United States Deportation Policy and its effects on Samoan Deportees

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Abstract

Deportation is increasingly used as a policy tool across many countries. The United States deports large numbers of people to many parts of the world, including Samoa. Previous studies have explored perceptions of human insecurity among returnees to Samoa. In addition, a growing body of literature considers the threats to regional security that such large movements of criminal deportees present. This article seeks to add to this literature by presenting returnee narratives to provide an in-depth exploration of the returnee journey and its possible implications for policy design. The article seeks to add to this growing body of literature by demonstrating policy gaps that prevent effective policy coordination between friendly nations. This article suggests that these gaps can be addressed through the use of more effective policy design to ensure more successful resettlement. Such an approach would bring together deportees and policy actors in the United States and Samoa to better address the complex needs deportees present and more broadly for improved bilateral and multilateral relations with small island states.

Keywords: deportation, crimmigration, Samoa, reintegration, public policy design

Introduction

International migrations take place within legally restrictive and often overtly hostile political environments in destination countries. Legal restrictions limit opportunities to formalise or extend immigration status. This, in turn, contributes to the rise in deportations by creating a perpetual underclass of individuals and families deprived of viable, sustainable economic opportunities (Anderson, Gibney & Paoletti, 2011; Coutin, 2015; and DeGenova & Peutz, 2010). For many, denial of access to the formal economy as visa overstayers results in unemployment, over-crowded housing, and exclusion from public welfare (Raphael, 2006). This deprivation often leads to poor socioeconomic and health outcomes and increased criminal offending (Vargas, Sanchez & Juarez 2017; Moran, Gill and Conlon, 2013; Peutz, 2006; and Walters, 2002). For those with impermanent immigration status, a criminal offence can lead to deportation—or the "forcible removal, upheaval and sometimes permanent exclusion from the polity" (Wong 2015, p. 65).The deportee is thus taken from family and community and sent to a country where they often share little in the way of language, culture, and connection with others.

Besides the many hardships such dislocation creates for deportees, the deportation also presents myriad policy challenges for resettlement nations. A growing body of scholarship has shown that deportations pose complex criminogenic policy challenges to resettlement states in terms of education, employment, drug abuse, mental health and family and peer relationships (DeBono, Ronnqvist & Magnusson, 2015; Torres, et al., 2019; Rojas, Flores, et al., 2017; Ward & Stewart, 2003; Weber & Powell, 2017).Deportees thus represent a complex, intersectional policy problem: they are politically weak, regarded as socially undesirable, disconnected from policy processes, and often have backgrounds defined by violence and mental illness. These factors are exacerbated in island states where experiences of dislocation occur within small communities.

As the number of criminal deportations from the United States has grown, alongside those from Australia and New Zealand, the current trajectory of policy responses in Samoa (and elsewhere) is one of increased surveillance and securitization (Sousa-Santos, 2022; McNeill, 2021). Policies have

thus grown more punitive and arguably less focused on deportee reintegration as citizens. Examples of this trend include Samoa's adoption of a 2015 Aotearoa New Zealand law, the Returning Offenders (Management and Information) (ROMI) Act. The Act subjects those deported from Australia due to a criminal conviction carrying a sentence of 12 months or more to various forms of surveillance upon their return to New Zealand. In 2019, the Government of Samoa adopted similar legislation, the Returning Offender Act, which similarly mandates returnee surveillance (Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, 2019). From the returnee perspective, deportation stigmatisation is exacerbated by such measures. This has the potential to further marginalise returnees and present challenges to their successful reintegration. This trend, however, is occurring as part of a broader movement towards the use of deportation as a policy response to immigration.

The "Deportation Turn"

By the start of the twenty-first century, many states began to use deportation as a policy tool within increasingly strict migration policies (Ward & Stewart, 2003). Some scholars refer to this period as the 'deportation turn' (DeGenova & Peutz, 2010). Yet, this policy shift also presents an apparent paradox. Although states have increasingly relied on this tool, it is widely regarded as "brutal, expensive and ineffective" (Majidi & Schuster, 2018).There is no indication that these punitive policy regimes are waning or are likely to become more humane.

These issues are emerging within a new policy domain, sometimes called 'crimmigration', through the convergence of two previously distinct bodies of law and policy: immigration and criminal policy (Stumpf, 2006; Das, 2018; Billings, 2019; and Weber &Bowling 2004). As Menjivar, Gomez Cervantes and Alvord (2018, p. 2) have defined the concept, crimmigration constitutes the "convergence of immigration law with criminal law, through the expansion of policing enforcement inside the country and its borders. "This shift has coincided with constructions of immigrant populations in media and policy narratives becoming more "gendered, racialized and marginalized" (Menjivar, Gomez-Cervantes, & Alvord, 2018, p. 1). Such constructions have exacerbated racial animus, informed criminal convictions used as a pretext for deportations and diffused rapidly across many countries in recent decades (Das, 2018). Within the Pacific region, the United States, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, for example, have fully embraced crimmigration (Carvalho, Chamberlen & Lewis, 2020). At the same time, deportations have risen, migration laws have tightened, and detention practices have become routinised. In the region, Aotearoa New Zealand has also expanded deportation for criminal convictions (Fadgen, 2021).

Responding to the rise in deportations, many states are forced to develop policies to address the needs of deported citizens. There are a range of returnee country policies to reintegrate deportees, from the merely unwelcoming to the more benign (Golash-Boza, 2015; Caldwell, 2019). Yet, these countries often lack the social safety nets or other progressive policies that might enable returnees to become re-established. These states often rely upon "binational agreements, collaboration with international organisations, interfaith coalitions, local educational institutions and civil society organisations and, in some cases, support from the deporting countries to fill these gaps" (Hagan &Wassink 2020, p. 542; Cassarino, 2004; and Boehm, 2016).Such governmental and civil society features of deportation infrastructures across the Pacific have yet to be explored.

Overall, much of the existing scholarship is framed as the 'political sociology of return' and aims to "understand the effects of mounting immigration control policies by examining the return experiences of those migrant groups" (Hagan & Wassink 2020, p. 540). Scholars then divide this

literature between research that focuses on the "subjective reintegration experiences, interpretations and agentic responses" of deportees and those that examine the deportation and reintegration policies themselves as a unit of analysis (Hagan & Wassink 2020, p. 541). These studies have observed a continuum of settling-state responses that range from indifference to re-criminalization (Hagan & Wassink 2020). Some recent work has even delved into the deportation journeys, with a particular focus on reintegration experiences (see e.g. Turnbull 2018). Their search at the heart of this article seeks to add to the growing body of research on the subjective reintegration experiences and responses of a small cohort of returnees to Samoa, a middle-income, small island state located in the southern Pacific region.

Pereira (2011) is often credited as having authored the first major report to draw attention to Pacific deportation in recent years. At the same time, several interesting studies had begun to emerge on this phenomenon in the years prior to her UNESCO-sponsored study.[1] Pereira's mixed-methods report focused on deportation experiences for Tongans and Samoans and amongst its key findings were the detrimental impacts of family separation as well as those challenges faced by deportees upon their arrival in Samoa and Tonga. That report was written at a time where the Samoa Returnees Charitable Trust, a homegrown, community-based not-for-profit dedicated to the resettlement of deportees, had not yet been established.

Other studies have explored various elements of the deportee experience in the decade since Pereira's report. Weber and Powell (2018), for example, focus on the proliferation of deportation as a policy tool in response to the "major preoccupation of contemporary governments" with "ongoing risks to community safety" (2018, p. 205). And importantly their contention that "it appears that little thought is given by governments to the impact of deportation within receiving countries." (2018, p. 206). The authors considered the impacts of deportation on individuals re-integrating in Samoa. In particular the authors argued that the experience of deportation constitutes a significant risk to the security of the deportees themselves. This is particularly so given the challenges of (re)establishing their lives in "unfamiliar or even hostile" communities whilst also labouring under the stigma of their identities as criminals (2018, p. 207). Weber and Powell's study was primarily concerned with the deportation experiences of those individuals returned from Australia with the bulk of the research coming from data collected in Australia and some additional research collected in Samoa.

Recent scholarship on deportees in the Pacific has tended to focus on the criminological aspects of return as well as a growing literature on the expansion of a criminal justice policy paradigm for the control and surveillance of deportees (see e.g. McNeill, 2021). In particular McNeill's recent work on "crimmigration creep" or the phenomenon of this increasing reliance on a criminological and security-based paradigm in the Pacific region is of particular interest. Yet, this work is primarily concerned with the inter-state relations within the southern Pacific region and not with those between the United States and Samoa.

These interstate relations, as well as the myriad domestic policy challenges created by deportations of this nature raise the centrality of public policy responses to ensure successful resettlement outcomes. To that end, this article also seeks to bring into the discussion of deportee resettlement discourse the emerging scholarship on public policy design (Dorst, 2010; Burkett, 2012; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2018; Peters, 2018; Howlett, 2018; 2019; Fernandez-Marin, Knill and

[1]Among these, a 2005 Master of Arts thesis titled *Narrative Survival in the Tongan Diaspora: The Case of the American Deportees* by Lea Lani Kinikini at the University of Hawai'i.

Steinbach, 2021). As Peters (2018, p.3) has observed two of the core benefits of sound policy design is that it requires that policy architects think "systematically about what would constitute the policy" and that having such a clear design in mind will lead to better learning about policy and an ability to evaluate its effectiveness more thoroughly.

Policy design can be understood as an attempt "to integrate understandings of the problems being addressed with some ideas of the instruments used for intervention and the values that are being sought through the policy." (Peters 2018, p.5) Howlett has further refined the definition of policy design as the "deliberate and conscious attempt to define policy goals and connect them to instruments or tools expected to realize those goals." (2015, p. 292) The most important elements of the current scholarship on policy design is the emphasis on gaining a clear understanding of the policy problem from the population most affected by the policy problem or the intended intervention— placing people are at the centre of the policy process.

Moreover, in addition to the primacy of people in a policy design orientation to policymaking, the designer must also be mindful of the particular context—or contexts--within which the policy is to be developed and implemented. Policy designers are thus wise to take into account those institutional and social contexts surrounding a policy space and to avoid ready-made solutions or approach problems and a "excessively technocratic" manner the policies are unlikely to succeed (Peters, 2018).

The increased focus on design thinking and principles in the formulation and study of public policy as given rise to competing views of the design space, including the drive to achieve co-design of public policy. As Blomkamp (2018) has observed, the application of co-design principles for public policy "is not entirely new—it draws on established traditions of participation, collaboration and empowerment in public policy and planning" (2018, p. 730). Central to this approach is the recognition of the "privileged position" of the lived-experiences of those for whom the policy is intended rather than the solely relying upon the technical expertise of policy advisors (See e.g. Blomkamp, 2018; Howlett and Migone, 2013).

Blomkamp (2018) has helpfully emphasised the importance of co-design within the policy space. Citing Bradwell and Marr (2008), she noted the importance of the approach to engendering connection to and ownership over the resulting policy. This connection is created not only amongst the target population but those working within the implicated policy space. The bringing together in dialogue of those impacted by and those traditionally charged with the crafting of policy, is an approach most likely to generate empathy and better understanding across these groups. (See e.g. Hagen & Rowland, 2011). This process would be particularly appropriate for those policy spaces where misunderstandings are greatest; where there is the likelihood of misaligning policy to the needs of a particular moment.

In the sections that follow, this article contends that deportees constitute such a community and one that is novel in its transcendence of national boundaries, requiring a high degree of policy co-design to address needs throughout the deportation journey. Based on deportee experiences, this article proposes an organisation of the deportation process into three policy phases: first, the pre-deportation phase; second, the arrival in the country of national origin phase; and third, the long-term (re)integration phase. As will be seen below, these phases can, in turn, be further segmented to allow for policy dialogue and design to better address the unique needs of deportees, their families and countries of national origin.

Situating the Research

This article seeks to add to this literature by more centrally locating the lived experiences of deportees and in particular their journeys from the United States to Samoa and how these journeys are influenced by public policies in both the sending and receiving states. In the process, the emphasis here is on providing points for reflection on the improvement of policies and process that remove people from one context to bring them into another, foreign context. As argued below, the main deporting countries to the Pacific islands, which include Australia and New Zealand along with the United States, have not effectively collaborated or coordinated with receiving states, let alone have practices which place the interests of deportees or their resettlement communities in mind.

To explore this phenomenon, this article adds to the growing literature on deportee experiences by considering experiences of deportees in the small island state of Samoa. In the process, the article considers how a small cohort of individuals navigated the process from incarceration in the deporting nation, to arrival in Samoa and their reintegration experiences in Samoa. The aim of this article is to explore how these deportees have found ways to reconnect with civic and policy-life within their countries of birth and imposed residence. The discussion concludes with suggestions for future research and suggestions for policy engagement opportunities for deportees to improve the likelihood of more successful resettlements in future.

As will be argued below, one of this study's key conceptual insights is in extending the concept of liminality (Van Gennep, 1960)—a state of disorientation that exists in people transitioning from one life-phase to an undefined future state. Chakraborty (2016, p. 146) has described those experiencing liminality as "caught in between two stages of development, who do not hold clearly defined positions within their social system, feel marginal, excluded, without identity or influence. "Liminality has been considered in a range of social experiences (cancer survivors (Little, et al., 1998); asylum seekers (O'Reilly, 2018); deportees (using case files) (Blue, 2015) management studies (Soderland, 2018)). For the reasons set out below, this concept is particularly useful when exploring the experiences of deportees whose existence is a convergence of political, legal and social inflection points.

Methods

This is a phenomenological exploration of United States deportees to Samoa. To examine the end-to-end deportation experience of deportees, this study assembled narrative accounts of those deportees who had been through this process. The author conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small group of male Samoan returnees, four (4) in total. Young and Casey (2018, p. 12) have found that a small sample size consisting of "rigorously collected qualitative data" can "substantially represent the full dimensionality of people's experiences." Indeed, such an approach has even been advanced in research employing a quantitative approach (see e.g., Tu'akoi, et al., 2018).

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews in this study focused on three dimensions of the deportation and reintegration process, including the pre-deportation process, initial arrival in Samoa and longer-term community re-integration. Interviews were conducted by the author and audio recorded. The author hand-coded and analyzed verbatim transcripts to identify themes using a modified van Kaam approach (Moustakas 1994). This approach is intended to preserve the centrality

of the participants' voices; a central concern particularly with this population, which is marginalized in both the deporting nation as well as in the reintegration context. As the discussion that follows reveals, the areas of inquiry focused on the processes and practices impacting on deportees and their journey from their adopted country back to Samoa.

Discussion

This section identifies four themes identified from the in-depth, qualitative interviews. The central aim of the research was to explore the lived-experiences of the deportees in the events leading up to their deportation, their deportation experiences as well as their experiences upon arrival in Samoa and re-integration into the community. The first theme concerns experiences in early life and departure from Samoa and their journey through the Pacific to the western United States where for the most part these deportees settled. The second theme relates to the deportees' criminal offending in the United States and experiences in prison leading up to their eventual release into Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody and their deportation from the United States. The third theme involved the returnees 'deportation experiences from the United States. The final theme concerns their arrival in Samoa and subsequent re-integration into the community. The sections that follow are divided into these broad thematic categories.

Early Life Experiences

Each of the participants reported leaving Samoa at a young age some as young as just a few months old. And they tended to remain out of Samoa for many years until deportation brought them back, most living between 15 and 30 years in the United States and other countries. All returned to Samoa over the age of 30, well into adulthood. While some participants mentioned having familiarity with the Samoan language, lack of comfort with it was highlighted as a barrier upon return. Most of the participants reported being permanent residents in the United States and most followed a similar pattern of moving from Samoa to either American Samoa or Hawaii and then to the western United States. Two of the participants noted having spouses and children still living in the United States.

Each of the respondents reported very similar youth experiences. They reported lower levels of education, often leaving school by intermediate school age. They described economic challenges through either the loss of a parent or the migration of the family and some of the dislocation that this cost. For example, one participant noted:

> My background when I grew up was, I didn't even have an education because, you know, the condition of my family at the time…. I had a good family; I had a father and a mother but my father passed away when I was very young…. He was the only one that provides for the family and we don't have any financial income so my mom was crying because she didn't know how she was going to manage and keep us as a family…That's when I came to the conclusion, I got to make a choice. Quit school from that time and I tried to find a job. I was trying to find anyway that I can you know make some money to support [my family]

Each of the participants mentioned hardships in their youth including loss of a parent or some upheaval caused by their family's migration. All had encounters with the criminal justice system with some beginning in the juvenile justice system and others not until adulthood. Their criminal acts would increase in frequency and severity over time with each of the participants included in this study eventually serving long sentences for felonies.

As a group, the participants reported low levels of formal schooling and family disruptions and dislocation for myriad reasons. They emphasised the need to find work to support family as well as to support their own existence. While many of the participants noted that they had achieved 'permanent' residency in the United States and decades spent living in the country, they were nonetheless vulnerable to deportation. Invariably, these experiences culminated in juvenile and later adult criminal offending and incarceration, ultimately with the imposition of very long prison sentences for a range of offences. While the interview discussion topics did not ask about prison experiences, these were often discussed at some length to provide context about the conditions under which these men had endured immediately prior to their ultimate deportation to Samoa. Their experiences moving from inmates to deportees provides further insights into their shared experiences as eventual returnees in Samoa and it is a consideration of this part of their journey to which we now turn.

Experiencing Deportation

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of being deported from the United States. Each reported a very confusing and convoluted process. These men explained that they had not been very clearly informed about how the prospects of their removal from the United States had even first emerged. Some, owing to anecdotal evidence from friends or associates who had already been deported, reported being vaguely familiar with the process. Most understood from these experiences that the route was long and difficult and that ultimate success in avoiding deportation was improbable. None fought their deportation despite the fact that most indicated that they were aware that they could have done so. As one participant noted about his decision-making process:

> I decided not to fight it…I had about like a year to think about this. Either I fight it or I'm gonna sign [the documents] and get sent [to Samoa] … I don't wanna get caught up again and go to prison for 10-15 years … I was thinking what do I have here? If I stay here I'm gonna end up back in prison because I know myself too much If I go to Samoa, I have my freedom, get my life back. And so that's why I sign the papers.

Another participant conveyed a confusing and astonishing story about his deportation when he explained:

> When they it was 1 o'clock at night and these two guys asked me 'do you have a wish to go on with life?' I thought it was a joke so I told him I wanna go home. I tell them what do you expect me to do? I've been locked up this long, I don't even see my family or anybody that I know. If you asked me that question that's the only thing I want to go home and they ask me what is home? I told them Samoa. When I was talking at the time, I had no idea it was gonna happen but then they tell me then they say your wish will be fulfilled today. We're gonna take you and they change me from shackles. I was used to being transported in another jumpsuit and that then they said we're going to find [me] some clothes that fit that was the only thing they gave me.

Others reported having been convicted and then only many years later being informed that they were going to be deported. As one participant observed:

> Years later I found out that I was getting deported. Probably be about two months before I was actually supposed to parole from state prison. One of the counsellors called me into the office handing me a paper and told me "Hey" you know "sign this". I said "what is this?" he said that "you have an INS hold" I said "what for?" He said "oh you're being deported" so I was like: what? I mean, I wasn't familiar with immigration laws anyway so I never expected to get deported being that I was in the States and being a resident.… So, he gives me a colour copy and tells me that, you know, I got this hold. The prison I was at was already on lockdown so we weren't allowed any phone calls. I couldn't really check up on anything and he didn't give me much information.… After the day I paroled from the prison they sent me to

> another prison . . . . then from there after I paroled. From there . . . . to an immigration facility, El Centro . . . that's in southern California not too far from the border. They processed me in and I didn't talk to a caseworker until maybe a few weeks after that. I was supposed to parole from the prison in December but I stayed in the immigration facilities after that until March.

Other participants reported similarly bewildering experiences. For example, one participant noted being successful on an appeal of a sentence only to then be told that they were being held awaiting an immigration officer to come and pick him up. This participant reported "then they come pick me up from there and take me to another prison to wait. I think further down south . . . at the time I was waiting for two months." And another:

> I went to court and by that time, honestly, I had already been locked up almost 12 years straight. And my understanding from other people, the immigration process it can be long, especially if you're fighting it and it can be expensive. So, I didn't want to be locked up anymore. So, by the time I go to court they gave me the papers and said "hey you can sign and you'll be out of here as soon as possible and get your freedom." So, I signed. After I signed, it still took me a few months to leave.

Each of these participants reported that this period was quite chaotic. During this period of immigration detention there were frequent moves between facilities and States across the western expanse of the United States. The services that they had been offered in prison, limited as they were, were now completely absent. There were no more counselling or educational opportunities. These final American months were ones spent in limbo, awaiting whatever might come. As one participant noted "I just read my Bible. I couldn't even call my wife and my child."

Then, it seemed, just as suddenly as the experience began, it would end. Each of the participants reported that they were simply approached by an officer that said some variety of: OK, you're going now. These people would then be transported to the airport, freed from their incarceration but still shackled during the trip from lockup to airport under the watchful eye of a U.S. Marshal or other official employed to ensure these men boarded their flights before, at long last, cutting them loose. And it was only then, that the real hardship would begin.

Arrival in Samoa and Community (Re) Integration

Arrival

As the previous section presented, participants reported being in custody for many years and sometimes more than a decade prior to being sent back to Samoa. They described their return to Samoa as having occurred often under confusing circumstances with little (or no) communication or coordination with family, counselling or legal services. To make these matters even more strange, they were often sent abroad without a passport, carrying only a certificate of identity to establish who they were to receiving authorities. They explained a process that had them removed from this long term of custody, and then transported in chains until arrival at an airport, where these were removed and told, as one participant reported: "now you're going as a free man."

Whatever elation they might have felt from their new found freedom—from prison cell to the rear of the airplane—would be brief and fleeting. Upon arrival in Samoa, all participants reported a high degree of confusion and feelings best described as surreal. As one participant explained:

> To be honest with you I didn't even know it was real. I didn't even, to be honest with you I had to pinch myself I had to make sure I touched You know when I get off the plane I had to get down on the ground and touch it to see it's real because you know I was still thinking how can this have happened [in the prison] they kept me isolated So when I came I didn't even look like a man, you know? I thought, like, I was from outer space. So when I got here I hadn't had contact or seen anything outside. It was just half of this room [gestures to the small interview room] and this is where I spent 23 hours a day. Seven days

> a week the whole time I was up there I didn't see the outside. So you can imagine from this little area I was in a 6 x 4 [feet] room I spent all these years and then they just put me on a plane and take me to Samoa and I came to Samoa. I felt like I was just losing it.

And besides their freedom, participants reported arriving with little else. They weren't given any money upon their release; they carried no luggage and wore the second-hand clothes their jailers had provided. As one participant noted "the only thing they gave me was pants and a T-shirt and I had my shoes and that was it."

For many deportees, their first steps in Samoa are taken only as adults; after many other steps had been taken in distant lands. Now, with only the clothes on their backs and a single piece of paper in their hands to establish their national origin; a form of identity that to them was similar to that of so many other Americans, as merely a part of a story about where they were from—not really about who they had become. The place on this paper, "Samoa", indicated more about where their ancestors had lived than any of these men. Samoa, a once distant place, viewed fondly, but with reservations, and some distance. The place that had been their true home was now gone, and for most, gone forever. Here, in Samoa, where the heavy, humid tropical air makes a thick mist when first mixing with the cold, dry air of a just-opened airplane cabin door. It was on these airplane steps that these men would again make first steps. Each of the participants described an experience located somewhere between confusion and bewilderment as they emerged at Faleolo airport.

For those deportees fortunate enough to have family that could either afford to travel in advance to meet them in Samoa or who had extended family who are still close enough to their parents or siblings that they could coordinate at the last minute for someone to meet them, these are the exceptions. Stories told about other deportees roaming around the airport for days before someone noticing that they had nowhere to go, were once common. For others, even if they knew where to go, lacking the means to get there and without phone numbers to call. Some might arrive with only the name of a village heard mentioned by family long since gone. As one respondent suggested:

> I was still kind of confused because now, I'm free. I think when I was in prison, you know, how they always tell you go, come, eat, so in years you're not using your own mind. Somebody's telling you: Come! Sit! You know? That kind of mentality that you're not used to control yourself with your own thinking. So, for about two months [post-arrival] I locked myself up in the house. And the family would say: come, eat. Ok, I go eat and come back because I'm confused. Now I'm free but I don't know what to do unless somebody says, aye, come let's go do this, do that. What do you call it [pauses] institutionalized?

Another participant reported:

> Honestly, I didn't know what to expect. I know for me it was, it was scary. Because I left here when I was two months old and everything, I knew was basically the States. As far as I knew, I was American. And I didn't speak the language. I don't understand the customs or the traditions. So, my mom and dad gave me while I was inside, my mom gave me a contact list of family here but I didn't know how to contact anybody… So, I got here finally got to Apia, I mean Faleolo [airport] and my ICE agent brought me out, hand[ed] me over to the local authorities. And in my opinion, they're not as sensitive to returnees, especially at that time. The officers get me and tell me that if nobody's here to pick me up then I would have to stay with them or stay in custody. I told him 'Nah, I'm free'… To me it just rubs me the wrong way man, I've just done all this time, come over here and I got to deal with this.

This deportee had the benefit of a mother who was able to travel to Samoa and wait for him to arrive.

Ostensibly because of security concerns, the immigration system in America would not notify a deportee or their family members in advance of a deportee's arrival. As a result, this deportee explained how his mother had to travel on the day of the international flight. At that time, there was but a single flight a week that came from the U.S. mainland. His mother would, for weeks on end, journey to the airport, hoping that her son might be on that flight. This trip was no small undertaking. Each week she travelled by bus, then by ferry, and then by bus again to Faleolo. Standing for hours while hundreds of passengers, mostly tourists and Samoans returning home, alight from the airplane. This mother waited alone, with nervous anticipation of being reunited with a child not seen in years, a child about to take his first steps again. After the terminal had emptied and then, after waiting a little longer still, just in case he had been held back by over-zealous immigration officials. Waiting until long after tourists had departed in taxis and rental cars, after other families had joyful reunions and had also departed, only then could the mother leave, to begin the long journey home again until the next week and the hope that he might arrive then, until eventually he did. He explained the experience: "as I'm walking back, I hear somebody call my name I turn around it was my mom. That's when I told the officers: I'm gone…"

Community (Re)Integration

More challenging times awaited these returnees. The adjustment from being institutionalized, as they described it, to being free, always a difficult process for someone being released from long prison sentences, was compounded in Samoa by the lack of social services available to returnees, unfamiliar surroundings, and often absence of close family network to help ease the transition. As one returnee described the experience:

> I couldn't really take it to tell you the truth, I didn't wanna be outside. I mean I wasn't used to a lot of things and for one I still get paranoid around people coming from an isolated, structured environment there's too much for me to handle. People constantly moving by me and you know cars and everything else.… Basically, just kind of stayed in the room for a few months . . . I came out and interacted with my immediate family or whoever was there but I didn't feel comfortable just being out.

A similar experience was reported by another deportee who said

> I look at the outside, look at people, you know, they start talking to me and I'm just daydreaming. Alot of people start talking to me and I'm just staring at them, you know? And … when you get out, we have to . . . cut your hair [to] make you look decent like a human being. Because I just walked straight out of a cell and straight to the plane.… It took me like the whole month before I start talking.

And this is where for many returnees a difficult crossroads appears. Some, in order to help cope with the anxiety and stress they were feeling, turn to old vices, including alcohol and drugs. In addition, there was the feeling amongst the returnees that they needed to conceal who they were. They lived in fear of what people would think of them. Some deportees were able to reside with people who knew that they had been in prison and so for these immediate acquaintances and family members it was not a significant issue but for many others it was.

A small community has formed as the number of returnees has increased over the years. This can be both good and bad. For the returnee who is trying to start a new life, hopes of avoiding old and familiar habits and behaviours, this new community presents potential peril. A return to drinking, for some, might lead to human connections but can also lead to people engaged in questionable conduct. As one deportee noted,

> You know once you meet one, they'll introduce you to everyone and everybody was usually caught up in the same thing still drinking hanging out getting in trouble. Me personally after about a month of hanging out with these guys for me it didn't feel right because I've already been through all that and I

> didn't wanna have to come back to Samoa and to go through the same… so I decided to break free and stop hanging out.

Others noticed that life was not so much different. As one noted "I still live like I'm living in the States. It's just the language that's different." But even for this one returnee noted that "all my brothers and sisters, they all live [overseas] I'm the youngest out of 12 and I'm the only one here."Some members of his family are able to visit once or twice a year. This experience seemed atypical.

What do Deportees Consider Challenges and Strengths to their Effective Reintegration?

The participants in the study shared other commonalities. For one, the participants shared a desire to have a new life, to help others learn from their experiences and mistakes and to find love and fulfilment. It was also common to find a desire and indeed even an expectation that they would one day be able to return, if even for a visit, to what they perceived as their rightful home in the United States. A place where, for many, their spouses and children still live.

Given the tremendous stigma attached to deportees seeking to re-integrate in the community, deportees expressed that Samoan employer exhibited a general hesitancy if not outright hostility to employing deportees. The lack of employment opportunities and unavailability of resources or savings to draw on, meant that deportees often had to rely on immediate family to provide for their shelter, transportation and in meeting other basic needs. The participants, to various degrees, reported significant struggles in finding employment despite some of the returnees possessing trade skills and other technical abilities that one might reasonably expect to be marketable. As one returnee described his difficulties:

> when I start going around to any organization that could help there was none. I even asked some people if there was a job, you know, I'm looking for a job. When I told them I'm from overseas they say 'sorry, we don't have any. 'That wasn't very easy, you know, trying to explain to these people. I feel like I'm alien to this country nobody really wanna know you. Nobody wanna give you anything. Nobody wanna show you anything. It was just like the hardest part of my life. I mean in prison I can know how to get it. When I get back here, I was totally lost. I don't know when I can have food so I just survive.

Still, for others, for whom more spiritual or therapeutic paths were sought, opportunities existed through the presence of a special school for troubled youth where deportees were able to meaningfully contribute as a living cautionary tale--a sort of "scared straight" experience for youth sent into the country from overseas. Others continued with Bible training and other pursuits in order to fulfil a desire to give back to the community, and in some ways to make amends to it.

In terms of connections and the building of a social network there is of course the Samoa Returnees Charitable Trust, which offers returnees a community of people with similar lived-experiences. Most often, however, what was noted was the church or church organizations. As one respondent noted

> I had to work myself into the church group Do you know being accepted in those churches and they gave me responsibility those responsibilities make me feel like I'm a part of it. I'm a convict I need to prove myself to allow the things that I'm doing and not just on only church and to the people into the ministry and all the people who look at me with that label. And now it's just like I feel like I work more harder. I think what I have to do this just to make sure I can be accepted because the expectation of these people Because any little mistake Normal people make mistakes but for me, for people like me. one little mistake will become a big issue

Others reported learning how to plant and grow food, something with which they hadn't experienced before but confronted by a lack of income and food insecurity, now became dedicated.

As one participant explained:

> Land is a big thing here. So, I got one of my uncles to call my dad in the United States and asked if there was a piece of land I can use. Had my uncle border it, you know show me the borders. So, I just gather some boys and gave them a bottle of Russian vodka, chop down the area and then start planting… they didn't believe that I would actually stick with it because I was supposed to be a city boy but when they see me get up at five in the morning every morning and actually make my effort going to the plantation that kind of attract them to come and help.

The same respondent noted that his greatest resource was "self-motivation "he commented that:

> When you're locked up your options are limited and even while I was growing up I understand that it was a bad choice that I made… I figured out now that as long as I have freedom, I have the option to either go back down the same path or not so I took advantage of my options and just put myself out there rather than being in the shadows and afraid to say that I'm actually deported. Because a lot of people are afraid to admit that they've been deported.

And his hope for the future was that through his work and of their few advocates, including the Samoa Returnees Charitable Trust, that the perception of deportees would become more positive to "help re-integrate and resettle the guys. "This participant commented further that

> one of the things that I believe, we already have the stigma of being deportees, which is bad. So, one of the first things to do is change the perception of a deportee. Everybody makes bad decisions but there's also the chance of having a second chance… The deportation process itself the waiting period being in limbo not knowing where to go and probably in all hoping that those that do you have the opportunity to either get back to the United States or their families or hat have a chance of staying.

Another deportee, reflecting on the deportation process, noted that

> one thing I learned from prison. if you're going to be released you should always have some money handed to you but. you know they just hand me to the door and push on my back and you go to your country. And even when I came here it's like nobody want to look at you when you come home here. You go just to ask for things that you need, it's like you don't exist. It's almost like you're not just only the label on your back, but on your forehead but also still when I came back, you know, when they let you go as a freeman to your country but now it seems like I'm still living under the same problem. The thing is hanging on my back from the States. I cannot even leave this country. My sister passed away last year and I could not even go see my sister. And my mom, she's growing old and when she's gone. That's the only thing right now that really heavy in my in my mind It's like I'm still locked up.

Another participant added to these sentiments that "maybe when they deport a person, they should have sent that person with some sort of money or something to help. Because that person has nothing to come back here to or else it's hopeless."

As presented here, deportees clearly suffer more than most others offered release from prison in the United States. While services upon release for parolees and probationers in the United States is far from perfect, there are still some limited services offered to ease the transition to the community. Public welfare benefits and support offered by immediate family, friends and community are just some of the resources that could be accessed for those released from prison hoping for a fresh start. The experiences of these returnees' lays bare the compounding challenges awaiting those returnees yet to come back to Samoa. In the next section, I offer some brief closing reflections on possible future directions for a more holistic and collaborative policy approach to help address some of these concerns.

Conclusion

As introduced earlier in this article, the deportees' lived-experiences explored here implicate the concept of liminality. The experiences outlined here help bring into better focus the boundaries of this in-between state. What is clear about these blurred lines is that they pre-date the return to

Samoa. The deportation process begins at the first moment of official recognition that they are lacking in one important element of their identity: the right to remain, to be a part of a community rather than labelled as apart from their true home. Thus, liminality might be said to begin while the participant was imprisoned in the United States—and extending well beyond their arrival in Samoa.

This insight allows for, from a policy perspective, more comprehensive and effective mapping of the policy space. Seeing the dislocation and disaffiliation as something a deporting nation bears responsibility for—as much even as the deportee-receiving nation, opens the possibility of cooperation and coordination across these policy spaces to create the potential for more effective outcomes. While one limitation of this study is in the small sample size, thus its generalizability, the participants' experiences very clearly identify a shared pattern of life journey and their existence between now and the yet to be. Future research might take up this issue, perhaps through a survey of deportees and their communities to better understand the perceptions of barriers and opportunities for more successful community reintegration.

Moreover, the foregoing discussion identifies at least two broad policy areas that should become the subject of greater cross-national cooperation and policy co-design. First is the pre-departure deportation process experience within the United States. It is clear from the shared experiences represented in these narratives, that significant confusion existed as to the process followed, the right that each had to fight the deportation decision and the lack of communication to the deportee and their family in order to better facilitate a smooth transition from prison in America to freedom in Samoa. A related issue concerns the variable length of time that the detainee remains in immigration custody awaiting deportation. The cessation of services and other counselling and support in the prison upon their transition to immigration custody is an area that could be ameliorated for deportees. In a sense, further isolation and dislocation within these months, likely exacerbates the difficulties in ultimately adjusting to life in Samoa. Moreover, the secrecy around which deportees are transitioned and transported from America to Samoa, ostensibly for security reasons, only furthers the sense of disconnection and immediate difficulties faced by these returnees.

A second area of policy concern, that of reintegration strategies and practice, arises wholly within Samoa. On first blush, this may seem to be solely within the scope of Samoa's policymaking capacity. However, given the significant social and political challenges that rising criminal deportation pose to small countries like Samoa, and given the otherwise positive relations between Samoa and the United States, not to mention those with Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, the experiences that the deportees presented in this study, give rise to questions about special responsibilities owed perhaps not to the deportees as individuals but by one nation-state to another. Enhanced coordination built on evidence-based practices of effective deportee reintegration that draw on those success stories, such as they are, alongside instances of unsuccessful reintegration, could form the basis of future policy co-design, programmatic coordination and innovation. This would constitute a new direction in cross national relations but would nonetheless represent evidence of the otherwise positive relations that exist between these states.

It is apparent from both the growing frustration that nation-states experience with deportation, as evident in the domestic political discourses in countries like Samoa—but not only there as Aotearoa New Zealand has vented similar frustrations to Australia's practice vis-à-Vis New Zealand, decrying the practice of the deportation of long-term residents who have committed (or who have even been accused of committing) criminal offences. Whether or not a person believes that the deportation of long-term resident is right or just, the practice has succeeded in creating ill will between otherwise

friendly nations. Therefore, even if we were to set aside the human rights interests of deportees, countries engaging in more collaborative, human-centred policy co-design initiatives aimed at more successful reintegration outcomes for criminal deportees would undoubtedly lead to improved resettlement but also improve cross national relationships.

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