CHAPTER 1

Destinations

Your government is throwing everyone out!
—Raúl

“You’ve heard, haven’t you, about los deportados [the deportees]? There are many who have returned. It seems you are sending us all back!” Mariela was tidying the house as we spoke. She walked into the courtyard, threw some food to the dogs there, and came back inside. Her joking tone quickly passed: “Quién sabe que van a hacer . . . ¿Quién sabe? [Who knows what they are going to do . . . Who knows?].” When I first went to rural Mexico to conduct fieldwork in 2001, everyone in the community was talking about migration north—a family member who was there, plans for one’s own migration, life on the other side. Years later, the conversation had shifted notably. Now as people welcomed me into their homes and chatted with me at community gatherings, they had a common topic on their minds: return to Mexico and the experiences of deportees who had arrived in recent months. As Mariela said, the future of those who had been deported and their loved ones was indeed uncertain.¹

Beginning with my first conversations with migrants—during research about the ways that migration affects family life—transnational Mexicans have repeatedly expressed a desire to “go and come,” to move freely between the two countries.² This has been more or less a possibility at different points in history, as demonstrated by generations of Mexican migration to and from the United States, but movement has always been in some way defined, controlled, facilitated, and/or prevented by the state. As a result, the mobility and immobility of people
between Mexico and the United States over time has directly served the state. Even when movement has been relatively open, the terms have been set by the U.S. government.

What does it mean to return in the context of deportation? How can we understand departures and destinations in this disorienting milieu? Deportation touches many lives and includes multiple forms of return: being returned, returning, “returning” for the first time. The return of deportation can be removal, forced migration, return migration, exile, displacement, or homecoming. Although states enact deportations as supposed returns, the very notion of “return” is problematic. Is return a revocation? A regression? A reinvention? As I demonstrate, deportation by the state reverses, or undoes, several processes. Removals, and the multiple forms of return that follow, upset the geographic direction of transnational migrations, confuse temporal narratives, strip communities of a sense of security and well-being, deunify families, separate couples, disorient young people, and problematize—and in the end, erode—citizenship and de facto membership in the nation. The difficulty of assessing removal’s multiple effects rests in large part on the disappearance of its subjects from the geographic and social scene, its official emphasis on unidirectionality, and the overwhelming right and power of the state and its apparatuses. Yet removal’s dis/order and dismantling can be traced through returns, as people go to and come from nations north and south.

RETURNED

The many forms of transnational movement I describe throughout this book begin with deportation, expulsion, or “removal.” This is return by force—the act of being returned—carried out at the borders of the nation and from places within the country’s interior. Since the 1990s, deportations of foreign nationals from the United States have been on the rise. Mexican nationals make up the largest number of individuals identified by DHS as “deportable aliens,” foreign citizens who may be deported. The statistics tell a story of increasing removals, with record highs, for example, of 478,000 foreign nationals detained in 2012 and more than 438,000 people removed in 2013. Removals—forced returns carried out by the state—are ever more common, in the United States and elsewhere.

As a result, the number of deportees and other returnees living in Mexico grows as people arrive each day. The many statistics on deportation
reflect the experiences that I witnessed during research. In 2001, when I first went to a Mexican farming community with approximately three hundred inhabitants, I heard people talk about only a few cases of deportation in the area, but I knew no one personally who had been deported. In 2008, six people had been returned. In 2010, nearly twenty community members had been deported from the United States, and in 2011, as a year of fieldwork came to a close, more people continued to arrive after long stretches in el norte. The numbers of family members who have returned with or followed deported loved ones, as well as those who have come back because of the increased risk of deportation in the United States, are much higher than those the government categorizes as “officially” removed, changing the character of communities throughout Mexico.

As the number of removals grows, so do the legal consequences. DHS distinguishes between “removal” and “return”: removal is what is commonly understood as deportation, a legal process with “administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry owing to the fact of removal”; return is “not based on an order of removal.” According to DHS, the majority of “voluntary returns” are those of Mexican nationals who are apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol agents and then sent back to Mexico. Notably, these supposedly voluntary returns have declined, while removals, or formal deportations, have reached a record high. In other words, “returns” as they are officially defined are decreasing, while deportations or “removals”—with their accompanying legal ramifications—are ever more common.

Current deportations of Mexican nationals must be considered “within a long historical frame” of migration between Mexico and the United States. Previous “returns” to Mexico have frequently been forced, for example, the “repatriation” of Mexican (and U.S.) nationals after World War I (1920–23), during the Great Depression (1930s), and through Operation Wetback beginning in 1954. In addition, many other forms of return have been understood as “voluntary,” such as seasonal migration, although, as is evident through the returns of removal, this forced/voluntary dichotomy inadequately captures the many complexities of transnational movement over time.

For Mexican nationals, and for those with ancestral ties to Mexico, the U.S. government’s systemic removal of people living within its borders is both reminiscent of and a departure from mass deportations of previous eras. Although return and involuntary removal are familiar processes for Mexicans, since the mid-1990s return migration to
Mexico has taken on a shifting character. According to oral histories I conducted, migration and return were relatively open from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. In fact, many migrants received amnesty under the Special Agricultural Worker provisions (SAW I and II) of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. However, the U.S. Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996)—which systematically criminalized undocumented migration—and the government’s response to the events of September 11, 2001, have set the stage for the current increased control of undocumented migration through deportation.14

Los que regresan

When Mariela described the many people being “sent back,” she listed first those who were returned by the U.S. government. But as she talked more about the uncertainty in people’s lives, she also described the networks of family members affected by removal and the many other forms of return that accompany deportation. She spoke of the young children of one deportee and concerns surrounding their father’s ability to provide for them now that he had been expelled from the United States. She told me about a man whose teenage daughter had just arrived in their small town, against her wishes, more than a year after her father’s deportation. Mariela captured the uncertainty for those who are returned but also for those who return, who come to Mexico for the first time, or, because of age, gender, or other aspects of subjectivity, who may never migrate to the United States but depend on the migration of others. Deportation alters many lives, even those of individuals who have never gone north.

In 2008, the state government of Zacatecas began a program called Por los que regresan/For Those Who Return. The program provided grants to aid migrants returning from the United States. The funds were directed to small development projects that would benefit return migrants and their local communities; for example, grants could be used to start a business or to make improvements on a home that a family returned to after a long period away. When I spoke with program administrators, I noticed the fluidity of the broad category “those who return.” The program, according to staff, was to provide assistance to any resident of the state who had previously lived outside of Mexico, including return migrants, deportees, or those who had lost jobs in the United States and come back to Mexico looking for work. By grouping
returnees with different motivations and experiences, the state government seemed to recognize the diverse meanings of return for its residents and the difficulty of delineating specific categories.

Indeed, migrants and those connected to them experience the return of deportation in many ways: this includes being returned—return as deportation—and returning—return because of deportation. Artemio was returned, removed from the United States by force. This is deportation as expulsion by the state. As “immigration and criminal law converge,” deportations can take on diverse forms. In this age of “crimmigration,” types of removals are expanding: expedited removal (which bypasses the legal proceedings typically associated with deportation) or removal through judicial processes, deportation from the country’s interior or at the border, deportation after or without detention, returns labeled “voluntary” by DHS, removals of individuals, mass deportations through programs such as Operation Streamline, and so on.

Alongside those who are returned are the many transnational Mexicans who also return or who migrate across the international boundary for the first time. These returns are more difficult to track, as they are not easily or generally accounted for in statistics. There are those who return because of the deportation of another, such as Mexican citizens who go back to their nation of origin when a loved one is forced to do so. In addition, there are other Mexican citizens who return after the deportation of a family member, though because they first migrated at a young age, they may have no memory of or little connection to Mexico as their homeland. In this case, “return” is an especially problematic and paradoxical label. In addition, many of those who are affected are U.S. citizens, confounding popular understandings of deportation as a process that expels only persons who are not formally recognized members of the nation. After deportation, the U.S. citizen children and partners of deportees frequently move south. And there are U.S. citizen children—usually very young—who are sent by their parents to live in Mexico because their parents are undocumented in the United States and fear their own deportation. Thus many U.S. citizens who accompany deportees to Mexico have never been to Mexico, placing them in the curious position of “returning” for the first time.

“Deportability,” or the threat of deportation, also produces migrations south as individuals and families return because of a pervasive climate of fear among unauthorized migrants in the United States. This kind of preemptive return has been tagged with the politically charged label “self-deportation.” As many former migrants told me, “Ya no vale
la pena”—with fewer jobs and increased risk of incarceration and deportation in communities throughout the country, it may be “no longer worth the effort” to stay in the United States. And finally, there are forms of return that while not caused by deportation, are nonetheless part of the broader context of an increasingly commonplace “going” and “coming” of north-south movement. Such returnees might include a retiree—a previous bracero and U.S. permanent resident—who plans to spend his retirement in Mexico; a labor migrant who returns because an economic crisis makes work scarce; an elder in the community who dreams of returning “home”; or even the bodies of Mexican nationals who have requested that they be “returned” to Mexico after death.

Just as deportation moves widely through families and communities, so, too, does my research. I focus on the multiple forms of return that deportation produces, from the forced expulsion of deportation itself to the supposedly “voluntary” north-south migrations and de facto deportations of U.S. citizens that are driven by the U.S. government’s removal of people living within its borders. My analysis focuses on those who are deported and the many people who experience deportation even if it is not technically their own—partners, children, siblings, and parents of deportees—as well as members of communities to which returnees go or come. The reach of deportation is so extensive that it is impractical and unfruitful, if not impossible, to consider deportees in isolation. The fallout of deportation is profoundly damaging. It upends families, unnerves people without formal status in the United States, and frightens those who have ties to undocumented migrants. I consider these many diverse experiences as I piece together the story of return.

Throughout the book, I draw on the lived experiences of interlocutors to demonstrate how people go and come through force or will, move and stay, migrate to some locations or find themselves unable to relocate to others. As their experiences show, tracking emergent processes and experiences of return enables us to begin to document the larger impacts of deportation and its intended and unintended, official and unofficial consequences and effects. I consider the multiple ways movement takes place or is channeled, forced, controlled, or prevented by the state. The very categories or terms for return and those who return—deportees, migrants, returnees—are shifting and not easily assigned. The return and movement of transnational Mexicans is disorienting, as people describe “here” and “there” as unfixed places. These forms of movement can be arrivals as well as departures, passages
to multiple destinations, or border crossings in both directions. Narratives of “going” and “coming” capture the chaos and uncertainty of return. Tracing such narratives and the trajectories they describe are a way to follow those forced to leave a nation, and the many others who leave with them.

**UNCERTAIN RETURNS**

The accounts of deportees and those close to them do indeed focus on uncertainty. Mariela’s question, “¿Quién sabe?,” was echoed in nearly every conversation I had with interlocutors about return. On the one hand, Mariela’s words indicate the unpredictability of migrant experience and the economic and social precariousness of undocumented migrants: anyone might be targeted for removal, and all may be affected in some way by the experience of deportation. On the other hand, her repeated phrase is almost an ironic evocation of the certainty of the trajectories of those who are targeted for removal. Exceptions are rarely made within the current legal system, and so the paths before and after removal are, sadly, common to many. Uncertainties of time, geography, and immigration status thus permeate processes of removal that are themselves conceived of in terms of ineluctability, certainty, and unidirectionality.

This erasure of presence has effects elsewhere and close to home, wherever “home” might be located. Constructions of “illegality” and “deportability” in one nation-state can perhaps best be understood by extending an analysis of deportation to migrants’ nations of origin or current nations of residence. Legal categories formulated in the United States circulate transnationally. Ethnography among deportees is especially fruitful in explicating processes that may be difficult for researchers to “reach,” including “vast institutional machinery—consisting of local jails, prisons, detention centers, INS and FBI surveillance and interrogation, transport, and more.” Because the impact of U.S. immigration policy extends well beyond the boundaries of the nation—and beyond any one individual—a primary objective of the book is to examine its effects in multiple contexts and in the lives of the many people touched by deportation.

As ethnographic research makes clear, the chaos of removal is felt (perhaps most) tangibly within family life. Deportation unravels kin networks. State regimes permeate family relations and re/structure kinship, underscoring the ways that relatedness and family dis/connections shift and endure within processes of return. While there is a well-developed
body of work about how kinship is structured as a result of migration, how families respond to deportation and return migration is much less studied, largely because these are processes in the making. As the state upends family life through deportation, the kin relations at the center of this upheaval have been an important focus of my study.

Although deportation is ostensibly targeted at individual subjects, it is an assault on family life and one’s embeddedness in kin relations. Here, family and gender relations can become channels of control for the state. Through deportation, the state does not discipline only individuals; it also disciplines the loved ones of deportees, regardless of U.S. immigration status. As with migration, the presence of the U.S. state permeates family life as it carries out deportations. What distinguishes deportation from migration, however, is the intensity, and presumed permanence, of state actions related to removal.

Thus contradictions play out in the everyday lives of those touched by deportation: order and disorder, predictability and unpredictability, permanence and impermanence, structure and chaos. Movement through time, across borders, and through categories of membership is often assumed to be easily delineated or even immutable, be it migration from one country to another or the inheritance of birthright citizenship. In fact, such experiences, particularly when framed by return, are fragmented and disorderly, a series of disruptions. Here I outline the un/certainties of removal across time, space, and status, themes that are extended in subsequent chapters. Throughout the book, I consider the bumpy, uneven ways in which individuals and families affected by removal are situated temporally, geographically, and within and outside of categories of belonging.

Unmaking Presence, Family, Future, and Membership

The experiences of Rodrigo bring into relief ambiguities of place, time, kin, and categories. Rodrigo lives in a binational, mixed-status extended family: his parents and adult siblings are U.S. residents, many of his children are living in the United States as unauthorized migrants, and he has grandchildren who are U.S. citizens. In Mexico, he has siblings, children, and grandchildren. Rodrigo and his family members have experienced many migrations and returns over time. In the 1980s, Rodrigo lived in the United States for an extended period, though he returned to Mexico because of health problems, and therefore he did not receive amnesty through IRCA as several of his family members did. Years later, however, he was able to obtain a tourist visa, which allowed him to visit three
generations of family members living in New Mexico. Prior to 2006, Rodrigo and his wife had traveled twice using their visas without difficulties, each time careful to return to Mexico within the six-month period for which they were granted permission to be in the United States. Rodrigo explained to me that he did not want to break any U.S. laws, and so he always had come back to Mexico within the allotted time frame.

On his third trip north, Rodrigo’s experience was quite different from previous border crossings. When he arrived at the U.S. port of entry in El Paso, Texas, and presented his passport, he and his wife, Teresa, were taken aside, each questioned for several hours separately because, as outlined in the “Notice to Alien Ordered Removed/Departure Verification” he was given later, Rodrigo was “suspected of being an intended immigrant.” Like the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in the United States, this border crossing was filled with fear for both Rodrigo and Teresa. Ironically, he experienced deportability and was deported without actually having entered the borders of the nation and despite legal permission from the U.S. government to do so. His Mexican passport, with the valid U.S. visa inside, was confiscated, and he was formally “removed.”

The questioning of Rodrigo by a U.S. Border Patrol agent reveals intersecting scales of time, place, and status. According to Rodrigo, the agent pressured him to discuss years in the past when he had worked without papers in the United States. Curiously, this time during the 1970s and 1980s was the precise period when individuals who received amnesty through IRCA were also working in the country without documents. For example, two of Rodrigo’s brothers, now U.S. permanent residents, both worked with Rodrigo, first in agriculture and then for a construction company. The agents also asked about his place of residence during these years and since receiving the visitor visa. When did he first migrate to the United States? How long did he live in Mexico after returning? Where did he stay during previous visits as a tourist?

Here, past, present, and future events, multiple geographic locations, and a range of statuses vis-à-vis the U.S. state converge in unsettling ways. In this moment, this one afternoon, Rodrigo’s future trajectory took a certain, seemingly permanent turn, based on events that occurred decades ago. Places, too, blurred, as an intended trip north to the United States underwritten by the authorization of a tourist visa quickly transformed into forced movement south, a transnational traveler’s border crossing abruptly stopped and reversed by a sudden shift. At the border, Rodrigo’s status changed from a category of relative mobility—that of
“nonimmigrant” with a “visitor visa”—to one that would shape any future transnational migration, that of “deportee.” The labels “alien” and “illegal immigrant,” attached to Rodrigo’s unimpeded migration decades before, surfaced in the context of migration and border politics of today. Paradoxically, Rodrigo, like others I spoke with during my research, was deported while following the law. As he described, his commitment to respecting U.S. authority and regulations had motivated his initial application for a visitor visa. Acquiring a visa also involved an uncertain process: it had been expensive, lengthy, and—because of very low rates of tourist visa approval in the region—unlikely, but he and his wife were successful in securing the visas. Now, however, they were barred from legally entering the country in the future.

Just prior to his removal, Rodrigo was given a stack of paperwork, including a transcript of his exchange with U.S. Border Patrol agents. Then he and Teresa walked across the pedestrian bridge at El Paso–Ciudad Juárez and took a cab to the bus station for their eventual return to their small town. Several of the questions in the transcript of Rodrigo’s removal documents aim to verify the clarity of the proceedings and his understanding of the events; the transcript ends on a definitive note, with Rodrigo’s signature at the bottom of the document indicating that the information was correct and that he understood the ramifications. Now, in the eyes of the law, he was a “deportee.”

However, while these documents represent the proceedings as clear and straightforward, they were, for Rodrigo, a source of great confusion. When I spoke with him about the experience, there was little certainty, a rendition of that day quite different from that indicated in the official documents. “I didn’t understand it . . . honestly, I’m still not sure what happened. It was all very confusing. My wife was in another room, and so I was worried about her. Also, I was concerned that they would go after my [family members in the United States] and punish them,” he said. He showed me the forms and asked if there was anything that could be done. Could I, he wondered, at least explain to him what it all meant? Could he return to the United States sometime in the future or was he permanently banned from entering?

Un/predictability of Place

In the context of removal, places are uncertain and future destinations and locations unknown and unexpected. Deportation removes people from the nation: through geographic displacement, the construction of
legal categories, and an intensification of laws and their enforcement, states erase the “presence” of particular human beings. The migrations of return and removal are uneven, characterized by both transnationality and limited, restricted, or even completely prohibited movement. Mobilities can be involuntary, such as deportation itself or the relocations of very young migrants. Such “forced” transnationalism27 is frequently experienced in ways more parallel to movement as the result of war or exile than labor migration. Far from places they understand to be home and regardless of formal attachments or government recognition of membership, people experience geographic displacement as well as dis/connected ties to identities that transcend place.

Similarly chaotic, and both predictable and not, removal can include immobility, as individuals find themselves trapped within one nation, be it the United States or Mexico, with few possibilities for transnational movement and despite concrete ties to more than one place. Such immobilities repeatedly result in divided families—with one member far from others or families split, with partners, children and parents, and siblings separated by the borders of national territories. These configurations of family intersect with the uncertainties of time; intimate living arrangements thought to be permanent can be suddenly dissolved by deportation, while family members once living apart can unexpectedly find themselves geographically close to kin. As with migration, families are again restructured, this time because of removal, with loved ones situated in unpredictable places.

In the context of removal, there is also unpredictability in the direction of movement. In cases of deportation, people typically move from north to south rather than south to north as with previous notable migration flows from Mexico. Yet removal can also produce new transnational migrations north. Deportation thus is experienced as, accompanied by, and generates many other forms of return. Even those deported may be willing to risk the potential consequences of return passage to the United States, “reentry” after deportation that many understand as their only alternative. The predictability and unpredictability—and permanence and impermanence—of future locations create chaos in the lives of those removed and those who are close to them.

**Temporal Un/Certainty**

The temporal dimensions of return are nearly always framed by narratives of un/certainty.28 Both migration and deportation are understood
in terms of time and are “temporally complex,” or what the anthropologist Cati Coe has termed “transtemporal.” These transnational processes represent a convergence of temporal scales, a collapsing or interdependence of past, present, and future. Migration is clearly linked to the past through the historical factors that have shaped movement. Another connection to the past is the fact that family and community members from different generations have migrated at a previous point in time, whether as braceros in the 1940s or as unauthorized migrants last month. Migration is also in the present, experienced as subsistence for families through remittances. Finally, Mexican migration to the United States is nearly always focused on that which is yet to come: people repeatedly equate migration with their hopes for a secure future, for themselves but especially for their families and children.

Deportation, in contrast, is nearly void of future imaginings, except as expressions of the future as unknown or a definitive dead end. Here, too, past individual experiences collide with present events and future trajectories. Previous actions that seemed insignificant or at least commonplace, such as obtaining a social security card, can have a lasting, calamitous effect. Life in the United States—and the support to Mexican communities provided by labor migrations—is understood as fleeting, since one can be deported at any time, while deportation and the threat of removal are persistent, a perpetual state of unpredictability that frames unauthorized migration and state removals. Attention to temporality shows how uncertain trajectories are, paradoxically, accompanied by a sense of surety, especially as the permanence and immutability of state action.

Temporal un/certainty, then, frames discourses about migration, but especially discussions of deportation and the movement that stems from it, and in particular highlights the many aspects of transnational return that are driven by broader forces or that cannot be controlled. Migrants hope for “suerte [luck]” and acknowledge the limits of individual agency: “Así es la vida [That’s life].” Such tropes are expressions of social reality or what the anthropologist Maria Tapias has termed the “embodiment of social suffering.” These statements point to the vast “gulf between who is in and who is out,” a divide created by the expulsion, displacement, and attempted erasure of transnational subjects. Un/certainty of time shuts migrants out of a life once known and destabilizes hopes for the future.
Un/Documented Citizens

The same sorts of rigidity and fluidity at work in the temporalities and locations of deportation permeate the categories that define who is included in and who is excluded from the nation. While all transnational subjects embody ambiguity to some extent, removal and return make such category crossing that much more evident. Central to this question is scholarship about the construction of “il/legality” and “il/legal” subjects. Such research emphasizes the historical, political, and social context in which states define migrants as “legal” or “illegal,” “in” or “out” of the national body. Similarly, research on citizenship has complicated the many ways that membership is constructed, granted, and withheld from those who cross national borders.

The categories assigned by the U.S. government are plentiful even as they limit or constrict identities: “deportable,” “illegal alien,” “criminal alien,” “permanent resident,” “citizen,” “noncitizen,” “naturalized citizen,” and “guestworker,” among others. “Aliens” are further distinguished, such as the categories used by government agencies, including “alien worker,” “alien entrepreneur,” or, especially relevant to this discussion, “alien relative.” Yet even as the U.S. state employs an extensive system of categorization that would seem (to seek) to stabilize those persons and identities it assigns to categories, the categories themselves in practice are much more fluid than not. No one neatly fits in any one legal category created and imposed by the state, hence the proliferation of the categories themselves.

State categorization of authorized/unauthorized or documented/undocumented migrants is not easily delineated as the state enacts removal: deportability results in deportation erratically; many migrants find themselves in legal limbo or “liminal legality”; migrants may be deported while aiming to or in fact following the law; U.S. citizens are exiled through de facto deportation; and citizens of both nations experience binational bureaucracies in the spheres of education, property ownership, and social services. “Aliens” can be de facto citizens, and U.S. citizens can be easily converted into “aliens.” Seemingly static statuses change through legal processes, with membership made available through naturalization or formal citizenship made impossible after deportation due to a felony conviction.

Similarly, there are chaotic elements to the labels by which migrants are perceived by themselves and by others, including academics: returnees,
deportees, de facto deportees, migrants, unauthorized migrants, undocumented migrants, citizens, contingent citizens, undocumented citizens, de facto citizens, expatriates, refugees, and exiles, among others, make up those touched by removal. These labels also shift through various exchanges and resituatings, and, not surprisingly, lived experience may be altogether different from the seemingly distinctive categories of transnational movement. For example, a teenager who is deported after living in the United States since infancy shares much with U.S. expatriates or even exiled citizens because a return to one’s “home” nation could result in arrest and imprisonment. A deportee who is removed while crossing the border for the first time or after a brief stay in the United States is perhaps best understood as a migrant, since both migration and return happened in short succession. Of course, one notable difference after formal removal by the state—rather than return as part of circular migration—is that the legal stakes are high and indeed increase if the individual “returns” to the United States after deportation. Thus I present this research with recognition of the complexities inherent in labeling but also as a way to interrogate, problematize, counter, or reframe the politics of categorization.

Labels, categories, and systems of classification, then, are both multiple and limiting. That one is categorized is inevitable, and how one is categorized has very real and lasting effects, but the metrics and definitional complexity of many categories reveal a less certain and less stable system. In the end, state removals undo or erode citizenship and belonging more generally. Of course, removal itself aims to formalize exclusion, as people are expelled from the nation and assigned a status that legally marks individuals as outsiders or foreigners. Another consequence of the current increase in removals, however, is the way that deportation actually undermines citizenship in its many forms, including state-recognized citizenship, the very membership against which those who are expelled are defined. This is the conundrum the state faces as it attempts to clearly delineate lines of belonging and exclusion in an environment where such an endeavor is ever more difficult, if not impossible.

What is striking about the current wave of deportations is how citizenship, as it is denied for some, is eroded more generally as a system of classification. Membership—as de facto, undocumented, or cultural citizenship—is certainly negated for the deportee but for many others as well. By focusing on the lives of people affected by U.S. immigration policies and the government’s removal of migrants from the nation, this