CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Foreword: Mayan Migrants Speak Out xi
  Luis Argueta

Introduction: Migration, Detention, and Deportation: Dilemmas and Responses 1
  Daniel Kanstroom and M. Brinton Lykes

PART I: THE LEGAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND POLITICAL RESPONSES

1. Unhappy Families: The Failings of Immigration Law for Families That Are Not All Alike 33
  David B. Thronson

2. Improving Conditions of Confinement for Immigrant Detainees: Guideposts Toward a Civil System of Civil Detention 57
  Dora B. Schriro

  Denise Noonan Slavin and Dana Leigh Marks

4. Immigration Reform: Will New Political Calculations and New Actors Overcome Enforcement Inertia? 113
  Ali Noorani, Brittney Nystrom, and Maurice Belanger

PART II. INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND ACTIONS FOR AND WITH MIGRANTS AFFECTED BY DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

5. Legal and Social Work Responses to the Detained and Deported: Interdisciplinary Reflections and Actions 147
  Jessica Chicco and Elaine P. Congress
6. Immigrants Facing Detention and Deportation: Psychosocial and Mental Health Issues, Assessment, and Intervention for Individuals and Families
   Kalina M. Brabeck, Katherine Porterfield, and Maryanne Loughry 167

7. Participatory Action Research with Transnational and Mixed-Status Families: Understanding and Responding to Post-9/11 Threats in Guatemala and the United States
   M. Brinton Lykes, Erin Sibley, Kalina M. Brabeck, Cristina Hunter, and Yliana Johansen-Méndez 193

   Katie Dingeman-Cerda and Rubén G. Rumbaut 227

Index 251

About the Editors 000

About the Contributors 000
When interviewed in El Salvador in 2011, two years after his deportation, Andrés Meranda\textsuperscript{1} reported that he considered the U.S. his home. He had lived in Texas since the age of six when he was reunited with his immigrant parents. Despite his undocumented status, he did fairly well in school and maintained a group of friends who shielded him from the gangs that were prevalent in his neighborhood. During his junior year of high school, Andrés received legal permanent resident status through his father. Later that year, however, he was found in possession of a controlled substance and was sent to juvenile hall. Once released, he decided not to finish high school. He instead established a successful auto-body business and had three children, whom he raised with the mother of the youngest two. Since issues of race and illegality purportedly never affected his life, Andrés did not understand that he could one day be separated from his family, career, and nation.

Twenty years after his arrival in the U.S., Andrés was deported for a felony offense he did not commit, but for which he accepted a plea bargain. He wanted to fight for cancellation of removal, but he could not afford legal aid and was afraid he would wait in detention for years while the case was pending. By signing an order of removal, he agreed to be returned to El Salvador, the country of his birth and citizenship, but a place he did not know. Andrés could only recall two faint memories of his life prior to migration. He was unable to recount any details about the civil war that plagued El Salvador when he was a child. He did not know the name of the Salvadoran president. He had no direct familial or other social ties to the nation. “I don’t know anything about this country,” he stated.

\textsuperscript{1} Pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter to protect the identities of study participants.
Andrés was alienated in El Salvador. When he first arrived he had no place to live, so he stayed with a deportee he met at the airport. An aunt was eventually located and she accepted him temporarily into her home. After a month she asked him to leave because she was afraid that his tattoos—which depict the names of his three children on his neck—would attract gangs and police to her neighborhood. Faced with homelessness, Andrés considered re-migrating to the U.S. When he heard that his step-brother had been murdered in Texas, he fled El Salvador by foot. Immediately after crossing the U.S. border, he was apprehended, detained, and deported a second time. Since then he has been stopped-and-frisked by Salvadoran police thirty-five times. It took him seven months to secure a job because employers assumed he was involved in gangs. This presumption of criminality made Andrés grow financially dependent on remittances from family members living in the U.S., people for whom he was once a proud breadwinner.

Many deportees remove tattoos to distance themselves from gang members and construct legitimate lives in El Salvador. Andrés refused to do so because his tattoos represent the children he was forced to leave behind and who are gradually un-knowing him. Their branded names are his way of embodying their presence in his absence. They serve as a reminder of the life to which he hopes to return and a family he hopes to rebuild. In the meantime, Andrés maintains employment as a customer service agent in a foreign-owned call center that hired him for his bilingual skills. Other deportees work at the call center, but he resists establishing friendships with them because he believes they cannot be trusted. When not working, Andrés minimizes his presence in El Salvador by incarcerating himself in his apartment. ‘I don’t even think,’ he said. ‘I just stay in my room, listen to music, and draw.’

Andrés represents one member of the so-called new American diaspora that has emerged as a result of restrictive U.S. immigration enforcement policies in recent decades. According to Daniel Kanstroom (2012: xi), this diaspora “consists of a forcibly uprooted population of people with deep, cohesive, social and cultural connections” to the U.S. As Andrés’ story highlights, the population is concentrated by individuals who first emigrated as youth and/or spent a substantial amount of time in the U.S. Despite their non-citizen status, they become de facto members of U.S. society through school attendance, career establishment and family formation. They integrate into their cultural repertoires many ideas, behaviors, and practices associated with U.S. society. When asked post-removal, they identify themselves as full or hybrid “Americans.”

Nascent research demonstrates that members of the deportation diaspora often experience removal as banishment from the lives and families they constructed in the U.S. (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Coutin 2010b; Dingeman-Cerda and Coutin 2012; Golash-Boza 2013). Like many child migrants (Rumbaut 2002), they generally do not retain strong transnational ties and often lack significant memories, maintain imperfect knowledge, and
sometimes lose the language of their countries of birth\(^2\). When returned to their native “homelands,” they are forced to navigate social worlds with which they have little to no familiarity, while being estranged—sometimes permanently—from the economic and affective ties they maintain to the U.S. Such ruptures have serious consequences for the livelihoods of deportees who are often stigmatized, criminalized, and alienated in their countries of birth post-removal (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Dingeman-Cerda and Coutin 2012; Golash-Boza 2013; Hagan, Rodriguez, and Castro 2011; Miller 2008)\(^3\).

Another potential and little understood consequence of the U.S. deportation regime is the transformation of societies to which large rates of deportees are returned. Deportees carry the remnants of their acculturation experiences, or “social remittances,” with them post-removal. When these “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital” diffuse through interpersonal interactions (Levitt 1998:927), they can accrue and produce ripple effects that alter local and national contexts of return\(^4\). Deportees may export so-called “positive” elements of U.S. society, such as notions of gender equality and socioeconomic mobility, improved environmental and health practices, and religious and community development organizations (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010 and 2011). They may also transmit aspects of U.S. society that disrupt native cultures, weaken families, set poor examples for local youth, and contribute to the global culture of migration. Examples of such “negative” social remittances include hyper-individualism, conspicuous consumerism, sexual permissiveness, and criminal networks, technologies, and practices (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010 and 2011).

---

\(^2\) Salvadoran migrant transnationalism appears especially stunted. Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) found that only between 10 to 15 percent of Salvadoran and Dominican immigrants retain transnational ties. Undocumented and partial legal statuses keep Salvadoran migrants “confined within” the U.S., preventing return visits (Coutin 2010a). Moreover, parents and guardians repress memories and knowledge associated with the civil war, preventing the transmission of historical knowledge about El Salvador to their children (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001).

\(^3\) Deportation also impacts the families of deportees. Family separation, usually through paternal removal, forces children into the foster care system and contributes to poor grades and mental health outcomes for children (Brabeck and Xu 2010; Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, Santos 2007; Dreby 2012; Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez 2010; Brabeck, Lykes, and Hershberg 2011; Rodriguez and Hagan 2004). Large scale removal also ignites fear in migrant communities and contributes to economic exploitation and human rights abuse of immigrants and ethnics (De Genova 2002).

\(^4\) These little pieces are never carbon copies of some mythical authentic U.S. culture, but are hybridized and creolized versions of cultural ideas and practices from specific sites in the U.S. They are constantly being defined, redefined, and reformulated through deportees’ ignited engagement in the US-El Salvador transnation via communication with family members left behind, occasional clandestine return visits, and contact with other Salvadorans who spent time in the U.S. Social remittances are transmitted through deportees’ mundane daily interactions as they struggle to reintegrate into Salvadoran society. The cumulative volume of certain types of remittances and the degree to which remittance recipients share them with new and receptive agents eventually determines their transformative power.
Research on social remittances largely focuses on the agentic behaviors and cultural influence of migrants who voluntarily return, visit, or otherwise communicate with their native countries. This chapter seeks to understand whether, and the ways in which, forcibly removed members of the new American diaspora impact their countries-of-birth. We focus on the case of El Salvador, a small Central American country that receives approximately between 17,000 and 20,000 deportees from the U.S. each year. Our insights emerge from a sample of 100 life-history interviews with Salvadoran deportees conducted by Dingeman-Cerda and a Salvadoran research assistant between 2008 and 2012. Ninety-six of these interviews were conducted in El Salvador and four were conducted in Los Angeles. Consistent with the claim that deportation is a gendered phenomenon (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), ninety-six of the 100 interviewees were male. The sample was collected through a combined referral, snowballing, and purposive sampling method designed to capture maximum variation in deportee post-removal experiences. Once theoretical saturation was obtained, interviews were transcribed and analyzed by coding, memo-ing, and negative case analysis by Dingeman-Cerda and a team of research assistants.

In this chapter we draw primarily from the narratives of 47 deportees who we identified as part of the new American diaspora. These individuals framed their life-histories around their socialization and acculturation experiences in the U.S. They usually migrated as children and adolescents during the Salvadoran civil war and were returned over a decade later for immigration violations and a wide range of criminal convictions. They reported few ties and articulated few clear memories of El Salvador. While in the U.S. they had no intentions of returning to El Salvador to settle. Two of the interviewees could not speak Spanish, several retained Mexican accents, and one thought he was a Mexican until he was placed in removal. In El Salvador, they described themselves as more ‘American’ than ‘Salvadoran’ and they engaged in transnational relationships that kept them emotionally and financially connected to the U.S.

We find that deportees with strong ties to the U.S. constitute unwelcome foreign elements in El Salvador (see also Coutin 2007; Dingeman-Cerda and Rumbaut 2010). The antipathetic societal reception they experience ostensibly condemns them to lives of social and economic alienation and stunts their ability to diffuse social remittances acquired in the U.S. They are not, however, completely devoid of agency. Deportees find creative ways to hide their status and survive financially. They also offer numerous suggestions on how to improve Salvadoran society and their own lives. Ultimately, however, their deflated social status robs them their potential and inhibits solidarity and collective action. To regain the power they lose through removal, some deportees join gangs or clandestinely re-migrate to the U.S. However, as Andrés articulated in his interview, most simply ‘resign themselves to existing’ in El Salvador, while dreaming, usually in vain, of reclaiming their former U.S.-based lives.
Salvadoran Migration and Removal

Contemporary migratory ties between the U.S. and El Salvador are linked to the brutal Salvadoran civil war that took place between 1980 and 1992. The war, which was largely funded by the U.S. federal government, claimed over 75,000 lives and sent between 25 and 35 percent of the population on a migratory trail to the U.S. (PNUD 2005). In the postwar period, persistent economic inequality, environmental disasters and gang violence have sustained remarkably high levels of emigration (Gammage 2007). Today over 1.5 million foreign-born Salvadorans live in the U.S., 65 percent of whom entered as economic immigrants in the postwar years. Despite the small size of El Salvador, the population now constitutes the third largest Hispanic, sixth largest foreign-born and second largest undocumented population in the United States (Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker 2012; Brown and Patten 2013).

Because they financially supported the Salvadoran military during the war, the U.S. government initially denied refugee status to Salvadoran entrants. Pressure from activists and the Salvadoran government eventually led to piecemeal protections, including political asylum, temporary protected status, deferred enforced departure, and cancellation of removal (Mountz, Wright, Miyares, and Bailey 2002). Despite these efforts, Salvadorans now constitute one of the most deportable migrant populations in the U.S. 46 percent of the foreign-born population is undocumented and another 25 percent hold temporary or partial statuses that lack a pathway to citizenship (Brick, Challinor and Rosenblum 2011; Brown and Patten 2013). 71 percent are non-citizens and are thus potentially subject to removal if they commit deportable crimes. The overall state of “legal liminality” that characterizes the population limits their life chances, makes them vulnerable to economic exploitation and human rights abuses, and forces them to lead lives haunted by the specter of immigration control (Menjívar 2006).

Most Salvadoran immigrants are consigned to poor urban centers with high levels of racial and ethnic tensions. They are disproportionately employed in service, manufacturing, and construction industries characterized by instability and low wages (Brown and Patten 2013). They tend to live in states with high costs-of-living and reside in overcrowded households in poor and working-class neighborhoods (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). The state of “multiple marginality” in which Salvadoran migrants and ethnics live has contributed to the formation of street gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street (Vigil 2002). The politicization of these gangs stigmatized the wider population, led to increased criminal and immigration policing in Latino neighborhoods, and increased the deportability of the Salvadoran population (Chacón 2007).

Salvadorans now constitute one of the most highly deported populations from the U.S. by percent of total removals. Out of 391,953 in FY 2011, 4.4 percent (17,308) were to El Salvador. This made them the fourth most deported group behind only Mexicans at 75 percent (293,966), Guatemalans at 7.7 percent (30,313), and Hondurans at 5.6 percent (21,963) (OIS 2012). Removals of the Salvadoran population have followed the national
trend over the last few decades. Until 2011, when criminal convictions suddenly constituted 49 percent of removals, the vast majority of deportations since the formation of ICE in 2003 have been the result of immigration convictions (OIS 2012). Speculation continues to exist whether those removed for criminal convictions truly represent those considered most problematic in U.S. society. Removal data from 1997 to 2007 analyzed by Human Rights Watch, for example, unquestionably shows that the majority of ‘criminal’ deportees committed minor, non-violent offenses redefined as aggravated felonies under the restrictive 1996 immigration reforms (HRW 2009). If this trend has continued we suspect, the majority of current deportees to El Salvador are far from the hardened, violent criminals they are often portrayed to be.

Regardless of reason for removal, the context to which deportees return in El Salvador impedes successful re/integration (Dingeman-Cerda n.d.). Progressive efforts have been made since the moderate-leftist Mauricio Funes was elected to the presidency in 2009 (Arnson et al. 2011; Mills 2012; Seelke 2013b; Shifter and Schwartz 2012), but the country continues to struggle with poverty, unemployment, and street crime. In the postwar years the government has followed a neoliberal model of economic development (Velásquez Carrillo). Since this approach has done little to improve inequality, deportees return to a highly stratified society that offers few well-paying occupational choices. Until the historic gang truce was negotiated in Salvadoran prisons in 2012, the government relied upon a zero-tolerance approach (Zilberg 2011). Their heavy-handed strategies exacerbated violence and contributed to the criminalization of the new American diaspora (Dingeman-Cerda and Rumbaut 2010; Zilberg 2011). Neither the U.S. nor the Salvadoran government has sufficiently invested in deportee reinsertion program. They have instead placed the onus almost entirely on deportees and their families. In doing so, they have also limited deportees’ ability to exercise positive agentic behavior in El Salvador.

What They Carry

Members of the new American diaspora carry the remnants of their acculturation into U.S. society. As they navigate El Salvador post-removal, they experience a kind of ‘reverse culture shock’ that reveals them as distinct from the local population. Markers of their membership in U.S. society include tattoos, a ‘casual’ or ‘baggy’ style of attire, the use of English and or Latino slang, and more subtle ways of walking and gesturing. Deportees also often maintain identities and tastes associated with the U.S., including food and music preferences, leisurely rituals and holiday traditions, and beliefs about acceptable standards of living, environmental practices, and courtship rituals. Such embodied remnants of the U.S. ostensibly represent the social remittances deportees have the potential, though not necessarily the power, to transmit through Salvadoran society.

Deportees’ social remittances usually surface as comparisons between themselves and non-migrants and as complaints about Salvadoran society in relation to the U.S. Pablo,
47, was a trained guerilla sniper who spent thirty years in the U.S. Though he had a family to receive him after his deportation, he described his post-removal self as ‘a new puppy in the house that doesn’t know where to go or what to do.’ He romanticized the U.S. an efficient, wealthy, and clean society without any political corruption. He also offered numerous suggestions on how to improve El Salvador, including expanding national highways, controlling bus smog output, and reducing government corruption. Frustrated by the lack of jobs and possibilities for economic mobility, he protested that the government ‘really steps on the poor people. They step on their face, on their throat, so they don’t have much air to breathe.’ He suggested that the Salvadoran government reject policies, like dollarization of the economy, that primarily benefit the wealthy and instead focus on improving the life chances of poor and disenfranchised populations.

Freddy, 28, was another individual who held convictions that, if diffused and enacted, could be transformative for deportees and El Salvador. He migrated to the U.S. at age 5, grew up speaking only English, and adorned his body with visible, but non-gang related tattoos. After his first deportation in 2002, he experienced police harassment, gang beatings, job discrimination, and suspicion from locals. After a second deportation in 2008, he learned to cover his identity by ‘behaving like a tourist.’ He wore long sleeved shirts and sunglasses, lived off credit cards and his parents’ remittances, ate in chain restaurants like Burger King and Pizza Hut, hired a cab driver in lieu of taking the bus, and sought employment in a call center. A self-purported ‘typical American,’ he expressed that Salvadoran society could really benefit from the ‘freedom of tattoos, freedom of speech, and freedom of dressing the way you wanna dress’ that he believes exists in the U.S.

Narratives such as these show that deportees like Pablo and Freddy are not just pawns of the U.S. deportation regime. They are also cultural carriers whose linguistic capacities, personal styles, food, transportation, and employment preferences, and ideas for public policies are tied to their migrant histories and acculturation experiences in the US. They find creative ways to maneuver through Salvadoran society, like accepting housing and job references from family members, removing or covering their tattoos, altering their personal style, monitoring their geographic mobility, learning Salvadoran slang, and attending Church services. They also seek out ‘little pockets’ of the U.S. in El Salvador, like fast food restaurants and call centers, where they can shield themselves from outside threats and attempt to construct legitimate livelihoods. In spite of this agency, however, they remain limited in their ability to surmount the tarnished social identity imposed on them by a xenophobic societal reception.

Un/Welcome Interventions

One deportee astutely observed that ‘in El Salvador it is [often] monkey see, monkey do.’ Indeed, the U.S. influence has historically been invited into the country, at least by economic and political elites. Reliance of the Salvadoran economy on the U.S
traces back to independence and has been reinforced time and time again through the outpouring of U.S. investment in the coffee industry, the ‘modernization’ of national infrastructure in the mid-20th century, the intensified USAID support starting in the 1980s, and the neoliberal economic policies that characterize the postwar period (Negroponte 2012; Seelke 2013b). The Salvadoran government has also welcomed U.S. political influence through the financing and training of the military during the war and the importation of both heavy-handed and preventative anti-gang strategies in the contemporary period. Finally, the Salvadoran government has constructed U.S.-bound migrants as national heroes in need of support en route and while acculturating into U.S. society. This mode of governing transnationally was designed to ensure continued out-migration and the transmission of financial remittances from the U.S. to El Salvador, but has also served to reify the transnational social field that now exists between the two countries (Baker-Cristales 2004).

Of any country in Latin America El Salvador society retains the most positive view of the U.S, its policies, and its culture (Pew Research Center 2013). Interviews with deportees make it clear, however, that not all interventions from U.S. society are invited into the country. Deported members of the new American diaspora feel like foreigners in Salvadoran society and often interpret their presence as an unwelcome intervention into their native country. The case of Luis, 31, is representative. He migrated to the U.S. at the age of 7 and was deported 23 years later for a non-gang related violent offense. He reported that, after so much time in the U.S.,

...your customs become American. The way you dress, you don't dress like people here. This is the way you dress in the United States. [He points to his khaki shorts, t-shirt, and earrings.] This is the way I used to dress in New York City. Now, I don't even walk around. People look at you different, like ‘this guy is not from here.’...To have someone look at you, you can afford. But, everybody looks at you different. When you are in the United States, you understand why people look at you different. They know you are not from there. But here, you are the same color skin. And they mistreat you because of the way you walk, the way you talk. They make fun of you.

The feelings of alienation reported by Luis are rooted in the history of gangs and their enforcement in El Salvador. When members of the new American diaspora returned in the mid-1990s, they knew little of the country, had few social ties, and encountered limited economic opportunities (Cruz 2009; Zilberg 2011). Many took to the streets where they encountered local gangsters who admired their style and mannerisms (Zilberg 2011). Though they only accounted for 10 percent of the total gang population (Cruz and Portillo Peña 1998), deportees attained elevated status and were able to diffuse social remittances. They transmitted “the use of tattoos, the utilization of gang signs to communicate and...the norms, values, and knowledge about how to behave, about who is the enemy, and about who is friend” (Cruz 2009:4). Local gangs became more involved in extortions, robberies, assaults, cocaine and meth sales, rapes and murders under deportee leadership (Cruz and
Rates of homicide escalated accordingly and El Salvador became the most murderous country in the Western Hemisphere, at least until 2008 when it was surpassed by Honduras (UNODC 2013).

Postwar material conditions and the Salvadoran state’s repressive response were as much, if not more, responsible for the intensification of gang violence in El Salvador5 (Cruz 2009). When the deportees returned in the 1990s, there was an abundance of disenfranchised youth who attended weak schools, confronted violence in their families and neighborhoods, had access to war weapons, and engaged in relatively low-level street crimes (Cruz 2009). When the gang crisis exploded in the 1900s, police, security agents, and vigilantes began a social cleansing campaign against any and all suspected gang members (Seelke 2013a). From 2003-2012, the repressive Mano Dura (heavy hand) and Super Mano Dura (super heavy hand) programs criminalized gang membership, resulting in the incarceration of tens of thousands of tattooed people. This approach caused oppositional gang identities to harden and gangsters to hide and remove tattoos, change their style of attire, and reduce their use of hand signals (Seelke 2013a). Control over loosely affiliated cliques also consolidated inside prisons, helping MS-13 evolve into the cartel-like organization involved in transnational criminal activities it is perceived to be today, at least by the U.S. government (Cruz 2010).

Regardless of the state and media’s role in exasperating the transnational gang problem, the oft sensationalized narrative of deportee-induced gang expansion continues to stigmatize deported members of the new American diaspora. They already arrive ashamed because they were not able to remain in the U.S. with their families, but also soon encounter a much more devastating sense of marginalization. Markers of their history in the U.S., especially the presence of tattoos, make them the targets of police and security agents, who survey their mobility, stop and search them, and detain them without evidence of gang affiliation. They are denied jobs in the local labor market by employers who use lie detector tests against them, search them for tattoos, or more subtly discriminate. They are threatened and harmed, sometimes fatally, by gang members trying to mark their territory, recruit, and rob them. They are also shunned by the public who give them dirty looks and avoid them in the streets and buses. As Freddy, 28,—a self-proclaimed ‘American’ who barely spoke Spanish and had no reported gang history—proclaimed, “[everyone] gives you that ‘look’ like this guy is a hoodlum just because I have tattoos here

5 Police, security agents, and vigilante groups continued a social cleansing campaign against suspected gang members throughout the 1990s and 2000s. People disappeared from their homes, communities, and shortly after their arrival at the airport. Law enforcement frequently murdered urban youth—sometimes en masse—and blamed it on gangs. The repressive mano dura (heavy hand) and super mano dura (super heavy hand) programs criminalized gang membership, resulting in the incarceration of thousands of suspected gang members. Inside prisons similarly named but previously unrelated and loosely affiliated cliques organized hierarchically and consolidated control over their constituents. Although there is contention on this point (see Wolf 2012), mass incarceration may have also helped them evolve from prison gangs into cartel-like organizations that are increasingly involved in transnational trafficking (Cruz 2008 and 2010).
[on the neck]. They judge you without even knowing you.” Through experiences such as these, they come to represent an unwelcome intervention from the United States.

Coping Mechanisms and Divergent Trajectories

Despite their spoiled identities, deported members of the new American diaspora employ a multitude of coping strategies to survive and follow divergent trajectories post-removal. Evidence from our interviews suggests that most deportees actively resist association with local gangs. Luis provides an example. For the first few months after arrival, he avoided social interaction almost completely after negative interactions with police and gangs. He stayed at his aunt’s home where he could reportedly “just be myself.” But “it was hell,” he said. “I felt like I was still in jail.” After three months, he learned that if he exchanged his shorts and t-shirt for long pants and a button-up shirt he could safely travel outside of San Salvador. He regularly visited distant relatives in Usulután, a more rural department of the country. Such excursions provided him necessary respite from seemingly constant harassment he experienced from police and gangs in San Salvador. They also gave him hope that, even if he would not thrive, he could at least survive as a deportee in El Salvador.

Like Luis, most deportees found that the key to blending into Salvadoran society was to alter their appearance, especially covering their tattoos. If this strategy was insufficient to break the association between them and gangs, some altered their physical mobility. Over time they learned the ‘hot’ areas of San Salvador where gang activity was prevalent, so they avoided riding buses or otherwise moving through those zones. Some, like Freddy introduced above, only frequented well-guarded malls and dining establishments that look similar to those in the U.S. Still others turned to Christianity as a way to avert recruitment from gangsters or interrogations from police officers. The rhetoric of Christianity, they found, was a powerful way to demonstrate that they accepted culpability for their past and were humbly working toward a better future.

While somewhat effective in reducing social stigma, none of these coping mechanisms guarantee employment. Most deportees interviewed for this project remained dependent upon remittances from family members living abroad. They also wished to become financially independent to lessen the burden upon their family abroad. A few eventually found and accepted low-wage employment in the local labor market, working, for example, as a bellhop or a car mechanic. Others worked in the informal labor market, selling gum and toiletries on public buses, babysitting for family members in exchange for housing, or providing tattoos to ‘middle class kids,’ for whom tattoos are arguably becoming more acceptable in El Salvador. Still other deportees capitalized on the human and cultural capital they obtained in the U.S. by securing and maintaining employment as bilingual customer service agents in foreign-owned call centers.
Call centers provide deportees a space in which they may earn sustainable wages and develop solidarity. Employers at call centers reportedly do not regularly discriminate on the basis of tattoos. They also provide deportees an average of 450 dollars per month, which is four times the average earning of other deportees interviewed for this study. Once employed, deportees encounter other individuals who spent substantial time in the U.S. While some, like Andres introduced at the beginning of this chapter, avoided developing friendships, others gathered informally to share life experiences. They hold barbeques after work and on weekends, for example, in which they watch American football games, enjoy Budweiser beer, and share stories of lives past and present. Such social support appears to not only help deportees’ mental health but allowed for the formation of new ‘little pockets’ of the U.S. in El Salvador (see also Coutin 2007). Carlos, 30, who worked in a call center and frequented several barbeques, commented, on how call centers facilitate deportee interaction,

So it’s pretty nice. We continue with whatever you grew up with over there in the U.S., especially those that have been a long time over there, like living. You come back here and you meet people that were over there. Sometimes you see people talking in English. That’s ‘cause they were over there and, you know, they likely work in a call center. They just probably talk. Like with my friends, I talk English and Spanish. It depends on the scene and all that. But I mean, we continue all that, you know, with the culture, with the habits that we were doing over there.

It can be difficult to find employment in call centers due to the sheer size of the English-speaking population in El Salvador. For deportees unable to secure such positions, call centers represent an ‘unfulfilled promise’ of economic sustainability. Faced with limited alternatives, some turn toward gang life. Gangs provide them a sense of family when such ties are absent, a source of income when no alternate options exist, and a means to reclaim the power they feel they lost through removal. This was certainly the case for Ernie Martínez, 36, who was a deeply entrenched but relatively low-level member of MS-13 in the U.S. Ernie remembered how when he first arrived in El Salvador “kids would be like ‘Oh wow, you’re over here! You’ve got Nikes! You’ve got Levis!’” Far from being markers to alienate him, these symbols granted him power in the gang-context. Local youth deferred to him, Ernie claimed control over the clique, and he changed its name to MS-13. Despite his influence over the culture and tactics of his clique, however, Ernie was certain his activities would bring about an early death. He had to limit his mobility to MS-13 controlled areas ‘because if I don’t do it like that, I could get killed.’

Though the gang trajectory does appear to exist, by far the most common mechanism for deportees in El Salvador was dreaming or planning to return to the U.S. When asked what percent of deportees try to go back post-removal, most deportees responded between 80 and 90 percent. Nine of the forty-seven in this sample, 19 percent,

---

6 Thank you to M. Brinton Lykes for this observation.
attempted at least one and as many as five clandestine returns to the U.S. They say they
dream to return to the U.S. because, as Pablo shared, ‘They feel so bad. So bad, because
they don't have no family here that can receive them, to feed them. And [they] say ‘okay
now I stay here for so long, I feel that I have more power, I feel more strong to be leaving,
to be going, you know what I am saying?’ Removal clearly amounts to a devastating
rupture from their families, careers, and nation for members of the new American diaspora.
Merely surviving in El Salvador, even when solidarity with other deportees is available,
cannot replace the children, spouses, and parents from whom they were banished. Pablo
continued with a comment representative of the sentiments of many of the deportees,

My plan is by next year in January to leave from here…If God gives me the
last opportunity and gets me to the house up there, I can be with my kids
and my mother. That’s the only one dream I had in my head. Just get up
there and work two jobs and make my money and have my kids with me
and be with my kids, enjoying my life with my kids. See my kids grow up,
raise my kids, educate my kids…That’s my dream. And I ask God, give me
my opportunity that I deserve. He knows what kind of man I am, and I
deserve a second chance in his hands.

Conclusion; Limits and Potential of the New American Diaspora

The logic of the U.S. deportation regime that emerged in recent decades considers
deported persons as collateral damage in a larger state effort to control the size and
characteristics of the foreign-born population (DeGenova and Peutz 2010). They represent
undesirable migrants who have either unlawfully transgressed national borders or violated
the implicit contract of territorial personhood that would allow their continued presence in
the US had they not committed undesirable crimes (Motomura 2006). Their removal
reinforces the state sovereignty that their immigration had challenged even as it also helps
construct a large pool of deportable and easily exploitable immigrant labor (DeGenova
2002). When deportees return to their countries of citizenship, they experience a reverse
culture shock and subsequent re/integration experiences similar to migrants entering
receiving countries (Peutz 2006). They often face hostile contexts of return that interact
with their personal characteristics to significantly limit their life chances and those of their
family members.

Such is the case when those who form the new American diaspora return to El
Salvador as deportees. They experience a sort of reactive nativism emanating from the
Salvadoran state and society-at-large. As unwelcome products of US society, they are
viewed as undesirable foreign elements that threaten the security and the cultural integrity
of El Salvador. Though legally Salvadoran, they embody the United States in ways that
make them identifiable as outsiders. Viewed as potentially violent foreigners in their own
country, they experience discriminatory treatment from employers, police and security
agents, and average citizens. Like self-fulfilling prophecy, such marginalization undermines deportee reintegration and contributes to some of the problematic outcomes that initially inspired nativist resistance, like entry into gangs (see Aleinikoff and Rumbaut 1998).

From the vantage of social remittances, Salvadoran deportees are transformed from passive pawns of the U.S. deportation regime into cultural carriers with the potential to transmit “little pieces” of the United States to El Salvador. Members of the new American diaspora carry on their bodies and in their minds remnants of their acculturation experiences into U.S. society. They offer numerous suggestions on how to improve the Salvadoran government, society, environment, and economic climate. They also have the potential to more subtly impact culture through the ways in which they represent themselves and move through the world. Unfortunately, these deportees’ highly alienated and criminalized social status limits their ability to diffuse positive ways of seeing and being in the world.

Deportees find creative ways to reduce their social stigma and survive economically in El Salvador. However, the population has yet to establish wide-spread solidarity and collective action to improve their social position. Most members of the new American diaspora are, ‘just too busy trying to survive day-by-day.’ They express concern that, even if they were to collectively voice opposition to their treatment, they would not be taken seriously by the Salvadoran government. The unwelcome ‘homecoming’ they receive by the Salvadoran state and society appears to have damaged their collective self-esteem in ways that inhibit their agentic potential. As Pablo stated when asked if there exists a deportee social movement in El Salvador,

I don't think there is nothing like that. Nothing. Not even. It's just like Pac-Man, when he got hit, he melts. [Deportation] melts the personality, their mind, and their feelings, you hear? The same moment, the same feeling, the same situation that they have is, ‘I just won't make it here.’ They kind of like ashamed, like embarrassed. They feel like low. They feel like nobody, you hear me? They feel like a piece of trash. They feel like nobody, nothing.

Based on this analysis, members of the American diaspora appear to agree that the U.S. should better handle deportation and El Salvador needs to facilitate deportee re/insertion. Deportees claim that they U.S. government should take into greater consideration their long-standing ties and positive contributions to U.S. society. This could take many forms, from providing free legal aid to detainees to reduce coercion removal proceedings, to expanding prosecutorial discretion in cancellation of removal hearings, to offering a visa for some members to return to visit with their children and spouses. In El Salvador, deportees agreed that, at bare minimum, the status of the deportee in the public imaginary needs to improve, perhaps through political and media efforts. Moreover, El Salvador, with funding from the U.S., should ‘create a program from different deportees,’
like Ramón, 28, suggested. Such a program should move beyond the existing *Bienvenidos a Casa* (Welcome Home) that provides deportees a small meal and money for transportation. It should provide transitional housing for homeless deportees, training for and assistance in locating jobs, long-term mental health services, and continued preventive efforts to reduce gang violence initiated under the historic gang truce of 2012. Efforts such as these will put the new American diaspora in a much better position to construct more meaningful post-deportation lives and make more positive contributions to Salvadoran society.
References


Sørensen, Ninna. 2010. ‘The rise and fall of the “migrant superhero” and the new ‘deportee trash’: Contemporary strain on mobile livelihoods in the Central American region. Working Paper. Copenhagen, Denmark; Danish Institute for International Studies.


