NJMR NORDIC JOURNAL OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

Resisting Deportation Live: Affective Witnessing and Recognition of Airplane Deportation Protests

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

ABSTRACT

The article examines mediated videos of three Nordic airplane-based anti-deportation protests, by Elin Ersson (July 2018, Sweden), Aino Pennanen (July 2018, Finland), and 'Ahmed' (August 2017, Finland). Visual and multimodal analysis reveals how mediated spectators beyond the immediate location are addressed and how the videos' visual arrangements produce affective witnessing, identification, and thus attention among the intended viewers. Recording the events and circulating the footage figure as attempts to make the violence of deportation recognizable for the publics of the deporting society. Analysis reveals how visible and personified figureheads draw interest toward such mediatized protest, thereby also contributing to circulation and attention. The approach simultaneously facilitates reflection on the intersectional conditions for such protests' public recognition: the videos' visual arrangement alone is only one factor in protests' recognition; intersectional conditions perceived in connection with the protesters' (ethnicity, social status, race, gender, and language) played their own part in the formation of public awareness. The work also highlights that civil disobedience and livestreaming in selfie mode risk drawing attention to the protest methods and the protesters themselves rather than the grievances.

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KEYWORDS:

Deportation; Protest; Airplane; Affect; Witnessing; Recognition

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kotilainen, NK. 2023. Resisting Deportation Live: Affective Witnessing and Recognition of Airplane Deportation Protests. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 13(4): 7, pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.585

INTRODUCTION

A young female gazes timidly yet intently into her smartphone's camera. Rising to her feet aboard an airplane, she explains to the camera eye that she won't sit until the deportation of a person on the flight is terminated. The video wherein she livestreams the events via Facebook shows the ensuing ridicule from some fellow travelers; someone tries to snatch her phone and demands that she stop shooting the video. Regardless, she calmly expresses her plea both to those aboard and to distant audiences witnessing the events via social media. Eventually, numerous passengers stand, join the protest, and applaud her. The deportation is halted. The woman breaks down in tears of relief and thanks the crowd for showing solidarity.

This livestreaming from Gothenburg's airport on July 23, 2018, by 22-year-old Swedish student and activist Elin Ersson captured the interest of European audiences and headline-writers in Sweden and across Europe. The mediatized act of civil disobedience garnered intense visibility: her video has been watched millions of times. Amid the aftermath of Europe's 2015–2016 'refugee crisis,' as asylum policies grew stricter and forced removals of asylum-seekers became more common, her protest introduced a novel form of social media-based civil disobedience to wide international audiences (Rosenberger, Stern & Merhaut 2018). A similar protest followed only a week later when 30-something Aino Pennanen, a Greens-party legal secretary in neighboring Finland, attempted to halt a deportation flight at Helsinki–Vantaa airport. This protest too was extensively discussed and debated in the Finnish mainstream media.

Not all mediated deportation protests gain the sort of recognition Ersson's and Pennanen's did: ballooning from the social media sphere into wider publicity. For example, a year earlier, vocal dissent by a group of men brought a halt to the deportation in progress on their plane at Helsinki–Vantaa airport, and mobile-device footage was shared via social media on that occasion too—by a protester of Iraqi origin whom I pseudonymize as Ahmed—yet the events of August 15, 2017, failed to garner significant public attention beyond activist social media. To my knowledge, neither aforementioned female protester was familiar with Ahmed's protest anterior to theirs.

This article examines the three aforementioned videos of mediatized airplane-based deportation protests. I ask how the video's arrangements address their viewers affectively, construct their spectators as witnesses of the events, and thus generate identification and recognition. I approach the three videos as passages through which the often-unseen concrete events of deportation are made observable and concrete for larger audiences, especially the deporting societies at large. Visual and multimodal analysis of the videos uncovers how mediated spectators beyond the immediate location were addressed and how the videos' visual arrangements create mediated witnessing (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009), identification, and thereby attention in the intended audiences. Bearing witness is a specific way of addressing others: not only giving an account of the events/experiences witnessed by the protester and rendering these accessible to others, but also entailing manifold entangled relations of witness(es) and witnessed, affecting and affected. **Affective witnessing** is a particular form of witnessing, fortified in the era of digital online sharing and mobile devices—wherein what is witnessed affects itself (Richardson & Schankweiler 2019: 167). Teasing apart these videos' visual arrangement facilitates investigating how such videos generate affective encounters, produce affective witnessing, and thereby cultivate wider identification and recognition.

I approach the protest events as performances designed to provoke societal change by activating spectators at cognitive and emotional levels (Blee & McDowell 2012; Taylor 2017; Tilly 2008). Mobilizing publics through mediated protest 'in real time' and 'live' through social media-based platforms has in recent years become the dominant form of activism/protest communication (Khattab 2020; Martini 2018; Nikunen 2019a; Poell 2020; Van Es 2016). While the footage may be originally mediated 'live,' it need not be consumed at that moment; in fact, spectators most often watch it after the fact (Khattab 2020), with their awareness of liveness contributing to the sense of immediacy and of eyewitnessing the experience. Moreover, the 'live' look amplifies the real-time effect, enhancing impressions of reality, a direct connection, spontaneity, and sincerity since nonprofessional footage is often cognized as 'more real and less packaged' (Williams, Whal-Jorgensen & Wardle 2011). These qualities have proven effective for mobilization and for highlighting social issues that otherwise would remain latent longer (Khattab 2020; Khazraee & Novak 2018; Nikunen 2019a). Digital media in particular is seen to heighten the visibility of social dissent and provide platforms for new social movements in 'Western-style' liberal democracies, with the digitalized movements typically addressing such matters as feminist and environmental issues, racism, and marginalized/repressed groups' grievances, via horizontal participation, direct action, and issue-based social media protests (della Porta 2005; Fenton 2016; Nikunen 2019a).

Still, the Nordic females' protests gained hypervisibility, while Ahmed's similar protest did not. He is not alone: activists and migrants alike often actively resist deportations. Since non-citizens, migrants, etc. have utilized mobile devices and online sharing in deportation protests on commercial flights regularly over the years (e.g., Getting the Voice Out 2014; Getting the Voice Out 2016) yet typically fail to attract public notice or academic scrutiny, this disparity cannot be explained solely by the videos' arrangement and mode of producing affective witnessing. The conditions for wider media notice of political grievances stem from the prevalent power structures that determine what is seen as significant and worthy of attention, and are thus tied to the manifold intersectional conditions for societal and media recognition (Honneth 1995; Rousiley 2014; Taylor 1992). At the heart of the constellation of qualities behind perceived newsworthiness and therefore recognition of mediatized social protest are prevailing intersectional conditions and assumptions bound up with the protester, such as gender, ethnic background, language, and social status (Caspers & Moore 2009; Fraser 2000). Hence, I explore the intersectional conditions for recognizing such emotive protests also and ponder the double-edged sword of media recognition of mediatized protests.

Research has touched on airplanes as deportation sites/vehicles (Walters 2016) and on-board protests as disruptive action (Kirchhoff et al. 2018), with Ersson's and Pennanen's actions having been approached from the angle of the ethics of civil disobedience and public reactions (Birnie 2018; Seppälä 2022). Ersson's has been studied also in terms of on-site and social media micromobilization (Khattab 2020). Nevertheless, airplane-based deportation protests are researched fairly seldom, and studies have not substantially addressed visual arrangements, affective addressing, and mediated witnessing in the context. Therefore, I offer new ideas pertaining to the formation of affective witnessing and the production of identification in mediatized protests, while also considering the intersectional conditions for recognition in such contexts. This entails introducing the videos and their context as background to the analysis that follows, which considers the videos' manner of addressing

intended audiences beyond the immediate location and, after this, the videos' visual arrangement and production of affective-witnessing modes—alongside the generation of affectiveness, personification, and identification via them. I then reflect on intersectional conditions for recognition of livestreamed protests, on the aforementioned double-edged sword, and on how direct social media-based protests influence reactions to marginalized groups' grievances.

CONTEXT, MATERIAL, AND METHODS

As forced deportation crystallized into a general European state securitizing method in the wake of the so-called refugee-reception crisis, with the Nordic countries being no exception (Horsti & Pirkkalainen 2021; Khattab 2020; Näre 2020; Parusel 2016), its divisiveness sparked high-profile public discussion, emblematic of the broader controversy surrounding migration and asylum. The laws' and practices' lines of tension elevated this topic, seldom debated in public, into a social issue affecting many citizens' sense of trust in immigration authorities and the state (Horsti & Pirkkalainen 2021). It was in this climate that anti-deportation activists and citizens of deporting states began hiding deportable persons from the police (Horsti & Pirkkalainen 2021; Seppälä 2022) and expressing dissent with forced removals at sites such as airports (e.g., Birnie 2018; Hayes, Cammiss, & Doherty 2021). Because deportation sometimes involves commercial flights, not just deportees themselves but also fellow passengers have attempted to stop deportations via actions on aircraft. Anti-deportation networks began circulating practical instructions for this via social media (see the Getting the Voice Out pieces), which encourage resisting forced removals and showing solidarity on airplanes. These advise passengers witnessing a deportation to unbuckle their seat belt, stand, demand to talk to the pilot (who has authority over people's removal from the aircraft), and refuse to sit until the deportation is terminated (Sunila 2017).

In the aforementioned environment of heated debate over forced removals, the Nordic females' onboard protests were extensively discussed in prominent news, both nationally and internationally. However, when I was researching Ersson's video (primary source 1) and Pennanen's (2), asylum activists mentioned similar incidents on airplanes that went without substantial notice at the time.[1] This formed the seed for incorporating Ahmed's video into the study (as video 3) and analyzing it alongside the other two. I examined and cross-compared the three anti-deportation airplane-protest videos for their addressing, visual features, and arrangement and considered them in light of related media discussion and academic literature.

When Ersson boarded the flight, she knew a deportation was taking place, and she had plans to stop it. From the moment she stood up to vocalize her demand and throughout the 14-minute livestreamed video, she kept the camera focused on herself, so the protester herself constitutes the video's main visual feature, while fellow passengers and the cabin crew are somewhat present and the deportee remains unseen. Ersson, a native Swedish speaker, chronicles the events in English and explains her motivation, clearly emotionally moved yet calmly articulating throughout. Her successful micromobilization has been watched millions of times (Khattab 2020).

1 I wish to thank the December 2021 ETMU conference attendees for highlighting the disparity of attention and Ahmed's protest video.

Pennanen's protest was clearly inspired by Ersson's: she knew about it, saw the video, and was moved by it. Pennanen, a lawyer and Finnish citizen, was concerned about the legality of her country's increasingly frequent forced removals (Uusi Suomi 2019). Her protest was spontaneous, though: she had intended to visit Berlin with her family but then noticed a man moaning while cuffed to his seat and under police escort. Recognizing that a deportation was in progress, she decided to try preventing it (Seppälä 2022; Ukkonen 2018). As Ersson had, she stood and started livestreaming the events via Facebook. Her video is likewise shot from a perspective primarily showing the protester speaking, explaining her actions and motives. Her face and some fellow passengers, the crew, and police officers aboard are the main features in the four-minute film; again, the deportee remains unseen. The language spoken throughout the video is Finnish. In this case, the police stopped the protest, and Pennanen was escorted from the plane. The deportation proceeded, with a flight delay of only 10 minutes.

It was a year earlier at the same airport when people boarding a Turkish Airlines flight to Baghdad brought a halt to a deportation by vocally opposing a young male asylum-seeker's forced removal. Whether their decision to act against that removal was spontaneous is unknown. On the aircraft where Ahmed captured his two-minute cell phone video were several people who had opted for 'voluntary return' after receiving a negative asylum decision. They are part of the events shown—Ahmed's video is unlike those by the Nordic women in displaying the actual deportation without the visual perspective of protesters recording and contesting the events. The main actors visible here are three Finnish policemen and the deportee shown held down by the police. Bystanders, members of the cabin crew, and other passengers. Three languages are heard: Finnish (from police officers), Arabic (spoken by protesters), and English (from the protesters and deportees). Eventually, in response to the deportee's resistance and the vocal dissent of Ahmed and others, the deportation was halted and the deportee was escorted off the plane.

Whether or not Ahmed streamed the events as they unfolded, the video was at least circulated via social media not long after, gaining visibility in Finland's Iraqi-diaspora community. Also, Ahmed sent it to at least a Stop Deportations Finland activist, who shared it from the network's Facebook account with a note: 'Brave co-travellers stood up to oppose the forced deportation of Iraqi asylum seeker on Turkish Airlines flight from Helsinki today. Deportation was stopped. Solidarity is our weapon!' (Stop Deportations 2017).[2] Notwithstanding activist social media circulation and commentary, the incident failed to arouse wider attention nationally, let alone internationally. There was just a brief note on the item by Finnish anti-immigration online newspaper *NykySuomi* (2017). Moreover, the details of the events, the protesters and their motivations, and background on the acts remain obscure, partly because Ahmed left Finland voluntarily himself on the flight in question after receiving a negative asylum decision.

Against this background, I examined the motivation for protesting, as evidenced by the videos, and what this says of the audiences the protesters strove to mobilize. My

2 By 2022, the video had gathered 39,000 views per the Stop Deportations Facebook page and had been shared via Refugee Hospitality Club Finland's social media accounts, etc. Outi Popp, the Stop Deportations Finland spokesperson who shared it via the network's social media, explained the events' background in a conversation with me on March 25, 2022.

analysis encompassed how viewers are summoned and addressed and the framing of the events and situation, visually (e.g., how those acting and speaking appear) and verbally (the narration, manner of speaking, tone of voice, audible features, language choice, etc.). Moreover, considering the videos' visual arrangements (camera angle, perspective, focus, framing, etc.) and these testimonials' content elucidated methods that produce affective witnessing. Facial expressions, gestures, habitus, the actors' juxtaposition and positioning, etc. all contribute to affective witnessing, hence informing how audiences see and witness the protest (see Lindgren 2017; Rose 2007). This sheds light on utilizing the affordances of live reporting and swift digital social media mediation to activate and produce reactions/affect in spectators far beyond the immediate location.

REVEALING THE VIOLENCE OF DEPORTATION TO WIDER AUDIENCES

Spectators watching the three protest videos witness something usually unseen. They gain a window to an often-invisible event: all three videos show deportation—frequently perceived as quite abstract and bureaucratic (Horsti & Pirkkalainen 2021; Näre 2020)—at a concrete site, the airplane, and thus render it more tangible for distant audiences. Videos shot 'on the spot' create a feeling of virtual presence and impressions of being able to see and witness the events unfolding on the aircraft as they 'really happen.' The videos are clearly from mobile devices in the midst of the events: the filming appears hasty, erratic, and spontaneous. A cumulative reality effect arises, evocative of spontaneity and disclosure; this is what enhances the 'reality' of live amateur reporting of crises (see Nikunen 2019a; Williams et al. 2011).

Obviously, all three dramatic videos were captured and circulated to draw public attention to moral and structural problems connected with more frequent deportations. The verbal addressing by Pennanen and Ersson reveals the target audience to be wider than those on the site. Both women state which flight they are on, explain what is happening on the aircraft at the moment, and clarify their actions and their legal background for viewers (Ersson 2018; Pennanen 2018). Later, specifying the context further, they publicly stated that frustration with tightening asylum policy and distrust of rushed forced-removal decisions' legality fed their dissent. Pennanen has voiced suspicions surrounding the dubious legality of Finland's ever-stricter securitization-based asylum policy in the aftermath of the 'refugee crisis.' Also, both have expressed concerns about the post-removal safety of the deportees (Dagens Nyheter 2018; Uusi Suomi 2019).

While media sources do not reveal Ahmed's reasons for shooting his video, the fact that the events were recorded and then circulated via social media, and that the video was supplied to Finnish activists for generation of greater visibility and circulation, suggests efforts to make the events visible to wide audiences, particularly in Finland. Moreover, the vocalized plea in the video targets the 'outside world' at a larger scale. While security personnel visibly hold the deportee in place forcibly, male voices say in Arabic,

> 'This is Finland's justice, look.'
> 'This is Finland's justice, look. We wish the people in charge would witness this in the United Nations. To witness Finland's justice.'

'Look what they have done to him. This is the Finnish intelligence agency.'[3]

The concern and strong disapproval expressed at the deportee's heavy-handed treatment at the site, when combined with direct pleas to the officials executing the forced removal, create a strong appeal. The protesters demand that audiences 'look' and 'witness' what happens, suggesting moreover that international human-rights authorities should witness through looking and acknowledge how the Finnish state handles deportees.

The visual record of the moment of deportation on aircraft renders the bureaucratic **slow violence** embedded in deportation processes visible and noticeable for a wider audience: the deporting society. Hence, recording the events and propagating the footage figure as attempts to create public attention that makes the violence of deportation affectively tangible and, thereby, more likely to be recognizable by the public (see Horsti & Pirkkalainen 2021; Näre 2020). Though only Ahmed's video shows the deportee and the deportation itself, all three concretize the often-invisible procedure as what it is: a violent, coercive act.

Ahmed's video does this in an uncompromising manner: the violent procedures of forced removals become blatantly witnessable. The police visibly restrain the deportee, shown moaning on the floor of the plane, asking for help. The video exhibits a frantic, torrid atmosphere, with loud voices, shouting, and direct demands targeted at the police. By actually recording such events occurring, visual documents of this nature may be regarded as something more also, digital counter-surveillance (Martini 2018), exposing security officials' actions for possible wider critical evaluation. Forced removals involve physical coercion, and those carrying them out could abuse that power: detention or physical restraining on deportation flights has led to numerous deaths. As Horsti and Pirkkalainen (2021) argue, the act of making the violence of deportations visible dismantles the slow violence of deportability and shows deportation for what it is. Pennanen's video puts on display a feature strongly associated with the coercive violence of deportation via the striking visual juxtaposition between the female protester and the militarized physicality of masculine security personnel halting the protest and escorting her away. The nexus of physical coercion, state power, and asylum policy's militarization (Currion 2016) becomes seeable in the uniformed militarized male body representing the deporting state.

VISUAL ARRANGEMENT IN WITNESSING, IDENTIFICATION, AND PRODUCTION OF AFFECT

The motivations, technological tools, and audiences addressed are rather similar across all three protests, but the videos' visual arrangement and, hence, both the modes of affect-production and the affective witnessing thus formed are vastly different. The most obvious difference in visual arrangement—and in producing the witnessing act overall—between the videos of Pennanen and Ersson and that shot by Ahmed is the visual angle through which the events are shown. The protesters shooting the videos are eyewitnesses to acts of deportation as they take place. When the video testimonials of the events are circulated via hybrid media, people viewing these records become witnesses to the events and also to the act of bearing

3 I thank Omar Ziad Tariq for providing a transcript of the Arabic-language content.

witness at the site (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009: 1; Guerin & Hallas 2007: 10; Richardson & Schankweiler 2019: 171). The angle and frame that form the window to the protest event produce the mode of witnessing, arouse emotions, and influence the process of identification.

Ahmed's video shows the events in the first person: the spectator sees through the witness-bearer's eyes. This turns the people viewing the footage into mediated witnesses (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009) of the actual event of deportation: the physical coercion and the hectic, rather aggressive situation on the plane. This video makes the act of deportation, the injustice and violence embedded in it, and the primary focus. The main visible agents are the policemen holding down the resisting deportee and the deportee himself—seen only partially and not clearly identifiable from the film. Significantly, the protests are framed out of the picture, and the protesters remain invisible. Only their audible appeals (in English and Arabic) are present.

A video is not merely a record of events that renders them and the eyewitnessed experiences accessible for others; it entails manifold intertwined relations between witness(es) and witnessed, and it encompasses both affecting and being affected (Richardson & Schankweiler 2019). The visual arrangement of Ahmed's video is, foremost, an invitation for distant spectators to feel benevolence toward the vulnerable deportee, shown being handled somewhat roughly by state security officials. The arrangement, accordingly, represents strong accusations, aimed at both the policemen present and the society behind them. The vocalized plea of the protesters to 'look at' and 'witness' Finland's justice only accentuates these. Emotional charge arises in the arrangement via juxtaposing the deportee's pleas for help (and attempts to resist) with the forces restraining him, as well as by the strong voices disapproving the forced removal, demanding the deportee's release, and referring to his human rights.

Such arrangements and camera angles are conventional in testimonials of violence and oppression designed to call on viewers to adopt an empathic posture toward the 'victim.' It is the visual record of physical distress pictured in the sufferer's body that ignites the affect and identification (see Chouliaraki 2013; Moeller 1999). Recent decades' crisis communication has often seen first-person visual arrangements showing both the victim and the perpetrator, including protesters loudly speaking against acts seen as illicit, in aims of exposing violence and human-rights abuses via real-time nonprofessional footage on the spot of enfolding events. In the age of digital crisis reporting, this sort of imagery is a typical way of enabling repressed groups and their advocates (especially those in global crisis zones and under repressive regimes) to voice their concerns in unprecedentedly effective and unrestricted ways, breaking free of institutionalized, professional, and one-directional media communication (Andén-Papadopoulos 2014; Askanius 2020). Furthermore, the video is cathartic, in that the protest ultimately succeeds. This is significant for the emotional witnessing, aligning the spectator with the victim's distress. Such a visual arrangement lets the distant witnesses find relief and a sense of justice is being served.

In contrast, Pennanen's and Ersson's videos employ a form of digital self-imagery, the 'selfie,' not showing the events from the protester's viewpoint but turning the camera on the protester in close-up. Selfies and selfie-videos are often read as centered on the aesthetics of self-curated self-portraiture or even seen in a narcissistic frame, putting emphasis on the self-presentation of the selfie-taker (Ibrahim 2020).

Selfies in the context of activist campaigns and protest communication have been perceived also as a form of (positive) self-representation of marginalized groups (Nikunen 2019b), or selfie-politics; as displaying political activism through 'political commodification of the self' (Moeller 2021); and, in some cases, as superficial self-centered slacktivism (Boccia Artieri 2021). While commonly denounced as ethically, politically, and aesthetically somewhat dubious, selfies have gained prominence lately in amateur crisis reporting and protest communication, because they convey personal presence, invite verification thereof, and build personal connections (Boccia Artieri 2021; Ibrahim 2020).

For Pennanen and Ersson, resorting to selfie-mode documentation and recording was a fairly practical choice and an ethics-based one. Ersson explains the camera angle in her video in terms of not wanting to show fellow passengers, for privacy reasons (Ersson 2018); at face value, the angle cannot be seen as a form of narcissistic or willful self-representation. Nevertheless, the selfie-mode viewing angle produces a novel form of gaze for social protest, one that brings new forms of identification and affective witnessing (Richardson & Schankweiler 2019). The videos show events not from the protester's perspective but from the angle of someone observing only the protester in close proximity: the protester as a bodily being, her face, and her bodily expressions become unavoidable features of the film. Such a choice of angle, rather than unveiling what she sees, forms a path to intimately observing the protester's reactions and emotions—witnessed in facial expressions, gestures, and physical reactions mirrored by the body. The protester seems to speak directly to the spectator witnessing from a distance. The viewer sees timid expressions, concentrates on the swallowing and stammering, notices flushing cheeks and teary eyes, and thus becomes a witness especially to the emotions of someone at the heart of an emotional, stressful situation.

These two videos offer a glimpse of how it feels to stand up against deportation, resort to civil disobedience, and follow one's moral conviction. Thus, they produce strong affective identification between the spectator and spectated: an invitation to feel together (Nikunen 2019a: 155–156). By recording and circulating on-site testimony, eyewitnesses of deportations transform viewers into co-witnesses to not only the events but also their witness-bearing (Richardson & Schankweiler 2019). These videos, by focusing on depicting emotional, bodily, and intimate witness-bearing, underline the emotionality of witnessing political violence. They concretely attest to how contemporary digital media tools and practices—with smartphones, body cameras, livestreaming platforms, selfie angle, etc.—have brought renewed prominence to affective witnessing in protest communication as a particular form of mediated encounters with the world. In affective witnessing, affect is at play on numerous levels: one observes and witnesses the affectivity of the witnessing experience but also the affect itself (Richardson & Schankweiler 2019: 166–167). Therefore, what is witnessed and affirmed through the two videos are the affects and emotions of protesters witnessing forced removals—and, consequently, not so much the acts of deportation as such. Whereas Ahmed's video expresses accusatory messages toward the deporting state and arouses empathy for the person facing forced removal, the other two videos emphasize, rather more, the protesters' moral actions and feelings, thereby pleading for identification with the protester and for moral self-evaluation by the citizens of the deporting state.

VISIBILITY, IDENTIFICATION, PERSONIFICATION, AND ATTENTION

The self-portraiture aspect of the two women's videos raises the protesters' emotions and corporeality to the fore while also emphasizing the persona. As the visually appealing emotions of the protester contribute to the videos' strong emotional charge, so does the will of a woman who steps into an undoubtedly frightening conflict situation to take a stand and resort to direct action, guided by her moral principles. This charge is amplified as these women tell the camera, calmly yet seriously, what they are striving for and why: they refuse to watch silently or obey the rules as a fellow human is sent into danger. The composed yet emotive and clearly anxious appearance of the two women, coupled with convincingly articulated pleas for the rights of others, add to the aura of willpower and courageousness often associated with nonviolent civil disobedience (Seppälä 2022).

This focus on the protesters' persona and personal character was mirrored in the highly personified public discussion of the two protests. The predominant media-discussion frame emphasized the demonstrators' personal and moral character. Attention was given to visually detectable traits such as their gender and relative youth, alongside characteristics related to social status, such as profession/education (being a social-work student or lawyer) and social activeness (being an activist or party employee) (Anderson & Palko 2018; Crouch 2018; Dagens Nyheter 2018; Junkkari 2018; Ukkonen 2018). Personal strength was highlighted further via parallels likening them to well-known heroic historical freedom fighters resorting to civil disobedience: Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, and Rosa Parks (Junkkari 2018; Nicholson 2018; Vuorinen 2018). This tallies with evidence that collective action and social movements—perhaps all the more in the social media era—tend to be represented by personified figureheads, who add interest, intimacy, and identification to the otherwise often somewhat remote social fights online (Bennett & Segerberg 2012; della Porta 2005; Poell et al. 2015). Media representations cast Pennanen and Ersson as the main figureheads for their cause, placing them in a role resembling, for instance, Greta Thunberg's in climate activism (see Bergmann & Ossewaarde 2020; Jung et al. 2020).

The focus on these highly personified protesters, acting benevolently and morally when encountering others' grievances, echoes what Lillie Chouliaraki wrote about humanitarian appeals and celebrity humanitarianism in the age of post-humanitarianism. In such arrangements, Western celebrity figureheads for humanitarian action convey the distress of suffering to others for distant audiences who can help. In such appeals, (Western) spectators' identification with the person in need often becomes less relevant as the emotions of the morally exemplary activist fighting global injustice become the focus of the play. The protest videos give an affective account of what and how the citizen of a deporting nation feels about injustice and peril facing others. Such arrangements, Chouliaraki (2013: 78–81) argues, risk producing narcissistic solidarity, obsessed with 'our emotions' rather than oriented toward acting against injustice and suffering or addressing their root causes. Considering videos 1 and 2 alongside Ahmed's video seems to cast this issue into relief. Overall, in recent decades, arrangements of appeals for others' rights have shifted from images of suffering individuals toward positive appeals—depictions of cosmopolitan do-gooders who respond to those in peril—since the latter have become viewed as a more compelling mode of addressing and mobilizing potential

helpers (Chouliaraki 2013). In this vein, visual records of activists'/protesters' emotions seem to represent more compellingly affective performance within contemporary mediatized protest communication. Largely absent are direct visual highlighting of injustices and testimonials of suffering/oppression. One factor here is that intended audiences composed chiefly of European spectators may more readily identify with heroic figureheads appealing for the rights of others than empathize with noncitizens standing up for fellow asylum-seekers. Furthermore, these cases suggest that an identifiable human witness presenting herself to the camera adds credibility and newsworthiness to social protests. Identifiable, visible figureheads and arrangement that produces identification with the protester hold the power to attract interest and attention—more than the testimony of anonymous witnesses unseen behind the camera (see Richardson & Schankweiler 2019: 175).

DISCUSSION: INTERSECTIONALLY CONDITIONED VISIBILITY AND THE TWO-EDGED SWORD OF RECOGNITION

The videos' arrangement and production of affective witnessing do not entirely explain the disparity of visibility between Ahmed's video and those of Ersson and Pennanen. Several other conditions influence and construct visibility, circulation, and (thereby) media recognition, with perceived (non-)newsworthiness and frames of the protests' recognition being strongly tied to the protesters' personal character, agency, and positionality. Differences in apparent motives for protesting and subjective positions related to asylum, alongside nationality and social status, unquestionably played a part in reactions and the resulting media visibility. Nordic women speaking out in their countries of citizenship for the rights of 'others' create a vastly different position and, hence, a vastly different reception than deportees or other non-citizens expressing dissent against deportations, especially among citizens of the deporting countries (as opposed to activist and diaspora communities).

While the protesting witness-bearer's visual presence enhances credibility, interest, and identification, dissent on aircraft may be considered illegal, so is a sensitive issue, especially for noncitizens. Asylum-seekers and other vulnerable people or members of marginalized groups seldom have the luxury of showing their faces and being outspoken (Seppälä 2022). Broader intersectional positions of power and privilege entwine in opportunities for public dissent—and for creating public recognition. This intersectional disparity becomes apparent in arrangements whereby deporting countries' white nationals become a protest's visual/bodily focus while non-citizen males remain invisible. An obvious reason for the perceived non-newsworthiness of Ahmed's protest lies in such factors as citizenship, gender, and the assumed cultural/racial traits of protesters of Middle Eastern origin. White citizens of deporting nations are more likely to be seen as newsworthy protest figureheads, recognizable political subjects to represent marginalized groups, and figures that national audiences can identify with. The videos' visibility gulf illustrates the power of the various intermingling intersectional elements in the formation of media notice, frames, and conditions of recognition for social injustices suffered and protested by marginalized groups (Caspers & Moore 2009; Fraser 2000).

The media are crucial in mediating the social and political struggles of the distressed, marginalized, and exploited. Mediated struggles for recognition align individuals

emotionally with some bodies more than others, contributing simultaneously to both solidarity and distancing (Harju & Kotilainen 2023). The personal features and character perceived in a protester—familiarity and shared features that bolster identification and intimacy—contribute to media recognition of the acts of dissent, while elements that are distancing from the audience's perspective (differences in language, nationality, perceived religious views, social status, etc.)—yield invisibility and nonrecognition for otherwise similar social and political appeals. That said, recognition and (in)visibility have a flipside and display ambivalent relations. Visibility cannot guarantee increased justice, equality, or genuine recognition of the grievances expressed. In fact, recognition may bring unintended consequences, even harm (Harju & Kotilainen 2023; Herzog 2020), such as personal attacks on the protesters, hate speech, and even court proceedings. The reactions and negative public discussion surrounding Pennanen's and Ersson's protests seem to demonstrate this well.

Although all the protests were largely intended to draw attention to the violence embedded in the deportation procedure and its morally and legally dubious attributes, the cruel ethos and process of forced removal were often not central to the ensuing discussion. The protests' nature as civil disobedience came to the fore. Negative views of their moral dimension were expressed, especially in Finland, and debate swelled around the (il)legality of direct action (Seppälä 2022). This is in line with a tendency for new social movements that attract attention via civil disobedience (e.g., Extinction Rebellion) to spark considerable discussion on the means of protest and less on the substantive issues (Bergmann & Ossewaarde 2020; Birnie 2018; Seppälä 2022). Societal discussion of Ersson's and Pennanen's videos attests that civil disobedience is a risky approach, involving *imago* risks, and its focus on the method and protesters illustrates all the more that generating high-volume discussion is a far cry from spotlighting the grievances of victims of forced deportation. One could posit that the acknowledgment produced by mediatized protest often fails to produce sustained media/public interest in the structural problems. Scholarship on online witnessing and crisis/protest communication remains divided on mediatized protest's ability to produce heightened, lasting attention for the grievances of marginalized and repressed groups (see Askanius 2020; Poell 2020).

Still, scholars at the intersection of media studies and social movement studies have recently asserted optimistically that the immediacy and instantness that social media can grant protest communication yield heightened visibility and strengthen social movements' demands (Askanius 2020; Poell 2020; Rosenberger et al. 2018). Many aspects of the arrangement of Pennanen's and Ersson's protests do attest to the greater ability of livestreamed protests to produce affective reactions; however, public reactions to the protesters themselves were more fraught. When the female figureheads became the top news story, the protests' personification occasioned hate speech, online vitriol, racist remarks, and personal attacks on the protesters. Studies have found that personified hate speech and harassment constitute a special risk for females engaged with (social) media and social activism (Saresma, Karkulento, & Varis 2020; Seppälä 2022). Also, many comments that castigated the protesters for taking the law into their own hands labeled the protesters as aberrant and naïve, particularly for trying to 'save' noncitizen foreign men, whom these xenophobic discussions connected with (sexual) violence and crime. Moreover, the protesters' live publishing through social media was a major aspect of cultivating positive but also negative attention. Circulating footage of one's own 'crime' was

labeled a stupid act of gullible people (Hakim 2019; Pham 2019; Siltamäki 2018). Indeed, court proceedings followed. While Pennanen argued that the personal harm caused by the negative public discussion and directed personal harassment formed an attenuating circumstance, the court deemed these insufficient reasons for withholding punishment, since she herself had published the video and made the protest public (Helsingin Sanomat 2019; Kilpeläinen 2019). Even in the courtroom, livestreaming protests was perceived as an aggravating factor. It seems that the same intersectional conditions that amplified the two protests' public visibility functioned against the protest or protesters in public.

Finally, things get read where they are situated. The public debate ignited by Ersson's and Pennanen's protests largely followed the—highly polarized—lines of the asylum-policy views already present in the deporting country (with overwhelmingly divisive societal positioning on the matter being vividly apparent), as shown by Seppälä (2022) and Khattab (2020). This dovetails with the argument that mediatized protests' ability to alter prevailing assessments of social inequalities remains limited. How spectacles of social protests get read tends to align with preexisting ideological postulates on the issues (Poell 2020; Zelizer 2022). In this pessimistic take, whatever the media platforms or technologies of digital image circulation, mediated grievances are still predominantly encountered in line with those suppositions. As history attests, such emotive spectacle—be it witnessing emotionally engaging mediated imagery of violence, revelatory livestreamed protests, or images of war atrocities—may trigger action and strengthen political positioning/resolve for acts of solidarity, but only when already backed by existing ideological beliefs and political resonance (Butler 2008; Sontag 2003; Zelizer 2022). We have all the more evidence that seeing more, more directly, does not necessarily bring on more responsiveness, greater caring, or more forceful action on others' grievances (Zelizer 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

A comparative assessment of the videos' addressing and affective witnessing, along with the identification and recognition constructed as a result, proved illuminating. While all three were intended to mobilize viewers and reveal hidden violence, with all of them using digital recording and circulation, differences in verbal addressing, description, and framing were decisive, most prominently inspiring sympathy for the 'victim' by showing the state security machinery's force in action vs. selfie-mode witnessing intimately tied to the bodily reactions, appearance, and emotions of a Nordic protester responding to injustice. The disparity runs deeper, though: the figurehead factor, in a constellation with visual, media- and technology-driven, and affect-associated attributes, is bundled up with intersectional conditions tied to the protesters' perceived personal character. Together, all these facets condition the circulation and attention gathered by such mediatized protests.

Various attendant issues emerged. While livestreaming and civil disobedience may be valuable tools for modern protest, attention does not automatically lead to or cause societally effective action or genuine recognition of the grievances. A key factor here is the narrowing of the frame to personified protesters rather than social grievances. The double-edged sword of public attention asserts itself also in the personal targeting of protesters and points to the continued relevance of the age-old question of the contested relations of seeing more, more directly, and caring more.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This article has been written while funded by the Academy of Finland Project DEMESO, Deportation in Mediated Society, Funding number: 320323.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Kotilainen, NK. 2023. Resisting Deportation Live: Affective Witnessing and Recognition of Airplane Deportation Protests. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 13(4): 7, pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.585

Submitted: 02 June 2022
Accepted: 12 May 2023
Published: 07 December 2023

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Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.

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