in Nezahualcóyotl, highlighting a little bit of what is being done here in Neza. We have met people here doing cool things, so we are trying to make those spaces accessible to carry on our mission regarding the products or things being developed by those who have been deported.

Thus, *Deportados Brand* is the source of income for Laura. Meanwhile, the *DUL* collective has become the platform that allows her to continue her role as an activist and promoter of various advocacy actions to facilitate the reintegration of deported migrants and create a network of deported entrepreneurs, acquire their products, and provide jobs for each other. At the same time, it is a space that has allowed her to live, experiment, and carry out her own deportation and reintegration process in Mexico. Despite her many efforts, she recognizes that she still “gets nostalgic and depressed” and hopes that one day the United States laws will change so that there is free mobility.

In this regard, she points out that the “obsession with returning to the United States” is what makes reintegration in Mexico difficult and even impossible. Thus, “changing your view from the north to the south” is essential, as happened to Laura when, in early 2019, “she had to face reality” regarding her immigration status. Although Laura knows that the hope of returning “will always be there,” in her narrative, she maintains that she is trying to stop looking to the north and focus on the south, relying on the networks that she is building with the groups of deportees.

In this constant struggle that involves contradictory feelings and emotions, Laura has become an example for other migrants who, in a situation similar to hers, consider that they can also get ahead in Mexico. Therefore, through the collective, as she states in her narrative, she seeks to raise awareness and motivate her “pals” to change their outlook and acquire the tools to reintegrate in Mexico, with a message that highlights the importance of training and acquiring knowledge that can also be useful to them if they return to the United States.

One of the keys to achieving successful reintegration is to take your eyes off the north. If you are still obsessed with returning to the United States, it will be very difficult to achieve reintegration, but if someone else who has not suffered deportation tells my friends this, they won’t believe it. In this case, however, my pals see that we are doing it ourselves, we are inspired, and there are already more people starting their businesses. I don’t deny the possibility that things may change and there will be free mobility, that the laws might change in the United States, but it is not an obsession, nor what I spend my

life thinking about, because I can do things here and build my life. In the end, what I try to make my pals see is that if you have such a desire to return, at the end of the day, the elements to return are here because it is no longer the same. So, instead of crying, playing the victim, why don't you take advantage of that time and start studying, start working, start doing something and gather resources so that if one day you can even qualify for a tourist visa, you'll be able to leave.

The labor reintegration and the strategies that Laura has undertaken on an individual and collective level have occurred without her plan necessarily being to prepare for deportation and to stay in Mexico, because, as it was in her case, "people try to think about staying and not about returning. People don't even think about that, nor do they want to know anything about deportation. What they want is to be able to fix their papers".

That is why —she explains— initiatives such as "the plan is to make a plan" are not in the interest of the migrant population, since, in any case, it is first necessary to "understand their reality, to speak their language, to understand the two realities" to explain why after having lived in another place they seek to remain there, and why after having been deported they do not always seek to settle down but to return to what has become their home.

In this regard, as mentioned before, the story of Laura makes evident that the obsession or hope that many of these migrants always have for returning to the United States has to do with building their home, their house, and their life. The above is similar to the extent that Laura herself —who considers that she has redirected her outlook toward the south and has settled in Nezahualcóyotl— "resisted" furnishing her apartment because she did not find a reason to do so thinking that she was going to return to the United States, since her home is there and her things are there. Thus, the construction of house and home, which to date for her are still in Chicago, is one of the main factors to consider to recognize the needs and actions of the deported migrant population. In other words, reflecting on the processes of reintegration of this population requires understanding other aspects that go beyond the question of work, as they are combined with a set of emotions and feelings that also are to be found in the processes of acceptance or denial of the processes of return and reintegration.

My concept of what I understand as a home is in Chicago, and that is what sometimes people don't understand. It is much more. It is your life, it is your roots, and it is not easy to leave the place where you have built something. I have said this before, for me it has been so difficult, that just now I began to furnish my house, the apartment where I live. Before, I refused to furnish it or to buy things. What's the point if I'm going to go back? Sooner or later I'm going to go back, what should I buy that for? Why do I need to have this? If my house is there and my things are there... It has not been easy because I keep seeing my house there, imagine that your favorite cup, your plants, your pillow, everything that is a part of your life beyond work, beyond anything else, beyond money, all your life is there. How do you change it? How do you make people understand that things are going to change one day? that they are going to have to give up, that they have to prepare themselves to give up everything. It's not easy, and I think that's denial.

In closing, it can be said that the case of Laura is part of the prototype of settlement reintegration that Rivera (2013, p. 72) proposes to refer to the migrant population whose personal experience intersects with historical conditions as undocumented immigrants in the United States. That is, the detentions during her attempts to cross, the situation of psychological violence by her partner in the United States, the lack of documents that would enable her to become independent, her participation as an activist in labor matters in Chicago, the development of a productive project that developed into a business in Mexico, the organization of the DUL collective to facilitate the reintegration of her “pals” and the decision to turn her attention from the north to the south.

This is a set of actions that show her role as an agent in promoting her process of social, labor, and cultural reintegration, regardless of the many conflicts that the criminalization and stigmatization of the figure of the deported migrant may have caused her, as well as the shocks and impacts of adapting after having been outside of Mexico for a long time, with ups and downs caused by the continuing associations of her home with Chicago.

It is also clear that the reintegration process of Laura was facilitated by the availability of various capitals, which as an accumulated resource during her migratory career made it possible for her to promote a set of diverse strategies, both individual and collective, in contexts such as the State of Mexico and Mexico City, where she found the conditions to reconvert those capitals. In labor matters, for example, her return, although forced, became a productive return, in addition to fostering the use of her skills, knowledge, and assets acquired in the United States.

## Conclusions

The story and experience of Laura correspond to a case that, as she points out, has several similarities to other cases regarding the individual, family, and institutional needs associated with the forced return to the country. Despite these similarities, it has been the purpose of this work to emphasize the atypicality of her case, so that the use of her narrative in the development of this article makes it possible to demonstrate that the agency, initiative, and accumulation of capitals become evident in the forms of negotiating and managing successful reintegration in contexts that, although they are perceived as alien, are strategic for the reconversion and use of such capitals.

Although this article emphasizes the labor aspects, based on the narrative of the informant, it also recognizes the interrelationship with other social, cultural, institutional, and political aspects that require the understanding of reintegration from a comprehensive perspective. This, in turn, implies recognizing the complexity that these processes acquire from the heterogeneous profiles of the migrant population, the experience of living in the United States, as well as the conditions, temporal aspects, and context in which the return is occurring.

Considering the above, this work reveals that even when economic solvency is one of the first needs of deported migrants, the truth is that they will not always be prepared to reintegrate immediately, since each person will experience his or her deportation and reintegration process in a different way. By way of example, in contrast to the case of Laura, other interviews conducted with the deportees in

rural areas of the State of Mexico reveal not only the lack of knowledge of available government support but also of lack of employment and skills, and assets that cannot be used, as well as other personal resources that they use, not to overcome these difficulties, but rather to imagine situations in which they perceive Mexico as a place where they cannot get ahead.

Thus, the reintegration of this population is a challenge that must involve governments, returned and deported migrants, civil society organizations, and society as a whole, which means that integration involves the sum of collective rather than individual efforts. As has been documented in the case analyzed here, the reintegration of Laura had and still has much to do with her determination and willingness to link up with the public sector, her community of deportee friends, and society in general to establish processes aimed at facilitating the experience of deportation and reintegration in Mexico, to fight for a dream that for the moment remains on the other side of the wall. However, it has not stopped Laura from taking various actions to contribute to and support others who have experienced deportation.

To conclude, it is important to point out that the case of Laura contributes to the studies on deportation and labor reintegration inasmuch as it highlights the effects that agency, the availability of capital, and the capacity to reconvert it may have to ensure the individual and collective reintegration processes of people in this situation. For this reason, it is vital to understand the needs and recognize the heterogeneity of the profiles of deported migrants. The design and implementation of efficient initiatives and mechanisms to facilitate such processes among this group, which is continuously negotiating between reintegration in Mexico and return to the United States, depends on it.

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