Forced transnationalism: transnational coping strategies and gendered stigma among Jamaican deportees

tanya golash-boza
Forced transnationalism: transnational coping strategies and gendered stigma among Jamaican deportees

TANYA GOLASH-BOZA

School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, The University of California at Merced, 5200 North Lake Road, Merced, CA 95343, USA
tgolash-boza@ucmerced.edu

Abstract Once forcibly returned to their countries of citizenship, how and why do deportees engage in transnational relationships? Through analyses of 37 interviews with Jamaican deportees, I approach the question of why deportees engage in transnational practices and reveal that deportees use transnational ties as coping strategies to deal with financial and emotional hardship. This reliance on transnational ties, however, has two consequences: (1) male deportees who rely on transnational strategies to survive face a gendered stigma because they must relinquish the provider role and become dependants; and (2) the transnational coping strategies serve as a reminder of the shame, isolation and alienation that deportees experience because of their deportation. This consideration of the consequences of transnational relationships sheds light on why some migrants are transnational and others are not.

Keywords JAMAICA, STIGMA, GENDER, DEPORTATION, COPING STRATEGY, REMITTANCES, TRANSNATIONAL TIES

In 2010, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deported 387,242 people – 13 times as many as in 1991.¹ Deportation is the forced removal of a non-citizen from a host country to his or her country of citizenship, a form of state-sponsored forced migration. The high and increasing rate of deportation has important consequences for the study of migration, but the study of deportees has yet to become an integral part of this field. With more than one thousand people deported every day from the United States, hundreds of thousands each year from South Africa (Sutton and Vigneswaran 2011), and tens of thousands each year from the United Kingdom (Anderson et al. 2011), it is safe to say that we are in an era of mass deportation. How do deportees fit into our understanding of migration? What sorts of ties do they maintain with their former host country? In this article, I address these questions by asking how and why Jamaican deportees maintain transnational ties.

ISSN 1470–2266. © 2013 The Author(s)
Journal compilation © 2013 Blackwell Publishing Ltd & Global Networks Partnership
The question of why people engage in transnational exchanges is important because not all migrants participate in them. Transnational migrants are a subset of international migrants who retain significant ties to their country of origin while settling into the host country (Parreñas 2010). Guarnizo et al. (2003), for example, found that only 10 to 15 per cent of the Salvadoran and Dominican migrants in their survey regularly participate in transnational exchanges. The relative rarity of habitual transnationalism raises the question of why only some migrants use transnational strategies. Transnational practices refer to cross-border practices and include activities that literally and symbolically cross national borders, meaning that migrants need not travel to participate in them (de Bree et al. 2010). This is pertinent for deportees, whose international travel is often greatly restricted.

Analyses of the cross-border engagements of Jamaican deportees shed light on how the forced, shameful and physically and emotionally stressful experience of deportation affects how and why deportees participate in transnational practices. My analyses of 37 interviews with Jamaican deportees render it evident that deportees use transnational practices as coping strategies to deal with financial and emotional hardship. This argument builds on research on the transnational material and affective ties of voluntary labour migrants. Other scholars have found that transnational ties provide female migrants with social connections and support networks (Domínguez and Lubitow 2008), emotional support (Viruell-Fuentes 2006) and affective connections (Burman 2002). Although the deportees I studied were primarily male not female, they too rely heavily on transnational material and affective ties. Other scholars have found that transnational ties provide female migrants with social connections and support networks (Domínguez and Lubitow 2008), emotional support (Viruell-Fuentes 2006) and affective connections (Burman 2002). Although the deportees I studied were primarily male not female, they too rely heavily on transnational material and affective ties. Scholar have found that return migrants use transnational strategies to gain social status (Goldring 1998) and to create a sense of belonging on returning home (de Bree et al. 2010). The shame associated with deportation means that transnational ties do not bring social status to deportees. In addition, the notion of ‘home’ is complicated for those deportees who have spent most of their lives in the United States.

Deportation creates economic hardship as well as a sense of alienation, shame and isolation. Gendered expectations that men should be able not only to take care of themselves but also to provide for others exacerbate the shame of dependence (Lewis 2007). Due to a gendered stigma of men unable to provide for themselves and their children and incapable of controlling their emotions, many deportees find their newfound material and emotional dependence to be shameful. They face a paradoxical situation: they use transnational coping strategies to relieve their financial and emotional hardships. Because of their own and others’ gendered expectations, these same strategies remind them of their isolation and inability to provide for themselves, thereby reinforcing their sense of shame and isolation.

Mass deportation and Jamaicans in the United States
Two recent developments brought the United States into an era of mass deportation – the passage of restrictive laws in 1996 and an infusion of money into immigration law enforcement in 2003. The 1996 laws – the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant
Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) – expanded the grounds for deportation and eliminated judicial review of some types of deportation orders (Welch 2002), thereby increasing deportations. Under these laws, non-citizens convicted of any of a wide array of crimes are subject to mandatory deportation (Morawetz 2000). Any non-citizen convicted of an ‘aggravated felony’, namely any felony or misdemeanor for which the person is sentenced to at least one year in prison, faces deportation without judicial review. Furthermore, the law applies retroactively, and there is no statute of limitations for deportable offences (Master 2003; Morawetz 2000). In the wake of 11 September 2001, deportation became the responsibility of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), part of the newly created DHS. Since the creation of ICE in 2003, the number of deportees has risen dramatically, largely due to the injection of massive amounts of money into the DHS; its current budget is more than US$ 60 billion. The surge in interior enforcement has meant that increasing numbers of deportees are people who have lived for many years in the United States.

Jamaican immigrants are prime targets of these new laws and bureaucratic changes. Proportionally, Jamaican legal permanent residents in the USA are very likely to face deportation. I estimated that one in 24 Jamaican legal permanent residents has been deported since 1996. About 100,000 legal permanent residents have been deported since these laws were passed in 1996. About 10,000 of them have been Jamaican. Although my focus is exclusively on Jamaicans deported from the United States, Jamaica has received nearly 30,000 deportees since 1997 from the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom (Thomas-Hope et al. 2009). Some 96.5 per cent of the criminal deportees sent from the USA were men who, on average, had spent 12 years in the United States of which four were in prison. Some deportees migrated as small children, but many did not; the average age of migration was 23. About three-quarters of the criminal deportees came to the United States before the age of 16 (Headley et al. 2005). These descriptive statistics suggest that many deportees will have difficulty re-integrating into Jamaican society and will have strong transnational ties. My sample reflects these demographics.

I used snowball sampling and key informants to find interviewees in Jamaica. I employed two research assistants, both deportees, to help me find them. I obtained a sample that closely resembles the overall deportee population in Jamaica. The interviewees I selected, whether deported on criminal or non-criminal grounds, had spent different lengths of time in the United States, had served varying prison sentences, and had come to the United States at various ages. Although the deportee population in Jamaica is nearly all male, I interviewed four women to gain their perspective. I spent a total of seven months in Jamaica, conducting 37 interviews there between December 2008 and January 2011. The interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to more than two hours; they were all audio-recorded, transcribed and coded.

**Deportation, transnational coping strategies and gendered stigma in Jamaica**

Jamaica is a prime site for the study of transnationalism. A recent study found that 15 per cent of Jamaican households currently have a member of the household abroad...
and 28 per cent have a member who has previously lived abroad, but has returned to Jamaica (Thomas-Hope et al. 2009). For most of the twentieth century, Jamaicans have been leaving the island in large numbers, first to Great Britain and, since changes to US immigration law in 1965, to the United States. By the year 2000, there were more than 500,000 Jamaicans in the United States (Foner 2008). Notably, over half the Jamaican migrants to the United States have been women (Foner 2008; Thomas-Hope et al. 2009). This is remarkable when we observe that nearly all deportees are men (Headley et al. 2005). Many Jamaicans who travel abroad maintain close ties with Jamaica. One study of Jamaicans in Canada revealed that 88 per cent had sent remittances during the previous five years, 77 per cent had travelled home in the last five years, and 86 per cent had called home within the previous month (Simmons et al. 2005). In 2002, cash remittances accounted for 23 per cent of the Jamaican GDP (Orozco 2004).

There is a long history of transnational flows of people and goods to and from the Caribbean. Recently, the proliferation of technology has facilitated these flows (Potter et al. 2008). Studies of West Indian transnationalism often focus on the business activities of entrepreneurs and the bi-national identity of West Indian professionals (Conway et al. 2008; Horst 2007; Morawska 2007). The experiences of the deportees I met in Jamaica are distinct from those of voluntary Jamaican returnees who purchase large homes in Mandeville (Horst 2007) or of Trinidadian professionals who have a global network of friends and colleagues (Conway et al. 2008). Much of the attention to these transnational flows focuses on how people maintain these transnational dynamics. In this article, I ask why people engage in transnational exchanges, and argue that Jamaican deportees use their transnational ties as coping strategies. This article brings the experiences of deportees into the study of transnationalism through a consideration of the relationship between transnational practices and the deportees’ hardships. Studies of deportees are rare and most research on their experiences is outside migration studies. Ethnographic analyses of deportees point to the transnational practices in which they engage, such as international communications, receiving remittances and illegal border crossings, as well as those they are less likely to engage in, such as travel for tourism or business, sending remittances, or maintaining households in two countries at once. These studies identify five themes that are common to deportees. These are (1) unfamiliarity with the land of their citizenship; (2) deep despair about their future prospects; (3) the salience of state power to their lives in the USA and elsewhere; (4) a shift from being senders to receivers of remittances; and (5) the stigma attached to their status as deportees. The authors of these works (Brotherton 2008; Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Noguera 1999; Peutz 2006; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2004, 2007) have highlighted the extreme duress deportees endure and the socio-psychological costs of deportation. This duress was also evident in Jamaica, especially in terms of financial hardship and emotional stress.

Jamaican deportees often face severe financial hardship compounded by a sense of isolation resulting from family separation. They use their transnational ties as coping strategies to alleviate these hardships. However, this newfound reliance on emotional
and financial ties to the United States creates a gendered stigma in which men are ashamed of their inability to support themselves and provide for their children. This situation provides a unique opportunity to explore why people participate in transnational exchanges.

Financial hardship

The deportees with whom I spoke in Jamaica are among the working poor, the unemployed poor, the homeless, or living in precarious situations. In the light of the difficulty deportees have in securing work, especially permanent work, many depend on remittances from relatives abroad to survive. The money deportees receive from the United States is usually just enough to keep them alive. Even deportees who are able to secure employment in Jamaica struggle to make ends meet with low wages and temporary work.

Many deportees feel obliged to ask their friends and relatives in the United States for money to survive. Samuel, deported after spending nearly all his life in the United States, including 25 years in prison, has great financial difficulty in Jamaica. When I asked how he gets by, he said: ‘You nah, I bag. I ask relatives in the States that I need a $50 here, $50 there and, if they can, they will. They extend.’ Darius, also deported after a long prison sentence, told me that his three sisters and one brother in the United States correspond regularly with him. Were it not for them, he would be homeless. Darius’s fear of homelessness was realistic; my research revealed that one of the biggest problems deportees in Jamaica face is the lack of stable housing.

Most deportees dream of being able to fend for themselves and hope to receive money from abroad that will enable them to set up a business. Harry, for example, used money from relatives abroad to purchase a cargo van. He makes a living by charging for cargo services. Others told me they had already set up a business and it had failed. Winslow, for example, used money he received from relatives in the United States to set up a fishing business. However, his business failed when drilling began near where he was fishing, scaring all of the fish away.

Many deportees who have not yet started a business told me that they plan to do so. Elias, for example, is using the money his family sends him to set up a business on the beach selling jerk chicken.

I am trying to rent one of the stalls and stock it up. … I am trying to do some jerk chicken. … I am trying to set up this place on the beach. All the money they would send me, that is what I put in the stall and only thing needed now is for it to get stocked.

With no source of income in Jamaica, Elias relies on his ties in the United States to get his business off the ground. Kareem is also waiting for money from the USA so that he can buy a vehicle and start a taxi business. In addition to a vehicle, he needs to get his Jamaican driver’s licence and relevant permits.
I need to get my licence. I need a thousand dollars to get my permit. You just need a TRN [Taxpayers Registration Number], you know what I’m sayin’. Because that’s my really dream; I always like driving. … Driving is my dream, so that is what I am going to do and just start building from there. … My mother is supposed to come but I am really not going to wait on that. I am going to try and get my licence and get a car from somebody. When she come, I will ask her to lend me the money to buy one and then I will work and pay her back on it. Whatever, if she want to give it to me, or whatever. … I need the money to buy one and I will work and give it back to her.

In this excerpt from Kareem’s interview, it is evident that he will have to rely on his mother to realize his dream of starting a business, although he would rather not, and is quick to point out that he will pay her back. Both Kareem and Elias will need remittances from abroad to start businesses. They see their cross-border engagements as a necessary tactic for achieving financial independence in Jamaica. For them, transnational ties are coping strategies for dealing with financial hardship.

Many deportees were not well off in the United States, found it difficult to survive and admitted that life there was hard. This often forced them to seek work in the illegal economy. Carl, for example, told me, ‘landing in Brooklyn, coming from Jamaica, is not an easy place.’ Disappointed with the opportunities available in Brooklyn, New York, Carl turned to selling drugs and, eventually, was ‘deep in the business’ and pulling in large amounts of money transporting cocaine and marijuana, activities that eventually led to his deportation.

Deportees who avoided becoming involved in the US drugs economy earned enough to survive there; they had furnished apartments, cars and access to modern technology. In Jamaica, deportees living in rented rooms or from couch to couch experience a decline in their financial status. A minimum-wage job in Jamaica does not buy the lifestyle they enjoyed in the United States. They dream of starting a business, which they hope will be lucrative enough to allow them to achieve the financial independence they desire and once had. The only way many deportees imagine they will be able to amass enough capital to start a business is if someone abroad sends it to them. Deportees often rely on transnational coping strategies both for day-to-day survival and to fulfil their dreams of opening businesses in Jamaica.

Emotional hardship

Receipt of financial assistance was clearly important. Nonetheless, many deportees spoke with passion about the significance of staying in contact with relatives and friends in the United States for it allowed them to hold onto a part of themselves. O’Ryan’s case is poignant because, although he has been back in Jamaica for seven years, he still considers Brooklyn his ‘home’. Jamaica is O’Ryan’s country of birth, yet the relationships he developed in the United States and the strong ties he has there make Brooklyn feel more like home than Jamaica. O’Ryan is familiar with the Brooklyn landscape, has close attachments to people there and, as Olwig (2002: 215)
pointed out, home is both an ‘abstract place of identification and a concrete set of relations’. Burman (2002) describes transnational ties as diasporic yearning, but with Jamaican deportees such as O’Ryan we see this yearning reversed. For many Jamaican deportees, the home they yearn for is not in Jamaica but in the United States, where their families, friends and memories reside.

Under the status of a legal permanent resident, O’Ryan moved to the United States to join his mother and grandmother, who had migrated a few years before, when he was six years old. He went to elementary, then junior high school in Brooklyn. Although he dropped out of high school, he passed his GED (General Educational Development) tests and enrolled at Mercy College, where he studied computer programming. One evening, he gave a lift to a friend whose car had broken down. His friend was carrying drugs, which the police discovered at a roadblock on the highway. O’Ryan received a three- to nine-year sentence for drug trafficking, but opted to attend a boot camp in a US correctional facility, so spent only 18 months in prison.

O’Ryan’s mother, girlfriend and newly born daughter attended his graduation from the boot camp. He was expecting to go home with them, but immigration agents were waiting to inform him that he faced deportation. O’Ryan had been in the country for nearly twenty years and had no family with whom he was still familiar in Jamaica, yet at the age of 25, the US authorities deported him to a country he barely knew. As is common practice in the Caribbean (Bauer and Thompson 2006; Foner 2008), O’Ryan’s mother had left him in Jamaica with his grandmother until he was six, and then brought him to the United States, never to return. Thus, although his deportation involved a return to the same grandmother who had cared for him between the ages of two and six, O’Ryan made a new life in Brooklyn and no longer feels connected to his childhood home.

O’Ryan uses transnational strategies to cope with separation from his family and friends. His emotional life is still in New York. He maintains constant contact with people there to ‘live his life’, as he put it, and his friends and family in New York are the most important people in his life. After seven years in Jamaica, he still finds it difficult to accept that his exile to Jamaica is permanent and that he cannot return to New York:

One thing is guaranteed that no matter where I go or what I do I am born in Jamaica; I am a Jamaican, you know and I just gotta accept [it]. … I keep hearing from my family that you are in Jamaica, you need to start thinking about Jamaica … and it’s not easy … to me. I am still in America. I mean, that is home. … Regardless of that, I grew [up], I did everything there. I went to school there. I mean, that is everything. Everything that happened to me for the first time happened to me in New York. I have no experiences of Jamaica. …

I mean it truthfully, it’s like I said everything, that whenever I think about anything, I really still do think about New York. So it is like I still wanna know how everything is going, if everybody is OK. It is like, basically, I am still trying to live my life, but not … I don’t get to live it

Forced transnationalism
physically, you know what I’m saying. I like [to] talk to people and find out what is going on.

In this excerpt, we can hear O’Ryan trying to convince himself that he wants to come to terms with his Jamaican identity and with the fact that he now lives in Jamaica. At the same time, as Karen Fog Olwig (2002) points out, a migrant’s place of birth is not always his or her ‘natural place of belonging’. O’Ryan struggles with the feeling that New York is where he belongs, even though his deportation makes it clear that his official place of belonging is Jamaica. For him, maintaining ties with Brooklyn, which he considers ‘home’, is crucial for his psychological well-being. Like other deportees who had lived their whole lives in the United States, he never called anyone in Jamaica when he lived in the United States, but now separated from his loved ones, he calls ‘home’ on a regular basis. This contact with his prior life helps him deal with the emotional stress his deportation provoked.

O’Ryan told me about his great-aunt finding him crying in the back garden one day; he felt ashamed that she had seen him, a grown man, cry. To make matters worse, she telephoned his mother in the United States to tell her about it. Having no one in Jamaica with whom to share his grief, O’Ryan relies on his ties with the United States to keep him afloat emotionally. These affective transnational ties bear some resemblance to the emotional ties parents maintain with their children when they travel abroad to work (Parreñas 2005). The differences lie in the fact that, as a grown man, O’Ryan is ashamed of his inability to cope with his situation without relying on his mother and other relatives in the United States for transnational emotional support. He hung his head and lowered his eyes when he recounted his story, suggesting that he is ashamed of having been reduced to tears.

Morris had a similar story, even though he travelled to the United States for the first time at the age of 18. Deported to Jamaica after 11 years in the United States, he moved in with his mother in one of Kingston’s infamous ghettos. When I met him, he had been in Jamaica for 11 months and still found it hard to think about anything other than the United States – his five children, his business and his life. In the United States, he ran a restaurant and worked as a musician in the evenings. In Jamaica, he is lost, is unable to find gainful employment and feels useless, and as if he were living in a foreign country. Having spent the prime of his life in the United States, his banishment devastates him. He told me, ‘it’s like I am dead.’ When I asked Morris what he did in his free time, he replied:

Nothing, just watch TV and try to reminisce back on America. My mom always tells me, ‘why you don’t watch the local news?’ And, I say it can’t help me, you know, what I mean. I just watch overseas … my life wasting, wasting, wasting, wasting. … Most of the time I spend alone … me and my mango tree. You know, it’s just very weird, very weird to me right now. This is more like stress every day; you know what I mean, hurt every day. I try to pick up my mistake every day, you know. I just leave whatever I leave behind and move forward.
Morris’s emotional stress is evident in these words. He finds it difficult not only to gain a financial footing in Jamaica, but also to come to terms with his exile from the United States. In his mind, he still lives there. His transnationalism is emotional as well as financial; it is difficult for him to think about anything other than the United States and his former life there. Much like O’Ryan, who speaks to his mother in New York to find out what is going on there, Morris watches US news to keep abreast of current events in his former home.

Victor, who migrated to the United States when he was four years old, has similar feelings about his deportation to Jamaica – ‘I just ‘sit in [my] room and stress the hell out’. Victor finds it incredibly difficult to survive in Jamaica, a country he barely knew before his deportation. He grew up in the United States with his mother and sister. On graduating from high school, he got a job as a messenger and worked there for a couple of years, but his pay was too low to move out on his own. He turned to selling drugs and, in 1996, the police caught him with 50 pounds of marijuana, for which he served two-and-a-half years in prison. In 1999, the US authorities deported him to Jamaica, the country he had left at the age of four and he was now 27. He had visited Jamaica once when he was about 15, but has no close ties there and no one willing to house him. In the absence of either job skills or connections, Victor has failed to find work in Jamaica. When I asked him what he does to survive, he said he sells whatever he can find. He burns CDs and sells them; he sells used clothes. His mother is barely scraping by in the United States and cannot afford to support him. I asked Victor where he sleeps. He replied ‘here and there’. Victor continues to regard Brooklyn as home – ‘I come from Brooklyn … I grew up in Brooklyn all my life.’ He still talks regularly to his mother in the United States, whom he describes as ‘the cornerstone’ of his life. Victor uses his emotional ties to his mother as a coping strategy to deal with extreme emotional and material duress.

With regard to his plans for the future, Victor told me he intends to leave Jamaica. In the ten years since his deportation, he has tried several times to return illegally to the United States without success, usually with material assistance from someone there. Despite the difficulties involved in travelling illegally to the United States, he plans to try to get ‘home’ again. For him, like many deportees, ‘home’ continues to be the United States, even though he has lived in Jamaica for years and has no legal way of returning there.

For Victor, O’Ryan, and Morris, deportation provoked financial and emotional stress. This stress is compounded by a gendered shame surrounding their inability to provide for themselves and to cope emotionally with their new situations. Their transnational ties to the United States become coping strategies to alleviate the financial and emotional stress, but fail to appease the shame they experience. I discuss this shame in more detail in the next section.

**Alienation, shame and isolation**

Deportation creates a sense of alienation, shame and isolation. Deportees rely on transnational strategies to survive, yet these same strategies serve as a reminder of their
alienation and exclusion. Morris, introduced above, spends his days thinking about the life he had in the United States. His losses are compounded by the fact that Morris, who once provided for his mother in Jamaica and his family in the United States, now depends on them for his survival. Morris married a US citizen shortly after arriving in the United States and together they had three children, but after several years of marriage, they separated. Since his deportation, Morris maintains contact with both his wife (whom he never legally divorced) and his girlfriend with whom he has another child. Although he finds it shameful, he relies on their financial support. He is also ashamed of having to depend on his mother to whom he used to send money. As Morris put it, ‘well I survive off my mother’s daily bread, you know. … It is very sad at age 35 … to come back and survive off my mama’s bread.’ As he explained further:

Well, my wife sends me money sometimes. My girlfriend sends me money. My last baby mother send me money. … I feel a way to take money from my wife I never do that before. Worse, my baby mom, cause, in life I just met her. I just met her like couple years ago, you know what I mean, and she be my baby mom, and, you know, just like I used to be the person who help them you know, now I am the dependent one.

Morris now has to depend on economic remittances to survive, but these remittances are a reminder of what he has lost – his family and economic well-being. In his newfound position as ‘dependent’ instead of provider, Morris says he ‘feel[s] a way to take money’ from his wife. He has difficulty describing his shame – calling it ‘a way’ because to discuss it openly would be humiliating. As Michael Kimmel (1994) argued, men often fall silent when shame threatens their masculinity.

Caleb, a US army veteran living in the United States as a legal permanent resident and working as a software engineer, felt proud of regularly sending money to Jamaica to support his grandmother and aunts. Now, since his deportation, for the first time in his life he has to rely on others and being the recipient of remittances makes him feel deeply ashamed. He is not at all proud of depending on his girlfriend for his economic survival in Jamaica. I asked Caleb if he keeps in touch with his other relatives in the United States, now that he has been deported. His answer is revealing:

It is not like I don’t keep communication with my family, but they say: ‘Hey, you been there for 20 years, so you should have had yours.’ And, that’s a Jamaican’s idea – that you’re a foreigner, you’re rich. … ‘Him did a foreign’, meaning, foreign, they are rich. … Everybody’s perception is that if you go to America for even a day you supposed to be rich. You know who sent the wrong signal – the guys who go to the US and sell drugs or rob. They come to Jamaica with the gold chains, the quick house, the pretty cars and the glamorous lifestyle, so everybody’s perception is that American streets are lined with gold.

Since Caleb’s relatives think he should have saved his money in the United States, they shame him for asking for it. He keeps in touch with his relatives in the United States, but they think he should have saved his money.
Forced transnationalism

States, but is embarrassed to ask them for money. Many deportees feel ashamed of receiving goods and money from the United States, including Alberto.

Alberto was born in Kingston in 1954 and travelled to the United States at the age of 15, to where his parents had already migrated. He maintained few ties with Jamaica once he had left and, during his 40 years in the United States, never returned, even for a visit. Although Alberto rarely thought about Jamaica during his residence in the USA, he is fortunate that his parents did. They bought a house there, which meant that Alberto had somewhere to live when he was deported. He also had a few thousand dollars in savings when he arrived in 2007. When I spoke to him in June 2009, he was still living off his dwindling savings. When I asked him if he received remittances from the United States, he inferred that it would be an insult to his pride to ask his children in the United States for money. As he put it, ‘I am not the type of guy who likes to ask for help.’

Although Alberto does not like to admit it, he depends on the United States for survival. He lives in his parents’ home, which remittances sent from the USA financed, and one can regard his US-earned savings, currently his only form of income, as a form of migrant remittance. When that source runs out, Alberto will probably have to ask his relatives in the United States for money, though he will be ashamed to do so. For him, transnational practices are a strategy of last resort.

Carl expressed similar sentiments about asking for help from his family in the USA. As I mentioned above, Carl had been financially successful in the United States through his lucrative involvement in the drugs economy. When he lived there, Carl had enough financial resources to provide his children with everything they needed and most things they wanted. Now, as a deportee, he was reluctant to depend on them for his survival, even though he needed money from them to get by.

I do not want to depend on my kids and I do not want to put them in no pressure. … [My son] said, ‘Dad, you all right? I’m going to send some phone to you so you could sell the phone.’ I am, like, ‘no I’m all right, kid; I’m all right. I just want you to work, go to school, and take care of yourself.’ I got to lie to him. … I do not want to put no pressure on any of them. If they got it and they are willing to do it, I will gladly accept it because I am broke as hell, but I just want them to be safe and all right.

Carl is proud of having filled his gendered role as a provider and breadwinner (Lewis 2007) and his words make it clear that he is having trouble coming to terms with his newfound dependency on his children. When I met him in Jamaica, he still wore an expensive gold bracelet, even though he admitted he was broke. He promised that next time we met he would buy me a meal, implying that he still saw himself as a provider. Carl was practically penniless in Jamaica, yet did not want to sell his gold bracelet or expensive clothes, for they still garnered him a measure of respect. He told me that people called him ‘boss man’ because his clothing and jewellery made it appear as if he had money. Carl had only been back in Jamaica for a few months when we met, so his clothes and shoes were still relatively new. I
cannot help but wonder what will become of him once the reality of his newfound poverty sets in.

**Gendered stigma**

The alienation, shame, and loss that deportees experience is exacerbated by gendered expectations that men should be able to handle themselves, materially and emotionally. Deportees’ reliance on transnational strategies serves as a reminder of their inability to fend for themselves. Deportees who rely on remittances for their survival expressed shame at their dependence on these remittances, and often were reluctant to ask their relatives for much-needed resources. The stigma of dependency is a *gendered* one: many deportees referred to themselves as ‘grown men’ who should not be reliant on others and spoke proudly of how they had always provided for their families. In Jamaican society, being a provider is a crucial aspect of being a male: women and children may be dependants, but to rate as masculine men must be financially independent (Lewis 2007; Lewis and Carr 2009). As Delvin explained, ‘right now, I just need an income. I feel if I do not get an income I am not going to be a man.’

The inability of deportees to provide for their loved ones in the United States was sometimes as hurtful as their newfound reliance on their families abroad. Alberto, for example, is deeply ashamed that his children, with whom he was living at the time of his deportation in 2007, are now in foster care. In 2009, when we spoke, he told me that his children were ‘without proper homes’.

Their mother, I don’t know, something went wrong with her. I don’t really want to tell this part of the story, but I will tell it right now. I don’t tell people; I will tell you because it might make an impact on what deportation does to families. That is the only reason why I mentioned it, but I am private about my life and my children. Right now two of my youngest kids are without proper homes right now … their mother is not right. I have three sisters … and a lot of times I spend time thinking about asking them to take one of my child and the other take the next, but I can’t bring myself to ask them.

Gendered expectations render men reluctant to ask for help or confess their inability to fulfil their role as provider. They often prefer to remain silent rather than admit defeat or show their shame (Kimmel 1994). Alberto could not bring himself to ask his sisters for assistance because to do so would be to acknowledge his helplessness and inability to support his children.

These former long-term residents of the USA are in a paradoxical situation: it is crucial to their well-being to maintain transnational ties with their former home, yet they are ashamed of their newfound dependency on them. Caleb received regular remittances from his common-law wife in the USA, yet resented his dependence. Carl left his children a house and several cars in the USA, but was reluctant to accept their money, despite having no other means of survival in Jamaica. Alberto was too ashamed to ask his sisters in the USA to help him get his children out of foster care.
Forced transnationalism

Female deportees: reliant but not ashamed

With 96.5 per cent of Jamaican criminal deportees being men, I interviewed four female deportees in an attempt to gain insight into the gender differences between male and female deportees. All the female deportations were for drug offences – three for being drug couriers and the fourth for being in possession of drugs in the United States. They all worked in the drugs trade because they needed money to support their families. As Julia Sudbury (2002: 70) argues, ‘the failure of the legal economy to provide adequate means for women’s survival is the key incentive for those who choose to enter the drug trade.’ These women engaged in illegal activity not for their personal gain, but to provide for their families that which the state denied them – schooling, health care, and food.

Whereas the men spoke of being homeless and needing money for their daily bread, the women’s primary concern was to provide for themselves and their children, especially those who still had young children at home. Their transnational ties to the USA added a survival strategy to their toolkit. Wendy, for example, receives used shoes and clothes from the United States, and resells them in the market.

I have some friends in America that will send worn clothes and shoes from their children and I would sell them. … They just send them to me because the only money they pay is the freight to send the barrel because things they were going to throw away, somebody could use them.

Here, Wendy diminishes the effort her US friends make by saying that they send things ‘they were going to throw away’. This contrasts with male deportees who often acknowledge the Herculean efforts of their family abroad to send them money by pointing to the global recession and to how hard it is to get by in the United States.

Naimah is another woman deported for smuggling drugs. She accepted an offer to take a package to the United States in return for $2000 because she was having trouble making ends meet as a single mother with three children. Her endeavours were unsuccessful as Border Patrol agents arrested her at the port of entry after discovering she was carrying one kilo of cocaine and sent her off to be imprisoned and eventually deported. I asked her how she supports herself.

I get a little help here and there. … Right now I am at my mother’s house. My mother went away. She is in England now with my sister. They kinda help me a little … but she says it is not for me; it is for the kids because I just had twins a month ago now.

Naimah, like Wendy, downplays the assistance she receives, calling it ‘a little’. Her sister and mother send her money, but instruct her to spend it on the children. For Naimah, there is no shame in receiving money from someone else to help her children survive. As Charmaine Crawford (2003) points out, Caribbean women often see
mothering as a collective endeavour and are thus not ashamed when others help them raise their children, especially if those others are abroad and have more access to financial opportunities. Naimah transported drugs to the United States in the hope of making enough money to meet her and her children’s needs. Since her deportation, she still has the same needs – food, housing, school fees and medical treatment for herself and her children.

I spoke to very few women, and we thus cannot draw too many conclusions from this very small sample. Nevertheless, we can analyse closely what deportees have to say about their newfound reliance on relatives, and it becomes clear that many men feel emasculated by their inability to provide for their families, and even to fend for themselves as deportees. The women, by contrast, find it normal that others should help them out, so long as they also help themselves.

**Conclusion**

In recent years, migration scholars’ understanding of the quantity and quality of transnational exchanges has become more complex. The findings reported here make it clear that the strategic use of transnational ties is an area worthy of exploration. In this study, I highlight the importance of the affective and material ties that voluntary and forced migrations generate. I shed light on what people feel about transnational ties and look into how gendered expectations and societal stigma shape these feelings. The use of transnational ties as coping strategies is likely to apply to other migrants and deportees. My findings suggest that scholars should pay attention to gendered expectations associated with the receipt of financial and social remittances.

Deportees retain transnational ties with their former host country because they depend on them to survive. Forcibly uprooted from their friends, families and livelihoods in the United States, many deportees look abroad for emotional and financial support. In an earlier time, many of the deportees had sent remittances back to Jamaica, which made them feel they were fulfilling an important role as providers. It is common for male deportees to feel ashamed of their reliance on remittances and their inability to provide even for themselves, let alone members of their family in the United States and Jamaica.

This newfound dependence carries a gendered stigma. The few women with whom I spoke had not lived in the United States for long. Most had travelled there as drug couriers. The aim of their migration to the United States is to earn enough to support their children, but when it fails through their apprehension and deportation, they are in a similar or worse situation than before and are again reliant on remittances to survive. The four women with whom I spoke expressed no shame about their reliance on friends and relatives abroad. Many of the men, by contrast, felt emasculated by their inability to fend for themselves and provide for their families. To be real men, they needed to be providers.

The stigma of poverty, specifically the inability to earn a living, is the most powerful stigma in the lives of deportees. It is not just being poor that is shameful; it
Forced transnationalism

is the inability to fulfil important gender roles, notably that of provider. Deportation creates a newfound reliance on transnational coping strategies, which carries a gendered stigma through the male deportees’ inability to act as providers.

Transnational ties help deportees cope with hardship, but such reliance comes at a cost. Maintaining contact with ‘home’ – whether a country of birth or place of adoption – is a reminder of what one once had at home. Transnational survival strategies remind deportees of what they once had and have lost.

Acknowledgements

The funding to research and write this article came from a Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Award as well as a General Research Fund Award from the University of Kansas. I presented earlier versions of the article to the University of Kansas Hall Center for the Humanities, the American Sociological Association, the Latin American Studies Association, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. I thank Alisdair Rogers, Silvia Dominguez, Helen Marrow, Kirsteen Anderson, audience members at various forums and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

Notes

2. In 2010, of the 1475 Jamaicans deported 1161 (78.7 per cent) were deported as criminals. This was the highest among the top ten receiving countries of deportees. From ‘Immigration Enforcement Actions: 2010’, June 2011, available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/enforcement-ar-2010.pdf.
3. Detailed data on deportees from the United States are not freely available; consequently, these are estimates. My calculations are based on Bernard Headley’s estimates in his book (Headley et al. 2005), Department of Homeland Security data releases, Migration Policy Institute numbers (Glennie and Chappell 2010), and a report by Human Rights Watch: Forced apart: by the numbers. Human Rights Watch obtained its data from the Department of Homeland Security through a Freedom of Information request. Bernard Headley obtained his data from the US embassy in Jamaica. Glennie and Chappell obtained theirs from the Department of Homeland Security and Jamaican data sources.

References


Forced transnationalism


