

INTRODUCTION

The production of “human waste,” or more correctly wasted human (the “excessive” and “redundant” that is, the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment to modernity. It is an inescapable side effect of order-building (each order casts some parts of the extant population as “out of place,” “unfit,” or “undesirable”) and of economic progress (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of “making a living” and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood).

(BAUMAN 2004:5)

BAUMAN'S PRESCIENT ANALYSIS on the processes of social exclusion that appear to be endemic to late modernity frames our study of the lives of subjects who formerly resided in the United States, sometimes for considerable parts of their lives, either as “permanent legal residents” or as “undocumented residents,” but who now find themselves forcibly dispatched to their country of birth, the Dominican Republic, as “criminal deportees.” Our study traces the lives of these embodiments of “human waste” (in Bauman’s terminology) and their bulimic journey (Young 1999, 2007) across the Caribbean as they get pushed, pulled, and ultimately vomited out by a nation whose foreign policy has rarely veered from its early imperial path of Manifest Destiny and whose economy is so dependent on the world’s surplus labor pool. These twin, mutually reinforcing characteristics of the United States are key to an understanding of our subjects’ fates, past, present, and future, and provide the sociological and political economic contexts in which their lives unfold.

There have been more than thirty thousand Dominicans forcibly repatriated in a little more than ten years, a population little noticed by the general public until the recent protests of the undocumented and their supporters. We begin with a letter from one of them, Pedro.

12 January, 2005

Dearest Professor Brotherton

I sincerely hope this letter finds yourself, friends and family in the very best of health and spirits. As for myself, suffice it to say that I and others like me continue to struggle and try and make sense of it all.

Sir, I wrote you previously but after speaking to you over the phone I said to myself let me shorten this up because time is limited.

First off, I applaud your efforts, admire your work however little of it I was able to see, and thank you not only as one of the many affected by these unjust laws, but as one human being to another.

May the good Lord keep you strong and bless you always. Professor, people, that includes governments, always lament the atrocities when it's too late to do anything about it. I guess hindsight is always 20/20 but it is the observers, the conscientious objectors, the ones on the outside who must always point out these things while they are happening.

Because for any evil to win, the Good must simply let it happen, and evil is committed at the time by good people who happen to have good intentions but who simply forgot there's 2 sides to everything.

There undoubtedly exist those in power who simply and deliberately don't care because, as the saying goes "shit rolls down hill not up."

Sir, not all men leave prison the same. You cannot paint us all with the same brush. I do not believe that the founding fathers meant for all this to have taken place.

How many good men throughout history have come out of prison? Quite a few. But let me fill you in on what is going on down here.

The military and law enforcement are the true Dominican mafia. They are involved in everything. Narcotics, murder, rape, crime, etc. they routinely hire men like myself as gunmen or drug enforcers and then send a team of cops to kill us. Coming from me it may sound unbelievable but the facts speak for themselves and time proves and reveals the truth as well as the lie. The drug of choice is heroin for the deportees. No employment is available. Some have nowhere to sleep much less to eat, a lot are uneducated and the few who were educated in the U.S. can't find work here.

The cost of living is sky high here. In the Dominican Republic if you have no money, a car to get around in, and a house or an apartment you will go through many, many changes. Some make it through alright some or rather many don't.

The rise in crime is easily blamed on the deportees. I should say conveniently so. Professor, we the deportees are not a threat to the U.S. government. No-one can make me believe that.

A more real and serious threat are the Bush's and others like them. People in power who allow and sanction drug importation, prostitution, murder etc . . . Do you really believe that hicks from the Dominican Republic will topple the U.S. government? No sir they won't! Many will say, "Well, you're on a tropical island" and so on and so forth. That doesn't hold water either. Many like myself are raised there in New York all our lives, that's all we know. In prison I went to college for a 2 year Associates, a degree as a paralegal, preparing for my eventual release.

Did I get into a lot of fights in prison? Of course I did, but who didn't. It's prison for Christ's sake! Yet never was the good looked at, only the bad.

At the end I was told I would be deported to a country I basically knew nothing about. To a culture I do not understand and that's more than wrong.

I paid my debt to society and hoped and prayed to be with my family. To sit with them, laugh, cry, to walk down familiar streets, to ride a train, a bus and see the changes.

My personal plight is more of an emotional one, I guess. Does it make it any less important? No sir! I believe it only makes matters worse. My family in the U.S. is trying desperately to keep sending me money but what happens when they can't?

Who will feed a deportee for free? Or house us? Or anything?

Do you know the stigma that goes with being a deportee? The media has made us out to be animals who should be caged forever or killed for the good of society. In the D.R. law enforcement and their justice system has no problem doing either although they prefer the latter.

We can't even get a visa out of the country for up to a year or maybe more. That's because as soon as we arrive we are put in their prison until someone comes to claim you like luggage. Then you are fingerprinted, taken pictures of and you now have a criminal record in the D.R. without having committed a crime here.

We are on parole for six months and then given a document of good conduct but the record stays. You can't get a job without the good conduct paper by the way, because everybody asks to see it. You also need a cedula

(stamp in English) or a government I.D. card which you can't get without the good conduct paper.

Then when all this is done and you go to get a Visa to Europe or anywhere, excluding the U.S. naturally, you can't get it because the government of the D.R. has you pegged as a criminal, and with today's global atmosphere of paranoia you undoubtedly get denied. So we are in essence boxed in, forced to live in poverty and like it.

We are left with no other recourse because if you get a job here it's a miracle. With a criminal record you'd be lucky if they let you pump gas at a gas station so what do many of us do? We head back home. Home is where the heart is and we are N.Y. bound, sink or swim, that's the overall opinion. Better to live in prison in New York than free in the D.R. We simply don't care about getting caught for re-entry, that's the sad truth.

No-one leaves here with the intent of getting caught. We wish only to be with our respective families, and most, not all, wish to simply work off the books in the U.S. It's that simple. I just came from prison. Crime is on the rise. The Prison population is overcrowded. Did deporting 25,000 Dominicans matter at all? Do you see my point?

Sir, so much more I can write on this but for the moment I believe I touched base with you on most of the important issues and details of what we are going through.

I thank you sincerely for your time. May God help you always and I remain one of the many in the struggle.

Very Truly Yours

Pedro V.

Pedro, the brother of a psychology graduate student at the City University of New York, was deported in September 2005 after spending thirty-three years in the United States, coming to Manhattan, New York, with his family at the age of four. Pedro never became a citizen; like many Dominicans, he gained legal residency and felt able to travel freely back and forth between the Caribbean and his new homeland without thinking about the legal implications of being a noncitizen. That is, until the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), whose provisions created hundreds of thousands of quintessential examples of social rejection known as "criminal aliens," who eventually become "criminal deportees." The act passed in the same year in which Congress, with President Clinton's prompting, ended welfare as we know it, eventually becoming law after being

revised three times in the same year—each time increasing the severity of its penalties and widening the net of its criminal categories. The result was a complete reshaping of the nation's immigration policy, signaling a reversal of the more enlightened immigration legislation of 1965, which ended the Eurocentric and racist practice of quotas.

As Pedro balefully asks, How did this happen? How did this happen to him and hundreds of thousands like him? What happened to the country he was raised in? Was it not supposed to be the beacon of democracy and due process? Was it not based on giving immigrants a chance to prove themselves? What did he do to deserve such vindictive treatment from the criminal justice system after he had served his time and paid for his crime, as the expression goes? What can he do to adapt to his lot, a lifetime in exile in a country from which he is culturally estranged, where he is blamed for every spike in the crime index, and where he is regularly used as the stuff of moral panic by the government and the media, thus diverting attention from the corruption of the state and from the deepening inequalities that lie at the root of the country's fraying social fabric?

Yet, while Pedro veers between the sanguine and the desperate, he has not yet succumbed. Despite relapses, he has not become dependent on heroin to counter his depression as have an increasing number of deportees in a country that previously saw little hard drug use. Nor has he entered the illicit economy to counter the punishing levels of unemployment and underemployment while supplementing the meager income sent by his working-class family in New York City, who do their best to keep Pedro out of absolute poverty. Instead, he lives in the hope that, some day, he will be back in New York where he was raised, back with his mother and his brother, as he had dreamed while serving his sentence in those other New York State warehouses of human storage: Attica, Sing Sing, Comstock, and the rest.

For Pedro, the once-irrepressible immigrant, the street kid who as a youth wandered into the "wrong crowd," the question remains: Who took away his dream? What system does this to its quasi-subjects? Is this another form of inappropriate social control that ran so powerfully through America's twentieth century that it threatens to unravel the country's democratic traditions in the new millennium? This book is in many ways a study of what happens to the immigrant's dream when it becomes a nightmare in which a young bilingual, bicultural boy or girl attending a New York public elementary school at the age of seven becomes a permanent exile at the age of thirty-two. What happened in between? Where did the immigrant as subject go wrong? Why did no one warn him or her of the lifelong consequences of their actions? What does it feel like to be thrice removed from the most important people

in one's life, first through emigration, then through prison, and lastly through deportation? And finally, how does the immigrant-turned-deportee socially, economically, culturally, and psychologically survive in his or her newly enforced environment?

Questions such as these will be addressed in the ensuing pages as we analyze the data from our seven-year ethnographic study and apply a range of sociological theories in social control, immigration, transnationalism, and cultural criminology. It is our hope that shedding much-needed light on this population and the processes of inclusion and then exclusion will make a timely contribution to the escalating debates on immigration control and on the punitive sanctions that now take the place of a rational, humanistic, and progressive criminal justice and immigration policy. In so doing, we will have shown the humanity of these subjects who are mostly just numbers on the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) annual report of "deportable aliens," or just another case number in Immigration Court as the judge for the umpteenth time dismisses the vain efforts of the noncitizen to forestall his or her deportation back to their respective homeland.

