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“Negative Credentials,” “Foreign-Earned” Capital, and Call Centers: Guatemalan Deportees’ Precarious Reintegration

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Abstract

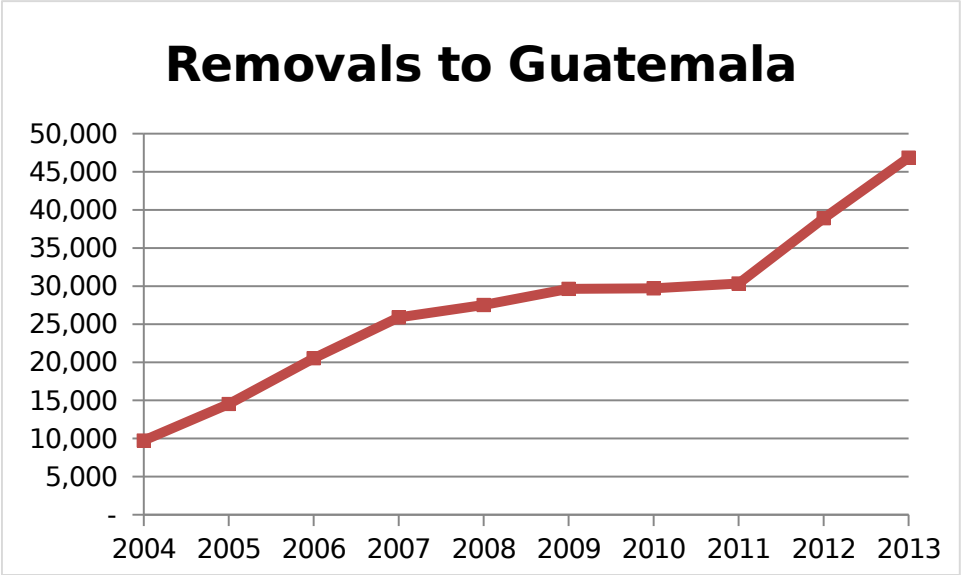
This article considers the experiences of people deported from the United States to Guatemala, with a focus on the precarious labor market and how deportees use the various forms of capital they bring with them from the United States to remake their lives in their country of birth. Previous research has found that deportees are often criminalized, stigmatized, and blamed for social problems. Researchers have also found that deportees can be well-suited for work in the transnational call center sector when they have adequate English skills. This raises the question of how deportees’ individual characteristics and the local context of reception influence their (re)incorporation. This study, based on interviews with 34 Guatemalan deportees, reveals that deportees have varied trajectories, yet that the availability of call-center jobs creates a bifurcation in labor market outcomes between call-center workers and everyone else.

Keywords

Deportation, Guatemala, Tattoos, Violence, Cultural Capital, Human Capital, Labor Market, Reincorporation, Globalization

Introduction

I spent most of a Friday in the fall of 2009 watching three planeloads of deportees – a total of 280 people – being returned to their birth country of Guatemala. Four to six planes full of Guatemalan deportees arrive by air every week into the Guatemalan Air Force Base. In 2005, 14,522 Guatemalans were deported, fewer than 15 percent of whom had a criminal conviction in the United States. By 2013, 46,866 deportees were sent to Guatemala from the United States, one-third of whom had a criminal conviction (Simanski 2014). Guatemala has thus experienced both an increase in the number of deportees as well as an increase in the percentage of people deported on criminal grounds.



Source: Table 41, Office of Immigration Statistics 2013 Yearbook

I watched deportees disembark from a plane that had an all-white exterior except for a blue tail, an ID number, and the words “Operated by Xtra Airways” written on the side. I learned that the deportees had been handcuffed and shackled for the duration of the five-hour flight from Texas. Deportees I later interviewed told me they had been given food and drink yet had difficulty consuming it with handcuffs on. When the plane landed, the U.S. Marshalls and U.S. Department of Homeland Security employees accompanying the flight handed a list of passengers to the Guatemalan migration authorities. The deportees were unshackled and un-cuffed, permitted to de-plane, and then walked single file into a room where the sounds of a marimba playing welcomed them. A Guatemalan official invited them to sit in rows of

white plastic chairs. On each chair was a paper bag with a bean sandwich, chips, and a drink for each returnee. The bean sandwich and the marimba music serve as cultural markers of a welcome “home.” Once everyone was seated, an immigration agent explained to the deportees the process they must undertake in order to leave the Air Force base. He welcomed them to Guatemala and reminded them to use their real names, as they would have nothing to fear, now that they were in their own country.

I suspected many of the deportees I saw that day were picked up trying to cross the desert that separates the United States from Mexico, as they were wearing dirt-stained jeans and T-shirts. But others seemed to have been arrested while going about their daily routines in the United States. One was wearing a grease-stained fast food worker uniform. Another had sharp clothes and sparkling clean tennis shoes. At one point, he flashed a wad of bills. He had a shaved head, and his arms were covered with tattoos. He asked another deportee to trade shirts with him, and when he took off his short-sleeved shirt, he revealed a fully tattooed, muscular upper body. With the long-sleeved shirt covering his tattoos, he went around chatting with other deportees, finding three others interested in sharing a cab. After the receiving process, the four young men hopped into a cab. I heard the sharp dresser say, with a Southern California twang: “I’m gettin’ up outta here.” The cab driver headed straight for the border.

Berlin et al. (2008) estimate that the vast majority of Guatemalan tattooed deportees attempt to return immediately to the United States. Schuster and Majidi (2015) also contend that most deportees around the world seek to leave their country of birth. This article explores what happens to those deportees who stay. Scholarship on the reincorporation of deportees reveals that deportees often experience stigma and isolation upon return to their country of birth, due to negative stereotypes of deportees (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Coutin 2010; Golash-Boza 2014; Headley et al. 2005; Peutz. 2006; Schuster and Majidi 2013, 2015; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2007; 2004). Jamaicans blame deportees for the rise in violence in the capital city (Headley et al. 2005); Dominicans associate deportees with transnational drug circuits (Brotherton and Barrios 2011); and Central Americans tie deportees to rising gang-related violence (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007). However, it is far from evident that all deportees face

stigmatization in every country. Jill Anderson (2015) points out that in Mexico, only some deportees are viewed as criminal – those who dress in urban gear associated with the United States and those who have visible tattoos. Others have found that in Brazil, there is no stigma at all (Golash-Boza 2015). This raises the question of whether or not Guatemalan deportees face stigma upon arrival, and how this affects their reincorporation into the labor market.

Many Guatemalan deportees arrive after having lived most of their lives in the United States. They have strong English skills and a deep sense of US cultural norms (Coutin 2013), which may confer labor market advantages over their peers in Guatemala. Their English skills constitute human capital and their bicultural knowledge, cultural capital. Sanders and Nee (1996) write about "foreign-earned human capital." Here, I discuss how deportees use both their foreign-earned human and cultural capital to get by in Guatemala. Scholarship on immigrant incorporation makes it clear that the capital - financial, social, cultural or otherwise - immigrants can access has profound effects on their success (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). This article addresses how deportees are able to use foreign-earned human and cultural capital in the Guatemalan labor market.

Deportees' Reintegration

Whereas migration is often carefully planned and voluntary, deportation is usually an unanticipated and unwelcome consequence of other actions and circumstances. Nevertheless, both processes involve the displacement of an individual from one country to another. A handful of scholars have begun to explore the impact of deportation. These studies focus on the despair and hardship deportees face as well as how deportees deal with stigmatization (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Golash-Boza 2014; Peutz 2006; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2004, 2007). These works highlight the extreme duress deportees endure and the socio-psychological costs of deportation.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that not all deportees face extreme hardship. We can draw from scholarship on immigrant integration to analyze how individual and structural factors shape deportees' experiences. Ruben Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes contend that individual-level factors such as the capital immigrants bring with them as well as the broader "context of reception" (2015: 139), which

includes government policies towards immigrants, the state of the labor market, and the features of their own ethnic communities, structure immigrants' lives. This perspective is useful to understand deportees' experiences – even though they are not technically immigrants, as they are newcomers to their country of birth and often have to work to reintegrate. Assimilation scholars posit we can parse out the individual and structural factors that affect immigrants' incorporation paths. Here, I consider the (re)incorporation paths of Guatemalan deportees. I focus on individual-level factors as well as the broader context of reception.

Individual-Level Factors: Negative Credentials and Foreign-Earned Capital

Just as immigrants bring varying levels of capital with them when they migrate, so do deportees. This section draws from research on immigrant integration and the U.S. labor market to consider how foreign-earned capital and negative credentials shape deportees' experiences.

Foreign-Earned Capital

When immigrants arrive in the United States from the developing world, their human capital is often not directly transferable to the U.S. labor market (Sanders and Nee 1996). This devaluation of their foreign-earned human capital is largely because of global hierarchies where college degrees from African countries, for example, are not as highly valued in the U.S. labor market as European or U.S. degrees. In addition, Nigerian immigrants who are multilingual and speak Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba often find that their multilingual abilities do not translate into labor market advantages. In contrast, given the high value placed on the English language, deportees may find that their English-language skills are valued in Guatemala. In light of these international political hierarchies where human capital acquired in the United States has global value and where English language skills are widely regarded, it is conceivable that foreign-earned human capital that deportees possess translates into labor market advantages.

In addition to human capital such as skills and education, immigrants also may use their cultural capital, or particular forms of knowledge derived from class status or surroundings, to improve their situation in the host country (Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Although a Cuban medical

doctor may not be able to practice as a doctor in the United States without a re-validation of her Cuban degrees, she still brings with her class-based cultural capital that can help her succeed in the United States. Similarly, deportees arrive in Guatemala with foreign-earned cultural capital that could be useful in a context that values many aspects of U.S. society and culture. As immigrants in the United States, many deportees learned a good deal about the United States, including knowledge about popular sports teams and television shows. This kind of bicultural knowledge may be useful cultural capital in Guatemala. Insofar as they acquired this cultural capital abroad, we can consider it foreign-earned cultural capital. This paper addresses the question of how foreign-earned human and cultural capital facilitates deportees' reintegration into the Guatemalan labor market, in light of global political and economic hierarchies.

Negative Credentials

Although deportees may bring back with them positive features such as language skills, they may also be penalized for their deportee status, as happens in the Dominican Republic (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). Devah Pager (2003) articulates the concept of a "negative credential" in relation to a felony record in the United States, as a state-sanctioned mechanism of discrimination or social exclusion. This concept is useful for thinking through how deportees' individual characteristics may work against them. Here, we will explore two examples of negative credentials: deportee status and tattoos. Researchers have found that deportees experience stigmatization either because of the perception that their migration was a failure or due to the assumption that they must have done something wrong in order to be deported (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Schuster and Majidi 2015). In this sense, merely being a deportee could be a negative credential.

Many Guatemalan deportees have tattoos, which could also be a negative credential. Tattoos have become de-stigmatized in the United States (Adams 2012), but Central Americans associate them with deviance. Scholarship addressing the experiences of deportees in El Salvador identifies tattoos as a major barrier to reintegration (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007). Neighbors and even kin – crucial sources of support for deportees - look upon tattooed deportees with suspicion (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007). One study of gang violence and

deportation in Guatemala (Berlin et al. 2008) found that, like the man I saw getting a cab at the airport, Guatemalan deportees who have tattoos often return immediately to the United States because of the threats and dangers they face in Guatemala. Thus, I ask: to what extent do tattoos serve as negative credentials? Do tattoos prevent deportees from securing employment?

Context of Reception

Immigrants' integration patterns are shaped by the "context of reception" that greets them upon arrival (Rumbaut and Portes 2015). Segmented assimilation theory - the dominant approach to immigrant incorporation in the United States - explains how social structural forces within the US context of reception facilitate different trajectories of integration among immigrants and their descendants. These scholars contend that government policies and labor market conditions shape immigrant incorporation (Rumbaut and Portes 2015). In Guatemala, there are no government policies that overtly discriminate against deportees. The labor market conditions, however, are precarious, and this precarity presents an obstacle for deportees.

Precarity—the prevalence of exploitation, vulnerability, and social and economic uncertainty—defines the Guatemalan context for all but the elite (Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson, and Waite 2014). Deportees encounter few options to reproduce the lifestyle they enjoyed in the United States. Only elite Guatemalans drive new cars and have a full array of modern appliances in their homes. A value meal at Pollo Campero – the nation's premiere fast food chain – costs Q25, or nearly half a day's work at minimum wage. This is akin to a value meal at McDonald's costing US$40.00 in Los Angeles. You can get a hot meal in Guatemala City for as little as Q10, but I use the reference point of a fast food chain as this is a modern convenience many deportees were accustomed to being able to afford when they lived in the United States. Guatemala has greater economic inequality than most Latin American countries, and, with half the population below the poverty line, it has one of the highest poverty rates in the region (Cabrera, Lustig, and Moran 2015).

Similar to many other countries in Latin America and Asia, Guatemala's integration into global capitalism has led to the proliferation of precarious labor market options tied to transnational industries (Boris

and Willoughby-Herard 2013; Boris and Dodson 2013; Cabrera, Lustig, and Morán 2015). These industries include work in the manufacturing sector (i.e. maquiladoras) and more recently the service sector (i.e. call centers) (O'Neill 2012). Work in these sectors offers few protections for workers and few options for a living wage. The alternatives – unemployment or self-employment – are often even more precarious. The deportees I spoke with survived by finding employment in these precarious jobs.

Deportees who arrive in Guatemala City have to learn how to deal with high levels of urban violence, especially gangs, guns, kidnappings, and extortion. Many deportees recounted to me that they were scared to ride on buses, especially at night. Others had no choice, and had to take public transportation to get to work each day. Nearly all of the deportees I spoke to went to a family member's house when they first arrived in Guatemala. Some of them were lucky, and their families lived in fairly safe parts of the city. Others were less fortunate and had to live in places filled with gangs and violence. The high level of insecurity makes the transition home difficult for many deportees.

The precarious nature of the labor market and the general sense of insecurity in Guatemala City lead me to ask: how does the local context of reception affect deportees' reintegration? Insofar as we can expect deportees' individual characteristics (such as levels of human and cultural capital) to also affect their reintegration, the primary research question this paper addresses is: How do deportees' individual characteristics interact with the context of reception to influence their integration patterns? I address this question through qualitative interviews with deportees.

Interviewing Deportees in Guatemala City

The data presented in this article is based on 34 interviews with deportees as well as ethnographic observation in Guatemala for three months in 2009 and one month in 2013. I employed local research assistants to help me find interview candidates. These research assistants were Guatemalan students with connections to the migrant community as well as a young man who had been deported in 2005.

Using a variety of entry points, I obtained a sample that resembles the overall deportee population in Guatemala. I selected interviewees who

had spent varying lengths of time in the United States, who were deported on criminal and noncriminal grounds, who had served varying prison sentences, and who had gone to the United States at various ages. Although the deportee population is nearly all male, I interviewed four women to gain their perspective. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to more than two hours and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for emergent themes.

Negative Credentials and Foreign-Earned Capital

When deportees arrive in Guatemala City, they often feel disoriented. This can be exacerbated when deportees are returning after a prolonged absence. Jose had a very difficult time when he arrived, largely because no one came to pick him up from the airport. This was aggravated by people's reactions to his outward appearance, particularly his tattoos.

When Jose arrived in Guatemala City in 2009, thirty years after he left, he had nowhere to go. He slept under a bridge the first night. He only had $15, which he used to buy food. His father came from California to Guatemala to help him, but couldn't find him. Jose wandered around the city, asking for help. However, people often turned away and refuse to talk to him. Jose soon realized why.

> **Jose:** Here, whoever has a tattoo automatically is either a thief or a gang member, period. There is no distinction. In the States, it's more acceptable. Not here. Automatically if you have tattoos, you're a thief or a gang member, period. So a lot of people wouldn't talk to me. I was asking questions and they were just, "Get away." Yea. The cops were always looking for me. Yea, pretty much everybody was calling the police. "Oh no, there's a gang member here." And they were trying to pick me up. So I was going place to place trying to hide out for two days. So it was kind of scary, getting back and not knowing anything, where my family was, not knowing. I couldn't get in touch with my own mom. I had no more money and everybody was sic-cing the cops on me. It was different. It was weird.

Police also harasses Latinos in the United States. I asked Jose to compare his experiences being harassed by Guatemalan police to the harassment he received in the United States. Jose was profiled and

harassed by the police in California, but he said he had never feared being shot to death by police in the United States.

Jose wanted nothing more than to return to the United States, the place he had lived since he was five, and where his wife and children live. He told me:

> **Jose:** I don't want to be here, I want to be at home with my kids. Be home with my wife. Actually, I just wanna be back home because this is not my home. I left when I was five and I'm back now, and I don't like it at all.

Most interviewees reported this sense that Guatemala is not home. Those like Jose who faced stigmatization and social scorn experienced heightened alienation and isolation. When I asked Jose if deportees are mistreated, he said, **"**A little bit. A lot of people kind of shine on us a little bit more because we aren't from here." Ben, who was also visibly tattooed, agreed that deportation status carries stigma. When I asked how he thought Guatemalans perceive deportees, he said:

> **Ben:** I don't think they like them, honestly. From what I know, I don't think anyone likes people from the United States that come here deported because you had to do something wrong for you to get deported, you know. So, I guess they look at you like a delinquent or something like that.

As Ben explains, there is an association between deportation and criminality. Ben went to the United States as a toddler and speaks a US-influenced dialect of Spanish. His mannerisms and way of walking also give away the fact that he grew up in California. A large tattoo that says "Orange" (in reference to Orange County, CA) on his arm—something few people in the United States would perceive as intimidating—also makes it difficult for him to hide his deportee status. Overton, who also has tattoos, explained that Guatemalans think deportees "come to make trouble in this country."

Many deportees explained to me that they experience stigma due to tattoos. Jose described the harassment he has experienced because of his tattoos:

> **Jose:** a couple of days ago, I was walking to work. I have a tattoo here on my neck. So, when I walked, a cop saw one of my tattoos. I was dressed with my button-down shirt and everything and just coming to work. It was 6:30 in the morning. And they had me all stripped down, taking pictures of my tattoos and my ID and where do I live, where do I work, and I'm like, "I work right there." I had my ID and everything and I'm like, "I work right there." And one of them walked me all the way down here just to make sure I came in….
>
> The cops are just doing their job, but they do go way out of line. You're stuck in like a box that categorizes you plain and simple, and it is just hard. A lot of stores don't want you in their shops. And, when you take the bus, a lot of bus drivers ask you to get down because there have been a lot of killings and muggings and everything. There were a couple of times when they wouldn't let me get on the bus at night. Especially at night. They were like, "No." And I would have to walk all the way over here. So, it's hard.

Jose has had to walk several miles home at night through crime-ridden neighborhoods because the bus driver refused to pick him up. None of the deportees I interviewed who do not have tattoos reported this type of harassment. It is notable that Jose said "You're stuck in … a box" as this phrasing recalls campaigns in the United States to "Ban the Box" in reference to discrimination for a felony record. In Guatemala, deportees with visible tattoos reported social scorn. Ben describes his experiences:

> **Ben:** When I first got here, I went to the Oakland Mall [an upscale mall] and because I have tattoos, they just look at me different. At first, I noticed it because I would be walking and they would look at me and they would just look at my arms and they'll just kind of like look away, you know.

There is an association between tattoos and criminality in Guatemala. Thus, police officers harass tattooed deportees at every turn: many, like Jose, reported having to remove their shirts so police officers can photograph their tattoos on a daily basis. Strangers avoid sitting next to them on buses – their tattoos provoke fear and loathing. Gang

members shoot at them, interpreting their tattoos as rival gang affiliations. Having visible tattoos marks deportees and renders them subject to social scorn and even violence.

Melvin explained his fears:

> **Melvin:** I don't go out because of my tattoos.… I can walk without my jacket here [in the Call Center]. But if I walk down the street, they shoot me. They see my tattoos, they go, "Oh, he's a gang member." If the gang members don't kill me, the cops will. So, it's bad. But sometimes I'm afraid more of the cops than the gang members 'cause they pull you over, they hit you, they want money. They want to put you in jail.

Melvin, who has spider webs tattooed on his neck and elbows, has been shot at by gang members and harassed by the police. He easily transitioned between talking about fearing violence from gang members to feeling threatened by the police.

Deportees who have visible tattoos nearly always told me that they are stigmatized because of their tattoos. Insofar as Guatemalans view their tattoos with disdain, we would expect that being tattooed would also be an impediment to their labor market integration. However, all of the tattooed deportees I met also spoke fluent English, which is an asset in the labor market. The reason that there is a correlation between tattoos and English language fluency is that getting tattooed is something Guatemalans did as part of their cultural and social adaptation to the United States. Many of them had U.S. place names tattooed on their bodies – such as "LA" or "Orange" [County]. None of the deportees I met who were Spanish-dominant had tattoos.

Deportees who did not have visible tattoos were less likely to say that deportees are stigmatized in Guatemala. Edison, who works as a taxi driver, believes other Guatemalans think that deportees have had valuable experiences. He told me he thought it was an advantage, and that he never hides the fact that he once lived in the United States or that he had been deported. Marcos, who works in a parking lot, agreed, saying flatly that deportees do not face discrimination. In contrast, Katy, who previously worked in a Call Center but was staying home with her children when we met and does not have tattoos,

explained to me that people would think that she had committed a crime in the United States if they knew she had been deported. Insofar as some deportees who did not have tattoos did not believe there was a stigma associated with deportation, whereas nearly all tattooed deportees believe there is a stigma, it is likely that the stigmatization is mostly due to deportees' visible tattoos.

Call Centers

Based on previous research on immigration, we would expect that the local labor market conditions would influence reincorporation patterns. In Guatemala, however, the availability of call-center jobs creates a bifurcation in labor market outcomes between call-center workers and everyone else. Deportees who have the requisite skill set – a high school diploma or GED and English language skills – tend to work in call centers whereas the labor market outcomes vary much more for everyone else. Let's first take a look at call centers and then turn to the other deportees.

Call centers in Guatemala are replete with deportees. Those who lived several years in the United States are ideal employees, as they have the requisite foreign-earned capital, i.e. they sound and act like U.S. workers would. The U.S.-based callers have no idea call center workers are deportees, often earning less than $100 a week. In fact, Jose Carlos told me he tells customers that he is in California to make the conversation go more smoothly. They have no trouble believing him as he has the requisite foreign-earned cultural capital.

Many of these deportees are doing jobs that not only pay a fraction of what they would earn in the United States, but also for which they likely would not qualify in the United States – either because of their undocumented status or because of their criminal record.

When U.S. customers call the 1-800 or 1-888 numbers on the back of their credit cards or on their service orders, they frequently reach such offshored centers. Jobs in these call centers require fluent English and pay started at Q3200 ($400) in 2009. As a manager at a call center, Vincent was one of the most well-paid deportees I interviewed, earning Q6500 – about US$800 a month in 2009. It's a far cry from the US$4500 a month he was making as a manager in the retail sector in the United States, but enough to support himself in Guatemala.

One of the call centers in Guatemala City's upscale Pacific Center Mall holds a contract with TracFone, which requires them to take over 70,000 phone calls a day. The workers are paid a minimum of $400 a month, and those workers who have a higher degree of responsibility earn more. The center's owner, Allied Global, began operations in Guatemala in 2005, with call center services in Spanish only. In 2008, the company began to offer services in English, and began to show high growth rates. Although it is hard to prove a direct link between the growth of call centers in Guatemala and the escalation of arrivals of deportees, it is clear that this industry would have found it difficult to grow at this pace without the influx of deportees.

The proliferation of call centers in Latin America is part of a growing trend of outsourcing labor to cheaper locations. Under global capitalism, the race to the bottom means companies can search around the globe for the most exploitable labor. Call centers are a prime example of precarious work insofar as turnover is high and work conditions can be unpleasant.

Lorenzo explained to me that the pay is decent at call centers, but that the work conditions are less than ideal. The workday is ten hours long, with only a 30-minute lunch break, and two 15-minute breaks. And, workers only have ten minutes in the day to use the bathroom.

> **Lorenzo:** It is stressful. You have to be sitting down for 10 hours and you have to take like 200 calls. You only have 10 minutes in a whole day to use the bathroom…. You cannot pass 10 minutes. If you pass 10 minutes, they will give you a disciplinary class. Half an hour lunch. Two 15-minute breaks.

The call center jobs are somewhat of a bind. On the one hand, they provide deportees with work that pays a decent wage. On the other hand, the conditions are oppressive. As Enda Brophy (2010: 471) points out, "working in a call centre tends to include a well-established mix of low wages, high stress, precarious employment, rigid management, draining emotional labour and pervasive electronic surveillance." This description captures the daily routines Guatemalan call center employees described to me.

Many countries in Latin America have call centers. A newspaper article that appeared on *McClatchyDC* in 2015 reported that deportees in El Salvador are ideal call center employees, due to their English and bicultural abilities. One manager pointed out that deportees are “very loyal” because “they know they won’t get another shot.”[1] While it doesn’t specifically say what he means by this, the article notes that El Salvador offers very restricted labor market options to deportees. The *Las Vegas Sun* reported in 2014 that a call center manager in Mexico trades on the vulnerabilities of deportees: "They were deported from a country where they were for so many years and now they're stuck here in a country where they've never been before. When you're offering them a job and an opportunity, they become the most loyal employees you can have."[2] These call center managers recognize that they have secured an ideal labor force insofar as deportees are highly qualified and have nearly no other options.

Hector, for example, is an ideal employee for a call center. He was a manager in a large company in the United States and was deported after serving 18 months in state prison for credit card fraud. Hector had been in the United States since he was a toddler and was not sure what to expect upon arriving in Guatemala City. He described his initial arrival:

> I was looking forward to coming back to Guatemala and it wasn’t until I started flying over the country and really started seeing the way that the houses looked… And I’m sorry. This is going to make me sound completely superficial and completely self-centered but it looked poor and I’m not used to that. My least expensive pair of jeans is $600, you know what I mean? That is the kind of guy I was in the United States for so long….
>
> And now I am moving to another country where really I’m gonna be… I have a lot of advantages over everybody else who lives there, education-wise, language-wise, and experience-wise. You know, I’ve worked for a billion dollar company for so long. I know what I’m doing.

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[1] http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/06/11/269595/for-deportees-to-el-salvador-call.html#storylink=cpy

[2] http://lasvegassun.com/news/2014/aug/21/deported-mexicans-find-new-life-call-centers/

Hector found a plethora of ads for call centers who wanted English-speaking employees. Two weeks after arriving, he sent out an email in response to a job ad, and got a response that same day. He set an appointment for an interview. When he arrived at the high-rise building, Hector was surprised to see that it looked “pretty American.” He was greeted by the receptionist in English, and the whole interview took place in English. At the end of the interview, the manager offered him the job and told him he’d be making Q3700 a month, with a possible bonus of Q500 a month – for a total of about $400 to $500 a month. It was nowhere near the $80,000 annual salary he was making in the United States, but enough to get by in Guatemala. Hector was astonished at how easy it was to secure employment in a call center. And, his visible tattoos were not an impediment in this sector of the labor market.

Hector – who is fair-skinned, speaks mainstream English and has middle-class mannerisms – was able to secure a job in a call center. However, I also found that deportees who speak either Spanish-inflected or working-class-inflected English and who are darker-skinned were also able to secure these positions. Melvin, for example, has skin the color of cinnamon, and arrived in the United States when he was 18. He speaks English well, yet his accent renders it apparent that Spanish is his first language. Nevertheless, Melvin found it easy to obtain a job in a call center and pointed out that the English he learned by living in the United States is his greatest asset.

> **Melvin:** And that I guess this why they hire us, because our English is a little bit better than whoever learned English here. ‘Cause we practiced it over there and even customers are like, “Wow, thank God that I got one of my people.” Why? “Man, I was speaking to the other people, like Spanish or India, I don’t where they’re from, but they don’t speak any English.”

Jose, on the other hand, went to the United States when he was five years old. His manner of speaking English and Spanish bear the marks of a Los Angeles barrio. He explained:

> **Jose:** I speak Spanish, but I speak more like Spanglish and Mexican than the way they do here…**.** I was able to

> communicate. Yea, but most people weren't really talking to me because I was… I look like a gang member from here.

Although Jose's physical presence sparks fear in other Guatemalans, this did not seem to influence his ability to get a job in a call center. A call center, however, seems to be the only place he can find employment.

> **Jose:** This is the only place I can get a job at. Here in the whole Guatemala, this is the only place, because everybody else asks for references, like job references, a certain amount of time, a certain amount of years, and they go through physicals. They strip you down and check to see if you have any tattoos. Automatically if you have tattoos, you can't get a job there.

Deportees' foreign-earned human and cultural capital are critical to them securing work in the call center industry. One website for a call center based in Guatemala advertises that many of its agents have lived in the United States.[3] Ironically, US-based corporations outsource to Guatemala, yet hope to find people who have lived in the United States as employees. The relative ease with which capital moves across borders makes it easy to contract call centers in Guatemala where labor is cheap. Yet these borders are nearly impenetrable for deportees who would like to go home to the United States.

The call center sector is notable for two reasons: 1) deportees who have access to these jobs have completely different trajectories than those who do not; and 2) "negative credentials" such as deportee status, visible tattoos, and criminal records play little to no role in deportees' abilities to secure these positions. Thus the rise of the call center sector – which seems to be at least in part due to the influx of deportees – has changed the labor market options dramatically for this group of people, in many ways overriding other aspects of the context of reception. What about those deportees who do not work in call centers?

About half of the deportees I spoke with worked in call centers. The other deportees were either unemployed, small business owners, car washers, salespeople, taxi-drivers, or mechanics. Only one deportee

[3] http://www.wconnection.net/about.html

who does not work in a call center makes as much money as some of the call center workers do. Enrique earns Q6500 per month as an auto mechanic. He is a skilled mechanic, having worked for years in an auto shop in Chicago. He also speaks English and is able to read the instructional manuals that are sometimes not translated into Spanish, and he has no visible tattoos.

I also met a couple of deportees who worked in hotels where their English skills were an asset. These hotel workers earned almost as much as the call center employees, but jobs such as these are scarce as tourism is minimal in Guatemala City, and deportees with visible tattoos had no access to such jobs. Deportees who had not learned English and thus were required to compete in the labor market with most other Guatemalans typically earned between Q1000 and Q2000 per month working in jobs such as sales, delivery, car washing, and taxi-driving.

Alberto, for example, earns Q1500 selling computers, which he says is not enough to survive. Alberto has a certification to work with heavy machinery, which he earned in the United States. He hopes to secure a better-paying job in that field. Edison earns Q2000 as a taxi-driver, which he says is barely enough to get by. He also worries for his safety, as there are constant news stories about violence directed at taxi drivers.

Whereas Enrique is able to use his US-earned human capital, deportees who do not learn English have difficulty finding work that takes advantage of their skill-set. There is work in heavy machinery in Guatemala, but Alberto does not have connections in the industry and has not yet been able to make any inroads there. Similarly, Edison learned roofing in the United States yet works as a taxi driver in Guatemala. Their foreign-earned capital does not earn them any material benefits in Guatemala. This was a common pattern with other deportees I met.

Marcos, for example, lives in his mother’s house in Guatemala City. Although he lived in the United States for decades, he did not learn to speak fluent English as he emigrated as an adult. Marcos did learn quite a bit about construction and maintenance but has not been able to use his skill set in Guatemala City. Marcos is able to get by because

his brother owns a parking lot and Marcos helps his brother out on the parking lot and earns Q1500 (US$200) a month. Insofar as he lives with his brother and his family and does not have to pay rent, this is enough for him to get by, although his current lifestyle is a far cry from what he had in the United States. Other deportees I met also were earning in this range and most had trouble making ends meet. Gustavo, for example, earns Q1200 doing odd jobs for his uncle. Sergio had not been able to find work at all. He had lived in the United States for several years, where learned quite a bit about construction and heavy machinery. However, he did not believe his skills were transferrable. He also had not learned English and thus could not get a call center job. When we met, his primary plan was to figure out how to get back to the United States where his wife and two kids were, as he believed he had no prospects in Guatemala.

Deportees like Gustavo, Sergio, and Marcos who do not speak fluent English tend to have a difficult time in the Guatemalan labor market. Often, this is not because their deportee status is a “negative credential,” but simply because there are limited options for all but the highly educated or highly skilled in a precarious labor market. Deportees who have visible tattoos, however, experience even more precarity, save the call center option. For example, Geronimo is a deportee who speaks English well and has many visible tattoos. When we met, he was working in a body shop with his uncle – one of the few people willing to employ him because of his outward appearance. He was earning Q800 ($100) a month, the least of all employed deportees I met, and was having a very hard time getting by. During our interview, I told him about the call center option. Several months later, a mutual friend let me know he had secured a job there and was much better off.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented here help us to parse out some of the ways that deportees’ experiences are not uniform. Immigration scholars in the United States have proffered the concept of “segmented assimilation” to explain the various reincorporation pathways that immigrants and their children take in the United States. This study is far from being able to outline a comprehensive theory of deportee reintegration. However, there is enough variation even in this sample of deportees for it to be apparent that deportees do take different pathways and

that their pathway is affected by an interaction between the local context and their individual characteristics.

Deportees who have lived in the United States long enough to have learned English and acculturated to the United States arrive in Guatemala disoriented. They are not fully welcomed as fellow countrymen by the locals. If they have tattoos, they can experience severe ostracism and the threat (and reality) of violence. There is minimal evidence that deportee status alone confers stigma, but many of my respondents had visible tattoos that marked them as dangerous. The call centers offer a safe haven, where there are many other deportees like them and where they can attain a sense of normalcy. When I conducted interviews in the call center lunchroom, deportees would speak English with one another and would often slip and say "here" when referring to the United States, signaling the extent to which the call center can feel like "home." Despite the downside of the working conditions, many deportees recognized that the call center was their only real employment option.

When Guatemalan deportees are able to enter the labor market, they bring valuable skills to the table. English fluency is the most valuable skill deportees bring back to Guatemala. At this point in time, the only labor market sector in Guatemala interested in profiting from the bicultural and bilingual skill set of deportees is the call center industry. Call centers are transnational industries with a client base in the United States. Their need for employees who can relate to their clients supersedes any concerns they may have with regard to the criminal records or pasts that tattooed deportees may have. The call centers need the deportees. And, the deportees need the call centers.

The data presented in this article make it clear that the integration process for deportees is highly skewed by the presence of call centers. Deportees who have the skills to work in call centers are on a completely different integration track from deportees who lack these skills. I did meet two deportees – Enrique and Roberto – who could work in call centers yet chose not to. However, they had secured employment in sectors that paid the same as call centers and provided them with more flexibility. Tattoos and deportee status may function as negative credentials for deportees, but this has no bearing on their ability to secure jobs in call centers. If there were no call centers, they

would face a completely different reality, as evidenced by the case of Geronimo.

In many ways, this is a story of squandered human and cultural capital. Hector pointed out to me that the United States had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in him, through his K-12 education and the financial aid he received to attend university. The United States was willing to discard this tremendous investment once Hector was convicted of credit card fraud. In Guatemala, Hector has been able to put some of his skills to use, but he also sees that his options are extremely limited and that he may never be able to reach his full potential in Guatemala. The human and cultural capital that deportees like Hector accumulated in the United States is being squandered in the stifling work conditions of the call center.

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