

CHAPTER ONE

The Violence of Mobility

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

“He stuck his hand in between the door when I turned my back. I didn’t see them coming. Before I knew it they were inside with their guns pointed at us, threatening to do something to my wife, or to me or burn down the institution (a migrant shelter). It was a very serious threat ... One of the Zetas, because he identified himself as a member of the Zetas cartel, spoke to me very calmly, in a certain way. ‘We want to take these two people. There is a *patero* (human smuggler) who is not reporting to us. We want to know who crossed them. We will ask them for code words. If they have the codes we will leave them alone and not bother them anymore. If they don’t give us the codes, well, it’s because someone crossed them and they are not with us.’” The longtime staff member Lázaro froze: “I immediately contacted the priest (in charge of the shelter) and told him, ‘Padre, we have a situation here.’ ‘Lázaro, let them go. We can’t do anything else,’ the priest replied, so I said, ‘You have to leave, *muchachos*, la Casa (del migrante) can’t do anything for you.’” The migrants started to scream and plead not to let them be taken. “I let them take them (the deportees) and I never saw them again. What else could I have done?”¹

These incursions into migrant shelters have become common in north-eastern Mexico. “I still hear their screams,” Lázaro said as we sat in a restaurant in D.F. shortly after the event. I had just ended my fieldwork along

the border and we got the chance to catch up at a workshop held by the ACLU in Mexico City to discuss migrant possessions. This incident happened shortly after I left the shelter, but similar events had happened throughout the Northeast. The two young men who were taken were originally from Michoacán, a central Mexican state and also an area controlled by one of the mortal enemies of the Zetas cartel: La Familia Michoacana. Being deported to Tamaulipas placed them in danger because the Zetas are always suspicious of deportees coming from territories controlled by rival gangs. When the Michoacanos were walking to the shelter, two young lookouts, known as *halcones*, who monitored the people coming and going from the shelter, stopped to interrogate them, a common practice. “They were big guys, as tall as you,” Lázaro explained, “and did not pay attention to the halcones, who were little kids.” The deportees pushed past the lookouts, shoving one hard against a fence. “The other (lookout) went and called on his radio and the reinforcements arrived. The trucks came with armed men.” Simple missteps like this one may have cost these two young men their lives. Being a deportee along the border is a dangerous world, one with complex rules and a shifting terrain that has put immigration squarely in the sights of drug cartels.

Events like this are rarely publicized—the organizations that run shelters do not want the negative publicity and potential closure, nor do the police and organized criminal groups from the area want these activities known. But *what* precisely is going on here? What would drug traffickers, once famous for their gaudy lifestyles and excessive wealth, want with relatively poor deportees and migrants? These hidden horrors are the backdrop for the high-profile massacres in the region, particularly the killing of 72 Central and South American migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, in August of 2010.² This massacre has become yet another gruesome footnote in the drug war that has wrecked havoc on Mexico during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

This book explores a fundamental problem with the U.S. immigration system. Deportation is not considered a punishment but rather an administrative action because people are simply being sent home.³ And

yet, people like these two young deportees from Michoacán are routinely placed in danger, many becoming the victims of torture or death. The mass deportation of people from the United States to Mexico has exacerbated an already hyperviolent situation whereupon organized criminal groups and corrupt authorities prey upon deportees. With the conflict over control of the drug trade raging between drug cartels and the authorities, criminal activities and the pervasiveness of violence into more and more aspects of daily life along the border have led to a concentration on migrants and deportees that is largely new. Long a staple of border cities, the small groups of individuals waiting on street corners, dressed in black and exhausted after days of walking through the desert, were once pitied or simply ignored by residents,⁴ but now they are interrogated, extorted, kidnapped, forcibly recruited by organized crime, and even killed.

This violence can be attributed to two major social processes. First, the figure of the migrant, or deportee for that matter, someone defined by his or her movement and always belonging to someplace else, is uniquely exposed to violence. The limited protections afforded to migrants because they are in transit make them easy targets for being abducted, brutalized, or simply made to disappear without anyone searching for them for long periods of time. While, in theory, international conventions protect migrants and refugees, at the local level the ambiguity of belonging, of being in transit, neither from the space where they live nor at their final destination, means there is no one to answer for crimes committed against them. Second, the increasing presence of death, both in terms of the danger of the journey itself but also its social and emotional counterparts, has become an important aspect of the journey. This is highlighted by the blurring of boundaries between deaths caused by the sprawling conflict over the control of drug trafficking and those that are the result of migration. As more and more people pass through these zones of conflict, either while traveling through Mexico from Central America or upon deportation to Mexico's northern border, they are placed in extreme danger and have become the unlikely targets of organized crime.

SAN FERNANDO: VIOLENCE AND
MIGRATION COLLIDE

The massacre of 72 migrants, “the 72” as they came to be known, marked a sea change in the conflict. For the first time it became impossible to contend that this conflict was confined to the ranks of drug traffickers and criminals; clearly many others were also exposed to this violence. Therefore, it became one of the events that caused the greatest problem for the Mexican government. The discourse of criminals killing each other, the “*ajuste de cuentas*” best translated as the settling of scores, had been the most common refrain for the Mexican government to fall back on when addressing the violence. These people were simply killing each other, and therefore it was not a matter of concern for those who were not involved in such activities.⁵ With 72 migrants from Central and South America murdered execution style, their bodies lined up against the wall of an abandoned, half-finished building, there was no way to spin it as some sort of internal gang dispute. This was something much more sinister.

Rumors swirled. The initial discovery of the bodies was due to a survivor, a young man from Ecuador, shot in the head and left for dead. He was able to escape and flag down a military convoy that reported the massacre. Questions about whether he was left alive on purpose, or a member of the cartel working in collaboration, caused heated debates (sources say that his survival was neither intentional nor was he a member of the Zetas). Certainly, the fact that no steps were taken to dispose of the bodies, as had become customary in the region, raised further suspicions. Those suspicions grew as almost two hundred bodies were found buried in mass graves in the same area the following year, many of them having been dissolved in acid and burned beyond recognition. Why leave such a devastating trail of violence? For Juanito, a young man who was kidnapped and held in San Fernando two years after the massacre, the answer lay in the complicated relationship between organized crime and the Mexican government. He believed it was a cynical action by organized crime to embarrass the beleaguered Mexican government

and destabilize their legitimacy by questioning their ability to protect foreigners on national soil, thereby exacerbating the international debate about whether or not Mexico was becoming a failed state.⁶ By selecting only foreign migrants to murder, it applied international pressure on the administration as the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Brazil all joined to denounce Mexico's failure to protect migrants. In this way the Zetas hoped to force cooperation from the government, and specifically its enforcement apparatus, to turn a blind eye to the drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping that has plagued Mexico's Northeast.

This leads us to one of the main questions driving this research: How does enforcement shape the types of activities carried out by criminal organizations? For one, the overreliance on the military, following the arrest and elimination of local police as occurred in cities such as Nuevo Laredo during my fieldwork, led to an increase in violence targeted at local residents. Militaries are not designed to police civilian populations, especially not their own nationals. They are trained to kill enemies, not to investigate crimes, not to make arrests and get convictions in court. They are trained to confront and engage. This has caused a great deal of institutional confusion as the army and navy begin to receive training in police tactics and the police receive more and more training in military tactics and materials such as the Black Hawk helicopters provided by the United States. Life on the ground, however, shows that this has resulted in nothing but chaos and confusion.

On one of my first trips to Nuevo Laredo, I headed to the convenience store with my hosts to buy some beer for the *carne asada*. We walked into the ubiquitous OXXO, similar to the one on nearly every corner in Mexico. The young woman behind the counter was shaking. "I can't sell you anything. I have no change. They just came in here and robbed me," she said. "They put a knife to my throat." My host Fernando⁷ pulled out his wallet to check. "That's okay. We have correct change for the beer." We paid and walked out as if it were the most normal thing in the world.⁸ The banality of violence and turmoil caused by

efforts to root out corruption was itself shocking and completely unremarkable as people averted their attention and normalized the things that were out of their control.

This is just one example of how national-level policy changes influence the nature and character of violence. But what about international policies such as border and immigration enforcement? How do the policies and even the individual decisions made by immigration officers at the U.S.-Mexico border influence the nature of violence along the border? I argue that immigration enforcement practices have been one of the major drivers of kidnapping and violence against migrants in Mexico. This occurs through the complicated geography of detention and repatriation that shuffles people all along the two-thousand-mile border, as well as the steady process of criminalization that has produced a stigma that transcends borders and has permeated Mexican society as well.

With more and more immigrants being arrested, incarcerated for greater periods of time, and sentenced for crimes that for decades were generally treated as administrative violations and not criminal acts, it has promoted higher levels of violence around undocumented migration and deportation.⁹ The costs to cross, the stakes of getting caught, and the intermingling of migrants and drug traffickers in prison have all converged along the border. This, along with the uniquely situated vulnerability and exposure of clandestine migrants, has led to the complex and shifting exploitation, abuse, and even massacres of migrants in Mexico such as in San Fernando but also in Cadereyta, Nuevo León. The lack of understanding and questions about the true scope of this violence present a unique challenge for research, advocacy, and especially for asylum seekers in their quest to stay in the United States. Neither I nor anyone else can answer seemingly simple questions about what happens to people whose asylum applications are rejected. How many are killed? Where do they go? Do they hide or run? How many are conscripted into organized crime? How many are kidnapped, tortured, and exploited? This book addresses some of these questions, but arriving at a definitive answer to such hidden and violent processes will

require additional research and perhaps decades of diligent work by scholars, advocates, and activists.

Furthermore, no other place along the border has generated as many unanswered questions as the northeastern state of Tamaulipas. With so little information coming out of this area, it is difficult to know for sure the levels of violence. How frequent are killings like the massacre in San Fernando? What has driven the explosion of drug cartel–related violence against migrants and deportees in recent years? One thing is for sure; this violence has drastically reshaped migration, adding new layers of violence to what was already a treacherous and often deadly journey.

The severity of the situation has left migrant rights advocates and service providers desperately unprepared and without the necessary resources. Across the Northeast, migrant rights centers were forced to close, often sending those running these programs into hiding, leaving the region or country as a whole. This lack of services correlates to the diminishing power of the press to report on crime or operate freely. In Nuevo Laredo where I worked, one could not buy a national newspaper or *Proceso* (a renowned news magazine published in Mexico City) at the local OXXO. Even the man who delivered papers from Laredo, Texas, was threatened and, as a result, stopped bringing papers across the river.

Survival became the primary organizing principle of social life. I remember walking around Ciudad Juárez in 2010, the year more than three thousand people were murdered in that city.¹⁰ People looked curiously at me, almost tripping over themselves due to the novelty of the out-of-place gringo. However, in Nuevo Laredo, no one looked at me. They were too busy watching who might be following them. Conversations took on an eerie cadence as we chatted freely in cars or offices, but everyone became immediately silent as they passed through public spaces, concerned about who might overhear them.

Migrant shelters were particularly vulnerable and, despite assurances, had to take matters into their own hands. The cost of protection—usually manifest in security cameras that only sometimes worked or a peephole in barred doors to talk to potential visitors before allowing

them entrance—was born almost entirely by these organizations. Some shelters were given a police escort during particularly intense periods when threats had been registered against shelter owners. Suspicions of being watched, as well as of people working for the drug cartels having been planted inside shelters, led to a flurry of rules, such as no cell phones (to prevent coordination with the outside) and the mandatory locking of doors that, in one nearly catastrophic instance, could have led to migrants burning to death, as a fire forced them to break the windows of the second-floor dormitory and jump to safety. Luckily no one was killed but two people were badly injured.

Shelter workers clung to shelter rules, even trivial ones, as they would to a lifeline; the rules were a way to organize and protect their space. To me, it felt like adding fresh paint to a burning building. Rather than concentrate on the extreme forms of violence and danger all around us, these organizations busied themselves with complicated systems to count the number of bars of soap given to migrants, or to keep track of the towels. This is not meant to undermine the work done in shelters and by other service providers who concern themselves with the day-to-day stresses of providing food and shelter for hundreds of deportees and migrants. This labor is absolutely necessary and, despite being imperfect as is the case in any situation where the needs grossly outweigh the resources, their dedication and commitment and sacrifices cannot be overstated. However, the necessity of having to work in a greatly constrained environment prevents those who provide care from being able to rise above the daily melee and advocate for change.¹¹

As a researcher, both issues affected me. First, I was far from immune to these pressures and was forced to adjust my methodology due to the stress of the environment. Recording interviews was uncomfortable for the interviewees and for me. Writing in public brought unwanted attention. I had to write at nights or sometimes during the day when I could escape to my borrowed office at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte. Moreover, my attempts to intervene, particularly by helping people escape the region, were (mostly) disastrous (see chapter 5). Because of this, my goal

for this book is to go beyond simply describing the horrible situation that people find themselves in, and attempt to use research as a tool for people working directly for immigration, asylum and policy reform. This book is therefore an attempt to address the security situation in Mexico, as well as the U.S. policies that have seriously exacerbated the vulnerability of migrants. These policies have placed people in extreme danger, which directly violates the U.S. commitment to asylum seekers as well as the commitment to the principle of *non-refoulement*, also known as the convention against torture. Mass deportation is creating the conditions of violence and vulnerability that should qualify many individuals for protection under the law, but this is largely being ignored.

THE VIOLENCE OF MOBILITY

Being defined by one's movement is to be defined as less than human. The immigrant and the deportee are identified as hailing from elsewhere, from someplace different. Human movement is etched with violence, and the people marked by these etchings are at the mercy of those around them. People in movement live through this violence, and the very fact of their mobility exposes them to new structures and forms of violence. Violence is both a social and a spatial process, with the radical "foreignness" of the individual inscribed on their being.

This is particularly true of the forced movement of deportation. While even the most desperate migration attempts, such as those fleeing violence, take place with the benefit of some choice (where to cross the border, how to travel, whom to go with), deportation is mobility rejected. It is failure. Every day, thousands of people find themselves marooned in unfamiliar, sometimes dangerous border cities all along the two-thousand-mile U.S.-Mexico divide. They struggle to decide what comes next. Return to a former home? Cross the border? Stay at the border? But the challenges of the first few days and hours are often much more dire. How will I eat? Where will I sleep? Is it safe here? How will I survive?

These questions have become paramount as the drug-related violence that has rocked Mexico for the past decade drastically changed the social order. Nowhere is this more profound and visible than along the border. Migrants and deportees are thrust into complex situations of local power-struggles, militarized policing, and brutal open conflict with no social safety net to rely on. Their movement, being away from both destination and origin, places them in a uniquely precarious situation. They arrive under scrutiny, stigmatized by the same mechanisms of criminalization that have led to ever increasing numbers of incarcerated migrants. During the same time period that over two hundred thousand people lost their lives in the “drug war,” several million people were deported to the border zone. The impact of this violence on people in movement demonstrates not only the seismic impact of the “drug war” on Mexico, but the deep connections between mobility and violence as a whole.

This violence, however, does not exist in a vacuum, and the neighboring countries of Mexico and the United States influence one another in a deep and profound way. Border enforcement policies and priorities in the United States have the power to radically change the atmosphere on the border, and have often led to complete reversals of Mexico’s treatment of Central American *transmigrantes*. The United States’ heightened immigration enforcement apparatus, driven by the blending of local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement, has intensified the image of the criminal alien, stigmatizing hundreds of thousands of immigrants. In many ways this is a direct extension of the same apparatus that has been criminalizing communities of color since the abolition of slavery.¹² Gang injunctions, racial profiling, for-profit prisons and their subsidiaries, mandatory minimums, and a growing list of felony eligible crimes—all tools used to lock up record numbers of people—have affected immigrants, but with the added caveat that they can be expelled afterward. The additional punishment of removal has become the dream of law enforcement agencies. Imagine not just locking people up but removing them to another country once their time is served. Not only does this make it possible to completely ignore the dire consequences of mass incarceration,

especially solitary confinement,¹³ but those “problematic” individuals then become the sole responsibility of another country. The social ramifications of incarceration and the consequences of institutionalization have been removed to the white space on the map: beyond our borders.

Throughout this process, the criminalization of immigration has succeeded in merging the figure of the immigrant with the criminal, not only in the United States but abroad as well. Mexican officials often laud migrants as heroes who support their families by suffering abroad, but periodically attack deportees as criminals, responsible for the violence along the border.¹⁴ This is not to say there are not social problems created by mass removal along the U.S.-Mexico border. For example in 2007, there were 129,330 removals¹⁵ to Nogales, Sonora, a city with an official population of only 220,000. When close to half of the population of a city is dumped on the streets over the course of a year, most with no place to sleep, no money, no contacts, and almost no government support, it is bound to have repercussions.

Combine the Obama administration’s mass, criminalized removals of over 2 million people, most of whom were sent to Mexico, with the extremely volatile drug war that began in 2007 and it is easy to see how this situation exploded. The heavy death toll in cities such as Ciudad Juárez, where more than ten thousand murders took place between 2007 and 2012, completely destroyed social life on the border. People fled, stores shut down, and a de facto curfew was in place for years. This was not isolated to high-profile hot-spots like Juárez but occurred almost everywhere along the border, especially in rural zones far from the cameras and reporters who, even at the height of the violence, documented much of the carnage in cities. For the first time, the conflicts among drug traffickers became a daily concern for everyone living on the border. Fear, suspicion, and self-preservation changed people’s habits. It is not surprising that narratives about the hundreds of “criminals” deported each day provoked such a visceral backlash.

This was particularly pronounced when then-mayor of Ciudad Juárez Hector “Teto” Murgia blamed deportees for the violence and urged the

border patrol to stop repatriations to the city.¹⁶ His strategy worked and removals slowed to a trickle. Contrast this with a letter-writing campaign from a group of migrants detained in a New Mexico facility who pleaded that they not be sent to Tamaulipas, home to the infamous migrant massacre in 2010.¹⁷ Their requests went unfulfilled, as have dozens of similar attempts, such as hunger strikes and activist campaigns to stem the flow of migrants into the most dangerous region along the border. The migrant as a threat will always have traction within the current approach to border enforcement, whereas any attempt to protect migrants and thereby reduce violence along the border has been met with extreme resistance.

By examining the ways people must negotiate the border, and the violence that has become commonplace, we can better understand the impacts of mass criminalization. This helps expose those changes to border enforcement that have succeeded in putting people directly in harm's way, while simultaneously exacerbating the already tenuous security situation in Mexican border cities.

Through ethnographic research with deportees along the entire U.S.-Mexico border from 2007–18, this book chronicles how drug-related violence has reshaped migration and deportation in Mexico. Tracing the twin phenomena of migration and drug violence through the distinct border regions demonstrates the importance of movement, both vertical movement north and south, as well as lateral movement along the border. Successful northward movement is aided by previous experiences, social contacts, and knowledge of the border. Southward movement, at least for everyone in this book, is forced movement, an expulsion mandated and controlled by the U.S. state. East–west movement is far more complicated. On the southern side of the border, there is generally a concerted effort to avoid the punitive state apparatuses of both the United States and Mexico, as well as a desire to avoid criminals and kidnapping. On the northern side of the border, people travel throughout the country in search of family, work, and a safe place to live. However, once apprehended, lateral movement is used as a punishment, to further disrupt people from geographies of migration that have become familiar.¹⁸

This occurs through two mechanisms. The first is the confusing geography of U.S. county and federal prisons, as well as immigration detention centers that leave migrants confused and disoriented.¹⁹ People may spend months or years incarcerated and then are removed to Mexico in a completely unfamiliar region where they know no one, and may be thousands of miles from family or friends. The second are lateral repatriation programs such as the Alien Transfer and Exit Program (ATEP) that send people to different regions of the border, in a nominal attempt to “break the smuggling cycle.”²⁰ This is part of the fantasy that smugglers are forcing people to cross the border rather than providing an agreed-upon service. The end goal, of course, is to increase the hardship for migrants. It is unclear whether or not officials actually believe that sending people to different regions will make it harder for smugglers; however, it is obvious that this is an undeniable hardship, making the migratory experience more difficult and unpleasant.

The Consequence Delivery System (CDS)—the strategic plan of the U.S. Border Patrol, formalized in 2011, but existing in pieces for much of the previous decade and even longer as a loose series of practices²¹—marks a significant change in border and immigration enforcement. It employs a government strategy that seeks to punish individuals in escalating ways based on previous migration infractions. Rather than relying primarily on the dangers of the desert to dissuade potential immigrants, this new system evokes the full brunt of the U.S. justice system to prosecute and punish undocumented migrants. This coincides with the worldwide push to fortify borders, which, in turn, leads to greater and greater levels of violence associated with political boundaries.²²

While most people are charged and incarcerated and removed in a matter of days and weeks, those who fear removal or have valid chances to fight removal must face the long and complex world of immigration courts. The immigration courts operate in a parallel legal universe.²³ Gone are the protections of innocence until proven guilty, gone is the right to counsel, and basically nonexistent is the right to a speedy trial,

with some people spending years in immigration detention without parole awaiting a decision. Wait times stretch into the years in some federal court districts for asylum seekers. The choke point of immigration reform is therefore not policing, but the court system, an underfunded backwater of our massive enforcement apparatus. With only minutes devoted to each case, judges must decide whether or not to separate families and expel people to unfamiliar and often dangerous parts of the world. With wildly varying rates of asylum being granted by different judges and court circuits, as well as the significant role of U.S. geopolitics in shaping which citizens from which countries we choose to grant asylum, this has become a roll of the dice.²⁴ Dana Leigh Marks, an immigration judge in the Ninth Circuit, famously described it as “death penalty cases heard in traffic court settings.”²⁵

While these issues have taken center stage in U.S. and Mexican politics, my arrival at this topic was the result of a series of experiences throughout years of living and working on the border. The evolution of violence was particularly jarring and created its own needs and directions for my work that would not necessarily have emerged otherwise. I watched as fewer and fewer people would venture into the streets as dusk approached, as stores closed and restaurants sat empty. I would fall asleep to gunfire in Nogales. As an elderly woman who ran one of the shelters where I work joked, “I never thought I would learn how to tell the difference between fireworks and gunfire at my age.”

And here I was, somehow a million miles from these conflicts, and yet often confronted by their realities, which I read about every day on sites like Blog del Narco and Michel Marizco’s Border Reporter. The bloody videos, graphic photos, and macabre tales all served as a reminder about the reality of death and violence in Mexico. I soon began to expand my research out of Nogales, Sonora, and into Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo. Going to new places without the years of contacts and built-in social support that I had in Sonora brought new methodological challenges.

METHODOLOGY: MIXED METHODS
AND MULTI-SITED RESEARCH

While there is a sprawling literature about the border, a limited amount of research on migration is actually conducted on the U.S.-Mexico border, much of it taking place instead in sending or receiving communities. Furthermore, still fewer works take place in multiple research sites along the U.S.-Mexico border. This project was an attempt to trace the twin phenomena of drug trafficking and deportation through the various settings and contexts of different border towns. The complicated movements through the carceral state, as well as lateral movements like ATEP, make the connections between places ever more intricate and harder to study, requiring a more holistic, mixed methods approach. The concept of multi-sited ethnography²⁶ allows us to better understand that we are not simply comparing two points on a map; rather, we are attempting to understand the different contexts and relationships between places. This book draws primarily from research with people in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Nogales, Sonora, and Tijuana, Baja California, although research was conducted in other cities as well such as Matamoros, Reynosa, Ciudad Juárez, Altar, and Mexicali. This ethnographic work, conducted largely in migrant shelters, was a way to expand upon a large-scale survey project with deportees, asking questions about the subtle ways in which crime and violence intertwine with human mobility. These questions could not be answered through survey questions written in black and white for the world to see without additional, nuanced qualitative work.

I was one of the PIs for a binational team of sixty researchers²⁷ who conducted surveys with deportees in Tijuana and Mexicali, Baja California; Nogales, Sonora; Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; and Mexico City during aerial repatriations (see Map 1). Overall, we conducted 1,110 surveys with recent deportees in 2010–12,²⁸ each questionnaire containing 250 questions and lasting about an hour



Map 1. MBCS survey locations. Source: Rolando Díaz.

per interview.²⁹ These surveys focused on the violence people experience while crossing the border, being apprehended, processed, and deported to Mexico. In order to participate, individuals must have crossed without papers within the last decade (to coincide with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security) and been deported to Mexico within the last month. This project, known as the Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS), is the first attempt to understand how peoples' experiences of being deported diverge from stated due process. However, not every question can be asked on a survey.

This is where ethnographic work becomes invaluable. In many ways the survey research led me to the ethnographic questions that form the basis of this book. The subtle interactions between people and places, the nuanced rules dictating behavior, and the undercurrent of fear associated with the brutality of organized crime and of the state are only apparent through in-depth qualitative research. However, there is

always an uneven nature to this knowledge. The work in Tamaulipas was conducted in fits and starts with trips in 2011, 2012, and a five-month intensive research period in 2013, with two follow-up visits in 2016. This was to account both for time, balancing multiple research sites, but also due to the unique security situation in the region. Because of this complicated research process, readers will notice significant jumps in time and space; however, none of the characters in this book are composites.

Additionally, one constant throughout this work was engaging in migrant shelters as an important space where the violence of the drug war collides with immigration enforcement. Lázaro, who narrated the opening vignette for this book, knows the history of that violence and its impact on migration as well as anyone. His unique background informed his particular perspective. Born in the Zapotec city of Pochutla, Oaxaca, Lázaro spent more time directly on the front lines of the Zetas's reign of terror over migrants than anyone else I encountered in my fieldwork. He worked at the front door of a shelter in Tamaulipas, deciding who can enter and who cannot for over seven years from 2009–17. Lázaro, although barely five feet tall, had a presence few could claim.

He was soft-spoken but firm, relying on short noncommittal sentences. He wore a vest, and several rosaries under his bearded chin and thick spiky black hair. Lázaro developed a rare bone disease when he was a child that caused the cartilage in his joints to calcify, leading him to walk with a limp, but this did not affect his demeanor and strength. “I have no limits,” he said. “I was dedicated to the farm, taking care of goats and sheep. My father is a *campesino*. It was a nice life, but at six years old I had to deal with my illness . . . it is an impediment for certain movements, but it does not limit me. *A todo lo que da!*—I keep going! I am a normal person. What I have is not a limit. God gave me an open mind and I am happy.” He arrived at the shelter because of his brother, who was in the seminary to be a priest. “Before, for example, I sold pirated goods, movies, CDs, cloths, T-shirts. Even back when I was in high school I started to distribute drugs. I have done a little bit of everything. That same experience that I lived in Oaxaca helped me do good things in

Nuevo Laredo. How did I detect the people who were smoking marijuana, well, before, I smoked a lot of marijuana!” laughed Lázaro.

He was well aware of the dual nature of providing services to migrants. The fact of the matter is that this is not a simple homogenous group of people. Neither the anti-immigrant right, hoping to demonize every immigrant as a criminal, nor the pro-immigrant left with a “pure” victim narrative would be wholly satisfied. People are complex and nuanced and not everyone has pure motives, and while it is factually correct that the vast majority of deportees and immigrants are not violent criminals, one needs to be aware of the potential presence of violent criminals when working in these spaces.

Many of the stories I collected depict important insights and devastating consequences of violence. Navigating this world and conducting interviews without causing potential harm to people was always in my mind. One incident was typical of this challenge:

I had interviewed Javier, a 45-year-old man originally from Jalisco who had married a U.S. citizen and had two children in the United States. At the end of the night, as I was leaving, he stopped me. He was reading a Bible alone by the kitchen, on the one indoor step. Javier was red in the face with tears in his eyes. He told me, “I don’t know who you are and what you will do with this stuff. Everyone here told you a lot of stuff. They all told you the truth and bad things could happen with it.” I wrote down my contact information for my websites, my email and full name. I told him he could see what I have done, and the transparency helped a little bit, but not much. He said, “I told you a lot because, what can happen? It’s already ruined.”³⁰

This served as a potent reminder of the challenges of working in migrant shelters. Not only are these complex places, filled with people who have wildly different pasts, goals, and purposes, but there is a sense of urgency and fear that often fills shelters. This presents an additional challenge as deportees attempt to navigate the obstacles of a dangerous and violent border region.

First, it has been well established that people working for the cartels or for human smugglers often infiltrate the shelters to find out informa-

tion about what is happening there, who is around, and what they are doing. Javier's worry about some of the stories I had been told was something I had reflected upon before. Most shelters are located in poorer parts of town. Generally, neighbors are not sympathetic to dozens of people arriving and staying in nearby buildings and having nowhere to go. Wealthy neighbors have repeatedly called the authorities and used their influence to evict the shelters or curtail their activities, meaning that working-class or poor neighborhoods are generally the only places that allow them to operate. This also allows for surveillance by cartels from the outside as well as the inside. Despite the well-known prospect of people overhearing them, during my research the stories flowed, sometimes in a whisper, other times loudly, too loudly in fact. Sometimes I tried to slow or stop people, but most did not care, as echoed by Javier's last point: this is the lowest of low points on an already difficult journey. Deportation is the point of collapse, where devastation sets in. People feel they have little else to lose and the desire to tell their stories wins out. I hope to humanize these experiences through the lives of people, who discuss not only their victimization, but also their hopes, dreams, personal histories, and livelihoods. Hopefully, this can contextualize the human tragedy of deportation.

TOWARD A TOPOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

Around the world, the figure of the immigrant has seen a resurgence as the scapegoat of choice. From Western Europe to Australia to Donald Trump's anti-immigrant xenophobia, immigrants have come under intense scrutiny and become the object of heightened fear and the subject of harsh reprisals. Some attribute this hatred and fear as an admonishment of their foreignness, being primarily attributed to another nation, another people. However, this does not help us answer one of the key questions posed in this book, namely: Why are deportees, those returned to their supposed homeland, also abused, tortured, or killed with impunity? Following the work of Thomas Nail it is not the

belonging to another nation that is primarily to blame for the seeming ease and ubiquitous demonization of migrants, but rather their movement.³¹ As an immigrant, or a deportee for that matter, movement has been etched on their being. “Thus, more than any other political figure (citizen, foreigner, sovereign, etc.) the migrant is the one least defined by its being and place and more by its becoming and displacement: by its movement.”³² Migrants are essentially named for their movement, and thus inextricably out of place by definition, always in transit from or to a different place. Migrants are not a permanent fixture of anywhere; they are forever in motion.

The object of this research, however, is not migrants necessarily, but that subset of migrants who have come in contact with our growing repressive, anti-immigrant machine: deportees. While the migrant may be the stranger, the deportee is the reject, the stranger who could not cut it and has been forcibly returned in chains. The deportee is still defined by mobility, but it is the failed mobility, the bulimic expulsion³³ from a foreign state, that has come to define their mobility. Therefore not only are deportees always from somewhere else, they are also defined as coming from somewhere that rejected them, even as they return to what may nominally be their country of citizenship. Understanding the geography of people, particularly through labels that denote impermanence or a state of motion, will help us grasp why it has become so common and so easy to abuse, demonize, and even dispose of certain groups.

The very fact that migrants are not rooted in any one place means that, first and foremost, no one will speak for them; no one will look for them, and their story is easily forgotten. Imagine if a hundred people were kidnapped and murdered in one small town or city. Regardless of the power of the murderers this could create extreme social upheaval. The concentration of mortality from one place alone would make it impossible to hide. Indeed this has happened several times over the past decade in Mexico as villages such as Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas, and Allende, Coahuila, were almost completely wiped out.³⁴ However, this is a difficult, costly, and dangerous activity, one that, barring