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Publication Date

2020

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Making of Illegal “Citizens” in Honduras

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

David James Lindstrom

Committee in charge:

Professor David Pedersen, Chair
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Professor Saiba Varma

2020

The thesis of David James Lindstrom is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Making of Illegal “Citizens” in Honduras

by

David James Lindstrom

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor David Pedersen, Chair

“Citizenship” is conceived as an identity that confers certain rights—freedom *from* removal, violence, and injury; freedom *of* political opinion, social group membership, etc. However, for poor Honduran youth “citizenship” confers none of these rights. Rather, within the U.S. Latin American interstate regime, a transnational political structure dominated by the United States and Latin American elites and comprising Central America, Mexico, and The United States, Honduran citizenship combined with poverty produces the pervasive threat and fact of both violence and removal—in fact, the opposite of “citizenship”: illegality. Therefore, this paper denaturalizes the concepts of “citizenship” and “illegality” in order to show how illegality’s consequences—forced migration, labor exploitation, and a lack of public services provided by the state—are created not merely through the law *as writing* but by the law *as*

tactics. In this sense, “illegality” is produced by the state through various practices that structure power, discipline actors, and channel capital within the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime. Through interviews with recently-deported migrants and members of Honduran civil society I show how such illegality is produced in Honduras by divestment in education, extreme unemployment, youth-targeted anarchic and state violence, structural violence, economic exploitation, deportee discrimination, a failure to reintegrate returned deportees, and a rhetoric of youth criminality. In doing so, I show how Honduran youth experience their production as illegal and exploitable subjects in a circular and compounded fashion throughout the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime.

THE MAKING OF ILLEGAL “CITIZENS” IN HONDURAS

“Citizenship” is conceived as an identity that confers certain rights—freedom *from* removal, violence, and injury; freedom *of* political opinion, social group membership, etc. However, for poor Honduran youth “citizenship” confers none of these rights. Rather, within the U.S. Latin American interstate regime, a transnational political structure dominated by the United States and Latin American elites and comprising Central America, Mexico, and The United States, Honduran citizenship combined with poverty produces the pervasive threat and fact of both violence and removal—in fact, the opposite of “citizenship”: illegality. Therefore, this paper denaturalizes the concepts of “citizenship” and “illegality” in order to show how illegality’s consequences—forced migration, labor exploitation, and a lack of public services provided by the state—are created not merely through the law *as writing* but by the law *as tactics*. In this sense, “illegality” is not merely a designation conferred by a definition of citizenship. Rather, “illegality” is produced by the state through various practices that structure power, discipline actors, and channel capital and value within the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime. Through interviews with recently-deported migrants and members of Honduran civil society I show how such illegality is produced in Honduras by divestment in education, extreme unemployment, youth-targeted anarchic and state violence, structural violence, economic exploitation, deportee discrimination, a failure to reintegrate returned deportees, and a rhetoric of youth criminality. In doing so, I show how Honduran youth experience their production as illegal and exploitable subjects in a circular and compounded fashion throughout the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime. I also show how the creation of these exploitable subjects benefits Honduran and American elites by enabling the transfer of capital to the upper classes and by reducing political dissent within Honduras.

THE LAW AS *TACTICS* AT CITY HALL

“So,” I say at last—after twenty eight exasperating minutes—“if a migrant comes today to the municipality and wants help, there is no one to help them?”

“If they come today,” says the functionary, looking at the desk, shifting in his seat, “today. . . there is no help.”

And so, after twenty eight minutes of Marcos-the-functionary’s boilerplate presentation—flipping through countless Powerpoint slides printed in a binder, passing me brochures, lauding the “mission” and “leadership” and “services,” and, in short, projecting the rhetoric of an effective welfare state—we arrive at this point: The municipal government, today, provides no services to returned migrants. There are binders and brochures and mission statements and lists of core values at city hall—and this is it.

Marcos and I had met in his office. He was young, perhaps in his late twenties, and he shook my hand quickly, offered me a seat, and then asked if I needed something to drink. I declined. He then asked again, nervously, and I declined again, and then he pushed an 8 oz bottle of water to my end of the desk.

Marcos’s office was exceedingly narrow. Posters from the United Nations and various NGOs plastered its walls. His desk was covered with the detritus of city government—a hodgepodge of forms, brochures, and binders that threatened to cascade around the bottled water and spill into my lap. Marcos’s speech, too, was uncontained: When using his own words, he was sometimes measured, even diffident, but when reading from one of his many brochures he launched full-boar into interminable bursts of speech, as if listing side effects in a never-ending drug commercial.

Marcos was in charge of all municipal services for returned migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs). I had heard that few or no government services were available to these Hondurans—a shocking fact (if true): Deported migrants and IDPs in Honduras suffer job discrimination, poverty, mental health problems, and difficulties reintegrating into the education system. Therefore government support for this population is essential. As such, I wanted to clarify which services were—and were not—available.

I am still uncertain as to why Marcos granted me the interview: In the end, much of what he told me did not reflect favorably on the municipality for which he worked. Marcos was, no doubt, limited by red-tape and an inadequate budget. Likely, he was trying his best. Yet, as became clear, his efforts made little difference to the migrants he was charged to help.

Marcos began our interview by giving me eleven brochures and a large packet. Then, unprompted by any questions, he opened his own packet and launched into a recitation of its contents—in the tone of the drug commercial genre but without its customary specificities: For three minutes, Marcos spoke in vague generalities about the municipality’s “goals” for “social development.” He stated that the municipality had goals for health, education, services for women, for children, and for young people. He mentioned that the city had a statistical department. He talked about other offices. Finally, after four minutes, I interrupted and asked, “Can you tell me, specifically, how this office helps migrants?”

Marcos paused, now off script. “Okay,” he said, his tone falling. The pause continued for two seconds. Then, looking back at the packet, speaking quickly, he continued the commercial. . .

As we’ve been seeing in the presentation, we include within the mission eleven values, their purpose within our mission, we have everything, here it is. Within this report is all the information about [our office]. We have our mission which creates and executes the municipal policies to provide services for returned migrants and migrants displaced by violence, according to the direction of the municipality and in conjunction with organizations and institutions both national and inter-institutional. International—sorry. Our vision for 2028 is a unity of leadership with the municipality with respect to immigration and displacement by violence—referring to the national level, focusing on the, focusing on the orientation of participants with heightened sensitivity with organized and efficient work. We have our values that include leadership, human sensitivity, providing services, equitable work, an orientation to results and innovation, transparency, responsibility, and honesty. And then, well, this is an introduction to our values and mission. (personal interview, August 20, 2019)

Here I interrupted: “Well, what I would like to know,” I said, “more than anything, is something concrete—if there is a program that helps migrants. If a migrant has a problem and comes to the municipality, or if someone who is displaced comes to the municipality, which services are available?”

Marcos referred me to another section in the packet and began the commercial, again. I asked him to be more concrete, again. He restarted the commercial. This pattern continued for twenty three additional minutes. Within this period, the majority of Marcos’s speech was boilerplate, yet—over time—

he did reveal some key facts: 1) Marcos did not, in fact, work with migrants. He supervised a staff of two persons who worked directly with migrants—one psychologist and one coordinator. 2) The coordinator conducted intakes with recently-returned migrants. Then, s/he referred these migrants to NGOs, principally the Red Cross, which *might* provide housing, food, or other services. 3) The psychologist provided counseling services free of charge. 1) Excepting counseling and referrals, the municipality did not provide services to migrants. There was no money for this in the budget. Concerning the budget, Marcos stated the following:

Many of these people have been helped, because measure have been taken, because they realized that the office would look [a brief pause] but we don't manage the money directly, so, more than anything the Red Cross helps them, we don't, uh, and we are always looking because there aren't sufficient funds in the budget to help the *citizens* [In Spanish, *ciudadanos*. Emphasis added]. (personal interview, August 19, 2019)

A light went off in my head: Marcos was not the first person I had contacted at City Hall. Two months prior, I had spoken with someone else. Later, one of my non-government respondents told me that this person had quit. *Where were the psychologist and the coordinator? Why were they not here?* I asked Marcos:

Marcos: Right now, this week [a brief pause] we don't have personnel, but I have made the request, and starting on Monday, perhaps Wednesday or Thursday they will send an assistant to this office. However, for the psychologist we are waiting to offer a contract.

Me: So, if a migrant comes today to the municipality and wants help, there is no one to help them?

Marcos: If they come today, today [brief pause] there is no help

Me: Is there another government organization within the department [Honduran equivalent of a U.S. state], or here [at city hall], where a person can go for help if they are displaced or recently deported?

Marcos: Here in [city name], only the Municipal Office of Migrants.

And so, in spite of the dozens of Powerpoint slides, the brochures with smiling migrants and their families, the “eleven values,” the mission statements, the talk of case plans and “accompaniment” —in short, the rhetoric and materiality of a benevolent welfare state—I had arrived at the truth: In a department with a population in excess of 450,000¹, and with a deported migrant and IDP population

¹ In order to preserve the anonymity of “Marcos,” I have anonymized the department and lowered its population substantially.

likely in the tens of thousands², there were precisely zero government services available to returned migrants and IDPs. In the words of Marcos, “there aren’t sufficient funds in the budget to help the *citizens* [emphasis added]”—only funds for brochures and Powerpoints, for the commercial of citizenship and for the selling of its rhetoric in the market. And, thus, the ultimate irony: Honduran migrant citizens could not secure a meeting with the sole municipal worker currently charged with their assistance, yet I, a foreigner and a non-citizen, could, as *the commercial of Honduran citizenship was crafted for people like me—not them*.

This paper is about the strange identity of “Honduran citizenship.” Normatively, citizenship is conceived as an identity that gives the *citizen* certain rights—protection from persecution based on one’s membership in a particular social group or political opinion (“Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” 1967), a child’s rights to life, protection from mental or physical violence, abuse, injury, neglect, exploitation, and maltreatment (“Convention on the Rights of the Child,” 1989), etc. Yet in Honduras those rights exist in rhetoric but not in practice. As with the “rights of the returned migrant” in Marcos’s brochures, these various rights exist on paper but are not made real with the actual provision of services. To wit, these papers are directed not to the provision of services but to the international marketplace of money and ideas, where they are used to justify international security aid, local budgets, and the legitimacy of the Honduran “state”—to U.S. officials, functionaries, and anthropologists. From the perspective of poor Honduran “citizens,” these papers are empty of meaning. Only for the foreigner or the bureaucrat are they “full.” Such papers gesture toward inclusion in the state but in fact are part of a system that excludes—even kills.

² The exact deportee and IDP population in this department is impossible to estimate. Even if one could, first, roughly estimate the returned migrant population (difficult) and the IDP population (impossible) within Honduras as a whole and, second, multiply that population by the ratio of the departmental population to the country population, this approach would be flawed: The department in question experiences higher levels of violence than the national average, increasing out-migration. Given the impossibility of a numeric approach, I arrive at the “tens of thousands” estimate by combining the size of the department, according to the most recent Honduran census, with the high number of persons who I encountered in my research who were either a returned migrant or knew a returned migrant. Admittedly, this approach is more intuitive than scientific.

In order to peer beneath this rhetoric of the “benevolent” welfare state, this paper conceives of the law and its products—the judiciary, statements of rights, rights brochures, etc.—not according to their *prima facie* meanings, but according to how they affect the lived experiences of (un)free-moving Hondurans. In contradistinction to Marcos’s formal citizenship of inclusion, what emerges is a substantive citizenship marked by the tactics of exclusion, neglect, violence, and exploitation—tactics which channel value to Honduran and American elites.

To portray these processes I first sketch a brief history of Honduran migration, politics, and economics. I then provide a review of “citizenship” as it appears within the anthropology of migration. Within this review, I show the value of adopting Nicholas De Genova’s conception of “citizenship”—and its converse, “illegality”—from the point of view of (un)free-moving people. This approach de-centers the vantage point of the nation-state and illuminates the lived experiences of those subjected to its discipline and exploitation. This theory in hand, I return to Honduras: By analyzing 1) interviews with deported migrants, leaders of NGOs, workmen from the lower class, university students, and a sociologist,³ and 2) ethnographic observations in a gang-controlled barrio, I show how Honduran “citizen” youth are produced as “illegal” within their own country: They are coerced to leave the space which they currently inhabit by the various governances (and the markets these governances create)—“official” and otherwise—which operate in the so-called territory of “Honduras.” This designation occurs through forms of direct and indirect violence⁴ and for the purpose of subordinating their labor: As detailed

³ In this paper I refer to the names of Honduran professionals who work with migrants by their real names. I have anonymized the names of all other respondents.

⁴ When considering “illegality,” direct and indirect violences are so closely tied that one cannot meaningfully trace one apart from the other. As merely one example, undocumented migrants in the United States suffer from multiple forms of structural violence that result from the *threat* of deportation (Andrews, 2018)(Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). However this indirect violence only exists because *actual* deportations—direct violence—are ongoing. If permanent or semi-permanent residents without documentation were not living under the constant threat of deportation—made real by actual deportations—then U.S. “illegality” would resemble the sociopolitical condition of certain migrants to the European Union in the early 1990s—a condition largely devoid of structural violence: Yasemin Soysal’s “transnational citizenship” (Soysal, 1994). That the structural violence of “illegality” in the United States in 2019 in no way resembles conditions of “illegality” in the European Union in 1994 is owed to its co-construction with the pervasive direct violence of deportation. Thus, from the perspective of (un)free-moving people, such “indirect” violence is merely an extension of direct violence. As will become clear

in my interviews with migrants, within Honduras potential migrants experience illegality through the intersections of Honduran forms of governance—direct and structural violence, pervasive unemployment, disinvestment in education, etc.—and micro-level factors such as an individual’s age, gender, class, and location of residence.

Finally, I conclude the paper by showing how the production of illegality within Honduras creates permanent illegality for poor Hondurans throughout the what Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez (2005) call the “U.S.-Latin American interstate regime”—a transnational political structure dominated by the United States and Latin American elites and comprising Central America, Mexico, and the United States. Within these geographies, I show that Hondurans are constructed as illegal, and therefore vulnerable to removal and exploitation, in the United States and Mexico because they are first constructed as illegal in their “own” country. In the United States, forms of governance different than those in Honduras—threats and facts of “official” deportation—result in returned migration to Honduras—both forced and “voluntary.” Thus, the illegality, vulnerability, and exploitation of poor Hondurans are co-produced by various governances throughout the regime.

A HISTORY OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND MIGRATION IN HONDURAS

As in all Central America, modern processes of social inequality and migration in Honduras originate with Spanish colonialism and systems of forced labor. Social inequality continued into the nationalist period, where it was reinforced by globalist economic processes. Principal among these processes were accelerated rates of land expropriation tied to the coffee and banana industries (Edelman & León, 2013). In the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal reforms and changes in global markets further

in this paper, direct and structural violences are also co-constitutive within Honduras. Therefore, in this paper I retain the terms “direct” and “indirect” in order to roughly and incompletely characterize certain acts of violence. Yet I also deconstruct this dichotomy to show how violence is both “direct” and “indirect,” personal and impersonal, and through these dual natures results in certain kinds of social production.

consolidated land among Honduran elites: The “Law para la Modernización y Desarrollo del Sector Agrícola” (Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector) opened Honduran markets to a glut of subsidized foreign staples, such as maize and rice, from the U.S. Consequently, Honduran peasants were unable to compete in local markets with subsidized imports and, facing bankruptcy, many peasants sold their lands en masse to large landholders (Edelman & León, 2013). The collapse of coffee prices in the mid-1990s also forced small growers to sell their land (Reichman, 2011). In turn, landholders converted newly-transferred lands to large banana and coffee plantations. The new landless formed the labor force (Edelman & León, 2013). Displaced by these combined processes, Hondurans increasingly migrated to the United States, with surges from 1998-2001 and 2001-2006—peaking at 25,000/year in 2001, and 30,000/year in 2006. Hondurans also migrated internally to the urban areas of the Sula Valley and Tegucigalpa. There, they formed a labor force for *maquiladoras*—factories owned by Honduran and foreign elites (Reichman, 2011).

The latest wave of Honduran migration began in 2009, after a military coup overthrew then-President Manuel Zelaya. A number of socio-political conditions prefigured the coup: First, Zelaya made policies and gestures that were interpreted as antithetical to the interests of Honduran elites: He instituted a moratorium on mining concessions to foreign companies and raised the minimum wage (Phillips, 2015, pg. 86). He also indicated openness to the *Alianza Bolivariana* – an alternative to the Central American Free Trade Agreement. (CAFTA was sponsored by the U.S.) (Phillips, 2015, pg. 86)(Webber & Gordon, 2013). Finally, Zelaya ordered the implementation of a non-binding poll, to take place June 26, 2009, asking whether Honduras would convoke a constitutional assembly (“Decreto Ejecutivo Número PCM-020-2009,” 2017). Such a measure might be construed as promoting democratic rule: The previous constitution was written during a military government in the 1980s (Gordon and Webber, “Post-Coup Honduras” 36). Phillips writes that the constitutional assembly was framed as an opportunity “to broaden the avenues for popular participation beyond the virtual political power monopoly of the two major parties” (2015, pg. 86).

Nevertheless, conservative elements within Honduran power structures saw, in the pretext of preserving democracy, an opportunity to oust a political opponent. On June 28, 2009, after the Honduran Supreme Court issued an arrest warrant, Manuel Zelaya was arrested by the Honduran military and placed on a plane to Panama (Gordon & Webber, 2014)(Phillips, 2015, pg. 86-87). The coup was initially denounced by President Barack Obama as an assault on democratic rule, but within a week the U.S. State Department backed away from demanding Zelaya's return (Frank, 2018, pg. 14). Moreover, there are questions as to whether the U.S. tacitly participated in the planning and execution of the coup (Johnston, 2017). Irrespective of possible U.S. collusion in the coup itself, the U.S. has continued to support post-coup regimes that are accused of stealing the national elections in 2013 and 2017 (Frank, 2018)(Phillips, 2019)(Frank-Vitale, 2017).

Post-coup Honduras is rife with government-sponsored narco-violence. In *The Nation*, Dana Frank writes: "Only in the post-coup context. . . can we understand the very real crisis of drug trafficking in Honduras. A vicious drug culture already existed before the coup, along with gangs and corrupt officials. But the thoroughgoing criminality of the coup regime opened the door for it to flourish on an unprecedented scale" (Frank, 2012). Bertha Oliva, member of the *Comité de las Familias de los Detenidos/Desaparecidos en Honduras* – Committee of the Families of the Arrested/Disappeared in Honduras – describes the situation as follows: "We are living in a state. . . in which the security forces can torture, and nothing will happen, where they can detain people without cause, and nothing will happen" (Gordon and Weber, "Post-Coup Honduras" 45). Moreover, in addition to state violence large swaths of urban Honduras are now controlled by narco-gangs. High levels of murder and other violent crimes flourish within these spaces of impunity (Wolseth, 2011)(Ahmed, 2019).

In addition to direct violence, structural and legal violence are embedded in accelerated processes of land expropriation: "The military coup made possible what Hondurans call the 'second coup': the deeper economic agenda of transnational investors and Honduran elites, now given almost free rein to use the state as they choose" (Frank, 2012). Following patterns prior to the coup, such seizures are often driven by the neoliberal export model: Large landowners seek new territory for the cultivation of export

commodities, such as coffee and palm oil (Phillips, 2015, pg. 19). These seizures are often given tacit or explicit support from the new regime (Edelman & León, 2013).

An even more extreme form of land expropriation is the “model cities” law, “which allows for autonomous economic zones in which the Honduran Constitution, legal code and most basic democratic governance structures won’t apply, and where transnational investors will be free to invent their own entire society” (Frank, 2012). Thus, model cities provide Honduran elites with the means to expropriate land not only from the lower classes but from the “state” itself (Loperena, 2017)(Geglia, 2016).

THE POST-COUP “STATE,” “CITIZENSHIP,” AND ECONOMIES OF VIOLENCE

In the Honduran post-coup environment, the categories of the nation-state are unsettled. The Honduran “state” is headed by a president, Juan Orlando Hernández, whose brother, Juan Antonio (“Tony”) Hernández Alvarado, was found guilty of drug trafficking charges in October of 2019 by the state of New York. Moreover, during his trial “Tony” Hernández was accused of both murder and of using proceeds from this trafficking to support his brother’s 2017 presidential campaign. In turn, Juan Orlando Hernández was accused of providing his brother with immunity from Honduran prosecution (Palmer & Malkin, 2019). Hondurans are well aware of these charges: In my research, Hondurans unanimously asserted that the current regime in Honduras is a narco-dictatorship.

As detailed below, narco-corruption and narco-violence—at all levels—are central to the governance and economy of Honduras. Given the credible accusations of narco-violence and corruption throughout the Hernández regime, as well as its incomplete control of Honduran territory, one might claim that a normative “nation-state” does not exist in the territory of “Honduras”: Rather, an assemblage of narco-gangs control this territory, and the most powerful of these gangs—the gang controlled by Juan Orlando Hernandez—is recognized and given legitimacy by outside governances, including the United States.

“Citizenship,” as well, signifies uncertain meanings in Honduras. As already discussed, in a normative sense “citizenship” is conceived as an identity that confers certain rights—freedom *from* removal, violence, and injury; freedom *of* political opinion, social group membership, etc. However, Honduran citizenship—from the perspective of poor Hondurans—confers none of these rights. Rather, Honduran citizenship combined with poverty produces the pervasive threat and fact of both violence and removal: “illegality.” Thus, if we are to understand “citizenship” and “illegality” within Honduras, we must move beyond superficial and normative definitions: We must peer beneath the formal conventions, Powerpoint slides, and brochures published by one of the narco-gangs in order to see how “citizenship” and “illegality” are constructed substantively *as tactics* within the politics, economics, and social processes of “Honduras” and USLAIR. Moreover, we must move beyond the vantage point of the nation state: We must see what “illegality” looks like to a recently-deported Honduran who cannot get a meeting at city hall.

ILLEGALITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF (UN)FREE-MOVING HONDURANS

In his literature review of “illegality” within anthropology, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” Nicholas P. De Genova argues that an anthropological approach to illegality must denaturalize “illegality,” as this concept is inherently state-focused:

“Illegality” (much like citizenship) is a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state; as such, migrant “illegality” is a preeminently political identity. To conduct research related to the undocumented noncitizens of a particular nation-state from the unexamined standpoint of its citizens, then, involves the kind of uncritical ethnocentrism that is, by definition, a perversion of anthropology’s putative aims as a distinctive mode of inquiry. (De Genova, 2002)

In opposition to this ethnocentrism, De Genova later argues that anthropology must examine “illegality” as a “sociopolitical condition” from the perspective of the undocumented. I make two observations: First, De Genova’s assertion that anthropology must examine “illegality” from the perspective of the undocumented is well taken: I will adopt something like this approach in Honduras, as

it brings into light certain kinds of migrant subjectivities and productions of labor. Second, there is a certain tension present in defining “illegality” as both—narrowly—a “juridical status” (i.e. undocumented) and—broadly—a “social relation to the state”: A “social relation to the state” entails a broad set of political, economic, and power relations. For any given migrant or resident, such relations are often greatly conditioned, even determined, by her/his juridical status, yet this status does not over-determine these relations. Therefore, insofar as a person-state relation is conditioned by factors *other than* juridical status, any theorization of “illegality” that uses a single juridical status—e.g. “citizen”/“non-citizen”—as the point of departure will fail to capture intersections of power not traced directly to the juridical. Therefore an “illegality” closely tied to juridical status gains precision, but it loses some analytic power—Such analytic power will be lost to the extent that the state primarily constructs the excluded and included, the vulnerable and secure, and the exploitable and exploitive through means other than “citizenship”: Thus, an “illegality” closely tied to juridical status loses little analytic power if applied to Sweden, where citizenship guarantees extensive rights. Yet, in Honduras a theorization of “illegality” which takes juridical status as its point of departure risks the very ethnocentrism De Genova would avoid.

Witness Honduras: What does “juridical status” signify in a context where the “government” is, in essence, a large organized crime syndicate—where few or no government services are provided based on documented status? (Most Honduran migrants carry few documents: for the purpose of migrating north, a Honduran passport is worthless.) Moreover, if a poor Honduran is more likely to be expelled from her/his home or murdered than a foreigner—likely, a businessperson or tourist who travels in secure taxis and stays in secure hotels or residential enclaves—then the naturalized connections between the citizen/noncitizen juridical status and relations to the state are not merely absent but inverted. Moreover, expelled citizens support much of the Honduran economy through remittances. As such, the expulsion (or threat of expulsion) of the “legal” is integral to the Honduran state-making project—a second inversion: In the U.S., the threat to expel the “illegal” is integral to the economy and the state-making project (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). We therefore see that a binary status of citizen/noncitizen signifies little, unless it is situated within larger social relations—principally, the relations of the law to the state and

labor. (In the latter half of this paper, I detail how differential access to state services—education, water, and health—impact migrants’ decisions to migrate.)

A better theory of “illegality” must therefore begin with a theorization of the relations between the law and society.⁵ De Genova, following Foucault, offers such an approach:⁶

[T]he intricate history of law-making is distinguished above all by the constitutive restlessness and relative incoherence of various strategies, tactics, and compromises that nation-states implement at particular historical moments, precisely to mediate the contradictions immanent in social crises and political struggles, above all, around the subordination of labor. . . Thus, immigration laws serve as instruments to supply and refine the parameters of both discipline and coercion, but this is largely through the deployment of those laws *as tactics* [emphasis added]. (De Genova, 2002)

⁵ In this paper I consider “illegality” as a particular sociopolitical condition enacted by the state and other forms of governance. This approach does not signify that there are only two such conditions—only “legality” and “illegality,” and nothing else: In fact, there are multiple modes of political being, including indeterminate modes of recognition by nation-states (Haas & Shuman, 2019). However, “illegality” is the mode most relevant to the majority of poor Hondurans. Therefore, it receives my primary attention.

⁶ In proposing to analyze the law *as tactics*, De Genova and I build on the work of a number of theorists: Holloway (1995) emphasizes that “money, capital, the state. . . are nothing but the struggle to form, to discipline, to structure what Hegel calls ‘the sheer unrest of life’” (De Genova, 2002. p. 455). It is this sheer unrest which De Genova’s law *as tactics* attempts to form, discipline, and structure—to govern.

In line with Foucault, Coutin (1996) argues that within anthropology the category of “illegal” should not be a given, but rather an object for scrutiny. Accordingly, she focuses on how U.S. immigration law produces illegality. She also details how the naturalization of the production of illegality renders invisible processes of exploitation. De Genova’s conception of “illegality” and citizenship as *tactics*—and, therefore my conceptions—are indebted to Coutin.

In contradistinction to Coutin’s emphasis on Foucauldian power, Heyman and Smart (1999) note “the incompleteness of formal states and the unlikelihood that they will master their own people’s ‘illegal’ maneuvers” (De Genova, 2002). For his part, De Genova, in agreement with Coutin, asserts that a theoretical attention to the production of illegality makes visible certain, forms of exploitation and governance. However, he also sides with Heyman and Smart: in analyses of illegal migration, disciplinary power cannot be envisioned as totalizing.

To my view, Heyman and Smart’s critique of Foucauldian power obtains in Honduras: In Honduras biopolitics are “in play”—if only as an illusion in Marcos’s brochures—but they do not “master” the biological phenomenon of Honduran migration. As will be seen in this paper, Honduran elites designate young Hondurans for removal. In doing so, they *do* manage the populace. Yet, in important ways the Honduran government does not govern migration in the manner envisioned by Foucault’s biopolitics: The incomplete Honduran “state” maintains little or no presence in gang-controlled barrios—barrios which produce much of Honduran emigration. As a result, I see no evidence that migration has been made a problem for the mathematical or biological sciences in Honduras. Such disciplinary methods are central to Foucault’s biopolitics (Foucault, 1978). Returning to Holloway, there is simply too much “unrest of life” in the gang-controlled barrios for the government to employ a robust biopolitics.

In this paper I de-center the particular juridical tactic of “citizenship-illegality”: In a U.S. context, the tactics of “citizenship-illegality”—identity documents, bureaucracies which distinguish those who possess documents from those who don’t—and the concomitant threat (and fact) of forced expulsion is central to the subordination of labor (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012)(Andrews, 2018). By contrast, in a Honduran context the law *as tactics* also subordinates labor by the threat and fact of forced expulsion, however the juridical binary of citizen/noncitizen is immaterial to this process. Citizenship confers no protections: a U.S. citizen is better protected in Honduras than a Honduran citizen. Therefore, if “illegality”—conceived, in the words of Nigel Harris, from the perspective of “the free movement of people” (Harris, 1995, p. 85)—is to have any meaning in a Honduran context, then the Honduran citizen/noncitizen binary is irrelevant.

An objection can be raised here: *Why use “illegality” to describe social processes in Honduras, when the definition of “Honduran illegality” dispenses with something indispensable in a U.S. context?* I offer three responses: First, the lived experiences of those made “illegal” within Honduras bear strong similarities with those made “illegal” in the United States. Both suffer remarkably similar kinds of coercion, exploitation, and violence. Moreover, in their lives Hondurans often experience “illegality” in multiple places—Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. Therefore if we conceptualize “illegality” from the perspective of “the free movement of people”—a perspective which considers the citizen/noncitizen binary only insofar as it affects the lived experience of such “free”-moving people—then an “illegality” that dispenses (where relevant) with the citizen/noncitizen binary is necessary. Put another way, “illegality” helps us to understand certain kinds of subjectivities—subjectivities which must live under the permanent threat of forced removal, throughout their lives, under different forms of governance.

Second, a citizen/non-citizen binary privileges the nation-state, and therefore privileges a particular kind of tactics—“national” law-tactics—for analysis. However, migration within the Honduras-Guatemala-Mexico-U.S. economic system is not governed purely by national tactics—It is also governed

by international and transnational tactics. An attention to a broadly conceived “illegality” brings the consequences of these multiple forms of transnational tactics to light.

Finally, broad illegality within the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime results in the international production of cheap labor: The threat and fact of forced removals produces “illegals”—in a continual process that unfolds across life-spans—as vulnerable and exploitable throughout the Regime. Threats and facts of forced expulsion repress labor organizing in the U.S. (Andrews, 2018), subject migrants to kidnapping and forced labor in Mexico (Slack, 2019), and channel rural Hondurans to *maquidolaras* (sweatshops) in Honduras (Pine, 2008, pg. 140, 142, 146-147). In addition, “illegals” often experience multiple forms of these labor exploitations throughout their lives, and throughout the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime. As such, these exploitations and cyclical precarity are co-constitutive: “Illegals” are vulnerable in the United States because they were first vulnerable in Honduras, and—often—the reverse is true. Therefore an attunement to “illegality,” broadly conceived, permits us to view how the international production of labor is contingent and co-produced in different locations by different forms of structural violence.

In light of this discussion, I propose the following definition for “illegality”—from the perspective of (un)“free moving” Hondurans: Illegality is a sociopolitical condition wherein the state designates an individual or group for the threat or fact of removal/deportation—through “direct” or “indirect” means. Such designation occurs through forms of violence, and usually occurs for the purposes of subordinating labor. Within the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime, such “illegality” provides the anthropologist with an important analytic for discerning relations between the state, labor, migrants, violence, and forms of governance.⁷

⁷ I distinguish the concept of “illegality” outlined above from a superficially similar denaturalization of citizenship which occurred in sociology: the so-called transnational turn. Those familiar with this turn may wonder if I am merely re-stating an old debate in new terms: Emerging in the early 1990s, theories of transnationalism posited the emergence of deterritorialized nation-states and communities. The so-called *transnationalism from above* emphasized the repeated cross-border activities of powerful institutions, such as international corporations and intergovernmental organizations. By contrast, *transnationalism from below* emphasized the regular cross-border (often political) activities of migrants and migrant communities (Soysal, 1994)(Schiller, 1999). This later approach revealed distinct forms of migrant

YOUTH CRIMINALIZATION AND “ILLEGALITY” IN HONDURAS

At the beginning of my fieldwork in Honduras, I was struck by a phrase I had not heard before: *la criminalización de la juventud*—“the criminalization of youth.” What could this phrase mean? I wondered. How could a regime criminalize what is by far the largest demographic group in the country?

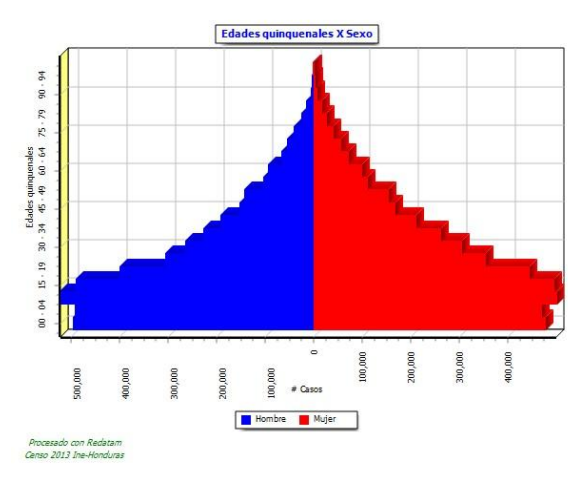


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Honduras (*Análisis de datos censales: Estructura de la población: Por sexo y grupos de edad, 2013*)

As my interlocutors would make clear, youth criminalization in Honduras comprises a large number of processes sustained by Honduran law *as tactics* that designate youth for the threat or fact of removal. Such processes employ both direct and indirect violence in order to effect such removals,

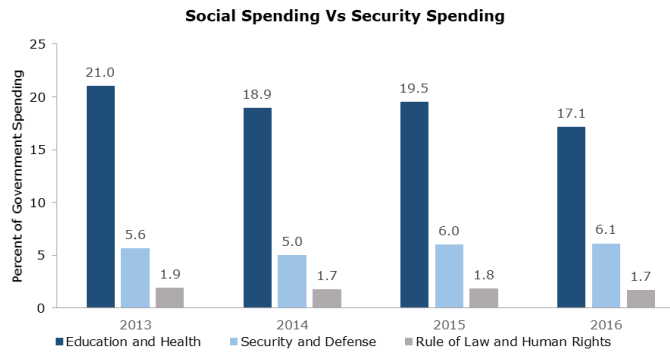
political action, but also obscured the constraints imposed on migrants by nation-states: To wit, in emphasizing the construction of communities by regular, cross-border movement, such transnational theory approached dispensing with the influence of nation-states altogether: “Illegal” migrants were said to possess a “transnational citizenship,” conferred by international institutions. Predictably, this erasure was critiqued by later theorists who held that the nation-state (and, we may add, citizenship regimes) continues to condition migration flows and migrant experiences (Hansen, 2009)(Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). I am in agreement with these later critics: one cannot discuss any kind of migration without discussing the particularities of individual nation-states. However, one cannot discuss Honduran migration without, simultaneously, acknowledging how poor Hondurans live as “illegal” “noncitizens”—even when they reside in Honduras.

exploit youth labor within Honduras, and reduce political dissent. Such processes include divestment in education, extreme unemployment, youth-targeted anarchic violence, youth-targeted governmental violence, structural violence, direct repression of youth protests, a rhetoric of youth criminality, economic exploitation, deportee discrimination, and a failure to reintegrate returned deportees. Moreover, Hondurans asserted that such criminalization occurs *precisely because* the Honduran youth demographic is so large: The large and restive youth demographic poses an existential threat to the Honduran regime. Therefore youth criminalization—and the discontent such criminalization produces—both increases the threat youth pose to the regime *and* comprises a tactic that the regime uses to mitigate this threat.

Most of the processes which comprise youth criminalization affect other demographic groups. However, as young persons form the majority of migrants and are the target of discourses of criminality, such processes are especially damaging to this demographic. Some of the processes that I fold into the category of “youth criminalization”—a rhetoric of criminality, lack of deportee support services, direct repression—would be recognized by Hondurans as such. Some of these processes—dialectics of security and insecurity, unemployment—might not be recognized as “youth criminalization” by Hondurans. Therefore, in this paper I treat “youth criminalization” as both an emic category that must be explored in its own right, as well as a point of departure to explore the illegality of youth in Honduras in a more general way. Below, I provide ethnographic data that illuminates each process, relates these processes to each other, and shows how these processes are productive of—and produced by—power and capital relations in the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime.

DISINVESTMENT IN EDUCATION AND HEALTH

During my research, Hondurans of all of all classes universally criticized the Honduran government’s disinvestment in education and health. These cuts have occurred over multiple years and with concomitant increases in the security budget (“Gobierno invertirá menos en Educación y Salud, a petición de Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI),” 2019)(Wilson & Johnston, 2017).



<http://cepr.net>
Source: Secretaría de Finanzas

Figure 2: Social Spending vs. Security Spending (Wilson & Johnston, 2017)

With regard to education, schoolteachers, students, and other informants all told me that the government does not pay for basic school services, such as textbooks, toilet paper, and janitorial supplies. Two informants told me that such “schools” may not include classrooms. As a result, many schools informally levy enrollment fees on students and their families. Those students who cannot afford to pay such informal fees drop out of school. Moreover, students from families of even limited means often opt out of the public school system entirely, in favor of private schools of questionable quality (personal interviews, August 15, 16, 2019).

Orlando Tinoco, Professor of Sociology at the public university in San Pedro Sula (UNAH), described the effects of such disinvestment as follows:

When the privatization started [after the coup], private high schools appeared on every corner. Here at the University, it’s brought us many, many problems—for example, in reading. Right now, in theory classes there are students who can’t read. . . And to give them a paragraph, or a pamphlet or brochure, for them it’s a huge challenge (personal interview, August 21, 2019).

In my interviews, respondents consistently linked the lack of education to unemployment within Honduras. A workman summed up this theory succinctly: “If someone hasn’t finished 9th grade and is illiterate, they can’t work. Many schools don’t have books, so it’s impossible to learn” (personal

interview, August 15, 2019). In Honduras, those who can't work often migrate. Thus, disinvestment in primary and secondary education designates a large portion of Honduran youth for removal.

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

As shown in Figure 3, unemployment and underemployment have risen steadily since the 2009 coup. Yet statistics fail to do justice to the problem: Since 2009, violence across Honduras has increased markedly. Consequently, entire barrios in Honduras's largest cities are no longer accessible to government agencies, including the Secretaría de Trabajos de Honduras, whose figures were used to construct Figure 3.⁸ Therefore the extreme unemployment present in such no-go zones—zones which produce much of the out-migration in Honduras—is not captured by any statistics.

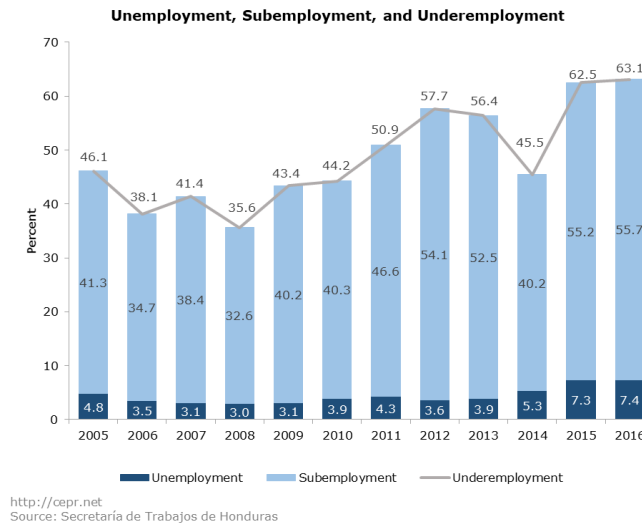


Figure 3: Unemployment, Subemployment, and Underemployment Since The 2009 Coup (Wilson & Johnston, 2017)

⁸ Churches and NGOs, as well, have limited or no presence in these areas.

In interviews, Hondurans consistently claimed that both disinvestment in education and high levels of violence resulted in underinvestment and, consequently, high unemployment. In turn, unemployment was linked to out-migration. Ricardo, a returned migrant cum small business owner summarizes this discourse well:

Me: Why did you immigrate?

Ricardo: The economic system. In this country, there is no permanent work. You work some days, and some days no. [I had a small store.] They didn't allow me to work because of the drugs and extortion. The businesses here close because of extortion. Narco-trafficking is the largest business. If you work with the small businesses, they don't let you work. (personal interview, August 15, 2019)

Here Ricardo articulates a theme I encountered repeatedly: Violence reduces investment, increases unemployment—and, consequently, the structural violences of poverty—and therefore drives migration: Seven of the thirteen recently deported migrants I interviewed stated that unemployment or work was one of the principal factors in their decisions to migrate. Two of these migrants discursively linked economic insecurity to violence.

Regime policies—the *law as tactics*—also contribute to economic insecurity. Since the coup, the Honduran regime has privatized essential services, such as electricity and water (resulting in higher rates), stolen money from health and teacher's funds (further undermining education and public health), and engaged in widespread corruption. Economic disaster resulted. Further, such disaster is not merely an undesirable outcome, but “co-constitutive of regime strategies that accrue wealth for elites” (Frank, 2018, pg. 193, 212-220). In her report, *When Corruption is the Operating System*, Sarah Chayes elaborates these strategies:

It is no longer possible to think of corruption as just the iniquitous doings of individuals, be they street-level bribe payers, government officials, or business executives. In the five dozen or so countries of which Honduras is emblematic, corruption is the operating system of sophisticated networks that link together public and private sectors and out-and-out criminals—including killers—and whose main objective is maximizing returns for network members. (Chayes, 2017)

My Honduran respondents confirmed this view. All agreed that the regime engineers the Honduran economy in favor of extractivist industries and the privatization/theft of national assets. Unemployment is co-constitutive with these tactics.

HONDURAN VIOLENCES

After the 2009 coup, San Pedro Sula came to be known as one of the murder capitals of the Western Hemisphere: The statistical murder rate in San Pedro Sula, depending on the source, varied between 44 and 113 murders per 100,000 residents from 2016-2018 (Ahmed, 2019)(“The world’s most dangerous cities,” 2017)(Linthicum, 2018). In addition to these wide variations, the “murder rate” is problematic for an additional reason: These figures carry the same methodological concerns as the unemployment figures: They cannot represent the true murder rate, as statisticians do not visit those areas of San Pedro Sula with the highest amount of violent crime—areas, not coincidentally, which produce the highest rates of out-migration. My Honduran respondents disagreed as to whether they perceived an improvement in security. I will return to these perceptions, shortly.

For the purpose of exposition, I divide direct violence that targets Honduran youth into two categories—anarchic and gang violence, and state-directed violence.

State-directed: After the 2009 coup, the Honduran police have been progressively militarized. As a result, they no longer provide meaningful protection to the populace, but rather protect the regime from political opposition. Such protection comprises the violent repression of protests, the expropriation of land from smallholders at the behest of large land owners, outright murder, and the repression of student protests (Frank, 2018, pg. 52-62, 88-92, 138-140)(“Video: Desesperación en bus de UNAH-VS atacando con gas lacrimógena,” 2019). Moreover, the line which distinguishing state police forces from private security forces is indistinct: Officers have been observed changing uniforms—from “public” to private, and back (Frank, 2018, pg. 52-62).

My non-government respondents universally asserted fear of the national police. Moreover, they asserted that the police existed in order to repress the people, rather than to fight crime. The sociologist Orlando Tinoco's description of his own relationship to the police is representative:

Now the police have changed into the Military Police of Public Order that repress the people in the streets. . . . When I see a military police officer in a green or blue uniform, I feel fear. I feel fear because there is no trust. If you say "Get out JOH [Juan Orlando Hernandez]" they might strike you. They beat the people" (personal interview, August 21, 2019).

Tinoco's statement captures the fear and avoidance of the National Police (PMOP) expressed by all my non-governmental interlocutors, as well as the sense that violence in Honduras operates within spaces of near-total impunity. In fact, the concomitant increases in state-directed and anarchic violence are co-constitutive: As the PMOP and other police forces cease domestic and community policing, the power vacuum is filled by other violent actors, including narco-gangs (Ahmed, 2019).

PERCEPTIONS OF ANARCHIC AND GANG VIOLENCE

Respondent perceptions of anarchic and gang violence varied: I conducted one interview with a community leader, called Daniel, in a gang-controlled barrio of El Progreso, a town close to San Pedro Sula which is notorious for gang violence.¹ Daniel's official title was *patronato de la colonia*—lit. "patriarch/leader of the colony." A *patronato* is part of a council that apportions responsibilities for the maintenance and provision of community services. In Honduras, gang-controlled and gang-influenced barrios are largely autonomous: Daniel's barrio received only one public service from outside the barrio—electricity from the (semi-privatized) national electric company. Daniel was in charge of the water system. No police services are provided in the barrio.

Daniel was in his mid-forties. His house was well-built, close to a cobblestone road, and was connected to a water system and to the power grid. Daniel told me that, owing to his own efforts and to community organizing, two narco-gangs had been pushed out of the area. He drew me a map that showed

the movement of these gangs out of his barrio and into other barrios (personal interview, August 19, 2019).

Two hours later, I spoke with a twenty year-old woman who was recently deported from the United States—also, in/from Daniel’s community. She communicated very different perceptions of security within the community: Elena told me that “in this place there are many gangs.” From Daniel’s house, Elena’s house is only a five minute walk up a steep hill. It is built from flimsy materials and is not connected to power or water services. Elena described the reasons for her recent migration as follows:

Me: Why did you leave?

Elena: For lack of security.

Me: Was there something specific?

Elena: In this place there are many gangs.

Me: Were you afraid that you would be kidnapped or assaulted?

Elena: Yes.

Later, and after I had put away my field notes, Elena amplified that she had, in fact, fled because she was afraid of being assaulted by a specific person—a woman who had assaulted her with a knife, before she migrated. Elena stated that she reported this assault to the police, but they police took no action (personal interview, August 19, 2019).

Elena’s story illustrates the positional interpretation of—and exposure to—violence in Honduras, as perceptions and experiences of anarchic violence vary in relation to individuals’ age, gender, social class, and geography: During our conversation, Daniel described how he worked with the municipal government and other community leaders in order to drive out the gangs. In other words, Daniel articulated the belief that he possessed the social capital necessary to protect both himself and the community from gang violence. It is likely that such social capital is, in turn, tied to his financial capital, social class, and gender. (Honduras is highly patriarchal.) Thus, we see how Daniel’s perception of security is linked to his identity and the social power necessary to protect himself—at least, according to his own perceptions.

By contrast, Elena’s social class and gender increase her vulnerability to structural and direct violence, relative to Daniel: The flimsy construction of Elena’s house and its lack of running water

expose her to water-borne diseases. And her gender exposes her to the high amount of gendered violence present in Honduras (Luciano, Hidalgo, Acuña, & Urban, 2019).

Differential exposures to violence may explain why Daniel and Elena expressed very different perceptions of their own susceptibility to gang violence and, in turn, the desire to migrate—even though they lived only five minutes apart. Moreover, we see here intersections of both macro structures—unemployment, the militarization of the police, pervasive anarchic violence, gang violence, structural violence, etc.—and different subjectivities tied to intersectional identities. In turn, we view how illegality—the “state” designation of an individual or group for the threat or fact of removal/deportation—is made real through the interactions of state laws *as tactics* and micro-level factors such as an individual’s gender, social and financial capital, and location of residence. From the perspective of Elena, a young (un)free-moving Honduran whose subjectivity is formed by her own understandings of herself as a poor woman in a Honduran shantytown, she is targeted for removal: If she does not self-deport, she is at risk of death.

DIALECTICS OF DIRECT VIOLENCE AND SECURITY: THE WALLING-OFF OF THE BENEVOLENT “STATE”

As detailed above, the Honduran militarized police do not provide protection for common citizens. Rather, they oppress popular dissent and protect the regime. Consequently, within Honduran securityscapes—as with many securityscapes in Latin America—protection from anarchic or state violence must be purchased on the market through the procurement of security services: real estate in walled enclaves, private security guards, (armored) vehicles, etc. Ironically, the “failure” of elites within the Honduran regime to address anarchic violence, as well as their complicity in state-sponsored violence,

is the precondition for the sale of such security services—services which these elites sell. (Pervasive violence also justifies U.S. security aid, further entrenching and enriching the regime.⁹)

One evening, my friend Miguel and I walked around the walled enclave in which he had built a house. The enclave contained roughly 150 houses.

Gesturing at the enclave, Miguel remarked, “Here one can walk without worries, really secure. Here you pay for safe walking.” Then, he gestured at one of the largest houses in the community. “Do you know who lives there?” he asked.

“No,” I replied.

“A former police official. He owns this enclave. Imagine that! A police official! How could he afford to buy all this land on a police salary?” (personal interview, August 13, 2019).

In Honduras, unemployment may signal not only the “usual” structural violences of poverty but a death sentence, as the unemployed cannot purchase “safe walking” from the corrupt police who, according to the law *as writing*, should protect them, yet according to the law *as tactics* (e.g. the militarization and corruption of police force) may, in fact, profit doubly from their own corruption and failure to perform what the written law prescribes. The picture below illustrates an embodiment of this dialectic of security and insecurity:

⁹ In 2017, U.S. security aid totaled \$30,258,000 in funding for “borders and drug control” and \$65,000,000 for “security, justice sector, and violence protection” (*Monit. U.S. Assist. to Cent. Am.*, 2019). Such aid is used to repress political dissent (Frank, 2018).



Figure 4: Enclave and Lean-To (Credit: author). A wall extends from the left side of the frame and then disappears beneath a corrugated metal roof. This roof is a lean-to which relies on the wall for physical support. The semi-homeless often live beneath such lean-tos. Behind the wall is an enclave, protected by private security guards.

Here is the dialectic shown in the picture: The social precondition of the enclave is the presence of geographies of insecurity and poverty within Honduras—geographies characterized by flimsy dwellings and a lack of infrastructure to provide water, drainage, and sanitation. Obversely, the physical precondition of the flimsy lean-to (and the community which occupies the lean-tos around it) is the enclave and its wall. Thus, the social dialectic of security and insecurity within Honduras is embodied in the physical relationship between the lean-to and the enclave wall.

Continuing our earlier discussion of the relationship between poverty and violence, we see that—from the perspective of (un)free-moving Hondurans—poverty is connected to violence in two ways: First, violence reduces investment and therefore increases unemployment. Second, unemployment prevents the unemployed from purchasing security services—further exposing them to violence and economic exploitation. In turn, these reciprocal processes of violence enacted on the lower classes and capital accrual by elites are embodied in the lean-to-enclave.

Therefore, from the perspective of elites mass unemployment is co-constitutive with a law *as tactics* of value accrual—part of an “operating system” of corruption, security services, and U.S. foreign aid that drives wealth from the lower and middle classes to elites. In the case of enclaves, such dialectics of security and insecurity are embodied in the urban landscapes of Honduras and, quite literally, wall-off the poor from essential security and infrastructure: The poor are walled-off from essential services of the “state.”

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, MIGRATION, AND RHETORICS OF YOUTH AND MIGRANT CRIMINALITY

Enclaves and the walling-off of essential services, such as security, are part of a larger system of structural, direct, and symbolic violences that designate poor Hondurans for removal. According to Mercedes Perez, Manager of Migration Services at the Mennonite Social Action House, an NGO that works to resettle deported youth, structural causes of migration include poverty, hunger, lack of education, family disintegration, and a total lack of deportee resettlement services. Perez links such structural violence—and the migration it promotes—to both direct violence and a rhetoric of youth criminality that is expressly promoted by the Honduran government:

Perez: We even have cases of young people who had to abandon the country, to flee, from the general violence and from the same state, which through its repressive military forces, because these young people were in a march, participating in a march, a group of students, they had to abandon the country because the police was pursuing them in order to murder them, to incarcerate them, to capture them. So, there are thousands in Mexico because Honduras has not given them opportunities. [The government] is criminalizing these youth. [The government] is saying that those who march are criminals, they're terrorists, uh, they're gang-bangers. . . And if one day this country changes the heroes will be the young people who have exposed Honduras for what it is. (personal interview, August 19, 2019).

Me: In other words, the government harms the youth because it considers them to be a threat?

Perez: Yes, that's the way it is. It considers them to be a threat. They are considered to be terrorists.

In this discourse, Perez links the indirect violence of unemployment—“Honduras has not given [youth] opportunities”—government-enacted direct violence which targets youth—murder, incarceration, etc.—a rhetoric of youth criminality—“they’re terrorists, uh, they’re gang-bangers”—and the threat which the politically active and large youth demographic poses to the Honduran regime. For Perez, the rhetoric of youth criminality is used by the government to both justify direct violence against youth and to deflect blame for both unemployment and mass youth migration from the regime to the youth, themselves. Perez outlines the relationship between this rhetoric of youth criminality and deported migrant youth as follows:

[The government] lies to the people, saying that from there [the U.S. and Mexico] come [deported youth who are] murderers, gang-bangers, that from there come people who are, in a society, . . . that are not good people. As a result, [deported migrants] are stigmatized. To be deported to the country is synonymous with evil, with crime, with being a poor influence, so that one can’t even apply for dignified work. (personal interview, August 19, 2019)

Thus, migrant youth who flee the direct violence of the state are blamed by the state for their own migration and subsequent deportation. Such rhetoric seeks to mask the complicity of the Honduran state in the anarchic and direct violence within Honduras, as well as justifies the direct repression of youth protests.

An example of this rhetoric—one cited repeatedly by my respondents—is government criticism of migrant caravans to the United States: The government often claims that such caravans are not organized by migrants themselves, but are in fact organized by radical opponents of the regime for political purposes (Requena, 2018).

A qualification: All of my respondents indicated that such rhetoric is only partially effective (if that): My respondents consistently blamed the government for pervasive societal violence. The complete indifference of the militarized police toward crime, the narco-corruption of the Honduran regime, and theft of the 2017 Honduran presidential election are acknowledged openly by all Hondurans who are not members of the regime. Nevertheless, it appears that this rhetoric of youth criminality may be partially effective. Witness the following conversation between me and a taxi driver in San Pedro Sula:

In this discussion, the taxi driver and I are discussing crimes against Honduran migrants in Mexico. Part way through the conversation, the taxi driver, mis-hears one of my questions and injects the topic of *jovenes*—“young people”—into the conversation:¹⁰

Me: How do the people of Mexico discriminate against migrants?

Driver: They treat some people badly. They treat them badly. There are people from here who assault people from there. There are bad people that go from here and assault people there.

Me: Are the bad people who migrate a small percentage or a large percentage of those who migrate from here?

Driver: Yes, young people, young people.

Me: So, the young people are those who are bad?

Driver: Yes, the young people. Well, yes.

Here, the driver, without my prompting, makes a direct connection between “bad people” and “young people.” A number of respondents made similar connections and claims. Thus, some respondents view *both* the government and youth as responsible for high rates of crime and migration. In turn, this view *may* inhibit political organizing against the regime, as some potential political actors consider the regime only partially responsible for high rates of violent crime.

Irrespective of this rhetoric’s effectiveness in tamping political dissent (a question which merits further research), Perez pointed to a second, important effect: The rhetoric of youth criminality results in employment discrimination against youth and deported migrants. Karla Rivas, Coordinator in Central America for the Jesuit Migration Network, confirmed this view:¹¹ Moreover, Rivas also claimed that this rhetoric asserts that migrants are both unpatriotic—“[They] don’t want to be part of the country”—and harm the national economy by discouraging investment (personal interview, August 20, 2019). Thus, the rhetoric of youth criminality serves to reduce the social power of youth through various stigmatizations—in turn, reducing their employability, in turn, exposing them to additional forms of structural and direct violence—reducing their social power in a vicious cycle.

¹⁰ The following discussion is not verbatim, but reconstructed from hastily written field notes.

¹¹ Rivas disagreed with Perez in one, important respect: Rivas asserted that she had seen no evidence that the government had targeted youth political leaders for assassination. In a separate interview, a group of university students told me that they strongly believed that youth leaders have fled the country, in fear of assassination (personal interview, August 22, 2019).

EXPLOITATION AND RHETORICS OF YOUTH CRIMINALITY
IN THE U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN INTERSTATE REGIME

The processes discussed above—disinvestment in education, mass unemployment, youth-targeted anarchic and state-sponsored violence, structural violence, the walling-off of secure communities, deportee and youth discrimination, and a rhetoric of youth criminality—designate young Hondurans for removal. In doing so, these processes reduce the social power of youths, exposing them to multiple forms of economic exploitation and concomitant structural and direct violences: in Honduran sweatshops (*maquiladoras*) (Pine, 2008, pg. 135-191), in the transnational migration industry (Vogt, 2018, pg. 81-104), by gangs in Mexico (Slack, 2019), and in employment in the United States (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012).

Fundamental to these processes of exploitation is the co-construction of Honduran youth as “illegal”—as removable “criminals” in Honduras—by *both* the Honduran “state” and the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime (USLAIR): Much of the repression of the Honduran populace, including the processes outlined in this paper, is made possible by U.S. foreign aid that provides guns, bullet-proof vests, training, and other tools of repression to the Honduran militarized police, or PMOP (*Monit. U.S. Assist. to Cent. Am.*, 2019) (Frank, 2018, pg. 199-205). In turn, U.S. foreign aid is justified, first by the rhetoric of a benevolent and democratic Honduran state (Frank, 2018, pg. 200) and, second, by a rhetoric that pins blame for pervasive violence in Latin America solely on the shoulders of (young) gang members. As we have seen, such rhetoric is supported by the Honduran “state.” Further, such rhetoric is produced and circulates internationally: In her book, *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis Between Los Angeles and El Salvador*, Zilberg shows how rhetorics of youth criminality were exported from the United States to El Salvador, as part of the “war on drugs” (Zilberg, 2011, pg. 9). Mutatis mutandis, this very exportation occurred in Honduras. Moreover, USLAIR is implicated in the production of youth illegality through migration itself: The precarity of Honduran youth is co-created in both the United States and Honduras: Youth migrate to the U.S. because they are first made illegal in

Honduras. In turn, youth deported from the U.S. to Honduras experience increased precarity—stigma and economic insecurity, compounded by a total lack of reintegration services—in Honduras. In turn, deported youth are subjected to increased violence and are more susceptible, yet again, to removal/migration. Therefore, Honduran youth experience their production as illegal and exploitable subjects in a circular and compounded fashion throughout USLAIR.

RETURNING TO CITY HALL

As I listen to Marcos tell me about the fictional services listed in the brochures, I leaf through the pamphlets he gave me at the beginning of our interview. Nine of the eleven bear the logo of the International Organization for Migration—a UN agency tasked with ensuring “the orderly and humane management of migration. . . [and] humanitarian assistance to migrants in need” (“About OIM,” 2019). One pamphlet bears the additional logos of UNICEF, the UNHCR, and the Red Cross and other NGOs. I look closer:

This pamphlet explains the origins of the municipal office for migration: The office began in 2014, at the “designation” of the United States, in response to increased levels of family migration to the U.S: Thus, the municipal office is an extension of the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime. The pamphlet lists a number of causes of migration, including “economics,” “general violence,” “organized crime,” and “domestic violence.” With regard to state violence, the pamphlet refers euphemistically to “political variables.” On the last page are eleven logos of various international organizations—eleven more than the total number of persons currently working in the office. At the moment, no one is present to hand the brochures to migrants—only to an anthropologist.

After Marcos finishes reading and summarizing the brochures, thirty minutes into the interview, I ask him about the challenges which confront returned migrants.

“The biggest challenge that they confront when returning,” he replies, “is the lack of employment. They go because there is no work, but when they return there is also no work. This is the biggest reason Hondurans migrate to the United States. After that, we have the problem of violence. . . People are fleeing because there is no security, uh, at the level of the national government. . . Also, we have the lack of opportunities for young people in all aspects, the lack of education (which we should have), health. All of these factors are affecting the *citizenry*—they keep them from staying. . . This is why we are working to reinsert them into society.”

No security at the level of the national government—a moment of honesty or another euphemism, depending on one’s point of view. *These factors keep the citizenry from staying*—as if it were the natural order for the *citizens* to stay, unplanned for them to leave, and the *factors* were no one’s tactics.

This is why we are...—resuming the commercial.

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