

“Transnational DREAMer Narratives: Following the Deportation and Return-Migration Trails of Mexican Immigrant Youth”

by

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Abstract

In the year 2000, the DREAMer Narrative gained momentum as a popular trope in political and activist discourse across United States. The Narrative was utilized as a tool to identify and justify the political inclusion of undocumented youth for citizenship privileges. A growing number of current and former undocumented scholars actively denounce the DREAMer Narrative for prioritizing a singular idea of undocumented youth that actively excludes the diverse experiences of the immigrant community, including those who have been deported or who chose to return to their home countries. This paper will trace the transnational travels of the term, “DREAMer,” as it has traveled alongside deported and returned undocumented youth to Mexico. I will explore historical examples of returned migration programs in Mexico and conduct an analysis of the DREAMer Narrative as performing a neoliberal agenda in Mexico.

During the Fall of 2012, I helped co-organize a symposium titled, “Everyday Practices of Popular Power: Art, Media, and Immigration,” alongside two of my faculty mentors at the University of New Mexico.¹ The symposium was a response to national and local organizing efforts that brought together activists, artists, and academics to address critical immigration issues at a turning point for undocumented communities. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA, 2012) program had just been implemented by President Barack Obama earlier that same year.² In many ways, the symposium served to highlight the messaging put forth by key organizing efforts that led to the DACA program’s implementation, as well as next steps for undocumented communities to continue to organize for the future. One of the key takeaways from the symposium was the idea of organizing transnationally between U.S.-based undocumented youth and those who were being deported or choosing to self-return to their countries of origin. For the purposes of this paper, I define deported and deportee as someone who has gone through the immigration process of removal from the United States to their home

country. I use self-returned and returnees interchangeably as someone who chose—out of their own desire, interest or need—to migrate and return back to their home country.³

During Barack Obama’s presidency, the United States witnessed the largest mass deportation period in the country's history.⁴ The organizers and scholars who convened for the symposium warned that DACA was merely a “band aid” solution to the broken immigration system. Without true reform to the system of immigration, the deportations and marginalization of undocumented communities continued to rise. The implementation of DACA further amplified and solidified an immigration system that prioritized certain kinds of immigrant groups by creating a larger group of those who are deemed unworthy of incorporation and protection.

Undocumented organizers spoke out against the “DREAMer Narrative” - a term under which undocumented youth grew to national political prominence in the early 2000’s derived from proposed legislation called the Dream Act that would have given a pathway to citizenship for qualifying undocumented youth. Undocumented and formerly undocumented activists and scholars take issue with the term “dreamer” because it: a) is an exclusive term that only accounts for a minority of undocumented populations, b) represents an identity associated with and tied to legislation, ignoring cultural as a significant aspect of identity formations, and c) exemplifies a neoliberal construction aimed to include minority population, while excluding large majority of immigrant populations, while seeming inclusive in policy as a nation-state (Negron-González, 2014, Chávez, 2013, Negron-González and Abrego, 2020).

Although the Dream Act failed to pass on multiple occasions, many scholars and activists have attributed these organizing efforts to the antecedents to passing the DACA program in 2012. I join recently published efforts by other undocumented and formerly undocumented scholars who are writing about this transformation within the undocumented youth movements

and communities to speak out against and choose not to identify with the term “DREAMER” (Abrego, Negron-González, 2020). Instead, I use the term *UndocuScholar* - a scholar researching and writing about the immigrant experience from an undocumented perspective. Reflecting on the implementation of DACA and its aftermath, the symposium helped undocumented community members (like myself) push our collective consciousness to go beyond positionality and utilize our privilege by learning about our undocumented communities’ experience that did not fit the mold of incorporation outlined by the DREAMer Narrative.⁵ As such, one of these personal and academic interest became to learn about the experiences of undocumented youth who had been deported or chose to leave the United States to their home countries.

This paper analyzes the use of transnational tropes by Mexican immigrants who challenge traditional notions of citizenship and human rights, both, in Mexico and the United States. The fluidity of transnationalism calls for a focus on “transmigrants,” defined by Michelle A. Stephens as, “social actors with allegiances, loyalties and networks that go beyond their citizenship in one nation-state.”⁶ Using a transnational approach across organizations and global immigrant communities allows us to understand the commonalities among immigrant groups who have shared *illegalization* experiences in both countries. The literature on illegalization focuses on two fundamental characteristics: a) restriction of mobility, and b) the ways in which undocumented status alters everyday experiences for immigrant populations (De Genova, 2002, Chávez, 2007, Menjívar and Kanstroom, 2013, Abrego, 2014). Here, I explore the ways in which illegalization allows us to understand how immigration status dictates exclusion from the social, political, and economic institutions of both nation-states.

The need for transnational organizing efforts is a direct result of global capitalist systems that produce global events that push and pull people to migrate. Global events like the 9/11

terrorist attacks on the U.S. had direct consequences as federal and state-level immigration policies complicated access to higher education for undocumented youth and led to transnational organizing efforts out of necessity. The *Los Otros Dreamers* project coalesced as transnational organizing and transnational scholarship, which began with the crowd-sourcing fundraising and organizing efforts by scholar-activist Jill Anderson to publish the book, *Los Otros Dreamers* in 2014. Anderson's push for binational research was taken up by other researchers in recent work like Malcolm J. Garcia's *Without A Country* (2017) that focuses on deported veterans and Beth C. Caldwell's *Deported Americans* (2019). Dulce Medina and Cecilia Menjivar's study, "The context of return migration," in 2015 highlights the ways in which mixed-status families navigate return migration to Mexico in distinct ways that focus on family units and their relationships to the Mexican government. Beyond academic interests, journalists have also engaged the subject of returnees and deportees in a critical manner.⁷

This paper engages the growing scholarship focused on deported and self-returned youth by adding to the conversation the ways in which the DREAMer narrative has been co-opted transnationally in Mexico. I organize this paper by first providing a note on my methodology in using textual analysis and coding of the interviews compiled by the *Los Otros Dreamers* book project. Secondly, I provide a brief analysis of the scholarship that exists on the colonial legacies of historical repatriation programs by the Mexican nation-state. In the third part of this paper, I provide a brief understanding of neoliberal paradigms that prioritize undocumented youth as model citizens for recruitment into Mexican universities. Finally, I close the paper by arguing that the DREAMer narrative must be understood in a transnational context to analyze the ways it has been selectively incorporated into Mexican institutional life.

Coding *Los Otros Dreamers*: Archive & Methodology:

The archive for this paper is indebted to the scholar-activist work of Jill Anderson and Nin Solis who self-published their book, *Los Otros Dreamers*— an oral history collection focusing on returnees and deportees to Mexico. Anderson speaks about the organizing efforts to fundraise and support the book by stating that, “Dreamers and their families, as well as immigrant rights allies on both sides of the border, helped fund the community-driven book you are holding in your hands,” to show the transnational organization effort that went into making the book possible. Anderson and Solis envisioned this as an art and social justice project to tell the stories of those returning and being deported in high numbers to Mexico.

Los Otros Dreamers consists of a total of twenty-six interviews that include self-returned and deported youth to Mexico. I coded these interviews based on grounded theory that helped produce metrics that led me to focus on the conditions of illegalization in regard to undocumented status and mobility restrictions alongside capturing the DREAMer narrative in a transnational light. I take an intersectional approach to analyze: ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; while also intersecting language, mixed-status families, parenting, and educational attainment. While incorporating these intersectional metrics, I narrowed the twenty-six total stories included in *Los Otros Dreamers* to a total of ten to focus specifically on oral histories that closely aligned with the metrics previously outlined.⁸

As an UndocuScholar, I am indebted to the oral history collection of scholar-activist Jill Anderson, who brought awareness to the stories of undocumented youth who were returning in higher numbers between 2005 and 2010 (Anderson, 8). I remember buying the book in 2014 when it launched and reading, highlighting, annotating, and trying to make sense of an experience that was foreign yet relatable to me as an undocumented graduate student with the

privilege of DACA. In re-reading and becoming intimately connected to the oral histories in *Los Otros Dreamers*, I began to code the oral histories as a way to make them legible—like an archive. Coding the oral histories in *Los Otros Dreamers* proved to be useful data in making connections for the arguments of this paper on the transnational mobility of the DREAMer Narrative and understanding the ways in which mobility is restricted transitionally and how undocumented youth are rendered illegal in both countries. Oral histories are powerful; they help us organize a worldview that can be alternate to the dominant ideologies held by power structures. As an UndocuScholar, I write this paper to take on the intention of scholar-activist Jill Anderson to “apply intellectual tools and skills for the purpose of social justice and transformation” (Anderson, 2019, 126). I want to honor and contribute to the ongoing transnational public work that Anderson initiated with *Los Otros Dreamers* by coding the interviews and providing useful data that can be extracted and analyzed.

Preliminary findings highlight that out of the twenty-six oral histories included in *Los Otros Dreamers*, a total of fifteen were of returnees and eleven consisted of deportees. Out of these numbers, I was able to code them based on gender: nine total female returnees and three deportees, in contrast to male identified subjects consisting of six returnees with seven deportees, and one person identifying as transgender woman who had been deported. Out of these numbers, we can see that a good majority of the returnees numbers consist of women, while male identified subjects dominate the deportees category. I provide a visual representation of the ways in which I codified the *Los Otros Dreamers* interviews in **Table 1.1.**, as a way to capture and correlate the intersections of the qualitative data collected in the book on the experiences of returnees and deportees.⁹ Showcasing qualitative data in this manner helps to highlight the

transnational connectivities that exist between the relationships and trends of those who chose to self-return or those who are detained by U.S. immigration services and deported back to Mexico.

Repatriation and deportation efforts of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. have a long colonial history. The language of colonialism is rooted in the potential of labor as exported to the center of the nation. Mexican immigrant youth living in the U.S. have historically been admired and sought after by both the U.S. and Mexico. The language of untapped potential is rooted in colonial languages of growth and expansion. In this next section, I will provide a brief analysis of the body of literature on repatriation efforts and the colonial relationships between Mexico, the U.S., and Mexican immigrants.

Colonial Legacies of Repatriation

The study of return-migration in a global and transnational approach among Mexican immigrant communities is not a new phenomenon, but rather, a historical one. In his book, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, José Angel Hernández details historical efforts by the Mexican government in the nineteenth century to return Mexican immigrants to their home country. Hernández analyzes this repatriation effort as a colonial relationship between Mexican immigrants and the Mexican state. Hernández conducts a historiography of Mexico's birth as a nation and the idea of incorporating a diverse population into a single political body under the guise of a "mestizo" identity to fit the molds of nationalism. He demonstrates the ways in which the immigration policies that the Mexican nation developed early on in the nation's history were colonial constructs that sought to continue eliminating traces of Indigeneity (Hernández, 18). In his analysis, Hernández links the construction of citizenship and immigration policies as remaining racially codified in resemblance to colonial models.

This call for repatriation by the Mexican government, as Hernández investigates, is not a new one, but rather an effort by the Mexican nation since the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), a period that witnessed mass migration from Mexicans to the United States. Hernández details official and unofficial programs of repatriation that established colonies along the borderlands in Texas, New Mexico, and California. Hernández directly refers to these settlements as colonies, because he analyzes worker's relationship to the state as dictated by the value of their labor and skill sets that they can offer a growing Mexican state. His analysis of coloniality also extends to detail the ways in which institutional structures and relationships to laborers followed a colonial structure of hierarchy and subordination. Hernández connects these historical repatriation programs to present-day efforts by the Mexican government to modernize the country under neoliberal models by incorporating immigrant populations who have been socialized, educated, and politicized in the U.S. In fact, Hernández's book begins with a more recent account of former Mexican president Vicente Fox, who in 2001 was urging Mexican immigrants to return to Mexico to help their nation "modernize" and prosper.

The early years of Chicana and Chicano scholarship was preoccupied with literature concentrated on the poor treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans both in the United States and in Mexico.¹⁰ Chicano scholars, Juan Gómez-Quiñones and David Maciel studied the relationship between Mexican consulates in the U.S. with the Mexican population in the U.S.¹¹ In their article, "'What Goes Around, Comes Around': Political Practice and Culture Response in the Internalization of Mexican Labor, 1890-1997," Gómez-Quiñones and David Maciel describe Mexican labor in the United States and in Mexico as being historically international and connected to the global market. They state, "The internationalization of Mexican labor involves clear actions by two states and the weight of their interdependent history" (Gómez-Quiñones and

Maciel, 28). The historical relationship between both nation states were rested on the internationalization of Mexican labor, which reflected a colonial past and a contemporary global capitalist present. Additionally, Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel detail the ways in which labor connects to negative cultural representations of Mexicans in both countries (Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel, 30-31).

This lineage of Chicana and Chicano scholarship details the ways in which global markets historically invested in producing differentiation in citizenship. As such, this global structure produced what Aihwa Ong calls, “differentiated citizenship,” that details the ways in which nation-states determine and produce a value system for their citizenry based on their capital worth and production. In a way, inclusion to not only citizenship rights, but also human rights for citizens and immigrants is dictated by the ways nation-states value and differentiate labor and labor markets, circumscribing and defining who is included or excluded from certain privileges or basic human rights.¹² This differentiation process is also racial, as described originally by the foundational work, *Racial Formation in the United States*, by Omi and Winant.¹³ Differentiated citizenship as described by Ong applies to the historical and contemporary repatriation efforts by the Mexican government. José Angel Hernández argues that repatriation programs by the Mexican state implemented a color-blind approach in the nineteenth century were efforts to eliminate Indigenous and ethnic Mexican identity that constituted a “difference” to the state’s official mestizo national identity.

Hernandez’s work shows how the Mexican nation-state made efforts in the nineteenth century to repatriate Mexicans living in the U.S. for their labor. Early Chicano scholars like Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel contribute to our understanding of Mexican immigrants’ transnational positionality in relation to a racialized global market. Ong, Omi, and Winant

provide an understanding that details how global labor has been organized alongside citizenship practices. Together, these scholars they show us that we must remain critical when there is a call for inclusion of immigrant populations and analyze the connection to what labor demands are being met for the nation-state.

Neoliberal Paradigms and Recruitment Efforts

In this next section, I will draw on Ethnic Studies scholars and Mexican scholars to unpack the transition into neoliberal paradigms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the ways in which neoliberal logic infiltrated institutional training in American and Mexican universities. This brings into focus how universities in Mexico began advertising the return-migration of undocumented youth from the U.S. as an attractive option in the midst of increased deportation and return-migration patterns for Mexican deportees and returnees.

The DREAMer movement grew to prominence between 2000-2010 with the rise of political legislative efforts to create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth. Immigrant youth were differentiated by their potential based on their educational attainment in the U.S., but also because of the neoliberal educational values that these potential students were inculcated. Inderpal Grewal highlights the efforts by American universities in the twentieth century to develop college students to view themselves as global agents (Grewal, P 48). Jodi Melamed expanded the understanding of this neoliberal ideological system tied to global agency by calling for the development of “global multicultural citizens.” She defined these global multicultural citizens as those who are inculcated with capitalist values of progress, racial logics, and individualism (Melamed, 142, 161). Countries with large immigrant populations in the U.S. like the Mexican government saw undocumented youth as untapped potential. The Mexican

government and other Mexican institutions recognized the potential to capitalize on skill sets from deported and self-returned Mexican immigrant youth.

After World War II, the United States emerged as a global leader in economic ascendancy and political influence (Melamed, 2014). European institutions were devastated by the war, while the U.S. remained privileged that combat took place abroad and its institutions enjoyed tremendous growth after entering the global conflict.¹⁴ Ethnic Studies scholars like Roderick Ferguson, Inderpal Grewal, and Lisa Lowe argue that the American University system was a pillar institution for ascendancy in a global capitalist system. Ferguson states, “the history of immigration, at least in the period of after World War II, is partly underwritten by the transformations in the American academy... immigration and international student migration, became new elements in power’s affirmative development that would be looked at and worried over in an effort to determine their suitability for hegemonic absorption,” (Ferguson, 147). Consequently, immigrant and international student differences are absorbed in the potential of affirming U.S. dominance at a global stage through “education” as ideology. Ferguson goes on to argue that, “immigration policy changes and the antiracist movements helped produced the conditions by which immigrant communities were absorbed into regulatory regimes of recognition, archivization, and affirmation,” (Ferguson, 160). Ferguson reaffirms the subjugation of immigrant and international students as a form of indoctrination at a global stage.

I follow the arguments of Roderick Ferguson in extending my analysis of Mexican immigrant students whose formative educational experience has been shaped in the U.S. and connect it to an established body of Mexican scholarship that analyzes Mexican universities under neoliberal paradigms. Pablo González Casanova is a Mexican sociologist who has written for three decades and provided critical analysis on the transformation of Mexican universities

and the development of disciplines of knowledge within institutions in relation to neoliberal shifts. In one of his foundational works, “La Universidad Necesaria en el Siglo XXI (The Needed University in the Twenty First Century)” he states, “The privatization of the ‘public sector’ in México and around the world is a neoliberal project of the complex transnational businesses whose hegemonic center is located within the most advanced nations members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of which the United States leads” (González Casanova, 1).¹⁵

In his analysis, González Casanova analyzes the ways in which the infiltration of neoliberal logic within Mexican institutions has been in operation since the 1960’s. His work focuses on the watershed moment that has come to be known as the “Crisis at UNAM,” where in 1998 the Mexican government used bureaucratic means to defund public education and created a model to implement a payment plan for students. The goal was to eliminate financial aid and increase the cost of public education (González Casanova, 8). González Casanova argues that the neoliberal logic implemented in Mexican universities was a push toward: a) privatization of education, b) defunding public education services, c) eliminating or undermining disciplines of knowledge that did not support modernization and entrepreneurial growth, and d) using the military industrial complex system to protect the privatization of education. These are all characteristics and principles of neoliberal logic as discussed by scholars of neoliberal studies (Harvey, 2005). González Casanova’s scholarship reveals the intricate ways in which neoliberal logic culminated in the rise of private institutions while public institutions were not prioritized by the national government in reciprocal ways. González Casanova’s historical trajectory of Mexican universities is critical for me to track the ways in which neoliberal logic permeated across public and private institutions and prioritized global markets to look at Mexican

immigrant youth for their intellectual potential, their training in American universities, and as a way to appear philanthropic while maintaining capitalistic goals.

After providing a brief introduction to neoliberal literature as it has been analyzed by scholars in impacting the direction of universities and student outlook, I return to the narratives from the book *Los Otros Dreamers* to analyze the ways the neoliberal cycle produced opportunities for Mexican universities to recruit undocumented youth. Secondly, I analyze the ideological language used by Mexican universities to: a) understand the ways in which undocumented youth are being targeted as transnational consumers and, b) understand the ways recruitment of undocumented youth is being disguised as benevolent act of public service for Mexican citizens abroad. I begin with the narratives from *Los Otros Dreamers* that focus on return-migration to Mexico.

A common experience in the narratives among those individuals making the choice of return-migration is the barriers that were presented in pursuing higher education because of their undocumented status in particularly anti-immigrant states. Out of the twenty-six interviews in *Los Otros Dreamers*, there are four participants who shared this common thread as their push/pull factor in choosing to return to Mexico to pursue higher education: Pamela, Jacqueline Pedro Noé, and Daniel (**Table 1.5**). Daniel's story is notable in that he would go on to be a co-founder for an organization whose sole purpose was to help returnees and deportees who were interested in higher education in Mexico.

Daniel mentions he would go on to successfully graduate from the University of Tecnológico de Monterrey (Tec) and is one of three founders and organizers of *Dream in Mexico*.¹⁶ Daniel entered the United States when he was fifteen years old. His parents decided to migrate to the U.S in hopes of a better life and economic prosperity from their humble

backgrounds in Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico. Unfortunately, his parents chose to immigrate to the state of South Carolina, which has become known as one of the most anti-immigrant states in the U.S. Like Daniel, Jacqueline shares similar migration stories of growing up in South Carolina. In (2008) South Carolina signed a bill barring undocumented students from attending public universities and only allowed them to attend private universities as international students. Unfortunately, Jacqueline had to return to Mexico to pursue higher education. She lamented this stating, “the fact that I had to return to Mexico to achieve my most sought-after dream made me sad,” (Anderson, 2008). This was the harsh reality for undocumented youth who found themselves in a conglomerate of U.S. southern states passing anti-immigrant legislation.

The bill that Jacqueline was referring to was passed on June 4th, 2008, by former South Carolina Republican Governor, Mark Sanford known as House Bill 4400 which denied undocumented students in state tuition and state aid at any college or university in the state.¹⁷ The bill also allowed local police enforcement to ask and require anybody to show proof of legal residence in the state, and finally the bill also denied healthcare to undocumented people in the state. We can trace the genealogy of such anti-immigrant bills to a back and forth heated debate between states that were passing anti-immigrant bills as in Arizona’s Proposition 300 (2006), Senate Bill 1070 (2010), and House Bill 2281 (2012). We see that the history of inaction at the federal level in immigration policy demonstrates a fracture that led states to try to implement different policies.¹⁸

Having lived in an anti-immigrant state for over three years and with limited opportunities to pursue his educational goals, Daniel looked into alternative options for his future. After much dialogue with his family and with supportive counselors, he took the tough decision of applying to University of Tecnológico de Monterrey and moved back to Mexico. The

decision was particularly challenging as it forced him to consider living his life in a region in Mexico he did not know. His decision also meant being separated from his family who would remain in South Carolina, knowing the challenges that they too would continue to face in an anti-immigrant rural location. This multifold-decision-making process highlights what is at stake for undocumented families: it is never an individual decision or action, but always one where decisions have consequences that impact the entire family.

Prior to leaving the U.S., Daniel gained organizing experience as an undocumented youth advocating for the Dream Act. He was part of an organization supporting the Dream Act in South Carolina. At that time, he hoped that after much national efforts and activism there would be enough pressure on the national political scene to create a path to citizenship for undocumented students. Daniel's formative experience as an activist occurred as he grew aware of national, state, and local organizations led by undocumented youth. Many activists were in the same position as he was, and all were working towards similar goals. However, when the Dream Act fell short of passing on December 8th, 2010, Daniel recalled that it was a hurtful blow felt nationwide which brought back the reality of his family's situation.¹⁹

The disappointing defeat of the Dream Act for immigrant communities in anti-immigrant states represented a "dream deferred" until further notice. The reality of the state's politics of mass incarcerations, deportations, and discrimination informed the geopolitical climate that undocumented students sought to change.²⁰ In the *Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, Mimi Thi Nguyen acknowledges that the neoliberal agenda has developed ways to recreate subjects in the promise of freedom that indebts subjects by deferring such pledge to a later time. This became the lived experience of undocumented immigrants in states

like South Carolina, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana, who all passed and still hold anti-immigrant laws.²¹

Facing barriers against pursuing higher education, Daniel and Jacqueline made the decisions of returning to Mexico to continue their educational growth. Jacqueline shares that connecting with Daniel's organization, *Dream in Mexico*, was foundational for her in making the decision to return to Mexico. She states, "Through *Dream in México*, I got in touch with the Tec de Monterrey," (Anderson, 208). The organization was the intermediary in connecting with the institution and resources needed to pursue her goal of higher education. Daniel's earlier navigation of immigration policies and establishment of *Dream in Mexico* facilitated a transmigrant organization that has gone on to support the enrollment of Mexican deportees and returnee students at institutions like Tec de Monterrey.

When Daniel co-founded *Dream in Mexico*, it was originally created to help immigrant youth reintegrate into Mexico as returnees, but he mentions that soon they realized the growing need of helping deportee youth. Daniel highlights the difference in situations between returnees and deportees when he states, "Our organization started by supporting youth who wanted to return to continue their studies here in Mexico, but we soon realized it was a much more difficult situation... We saw that their situation [deportees] had been very different from what we had experienced. We saw that not every case was an ideal situation," (Anderson, 233).

The realities of deportees accessing institutions in Mexico can be radically different from those who are choosing to return to Mexico. Valeria's experience captures the ways her deportation uprooted her life in drastic ways when she states, "I am not happy. I feel like a part of me is dead already. I'm not over it. It's hard to get over something like this" (Anderson, 81). Her words capture the frustrated, angry, and disappointed tone that comes across many of the

deportee narratives in *Los Otros Dreamers*. She goes on to say, “They can’t understand you and never will. They can barely imagine what you went through. They’re never going to have to go through it,” (Anderson, 82) as a way to highlight that people in Mexico do not understand deportees experience and are foreign to concepts of deportation practices of Mexican undocumented populations living in the U.S. Like many of the deportees experiences, Valeria was apprehended while doing an everyday activity where she was on the bus on her way to a concert.

Many of the participants in *Los Otros Dreamers* talk about feeling “illegal” or “undocumented” in Mexico as in the U.S. when it came to being incorporated or recognized by official institutions such as universities. Nancy’s narrative uses language that captures the feeling many returnees and deportees experience in being recognized by the Mexican state. She expresses the frustration of seeking documentation in their own country when she says, “After deportation, the first hurdle to overcome was the government bureaucracy,” (Anderson, 197). She emphasizes that this process would take six months for her to be able to obtain all required documentation to integrate into Mexican society. Nancy goes on to reveal that even after the process of obtaining her documentation, she still struggled in finding a job because, “Despite having an established career in philanthropy and community development in the US. I quickly learned that my experience was irrelevant in a border region driven by the manufacturing industry,” (Anderson, 201). Documentation in Mexico is one thing but having previous U.S. experience documented and counted is another thing.

Nancy’s story captures the complexity of obtaining documentation in Mexico. Deported youth express the complication of obtaining specific documents due to the fact that many do not have access to their documents or record of their life in the U.S., because deportation took them

by surprise. Like Valeria's story, Moy was suddenly apprehended after a leisure activity. He attempted to see manatees in their natural habitat in Florida, where unknowingly to him, the area he visited is considered an invisible border area. Moy expresses the sorrow he felt by his sudden deportation by saying, "I was sad because I had left everything behind: my things, my school, even my lifestyle," (Anderson, 220). Moy's statement demonstrates the fractured state of mind deportees face when their lives change overnight. Additionally, Moy's story captures the materialistic impact that deportation has on immigrant youth when they are not able to secure documentation from the United States. Moy states, "In Georgia, if you are not physically present at the school they cannot give you the apostille," to show the multiple barriers that obtaining documentation from the U.S. can be for deportees. He continues, adding that he recognizes he "was lucky to have family over there [in the U.S.]... but there are many that were deported who don't have anyone there or they don't know the process" (Anderson, 220). Moy was able to get the documentation that he needed from the U.S., but he also elaborates that it was a time-consuming and expensive process because all paperwork needs official certification, translation, and notarization in order to be accepted. He ends his story by sadly sharing that when he was deported, he was only a semester shy of graduating from college.

Out of the twenty-six stories captured in *Los Otros Dreamers*, the experiences of self-returned and deported youth range from 2006-2012. Daniel's story is among one of the early generations of return-migration in 2007. His co-development of the organization, *Dream in Mexico*, aimed to address the growing need of incorporating immigrant youth returning and being deported to Mexico. His generation represents some of the early success narratives of return-migration that is captured in the DREAMer narrative in the United States. But, the deportation numbers show that much more undocumented youth were being deported back to

Mexico at alarming numbers for minor felonies much the way that Moy's, Nancy's, and Valeria's experiences demonstrate.²² The number of returnees and deportees would continue to rise under the Obama administration. Campaigning under an anti-immigrant rhetoric, the forty-fifth president of the United States threatened to continue to increase deportations.²³ His plan to expand the number of deportations seemed more likely when his administration announced the decision to rescind DACA in 2017.²⁴

The news of cancelling the DACA program was felt across both sides of the border. In the U.S., it sparked mass mobilization among undocumented youth, organizing under a new Sanctuary Movement, dubbed the Sanctuary Campus Movement. The new movement strived to protect undocumented students attending universities through institutional means. Mexico's institutions responded as well, with Mexican universities like those of Tec de Monterrey and UNAM raising their hand as ready to offer institutional support for "dreamers" who might potentially be deported with the rescinding of DACA. These two Mexican institutions represent a unique case study in their appeal to undocumented youth for two important reasons: a) primarily because they represent the largest private and public university systems in Mexico, and b) most importantly, they are two of the institutions who had a track record of supporting early generations of returnees and deportees. Out of the five individuals in *Los Otros Dreamers* who report being educated in Mexico, after voluntarily leaving or being forcibly removed from the U.S., all of them report either attending Tec de Monterrey or UNAM (**Table 1.5**).

At the forefront of the realm of Mexican universities appealing to undocumented youth we can see those closest in resemblance to an "Americanization" approach to higher education. This appeal goes hand-and-hand with Mexican universities' adoption of neoliberal logic. As Mexico's largest private university and one of its fastest growing institutions, Tec de Monterrey

has been one of the initial institutions to support and reach out to undocumented students in the U.S. in very public ways. Two days after the official announcement of DACA's termination by the U.S. Attorney General in 2017, President of Tec de Monterrey Salvador Alva, published a video on his personal twitter account with the caption that read, "DACA's cancellation unjustly affects millions of young people. At @TecDeMonterrey we do not approve of walls. Talent does not have frontiers."²⁵ In the video, President Alva went on to say his administration would extend the university's scholarship program, *Líderes del Mañana* (Leaders of Tomorrow), to undocumented youth who chose to return or who may be deported back to Mexico as a result of DACA's termination.²⁶ During Alva's presidency at Tec de Monterrey, the program *Líderes del Mañana* was one way in which he attempted to transform the university into a more inclusive and diverse institution.

President Alva served as the head at Tec de Monterrey from 2012-2020, where he utilized his entrepreneur and global market organizing experience in the business sector to the largest private university in Mexico. In his response to the termination of DACA, he also highlighted that *Líderes del Mañana* had previously supported "voluntarily returned" youth who were returning to Mexico to study. He mentioned that the program included "Dreamers" as part of its advisory board, helping connect with undocumented youth in the United States. In an exit interview at the end of his term as President of Tec, Alva reflected on the goal of the *Líderes del Manana*, "we have to show the world that we can be an academically elite university, not an economically elite university."²⁷ Alva's leadership transformed Tec de Monterrey to be recognized as the twenty-eighth best private university in the world, one-hundred-and-fifty-fifth ranked university in the world, and eight best ranked university in entrepreneur studies.²⁸ It is important to consider the timeline of Alva's presidency in relation to the growth of recognition

of undocumented youth as “dreamers.” He began his tenure at Tec in 2012, the same year the DACA program was implemented in the U.S. which coincided with a peak in U.S. deportations after a whole generation of return-migration experiences.

As the biggest public university, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has also had experience with return-migration and deported students. Two of the narratives in *Los Otros Dreamers*, Pedro Noé (returnee) and Valeria (deportee) reported attending UNAM before the implementation of the DACA program. After being deported, Valeria states that she decided to attend UNAM as a way to “prove to the US government that I can make a life here or there,” (Anderson, 82) capturing a sense of reclaiming pride and self-worth that was not valued by the United States. A similar expression is conveyed in Pedro Noé’s narrative when he reflects that he is happy with his choice of moving to Mexico to pursue his dream of being an odontologist, “while a lot of people are still over there studying, others, like me, have come back to search for our dream on the other side of the border” (Anderson, 227). Anderson highlights the solidarity that those returning had in reflection with their undocumented counterparts in the U.S.

Like Tec de Monterrey, UNAM also made public announcements and created a program to support undocumented youth who might be impacted by DACA’s termination in 2017 while building from the experiences of an earlier generation of returnees and deportees like Valeria and Pedro Noé. In 2017, the President of UNAM, Enrique Graue toured the U.S. and Canada to establish global outreach networks and relationships abroad. During his tour, he commented on the situation of DACA being rescinded, “the university must not remain at the margin of the current conflict. As such, the university is creating diverse actions that can support one of the

most vulnerable groups: students and academics.” His statement demonstrates UNAM’s commitment to create a program that supports returnees and deportees.²⁹

The initiative that UNAM started for undocumented students was called, “Dreamers La UNAM Los Apoya” (Dreamers, UNAM Supports You). The program launched as an online site that operated as a small questionnaire that aimed to facilitate the process of enrolling and receiving assistance.³⁰ In following the online questionnaire, the survey is geared at undocumented youth who may be making the choice to return to Mexico or for those who may already find themselves in the country due to deportation. The site is available in English and Spanish language to make it accessible for immigrant youth who might have grown up in the U.S. and may not speak fluent Spanish. Beginning the survey, the site asks for basic information, such as name, it then asks where the most recent studies were conducted with a drop-down-option that asks for a state and city in the United States. Following the questions on education, the survey asks for certification in the mode of transcripts from Middle School to College level education. Part of the support promised for the initiated “Dreamers UNAM Supports You,” there is the mention of administrative and financial assistance towards completing the needed paperwork.

It is important to consider the language that the presidents of these institutions utilize in their outreach efforts to Mexican immigrant youth. President of UNAM, Enrique Graue, declares “The objective is that deported students should be able to continue their education and our country should not miss out on their potential intellectual,” to focus on the possibility that undocumented youth represent to Mexican institutions of higher learning and to the country more generally.³¹ President Salvador’s Alba’s twitter video ends with him saying that “Tec de

Monterrey will continue to build bridges of solidarity to ensure the success of Mexican youth, in Mexico, and beyond our borders.”

The publication date of *Los Otros Dreamers* is significant to this paper’s analysis of the DREAMer Narrative as a transnational turn. Jill Anderson’s research for the book spans a two-year process, which puts us at 2012, when the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was implemented by President Barack Obama. Between 2012 and 2014, the term DREAMer had reached its heights in usage and its effective rhetoric in adaptation towards favorable and strategic language. In Anderson’s introduction, she highlights that one of the objectives of the book is toward positive adaptation of policy change for returned and deported immigrant youth (Anderson, 15). Anderson provides a definition and history of the development of the term, “DREAMer,” and she goes as far as describing how the oral histories collected in *Los Otros Dreamers* complicate said terminology (Anderson, 8, 9). In a follow up article published by Anderson, where she references *Los Otros Dreamers*, she highlights how the “DREAMer” terminology “skews the realities of a generation of youth caught in the crucible of immigration control, racial profiling, and neoliberal economic policies,” (Anderson, 2019).

My work is in conversation with Anderson and the work more recently published by undocumented scholars and formerly undocumented scholars who highlight the issues with the term “DREAMers.” Key categories used in my coding include: educational attainment, referencing of DREAMer Narrative language, and also coding for illegalization processes. I coded educational attainment to represent youth reaching a college or university education as it is consistent with the DREAMer Narrative. Out of the twenty-six total oral histories, ten subjects mention obtaining a college or university level education; six of them obtaining said education in

the U.S., five of them in Mexico, and Pedro Noé from El Salvador who had obtained higher education degrees in El Salvador, the U.S., and Mexico.

The numbers on educational attainment for deportees and returnees is significant for two reasons: a) it speaks to the ideology embedded in the DREAMer narrative of immigrant youth as model citizens pursuing a higher education, and in contrast, b) also debunks the myth of the DREAMer narrative by demonstrating (in a small sample size like that of *Los Otros Dreamers*) that only twenty percent of the population is able to pursue higher education in either country.

Social mobility in either country is heavily built on educational attainment. From the coding I conducted of the *Los Otros Dreamers* oral histories, it becomes evident that those who enjoyed the largest social mobility obtained it through education. In contrast, the larger majority of the stories who did not share the possibility of having access to higher education also correlate with lack of opportunities for social mobility. Many of the participants in *Los Otros Dreamers* share their awareness around this societal structure and speak of organizing transnationally to create organizations that are able to cast a wider network of support. Daniel is among the first generation of returnees, and he went on to found *Dream in Mexico*, but others have begun to create similar organizations that tackle distinct issues of the returnee and deportee experiences. For example, Maru concludes her interview by saying, “I’ve learned that I don’t want that ‘legit’ job working for a company. I want to work with the Otr@s Dreamers Collective, a community of young men and women who have returned or who were forced to return to Mexico. My passion is borderless now” (Anderson, 66). Maru’s words demonstrate agency and a sense of purpose that rests on helping individuals who experienced various and diverse processes of reclamation to life in Mexico upon their return. Nancy also shares inspiring words that highlight the resilience that returnees and deportees express in ensuring they have control of their own future

and are not dependent on governments. She states, “what I am truly claiming is my right to belong as a ‘Citizen of the World.’ This is bigger than my own dream” (Anderson, 201).

Similarly, Azul offers concluding words, “What I can say is that there are others like you, and that they can be North stars that help you in your journey. You don’t have to do this alone” (Anderson, 33).

Conclusion

Organizing efforts by returnees and deportees demonstrate the contradictions and failed promises of global capitalism and articulation of the nation-state as the ultimate frame of analysis. Stated differently, transmigrant activism comes to stand in place as mutual aid and civic organizations that support transnational citizens who are not supported by their home country or their host country. This paper captures the contradictions of citizenship rights as dependent on the nation-state when global capitalist models of labor and production are producing transnational subjugation. The unique routes and choices that immigrant communities take are not created in a vacuum but rather are impacted by political discourse, notions of cultural belonging, and opportunities. Therefore, taking a transnational approach in studying activism is crucial in understanding the paths of exclusion facing immigrants in the United States. The existence and purpose of returnees and deportees reflect the shortcomings of both the U.S. and Mexico in providing populations with basic rights such as education.

Table 1.1 - Los Otros Dreamers oral histories: Breakdown of Returnee & Deportee Subjects

Returnees (15)	Deportees (11)
Patricia Carolina	Azul
Jaqueline	Miguel
Rufino	Rogelio
Maru	Valeria
Samantha Maribel	Moy
Raziel	Luis Manuel
Saúl	Édgar
Pamela	Adrian(a)
Jessica	Yoni
Maggie	Luis
Héctor	Nancy
Pedro Noé	
Virginia	
Daniel	
Claudia	

Table 1.2 - Breakdown of Returnee & Deportee Subjects based on Gender(s)

	Returnees (15)	Deportees (11)
Female	9	3
Male	6	7
Transgender	0	1

Language Coding: Table 1.3

	English	Spanish	Spanglish	Indigenous Language
Totals	17	8	3	3

Mixed Status-Families: Table 1.4

	Mixed Status Families	Children
Totals	20 = Yes 6 = No	3

Educational Attainment: Table 1.5

	Education	USA	Mexico	Other
Totals	11	6	5	1

Endnotes

1. “Everyday Practices of Popular Power” was a symposium organized by the American Studies and Chicana and Chicano Studies Departments at the University of New Mexico with a committee composed by two of my mentors, Dr. Rebecca Schreiber and Dr. Irene Vásquez, and George Luna-Peña and myself who were Masters students in American Studies at the time. The original website for the event, “Everyday Practices of Popular Power: Art, Media, Immigration” is no longer active, which was originally: <http://artmediaimmigration.com/>. But thanks to the internet digital archive service, *Wayback Machine*, snapshots of the original website can be recovered with original content, please consult: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130826155332/http://artmediaimmigration.com/>.
2. The original Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program announcement by President Barack Obama can be found on the White House archival website here: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration> (accessed July 17, 2018).
3. I interchangeably use the terms: deported, deportee, and self-returned, returnee throughout this paper to capture the many ways that these group immigrant populations have historically, politically, socially, and culturally been referred to in multiple mediums.
4. Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, Krogstad, Jens Manuel, “” U.S. immigration deportations declined in 2014, but remain near record high,” *Pew Research Center*. August 31, 2016.
5. I include my positionality and identity as an UndocuScholar to provide insights into the ways in which undocumented youth in the U.S. processed our counterparts who made the choice to return to Mexico or who had been deported. Connecting to this work as an UndocuScholars is part of my scholar-activist and public-scholarship approach. I have lived undocumented in the U.S. for over thirty years and have had the privilege of qualifying for the DACA program for over eight years. The symposium organized in 2012 was instrumental in coming to terms with my identity and approach as an UndocuScholar.

6. For more information on definitions and applications of “transmigrants,” please see: Stephens, A. Michelle “Black Transnationalism and the Politics of National Identity: West Indian Intellectuals in Harlem in the Age of War and Revolution” in *American Quarterly* 50.3 (1998).
7. Two journalists in the Los Angeles Times newspaper in particular that have done critical and extensive work on returnee and deportee communities see: Cindy Carcamo and Kate Linthicum.
8. The ten stories I use include: Maru, Azul, Luis, Pamela, Jacqueline, Pedro Noé, Daniel, Valeria, Nancy, Moy. I am using first-names only as is used originally in the *Los Otros Dreamers* book. In the Introduction of the book, Jill Anderson notes that when youth were interviewed for the project they were given the option of providing a pseudonym, include only first name, or include full name depending on their comfort level. All participants included at least their first name, some included their full names as part of their narrative, and all of them agreed to be photographed by Ninn Solis. *Los Otros Dreamers* by Jill Anderson and Nin Solis was originally self-published through community funded efforts in 2014. As I was completing this paper, the publication of their second edition of the book, *Lxs Otrxs Dreamers*, was published on April 19, 2021. As the title suggests, the second edition includes a wider range of interviews that seeks to include diverse and intersectional perspectives on returnees and deportees to Mexico.
9. I use various tables throughout this paper as a means of capturing the relationships and trends indicated in the qualitative findings of *Los Otros Dreamers* as a way to visually represent these connections to the reader. .
10. Scholars like Rodolfo O. De La Garza were invested in researching what he analyzed as “foreign policy” for Mexicans in the U.S. And there were also Chicano historians like Rodolfo Acuña who were invested in recovering the history and impact Mexican have had historically on both nation states.
11. Gómez-Quiñones. “Piedras Contra La Luna, México en Aztlán y Aztlán en México: Chicano Mexican Relations and the Mexican Consulate, 1900-1920,” in *Contemporary Mexico: Papers of the IV International Congress of Mexican History*, edited by James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer, and Edna Monzón de Wilkie. *The University of California Press*, 1976.
12. Ong, Aihwa. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Duke University Press, 1999.
13. Omi, Michael, Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States* (3rd Edition). Routledge, 2014.
- 14.
15. The English translations are my own translations. In my research, I have not come across official English translations of González Casanova’s work.
16. I use “Tec” to refer to Tecnológico de Monterrey as an acronym, because that is the common reference point used in Mexico.
17. For more information on national and state legislations concerning immigration bills, please visit the webpage: United State of America. National Conference of State Legislatures. *Undocumented Student Tuition: State Action*. N.p., July 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/undocumented-student-tuition-state-action.aspx>>.
18. For more information on the bills passed by former President, Bill Clinton and their impacts, please see: Nevins, Joseph. *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
19. Dream Act passed the House of Representatives with a vote of 216 to 198, but it was blocked two weeks later by the Senate after being five votes shy of passing. For more information on Dream Act failure to pass, read: Corrunker, Laura, “Coming out the Shadows”: DREAM Act Activism in the Context of Global Anti-Deportation Activism.”
20. To understand the lived conditions of anti-immigrant states, please read: Lovato, Roberto, “Juan Crow in Georgia: Immigrant Latinos Lived Under a Matrix of Oppressive Laws, Customs and Institutions,” as an example covered in Georgia where anti-immigrant sentiments run high and became one of the “triangle anti-immigrant” states that passed anti-immigrant bills in efforts to control and police undocumented communities.
21. To follow the anti-immigrant or pro-immigrant state bills passed up to date, read: United State of America. National Conference of State Legislatures. *Undocumented Student Tuition: State Action*. N.p., July 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/undocumented-student-tuition-state-action.aspx>>.
22. Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, “More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.,” *Pew Research Center*. November 19, 2015.
23. In this paper, I use “forty-fifth U.S. President” or “forty-five” to refer to the forty-fifth U.S. President of the United States of America as a form of resistance in my writing and in praxis. I am drawing this inspiration of omitting the name of the forty-fifth U.S. President from many of the social movements that have grown during his presidency, including the undocumented youth movements that composes my research.

24. Department of Homeland Security, “Memorandum on Rescission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)” DHS Website, September 5, 2017: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b5GOkEcVBpBHIToUeBNrmlWmSp2erMf/edit>
25. Alva, Salvador. “La cancelación de DACA afecta injustamente a miles de jóvenes. En @TecdeMonterrey reprobamos los muros. El talento no tiene fronteras,” Twitter, @Salvador. September 7, 2017. https://twitter.com/Salvador/status/905779994051448832?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwtterm%5E905779994051448832%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Ftecreview.tec.mx%2F2017%2F09%2F07%2Ftendencias%2Fdreamers-podrian-estudiar-en-tecnologico-monterrey%2F I have provided the English translation to the video by President Alva.
26. For more information on the *Lideres del Mañana* program, see their website: <http://lideresdelmanana.itesm.mx>
27. Treviño, Ricardo, Navarrete, Alejandro, “Salvador Alva: A Legacy of Transformation at Tec de Monterrey,” CON3CTA. July 29, 2020. <https://tec.mx/en/news/national/institution/salvador-alva-legacy-transformation-tec-de-monterrey>
28. IBID. <https://tec.mx/en/news/national/institution/salvador-alva-legacy-transformation-tec-de-monterrey>
29. Noticias, “UNAM ofrece ayuda a “dreamers” mexicanos que sean deportados por EEUU,” *Acceso Latino*. February 9, 2017. <https://accesolatino.org/noticias/unam-ofrece-ayuda-a-dreamers-mexicanos-que-sean-deportados-por-eeuu/> The article is in Spanish, the English translations are my own translations.
30. The “Dreamers La UNAM Los Apoya website can be accessed here: <https://dreamers.dgire.unam.mx/dreamers/>
31. IBID. <https://accesolatino.org/noticias/unam-ofrece-ayuda-a-dreamers-mexicanos-que-sean-deportados-por-eeuu/>
32. IBID. https://twitter.com/Salvador/status/905779994051448832?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwtterm%5E905779994051448832%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Ftecreview.tec.mx%2F2017%2F09%2F07%2Ftendencias%2Fdreamers-podrian-estudiar-en-tecnologico-monterrey%2F

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