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## The slow violence of deportability

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In 2015, Finland, like other European countries, received an unprecedented number of asylum seekers. Later, in the aftermath of what we prefer to call the “refugee reception crisis,” the deportation of those who had received negative asylum decisions began. According to a recent study, the Finnish Immigration Service significantly tightened its policies after 2015 (Saarikkomäki et. al 2018). Increasingly strict asylum criteria have resulted in deportations at a level never seen before. Furthermore, protests against deportations have increased and become publicly salient.

In this chapter we theorize deportation as a form of *slow violence* (Nixon 2011) that hurts not only its main target but also people nearby. While a forced removal can be seen as a single, potentially violent act, deportability is a slow process. The violence “happens” rather than “is done”, and therefore deportability may not be understood as violence. By analyzing thematic interviews with people who have contested deportations, we analyze how citizens who are proximate to deportable migrants “witness” deportability – how they begin to see and feel the invisible, slow violence done to others and decide to act. The chapter concludes that making visible violence that would otherwise remain unrecognized is crucial in current anti-deportation activism.

### 1. Introduction

Violence is usually conceived as an act committed by a perpetrator – an event that has a beginning and an end and is visible, taking place in a specific space. The deportation of a person unlawfully residing in a country can certainly involve such obvious acts of violence. For instance, physical constraint in the moment of detainment or during a deportation flight led to 17 deaths in Europe between 1991 and 2015 (Fekete 2015). Several European countries have begun to monitor deportations in order to prevent the police or contracted agents from crossing the line of what is conceived to be violent. In Finland, monitors from the Office of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman have been able to accompany deportees since 2014, and in the case of inhumane treatment, they can complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Since 2017, the European border control agency Frontex requires that a monitor accompany every joint deportation flight.

In this chapter we argue that this common, limited view of violence in deportation, with monitoring taken up as its solution, does not fully encompass the diverse

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the authors appear in alphabetical order to indicate equal contribution to the article.

mechanisms of violence in deportations. We develop our critique by paying attention first to the temporality of violence and second to the extent of people affected by the violence. We understand deportation not as a singular event but as a process that begins with deportability – a condition in which a person might be deported at any time (de Genova 2002; Nyers 2003; Dreby 2010; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015; Khosrafi 2018).

Deportability involves a cruelty that does not appear to be violence in the conventional sense. It is a condition that can last for years, and even if a person is granted residence, deportation may still be possible in the future. In addition, deportation has consequences that persist in time and expand over space. People may be removed to cities or countries where they do not have social ties, resulting in isolation. Often deportation carries a stigma of failure that people bear for the rest of their lives. Deportation also tears apart important relationships. (Plambech 2014; Drotbohm 2012; Schuster and Majidi 2015.) Deportations affect family members and people who are part of the same community: teachers at school, colleagues at work, neighbors and friends.

We reconceptualize violence in deportation as what Rob Nixon (2011) calls slow violence – “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011, 2). Nixon develops the idea of slow violence by considering the pain and suffering that results from environmental neglect or disaster. He also discusses how the remnants of war – land mines and the poisonous detritus of bombs – may continue to threaten people beyond the original targets. Because slow violence affects in particular those with less power and money, the consequences of slow violence are fundamentally unequal.

Slow violence creates challenges for representation and perception – how can we see, hear and sense violence that seems to “just happen,” without an obvious perpetrator? How should we represent and strategically act upon something that is perhaps not visible and may not be occurring clearly here and now? We address these questions by focusing not on deportees themselves but on those who are proximate to them<sup>2</sup>. We ask how individuals close to those threatened by deportation experience the deportability of others. In what ways do they conceive of deportation as slow violence? Following the idea of *bearing witness*, which refers to seeing something, actively taking responsibility and acting on that basis (Zelizer 1998, 2007; Durham Peters 2001; Tait 2011; Felman 2000), we also discuss how those close to deportability have acted upon the experience of seeing slow violence done to others.

Our empirical research focuses on Finland, where deportation became a publicly debated issue in the aftermath of the European refugee reception crisis in 2015 when more than 32,000 asylum seekers entered the country. After the parliamentary elections of 2015, a conservative government made up of the Centre Party, the nationalist Finns Party and the National Coalition Party significantly tightened asylum policies and procedures. The Aliens Act was revised so that international protection on general humanitarian grounds was no longer possible; instead, asylum seekers had

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<sup>2</sup> We have conducted research on experiences of people who are under the threat of deportation and written about this topic elsewhere (for example Pirkkalainen, unpublished manuscript; Horsti and Khademi, forthcoming).

to prove they were the target of a specific individual threat. Moreover, the government limited access to legal advice.

While the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) is supposed to be independent of the government, it nevertheless tightened its policies and implementation of the law at the same time. Migri updated its country information on Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan – the origin countries of most new arrivals – defining more areas as safe return destinations and therefore enabling negative asylum decisions based on the argument that internal displacement was available to asylum seekers. In addition, there was a decline in the number of cases in which fear of violence was accepted as a justification for asylum (Saarikkomäki et. al 2018). These changes in Finnish law and its implementation resulted in deportations at a level never seen before (Migri 2020b<sup>3</sup>). Significant increases in the EU Frontex budget and expanded Frontex rights to organize joint removal flights also contributed to increased deportations.<sup>4</sup>

One of the results of these national and international policies was that the European Court of Human Rights (2019) condemned Finland for having violated Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights – the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment – after a returned Iraqi man was killed in Baghdad (a claim that the Finnish police later proved to be false).<sup>5</sup>

For this chapter, our research consists of 14 thematic interviews with 13 supporters of asylum seekers who received a negative asylum decision and the order to leave Finland.<sup>6</sup> All but two of the supporters we interviewed are women and most of the asylum seekers they talked about are men. This reflects the situation more broadly as the majority of asylum seekers who arrived in 2015 were male (26 424 out of 32 477) (Migri 2020a), and also majority of rejected asylum seekers are male (Migri 2020b). The fact that the majority of our interviewees are female reflects the situation in which women tend to be more active compared to men in voluntary work assisting asylum seekers: for example 2015-2016 in Finland the majority of volunteers of the Finnish Red Cross working in reception centres were female (Nykänen et al. 2019). The positions and occupations at the system of refugee reception in Finland are often female-dominated, which may partly explain why women have more initial contacts with asylum seekers compared to men. Katherine Braun's research in northern Germany found that the voluntary assistance of new asylum seekers in 2015 were largely organized by female volunteers, who were elderly with a bourgeois background (Braun 2017, p. 39). Paul Scheibelhofer (2019, p. 205) found that in Austria even in cases where a heterosexual couple "sponsored" a young asylum seeker it was the woman who had initiated the sponsorship and was more involved in

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<sup>3</sup> In 2015, 1 897 decisions on removal from the country were made in Finland, and since then number of decisions has gradually increased. In between March 2019 and February 2020, 4 819 decisions on removal from the country were made. (Migri 2020b.)

<sup>4</sup> The Frontex budget grew from an initial EUR 6M for 2005 to EUR 320M for 2018. Frontex started to play a more substantial role in organizing return flights after 2016. Its sharp budget increase from EUR 142M for 2015 to EUR 302M for 2017 is directly related to the increase in deportation flights. (Bremer 2017; Frontex 2020.)

<sup>5</sup> In April 2020 the Finnish police began to investigate an alleged fraud related to the case. The Iraqi authorities had confirmed that the death certificate was fake. (Yle 2020.)

<sup>6</sup> Päivi Pirkkalainen conducted 11 interviews with ten people between February 2018 and January 2019. Karina Horsti conducted three interviews in January–February 2019.

the relationship. Braun (2017, p. 39) claims that the voluntary work relates to “gendered and racialized logics where the difference between the modern, emancipated female volunteer and the female, oppressed refugee plays a central role”. According to her (2017) this logic in the German case goes back to “the particular form of bourgeois femininity, which values education and takes a classically humanist view of what it means to be modern” (Braun 2017, p. 39). For example, the women not only cared for the basic needs or taught the German language but while doing that they often took on “mental motherhood” – a role to educate asylum seekers to behave and think like a German. Scholars have argued that such “caring communities” are useful for the neoliberal state that needs to cover up the underfinancing of social welfare institutions and legal services (see e.g. van Dyk and Misbach 2016).

Nevertheless, Braun (2017) demonstrates that the inegalitarian gendered structure of volunteerism with asylum seekers was ruptured and reconfigured as the “welcome culture” developed. First, the involvement of first and second generation refugees as interpreters disrupted the hierarchy. The encounter with asylum seekers also made German volunteers to reconsider their behavior in a self-reflexive and critical way. Second, as deportability became visible to volunteers their support shifted to a more politicized direction. Similarly, Paul Scheibelhofer (2019, p. 203) argues that the relationship between young asylum seekers and their Austrian “sponsors” became emotionally closer when the issue of deportability, resistance, and legal assistance came to the picture. Sponsorships became spaces of politicization and transgression “that not only sharpen the sponsors’ view of social injustices but also motivates them to confront them on diverse levels” (Scheibelhofer 2019, p. 216). These insights are crucial for discussing gendered and intersectional dynamics in asylum volunteerism. The neoliberal framework has the danger to ignore the fact that support can transform from a humanitarian care (useful for the neoliberal state) to a more politicized resistance (critical of the state). In addition, while there might be a gendered pattern at grassroots level encounters between asylum seekers and citizens it does not necessarily lead to a feminized practice. The way in which gender plays a role in the actual activism is more complicated as we will demonstrate.

While we acknowledge that the deportees themselves are most affected by deportation, our focus is on those who have witnessed deportability and deportation from close quarters as friends, teachers or colleagues. The pain of these supporters is an unintended collateral consequence of deportation. While the participants in our research are citizens who have not personally experienced deportability, they have nevertheless acted upon the deportability of others in some public form, either protesting or speaking publicly against deportation. Some of the asylum seekers they have supported were subsequently granted a residence permit, while others have been removed.<sup>7</sup> Each interview lasted one to two hours and was transcribed for thematic analysis. In this chapter we focus on moments in which interviewees address witnessing the pain of others as well as their own emotional landscapes. We analyse the kinds of emotions that result from the slow violence of deportation and examine

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<sup>7</sup> In administrative and legal discourse, the terms ‘deportation’, ‘forced/voluntary return/removal’, and ‘Dublin returns’ have different meanings. We follow the tradition of deportation studies and use the term ‘deportation’ to refer to all removals of asylum seekers who have received a removal order. Even the administrative process of “assisted voluntary return” and a signed waiver of “voluntariness” are in fact forced if the asylum seeker has no alternative. The European Court of Human Rights decided that a voluntary return to Iraq was forced in the case of *N.A v. Finland* in 2019 (ECHR 2019: 15).

the ways in which supporters begin to unpack incremental violence: how they act and respond so as to dismantle the violence and its consequences.

## 2. Symptoms of the slow violence of deportability

The significant changes in Finnish law and its implementation began to affect asylum applicants as soon as they came into effect in 2016. For many, the system changed during their asylum process. To speed up the processing of asylum applications, Migri hired new, inexperienced personnel, which together with the new limitations on legal assistance caused the whole landscape of the asylum process to become more and more unpredictable and confusing for those who had been assisting asylum seekers. Several supporters we interviewed reported that they began to be troubled by continuous changes in the system and the apparent disorderliness of the decisions. The sharp shift in the asylum process corroded their trust in the fairness of the asylum system. Several interviewees mentioned obvious mistakes in asylum decisions that resulted from poor translations or the inexperience of the official who had conducted the asylum interview – which they felt was a clear difference compared to how the process functioned prior to 2016. Moreover, many interviewees were disturbed to discover how rarely Migri found credible the individual threat posed to asylum seekers who had previously faced violence in their countries of origin.

The interviewees not only described the faults they had been eyewitnesses to – the mistakes they had seen in documents or firsthand in asylum interviews – but they also recalled their emotional reactions. Through emotions they lived and experienced injustices together with asylum seekers, and they later acted upon them. In other words, they “witnessed” (Ettinger 2006; see also introduction in this volume) deportability, experiencing emotions by virtue of being near and with those who were the direct targets of slow violence. This is similar to what performance scholar Diana Taylor (2011, p. 272–273) has termed, “presencing” (from the Spanish *presenciar*). Taylor has argued (in the context of presencing the testimony of a torture victim in Villa Grimaldi, Chile) that being with a victim in the place an event occurred and seeing the victim’s embodied feelings and reactions when revisiting the place are central to “presencing” – witnessing by being with the person who is telling their story. However, different from Taylor who discuss events that are over and that are being recalled in the form of testimony, in our case, we examine the conjuncture of emotions and witnessing also as the violence is *happening*. It has not yet been articulated into a testimony but the supporters observe the symptoms as they appear.

Over time, our interviewees began to notice how the restrictions the government had implemented one by one since 2016 gradually affected the asylum seekers they had become familiar with. In other words, they started seeing the human cost of restrictive asylum laws and policies. One recurring form of slow violence that many interviewees witnessed was waiting and delays in the process. Many supporters had seen countless asylum cases be processed first at Migri and later, after a negative decision, in the administrative court system, stretching out for over two years in total. We identified a variety of symptoms or behaviors that the interviewees mentioned that can be linked to the slow violence of deportation: insomnia, tiredness, exhaustion, lack of concentration, change in personality, and shame due to dehumanizing treatment.

One woman in her fifties whose family had supported an asylum seeker family with small children described the changes she noticed in the family seeking asylum during the more than two years they waited for the process to be complete. “I noticed that they started to succumb to institutionalization in the reception centre”, she said. The family had arrived in Finland from a refugee camp after being forced from their home many years earlier. It was particularly disturbing for the Finnish woman to notice that the children in the family had had to live in a continuous state of waiting and had not been able to settle down in a proper home.

A female teacher in her forties had noticed that one of her students who was waiting for his asylum decision had started arriving at school early in the morning although he didn't have class until later in the day. This happened several mornings in a row. She also noticed that he was tired and asked him if something was wrong. “He said he had not slept for several nights. He had nightmares and was really down in the dumps. He's a fighter in the sense that he didn't just stay in bed all day. He came to school where there are other people, so he could be with others.”

Neither the asylum seeker family with small children nor the student had articulated their symptoms to the people around them, but by being near the asylum seekers and observing changes in them, their supporters realized that something was not right. The consequences of waiting were beginning to come to the surface, and supporters began to witness and understand the otherwise invisible consequences of deportability. In these experiences of non-happening, nothing specific had occurred. Instead, the slow violence of waiting was emerging through emotions and physical symptoms.

After a long waiting phase characterized by “non-events”, concrete events such as an asylum seeker receiving a negative decision from Migri, being refused leave to appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court or being taken into detention dashed. Supporters witnessed the gradual dissolution of asylum seekers' agency in many of these situations. Many interviewees were extremely worried about the mental health of rejected asylum seekers. Some asylum seekers had revealed suicidal thoughts to their supporters, and some supporters had even heard about suicide attempts by rejected asylum seekers, some of whom were closed to the people they supported.

A woman in her sixties who worked as a volunteer in a reception center had noticed that the mental health of some asylum seekers who had at first been active and eager to learn the Finnish language and plan a new life in Finland deteriorated as they waited; once they received negative decisions, some refused to get up from bed, pulled their blankets over their heads and slept all day.

Another woman in her fifties who had also volunteered in reception centers had witnessed the desperate decisions rejected asylum seekers may make when faced with the experience of detention. An asylum-seeking family including a mother who was eight months pregnant was taken into detention. With the help of a lawyer, supporters managed to get the family out of detention and the Supreme Administrative Court issued an enforcement ban on their deportation order. A flat was arranged for the family to stay in. However, a couple of days after the family was released, they left a note on the table in the empty flat: “Sorry, we cannot stay here.” A little while later, they sent a photo of a newborn baby who had been born in France. The volunteer's

interpretation of the situation was that detention had been such a shocking experience to the family that they could not think or act rationally: they fled to France even though their deportation order in Finland had been blocked and the mother was due to deliver her baby at any time.

Interviewees who had supported asylum seekers as volunteers or worked at reception centers also noticed collective symptoms. Deportability touches the peers of the deported person who are still in the process of waiting for final decisions on their asylum cases. For example, seeing someone be detained made other asylum seekers in that same reception center realize that it could also happen to them, contributing to a collective feeling of vulnerability. News of detentions and deportations also spread within migrants' social media networks. For example, when Iraqis arrived in Finland in 2015 they had the expectation that they would be granted asylum because Finland was a country that respected human rights. After 2016, however, forced returns to Iraq increased partly due to Migri's strict interpretation of the law regarding what constituted a credible fear of violence (Saarikkomäki et. al 2018). A woman in her fifties who is an activist in the Stop Deportations network and had been helping asylum seekers since before 2015 explained that Iraqis "as a collective" felt exhausted because they had witnessed so many deportations taking place around them. She had observed that their initial hopefulness had transformed into collective despair. In other words, the Iraqis experienced the slow violence of deportation not only individually but also as a collective. Since 2018, when Iraq announced it would refuse to accept people who were being forcibly returned, this collective fear turned towards the threat of being forced to live in Finland undocumented.

### **3. The emotions and reactions of supporters**

The slow violence of deportability is undoubtedly felt and suffered most severely by rejected asylum seekers. However, witnessing deportability without experiencing it personally can also have strong emotional consequences for the supporters of deportable people. How does it feel to witness the suffering of other people, and how do witnesses react? Witnessing asylum seekers' emotional reactions to deportability at different phases of the deportation continuum – the wait, the negative decision, detention and deportation – revealed to the supporters the violence that did not initially seem like violence. In the interviews, supporters often described their own emotions and reactions while with the asylum seekers and witnessing the consequences of deportability.

A Finnish language teacher explained how the dehumanizing aspects of deportation became visible to her in 2017. She had witnessed closely "the horrible detention" of an Iraqi man whose asylum application had been rejected because neither Migri nor the administrative court believed the militia that had tortured him continued to be a threat. The police detained him in the middle of the night despite the fact that his case calling for an implementation ban was still in process at the Supreme Administrative Court. By the time the Finnish teacher realized what had happened and tried to contact the man, his mobile phone had already been turned off. She immediately suspected that the police had taken his phone. She contacted the police and asked them to return the Iraqi man's phone, but the police repeatedly denied having taken it. She was ultimately unable to contact the Iraqi man during his detention. She only managed to reach him when he had already been deported to Iraq, and he confirmed



that the police in fact had confiscated his phone during his detention – a practice that is prohibited. In addition to feeling sad for the Iraqi man she had tried to help, the Finnish teacher underlined that she felt extremely disturbed by the fact that the police had lied to her.

Interviewees also shared their experiences of being tired and exhausted by witnessing the hopelessness of deportable people. One female volunteer in her thirties described her feelings of exhaustion when she saw asylum seekers' hopelessness at Migri being unwilling to correct mistakes and the administrative courts' apparent lack of intervention in Migri's decisions. She said, "it is tiring and very hard to listen to people's circumstances and to see that you cannot help and to see that they are in such bad shape." She felt that this was caused by the authorities' unwillingness to hear about the problems and improve the situation.

Similarly, a female volunteer in her sixties described multiplying emotions related to witnessing individuals suffer coupled with her disappointment in how the Finnish state treats people:

I have managed these things pretty badly. I dream about them and they affect my mood. And what I have seen from others, too – there is fear and worry about what will happen to asylum seekers when they are crammed into airplanes [and deported]. On top of that, there is the disappointment of having lived in a constitutional state for all my life, and now people are treated like this here. The disappointment has been so deep that it has caused trauma.

A teacher in her forties recalled that she could not sleep after reading on the Stop Deportation social media feed that there would be a deportation flight to Afghanistan during the night. While she was not afraid that her own asylum-seeking student would be on the flight, she nevertheless woke up at night and could not stop thinking, "Now they are taking them, there, and they might be young guys, they might be like my student". The experience of witnessing her student's struggle with deportability sensitized her to the broader issue of deportation. She began to follow stories about deportation in the news, and her mediated witnessing of the deportation of people she did not know affected her emotionally.

#### **4. Dismantling slow violence through solidarity**

Seeing the symptoms of individual suffering or the perceived wrong-doing of the Finnish state prompted the supporters we interviewed to take action. Rather than remaining dispassionate to what they had observed, they acted upon what they saw and knew, they bore witness (see e.g. Durham Peters 2001; Zelizer 2007; Tait 2011; Felman 2000). The first step in taking action is to share experiences and emotions with other people who have witnessed similar issues and situations. The sharing of experiences and emotions makes them collective and potentially reduces exhaustion, anxiety, insomnia and other symptoms.

We identified three different categories of solidarity acts among our interviewees, acts through which they responded responsibly to having seen the consequences of slow violence: 1) *Helping* – Providing concrete assistance to those under threat of

deportation such as seeking out legal advice and finding ways to legally challenge deportation orders. Another example is creating jobs so that some individuals could get a work permit; 2) *Publicity* – Seeking mainstream media attention for individual deportation cases or protesting deportations in public demonstrations; 3) *Advocacy* – Advocating for change by lobbying decision makers and the authorities responsible for asylum issues.

Each of these solidarity actions helped alleviate the effects of slow violence and its consequences. Specifically, these acts of solidarity made visible the slow violence that would have otherwise remained invisible. The citizenship position of supporters gave them a privileged position to reveal the invisible slow violence of deportation at different levels: at the individual level, but also more broadly at the system level and societal level. This visibility is crucial because deportability tends to isolate, silence and make people invisible (Peutz and De Genova 2010, 23; Peutz 2006, 231; Hinger et. al. 2018, 164).

At the individual level, the sharing of difficult emotions and experiences made slow violence visible and audible. While the individual level of sharing did not always lead to attempts to change the system or to create public awareness, engagements with broader social change always included individual-level witnessing and sharing of emotions. The acts of solidarity based on sharing of emotions and support were not necessarily (or only) “personal” or “intimate” acts for the interviewed supporters but were based on wider motives to protect human rights. The supporters refused to align with the invisible perpetrator and accept ignorance and inequality as the normal response.

In the interviews the aspect of gendered roles in the supporter-asylum seeker relationships did not emerge, and we did not specifically ask about it. However, while writing this chapter we were in touch with some of the interviewees again who wanted to comment on our draft and then we asked them to reflect on the gender aspect. One interviewee, a man in his forties noted that in the group of supporters they had taken up different roles rather organically. Gender was one aspect – the young asylum seeker they supported called (with humor and irony) him a “dad”, one of his teachers a “mom” and others as “sisters” and “brothers”. However, more important in the division of support were the professional expertise of each person, age, and personal characteristics and interests.

A woman in her thirties expressed frustration that gender is like “a stamp” on women who assist asylum seekers, and it is also used to dismiss their practice of volunteering or activism. She recalls hearing that “racists groups openly talk about female supporters as ‘old maids in need of a man’”. She has also faced downplaying of her critique on asylum cases by some authorities. “Sometimes authorities have openly said to me: you are too close to these people (asylum seekers)”. This has made her feel that her critique would not be valid nor based on rational thinking.

Thus, while there might be indicators such as feminized professions that lead to women encountering asylum seekers through their work, or cultural social norms, such as “the modern emancipated female volunteer” discussed in Katherine Braun’s work focusing on Germany, it is also important to stress that those feminized structures and practices explain little the resistance to deportations.

Supporters played an important role in sharing the emotions of those threatened by deportation because many attempted to protect family members and friends from the distress caused by uncertainty. People who are deportable are often unable to lean on those closest to them for emotional or practical support. One “detention activist,” a woman in her forties, explained that her relationships with people she meets in the detention center easily become very close:

I mean close in the sense that a person tells me things that they have not shared with anyone else. They might call me and say “I can’t talk to my wife about these things because I don’t want her to have a nervous breakdown.” So it becomes a very close relationship, and I appreciate this trust a lot. I know it’s not a long-term relationship, it’s only during a crisis, detention, and the friendships often do not even continue, at least not with the intensity they had during that crisis.

At the system level, solidarity actions such as challenging the administrative asylum process make the slow violence of deportability visible within the administrative and the court systems. The ways in which supporters have resisted the system include seeking Supreme Administrative Court decisions that have ultimately suspended deportations and preparing new asylum applications with more convincing evidence. One anti-deportation activist in her thirties mentioned that in the span of a year “three of the people I assisted have been forcibly returned, but there are countless cases in which the deportation process has been blocked because of our resistance.”

Finally, solidarity actions that involve publicity through the media or demonstrations have made the slow violence of deportability visible to the wider public. A man in his fifties who has been an activist in the Free Movement network for many years, including before the recent refugee reception crisis, claimed that in the past forced removals were conducted in “the dead of the night” and resistance against deportations had been a very marginal phenomenon in Finland. According to the interviewee, however, since 2016 and specifically in 2017, when more deportation cases were covered by the media and larger protests were organized against them, a wider audience started understanding how inhumane it is “to forcibly push people onto airplanes,” and injustices committed by the authorities “were brought into the light.”

## **5. Conclusion**

In this chapter we have analyzed how supporters of asylum seekers in Finland bear witness and live emotionally with rejected asylum seekers, that is “withness” deportability. We have described the processes by which they have begun to see and feel the invisible slow violence done to others and how they have decided to act upon that experience. In using the term *slow violence* we have focused attention on the diverse and often invisible mechanisms of violence in the deportation process by paying attention to the temporality of violence and the extent of people affected by that violence.

Supporters of asylum seekers were alarmed by the changes in the Finnish political context in 2016, when asylum laws and policies became more restrictive. Strong

emotional reactions emerged when they witnessed the consequences of deportability for the rejected asylum seekers they had become familiar with. We argue that the slow violence of deportation manifests in particular through asylum seekers' and supporters' fears. Fear was visible in many ways: supporters feared what might happen to people in the future, or they were shocked by seeing what fear of the unknown did to people in the present moment. Supporters spoke not only about witnessing the fear-related symptoms of rejected asylum seekers but also about their own feelings of exhaustion, insomnia and anxiety. The injustice they witnessed and strong emotional reactions they experienced prompted them to engage in acts of solidarity, such as helping people under the threat of deportation through concrete assistance, publicity or advocacy.

Our analysis of this engagement and the resulting acts of solidarity emphasizes the supporters' strong personal and emotional experiences and their commitment to the act. Gender plays a complicated role in resistance to deportations. At the initial grassroots' level encounters between asylum seekers and citizens in Finland there was a gendered pattern as most newcomers in 2015 were male but among the citizens women were more active in mobilizing for the voluntary work. However, in the process of engagement in different acts of solidarity with political aims other aspects than gender, such as values and worldviews were more important. However, the situation in which most activists are female and most deportees male makes activists prone to criticism and targets of downplaying of their claims.

We stress that “witnessing” deportability is not only about living with the emotions of another and being empathic to those who are suffering as the direct targets of injustice, but also about the resulting responsible actions that bearing witness is essentially about. Following this line of thinking, we claim that activists, be they female or male, mobilized to make political claims on asylum seekers' human rights *because* of living with the strong emotions and suffering of others.

Finally, we have shown how solidarity acts by people in the privileged position of having citizenship can help dismantle slow violence. With secure citizenship status, command of the language, access to networks and knowledge of bureaucratic processes, supporters are able to make the slow violence of deportability visible to society at large.

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