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Returning to their roots: Examining the reintegration experiences of returned Indigenous migrant youth in Guatemala

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Abstract
This article examines the reintegration experiences of Indigenous migrant youth returned to Guatemala from the United States and Mexico, thereby filling a gap in extant literature. This qualitative study employed a critical ethnographic approach with reflexive thematic analysis of fieldwork and interviews with social service providers working with this population through the lens of Critical Latinx Indigeneities. Four major themes emerged: identity negotiation (subthemes being Indigenous identities and returned migrant identities), trauma and its consequences, institutional and internalized oppression, and decolonization. Implications for social work emphasize the importance of Indigenous and decolonizing approaches to social work.

Keywords
Critical Latinx Indigeneities, Guatemala, Indigenous youth, reintegration, returned migrant youth

Introduction

The acceleration of youth migration has produced a new set of quandaries regarding child migrants' rights and well-being. While young migrants receive some protection according to child welfare laws, they are simultaneously treated as criminals who have immigrated illegally and are subject to removal proceedings just like adults (Carlson and Gallagher, 2015; Dietrich, 2015). Migration to the United States has long been studied in various scholarly disciplines, yet the amount of literature on youth migrants' post-deportation experiences remains limited. Given the substantial increase in the migration and deportation of youth migrants, the human services field needs a stronger evidence base to inform responses to youth migrant populations post-deportation.

The existing literature on Guatemalan migrants' return and reintegration experiences largely fails to consider the significance of Indigenous identity during these migratory processes. In fact, few studies of Guatemala–US migration meaningfully differentiate between Guatemalan migrants' ethnic groups at all (Argueta et al., 2015; Jonas and Rodríguez, 2015). Recent events have

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emphasized the potentially serious consequences of this erasure of ethno-cultural differences in the migration experience, claiming that Indigenous youth migrants are at greater risk for deportation, family separation, and death in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody as a result of cultural differences that are systematically ignored (Gieselman, 2018; Truax, 2018). Thus, there is a pressing need for attention to the cultural and linguistic diversity of Central American migrants, as these may be life-and-death matters at any stage of the migration process. Emphasizing the importance of considering the diverse ethno-racial identities of migrant youth, the purpose of this article is to examine the reintegration experiences of returned Indigenous migrant youth (RIMY) from Guatemala in order to improve outcomes for this population.

Theoretical framework: Critical Latinx Indigeneities

In order to analyze the reintegration experiences of RIMY from Guatemala, a critical theoretical framework that accounts for the nuanced, intersecting, and multi-layered experiences of Indigenous Latinxs is needed. Critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI) offers such a theoretical framework, 'addressing a growing sector of the Latinx community that is often invisibilized, or relegated to a distant romanticized past' (Blackwell et al., 2017: 135). Rooted in the lived experiences of Indigenous Latinxs, CLI theorizes that there are many ways of being Indigenous, allowing for exploration of the ways in which Indigeneities intersect with oppressions and interact with changing contexts.

CLI attends to the intersectional and fluid identities of Indigenous Latinxs and considers the agency of Indigenous Latinxs in contending with colonization and oppression in multiple contexts through which they migrate. With its explicit focus on intersectionality, migration movements, overlapping colonial histories, and the myriad ways of being Indigenous, CLI can be considered 'a lens for understanding the ways Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class and other intersecting oppressions are produced over multiple contexts' (p. 130). CLI's engagement with and attention to the relationships between multiple Indigeneities, migration movements, intersecting oppressions, and changing societal contexts make it a useful framework for analyzing the return migration experiences of Indigenous migrant youth from Guatemala.

The Indigenous Maya of Guatemala and their migration to the United States

Return migration is perhaps the most recent example of a long history of forced displacement suffered by the Indigenous Maya of modern-day Guatemala. Like many Indigenous people throughout the world, the Maya of Guatemala were colonized by European settlers, namely the Spanish. While the Maya fought to preserve their culture and way of life, the Spanish employed new tactics of social control, attempting to pacify the Maya people with violence and religion, and implementing an *encomienda* system that legalized the enslavement of Indigenous Maya people by the Spanish elite (Lovell et al., 2013). Despite these events, Maya culture survived, with many people secretly practicing native religions and speaking Indigenous languages till today.

A renewed attempt to eradicate the Maya people in Guatemala emerged in the early 1960s, during Guatemala's brutal 36-year civil war. With US backing, hundreds of thousands of Maya people were systematically killed and tortured, and disappeared at the hands of the Guatemalan military during this time, constituting genocide (Álvarez and FLACSO, 2012). During the internal conflict, thousands of Guatemalans, many of them Indigenous, sought safety in Mexico and the United States. These northward emigration flows from Guatemala have steadily climbed since the 1970s (Jonas and Rodríguez, 2015).

Peace Accords formally ending the conflict were signed in 1996; however, lasting impacts of this genocide still resonate throughout Guatemalan society, manifested, in part, in

the country's persistent social instability, extreme poverty, poor health and education systems, continued state-sanctioned violence, and political impunity and corruption. These are all contributing factors to the country's current emigration rate of −1.9 per 1000 inhabitants (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2017). Today, an estimated 1 million Guatemalans reside in the United States, many of them undocumented, and thousands more arrive each year (International Organization for Migration, 2015).

Compounding the national context that pushes many Guatemalans to migrate, Indigenous Guatemalans 'are emigrating from historical settings of their racial subjugation and subordination, in which they were relegated to the lower stratum of Guatemala' (Jonas and Rodríguez, 2015: 18). This is reflected in country statistics that reveal a starkly unequal distribution of resources and social ills, with the Indigenous population being severely disadvantaged when compared to *Ladinos* of European descent.

Return migration and civil society responses in Guatemala

With increased policing of the borders and stronger directives for immigration law enforcement, Guatemalan migrants are being detained and deported at alarming rates, from both the United States and Mexico. Since 2015, nearly 250,000 Guatemalan nationals have been forcibly returned home; of the 45,792 Guatemalan migrants deported between January and September of 2017, 2890 were unaccompanied children, and 63 percent of those (1820) were Indigenous (International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Upon arrival, youth are placed in family detention centers for an average of 1 month or until they can be released to sponsors, usually relatives. Because Guatemala does not share a border with the United States, Guatemalan youth are guaranteed the opportunity to make a case for asylum or other forms of immigration protection through an immigration hearing. This means youth are placed in removal proceedings until a judge decides their case, which can take years. During this time, youth have no access to court-appointed lawyers and no legal status in the United States (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2016: 8–9). Many of their cases for protection are denied, or youth experience 'detention fatigue' during the long and complex legal battle, and give up. For Guatemalan migrants, this means living in a detention center while awaiting an indeterminate length of time to board one of six flights per week to Guatemala's military airport (Shoichet, 2017).

In response to the number of youth being deported, assistance programs for returned youth have been established in Guatemala. These programs are geared mainly toward reintegrating Indigenous migrant youth into their communities of origin through a family-systems approach. However, the reach of these programs is extremely limited due to budgetary and geographic constraints. Three existing programs are generally able to provide long-term support services to approximately 20 youth per organization per year.

Method

The current study employed a critical ethnographic approach to fieldwork and interviews with service providers working with RIMY in Guatemala (Madison, 2019). Critical ethnography attends to power in its analysis, interrogating and challenging social inequalities as a means of advocating the emancipation of marginalized groups (Brown and Strega, 2005; Madison, 2019; May, 1997), and is considered an anti-oppressive approach to social research, recommended for use with Indigenous populations (Brown and Strega, 2005). These features of critical ethnography are in line with CLI, and form the basis for the choice of this methodological approach.

Sampling and respondents

A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to identify relevant organizations for ethnographic observations, and key informants from interviews were drawn from those organizations. After receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval to conduct the research, I recruited and interviewed nine key informants, eight of whom work in service provision in Guatemala and one who is based in the United States but makes frequent trips to Guatemala for program oversight. All had knowledge of and experience working with RIMY and their families in programs focused on their reintegration. As reintegration over time, not initial repatriation, was the focus of this research, service providers at state-run and not-for-profit temporary shelters were excluded.

Data and analysis

Data were collected during fieldwork in Guatemala in the summer of 2017. Interviews lasted 90 to 120 minutes, and took place at the respondent's place of work. I gathered ethnographic observations at each organization either before or after the interview, and in some cases, during additional days spent at the organization. Interviews were semi-structured and centered around several lines of inquiry related to general post-deportation experiences of youth, bio-psycho-social needs upon arrival, factors that cause variation in experiences (gender, length of time in the United States), and challenges in the reintegration process. Interviews maintained flexibility in order to follow up on significant lines of inquiry and allow respondents to direct the interview to added areas of focus. In the interviews, respondents were asked to focus both on specific stories and experiences from their work with RIMY, and on general experiences in aiding RIMY and their families.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded with the respondent's consent and later transcribed verbatim, preserving the interview language. Respondents in Guatemala all spoke Spanish, and sometimes an additional Mayan language. I am a fluent Spanish speaker and was able to conduct all in-country interviews in person and in Spanish, eliminating the need for an interpreter or a translator. I conducted one additional interview in the United States by phone with a program administrator whose work area includes Guatemala, and that interview was in English.

As proscribed by the ethnographic methodology, I began transcription and preliminary analysis while still in the field. This allowed for an iterative process whereby emergent themes guided further data collection and allowed for discussion of developing thematic concepts with respondents during subsequent interviews. I preserved the interviewees' language throughout the analysis process in order to maintain their choice of words and phrasing. Only the quotes included in this article have been translated. I conducted reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts and fieldnotes, a flexible approach to identifying and analyzing patterns within data that allows codes to organically arise from the data and evolve over time (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analytic approach proceeded in six phases, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), detailed in Table 1.

Procedural rigor

Interview transcripts and preliminary findings were sent to interview respondents for member-checking. Respondents verified findings, adding to procedural rigor. Because researcher positionality can influence data collection and analysis, it is important to note that I am a White, female researcher, and not of Indigenous descent. I lived in the Highlands region of Guatemala for 2 years, working with Indigenous youth through a local non-profit organization, and have a commitment to Indigenous rights and autonomy. In order to reflect upon the ways that my own positionality may have influenced the research process, I recorded reflexive memos throughout my time in the field.

Table 1. Data analysis procedures.

Step	Braun and Clark description	Procedure for this study
1	Familiarize yourself with the data	I listened to and transcribed all recordings, noting down initial themes while in the field.
2	Generating initial codes	I began with several a priori codes based on my initial ideas from phase 1, and then applied as many additional codes as needed as I analyzed each transcript. Due to limited availability of resources while in the field, open coding was conducted using Excel to organize data. A preliminary coding scheme was developed in Excel, with portions of transcripts representative of each code copied and pasted into a spreadsheet. Upon return to the United States, data were imported into NVivo qualitative analysis software and re-coded using the existing coding scheme, while also allowing additional codes to inductively emerge during this second round of analysis.
3	Searching for themes	When the entire data set had been coded twice, I refined my analysis, sorting the codes I generated into potential themes and collating nodes and sub-nodes into those themes. Conceptual mapping was used during this phase to visualize how best to organize codes into themes and sub-themes.
4	Reviewing themes	Potential themes were reviewed, examining the data supporting each theme and relationships between themes. Some themes were collapsed into one another at this stage, while others were broken into separate themes or sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes were then considered in relation to the data set as a whole, and some additional extracts of transcripts were coded or re-coded into the emerging thematic scheme.
5	Defining and naming themes	At this stage, themes were named, and I wrote analytic memos for each theme and sub-theme, informed by the CLI theoretical framework. The interpretive approach followed a constructionist epistemology, seeking 'to theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 85).
6	Producing the report	In this phase, I chose specific quotes to represent each theme and sub-theme, established an organizational flow for the write-up of the data, and prepared to present and discuss the results that follow.

CLI: Critical Latinx Indigeneities.

Procedural rigor was also maintained throughout the study following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for establishing trustworthiness of findings.

Findings

Upon arrival at their communities of origin after detention and deportation, RIMY experience a unique set of challenges and strengths as they reunite with their families and attempt to reintegrate into their communities of origin. In analyzing service providers' perspectives on the reintegration experiences of RIMY in Guatemala, four main themes were identified and considered in relation to the CLI framework. These are identity negotiation (with sub-themes 'Indigenous identities' and

'returned migrant identities'), trauma and its consequences, institutional and internalized oppression, and decolonization. Extracts across at least seven of the nine interviews were coded within each of the identified themes.

Identity negotiation

Indigenous identities. For Indigenous youth, Indigeneity is a pervasive and dynamic layer of experience that shapes distinctive reintegration conditions and requires complex negotiation strategies. The negotiation and re-negotiation of Indigenous identity during the migration and reintegration process was a common theme in interviews, a process that is ongoing and contextually specific. As one respondent explained regarding the negotiation of Indigenous identity outside and within the Guatemalan context,

> If you're Christian, and you like *Barca* [Barcelona soccer team], and you listen to Mexican music, the moment that you cross the border from Guatemala to Mexico, you become *Chiapeneco* or *Oaxaqueno* [from the Mexican state of Chiapas or Oaxaca, respectively], or from the state of Guerrero. Because all of the Guatemalans over there in the United States acquire a Mexican identity. And they think they're Mexican, and when they return here to Guatemala, they realize they're not in Mexico anymore.

While this quote demonstrates the erasure of Indigenous identities in the Mexican context, it also points to Indigenous migrant youth's agency in re-negotiating their Indigeneity as a survival strategy in a new country. As another respondent noted, Indigenous Guatemalans are migrating out of a national context of discrimination against Indigenous peoples, so re-negotiating their Indigeneity can be socially advantageous:

> So really, for many of them, migration has been a way to overcome discrimination . . . The problem for many of them is that they don't take into account what they have to leave behind. And what they have to leave is, on the one hand, their land, their family, and also, their identity. So, they go to a context where perhaps racism isn't quite as directed toward their identity as an Indigenous person, but there is still some denial of ethnicity that takes place, and a lack of spaces that nourish and value that ethnicity in the United States.

As this respondent explained, re-negotiating one's Indigenous identity, which has advantages and disadvantages, is a common feature of Indigenous youth migrants' experiences.

Respondents frequently noted identity changes that occurred as a result of migration that simultaneously influence their presentation of self as it relates to markers of Indigeneity. One respondent described,

> They have the need to process this with somebody, to process what it means, how they've changed, how they've changed as a result of their migration and what it means to be coming back home . . . And sometimes that looks like, you know, prior to migration, they come from an Indigenous family, they wear the *traje* [traditional dress], and maybe during migration they were made to leave that, and they decided they no longer want to use it, and what does that look like? Or maybe they didn't use it and now they want to.

Language is another important marker of Indigenous identity in Guatemala, where most Indigenous people speak or understand at least one of the country's 23 native languages. Loss of their Indigenous language is one of many possible changes returned youth experience as a result of migration. As one informant shared,

> Many of them have been there 4 or 6 months, and sometimes up to a year. And so, when they come back, it's strange for them to return to their house, their community, but it's also strange for their families because they see that they've changed a lot. Right now, they sent me information about a girl who is returning after being there for a year. So, she's practically forgotten her maternal language.

This quote reveals the intersectionality of these youth's identities as Indigenous and as migrants.

Returned migrant identities. Respondents also conveyed that returned migrant youth must negotiate their identities while contending with stereotypes about migrants and more specifically, deportees. One informant explained:

> In Guatemala, there is a strong imaginary of the deportee . . . Deported migrants, adult men and women and youth, those who arrive by air, are received in processing centers at the Guatemalan Air Force base . . . That sends a message to them, that they're not even received in the international civilian airport. They're received by a group of soldiers from the Air Force.

Returned youth must confront the persistent stereotype of returning migrants as criminals, sometimes within their own communities. As another respondent shared,

> For example, [name of young man], he was just a kid when he left. When he returned to his community, they thought he was a gang member. Because he was young. So, you return when you're older, and the people don't know you anymore in your community of origin. So, many of these people don't want to live in their community of origin anymore, instead they seek out cities like the capital . . . to establish themselves.

As this informant shared, upon return, some youth choose to migrate internally, to more urban areas where perhaps they feel better able to live out the identities they've negotiated for themselves. Another respondent shared that RIMY also face tensions within their own families and themselves, due to their identities as 'deportees' and the associated burden of debt that identity brings with it:

> And there is shame. Obviously, the deportees blame themselves. They don't want to be photographed, they don't want to be studied. They're ashamed in front of their own families because of the great concern about the economic costs they have to face.

As these respondents related, RIMY negotiate multiple shifting identities throughout the migration and reintegration process.

Trauma and its consequences

Many service providers emphasized the severity of the trauma that RIMY experienced prior to returning to Guatemala, and the lasting impact of those traumatic experiences as they attempted to reintegrate into their families and communities. One participant explained the consequences RIMY experienced as a result of the trauma of being held in detainment in the United States or Mexico:

> In a shelter, it's a confinement, and so it's not easy. In the shelter, these young people aren't going to play games, they're detained, and they have many stories of things they saw there. They have passed many nights crying. We have cases of young women who have been raped. So, there's a period of shock when they return due to many factors – the shock of not being confined anymore. Sometimes, up to a certain

> point, they look for that confinement, they close themselves off in silence or they literally confine themselves to their beds . . . So, those are the first effects, but it can last months. Sometimes, they're in a place, and it reminds them of the shelter and that feeling of being confined. Because those shelters are small and cramped, some of them are literally a jail cell.

Another respondent shared that many RIMY exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress during the reintegration process, as a result of the traumatic experiences they've had during the migration process:

> They experience post-traumatic stress, typical of these traumas, where people are emigrating and are caught and detained and finally released. The psychosocial implications are really serious, the health impacts . . . chronic migraines, losing sleep, all of the symptoms this disease brings with it. Difficulties concentrating and difficulties being able to work.

Due to the traumatic experiences RIMY have survived and the lasting consequences of those traumas, service providers working with this population came to realize that reintegration is a long-term process. As one interviewee described,

> Early on, it became clear that [. . .] because of the kinds of experiences that they had lived, the traumas of migrating alone, coming to the U.S., and not being able to stay, and whether that seems like a failure or however that is perceived by the youth and their families, it became apparent through all of those things that a few months was not at all enough to get a youth reintegrated into their family, let alone into their community . . .

Thus, contending with the psychological impacts of many forms of trauma – separation, detainment, and in some cases, physical or sexual violence – is part of the reintegration process for RIMY.

Institutional and internalized oppression

Interviewees revealed that the reintegration experience for RIMY is also tied up with oppression, both institutional and internalized. Institutional oppression 'is when stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination are expressed – whether intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, and overtly or covertly – through society's policies, laws, regulations, assumptions, standards, cultural norms, and practices' (David and Derthik, 2017: 83), whereas internalized oppression 'is when the oppression that permeates the environment is able to seep into oppressed individuals who, in turn, begin to think, feel, and behave in biased ways toward themselves and their own group' (p. 86). Both forms of oppression are defining features of the reintegration experience for RIMY, according to service providers working with this population

Institutional oppression. In Guatemala, societal norms and policies have, for centuries, reflected the cultural values and identities of the Spanish colonizers. This institutional oppression persists up to the present day, where it is evident in the lack of infrastructure and economic development in the rural areas primarily inhabited by Indigenous peoples. Many respondents shared how the government's neglect of Indigenous-inhabited areas impacts RIMY's reintegration experiences. One informant emphasized the difficulties that RIMY experience in accessing needed social services and educational opportunities:

> Access to services is huge. Huge. But the de-centralization of services, you know, having government services available in the municipalities, in the departments and the municipalities where Indigenous

> families live, so they wouldn't have to travel 4, 7, or even 3 hours to get an evaluation or an assessment from a social worker, from a government-sponsored social worker who might be able to connect you to something . . . having access to services in these communities, and to know about them, and to get patched into them, seems like the most basic first step that isn't happening . . . One of the big things that I've seen through this project is the number of kids that live in an area where schools are just not accessible. Where anything beyond primary school will require a 2-hour journey, and that just seems like a huge barrier. If you can't even get a basic secondary education where you live, then your opportunities are, by default, very limited.

Another respondent commented on the persistent poverty in these areas, and how disconnected and inaccessible they are due to institutionalized oppression:

> When we arrive with a family, we see their economic need. We see the need and the way in which they're managing to survive. And they're completely forgotten about – all of the information about how the government works, they don't have that information. And part of it is, in these areas, there are no schools, there is no electricity, there are no highways, there is no way to reach the families by car.

Still another informant focused on the lack of employment opportunities in RIMY's local communities, directly connecting this situation to the government's neoliberal agenda and continued migration:

> The same people [in government] as always are pushing their own agenda, and it's an agenda of neoliberal competition. It's the same as the 80s. And it's going to end up with the same effects we see now, pushing more people out of the country. And so that's on top of the racism and discrimination that the [Indigenous] population faces. And there's also land-grabbing for the lands where they live. So, there are no employment opportunities, there are no educational opportunities in those areas. Why? Because it serves them [the government]. It's easier to manipulate people when they don't have resources.

This quote shows how reintegration into one's native community is complicated by the institutionalized oppression evident in rural areas.

Respondents also described how RIMY experience institutional oppression manifested in educational, governmental, and social service systems that operate only in the country's official language of Spanish, and according to European cultural norms. While Indigenous youth usually have at least basic Spanish-speaking abilities, Spanish-language ability and literacy among older generations varies considerably. Indigenous families cannot count on government offices or civil society organizations to have linguistically competent staff, which makes connecting to existing resources unduly burdensome. One respondent explained the language barriers parents often face when going to receive their children:

> We explain to the parents what the [return] process is like, because they aren't familiar with it, and sometimes they're very nervous, or some of them don't speak Spanish. So, we have to say, 'Look, if there is someone who speaks Spanish, have them go with you if they can', and when it's time for the interview, we request that the psychologist allow that person to enter to interpret.

RIMY also feel the effects of institutionalized oppression during the reintegration process in the pursuit of higher education. Many RIMY wish to continue their education upon return, but have difficulty doing so in Spanish. As another interviewee related, 'We were with him every day for tutoring and reviewing, because of the language. He speaks the *Ixil* language and this was the first time he was having to learn in Spanish'.

Beyond language abilities, some social and educational services lack the cultural understanding needed in order to work effectively with Indigenous people. One informant stated,

> There are many initiatives that work on migration, but they go against the culture in the way they work with [Indigenous peoples]. It's something that sometimes confuses us because we understand that there is a lack of cultural understanding. But sometimes, it feels intentionally against the Indigenous ethnicity.

A lack of cultural congruence is also felt within the educational system, in which the plans of study available are not aligned with the cultural and contextual realities of Indigenous youth. As one informant related,

> They have put in place some training programs in coordination with INTECAP [Central American Institute for Training and Technology]. In their work reports, what they tell you is that so many people were trained, and that's true, but when you look into the details of what course they were given, you see – a mushroom cultivation course but there is nothing available on marketing. There is no basic accounting course. There's a course for women to make balloon arrangements in an agricultural community that primarily grows peaches and other grains.

Similarly, another respondent noted,

> They stop wanting to go to school because they don't see any use in it. In the places where they live, there are no sources of employment. So, the question is, how to create them, but how to create them based on what there is in their communities.

The lack of linguistically and culturally competent educational and social services for returned migrant youth and their families is an added barrier to youth's successful reintegration.

Internalized oppression. In Guatemala, oppression of Indigenous peoples is evident in many facets of everyday life, and RIMY often internalize this racial-ethnic bias toward Indigeneity. A bias toward Western culture, over Indigenous culture, is perhaps more explicit within the US context, where assimilation of Indigenous peoples and immigrants has long been used as a subordination strategy. Exposure to the cultural values and norms in the United States can lead RIMY to believe their own cultural norms and values are inferior. One respondent vividly explained common attitudes of RIMY who have internalized the idea that US culture is superior to Indigenous culture:

> There is no cultural pride. 'I'd rather go to Banana Republic, or I'd rather go to Sears, or I prefer to eat my Domino's Pizza on Tuesdays because it's two for one'. So, I really feel that one of the worst problems migrants have is adaptation to North American culture . . . Basically, they love the culture of the United States. They come back to Guatemala and they keep shopping at Wal-Mart.

Another informant described the challenge of assisting RIMY to overcome such negative identity associations:

> It's difficult to show them how to understand that Western culture, as much as it is pushed on top of you, isn't better. And that's really complicated, because then these 'push' ideas start to enter their heads. 'Maybe I'm poor because I'm Indigenous. So, maybe I have to rid myself of what makes me Indigenous to not be poor'.

Both institutional and internalized oppression are common features of the reintegration experience for RIMY, and systemic issues that service providers working with this population are seeking to redress.

Decolonization

To support youth in negotiating their identities, healing from trauma, and combating institutional and internalized oppression, service providers conveyed that they engage youth in decolonization processes – 'the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches', which involves both 'dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics' and 'valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being' (Cull et al., 2018: 7). Many respondents described the importance of the latter practices in supporting RIMY during their reintegration process. As one interviewee related,

> What they need to be given is a historical education of how we've been suffering since colonization, and we still live in relation to colonization. How to decolonize ourselves, understanding the strategies that all governments have used, and up to now, another of their strategies is emigration. That's the ultimate strategy . . . but there is no investment in the young people at all. There is no field cultivating knowledge of all of this wisdom that the Indigenous people have, all of that knowledge to develop, so that the people live autonomously, to not live in this misery, but instead, to continue developing ourselves as a Mesoamerican civilization.

Similarly, another interviewee explained decolonizing practices as a key feature of his organization's work with RIMY:

> First, you have to get them historical memory. Second step, we have to talk about the context of globalization and migration . . . And the third step is the Maya worldview that we have . . . What we want to do is share a history of pride, a history of bloodshed that can also become art.

Thus, several organizations working with RIMY seek to raise their critical consciousness through decolonizing conversations aimed at helping them to understand their history and re-value Indigenous knowledge.

Service providers not only see a great need to engage RIMY in decolonizing practices such as these, but also find great hope in this work as a path to successful reintegration for RIMY. As one informant shared,

> In their own language, they're brave enough to express that joy, to show their happiness about the fact that they're coming to know what they really are, what their culture really is. And that culture isn't just about customs, but everything that makes up your everyday life . . . That is the success we have.

This quote speaks to the resilience that RIMY demonstrate, and the success service providers find in supporting these young people as they decolonize themselves.

Discussion

This study utilized a critical ethnographic approach and CLI framework to examine the experiences of Indigenous migrant youth returned to Guatemala. These youth navigate a complex reintegration process that merits scholarly attention and bears implications for global social work practice and migration policy. Using a CLI framework, Indigenous youth being forcibly returned to the land from which they fled can be considered a policy of exclusion of Indigenous peoples, 'predicated on denying Indigenous peoples the right to live in their communities of origin or to create new communities' (Blackwell et al., 2017: 128). It may also be a turning point in the migration cycle,

as depending on their ability to reintegrate, returned migrants may decide to emigrate once again. Yet we know little about the reintegration experiences of returned Indigenous youth migrants – a gap this study begins to fill in order to inform best practices and policies for meaningfully supporting this population. While RIMY are a diverse group, and their experiences vary, this study identified several common features of the reintegration experience for these youth, from the perspective of service providers working with this population.

First, these youth have multiple, intersecting, and contextually shaped identities that they negotiate and re-negotiate during the migration and reintegration processes. Study informants shared about youth's experiences negotiating their Indigenous identities and (or in conjunction with) returned migrant identities upon return to Guatemala. From a CLI framework, this finding sheds light on 'how indigeneity is defined and constructed across multiple countries and at times, across overlapping colonialities' (p. 126).

Indigenous youth migrants are constantly negotiating and re-negotiating their Indigeneity throughout the process of emigration, return, and reintegration. These youth migrants have had to confront and traverse 'hybrid hegemonies' – the interface and hybridization of Guatemalan and US hegemonic racial hierarchies (p. 128) – which necessitates identity negotiation and demonstrates Indigenous youth migrants' agency in enacting multiple ways of being Indigenous. When Indigenous youth emigrate from Guatemala, they often become identified with broader national (Guatemalan), regional (Central American or Latino), or experience-based (migrant) identity categories in different contexts. Thus, by circumstance or by choice, identity negotiation is a prevailing feature of the reintegration experience for Indigenous youth migrants returned to Guatemala, who have constructed and embodied many ways of being Indigenous, and continue to do so upon return to their communities of origin.

Indigenous migrant youth also must contend with the consequences of traumas they have experienced during the migration and return process. Family separation, detainment, physical and sexual violence, and other potentially traumatic events are common experiences for youth migrants, and coping with the sequelae of these traumas is a common feature in their reintegration process. Grappling with the perceived failure of return migration can be considered a form of structural and political violence that may be traumatic in and of itself.

CLI theorizes that Indigeneities interact with changing contexts, and intersect with other oppressions. This study found that Indigenous youth migrants returned to Guatemala experience institutional and internalized oppression as they attempt to reintegrate into their country of birth. Service providers emphasized how racism, discrimination, and logics of erasure directed at Indigenous peoples have been institutionalized in Guatemala, as evidenced by systematic efforts to dispossess them of their lands, disconnect them from vital services, and deny them access to educational and employment opportunities. As a result, Indigenous migrant youth face great challenges in securing needed resources that would support their reintegration, with only a few organizations making concerted efforts to help this population meet their unique needs.

Service providers also shared the often-subconscious psychological experience of internalized oppression with which returned Indigenous youth migrants struggle upon return. Narratives of anti-Indigeneity and racial subordination in the Guatemalan and US contexts often leave their mark on the psyches of these young people. During their reintegration process, Indigenous youth migrants often grapple with negative conclusions about what it means to be Indigenous, and experience feelings of shame and/or blame with regard to their Indigenous cultural roots.

Directly counteracting internalized oppression, service providers and returned Indigenous youth migrants are engaging in decolonization projects that aim to re-value and revitalize Indigenous historical memory, cultural knowledge and ways of being. Decolonization is seen by many service providers as a vital part of the reintegration process, allowing Indigenous youth to heal from not

only their experiences as migrants, but the intergenerational and historical traumas the Indigenous people of Guatemala have survived.

Limitations

This study reveals important findings that increase understandings of the reintegration experiences of RIMY in one national context – Guatemala. While these findings may have relevance to other settings and contexts, they are specific to the Guatemalan context and should not be generalized beyond the population of focus. Further research should examine the reintegration experiences of Indigenous peoples in other national contexts. In addition, future research should aim to include youth's voices, as only they are able to provide firsthand knowledge of their experiences.

A small sample number of nine respondents were interviewed to shed light on the research questions of this study; while saturation was reached with these respondents, additional respondents may have been able to provide new information. It should also be noted that a potential favorability bias exists, as respondents may have felt the need to present their respective organizations and their own work within them in the best possible light. Furthermore, the service providers interviewed could only speak to the experiences of returned migrant youth who receive reintegration support through their programs, thus there is a potential bias in terms of whose experiences are included (i.e. youth in the more favorable position of receiving assistance vs those who do not).

Implications and conclusion

The findings of this study have several implications for social work practice and policy that span borders. In the United States, culturally responsive services for migrant youth in detention can be of assistance. An important first step is to ensure that the ethno-cultural backgrounds of Indigenous immigrants are recognized, rather than erased through national or pan-Latino labels (Casanova et al., 2016). To fail to take racial and ethnic identities into account in assessments of youth's strengths and needs is to neglect a central feature of their realities.

It is also important to offer reintegration assistance programs in countries of origin that cater to the unique needs and strengths of Indigenous migrants, as several community-based organizations in Guatemala have done. Increased support for these programs is needed in order to extend their reach. Furthermore, there is a need for linguistically competent mental health workers who can treat youth suffering from trauma-related symptoms; thus, greater access to training in mental health fields is needed for Indigenous adults interested in pursuing such careers in Guatemala. Organizations in Guatemala also play a vital role as advocates for the migrant and Indigenous populations, pressuring the government to assume greater responsibility for returned migrants. More international advocates are needed to join these organizations in lobbying for government accountability, especially as relates to the institutionalized oppression Indigenous youth and their families face.

Finally, this study has shown that decolonization is an important path forward for RIMY. These efforts are being led by Indigenous community leaders, traditional healers, and service providers in Guatemala. Decolonization supports youth in feeling re-connected to their cultural heritage, community, and lands during the reintegration process. Engaging youth in decolonization processes is a strengths-based approach that directly addresses many of the common features of the reintegration process identified in this study, such as identity negotiation, internalized oppression, and trauma. Reintegration programs that emphasize decolonization should continue to be developed, supported, and evaluated to better inform the evidence base, and Indigenous people should be integrally included in this work. This study underscores the need for Indigenous responses to social

work, as advocated by scholars in this area (Gray et al., 2013; Nygård and Saus, 2016). The perspectives of service providers who participated in this study reveal that it is through decolonization that Indigenous youth returned to Guatemala are finally returning to their roots.

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