The Labor of Chartering a Deportation Journey

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the work routines of preparing for deportations, alongside the work-life situation of employees who handle the task of deporting people. Via an ethnographic account from Swedish detention centers, where immigrants' forced removal by way of chartered journeys is prepared for, the article elucidates how 'affective labor' goes into deportation. Through a close examination of the work dynamics among employees, discussed via the 'game' concept, the article reveals what is significant for realizing deportations and how this occurs in the interplay both of staff members and between those personnel and deportees. Thereby, it offers profound insight as to how employees cope with the task of detaining people and deporting them. The author concludes that the deportation work, in addition to being conditioned by legal frameworks, is characterized by work-life challenges tying in with general tendencies that have global counterparts. A significant contribution to deportation scholarship is visible in further knowledge of the affective labor that deportation entails, coupled with the argument that it constitutes a key dimension of Sweden's deportation regime.

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INTRODUCTION

Swedish detention-center employees perform service and security tasks in the centers' day-to-day work. That includes preparing deportees for forced removals coordinated by the National Border Police Section and undertaken in collaboration with the Prison and Probation Service's International Transportations Team. A full-fledged infrastructure of forced mobility (Walters 2018)[1] exists that supplements individuals' and small groups' departure journeys with the compilation of passenger lists for chartered planes in collaboration with other EU member states across complex legal geographies (Könönen 2020). Partly because of the deportations' secretive nature (see Borrelli 2021a), these chartered operations' realization is rendered largely impervious to scientific attention, in one more piece of the picture of immigration linked detention as 'an instance of state violence unchecked' (De Genova & Peutz 2010: 102, citing Galina Cornelisse). This article ethnographically explores the procedures for chartered deportations from a detention center in Sweden.

Scholars find the Swedish detention and deportation regime presenting as forceful and yet ambiguous (Canning 2020; Khosravi 2009; Lindberg et al. 2022). As DeBono, Rönnqvist and Magnusson (2015) show, the state of deportability can imply an everyday burden, while the possibility of deportation, of course, affects people variously. A comparative study found Sweden inclined to assist individuals rather than enforce their return; the country seemed relatively reluctant to employ state violence in deportation (Leerkes & Van Houte 2020: 332). This proneness to apply a 'soft' approach is visible also in detention facilities, where the personnel's work channels a discourse of hospitality focused on notions of safety and detainee wellbeing (Khosravi 2009; see also Canning 2020). Fostering feelings of friendliness with detainees is thought to be conducive to maintaining security; however, this poses a challenge to employees, who face the contradicting commitments of official duties and acting as fellow human beings when tasked with maintaining securitized yet humane treatment of detainees (Puthoopparambil 2016; Puthoopparambil, Ahlberg, & Bjerneld 2015). The challenge has been problematized as part of an emotional dilemma that increases stress—for both those working at detention units and their residents (Canning 2020; Fischer 2015; Khosravi 2009; Puthoopparambil 2016; Puthoopparambil, Ahlberg, & Bjerneld 2015; Sundqvist 2017). The strain on employees especially is fruitfully read through the lens of emotional labor, with the result often getting presented as a health issue to which the authorities should attend (Puthoopparambil 2016; Puthoopparambil, Ahlberg, & Bjerneld 2015).

The tension between the soft approach and the personnel's emotionally burdensome deportation related tasks can be nuanced (see DeBono, Rönnqvist & Magnusson 2015), and here it opens an analytical window to the affective dimension of detention and deportation work. In light of the tension's origins in the split focus of their professional role, I examine the 'easygoing' dimensions of the work that helps employees cope with the task of forcibly removing immigrants. The discussion explores the work routines of preparing for deportations, along with the work-life situation of those employees tasked with detaining and deporting people, through the metaphorical concept of the game. My analysis of team-based procedures, which reflect the dynamics of a game through several elements (playful disposition, an element of uncertainty, equality among players, and consent to the rules), suggests that the

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1   Joint journeys are coordinated by the European Border Guard Agency, Frontex.

paradoxical effects of play (Bateson 2000) help staff members perform their task by bridging the common distinction between work and play. Work attracts employees' attention to their tasks rather than the consequences of them, thus reducing the emotional burden that accompanies the task of forcibly removing immigrants. By discussing this effect, I explicate how 'affective labor' (Hardt 1999) is channeled into preparations for deportation and established as a key dimension of the Swedish deportation regime, in a phenomenon consistent with the observation that migration is increasingly governed at an affective level (Bissenbakker & Myong 2019).

Before the discussion proper, I contextualize the research, address some methodological considerations, and discuss the theoretical frame for my research. I can then explore how the game emerges between employees during the preparations and how the setup comes off in relation to detainees, how the procedures of departure unfold by way of team play, and how employees cope with the forced-removal tasks. The article draws on Michael Hardt's work on affective labor (1999) and literature on practices of detention and deportation (Drotbohm & Hasselberg 2015; Eule 2018; Hall 2012; Khosravi 2009). It, in turn, enriches the anthropology of removal (Coutin 2015; De Genova & Peutz 2010; Fassin 2011; Peutz 2006) by further illuminating the coping mechanisms of those professionally engaged in maintaining the detention and deportation regime.

THE GAME METAPHOR AND AFFECTIVE LABOR

Sociologist Michel Burawoy (1979) used the game metaphor to describe the social dimension that made industrial manufacturing work effective. This element improved the attention, commitment, and consent levels of machine-operators working under time pressure and increased their production output by motivating them to optimize their performance. I use this metaphorical lens to identify the sources of employee concerns and commitments in the labor process of detention and deportation, thereby informing an understanding of what enables work that carries a heavy emotional burden (Puthoopparambil 2016). Such metaphors, when utilized carefully, are thought to confer 'heuristic power' by allowing one to 'see things in a new light' (Swedberg 2020: 240, 252). By considering the procedures a game-like pursuit, I explore work's nature as both something beyond a source of income (Suzman 2021) and a form of interaction that 'drives away boredom' (Spittler 2016: 176). The ethical and analytical implications of considering *the work process* to prepare for deportations as a game should be warranted. The intention with using the game metaphor is to point to a coping mechanism rather than to game playing as a possible idle pleasure.

In discussing this mode of production, where the condition of deportability (De Genova 2002, 2007) is used, I employ Hardt's notion of affective labor to explicate how labor practices produce sociality and expected happiness (Ahmed 2010). Through establishing humane detention conditions, the personnel produce 'a feeling of ease, wellbeing, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community' (Hardt 1999: 96) in relation to each other and detainees. Hence, when staff members devote their emotional and bodily capacities to the work, the practice displays an affective dimension that produces 'embodied meaning making' (Wetherell 2012: 4). Drawing, further, on the theorizing of play, I consider this effect reminiscent of symbolic representation of 'mood signs,' a concept Gregory Bateson (2000) applied when positing that, by taking place on multiple levels of abstraction, communication enables us to transcend particular meanings through paradoxical facets of play. For

example, as the workers' chores revolve around preparing for forced removals, their sociality is solicited and put to work, yet the tasks are undertaken with an easygoing and playful stance. Hence, play here is a **disposition** rather than an activity (Malaby 2009); in this context, it is worth remembering that playing a game can be 'powerfully compelling without being fun' (Ibid.: 205).

I find these notions helpful for understanding the Swedish deportation regime and, more specifically, its work to effectively detain and deport people. As Hardt pointed out when examining the role of affective labor in a capitalist economy, that labor also constitutes a force of governmentality producing 'social networks, forms of community, biopower' (1999: 96). This calls back to Michel Foucault's (2007) definition of biopower, the 'power over life,' administered through biopolitics, which, in turn, is a form of governance that rationalizes controlling a population. Labor practices make biopower apprehensible 'from below' (Hardt 1999: 98); accordingly, I consider what becomes visible in the work detention employees do that enables government of migration through affect (Bissenbakker & Myong 2019).

WORK AT DETENTION CENTERS

At the time of my fieldwork, in 2019, detention centers provided work for 1,399 people, across six units (in central and southern Sweden), which could host 528 detainees in total. The Migration Agency recruits people with relevant language competencies and university degrees in social sciences, to increase the centers' efficiency by means of employees' greater cultural competence (Khosravi 2009: 45). A significant aspect of such work in confined environments is that it easily brings people close socially—specifically in respective work teams, in something resembling 'more than just a workplace' (Hall 2012: 67). This particular work environment, while displaying welded teamwork, nevertheless is not spared from inter-employee issues such as harassments, discrimination, and violence, giving rise to measures in the form of courses on equality and treatment in addition to periodical workplace meetings [*APT—arbetsplatsträffar*].

The staff's service work involves day-to-day maintenance of the detention-unit departments, which entails looking after the facilities, maintaining security, and helping detainees with what their situation requires (to the degree deemed appropriate). Employees are encouraged to utilize their language skills, experiences, and subjectivity in these duties. Tasks such as arranging visitations, confiscation, and transportation are conditioned by legal frameworks (Majcher, Flynn & Grange 2020) and guided via paperwork (Borrelli & Lindberg 2019) that demands accuracy and careful consideration. While responding to various aspects of the residents' 'undeportability' (Campesi 2015), the tasks are aimed toward the execution of forced removal once the legal and practical possibility to do so has been verified. Other relevant factors in the work are general work conditions such as lack of institutional oversight (Eule 2018), professional habitus (Borrelli 2021b), and emotions (Borrelli 2021c; Kalir 2019b). As research attests, the personnel at Swedish detention centers experience a struggle for balance between their official duties and empathy for detainees (Borrelli 2021a; Borrelli 2021b; Canning 2020; Puthooparambil 2016). The challenge has been described as an emotionally stressful dilemma of being 'torn between two loyalties' (Puthooparambil, Ahlberg & Bjerneld 2015: 9).

THE METHODS AND APPROACH

Research on detention and deportation has been plagued by difficulties in accessing detention institutions (Bosworth & Kellezi 2017; Kalir 2019a; Kalir, Achermann, & Rosset 2019; Lindberg & Eule 2020; Vrâbiescu 2019). Full access was granted after a period of emailing and phone calls to the management team at the Migration Agency's detention department. Entry was predicated on wearing a staff uniform and a personal alarm, which greatly influenced my position in the field but, for reason of the high-security, high-secrecy environment constituted by every detention department at a center, was not negotiable. In terms of position in the field, the choice to comply with wearing a uniform involved committing to the focus on staff members and being open with my research agenda in relation to everyone I had a chance to address. Wearing the uniform did not involve an attempt to go undercover. However, it raised additional demands to be outspoken about the fieldwork I was undertaking. In terms of ethical implications, the take makes this research sensitive though relevant. The choice to focus on staff was also balanced considering the limited coverage of previous research and the ethical concerns evoked by the demanding situations that do not outrun the need to review the activity. The chaotic and sometimes impromptu nature of large-scale deportations makes it impossible to obtain consent from all involved, including external actors; however, the benefits of completing the research anyway overweigh the minimal risk of disclosing any personal information. A data management plan including ethical considerations was developed and followed in dialogue with the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research and in line with GDPR regulations. When interviews have been recorded, informed consent has been secured. No personal data has been registered or saved upon end of the project.

The fieldwork included 6 weeks at each of five units, shadowing the workers during their duties and interviewing them about their work. While I met with hundreds of employees over the course of the fieldwork year, I focused on semi-structured and anonymized interviews with two to three of them a day. This article is based on parts of the fieldwork and specifically on the experience of preparations for chartered deportations. Days spent at the various departments and in the offices, main halls, courtyards, and cafeterias yielded insight as to the nature of the work and the challenges that became apparent in what employees faced as soon as a departure started looming. At times, the collegiality between people provided insights into the pleasure of working in teams endeavoring to make the best of challenges like schedules, arrivals, departures, visitors, visits, and isolation. This range of extremes also resonated with the way in which fieldwork on migration control can display 'an utter absence of spectacle' (Eule 2018: 2790), which added substance to one staff member's description of being an 'adrenaline junkie' longing for something to happen. It directed my attention to how people 'kill time' in detention work and sparked my curiosity about what makes work agreeable to employees. Next, I discuss how I addressed that inquisitiveness: with theoretical tools enabling me to approach the paradoxical tension in the employees' loyalty and the dynamics among those who carry out coercive measures.

PREPARATIONS

'What will today look like?' the chief alarm manager asks the team leader in charge of the departure. 'Well,' replies the latter, passing a document across the table, 'there

are 23 traveling. Five of them are circled, but I don't expect any trouble. Knock on wood.' Rapping on the table, he adds, 'But it might be good to keep an eye on those' nonetheless, drawing attention to the five deportees on the list whose portraits are circled. 'I know him,' one of the alarm managers present says when peering more closely at the document. 'What does it involve? What can we expect? Is it suicide or …?' he keenly asks the team leader, who replies, 'No, I guess it's just a general heads-up, in case they make trouble, get loud, or get noisy.' He hastens to add, 'There is one guy with an illness, and this time he will be the last one to go, because the others are upset about him being sent even though he is ill.' In his response, the chief alarm manager concludes, 'Last time we received criticism because the pick-up wasn't smooth enough, specifically when they took those from isolation last.[2] But there won't be any of that today.'

This conversation took place at one of the weekly security meetings at the detention center in Märsta, outside Stockholm, from which a chartered deportation to Kabul, Afghanistan, is set to begin in a few hours. Participating in the meeting were the alarm managers, in charge of the center's security, and the aforementioned team leader, invited to brief them on the departure agenda. At this meeting, discussion led to the topic of expected disruptions to the forced removal, at which point the team leader, who is tasked with overseeing the passenger list, communicated which deportees might be likely to cause the staff trouble. Thus, deportation is approached as a security issue that intensifies during departures, requiring alertness and advance knowledge of the deportees. These meetings serve to build a common understanding of the projected dynamic between employees and deportees, with the listing, portrayal, and discussion of deportees transforming them into 'standardized risk objects' (Røyrvik & Almklov 2013) through particular 'acts of entification' (Larsen 2010). As many of the personnel told me, the work generates indifference in relation to the detainees' situation. One team leader described the pattern thus:

> One stops caring. It took me some weeks, and then I was blunted. You
> know, there are always the same cases in circulation, the same kinds of
> issues, the same walk to the garage and the same walk to the luggage
> room. You get used to it. You cannot have empathy with everybody. You do
> not have the strength.

This team leader had experience with how the everydayness of the work renders its tasks easier. For him, the emotional strain dissipated over time, in connection with which he described a mode of dehumanization, which resembles a process of entification that rationalizes the work by enabling the meeting's participants to focus on their task and predict its outcome rather than contemplate the consequences of it.

Notwithstanding the seriousness of the conversation, a sense of playfulness lingered in how those at the meeting pondered the prospect of a successful departure. This was evident in the way they treated the uncertain ramifications of the task. Once the practical requisites and migration-conditioning legal frameworks that structure the forthcoming procedures are established, a dimension of uncertainty renders the work ahead interactive by 'establishing an element of unpredictability' (Spittler 2016: 169). The unforeseeable aspect of the work is how the deportees are going to act when the procedures commence; this reflects how the task and the objectification

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2　Isolation is implemented in line with the Aliens Act, or *Utlänningslagen* (2005:716), Chapter 11, §7.

come together in work on 'an object that is not fully controllable' (Ibid.). The playful stance in relation to the unpredictability is reflected not just in the general attitude to uncertainty but also in the eagerness over having a potentially suicidal deportee, which might render the departure challenging. The manner of familiarization with the portraits of the deportees and strategizing on the order of escorting them—and perhaps even the reference to knocking on wood to attract a bit of good luck to whatever the future holds—tells us that they are preparing for a challenge. The game is afoot.

In events a few days earlier, at another detention unit, supervisor Tessa is asked by her team leader to inform a detainee of an impending transfer to Märsta Detention Center—more precisely, to Department 3, the site of the meeting described above. Tessa is entrusted with this assignment because she speaks Dari, Farsi, and Urdu, languages useful for communicating with detainees who, as she does, have an Afghan background. Double-checking, the team leader asks, 'Do you think you can do it?' in the knowledge that the detainee might have a strong reaction because Märsta lies in the proximity of Arlanda Airport, hence representing an approaching deportation date. Tessa agrees, not because she must not refuse but since she knows that in this case no one will shoot the messenger. Pleased with her response, the team leader reminds, 'Please, try to do it as soon as possible,' in awareness of the staff's legal commitment to inform of decisions in a timely fashion. Tessa also knows that the detainee already is aware he is about to be transferred: he told her that very morning when interrogating her about rumored departure dates, suspecting he might already be on a passenger list.

She still is hesitant, because security regulations require her to pair up with a colleague before she sets out to insist on a meeting, and she must wait until after lunch, when her colleagues are less busy, so able to assist her. While waiting, she engages in some hide-and-seek by strolling through the department in efforts to locate the detainee. She checks the computer room and then the main room, but she does not see him. At last, when a colleague has joined her, the workers knock on the door to the room where he is sleeping. Tessa pushes the door ajar to tell him she wants to speak to him, and then she waits for him outside the room. The detainee accompanies the two workers to the administrator's office, where they sit near a cluster of armchairs: both with the back door right behind them, in easy reach in case they must escape the situation. Tessa says calmly in Farsi, 'You will be moved to another department. The transportation team will take you there. Do you understand?' The detainee nods, taps the chair's arms, and leaves the room.

This is how employees navigate the dissemination of information, with an incentive to optimize the chances of a smooth deportation, whereas postponing such a meeting would add to the indeterminacy of waiting in detention that detainees are subject to (Turnbull 2016). Since timing is important, maneuvering room in relation to the information is recognized, as long as one considers what is legally required and practically needed (e.g., for leaving enough time for packing). What is at stake for the employees is the gain of having to deal with deportees who are well-informed about what is going on versus upset about a sense of lost control. Here, what Tessa is asked to do corresponds to fulfilling legal prerequisites while being able to keep the detainee's possible reaction in mind. Together, her language skills, tone of voice, straightforwardness, and perhaps also gender provide good conditions for diminishing the risk of conflict. Simultaneously, her achievement comes with another component of effort too: just as important as these is to set aside her personal experience. When

I ask Tessa what she feels after having informed the detainee of the transfer, she tells me, 'I went to Afghanistan with my family last summer. We were there to visit family and relatives. I was scared all the time. It was not enjoyable at all.'

Back in Märsta, in Department 3, the team leader, his administrative colleague, a few staff members, and the head of the department are looking out the window of an office up on the second floor, waiting. Though the employees themselves aren't in detention, the passing of time here hits them hard too from time to time (see Turnbull 2016). From their vantage point today, the staff members kill time by catching a glimpse of the handful of people gathering in protest across the street. Some personnel joke about the activists' small numbers and the insignificance of their efforts to stop the deportation, but their attention will soon be drawn back to their duties. A phone rings. Quick to pick it up, team leader Kim takes a seat at his desk in front of his computer. The legal administrator, seated at the desk beside him, turns to his computer screen while listening in on the conversation. Both carefully look over the passenger list, which is continuously updated as claims of impediments to enforcing deportation (*Versktällighetshinder*) are submitted by and on behalf of deportees.[3] The document is projected for personnel on a large flat screen, radiating extra heat from the wall of an office already hot from many people's presence. 'It looks good,' Kim says of the document before hanging up. In this case, the Swedish Border Police have worked on collecting travel documents, which implies substantiating what people shun while finding themselves in what scholars refer to as a burdening state of deportability (De Genova 2002, 2007). 'Here they come,' announces the department head. As the hum of the bus grows closer, Kim rises from his desk. 'Okay, that's it,' he says, prompting the group to get things in motion all at once. It is time for the team to pull off what has been worked on for the last few weeks.

The pre-departure situations described above reflect how employees establish 'a common interest among the players' (Burawoy 1979: 85): The alarm managers mobilized an understanding of what they would deal with during the departure. Tessa and the team leader strategized on how to inform the detainee of his transfer. And in the stretches of waiting and window-gazing on the staff's part, the personnel built focus before a deportation, concentrating on this as 'a reduction of fatigue, passing time, relieving boredom' (Ibid.). These situations reflect employees' 'disposition to play' (Malaby 2009), which suggests that the game begins long before the departure procedures do.

The playfulness in the situations and the sense of inter-employee community produced through sociality can be understood as directing affective labor into the work. Tessa's success in remaining calm and focused entails producing wellbeing rather than distress, which requires considerable affective labor. Here, the concern about how information is disseminated pays off by helping to maintain order within the department. This aids in stabilizing the situation and consequently affords a smooth departure. As staff members deal with the situation by joking and 'compulsively' checking the list of deportees, they create a sociality that renders the situation enjoyable. The affective labor directed toward waiting and preparing makes the work easier going and gratifying. Furthermore, by directing attention away from the distressing situation facing deportees, socializing lets the employees focus on the

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3   Section 12 of the Aliens Act, addressing border-crossing provisions, specifies that the grounds constituting impediments to enforcement must be accorded weight, potentially necessitating a new examination of the application.

task ahead of them. This kind of immaterial labor is commonplace in any collegial endeavor, but I argue that the efforts to enthuse each other are fundamental to executing the task of deportation.

All three situations—at the security meeting, in Tessa's department, and in the crowded office—illustrate the manner in which affective labor is put into preparing for deportations but also how the work coheres around a dynamic akin to escalation into a game (Burawoy 1979). Next, I delve into how preparations such as these pay off for a smooth departure and how the playfulness serves to distract employees as the work situation grows increasingly disturbing rather than boring.

TEAM PLAY

A few hours before the departure for Kabul, Ali, a supervisor in his thirties, steps into the transfer department, and loud chanting from the main room becomes audible. The atmosphere is jolly and almost wild as some detainees sitting on a couch speak in rhymes and address the busy staff members on a first-name basis, sarcastically asking how they are doing and, thereby, establishing an asymmetrical form of joking relationship (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). Ali greets some of the detainees in the corridor, which substantiates the sense that today's departure will, as any work day does, demand his efforts to socialize.

In the team leader's office, Kim instructs Ali, 'Partner up with Nick. Together you have four guys to prepare. You've had lunch already, I hope?' Taking a break will be impossible once the procedures have begun, and this concern reflects the workplace's paradoxical existence as 'a kind of homeplace' (Hall 2012: 67). Between giving clear instructions, Kim maintains an easygoing demeanor, and this calm manner seems to attract others' admiration. 'Where is Kim?' the personnel ask each other, trusting him. 'Have you asked Kim what to do?' they check. Kim scratches his head, pushes his glasses up his head, throws some snuff in his mouth, and avoids showing excitement about the importance his colleagues accord him. Remaining calm is a virtue in a securitized milieu, and the efforts to radiate control reflect the affective labor of producing wellbeing (Hardt 1999). In this regard, the game of chartered deportations is a form of 'deep play' in that social hierarchies and respect are at stake (Geertz 2000).

'I have already done three of them,' Nick assures Ali with a tap on the shoulder. This gesture is telling: Burawoy's observations of manufacturing work led him to conclude that playing the game individualizes workers as they compete in the production process (1979: 81), with this differentiation mechanism improving performance but obscuring that the workers belong to the same class of agents (Ibid.). The deportation process, in contrast, brings employees together as equals—with tasks undertaken in pairs, the work on chartered departures increases the sense of collegiality. The procedures intensify employees' mutual attentiveness. Chartered departures consolidate relations between people who already are 'entangled in the close-knit atmosphere' (Hall 2012: 66).

Ali and Nick tell the detainee, 'Let's go!' and the tension in their 'dual loyalty' (Puthoopparambil 2016) becomes apparent. Now the employers must find a balance between social engagement and indifference to the detainees. Whereas a sense of community is generated between workers, the sociality is challenged in relation to detainees when the hour of departure approaches. The game, as Burawoy (1979) described it, is a battle (against time and factory machines) that motivates workers to

increase productivity. For detention-center employees producing smooth departures under time pressure, the core challenge is formed by detainees who are not excited about being forcibly removed from the country. Employees' disposition toward playing in this context implies acknowledging that events 'can never be cordoned off from contingency entirely' (Malaby 2009: 211). The aspect of uncertainty requires their 'readiness to improvise' (Ibid.), and directing affective labor toward coworkers and detainees in response to not knowing how the detainee will behave during departure lubricates procedures through undertaking them in an easygoing way.

When Ali, Nick, and the detainee enter the luggage room, it is crowded with staff members watching the detainees rearrange the contents of their suitcases. While packing, a detainee glances at Ali and says something in Dari with an ironic tone. Ali smiles politely but does not reply. He looks at me and Nick with an enigmatic expression on his face but then explains: 'He tells me, "You want **us** to go there, but you do not want to go there yourself!"' Ali and this detainee have spoken before, and Ali has admitted to having no desire to visit his home country now, because of the political unrest in Afghanistan.[4] While Ali often is requested to facilitate work on chartered deportations, the qualities his employer values—his language skills and sociocultural competence—now are causing his countrymen to call his position into question. His skills are essential for treating detainees humanely, but the detainee calls his intentions into question by indirectly accusing him of applying double standards.

The tension in this interaction reflects the paradoxical effects of play. Ali copes with the tension by performing a kind of service work that, in affective terms, means answering an accusation with friendliness. He responds to it with a smile—in other words, 'a feeling of ease' (Hardt 1999: 96). The possibility of choosing a course of action establishes consent, 'however narrowly confined those choices might be' (Burawoy 1979: 27). The room for maneuvering is invested with easygoingness, which helps us comprehend how forced removals are possible when contemplating the levels of abstraction that enable communication through the domain of play.

At the team leader's signal, the staff members don neon-yellow vests. The bus has arrived and parked outside the garage, filling it with a faint scent of exhaust. The police officers aboard the arriving bus are in casual attire (jeans and sneakers, sweatpants, and caps), but they too put on vests, with 'ESCORT POLICE SWEDEN' emblazoned on their back. The detention-center employees greet the police, some in silence with a stony-faced nod from a distance and others with a casual hug. They ask each other, 'Hey, how's it going?' and 'Who are you partnering with?' Also present are three health-care workers, and the fellowship extends to them, for they have been on this journey together before. 'How many is it?' a policeman asks the team leader, receiving the reply, 'It's 22. Twenty plus two: one in isolation and another one at Department 1.' Now that procedures have begun, staff members mingle with deportees in the department. They form lines along the corridor, standing opposite each other, and some other detainees show up to show their support, all reflecting a disposition to play. A detainee throws a used wad of snuff in the air such that it sticks to the ceiling. The act of mischief goes without comment, adding force to the sense that this is a moment of liminality (Turner 1982) in which anything is allowed—if all goes according to plan. One by one, the detainees are summoned by two staff

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4   At the time of the fieldwork, Afghanistan was experiencing heightened violence against civilians in connection with the armed conflict among United States, Taliban, and pro-government forces (UNAMA 2019).

members and escorted to the luggage room to pick up their belongings before being escorted through the main door. Some detainees have to be summoned from the rooms down the corridor. 'Five minutes left. You can start to say goodbye to your friends now,' the team leader says. Footfalls echo in the stairwell as deportees are escorted down to the registration office. At the very first sight of them at the back of the garage, the police (also working in pairs) greet them. Now that the game is going, it requires 'a dispositional stance toward the indeterminate' (Malaby 2009: 208) in case deportees react to the insistence on escorting them. With a handshake, the officers ask how each deportee is doing. When one of the deportees answers 'Good,' the police continue with, 'Do you speak English?' and the question is met with an irritated: 'Jag pratar bra svenska [I do speak Swedish well].' The policeman, adopting a softer tone and now in Swedish, explains that they will undertake a visitation. The procedure is quick, except when confusion over prohibited items arises.

The deportee's belongings are placed in a line along one of the office tables. One officer searches the man's shoes, and the other counts and registers his pocket money. They ask the deportee to sign a document listing his valuables. Before leaving the garage, they ask whether they may take hold of his arm. Then they walk him to the bus, with additional policemen for backup monitoring proceedings from behind. They have Velcro tape at the ready and are prepared to intervene if needed. The leader says, 'Okay, let's take number 7,' and the next detainee gets escorted down the stairs to the garage. The policemen are easygoing in conversation and playful when positioning themselves to catch anyone who might try to deviate. Their stance reflects a playful disposition, while the social conflict is handled on a metacommunicative level, telling the players that the 'actions in which we now engage, do not denote what those actions **for which they stand** would denote' (Bateson 2000: 180, emphasis in original). That is, the playful interaction metacommunicates enforcement, in that the Velcro tape signals enforcement while the playfulness allows the signal to remain a signal. The paradoxical tension in contradicting commitments is handled through the simulating effects of playing a game.

In this way, the detention-center employees and police undertake the departure procedures with attention to deportees' bodily movements and moods, all while remaining calm and easygoing. The affective labor put into deporting them is a directly exerted force of production that permits employers to refrain from using physical force and instead focus on the 'creation and manipulation of affects' (Hardt 1999: 96). The sociality established among them keeps the work pleasant and simultaneously serves as one of many 'relative satisfactions' that 'contribute to the psychological and social health of the laborer' (Burawoy 1979: 78). The efforts are value-producing in that they enable a smooth departure. Thus, the sociality generated by the affective labor poured into the situations completes the deportation process.

DEPARTURE

The rhythm of the protestors across the street shouting, 'No borders, no nations! Stop deportations!' reaches the garage and establishes a contrast against the easygoing-feel procedures, a stark reminder that there are differing perspectives on what is going on. The last visitation is followed by a dialogue initiated by the deportee: 'Do you find anything?' he asks the policeman, who is busy inspecting his shoes. 'No,' the policeman smiles, tapping him on the shoulder as if a comrade. He is friendly but determined—'the laugh or the smile indicates that a behavior that might normally

be aggressive is free of aggressive intention; it is a game, a fiction' (Valeri, da Col & Stasch 2018: 170). In this way, the game unfolds as 'a simulation of a social matrix' (Geertz 2000: 436): it is via the interactions that hierarchies are both challenged and reproduced.

When the last deportee has been escorted to the bus, the positions in the room dissolve, and the center's personnel move to the garage door to get a better view of the protestors, whose voices have increased in force as the bus prepares to leave. 'What are they yelling? I can't hear,' the nurse says, but nobody replies—perhaps because this resembles a statement more than a question. She looks at me and smiles. Once the distinction between work and play is overcome, we can consider how play has instrumental value (Malaby 2009: 213). Burawoy offered a convincing demonstration that the game serves to relieve boredom (1979: 85), but here, I suggest, the playfulness has a therapeutic effect too. Valeri, da Col, and Stasch wrote that play 'creates a further protective shield against the instincts and emotions that, directly experienced, run the risk of being destructive' (2018: 180). The playfulness is therapeutic in that it transfers the weighty and distressing situation to a playful sphere of humor and teasing. The dynamic traversed in the conversations allows the given setup to be seen in a new light in the sense that the game-like dynamics of the situations seem to offer a way of coping with work. Undertaking distressing tasks playfully implies managing a paradox, which reflects that therapy and play bear a stark resemblance (Bateson 2000: 191).

Just as the alarm managers planned, the last deportee under escort is a tall, skinny man who seems to be in pain. The policeman escorting him smiles. 'Send them to Afghanistan,' he says. He refers not to the deportees, though, but to the protestors. The joke is met with a giggle from the staff. While barely audible, it is one more part of the jokes and comments manifesting the playfulness in which employees engage while the procedures are underway. Serving as a coping mechanism, joking enforces their sense of community by distracting from more burdensome aspects of what is happening. The paradox of dual loyalty is smoothed over via affective labor turning misery into play, as a form of 'happiness duty' (Ahmed 2010: 7) that sparks expectation on people to hold spirits high—in this case, at work.

Ben, a supervisor in his forties from the north of Sweden, is pragmatic with respect to working on deportations:

> I mean it is the law. I should know because when I went to Australia and had spent six months there, I wanted to stay longer but I had no visa. So I had to fly home two days before my visa ran out. That is the way it is.

For Ben, the law justifies forced removals. Equating his situation to the detainees' normalizes deportation. His colleague Martin explains that he approaches the deportees with a solution in mind: 'I usually ask the guys what they have worked with, and then I ask if they can't do the same job when they get back home.' Thus, he renders the situation of the deportees ordinary, easy to resolve, and safe. Playing around with the social order consolidates it by allowing it to be challenged from equal footing. In other words, the game is played by equals and serves to legitimize domination by allowing relations to be contested between equals. Play enables what is otherwise hard to achieve (Sutton-Smith 2009: 202). This implies that these people are not necessarily motivated to work on deportations because they consider them justified; rather, it is the work situation itself that enables them to carry on, motivated

to finish a task (Burawoy 1979: 85). In the long run, taking part generates consent to the rules of the game; after all, 'one cannot both play the game and at the same time question the rules' (Ibid.: 81). The social relations established, including the captivating game played, keep the focus on the work and hold employees back from questioning the practical and legal conditionings of the task. More importantly, they refrain from doubting the necessity of the undertaking.

'That's it,' Kim says, speaking into his handset when the bus has departed. 'Can someone let the police out from "Caesar?"' he instructs, and five officers carrying riotcontrol equipment emerge from said meeting room. I ask the worker standing beside me who they are. 'Squad team,' he says, explaining, 'They are here in case there is a riot.' He quickly adds, 'Because if there is, then we have no chance. They are our backup.' The forced removals are not executed by way of physical enforcement, but physical enforcement is never truly absent. There is a backup mechanism of physical enforcement, and it is of such a character that there is no doubt who would be in control of whom. This is in line with Burawoy's description of the game as compelling, but only with certain prerequisites (1979: 87):

> A game loses its ability to absorb players under any of the following three conditions: first, when uncertainty is too great and outcomes are entirely beyond the control of players; second, when uncertainty is too slight and outcomes may become completely controlled by players; third, when players are indifferent to the possible outcomes.

That note is important because it allows us to contemplate the level of uncertainty that represents balance when considering that the goal (deportation) is clear while the path is undefined. Had the risk of failed deportation been greater, the work would have been less attractive. By the same token, though, per Burawoy's third point, were the personnel indifferent to success versus failure in it, there would be no gain—and hence no game. The uncertainty dimension reflects how work as interaction is 'more fun than a successful domination of the object which excludes every surprise' (Spittler 2016: 179). More importantly, the procedures' easygoing nature is made possible by the backup squad's presence. With the game now over, that 'which does not exist' or, rather, what is subverted by play—employees' dominance over detainees—comes into existence again. Chartered deportations are undertaken through a playful disposition toward an element of uncertainty that necessitates the players' equality and consent to the rules of the game.

CONCLUSION

The study reported upon here contributes valuable empirically rooted findings from applying the game metaphor to the work at Swedish detention centers, enriching scholarship especially with regard to playful disposition, the element of uncertainty, equality of players, and consent to the rules. The team-based undertaking of preparations for chartered deportations cultivates a playful inter-employee dynamic that also expresses in relation to deportees. The analysis sheds light on the course of action connected with what has been characterized as Swedish reluctance to use state violence in deportation (Leerkes & VanHoute 2020) and demonstrates well that the paradoxical effects of play as mediated through affective labor enable carrying out the procedures within the frames of appropriate formal mechanisms of (physical) enforcement. The findings tie in with broader work-life issues in reflecting the idea

that migration is governed through affect (per Bissenbakker & Myong 2019) and that affective labor is gaining dominance as a value-producing form of labor in the global economy (Hardt 1999: 90)—and as biopower to control a population (Foucault 2007; Hardt 1999). However, the argument presented here adds a nuance to the argument that people who work with detention manifest state power, which reflects in some of the detention literature (Canning 2020; Khosravi 2009; Lindberg et al. 2022). The contribution locates in the suggestion that there are coping mechanisms is effect, with causes possible to localize in the immediateness of the working situation rather than in structural domination. The intention here is to cast light on the situations rather than the symbolism of deportations.

There are important ramifications to the pattern I found wherein concerns originating in the work serve to distract from other burdens of the work situation, thereby generating consent to the proceedings. Also important is how the tension in the employees' divided loyalties gets formalized in interaction with detainees. This conveys some understanding of how individual subjectivities are instrumentalized as an asset in the production of deportations. I argue that the easygoingness by which employees engage with each other and detainees actually **enables** completing chartered deportations by establishing employee coping strategies as key assets of Sweden's detention and deportation regime.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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