Transnational alienage and foreignness: deportees and Foreign Service Officers in Central America

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Transnational alienage and foreignness: deportees and Foreign Service Officers in Central America

Connie McGuire and Susan Bibler Coutin

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The literature on transnationalism has emphasised the ways that citizenship practices can transcend borders, for example, enabling migrants to use resources acquired outside of their country of origin to engage politically within it. This literature has not, however, addressed how migrants fall outside of rather than transcend national boundaries. To analyse this condition, we develop the concepts of transnational alienage and foreignness and apply them to the experiences of two groups: (1) US Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) stationed in Central America and Mexico and (2) long-time US residents who were deported to El Salvador. Though positioned quite differently, there are also surprising intersections in FSOs’ and deportees’ social locations. These intersections shed light on the forms of citizenship and alterity created by the transnational security regimes in which both FSOs and deportees are situated. Our analysis draws on interviews conducted in the US, Mexico and Central America between 2008 and 2010.

Keywords: Central America; transnationalism; citizenship; security; alienage; foreignness

Introduction

Transnational citizenship has received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades, as global interconnections have challenged traditional notions of citizenship as tied to a particular territory, legal order and social milieu (Basch et al. 1994, Glick Schiller et al. 1995, Ong 1999, Mahler 2000, Bernal 2004, Grewal 2005, Bosniak 2006). The term ‘transnational citizenship’ and a plethora of related concepts – transmigrant, deterritorialised nation-state, post-national states, flexible citizens – were coined in order to describe circumstances in which the practices that have been taken as hallmarks of citizenship – political engagement, rootedness, family ties – transcend national boundaries. For example, to convey the ‘unbounded’ nature of migration and the nation, Basch et al. defined transnationalism as ‘the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (1994, p. 7). Basch et al. argue that transnational migrants are actively involved in the ‘nation building process of two or more nations’ (34). Relatedly, Soysal (1994) has argued that globalisation and transnationalism have produced a ‘postnational’ moment in which national memberships and identities succumb to deterritorialisation through
international organisations like the United Nations or regional governing bodies like the European Union. Such concepts have enriched scholars’ understandings of citizenship and transnationalism by noting new forms of membership.

What has received less attention in studies of transnationalism, however, are the circumstances of individuals who do not transcend but rather are positioned outside of multiple national borders. Examples of such individuals include military personnel abroad, international athletes, business people, foreign students, undocumented migrants and even tourists. In this paper, we juxtapose two such groups: (1) US Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) stationed in Mexico and Central America and charged with combatting gangs and unauthorised immigration throughout the region and (2) immigrants who are deported from the United States to El Salvador and who are the targets of such policies. Examining FSOs and deportees side by side makes visible correspondences that could not be seen by examining either group alone. We do not mean to suggest that FSOs and deportees are intrinsically comparable, rather, this juxtaposition is a product of our collaboration as researchers interested in transnational, socio-legal phenomena (see also Yngvesson and Coutin 2006). At the same time, these two subject positions have emerged in a particular historical relation to one another. We have chosen to focus on these groups both because they represent something of two extremes – FSOs are highly privileged while deportees are severely marginalised – and because of surprising similarities in FSOs’ and deportees’ accounts of uncomfortable experiences that constitute them as outsiders. Both FSOs and deportees are pulled between countries. Their experiences outside of the United States differentiate them from other residents even as their connections to the United States set them apart from others in Central America and Mexico. Importantly, both FSOs and deportees counter their own ‘outsiderness’ through an ethic of service or ‘contributing to society.’ Juxtaposing their experiences therefore reveals the subjectivities that are created in the transnational spaces outside of nations, subjectivities that are not captured through the notion of transnational citizenship.

At first consideration, these forms of alienage and privilege seem to be very different, yet they also have something in common: both fall outside of and make possible national jurisdictions.

To flesh out these subjectivities, we develop two concepts, each of which is defined in relationship to citizenship: (1) transnational foreignness and (2) transnational alienage. These forms of alienage resemble other experiences of social exclusion (such as racism and stigmatisation of convicted felons) and privilege (such as the elite status of expatriates or professionals in multinational corporations). At the same time, transnational foreignness and alienage are unique in legal form. Transnational foreignness is citizenship’s constitutive outside, that is, those who are transnationally foreign are external representatives of a nation, regarded as honourable or exemplary, and are exempted from national regulations in ways that enable them to be positioned anywhere. Thus, the elite status held by government representatives who are stationed in other countries derives from their foreignness, their position outside of the United States but also outside – in a
jurisdictional sense – the country where they are stationed. Transnational alienage, in contrast, is citizenship’s constitutive inside, that is, transnational aliens are internal others who are considered criminal or unassimilable and who are therefore excluded in ways that position them elsewhere. Non-citizens are subject to deportation either due to criminal convictions or due to immigration violations, but when they are returned to their countries of origin, they may also be regarded as outsiders there (Dingeman and Rumbaut 2010, Dingeman-Cerda and Coutin 2012). In El Salvador, deportees are often stigmatised, harassed, subjected to violence and essentially denied access to employment and community membership. If these individuals attempt to return to the United States without authorisation, they face a harrowing and even life-threatening journey that may end in apprehension, incarceration and re-deportation. Essentially, such allegedly ‘failed migrants’ may, for all practical purposes, be forbidden to exist anywhere.

Our analysis of FSOs and deportees is based on interviews and fieldwork that we conducted in Mexico and Central America in 2008–2010. Our account of FSOs’ experiences is based on interviews that one of us – Connie – conducted in 2009 and 2010 with US Embassy officials in Mexico City, San Salvador and Guatemala City. Her interviews focused on US officials creating policies that were being developed at the time to combat ‘criminal gangs from Central America and Mexico.’ Interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling for a larger project that included over 80 interviews with NGO representatives, FBI agents, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officers and USAID and State Department officials not in the Foreign Service. The researcher also participated in meetings in Central America, Mexico, Los Angeles, Washington DC. The interviewees included in this analysis include only FSOs in El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, whose work related to the topic of gangs, and not the entire FSO population in a given US Embassy. Fourteen individual FSOs working on the topic of gangs were interviewed, 8 women and 6 men. All interviewees had held other posts while in the Foreign Service and they had been in their post for between 1 and 3 years. The researcher’s focus was principally on the interviewees’ policymaking practices; however, in order to understand the interviewees’ relationship to the topic of gangs, she asked them about both their experiences as FSOs in the United States and in the places they were posted.

Our account of deportees’ experiences is based on interviews that the other of us – Susan – conducted in 2008 in El Salvador. Her interviews focused particularly on 1.5 generation immigrants, that is, individuals who had immigrated to the United States as children (defined as under 18, though most were pre-adolescent) and who had subsequently been deported. Interviewees were recruited through the CARECEN Internacional (the San Salvador office of the Central American Resource Center) and Homies Unidos, two Salvadoran non-governmental organisations that worked with deportees. Forty-two individuals were interviewed. All interviewees were male, due both to the overrepresentation of men within the deported population and because women who had been deported were more reluctant to participate in interviews. On average, interviewees were 10.6 years old at
the time that they left El Salvador and had lived an average of 16.2 years outside of El Salvador before being deported. Approximately half of the interview sample had become legal permanent residents, while the other half was undocumented, temporarily authorised or of unknown legal status. Most had been convicted of a crime prior to being deported. In some cases, the crime was quite serious, such as homicide, but most often convictions were for more minor offenses such as fighting, drug possession, joy-riding, petty theft, gun possession or driving while intoxicated.

In what follows, we detail the US foreign and immigration policies that have shaped both FSOs and deportees, the subjectivities produced by these policies, the spaces in which these subjectivities are performed and notions of service that animate FSOs’ and deportees’ senses of personal and professional self-worth. Throughout, we argue that the relationship between citizenship and its internal and external others is key to understanding complex positions created by transnationalism itself. Thus, the position that FSOs and deportees occupy in relation to the United States is precisely what places them outside of both that country and the Latin American nations where we encountered them.

Emigration and intervention

Both FSOs and Salvadoran deportees were impacted by the Central American civil wars of the 1980s, which led to a mass exodus of emigrants from Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. FSOs’ duties during this period included maintaining strong ties between US and authorities in El Salvador and Guatemala, supporting counter-insurgency efforts, providing development assistance, reducing public support for guerrilla forces, tempering extreme right-wing elements of the Salvadoran government and Armed Forces, and countering negative publicity regarding human rights violations perpetrated by US allies (Schwartz 1991, Binford 1996, Quan 2005). FSOs thus contributed indirectly to the conditions that led Salvadorans to emigrate while defining this emigration flow as economic rather than political in nature. The majority of the deportees interviewed for this paper left El Salvador during the 1980–1992 civil war. Because the US government’s stance at the time was that these migrants were economic rather than political, few received visas or asylum, leading most to live in the United States as undocumented immigrants and in marginalised urban communities. There, some interviewees became part of a youth culture that has been criminalised through stiffened penalties for drug-related offenses, increased police presence and gang injunctions.

In the 1990s, after the Central American wars concluded, US immigration policies began targeting so-called criminal aliens, that is, non-citizens who had been convicted of crimes (Welch 2002, Hing 2006). With the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in the 2003, combating gangs, rather than guerrilla insurgents, became a key focus of US policy and of FSOs’ work in Central America. Deportations from the United States to El Salvador increased
dramatically from 5561 in 2003 to 20,361 in 2010 (Office of Immigration Statistics 2011). During this period, crime rates in Central American countries, including El Salvador, also increased, leading officials to attribute rising crime rates to deported gang members (Aguilar 2006), even though academic studies argued that few criminals and violent gang members in El Salvador had been outside of their country (Cruz 2007). By the 2000s, rising concern over public insecurity in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras led to adoption of ‘zero tolerance’ anti-gang strategies and to increased collaboration between US and Central American authorities (Moodie 2010, McGuire 2011, Zilberg 2011). In 2003, the Salvadoran government initiated mano dura or ‘iron fist’ policies according to which mere membership in a gang was considered a crime. After Salvadoran courts ruled mano dura unconstitutional, the Salvadoran government developed super mano dura or ‘super iron fist’ policies that again criminalised gang membership and focused on repressive strategies, such as police dragnets, mass arrests, incarceration of suspected gang members and collaboration between the military and the national civilian police (Godoy 2005, Ribando 2007, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2007, Zilberg 2011). Finally, in 2007, reasoning that gangs were a transnational threat, the US National Security Council (NSC) released the ‘US Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico’ (United States Department of State (USDOS) 2007). Deportees were directly impacted by this ramping up of enforcement practices. As non-citizens living in the United States, they were first subjected to increased police surveillance, then, if convicted of a crime, they were prioritised for deportation. The breadth of the enforcement net also caught up individuals who were simply undocumented or who had failed to attend a court hearing. Those who were deported to El Salvador were stigmatised as criminals, regardless of whether or not they had been convicted of crimes.

From the 1980s to the present, then, FSOs and the Salvadoran emigrants who eventually became deportees have in some ways shaped each others’ lives and missions. The transnational nature of this complex policymaking effort has given rise to the subject positions that we term transnational foreignness and transnational alienage.

**Alienage and foreignness**

To delineate the way that transnational alienage and foreignness position individuals outside of multiple societies, we here focus on two paradigmatic cases: deportees and FSOs. As transnational aliens, deportees are subject to the racialising effects of US immigration and criminal justice policies, even though many had lived in the United States for most of their lives (Ramos-Zayas 2004, de Genova 2005, Inda 2006). When deported, they are relegated to the margins of their countries of legal citizenship, despite the fact that many of the individuals who are deported, including those who have been convicted of crimes, are not gang members. As transnational foreigners, FSOs are professionally identified as
foreign and their presence demarcates an international jurisdiction. Yet, instead of causing exclusion, their foreignness grants them a position of privilege, enabling them to be officially hailed rather than feared. Ironically, FSOs’ presence in the countries where they are stationed may be considered more legitimate than that of deportees who are citizens there.

The transnational alienage of deportees is signalled by their lack of documents in both El Salvador and the United States. For example, Herbert Osorio, a deportee interviewed for this project, originally left El Salvador in 1997 at the age of 17. He tried to obtain legal status by applying for political asylum; however, he missed a court hearing and was ordered deported in absentia. He continued to work, and narrowly missed being apprehended during workplace raids. Finally, in 2004, he was stopped for a traffic ticket, and because he had two prior unpaid tickets from 2000, he was arrested. His prior deportation order was executed three months later. Likewise, in El Salvador, deportees who have been outside of the country for many years struggle to obtain Salvadoran identity documents from sceptical officials. One NGO member, who worked at a shelter that housed deportees, observed that, ‘the authorities don’t want to give [them] cédulas [national ID cards]. In some cases, we have been told that they have to conduct an identity trial. Bring witnesses to say, “He was born here, he left at a certain age.”’

Deportees who had lived outside of El Salvador for lengthy periods reported that interactions with other Salvadoreans reinforced their sense of not belonging. As Herbert, who was quoted above, explained, ‘One comes here [to El Salvador] with a different accent, not the accent one has here. And people here think that you are doing it out of malice. . . . And people say, “Bueno, vos, you think that you are better than us. Why do you speak that way if you’re Salvadoran?”’ Deportees reported that their clothing, haircuts, tattoos, ornaments (i.e. piercings) and mannerisms led others to treat them as dangerous, making it difficult for them to secure employment. Interviewees described boarding buses, only to have other passengers grab their purses and look away. Victor Castillo, who had lived in the United States from age four into his forties, reported, ‘I was born here. But. . . . people don’t look at me like I belong here. They look at me like I’m a stranger. This guy can’t even speak Spanish. You know, he’s saying he’s Salvadoran. He ain’t Salvadoran, he’s gringo! . . . He was born here but that don’t mean he’s from here.’

In Central America, deportees had to regulate their behaviour and movement so as not to attract suspicion. One deportee told us that in El Salvador he wore his work badge when out in public in order to avoid being suspected of being a gang member. Other deportees described being harassed or beaten by security guards who concluded that, from deportees’ demeanour, they were criminals. Francisco Ramirez, who had been deported to El Salvador along with his two brothers, commented,

I don’t like going to the malls here. Because especially with my two other brothers, they think we’re up to something. Even though we’re just walking around being like
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a normal person. They just follow us and make us go through all this embarrassment, in front of everyone. “Pull up your shirt! Let me see if you have a gun!” Search us. And everyone starts looking at us like [we’re criminals].

Those deportees whose economic resources permitted them to do so travelled by car instead of bus and rented homes in middle class neighbourhoods to avoid the suspicion of security guards and gang members who viewed them as potential enemies or recruits.

In contrast, FSOs’ status as international representatives of the US government positioned them as transnational foreigners. The Foreign Service’s structure is designed to cultivate FSOs’ sense of foreignness in their host country and their allegiance to the United States. For example, FSOs’ rotations in each country are limited to between two and five years in part to keep FSOs from identifying too strongly with their host country. FSOs are also required to take six weeks of paid ‘home leave’ in the United States each year to encourage their national connection. Described as ‘generalists’ rather than country or area experts, FSOs’ professional skills are shaped to be relevant in any US Embassy in the world.

Unlike deportees, FSOs’ outsider status in their host countries makes them esteemed rather than stigmatised. FSOs working for the State Department hold diplomatic positions, meet with local and international officials, provide services to would-be visitors to the United States and serve their fellow citizens living abroad. In addition to being officially foreign in their host countries, FSOs may also feel foreign in the US. Frank, an FSO married to an Irish citizen, felt estranged in the small southern US town where he and his wife lived prior to joining the Foreign Service. He became a FSO because ‘when you have a family from two different cultures, even as similar as Ireland and America, you kind of crave that diversity for your children.’ As an FSO, Frank could provide his children with experiences unavailable in the United States. Frank commented that after living abroad for 4 years as a FSO, ‘what is frustrating is that you go back to the United States and absolutely nobody understands what you do. And so you tend to relate more to your peers and people outside of the country than you do to people inside of the country.’ Ironically, the required home leave instituted by the State Department in order for FSOs to identify with the United States made Frank realise how out of place he felt there. Yet his feelings of foreignness were confounded by a sense that he was losing American customs.

You do give up quite a bit in this . . . traditional things. My daughter, who will graduate from high school this year, has never gone to a high school football game. She thinks cheerleading is sinful only because she thinks it is stupid. Which to me is terrible! You know, I love cheerleaders. And, you know, my kids, they don’t have the kind of centralized YMCA sports type thing that my brother’s kids (who live in the US) do. They do a lot of different things. There is a lot of give and take.

As foreigners in both their host country and in the United States, FSOs’ experience mirrors, in a privileged way, the experiences of deportees who are effectively
alien in both the United States and their countries of birth. In short, though more privileged, FSOs are like deportees in being in, but not of, the multiple societies they occupy.

Securing national territories

Just as transnational foreignness and alienage form a constitutive inside and outside of citizenship, so too are the spaces that the transnationally foreign and alien occupy produced through the internal and external policing of national territories (Raustiala 2009). Such policing has taken multiple forms. During the Salvadoran civil war, US military advisors stationed in El Salvador sought to win Salvadorans’ ‘hearts and minds,’ and thus limit guerrilla influence (Schwartz 1991) while also supporting military struggle against armed insurgents. These counter-insurgency tactics have now been resuscitated in the war on terror (Cole 2003, Pedersen 2012), one component of which is to fight transnational gangs (Thale and Falkenburger 2006, US House of Representatives 2006, Zilberg 2011). Police sweeps of Salvadoran neighbourhoods in search of suspects, the mass apprehension of youth suspected of gang membership and intensified interrogations position both FSOs and deportees in multiple spaces. The FSOs who implement US anti-gang strategies in Central America are simultaneously outside of the United States (stationed in foreign countries), an extension of the United States (through their service) and inside of the United States when working at the Embassy or consulate where they are stationed. Likewise, the deported gang members targeted by these strategies experience El Salvador as a place where they cannot be but also where they are confined (Coutin 2010). To them, El Salvador is ‘foreign,’ yet their land of birth; an extension of the detention centres where they were held prior to deportation, yet a place where they are ‘at liberty.’

The production of transnational foreignness entails the transnationalisation of US territory (Zilberg 2004, 2011). Thus, local knowledge of gang ridden US neighbourhoods is considered to particularly qualify FBI agents for being stationed in Central America. Further, the FBI recruits agents of Latin American descent in part because they are regarded as having foreign expertise that is valuable for national security purposes. One such agent stressed his awareness of the atrocities that gang members can perpetrate, and his unique abilities to relate to and extract information from gang members, stating, ‘I know these guys, I know these streets.’ US neighbourhoods sometimes ‘enter’ El Salvador in the form of gangs that are named after streets in Los Angeles (Baker-Cristales 2004, Zilberg 2011). Indeed, interrogation and other policing practices deployed in Central America in the FBI’s Transnational Anti-Gang (TAG) units produce such familiar foreignness through the transnationalisation of gangs themselves (McGuire 2011).

As employees and representatives of the US government living abroad, FSOs’ movements and relationships are also restricted as a matter of national security. The Department of State’s Foreign Affairs Manual states that, ‘Employees will at all times remain subject to continuing evaluation by supervisory and security
personnel to ensure that continued security clearance eligibility is clearly consistent with the interests of national security’ (USDOS 2011). Until 2010, FSOs had to report to the Regional Security Officer (RSO) working at their post about any relationship with a foreign national from a ‘non-critical human intelligence threat country’ that ‘involved continuing romantic or sexual intimacy’ due to the risk of espionage or blackmailing (USDOS 2011). FSOs are forbidden from having relationships with foreign nationals from ‘critical human intelligence threat countries’ such as Cuba and Iran. Some FSOs are restricted from bringing their cell phones, cameras, personal computers or other recording devices into their offices, where secured documents and computers could be accessed. The personal safety of FSOs is also treated as a matter of national security because the killing, injury or kidnapping of US nationals abroad can become a national crisis, a political embarrassment and a diplomatic scandal. FSOs must always report on their travels and avoid areas of the country or parts of town that are considered to be dangerous. They are encouraged and sometimes required to take different routes to work, whether they travel by car, by foot or by public transportation, in order not to establish regular patterns of activity that could make them vulnerable to attack. One FSO told us she was mugged while exiting public transportation, nearly losing her Blackberry to the attacker before snatching her arm away from him. When she reported the incident to her RSO, a requirement, he reprimanded her for being on public transportation and strongly suggested that she instead use the secure taxis from the Embassy.

Like FSOs, deportees are also positioned outside of national territories in the name of national security (Coutin 2010). Lorenzo Gómez, who was interviewed in El Salvador in 2008 following his third deportation from the United States, occupied such an extraterritorial space. Lorenzo had immigrated to the United States in 1978 at the age of 8 to join his parents, who were living in Los Angeles. In 2000, after being convicted of drug possession, Lorenzo was deported to El Salvador. He returned ‘home,’ as he put it, to Los Angeles the same year via a harrowing journey in which he hopped trains, disembarked before reaching checkpoints, scrounged for food in Mexican villages and confronted gangs that robbed migrants and threw any who resisted off of the train. In 2002, Lorenzo was picked up on a traffic violation and deported a second time. In 2004, he once again returned to the United States, but was apprehended in Texas. This time, Lorenzo was prosecuted for unlawful re-entry and sentenced to four years in a federal prison. Following his 2008 deportation, Lorenzo’s circumstances in El Salvador were dire, as he explained, ‘I don’t know anybody in this country. No friends. No family, no support. I live in the streets. I’m homeless. If I could keep my clothes clean it’s because some guy is helping me out where I can wash my clothes and shower.’ Lorenzo wanted to return clandestinely to the United States, but was terrified of another prison stint: ‘I’m scared. Because if I get busted crossing, I’m going back to the BoP [Bureau of Prisons]. For re-entry again. This time, I’m gonna get double time. Eight years. So I really don’t know what to do. I’m so confused. I need time. I miss my family so much! I’m really hurt!’
Lorenzo’s experiences of apprehension, deportation, clandestine migration, prosecution, incarceration and homelessness took place in particular spaces: prisons, detention centres, the roofs of trains, the streets of El Salvador. Though not physically outside of national territories, the policing practices that exclude individuals such as Lorenzo define these spaces as outside – El Salvador is outside of the United States, the detention centre and the prison remove Lorenzo from US society, and the streets where Lorenzo sleeps position him outside of Salvadoran society. These spaces of clandestinity, abjection and confinement are, for Lorenzo, a transnational outside. This is not the transnationality of the elite, who by virtue of their class status, nationality or multiple citizenships, can move between nations (Ong 1999), but rather that of the marginalised, who move from place to place because they are forbidden to be anywhere.

Transnational foreignness and alienage also depend on and make possible particular sorts of membership claims. ‘Service’ and ‘contributing to society’ are therefore – and perhaps somewhat surprisingly – key concepts not only for Foreign Service Officers and but also for deportees.

Service

Both FSOs and deportees narrate an ethic of service that allows them to embrace or contest transnational foreignness or alienage. Service, a common idiom of self-worth, is part of a professional identity for FSOs and a legally significant activity for immigrants who seek authorised status in the United States. FSOs’ status gives them the privilege of serving in foreign lands. As they serve, FSOs also reproduce the ‘national’ in the form of US interests, US jurisdictions that are transplanted abroad (as in the US Embassy compound) and US identities (as representatives of the United States). At the same time, particular FSOs’ relationship to the United States is highly complex. Officers see themselves as promoting justice, reducing crime, building relationships and promoting development. Their own individual desires and ethics in some ways map onto but in other ways diverge from the policies that they are mandated to implement. Further, the implementation process allows them to refine and interpret these policies in key ways. ‘Service’ to multiple entities and goals is therefore a key to FSO identity, both professional and personal. As described above by Frank, working for the Foreign Service can be as much about serving one’s family as it is about serving his or her country. Additionally, when joining the Foreign Service, FSOs make personal and professional sacrifices that can be seen as an element of their service.

FSOs are invoked as servants through their job title and the Foreign Service Guidelines. Service for FSOs is a privilege and a job duty. The first point in the ‘Guidelines for US Government Personnel Taken Hostage’ states that the ‘US Government personnel serving abroad are expected to be mature, responsible, and patriotic individuals for whom the concept of service has a real and personal meaning’ (USDOS 2011). Several of the FSOs interviewed had previously served overseas in the US military or had grown up in military families.
As a child, one high level official had lived through the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, experiences that he said shaped his desire to address injustice.

Recognising the international influence of the US government, others felt a responsibility to improve the US government’s development projects. Many FSOs noted that they chose meaningful work over opportunities to earn more money. Frank stated, ‘I also do like the service to your country. But I can also say that Uncle Sam is a very difficult person to work for. The bureaucracy of the federal government challenges you as a person because it is not efficient. And the things that you see in different areas of the federal government are extremely frustrating.’ For FSOs, working through such challenges becomes a form of service and sacrifice through which they perform transnational foreignness.

For deportees, in contrast, an ethic of service is articulated as a desire to ‘contribute to society’ and as a critique of the fact that they were deported. Evidence of serving and being a productive member of society is also a legal argument that immigrants have used to make membership claims such as when applying for suspension of deportation (Coutin 2003). Deportees who were interviewed expressed frustration that their deportation prevented them from serving society as they otherwise could – they were unable to be gainfully employed, use the knowledge and skills they had acquired in the United States, be good spouses or parents, or serve in the military. They were also frustrated by the stigmatisation that they encountered in El Salvador and that prevented them from being able to contribute there. When deportees articulated a desire to contribute to society, they were responding to the exclusions that they had experienced, exclusions that policymakers justified as cleansing society of ‘illegals,’ ‘criminals,’ ‘gang members,’ ‘delincuentes’ and ‘pandilleros.’ By stating that they had the capacity to serve, these deportees asserted that they had value. Furthermore, articulating this desire was also a way of trying to redeem themselves and suggested that they should be granted a visa to re-enter the United States, on the grounds that they were upstanding individuals. The ethic of ‘making a contribution’ also articulated membership claims, namely, that their US background deserved recognition and that they deserved the opportunity to participate in Salvadoran society as full and equal citizens, especially because those who had been convicted of crimes had already ‘served their time.’

One of the most striking articulations of a service ethic on the part of deportees occurred in 2001, when one of us, along with a colleague, visited the San Salvador offices of Homies Unidos. Homies Unidos is a transnational community organisation founded in 1996 and dedicated to preventing gang violence and, in El Salvador, to working with deported gang members. This particular visit took place in February 2001, shortly after two major earthquakes rocked El Salvador, and indeed, while we conversed, the ground was still trembling with aftershocks. The following field note excerpt summarises part of our conversation:

[A Homies Unidos member] told us that during the January 13th earthquake, when [the neighborhood of] Las Colinas was buried, they [Homies Unidos members] went to help out. He said that they dug people out with their bare hands, but that the
soldiers who were around weren’t doing anything. They were just watching and they stayed clean the whole time. . . . He said too that the Red Cross, the Green Cross, and the Blue Cross were there, but that instead of focusing on the needs of the victims, they were competing to see who would find more dead bodies. He said that one of these groups didn’t have any gloves, but that the other groups wouldn’t lend it gloves, so it had to take people out with bare hands. He was critical of the relief efforts that have been mounted by the government, and he said that the best way to get assistance to people is by delivering it directly. He showed us pictures of the earthquake zones that they had visited with institutions like CARECEN [Centro de Recursos Centroamericanos, Central American Resource Center] Internacional, and the YMCA. In particular, they had assisted some fisherwomen who were having a difficult time because the earthquake had scared away their fish. Homies members arrived with food, “and they were super happy. They couldn’t believe that these guys with tattoos, who normally they would have been afraid of, were bringing them all this food.”

The speaker in this excerpt contrasts Homies Unidos’ relief work with that of soldiers and official aid agencies, who were depicted as uninvolved and as more focused on competing with each other than with aiding the victims. He positions deported gang members alongside recognised agencies, such as the YMCA, and stresses the degree to which Homies Unidos’ generous donation of food countered societal stereotypes of tattooed individuals.

Other deportees, who were not Homies Unidos members, also stressed their desire to contribute to society, whether in the United States or in El Salvador. Victor Castillo recalled that in the United States,

I was ready to serve my country, I was a registered voter, I voted for governor of California, I voted for presidents, my whole life was over there, my wife, my kids, I was a total American . . . And here, I can’t work. So much study I did! I have the intelligence, the capability. But here, there is no way to put it to use. And that is the frustration, puchica.³

Like Victor, other deportees were frustrated by the obstacles that, they argued, prevented them from contributing to Salvadoran society. A number of deportees nonetheless described goals, such as opening a rehabilitation house, starting a business and strengthening their families. Manuel Mariona explained, ‘My future plan it to become a better father, be a good mentor to my kids, be a good team leader, and try to better things, to get people to actually look and see that they are no better than anyone else. In God’s eyes we’re all the same. I’d like to at least be able to visit the States once in a while, see my family, and show them the changes I’ve made in my life.’ Such desire for recognition explicitly countered the stigmatisation associated with deportation. As Pablo Ramirez stated, ‘I want to be somebody, like, “Oh, wow, look! He was deported, but he got back on his feet.”’ For at least some, the mere act of participating in an interview with a US researcher performed ‘making a contribution.’

In sum, articulating an ethic of service – through government employment, sacrifice or through socially positive, non-criminal activities – enables FSOs to
embrace the capabilities conferred by transnational foreignness and deportees to contest the exclusions entailed in transnational alienage. These ethics are not identical – one is mostly professional, formal and privileged, whereas the other is personal, informal and thwarted by deportation – but together they demonstrate the linkages between *belonging* and *service*, the sense that individual actions taken together *create* the nation and link individuals to national communities. Further, these ethics demonstrate the complexity of the subject positions within which both deportees and FSOs are situated. As foreigners, FSOs are citizens par excellence, in that they represent the United States as a nation abroad and are charged with carrying out US foreign policy. Their epitomisation of the United States, paradoxically, permits and requires them to circulate internationally. In contrast, deportees’ appearance, language skills, histories and multiple origins placed them outside, leading them to be excluded from their countries of origin and emigration.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that the literature on transnational citizenship can be enriched by recognising that the transnational foreignness that underlies FSOs’ status and the transnational alienage that excludes deportees from multiple nations are both necessary counterparts of citizenship itself. The Foreign Service exists, in part, to promote citizens’ security. Just as national sovereignty produces states of exception, the power of the sovereign to pronounce and suspend law (Agamben 1998), so too does the Foreign Service exist in an exceptional space, a space that is necessarily outside of the United States due to officers’ need to represent the nation, a need that sends them out. Likewise, transnational alienage is the counterpart of citizenship in that aliens are abject non-citizens who are neither temporary guests nor immigrants on the path to membership. Furthermore, though technically citizens of their countries of origin, deportees are rendered alien by their time outside of their country of origin, their acquisition of US identities, their expulsion from the United States and, in some instances, their criminal records. Clearly and with very different consequences, the practices that position FSOs and deportees outside simultaneously define the boundaries and markers of belonging. Drawing attention to these boundaries and markers enhances efforts to theorise the spaces, subjectivities and membership claims produced by transnational security regimes.

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Notes
1. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the anonymity of our interlocutors.
2. While one of us – Connie – was conducting fieldwork, consulate workers in Juarez were murdered. More recently, two DEA agents were killed.
3. ‘Puchica’ is a difficult-to-translate Salvadoran expression meaning something like, ‘Damn!’ or ‘Shit!’

References


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