According to a company flyer that is probably being handed out on the UNAM campus and the streets of Mexico City right now by Teletech—a transnational call center based in Denver, Colorado that mainly serves U.S.-based companies with English-speaking tech and client support—“The Top Five Reasons to Choose Teletech” are:

1. “I receive great pay for my work.”
2. “I've grown professionally.”
3. “I get rewarded for my effort.”
4. “I can be myself.”
5. “It's a great place to work.”

Based on several interviews with Teletech and other call center employees who are also return migrants from the United States, I would like to slightly modify this flyer so that it reads:

1. “It could be a lot worse, a lot of people make a lot less. You can live on your own with this money.”
2. “The job is okay, a little frustrating sometimes...it’s pretty, pretty repetitive.”
3. “I’ve never had a job with paid vacation, which will be nice, cuz I don’t know what that's like.”
4. “I feel like an outcast. The only time I am comfortable is when I am in work. I walk in there and it's like you're in the States.”
5. “Now we are all family.”

In “Quiénes son los retornados? Apuntes sobre el migrante retornado en el México contemporáneo” (2011), Liliana Rivera Sánchez describes the recent shift in return migration to Mexico from a predominance of rural, retirement age migrants to an increase in returning migrants “in full productive age, between 20 and 45 years old, men as well as women...people with migratory experience who have returned to Mexico and who need to find work and re-insert themselves socially” (translation mine,
Since the passage of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act by the U.S. Congress in 1996, generation 1.5 immigrant males in the urban centers of the United States have been increasingly criminalized and targeted for deportation. Furthermore, as the children of the massive waves of immigrant laborers who left Mexico in the eighties and nineties come of age in the United States, many are rejecting the second-class status that the segmented undocumented economy demands for them and their parents in the U.S.. Upon graduation, a significant number of young men and women are making the difficult decision to return to a country they barely know but where ostensibly they will have rights and access denied them in the United States. While Rivera Sanchéz found that many of these young people find precarious employment in Mexico City's informal economy, the transnational call centers are actively inserting themselves as an alternative option within the economically vulnerable climate to which these young people return.

To date, there is no systemic study of the numbers of deported and returning young people working in call centers throughout Mexico, but my qualitative research through interviews and participant-observation in Mexico City since March 2012, as well as contacts and conversations with returning youth in Guadalajara, suggest that there is a significant presence of deported and returning youth as call center employees in urban areas. In April 2012, a manager at Teletech estimated that about 30% of around 1600 Mexico City employees had experienced deportation from the United States. In this presentation, I describe the resilience and opportunities created by the globalized telemarketing industry within the experience of return, as well as the economic and social vulnerabilities upon which the industry structurally depends. Here, Teletech serves as a case study of globalized capitalism as it incorporates and affects the lives and prospects of returning and deported youth. I also present the ways that the heavy recruitment of near native-English speakers by these call centers has led to a dynamic
and complex web of transnational subcultures that coexist within and beyond the call center itself. In the end, that which is produced and reproduced in the call center extends far beyond the high-tech consumer information systems and the infinitely closed loops of consumer-telemarketer feedback that fuel the growing industry worldwide.

(=> SLIDE NINE: CALL CENTERS IN MEXICO, SANTANDER/QUERETERO) According to Jordy Micheli Thirión's study “El sector de call centers: Estructura y tendencias. Apuntes sobre la situación de México” published in Frontera Norte in 2012, “between 2000 and 2010, the call centers based in Mexico and dedicated to foreign markets grew from 8,631 to 18,701 locations—a 116% increase” (translation mine, 163). Growing cities like Guadalajara and Guanajuato actively recruit the arrival of these transnational companies as they offer employment to young people: returning immigrants as well as those who never left Mexico but have studied advanced English in Mexico's private and public schools. Teletech’s online website reports that the company currently employs approximately 44,000 people around the world who complete 3.5 million interactions with customers each day. Operating call centers in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Ireland, Mexico, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the company's call centers in Mexico are located in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Leon. The Mexico City call center clients include DISH Satellite Television and Time Warner Cable.

Thirión focuses on telemarketing as an exemplary model of postindustrial global capital wherein the service economy is linked to mass production in the form of call centers, or “factories for communication and information management” that depend upon “a new kind of worker”: the tele-operator (translation mine, “Los Call centers y los nuevos trabajos del siglo XXI” 2007, 49). Because the salaries of the tele-operators represent 60% of the operating costs of a typical call center and the fast-paced nature of the job requires language and quick-learning skills, the industry has quickly become very sophisticated at recruiting young university graduates in countries with low base wages.
In Mexico City, Teletech hires returning near-native English speakers with a minimum of a U.S. high school education at a starting wage of 48 pesos an hour.

(⇒ SLIDE TEN: SECOND TELETECH FLYER) Thus, the call center job has become a viable and important employment option for young people who formally worked in the segmented, informal economy in the United States, and who upon return find themselves limited by the severely suppressed earning potential of the informal economy in Mexico. Returning youth also struggle to successfully complete the long and complicated process to validate their U.S. studies in Mexico, which bars them from many other possible job options and from applying to many universities. For those young people who made the difficult decision to return, employment as a tele-operator is the kind of entry-level formal sector job which they were barred from obtaining due to their immigration status in the United States. For those who have experienced deportation, the call center job becomes a means of immediate if precarious stability upon which to begin re-building after the trauma of expulsion.

Teletech advertises a monthly salary between 8000 and 9000 pesos for full time employees, indeed making it possible to move out of an aunt's or cousin's home and “live on your own.” One young woman notes that she makes more at the call center than her cousin who is a nurse with a college degree. The job also includes a variety of formal benefits including IMMS, IFONOVIT, and paid vacation after a year. There is a cafeteria with a food stipend, a computer lab, and a gym. Furthermore, during periodic breaks and a half hour paid lunch break, the young people congregate outside of the call center in groups, and, among the five in-depth interviews I completed with former or actual call center employees, they all described the moment they started working at the call center as an important realization that they were not alone as “Americanized” Mexicans in Mexico City.

Teletech heavily recruits English-speakers—and preferably English-speakers without an accent—via ads on public transportation, television commercials, and teams of recruitment employees, or “talent acquisition” who stand on corners across the city handing out flyers and signing up potential
employees for interviews. One participant reports being told about the Teletech jobs at the Mexico City government's Atención a la Ciudadanía offices. The above-quoted manager suggested that in 2011 the company experienced almost 100% turnover in its Mexico City location—the company is constantly hiring. The job is repetitive and intense, with little opportunity for advancement. Low performance, tardiness, or misconduct are grounds for a quick dismissal. What is more, the company does not need to make a longterm investment in its entry level employees because the position requires minimal training and depends largely on the skills that the potential employees bring with them. The call center's ability to absorb labor quickly is a key element of the business model, as the industry can then respond to high turnover and even move locations across the globe in search of the most favorable economic and cultural conditions. For now, the substantial return migration of generation 1.5 migrants is demonstrably a key factor in the call center's model for success in Latin America.

(=> SLIDE ELEVEN: TELETECH PHOTOS) The telemarketing industry provides a sophisticated example of the way the global economy depends upon local/transnational culture(s) even as it articulates new cultural formations. The internet-based technology and the hiring of return migrants articulates a simulacrum of geographical and cultural continuity via the language/accent of the ideal tele-operator. Thus, English language and U.S. American cultural fluency become a marketable skill for the returning migrant who regularly talks to people within the United States and yet who cannot legally set foot in the country he or she also calls home. Roland Robertson describes “the interpenetration of culture and economy” as the inevitable result of “the consumerist global capitalism of our time” that depends upon an ever increasing and more sophisticated “connection between globewide, universalistic supply and local particularistic demand” (Chambers 77). The cultural and linguistic presentation of the agent over the phone intentionally renders invisible the militarized border that divides the teleoperators from their families and friends in order to appeal to the “local particularistic demand” in the United States for locally-based tele-operators.
In fact, the participant-narrators describe a common conversation wherein their actual location within or without the territorial United States becomes the main inquiry during a call. (=> SLIDE TWELVE and THIRTEEN: NARRATOR QUOTES)

Sometimes, a lot of the times, you're going to run into, “Where are you located?” And you tell them, “We're located at the national help desk.” “Oh, where is that?” “Mexico City.” “What? I'm paying in dollars, I wanna talk to somebody who makes dollars.” And you're like, “I don't know how m'am, I'm sorry but I can't. I really physically can't transfer you to a local office. There's no number.” They'll get mad at you, but there is no one else.

and

“They'll ask me, oh where are you? Am I calling somewhere in the U.S.? And I'm like, 'no, you're calling Mexico City.' I always get the same reaction, 'oh my god, are you kidding me, really?'...I would never guess, your English is really good.' And we kind of get to talking: 'no, well, I grew up in the States.' 'And why are you back in Mexico?' That's when I come up with some lie, 'oh I don't know, I just wanted to come down here and visit and bla bla bla.'

Both participant-narrators described these calls with particular emotion. Whereas their language and cultural fluency function to craft a sense of a “local” and “locally racialized” connection that is fabricated via their accent (one young woman observed, “I talk like a white girl”), very real and poignant “local” connections can erupt in bittersweet moments of recognition and belonging over the course of a 4 to 8 minute tech support call. “When I lived in Kansas we had Time Warner also, and I had a lady call the other day who said 'I just moved from Overland Park,' and I was like, 'No way, that is where I used to live!' We’re supposed to take 4-8 minutes for a phone call, I talked to her for like 20 minutes....”

Following the definition of transnational spaces in the 2004 collection with the same title edited by Peter Jackson/Philip Crang/Claire Dwyer, wherein transnational spaces incorporate subjects “irrespective of their own migrant histories”, Teletech instantiates multiple transnational encounters between the tele-operators, the callers, the managers/human resource employees of the call center, and even the neighbors of the call center in the surrounding community who interact with the 1600 employees on a daily basis (2). (=> SLIDE FOURTEEN: PHOTOS OF CHURUBUSCO CALL
CENTER, TELE-OPERATORS) The call centers are creating a cultural and economic space where integration into Mexican society is facilitated and simultaneously limited by its transnational economic imperatives. On the one hand, the call centers are providing economic opportunity and social community in ways that government and civil society institutions are not. On the other hand, many of the young people I have talked with describe themselves in limbo, “just waiting”, or stuck. They have dreams of going to college, starting their own business, and/or returning to their friends and families in the United States. The presence of Latino gang activity, arms, alcohol, and drugs within the call center and in the surrounding streets—all of which are clearly associated with returning and deported call center employees by individuals within and without Teletech—bear witness to an alternative liminal space and youth subculture in which these young people are also finding some economic opportunity and social community.

(=> SLIDE FIFTEEN: FULL QUOTE) In Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language (1992), Paul Carter speculates upon “an authentically migrant perspective...based on the intuition that the opposition to here and there is itself a cultural construction, a consequence of thinking in terms of fixed entities and defining them oppositionally.” To follow such a migrant perspective, in the context of return for generation 1.5 immigrants,

might begin by rewarding movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world. The question would be, then, not how to arrive, but how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements; and the challenge would be how to notate such events, how to give them historical and social value (101).

What might it look like to “reward movement” and to value migration and return migration as a “mode of being” that is challenging, awkward, arguably unjust, and yet also, historically, culturally and socially valuable? Call centers like Teletech have identified the economic and cultural value of returning migrants in Mexican cities with remarkable sophistication. How might governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and local communities respond with the same embrace?