So Far from God, So Close to the US

Current Dynamics of Mexican Migration to the United States

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This work examines the development of US immigration policy with a focus on border enforcement, migrant removals and the effects on human security at the US-Mexican border. My research considers three stages in the journey of the unauthorised migrant: clandestine crossing, detention in the US and deportation to Mexico. Since the border wall was constructed, dynamics at the border have changed as Mexican and other Latin American migrants have started risking their lives by crossing in remote areas like deserts and mountains in order to avoid US Border Patrol and new surveillance technology. At the same time, criminal organisations have taken advantage of the rising interest in human trafficking and begun profiting from the smuggling, robbery and extortion of migrants, only worsening human security concerns in the area. Clandestine border crossings are, however, just one of the stages of the ordeal described by many of the migrants whom I interviewed. The militarisation of the border and increasing protectionism of US immigration policies have been accompanied by the detention of growing numbers of undocumented migrants, giving rise to a complex detention system that profits private prisons and detention facilities. During their detention, migrants' security may be further affected; physical mistreatment and legal difficulties have both been reported. After spending days, weeks or even months in detention centres, detainees are commonly deported, which is the most stressful part of their journey. Deported ex-migrants amass in Mexican border cities and soon become socio-economically marginalised and depressed. I highlight the alarming case of El Bordo, the river canal area where

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most Mexican deportees to Tijuana settle after failing to integrate into the local job market. This analysis of these three stages suggests that US policies have a great human cost, and thus, lack sustainability.

Keywords: migration, US, border, Mexico, clandestine networks

Introduction

Late in the 19th century, the pre-revolutionary Mexican president, Porfirio Diaz coined a phrase about his country that would become famous: 'Poor Mexico: so far from God and so close to the United States.' Since then, these words have been used to express both the uncomfortable asymmetry between these neighbouring countries and their interdependence, which extends deeper today than it did back then. One factor that has significantly influenced this Mexican-US political and economic interdependence is Mexican migration northwards, which has been encouraged by the existing disparities. It has recently been estimated that nearly 30% of the US's foreign-born population is Mexican; this is the equivalent of 11 million people, representing about 10% of all Mexicans.[1] It is interesting to put this figure in a global context; according to the United Nations, almost 214 million people were international immigrants in 2010,[2] i.e. 3.1% of the world's population did not reside in their country of origin.

While migration is a complex phenomenon and has been present throughout human history, in recent decades it has attracted growing attention and become central to many debates in developed countries. These debates have been relevant for the formulation of domestic and increasingly also foreign policies, which then contribute to defining relations between countries of emigration and immigration. As a consequence of the large numbers of unauthorised migrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries who have been crossing the US-Mexican border, the US has formulated protectionist policies, which, in turn, have profound and negative human security effects at the border. Unauthorised migrants face a number of security risks during their journeys due to this US protectionism, which also ignores the importance of these migrants for the US labour market and economy.

As well as examining US immigration policies, this study considers other issues that have recently affected the dynamics of Mexican migration to the US In order to approach these dynamics, it is essential

to understand the historical development of US migration policies and the nature of migration flows. In this context, it must be emphasised that my focus is predominantly on unauthorised migration.[3] To that end, I identify the diverse factors and actors which endanger migrant security in the course of clandestine crossings, detention in the US and deportation to Mexico. The construction of the border wall, privatisation of the detention system, role of lobbying and presence of organised crime are all analysed as key factors affecting human security at the border. Among the actors who play a major role in this framework, I discuss federal authorities, private companies, white supremacy groups and human smugglers along with the US and Mexican governments more broadly.

In order to fully portray unauthorised migrants' journeys and identify the factors and actors that determine their experiences, four types of data were collected. First, academic publications (available at Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Mexico and the University of California, San Diego in the US) and policy and legal documents (from the US government and NGOs, for example) were studied. Second, field interviews were conducted with deported migrants in Tijuana as well as immigrants to the US who were or still are undocumented or their relatives. Third, mass media reports, including recent news items and YouTube clips, helped to round out the picture. Fourth, I collected observations based on notes, photographs and recordings taken in July 2013.

This work seeks to approach the migration process from a human perspective. It is important not to perceive migrants in purely statistical terms; they must be understood as actual individuals. Approaching the issue (*problematique*) in this way allows us to merge the human dimension with the political, economic and social aspects of migration processes. My analysis suggests that US anti-immigration policies have been erroneous and are unsustainable.

Characteristics of the US-Mexico Border

The US-Mexico border extends over nearly 3,200 kilometres. Although it is only the ninth longest border in the world, close to one million legal border crossings occur daily, making it the busiest international border globally.[4]

The line dividing the neighbouring countries was established in 1848 following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that concluded the peace

negotiations towards the end of the Mexican-American War. In that war, Mexico lost much of its territory, including its northern states that today lie in the southern part of the US This loss is still remembered as unfortunate, and the new border lacks moral and legal value for many Mexicans, who perceive itprincipally as a physical barrier.[5] Mexicans tend to cite the loss of this territory when justifying their migration to southern states of the US – historically part of Mexico – such as California, whose population is one-third Mexican.

Historically, the main flow of migrants crossed to the US from close to the urban zones of Tijuana-San Diego and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso. In the 1990s, US protectionist policies of border enforcement prompted the construction of a border wall in the places where clandestine crossings had occurred most frequently. As a consequence, kilometres of robust metal fencing were erected and increasingly sophisticated surveillance and apprehension technologies – including remote video surveillance systems, infrared monitors and seismic sensors – installed. The sum invested in immigration and border security control rose five times between 1993 and 2004.[6] In addition, in the mid-2000s, there were more US Border Patrol agents than soldiers in Afghanistan.[7] The border is seen as a symbol of violence, not only because of the deaths of many migrants in deserts and mountainous areas, but because it was built by military forces from the corrugated steel once used as landing pads in the Vietnam War.[8]

In order to avoid overprotected areas, migrants cross over deserts and mountains that are assumed to pose fewer barriers. The risks taken by those crossing clandestinely through these areas are extremely high; the loss of life has not been exceptional since the 1990s. Since the construction of the border wall, the number of deaths has grown substantially; on average, at least one migrant dies daily when crossing the border. While the causes of deaths are diverse, most of the migrants are killed by hyperthermia and dehydration. At the same time, fatigue, cold, hunger and blisters create substantial threats.[9] Climatic changes, lack of water and the sheer long distances further complicate these clandestine journeys. Moreover, those who intend to cross the Rio Grande River face the risk of drowning. Mexican news agencies have reported a case of migrants drowning in the currents of the river while US Border Patrol made no attempt to save them.[10] Even if they reach the US side of the border, these individuals continue to meet with challenges to their security. After entering US territory, they must move quickly to avoid being caught by

Border Patrol. For that reason, they make hurried crossings of highways where they may be run over by cars and killed accidentally.

Along with the prospect of an unfortunate death in the desert or mountains, migrants run the risk of becoming the victims of violent crime. They may, for instance, be robbed by gangs or even forced to collaborate with the criminal organisations that operate widely in the border zone and control smuggling activities. Two key groups whose presence in the border regions has been extensive are Los Zetas, situated to the east and the Cartel of the Pacific, which controls the western part of the border. The presence of these powerful cartels profoundly affects migrant security, as was demonstrated by the events of August 2010 when the corpses of 72 migrants, originating mostly from Central and South America, were found in the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas. According to news reports, these migrants had been blackmailed and subsequently executed by Los Zetas when they were unable to pay the extortion money.[11]

In the 1990s, many human smugglers, known as *coyotes* or *polleros*, began to form ties with criminal organisations. Illegal smuggling activities soon proliferated as a consequence of border enforcement and the stricter immigration policy. Due to the extensive barriers constructed by the US government, the need to develop a network of smugglers with in-depth knowledge of the complicated border crossing grew. A sophisticated smuggling business, controlled increasingly by criminal organisations, thus, expanded thanks to the rising call for people, drug and arms traffickers. Furthermore, the new barriers meant that coyotes' prices rose steeply, making business more profitable each time. Perceived solely as a source of money, migrants began to be treated as products and processed in an impersonal, inhuman way, an attitude that had not existed before the 1990s. Today's migrants may easily fall prey to deceit and violence. Historically, they trusted the coyotes, but in present-day Mexico, many are afraid to hire a human smuggler; as my interviews showed, they fear being robbed, abandoned during a crossing, kidnapped or blackmailed.

As soon as an unauthorised migrant manages to enter US territory, their main challenge is to avoid the diverse actors whose job or interest lies in stopping the inflow of unauthorised immigrants. The actors in this area include the US Border Patrol, the US National Guard and other national but private forces as well as activists from organisations such as the Minutemen. The common objective of these actors is to patrol the border and prevent clandestine crossings. Migrants captured by

them are generally detained for a short time and then deported to their country of origin.

Although the likelihood of experiencing violence at the hands of state actors is low, there have been several cases of abuse and even murder: a teenager was gunned down by Border Patrol in 2010; another man caught climbing over the border wall was shot and killed by a Border Patrol agent in 2011; one year later, the Patrol shot at a group of people who were throwing stones, killing one young Mexican man; and there have been more cases. According to the Southern Border Communities Coalition, at least 39 individuals – most of them Mexican migrants, but also several US citizens – died between 2010 and 2014 as a result of an encounter with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials.[12] The use of lethal force by Border Patrol has met with indignation from the Mexican government, which itself condemned the shootings and identified these types of deaths as a serious bilateral problem.[13] It is little wonder that at the start of 2015, the CBP began installing body cameras on Border Patrol agents in a bid to increase transparency in cases where agents are accused of abuse or using excessive force.[14] At the time of writing, the impact of this technology on human security at the border is not yet known.

Another entity affecting migrant security at the border is the group known as the Minutemen. Its vigilantes oppose illegal immigration and organise private patrolling activities along the US-Mexican border. The Minuteman Project was established in 2004 in response to the changing situation in Cochise County in Arizona, which had been the site of more unauthorised migrant detentions than anywhere else in the 21st century.[15] Since then, the Minutemen have vandalised many of the drinking water stations installed in the desert by the Border Angels organisation that seeks to help the migrants. Furthermore, the Minutemen have been accused of robbing, physically harming and even killing migrants; nevertheless, it has been extremely difficult to collect evidence against these activists. Not surprisingly, they are suspected of having ties to white supremacist movements, which not only act locally, but also aim to influence legislative processes in the US southern states. For instance, the white supremacist groups White Aryan Resistance and Light Up the Border have led protests backing proposals for greater border militarisation. These two groups have gained further support from the employees of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, thus helping to foment anti-immigration sentiments.

Development and Impact of US Immigration Policy

In the late 19th century, the main objective of US anti-immigration campaigns was to limit the intake of individuals who came not from Mexico but from China. Chinese people were seen as unfair work competition because of their low salaries, which were below even those paid to Mexicans. Labelled "Chinese wetbacks" by the media, these immigrants entered the US through the US-Mexico border. As a result, the first predecessors of Border Patrol agents, known as "Chinese inspectors," were appointed in 1891.

Among the first restrictive immigration laws were the Immigration Act of 1917 and its amendment of 1924, whose main purpose was to limit European immigration. In 1925, a new statute established the Border Patrol, which for the first time related (if only partially) to Mexican migrants. The Great Depression, which began in 1929, gave rise to more legislative changes; crossing the border without authorisation, in particular, became a crime. Nonetheless, at the end of the Second World War, the relationship between Mexico and the US was favourable concerning migration matters. Thanks to the high demand for manpower in the US, the Bracero Program – an agreement which guaranteed seasonal jobs in the US for a certain number of Mexicans – was successfully put into effect in 1942.

The US Mexican population grew gradually due to the influx of authorised as well as unauthorised Mexican migrants. In response, US authorities' efforts to return unauthorised migrants began with deportations from California and Texas in 1947. They culminated in Operation Wetback, which launched in 1954 and ended with the military expulsion of more than one million undocumented Mexican workers from the US.[16]

Ten years after Operation Wetback, the Bracero Program was suspended and a system of quotas established which allowed 120,000 migrants from the western hemisphere to enter US territory every year. However, after a 1976 statutory amendment, the quota for Latin-American migrants was cut to 20,000 individuals. In this period, migration policies became stricter: in addition to the limitations brought by the quota system, the number of deportations was increased. In 1965, just over 100,000 people were deported. This figure grew gradually to reach almost half a million in 1971; by the mid-1980s, there were more than

one million deportations per year.[17] While these statistics included all deported foreigners, Mexico was most affected by these policies since the majority of deportees were Mexican. In order to analyse these increasingly protectionist US policies, it is therefore vital to understand the wider historic context, and especially Mexico's economic development after 1973.

In the 1970s – a decade that transformed the migration dynamics between these neighbouring countries – Mexico underwent an economic and political crisis. This came as a shock after three relatively successful presidential terms of "stabilising development" (*desarrollo estabilizador*) during which low inflation, a fixed exchange rate and a stable economy were maintained. When, in 1973, the oil crisis disrupted the country's economic stability, Luis Echeverria, then president of Mexico, began to support state intervention in the economy as a solution to deteriorating living conditions. Nevertheless, the macroeconomic results were negative: the fiscal deficit, public debt and inflation all increased. In addition, for the first time in 22 years, the Mexican peso was allowed to float in the foreign exchange market, resulting in its devaluation against the US dollar by 40%. This recession was followed by rising poverty, deteriorating education and health standards, problems with malnutrition and infant mortality and water shortages (approximately 50% of households lacked running water in 1980).[18] In the early 1980s, the Mexican economy remained unstable with little prospect of improvement; Mexicans were therefore made to face growing challenges such as rising unemployment and falling real wages. In many cases, migration was the immediate response to these difficulties. Widespread poverty in rural areas forced many Mexicans to move to local cities, resulting in a major urbanisation wave inside the country. Others, however, decided to head north instead of to the cities. As a consequence, the US experienced a swift increase in its unauthorised immigrant population in the 1970s and 1980s, and this, in turn, intensified the tightening of US immigration laws.

During the administration of former president Ronald Reagan (1981-89), border control began to be seen as a matter of national security and migrants were increasingly treated as scapegoats for US domestic problems.[19] The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 concentrated on border surveillance, opening the way for a new era

of US policies known as "border militarisation." After the adoption of the IRCA, the number of agents at the border increased and new sanctions were introduced against employers who hired undocumented migrants. At the same time, under an amnesty embedded in this law, approximately 50% of immigrants were legalised, a move which benefited plenty of Mexican migrants since six out of every ten immigrants in the US were Mexican citizens.[20]

The extensive border patrolling and enforcement regime was augmented in 1993 when Bill Clinton became US president. That year, his administration carried out its first operation, Hold the Line in the border region of El Paso-Ciudad Juárez. The stationing of growing numbers of Border Patrol agents at regular distances along the Rio Grande River led to the rerouting of migration flows from monitored areas to those that were more remote. Coyotes, thus, increasingly benefited from rising demand and prices for their services.

In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect and forced many Mexicans to emigrate. When the free trade zone was established between Mexico, the US and Canada, cheap imported agricultural products from the US flooded the Mexican market, pushing down prices and wages in Mexico and making it increasingly hard for Mexican agricultural producers to earn a living.[21] In particular, the import of corn from the US state of Iowa, subsidised by the US government and sent to Mexico, brought bankruptcy to about 1.5 million farmers.[22] As a result, unemployment in Mexico rose, generating a new migration wave from Mexico's rural areas to its cities and to the north. Soon after, the US government responded to the rise in clandestine entries by implementing Operation Gatekeeper at the San Diego-Tijuana border. In 1995, Border Patrol conducted Operation Safeguard, which focused on Arizona's borders and was followed by Operation Río Grande in Texas in 1998.

In terms of human security at the border, the consequences of Operation Gatekeeper were crucial. This operation's objective had been to divert immigrants away from urban zones: according to the underlying presumptions, unauthorised immigrants would be discouraged from crossing the border in urban areas due to extensive border fortifications; at the same time, they would be deterred from crossing clandestinely in remote zones due to the physical and natural barriers as

well as the life-threatening dangers. These premises, however, proved incorrect: migrants were not deterred from crossing the border in the desert or mountainous areas despite the high risk of death. The number of migrant deaths consequently increased fourfold during the operation.[23] Furthermore, the increasingly lucrative business of human smuggling began to lure coyotes without much experience; it also captured the attention of cartels and other criminal organisations that discovered the opportunity to use migrants as *mulas* and smuggle drugs on their bodies. Thus, instead of securing the border, these US policies transformed it into a more dangerous space that profoundly affected migrants' security.

US immigration policy and border controls became even stricter at the beginning of the 21st century. Less than two months after 9/11, then president George Bush signed the USA-PATRIOT Act into law. This controversial law authorised the government to conduct secret searches, monitor phone calls and Internet usage, obtain personal data and exchange information between its different agencies. It also gave rise to the detention of foreigners, irrespective of whether the person in question had been proven to pose a threat. During the Bush administration, different anti-immigration laws entered into force, making it possible for authorities to monitor residents who were not citizens and verify the migration status of those seeking government benefits. At the same time, these laws portrayed immigration across the US-Mexican border and unauthorised migrants themselves as presenting a security issue or even a national threat.[24]

Despite these strict immigration policies and the militarisation of the border, Mexican migrants along with migrants from Central and South America continued to make clandestine crossings of the US southern border. According to polls conducted in 2004-2005 in the Mexican states of Zacatecas and Jalisco, 72% of the ex-migrants and potential migrants interviewed were aware of strict border controls and the risks associated with making an illegal crossing; nevertheless, for most of these potential migrants, this information did not diminish their inclination to head northwards.[25] Rather, border militarisation had the opposite effect: it extended unauthorised migrants' stays in the US In the past, the majority of Mexican migrants had crossed the border in order to find a temporary job after which they returned

to Mexico where they remained until deciding to migrate for a limited time once again. Today, Mexican migrants stay for longer in the US instead of returning home and risking another clandestine crossing.[26]

Detention, Deportation and the Post-deportation Experience

Each time that more arrests and deportations of undocumented immigrants occur, this represents a new challenge to migrants' security. Due to the growing number of individuals detained by US authorities, detention centres and prisons have become crowded and expensive to operate, which has led, in turn, to more deportations. Between 1996 and 2003, the daily detention population increased from about 9,000 to 21,000 individuals.[27] In 2011, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported that a record 429,000 immigrants had been detained in more than 250 facilities across the country.[28] In February 2013, the average daily number of detainees was more than 35,000.[29] Because of this rising volume of detainees, detention centres have become an important business with links to some US politicians, and hence, to policy-making.

Growing numbers of deportees have caused alarming situations in Mexico and El Salvador, the two nations whose citizens are most affected by removal practices. Although the debate has focused on unauthorised migrants, immigration legislation also applies to those living legally in the US, especially permanent residents who are seen as inadmissible or deportable aliens based on their past convictions. Indeed, each round of deportations involves more individuals including legal residents, who form an essential part of US labour market.

Currently, the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants is in the hands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), DHS's principal investigative body. Since its creation in 2003, ICE, the successor of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), has aimed to promote public and national security through the criminal and civil enforcement of federal laws that regulate border control, customs, trade and immigration. Soon after ICE's establishment, plans for Operation Endgame began with the goal of detaining and deporting all deportable aliens and suspected terrorists living in the US within a time span of 10 years. In order to fulfil this objective, ICE received an

annual budget of more than US$5 billion and employed about 17,000 people.[30] Today, ICE relies on a larger budget of US$6 billion and has 20,000 employees.[31]

Even before ICE was created, the federal authorities had been cooperating with local actors (for example, local police departments, state and federal prison agencies, local lawyers, etc.). Since that time, states have been requesting reimbursement of their incarceration costs. In this way, a stratification of power has taken place within the US detention system; power has been delegated downwards to states and outwards to private actors.

Arizona's controversial legislation SB1070 undoubtedly illustrates the decentralising application of immigration policies. This Act, which requires all immigrants to carry adequate identification and allows authorities to check the identification documents of any person at any time, has caught the attention of the media, which has pointed out the connections between private detention centres and Arizonan politicians. It has been alleged that the then governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, had ulterior motives for signing it into law since some of her advisers had links to the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest private prison business in the US Furthermore, CAA had a federal contract to house detainees in Arizona. As such, all immigrants detained by Arizona police would be sent to CAA facilities, which would occasion great revenues for the corporation.[32]

Due to the privatisation of the detention system, detentions have become more frequent, which has resulted, in turn, in a growing demand for the services of detention centres. Correspondingly, private prisons have increased the price charged per detainee. While several years ago, ICE paid an average US$80 per detainee per night in New Jersey, in some cases, private prison lobbyists have since managed to obtain a contract for more than US$200 per person per night even in this same geographic area. This development has also contributed to worsening conditions in these facilities and the mixing of the private prison industry with the immigrant detention system, transforming detained migrants from human beings into products defined by their price.[33]

The interconnection of detention, the criminalisation of unauthorised migrants, the privatisation of the detention system, policy-making driven by private interests and anti-immigration rhetoric is what

ultimately constitutes the Immigration Industrial Complex. This is a direct product of US politics which, following the 9/11 attacks, has turned in the direction of a "war on terror." In combination, these tendencies have led to ineffective immigration policies despite the entry of billions of dollars into the cycle of advancing protectionist anti-immigration efforts. Besides being ineffective, these policies have been harmful on a human level.

The security of migrants is not only threatened during their clandestine crossings northwards, but also while they are in detention in the US According to a report by Detention Watch Network, a national network that calls US detention and deportation policies into question, ICE should close its 10 worst detention centres due to the mistreatment of the immigrants detained there. The most reported problems in these centres include sexual abuse and the lack of medical attention, hygiene or open-air activities. While emphasising these objectionable conditions, the investigators also concluded that none of the 250 facilities used by ICE thoroughly maintain basic standards.[34] In particular, many immigrants who are accused solely of immigration offences spend long periods – of several years in extreme cases – in detention without any right to bail, until their case is resolved or until they sign a "voluntary departure" declaration. According to a study conducted at Casa del Migrante (a migrant shelter) in Tijuana in 2010, some migrants are forced or deceived into signing a Stipulated Removal Order, which hastens their release from the detention centre and also renounces other entitlements such as the right to a hearing before an immigration judge.[35]

While numerous NGO reports as well as academic publications address the issues related to migrants' stays in detention centres, only one of the ex-migrants whom I interviewed in Tijuana had experienced an extremely prolonged period of detention. He had been detained for one year and eight months. Based on the experiences of the other migrants I interviewed there, it seem that the authorities continue to hold immigrants in detention centres if they refuse to sign forms declaring their "voluntary departure" from the US to their countries of origin. In addition, these immigrants commonly lack judicial assistance, which extends their detention to the point when they have no choice but to sign the document. According to some ex-migrants, they were not always sure what they were signing as their knowledge

of English was not sufficient despite having lived for several years in the US The interviewees also mentioned that in some cases they were asked to sign other types of documents, which concerned their property or personal belongings, for example. Other problems arose from deportees' confusion of the document confirming their "voluntary departure" with a Stipulated Order of Removal, as attested by their testimonies, as well as from the rising numbers of these Orders signed by Mexican migrants since 2004.[36] These two documents are in fact very different: while a Stipulated Order of Removal limits the deportee's rights and may prohibit any attempt to return to the US, "voluntary departure" leaves open the possibility for reassessment of the migrant's case.

Detention frequently leads to deportation, which is probably the most harrowing part of an unauthorised migrant's journey. The focus on deportation intensified in 2002 due to the new application of section 287(g) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA, 1996) corresponding with changes in US policies after 9/11.

The second wave of deportations came after Barack Obama became US president. His administration has managed to deport more migrants than the Bush government. In 2010, Janet Napolitano, then DHS secretary, announced a historic record: more than 392,000 deportations had been achieved in the relevant fiscal year. This number continued to rise, reaching nearly 397,000 deportations in the 2011 fiscal year and 410,000 deportations one year later.[37] The increasing volume of deportations has caused a disturbing situation in the Mexican border cities where deported migrants amass. Deportations represent a significant challenge especially for Tijuana, which is a key recipient of Mexican deportees: in 2010, an average 366 daily repatriations were recorded in the border city.[38]

While only some migrants experience violence in the course of clandestine crossings, detention in the US and deportation, all of them endure psychological trauma as a consequence of being detained and deported: they suffer because they are separated from their families and lose their jobs or businesses as well as their property in the US Most of ex-migrants whom I interviewed had lived in the US between one and 20 years, and thus, when they spoke about their home, they did not mean home in Mexico, but the place in the US which they had had

to leave behind. Due to the long period they had spent abroad, it was difficult for them to return to Mexico; often they felt alienated from their country of origin.

Insufficient financial resources, a lack of identification documents and poor knowledge about their country of origin are among the most common problems of deported migrants. Those who are poor, cannot rely on friends or acquaintances in Tijuana and lack strong financial support from their family in the US tend to seek refuge, food and clean clothing in local migrant shelters. Migrants may eat, rest and sleep overnight in these shelters, however during the day, they must leave the building in order to search for a job. That search is an incredibly hard task, especially for those without Mexican documents.

When Mexican deportees from the US reach the border office of Mexico's National Migration Institute, they receive a document confirming their deportation certificate, including their personal details, from the Mexican authorities. However, this document is only a simple A4 sheet of paper, which does not replace official identification documents (Instituto Federal Electoral credentials) and is easily destroyed. Paradoxically, the Mexicans who once lived without documents in the US become undocumented in their own country. This lack of proper identification leads to two additional problems: ex-migrants find it extremely hard to secure a job, and they are commonly abused by the Tijuana municipal police, who usually do not accept the documentary proof of deportation and instead imprison deportees for a limited time or even demand a bribe in exchange for leaving them alone. In this way, deported migrants easily enter into a vicious cycle: following their deportation, they fall into poverty due to a lack of income; their appearance then deteriorates since they continue to wear the same clothes, and this both complicates the ensuing job search and increases the risk of police abuse.

Last but not least, deported migrants experience feelings of shame and despair and are vulnerable to depression, which can lead to a range of addictions. It is difficult for many to lose the status of national hero, a figure admired by former Mexican president Vicente Fox, who praised Mexican migrants for contributing significantly to the national economy through their remittances. Indeed, the remittances sent by Mexican workers from outside the country constitute its most important source of income after oil revenue. Around 10 years ago, the total amount of annual remittances from Mexican migrants was estimat-

ed at $US20 billion, surpassing foreign direct investment and income from tourism.[39]

The social exclusion of many migrants leads them to consider risking a clandestine crossing and returning illegally to the US in order to be with their families again and continue living a productive life. However, some experienced crossing more than 10 years ago and are not ready to face the new border regime or the dangers accompanying the sealing of the border. For many, clandestine crossing continues to be the only option while others have managed finally to find employment in Tijuana and establish themselves in the city. Another option – promoted frequently by civil society organisations that work with ex-migrants – is to request a bus ticket from these organisations allowing them to return to their place of origin irrespective of how far it is from the border. Others still remain dependent on money they have saved or received from their families in the US since they cannot or do not want to find a job. Those in this group spend their resources on accommodation or drugs. Due to the poor psychosocial conditions in which deported migrants find themselves, it is all too easy for them to fall into depression and drug use. In some areas of Tijuana, drugs are omnipresent and represent a cheap temptation for many desperate individuals. Crystal methamphetamine and heroin, for example, are sold publicly at established places that are "overlooked" by local police. The part of Tijuana which is most severely affected by drug addiction is called El Bordo.

El Bordo is situated in the dry, sandy, concrete area of the Tijuana River canal that runs between the US border, represented by a yellow line, and the city centre. It is about two kilometres long. El Bordo's population is divided by the drainage that flows through the canal's centre: heroin addicts live on one side while marijuana, crystal meth and alcohol addicts stay on the other side of the drain. According to an investigation conducted by Colegio de la Frontera Norte, between August and September 2013, there were between 700 and 1000 individuals residing in El Bordo; of this population, 91.5% had been deported by US authorities, 72.6% had no identification documents to rely on and 96% were male, of whom 67.3% had children. This signals that the deportations from the US to Mexico result in the separation of families and, more specifically, the isolation of fathers from the domestic sphere, which causes the breakdown of individual and family plans.[40] Since the existence of the population in El Bordo is entwined with the

large volume of deportees, it may be concluded that the safety of migrants is affected by the US's protectionist immigration policies even after they are deported. In this context, it is also important to emphasise that the Mexican government is another actor that plays a role in ex-migrants' situation since it has not created any aid programmes or other mechanisms for deported Mexicans.

Conclusion

The growing security risks being faced by Mexican and as other Latin American unauthorised migrants during clandestine border crossings, in detention centres and even after their deportation from the US reflect US policies that for more than two decades have been defined by a strong anti-immigration focus. The Clinton administration instigated the construction of the border wall, which for many has become a symbol of military violence and the many deaths of migrants who have sought to cross the overprotected border clandestinely. During the Bush administration, the men and women whose poverty and hardship had forced them to leave their homes and migrate northwards came to be seen as a national security issue or even a threat to US security. Soon after Obama became president, the US authorities managed to exceed historical records through deportations that separated many parents from their families and left them in psychosocial difficulties.

Besides transforming migrants' journeys into a nightmare, US immigration policies and costly protectionism have failed to meet their own objectives: the militarisation of the border has not deterred migrants from crossing in remote areas, and nor has it established greater security in the border area. Rather, the opposite has transpired. The border enforcement regime has become an invitation to criminal organisations whose smuggling businesses have flourished, and it has led many migrants to risk their lives. In the long term, these policies may cause more extensive damage on a human level and harm the relations between countries. On this basis, they are not sustainable.

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Notes

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