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## **“My Whole Life Is in The USA”: Dominican Deportees’ Experiences of Isolation, Precarity, and Resilience**

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### **Introduction**

In January of 2010, the first author of this chapter rode in a car with migration officials and military officers to the cargo area of the airport in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. When we arrived at the airport, a white, unmarked plane landed between two cargo delivery planes. The cargo planes were bringing bottles of water and other supplies for a relief mission to Haiti, which had just suffered a devastating earthquake. The white plane transported two US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) employees and 30 deportees. The imagery of the deportees arriving into the cargo area alongside plastic bottles of water from abroad speaks volumes about the perception of deportees as disposable.

One of the military officers boarded the plane and explained to the deportees the process they were about to undergo. He called them each by name and they got off the plane one by one onto a Dirección General de Migración (DGM) bus. The bus was normally used to transport prisoners, and thus had bars on the windows to prevent the passengers from escaping and bars shielding the driver from the passengers, in addition to the protection of several soldiers. The bus arrived at the Deportee Department of the DGM office in downtown Santo Domingo at 5pm. Once there, the deportees were escorted upstairs, and given their possessions – a change of clothes for some, books, photos, deodorant, and shoelaces for others.

A DGM officer asked the deportees to have a seat, and separated them into two groups – those deported for being undocumented and those deported on criminal grounds. It was a relatively small group of deportees – two women and 28 men. Eleven of the deportees had been deported for immigration reasons and the rest on criminal grounds. The non-criminal deportees were processed first. They went, one by one, to be fingerprinted and have their names and information recorded both by the DGM and the Departamento Nacional de Investigaciones (DNI) – the Dominican version of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. As there were only eleven non-criminal deportees, that process took about 40 minutes. The non-criminal deportees were

released once they were processed. Then, it was time to process those who were deported on criminal grounds. They went through the same process. Once that process was over, they were not released, but taken to the police station in Villa Juana, to be booked again by the police and the drug control division.

At the police station, officers fingerprint and photograph the deportees and create a file with information that includes their name, criminal record, and home address. Once this process is completed, deportees are released to a family member, who must bring a photocopy of their national ID card - the *cedula* - to prove that they are indeed related. Deportees are only released to family members, and are not permitted to leave the police station until a family member comes for them. The official in charge of processing deportees assured me they are not being held captive, but that this procedure is for their own safety.

Deportation from the United States to the Dominican Republic is thus a lengthy process, which begins with a deportee being released from a detention center in the United States. It often can take upwards of 24 hours for a deportee to get from the detention center to the airplane that will take them to their country of birth, due to them being transported on different buses between different detention centers to fill the bus that is destined to take them to the airplane. After flying for several hours, the process in the Dominican Republic can easily take another eight hours until the exhausted deportee is released to his family members.

In the Dominican Republic, once people deported on criminal grounds are released into the community, they must report once a month to the police station. At each visit, they meet with a psychologist and let them know what they have been up to. In addition, a police officer makes field visits to deportees' houses to find out how they are adapting. On those visits, they talk with the deportees, their family members, and their neighbors to find out how the deportee is managing. After six months of good behavior, deportees are eligible to receive their *carta de buena conducta* - their criminal record, which states "This person has not committed any crimes in the Dominican Republic, either before or after their deportation."

When people are deported on non-criminal grounds to the Dominican Republic, their deportation records are not made public. In contrast, those Dominicans deported on criminal grounds have their names recorded in a government database. To secure a job in the Dominican Republic, prospective employees are required to show their *carta de buena conducta* to employers. Deportees are not issued this document for the first six months they are in the country. And, once they

complete their six months, their *carta de buena conducta* indicates that they have been deported. There is no limitation on this reporting – the deportation shows up on the *carta de buena conducta* even years after the person has been deported.

Ethnographic research on Dominican deportees reveals that Dominican deportees face official as well as informal stigmatization upon arrival in their country of birth. Sociologists Yolanda Martin (2013) and David Brotherton and Luis Barrios (2011) argue that the traumatic experience of deportation, as well as stigmatization can lead some deportees to the use of drugs (Martin 2013) or even to suicide (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). The deportees discussed in those studies faced devaluation, dehumanization, and extreme marginalization. This chapter, in contrast, focuses on the survival mechanisms deportees use to get by in the Dominican Republic. We ask: How are deportees able to overcome the obstacles they face in order to continue their lives in their country of birth?

This chapter explores what happens after deportation as well as the challenges deportees face. Although most deportees despair upon arrival in their country of birth, those who have strong family ties in the Dominican Republic have an easier time. Deportees can survive by finding precarious and informal work, as they are nearly always locked out of the formal labor market. Their dreams of returning to the United States and reuniting with their families are often what keep them going.

### **What happens post-deportation?**

This chapter contributes to the small but growing literature on what happens to people after deportation. Ethnographic accounts of the post-deportation experience highlight several themes: 1) a sense of unfamiliarity with the land of citizenship, 2) profound despair about their future, 3) the salience of state power in the lives of deportees both in the United States and abroad, 4) the stigma associated with being a deportee, and 5) the desire to return to the United States (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Coutin 2010; Golash-Boza 2013; Headley 2006; Peutz. 2006; Schuster and Majidi 2013; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2007; 2004). The deportees discussed in this chapter share many of these experiences.

Scholarship on the reincorporation of deportees reveals that deportees often experience stigma and isolation upon return to their country of birth, due to negative stereotypes of deportees (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). Jamaicans blame deportees for the rise in violence in the capital city (Headley et al. 1997; Dominicans associate deportees with transnational drug circuits (Brotherton and Barrios 2011); Central

Americans link deportees with rising gang-related violence (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007).

The reception of persons deported from the United States to Latin American and Caribbean countries is highly dependent on the cultural context and laws of each country. The Brazilian government, for example, does not view deportees as a social problem, and deportees face relatively few obstacles to reintegration (Golash-Boza 2015). However, in other countries, such as the Dominican Republic, deportees face several difficulties in reintegrating in different areas of everyday life (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). The process of deportee reception is characterized by an upsetting and traumatic stigmatization, which leads those deportees to situations of extreme social exclusion. Their lack of access to *cartas de buena conducta* adds to a work context that is characterized by patronage and clientelism, making it even more difficult for deportees to reestablish themselves in the labor market (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). These issues raise the question of how deportees are able to survive, and this chapter draws from interviews with deported Dominicans to explore their survival strategies.

### **Methodology and Interview Sample**

The first author interviewed 47 deportees in the Dominican Republic between November 2009 and February 2010. Interviewees were located through a snowball sample with two primary points of entry into the community - a local research assistant and a deportee with many local connections. The second author returned to the Dominican Republic from June to July 2016 to conduct follow-up qualitative research.

All of the interviewees were male except one. Nearly all Dominican deportees are men, so the interview sample reflects the overall population. The first author sought out women to interview, but was unable to find more women willing to be interviewed. At the time of the interview, the youngest of the deportees was 31 years and the oldest was 66 years old. The average age was 48 years. Of the 47 deportees, 20 emigrated to the United States before the age of 21. It is important to clarify that some of them emigrated first to Puerto Rico and then to the mainland United States. The first deportee migrated in 1964 and the last in 2001. Although this migration spans multiple decades, 1988 and 1990 had the most migrations, with 5 and 6 cases, respectively. In the remaining years, migration is distributed more evenly, with one or two cases per year between 1964 and 2001. Overall, participants migrated to the US at an average of 22 years of age and lived there for an average of 16 years, suggesting that these deportees had developed strong ties to the United States. All 47 deportees claimed to

have social ties in the United States, and 36 said they had at least one child in the United States.

The participants' mode of entry into the United States was as follows: 2 entered under a false identity, 3 entered through Mexico, 5 were stowaways on a ship, 18 travelled on a *yola* (fishing boat) to Puerto Rico and entered the US from there, 8 entered with Legal Permanent Resident Visas, 7 with temporary visas, and the remaining 4 with sports and student visas. The 17 respondents who migrated through Puerto Rico reported that they spent between 2 days and 8 years in Puerto Rico. This shows the double migration which some Dominicans experienced in order to reach the United States, which has large social, personal, and economic implications for these immigrants. In this group of respondents, 44 of the 47 deportees were deported for criminal reasons, the other 3 for immigration reasons. Of the 47 deportees, 5 said they had not completed primary education, 12 only completed primary school, 16 had not completed secondary school, and 14 finished secondary school. As for university studies, only one had completed post-secondary education.

When deportees arrive in the Dominican Republic, they are greeted by Dominican migration officials and the police. The government also set up a "Deportation Unit" in 2013, which aims to guide and facilitate the process of social integration of deported Dominicans. This office, however, is often viewed with suspicion given the government's general stance on deportees. Some loosely organized social organizations have also emerged that support deportees. Churches, for example, have for limited periods of time offered meals to deportees. There also was an organization called "Bienvenido Seas" that does not appear to be operational as of this writing. Deportees also know each other informally and sometimes may pass on information regarding employment. From the standpoint of Dominican deportees, however, there is little community or support for them. They thus must figure out how to make it on their own.

### **Surviving in the Dominican Republic**

This chapter addresses the question of how deportees overcome the obstacles they face in their country of birth. One of the first obstacles they face is overcoming the initial shock of arriving in an unfamiliar place.

#### *Arriving in the Dominican Republic*

When deportees were asked how they felt upon arriving in the Dominican Republic, almost universally, they responded that they felt "bad," "sad," "alone," "frustrated," or "scared." Having lived in the United States for between one and 36 years, the return to their country

of birth was often unexpected and unwelcome. Joselo, for example, described his feelings when he first arrived: *"I felt scared, and bad. Because I had not been here before and I never liked it. I am going to the Consulate to try to leave."*

Joselo had lived in the United States since he was 15 years old. Moreover, he had strong ties to the United States as his grandparents were Puerto Ricans. Through these family ties, Joselo's family was able to flee the Dominican Republic in 1965, when the country was undergoing political turmoil following the assassination of President Trujillo. Joselo's father was a U.S. citizen, but his mother was not. For this reason, Joselo traveled to the United States as a legal permanent resident and not as a U.S. citizen. Had both of his parents been U.S. citizens when he was under the age of 18, he could have obtained "derivative citizenship." This option, however, requires U.S. citizenship of both parents, which Joselo did not have.

When Joselo arrived in Brooklyn, he enrolled in high school. He lived with his father and stepmother until he was drafted into the United States Army in 1969. When he was released from the Army in 1973, Joselo qualified for U.S. citizenship and could have applied for naturalization. Like many Dominicans, he never applied and thus remained a legal permanent resident. Joselo explained to me that he thought he was a U.S. citizen because his father was a citizen and he had served in the army. He explained: *"I was in the army, I thought I was a citizen. I was told that when you go to the army you become an American citizen but that was not the case."*

After his release from the army, Joselo found a job in a plastic factory in Brooklyn. He worked there for fifteen years, until it closed in 1988. The closure of this manufacturing plant is part of a broader pattern of deindustrialization in the United States (Harrison and Bluestone 1990). Joselo found himself unemployed, with a wife and seven children. They were able to get by due to his wife's income from her job as a social worker alongside Joselo's unemployment checks. Nevertheless, the stress and life changes led Joselo to experience depression in addition to financial insecurity. Joselo was caught with a small amount of cocaine in 1989, but was released without serving prison time as it was a first-time offense. Despite his ongoing mental health and economic issues, Joselo stayed out of trouble until 1998, when he was caught with \$10 of crack cocaine. This time, he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. He was released in 2000, and was deported to the Dominican Republic.

When Joselo arrived as a deportee in the Dominican Republic, he had no family in the Dominican Republic to receive him. His wife traveled

to Santo Domingo from New York to ensure he found a place to settle down. She found him housing in a motel, and then returned to New York to attend to their children. Joselo has since found more stable housing. He receives his army pension, and survives with that income – nearly US\$1000 per month. However, he does not like it in the Dominican Republic. He left the country when he was fifteen, and has not been able to readjust to living in the Dominican Republic. His family has come to visit him. His wife has come twice, as have his daughters. They speak on the phone daily. Still, Joselo dreams of returning to the United States, the country where he spent 35 years and where all of his family lives.

The minimum wage in the Dominican Republic is about RD\$11,000 per month, which is roughly equivalent to US\$220. According to a report from 2015 in the newspaper *Diario Libre*, one family with this income will need 96% of that just for food, so other necessary (water, electricity, telephone, and detergents for washing) are not covered.<sup>i</sup> Joselo's income of \$1,000 per month was among the highest of all deportees interviewed, and is enough for him to cover his basic needs.

Nevertheless, Joselo has lost everything meaningful to him, and thus feels depressed in the Dominican Republic and has a strong desire to return to the United States. This feeling – that everything important to him is in the United States – was common among deportees and enhanced their feelings of isolation and alienation. Even though Joselo had a steady income, this was not sufficient to allay the effects of this isolation.

Maxwell expressed similar feelings of loss upon arrival. Maxwell traveled to the United States when he was 16 years old. Unlike Joselo, Maxwell had no family connections that would allow him to travel legally to the United States, and he stowed away on a boat that got him to Puerto Rico in 1988. Maxwell lived and worked in Puerto Rico for seven years before traveling to New York, where he moved in with his sister. In 1988, Maxwell married a U.S. citizen and obtained legal permanent residency. Maxwell's wife was in the military and he worked for a food bank, which distributed non-perishable goods to needy families throughout New York.

One day, a Dominican friend asked Maxwell to go with him to his sister's house in New Jersey. Maxwell agreed. Soon after they crossed over into New Jersey, their car was stopped. The police officers found a half-kilo of crack cocaine in the car. Although Maxwell denied that he had any idea there were drugs in the car and told the interviewer he never had sold drugs in his life, he also was found guilty. Maxwell served 18 months in prison before being deported to the Dominican



Republic in 2008. His wife has come to visit him twice in Santo Domingo, but she is not willing to move to the Dominican Republic. Maxwell wants to return as well. When asked how he felt upon arrival to the Dominican Republic, he responded:

*Maxwell: I was not feeling good because America is my life; I was young when I left for the United States; ... My youth is there, not here, my generation is not here; ... I belong there. My people are not here, my friends, my white friends, the boricuas [Puerto Ricans], the blacks, you know the "life" we had during the summer. In my company we used to do many good things, .... I feel depressed here, because my life... I don't feel it is good, it is not the same, I feel frustrated... I feel that my whole life is in the USA.*

Having lived in the United States since he was sixteen years old, and deported at age 36, Maxwell feels strongly tied to the United States. In addition, he longs to be with his wife and to start a family with her. For Maxwell, his life, his youth, his generation is all in the United States and he does not feel at home in the Dominican Republic. Maxwell is proud of his humanitarian work in the United States and the connections he was able to make through that work. When he was interviewed, he had been deported about a year earlier. He still hoped to be able to get a pardon to be able to return. The likelihood that he could get a pardon, however, is very low. Pardons can be granted by the President of the United States or the Governor. These, however, are rarely granted, and even less common in the case of previously deported persons. Nevertheless, whenever asked about his future plans, Maxwell said that eventually he would return to the United States.

Although nearly all deportees expressed similar feelings of sadness and loss, there were two interviewees that did not express these feelings when describing their arrival into the Dominican Republic. Unlike Joselo and Maxwell, these two interviewees arrived when they were older and had weaker ties to the United States. Darius, for example, traveled to the United States in 1980, when he was 36 years old. He lived in New York for eighteen years before being deported. He was 66 years old when he was interviewed.

*Darius: Well, I felt fine because I arrived to my country again, and all the people in my neighborhood, where I was born and raised were here. When I left I lived two blocks down the street, now I live two blocks up*

Having lived as an undocumented migrant in New York for seventeen years, deportation was the first time Darius was able to return home. Darius had emigrated to the United States in 1980, leaving his wife and two children in Santo Domingo. In 1988, his wife and children were able to join him in New York City, and they had a third child together. Soon after his third child was born, Darius was arrested on drug charges. He was in and out of jail for the next decade before finally being deported in 1994. Despite saying he was happy to be back, Darius also regrets being separated from his family, especially his youngest daughter who he barely got to know due to his time in prison and subsequent deportation. He is hopeful that one day his daughter will come visit him in Santo Domingo or that he would have a chance to travel to New York to see her.

Paulo also expressed that he was happy to be back in the Dominican Republic. When I asked him how he felt after being deported he told me: *"I felt good. I was in my homeland."* Paulo was born in 1969. He went to the United States when he was 23, in 1992. His wife was planning to go the United States as a legal permanent resident, facilitated by her father, who was living in the United States at the time. Paulo did not want to wait for his paperwork to be processed, which could have taken years. Instead, he decided to take a *yola* to Puerto Rico, and then travel by airplane to New York City. He and his wife moved into his father-in-law's house and he secured work in a bodega. Frustrated because he was earning so little, Paulo turned to selling drugs. He was arrested in 1985 for drug selling, spent 18 months in prison, and was deported. Paulo's child, who was born in the United States in 1994, now lives with him in the Dominican Republic.

Nearly all the interviewees (45 out of 47) expressed negative emotions when asked how they felt about their return to their home country. They missed the financial security they had in the United States, and most of all, they missed their families. Nevertheless, few, if any, of these deportees will be able to return to the United States due to the near-impossibility of returning legally and the high cost of returning illegally from their island nation. Thus, they must figure out how to survive in their country of birth.

Darius and Paulo were content to be back in their homeland whereas Maxwell and Joselo and many other deportees feel as though the United States is their homeland and are thus devastated with regard to their forced exile. For this reason, we see such a strong difference in their reactions. Whereas Darius said *"Well, I felt fine because I arrived in my country again,"* Joselo obstinately says *"I have not been here before and I never liked it."* Of course, legally speaking, the Dominican Republic is their homeland. Nevertheless, for many Dominican

deportees, it certainly does not feel like home. Faced with these circumstances, Dominican deportees must figure out how to survive.

As pointed out above, depending on years lived in the United States, some deportees experience this feeling of coming “home,” but for others, home is in the United States, where they have their family and where they have made their lives. The idea of home, in this case, will depend on where the deportees have spent more time and where they have their roots, usually those related to children, family, and friends.

### *Surviving in the Dominican Republics*

To survive in the Dominican Republic, deportees need access to cash. Some deportees are able to earn money by working. Others rely on remittances from abroad. Others rely on their family members in the Dominican Republic and still others receive a pension – either from the Dominican or the US government. None of the Dominican deportees interviewed for this project managed to recreate the lifestyle they had achieved in the United States. Nevertheless, many secured employment, primarily in the informal labor market. The most common form of employment they reported were odd jobs, working on the docks, and working as drivers.

37 of the 47 respondents indicated that they were working, 10 said that they were not working. Of the 37 who were working, 34 had informal jobs and 3 claimed to have formal work. Only 7 reported having papers or a letter of good conduct – the *carta de buena conducta*. The letter of good conduct is a prerequisite for gaining access to formal work, since this letter indicates whether or not a person has a criminal record. One reason that few deportees possess these documents is that the document costs RD\$330, a significant cost for an unemployed deportee. Another reason is that they may believe the *carta* will not do them much good insofar as it indicates their deportee status.

Nevertheless, informal jobs do not require these formal documents. These data are consistent with the information of the Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada (CONEP 2013) which states that the labor market in the Dominican Republic is characterized by informality, as 3 out of 4 jobs are informal, and this number is increasing. Between 2000 and 2012, employment in the formal sector grew by 19.8%, while the informal sector grew by 41.5% (CONEP 2013). Deportees who work in the informal sector described some of the work they do as follows: tourist guide at the pier, call center employee, taxi driver, manager of someone else’s business without a contract, coach, car salesman, landlord, valet [car parker], painter, repairman, construction worker,

messenger, street vendor, upholsterer, farmer, garbage collector, and car washer.

Despite the average age being quite high at 48 years, only one of the deportees said that age was an impediment to his access to the labor market. However, this may be because many get informal jobs or are self-employed, where age is not such a critical factor. Darius, for example, who is introduced above, explained that he gets odd jobs. *“I work doing alterations, fixing things, I paint, I do any job.”*

Phrases like “I do any job” or “whatever appears” are expressions that show the levels of job uncertainty to which deportees are exposed. The jobs they find are temporary and therefore, income is quite unstable. Goldin (2016: 55) defines human capital as “the stock of skills that the labor force possesses. It encompasses the notion that there are investments in people (e.g., education, training, health) and that these investments increase an individual’s productivity.” Despite the presumption that higher human capital would lead to higher wages, this was not always the case as deportees had few opportunities to use what limited human capital they had. Very few deportees were able to put what they learned in the United States to use in the Dominican Republic. One exception to this involves deportees who worked in call centers, who were able to use their English skills to secure employment.

When respondents were asked about the value or utility of what they learned in the United States for their new life in the Dominican Republic, they mostly expressed moral rather than technical learnings, i.e. they learned to work hard and dream big. Many deportees lamented the differences in the labor market that exists in the United States and in the Dominican Republic, in terms of the technical qualities that are appreciated in the United States.

Those deportees who secured work as drivers seemed to do well, at least insofar as they had daily work. Juan Carlos (47 years old and lived in the USA for 10 years) explained that his work as a driver allowed him to maintain his dignity. Florentino (48 years old, who lived 11 years in the USA) elaborated on this point, saying *“I am a driver. I make my life in this way. I do not have a problem. I am “clean.” I do not have to ask anybody for 10 or 100 pesos, or anything like that”*. Although many of these jobs require a *carta de buena conducta*, these deportees were able to secure positions as drivers without this piece of paper. Raimundo, who was 43 years old and had lived in the US for 8 years, explained that he did not need a *carta de buena conducta* in part because he is working for a friend of his sister’s family. Having a sister who would vouch for him was sufficient.

Not all deportees, however, were able to secure employment. Juan Pablo, for example, cites his lack of access to the *carta de buena conducta* as a significant obstacle.

*TGB: What do you do to make a living now?*

*Juan Pablo: I have troubles in this country. My family is helping me to survive, because here to work you have to have the carta de buena conducta, and since I came as deportee [five months ago], ... I don't have the carta de buena conducta, and I have to have one to work in this country. I cannot work, because if I go to work I have to bring the carta de buena conducta, and no one is going to give me the carta de buena conducta, so I think no one is going to give me a job, because I tried to find a job and they ask you for the carta de buena conducta.*

Juan Pablo had traveled to the United States in 1993, when he was 20 years old. He lived and worked in New York until he was arrested on drug charges in 2006. He served time in prison on those charges and was deported in 2009. When we spoke, he had been in the Dominican Republic for five months, and lived with his mother, who he had not seen since he left. He will eventually get his *carta de buena conducta*, but he still may not secure employment as his *carta* will mark him as a deportee.

Deportees face stigmatization in the Dominican Republic, a situation accentuated by the media which reinforces this stigma with headlines like "Ex-prisoners arrived in the country ...,"<sup>ii</sup> and "The United States repatriated ex-convicts."<sup>iii</sup> Because of this high level of stigmatization, entrance into the labor market becomes an uphill battle, especially because many workplaces ask them for the *carta de buena conducta*. Deportees were well aware of this stigmatization.

*TGB: What do people think here about deportees?*

*Darius: bad, for jobs, they scare them, they think they are criminals, that they are going to do something bad, but we all are not like that*

Carlos's (61 years old, who lived 31 years in the US) testimony reaffirms this idea that stigmatization comes from the media, and the police go to stop deportees and try to blame them for crimes. Deportees have become the scapegoat of many of the social situations in the Dominican Republic.

*Carlos: yes, they look badly at you, they believe that everything bad happens here because deportees, and it is not true, maybe*

*someone does something but not everything, they want to blame deportees, and it is not like that, the police said that, anything happening it is because deportees and they start to look for the deportees but it is a mistake*

Faced with bleak prospects in the labor market, deportees were often forced to rely on others for their survival. This reliance, however, can be threatening to their sense of masculinity and their desire to be providers. In both cases, we see that deportation has generated not only feelings of loneliness, but also depression, perhaps due to their inability to support themselves. This became clear in Emanuel's interview.

The first author met Emanuel in the restaurant of a large store in Central Santo Domingo. He was not completely comfortable with the idea of doing the interview, but agreed when I assured him it would be confidential. He was primarily concerned about the possibility of returning to the United States, and did not want to do anything to jeopardize a potential future application. Emanuel was born in 1956 in San Francisco de Macorís. He was raised primarily by his grandmother, as his father moved to the United States when he was 8 years old. When Emanuel was 18 years old, he moved to the United States to join his father. That was in 1974. Emanuel finished high school in the United States and then secured a job as a taxi driver. In 1980, Emanuel decided to join the army, where he served for two years. When Emanuel was in the army, he purchased a gun for his personal use. When he purchased it, he lived in North Carolina and had a permit for the gun. However, he took the gun with him to New Jersey, and did not seek a permit. One day in early 1996, Emanuel was driving his car in New Jersey. A police officer pulled him over and asked to search the car. Emanuel agreed. The officer found the gun and arrested Emanuel. He was sentenced to one year in prison for illegal possession of a firearm. He served nine months and was released back to his family. Emanuel began working again, but had to report to the parole officer each month. On one occasion, he showed up for his meeting with the parole officer, who turned him over to immigration, and he was deported to the Dominican Republic in 1998.

Emanuel left a wife and daughter in the United States. His daughter was born in 1996, just before he was arrested. They keep in touch by phone and through internet video calls. In the interview, Emanuel explains how much his deportation has affected him and his family:

*Emanuel: Everything happened so suddenly. You have your home, your work, and then you are separated from your family. After it happened, I could not see my daughter ... that it is a very*

*hard thing for the family. ... everything was broke, everything, ... sending me over here ... broke my marriage*

When Emanuel is asked about the possibility of reuniting with his partner, he expresses feelings of vulnerability and economic uncertainty that prevent him from taking care of his family if they were to return with him to the Dominican Republic.

*TGB: she did not think to come here?*

*Emanuel: ... here I had nothing, what could I give her here? I could not give anything to her here*

*TGB: what she does do for work now?*

*Emanuel: I don't know, she worked as an auxiliary nurse caring for elderly people, disabled people... but she had a hard time because I was not there. I was the breadwinner, she worked but she did not have to pay anything, I paid for everything, it is a hard situation*

From Emanuel's point of view, he has little to nothing to offer his wife and children at this point. In his interview, he expresses some anger when he points out that he and his wife had a good relationship, which ended because of the deportation and its consequences: the separation of the family and his consequent inability to be there for his family, emotionally, financially, or physically.

Maxwell, introduced above, was hoping to secure a *carta de buena conducta* so that he could get a job in the docks, but had not yet been successful. He is able to get by because he lives with his sister and mother and he relies on remittances from his wife. He is not happy about his newfound dependence.

*Maxwell: Yeah, my wife helps me. ... I know how you are used to living in the United States. I know how you work, what people earn per hour. People here don't earn the same ... I don't like to bother anyone over there because the work there is hard*

Juan Pablo and Maxwell had been in the Dominican Republic for relatively short amounts of time. The short time period means that they are still recovering from the shock of being deported. It also means that family members in the United States are still willing to help. And, it means that they have not yet established local support networks that help them fend for themselves.

The extreme difficulty deportees face in securing work and providing for themselves and their families exacerbated their feelings of isolation, loneliness, and helplessness. Despite these obstacles, they

were able to survive due to two primary sources of income: help from family members in the United States and the Dominican Republic and informal work. The most common strategy was reliance on precarious employment or entrepreneurship, such as working as drivers, handymen or on the docks. Nevertheless, entering the labor market, even in this very limited way allows for Dominicans to gradually reintegrate.

### *Plans for the Future*

Despite the difficulties deportees face, when asked about their plans for the future, they were relatively optimistic. Three themes stood out from their responses: their desire to reunite with their families; their intention to return to the United States; and their desire for economic stability. It will be practically impossible for most deportees to return to the United States. Those who have a criminal conviction have no option to return under current law. And, those who were deported on non-criminal grounds also face significant legal hurdles to returning to the United States. In addition to the legal hurdles, those applications that have even a small chance at success will cost thousands of dollars. There is the possibility to return illegally, but this also costs even more and involves substantial risk. Despite these obstacles, some deportees are able to return to the United States – usually through illegal, dangerous, and costly routes (Brotherton and Barrios 2011). With this glimmer of hope, many deportees recounted that they plan to return to the United States.

Maxwell, introduced above, is one example. He explained: *“as I told you, my plan is to return to the USA.”* Maxwell didn’t explain how he planned to do this, yet he remained hopeful. It is highly unlikely that Maxwell will ever be able to return legally to the United States, due to his criminal conviction. Although some deportees may be able to gain entry to other countries, only one deportees expressed a desire to emigrate to a country other than the United States. Fermin (46 years old and who lived 10 years in the USA) explained that he planned to travel to Italy to work. With no deportation on his record from Italy, he may actually be able to make that plan work. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s 2010 report, countries like Puerto Rico, Spain and Italy, and of course the United States as the most common destinations for Dominican emigrants.

Miguel (65 years old who lived 15 years in the USA), makes it clear why most Dominican deportees from the USA desire to return there. For Miguel, the USA is where his family is and is the country he loves best: *“I think that when my kids file my paperwork, I am going to be the happiest man on earth, because I will be in the country I most like and*



*will be back with my family.*" Miguel was 65 when he said this and had been deported 26 years prior. Nevertheless, he still held onto that dream of returning to the United States to be with his family. Carlos, introduced above, was deported on criminal grounds and would be arrested if caught trying to re-enter. That did not deter him from making plans, because his daughter had asked him to return.

And, more succinctly by Emanuel: *"I will go back to the USA. It is my priority be with my daughter."* The years that had passed did not weaken these deportees' perception of their family connections in the United States. Carlos had been living in the Dominican Republic for eight years and Emanuel for 12. Nevertheless, they dreamed of returning to live with their families, despite their relatively advanced age and the near-impossibility of their (legal) return. Carlos was 61 years old and Emanuel was 59 at the time of these interviews.

Despite a strong desire by most deportees to return to the United States, many of them also recognized that they could try and make things work in the Dominican Republic. Florentino, for example, said that his plan is to try and survive. *"I am thinking about building a little house here. I don't want to pay too much for a house, actually I am not thinking of going back to the USA, I don't think so."* German (48 years old, who lived 34 years in the USA) was similarly practical: *"My plans for the future are settling down here and being part of society, economically and socially, someday travel again, maybe to the United States, Europe, wherever and continue with my life forward because I have to live it."*

The interviewees expressed extreme disappointment in the fact that they did not have the same opportunities they once had in the United States. Additionally, they lamented the family separation they experienced as well as the traumatic experience of being jailed and deported. However, they also expressed a clear sense of being "free" once they were returned to the Dominican Republic. They were free insofar as they were no longer in jail. But, others spoke of a more subjective sense of freedom as they could do things like have a beer in the park that they could not do in the United States. Nevertheless, many deportees held out hope that they one day would be reunited with their families.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, Dominican deportees clearly expressed emotions related to deportation, such as loneliness and despair, similar to what other scholars have found (Siulc 2009; Martin 2013; Brotherton and Barrios 2011). In addition, they described their experiences of being stigmatized, particularly in terms of job placement, and the challenges

they face in order to survive. To survive, they turned to self-employment, informal jobs and help from family and friends. Despite the difficulties deportees face, they are able to survive in their country of birth. For some, their ability to work and to contribute to society allows them to feel useful again. For others, their plans to return to the United States or to make a life for themselves in the Dominican Republic allow them to get out of bed each day.

Deportees' exclusion from formal work, nevertheless, is disheartening. It is true that many of these deportees had committed crimes in the United States, mostly related to the drug economy. However, the fact that they sold drugs in New York City does not mean that they would engage in criminal activity in Santo Domingo. Placed in a different milieu, especially one where they have social and financial support, they would be unlikely to turn to illegal drugs for comfort or for financial security. In fact, pushing them out of the formal labor market is more likely to push them towards drugs and towards the illegal economy. The requirement that their deportation appear on their *carta de buena conducta* is a clear barrier to their participation in the formal labor market.

This exclusion from the formal labor market means that deportees who learned valuable skills in the United States, such as English-language or construction skills are unable to put these skills to use in their home country. Allowing deportees access to the formal labor market would not only enable them to attain financial self-sufficiency, but also would permit them to feel as if they are making a positive contribution to society. At present, many deportees feel as if their life is being wasted away. They are unable to find meaningful work. Their consequent dire financial straits prevent them from making financial contributions to their family, which makes them feel bad about themselves. This inability to be a provider for themselves and their family often leads to distress and depression, in part due to gendered expectations of what it means to them to be a man (Rivera and Ceciliano 2003). It is difficult for Dominican deportees to embrace their lives in the Dominican Republic and to focus on building their future there in part because they feel strong ties to loved ones in the United States and in part because there is little hope for them to remake their lives in their country of birth. In short, deportees, like most other people, cherish opportunities to make positive contributions to society and to their families. Insofar as current policies in the Dominican Republic and the United States prevent them from playing that role, these policies are detrimental to deportees, their families, and their communities.



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<sup>i</sup> El salario mínimo no alcanza ni para comer en República Dominicana. May 20, 2015. <http://www.diariolibre.com/economia/economia-personal/el-salario-mnimo-no-alcanza-ni-para-comer-en-repblica-dominicana-HVDL1156221> Accessed 28 September 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> Unos 115 exreos llegaron al país hoy en el primer grupo de deportados de EE.UU de este año. <http://www.listindiario.com/la-republica/2016/01/06/402727/unos-115-exreos-llegaron-al-pais-hoy-en-el-primer-grupo-de-deportados-de-ee-uu-de-este-ano>. Accessed September 11, 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> Llegan a RD otros 95 dominicanos deportados de EEUU. <http://listindiario.com/la-republica/2015/09/16/388358/llegan-a-rd-otros-95-dominicanos-deportados-de-eeuu>. Accessed September 11, 2016.