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The Microphysics of Deportation

A Critical Reading of Return Flight Monitoring Reports

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Abstract

In the paper, I argue there is a whole political logistics to deportation. This is made visible by bringing the concept of microphysics to bear on the topic. Taking the case of enforced and escorted removals from the UK, I show that this logistics is vividly and graphically documented in the inspection reports. Hitherto largely ignored, inspection reports offer researchers a trove of information regarding the mechanisms and procedures of deportation. As I finally draw out, this focus can speak to questions about the relationship of ethics to deportation: the inspection reports show how a certain form of ethical calculation, based on a risk-based approach to the use of force has been inscribed into the practices of deportation.

Introduction

'The operation began with staff briefings at Spectrum House, Gatwick, one of which we attended. Not everyone could hear or was listening to the briefing. Staff had spilled out into the corridor and some people were having conversations outside. Staff received appropriate advice on record keeping and were reminded that if they were falling asleep or needed a break, they had to make sure an officer was awake and monitoring the detainee. Staff were told the

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detainees on the charter presented higher risks than those on other charters and "virtually all are violent criminals who have assaulted staff". They were advised to "use close escorting… the officer behind the detainee should have his hands on the back of him". There was a strong emphasis on the risk of disruptive behaviour. On the flight, a member of staff justified his wary approach, saying that although he had no specific knowledge of the individuals, "people were going to be killed" and were desperate enough to do anything. Although a number of staff on the operation had little or no experience of charter removals, the briefing contained no guidance on welfare issues, such as the stresses the detainees might be under and why, the importance of treating people decently and giving detainees the opportunity to make telephone calls. We spoke to one officer on his first charter flight who did not know his colleagues or what his duties were in any detail'.

You might think these are the observations of an ethnographer of borders and migration. In fact, they come from a report issued by the UK's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMIP 2017). The report's object is a deportation charter flight, which flew from London's Stansted airport to Kingston, Jamaica on 7-8 March 2017. 32 'detainees' were 'removed' on this plane, under the watchful, but sometimes sleepy, eye of more than 100 escorts, 3 health care staff, and 3 inspectors. For many detainees this was a long journey. Once the time spent confined on coaches funnelling people to the airport from the Immigration Removal Centres is factored in, some people spent as much as 22.5 hours in transit. As is the case with nearly all the UK's charter removals, the escorting service was privately contracted, in this case from a security company called Tascor. 'The Customer is King'. That's what Tascor proudly announces on its homepage (tascor.co.uk). This business slogan is rather apt given the link many scholars have drawn between the act of deportation and the performance of sovereign power.

I start with this vignette because it immerses us in the milieu that interests me in this paper, namely the world of *air deportation*. In using this term I want to draw attention to an asymmetry in the way we imagine and discuss deportation. In scholarship and public discourse on irregular migration the notion of boat migration has become commonplace. Observers recognize that ocean currents, fishing vessels, rescue zones, and many other maritime elements play an absolutely pivotal role in shaping border crossing, and the life and death of thousands of border crossers. Yet when we discuss deportation, when we consider the ways in which states forcibly remove certain classes of illegalized and criminalized people, a similar kind of materiality is less evident. A concern for the media, the vessels, the journeys is, if not missing, largely confined to the background. By far the majority of removals from the

EU are conducted via the skies. For example, of the 25,375 deportations carried out from Germany in 2016, according to Deutsche Welle (2017), 94% were by air. I suspect we would find a not dissimilar proportion if we looked at a small island state like the UK. Despite deportation's dependence on air routes, airlines, airports, the world of aviation has a rather peripheral place in deportation studies.

The minor place of aviation and transportation more generally within deportation studies is a puzzle. Deportation studies has grown into a subfield in its own right (Coutin, 2015). One of its hallmarks has been a widening of the understanding of deportation beyond a single act, policy or event, to include a whole range of places, relations, and effects. This includes a concern with the phenomenon of deportability (De Genova, 2002), namely the forms of precarity that may afflict people even if they are never actually deported; the relationship between anti-deportation struggles and questions of citizenship (Anderson et al., 2011; Nyers, 2003; Lecadet, 2018); the mechanisms and practices of detention (Bosworth, 2014); and increasingly the scene of post-deportation (Khosravi, 2018; Schuster and Majidi, 2013). Yet despite this necessary broadening of the field, and with certain important exceptions (Hiemstra, 2013; Gill, 2009; Mountz, 2011; Peutz, 2006; Blue, 2015), the role mobility systems play in the governance, politicization, and imagination of deportation remains somewhat marginal. Ships are widely recognized by scholars as constitutive of historical experiences of banishment, enslavement, transportation and displacement (Gilroy, 1993; Rediker, 2007), just as are railways in the massive dislocations and genocides of the c.20 (Presner 2007). I argue it is time to take the airplane more seriously as an active and irreducible presence in the deportations of our time.

The case for taking aviation more seriously is not just a matter of filling in a missing piece. As I have argued elsewhere (Walters, 2016; 2018), there are at least two reasons why aviation should be of theoretical as well as empirical interest to scholars of deportation, borders, migration and security studies.

First, aviation is not just a tool which states use. It actively contributes to the material construction and governance of deportation. We recognize the importance of aviation in discussions of the globalization of migration in the commonplace remark that cheap airfares have compressed the world and greatly accelerated the pace and reach of human mobility. But we haven't applied this insight to deportation specifically. Bruno Latour suggests if you want to know the difference which a given nonhuman thing makes, try the trick of removing it (Johnson, 1988). Try this with deportation. What would Britain's deportations to Nigeria – a regular, destination for its forced removals - look like were the skies closed and they could only travel by road

and sea? What degree of force would such journeys entail? Now, it seems to me the legitimacy of deportation rests on at least two somewhat contradictory claims: (a) it is a sovereign right of the state to control its borders and discriminate between its citizens and others when it comes to residence on the territory (b) however unpleasant, deportation is a practice that can be carried out while respecting the basic human rights and dignity of the deported. I think aviation underpins this tricky balance – one reason human rights authorities recommend 'scheduled air transport' as the preferred modality for forced removals (Council of Europe 2002). Aviation does not dispense with the need for force. Far from it. But it does transform the economy and perhaps the optics of force. Aviation has remade deportation; to use Latour's terminology, aviation 'translates' the way states now expel their unwanted people (Johnson, 1988).

But let us not forget something important: aviation is not weightless. Aviation infrastructure has a material density which interacts with deportation. The securitization of airports (Salter, 2007), the logistics of flight schedules, the laws and regulations of aviation, the geography of air routes, the protocols of aviation security and safety, the economics of air travel, the culture of aerial life (Adey, 2010), the professional responsibilities of pilots, and much else mean aviation has an irreducibility. It is never just an instrument which states wield but a thick zone of interaction that shapes and interferes with deportation. It can also be leveraged by migrants and their allies when they struggle against deportations.

Second, a focus on aviation opens up questions about the corporeality of deportation, questions that have been rather overlooked in studies that dwell more on the level of state policy, law, and citizenship. Deportation does not just target non-citizens, illegalized others, etc. At the same time, it operates on and through living bodies (Khosravi, 2009; Makeremi 2018; Walters 2017). Moving people against their will entails a whole series of operations which include seizing but also calming, hurting but also soothing, personalizing and depersonalizing, informing and sometimes misinforming, promising and betraying, immobilizing and mobilizing, scaring and reassuring (Kalir, 2017). All these operations, the powers they mobilize, the norms they cite and frequently transgress, are especially visible when deportees are moved by plane. This corporeality is in evidence throughout immigration enforcement, but it is especially intensified in the milieu of air deportation.

Deportation: from policy to microphysics

In light of these claims about the significance of air deportation this paper aims to make a particular conceptual contribution. Following the lead of Collyer (2012), I argue that it is fruitful to think about deportation from the angle of microphysics. Whereas political science has tended to pose 'why' questions about deportation, a microphysics lens foregrounds the less studied 'how' questions. The notion of microphysics is, of course, closely associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1977). He coined the term to reorient the way we study power and power relations. Microphysics attunes us to a world comprised of a multitude of little devices, minor mechanisms, and molecular relations of force that have often passed under the radar of political scientists when they elect to focus on ideas, institutions, and interests. Now, a turn to microphysics is not a matter of dismissing big actors like the state so much as conducting an ascending analysis that works from the microlevel upwards, seeing these big agencies as the mobile and uncertain assemblages of the little things.

In order to study the microphysics of deportation I look to a particular data source. Immigration enforcement is far from being a transparent area of state activity (Maillet et al., 2017; Belcher and Martin, 2013). The involvement of private companies whether in detention, or in this case, airlines and private security, only adds further layers of corporate secrecy (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2013). I argue that inspection reports of enforced removals on planes are a valuable but hitherto largely untapped source of information about this rather closed and sometimes secretive world. Building on literature on secrecy, security and methods (Gusterson, 1997; Monahan and Fisher, 2014), this paper will treat inspection reports as an archive that offers insights about the power relations of air deportation.

My case is flight monitoring of the UK's escorted removals and charter flight programme (2011-2018). In the UK the inspection of deportation flights, as well as some areas of detention practice, is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Whereas in some EU states inspection is carried out by NGOs, in the UK it is this state actor (FRA 2018). HMIP conducted its first inspection of an escorted overseas removal in 2011, when it monitored the fate of 35 detainees on a chartered flight to Jamaica. To date (Sept. 2018) it has monitored about 15 flights, which includes such destinations as Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Albania and Kosovo. In 2018 HMIP (2018a) started to inspect 'Dublin' removals to France, Austria and Bulgaria.

The movement to set up flight monitoring systems gathered weight in the 2000s amidst mounting concern about the opaque world of airports and flights within the

immigration enforcement system (Pirjola, 2015). Journalists, scholars, legal experts and NGOs were pointing to a pattern in which a number of migrants and detainees had died in custody, while many more were experiencing abuse and degradation during removal (CPT 2003; APT 2012; Pro Asyl 2007; Medical Justice 2008; Fekete, 2011). Concern focused especially on so-called charter flights which have become a key weapon of the forced return arsenal of EU member states. Most deportations take place on regular scheduled flights, and involve the detainee being sat – usually at the back – amidst regular passengers. But on a charter flight the whole plane is dedicated to deportation. Since charter flights take place away from the watching eye of the fellow passenger they place detainees in a particularly vulnerable position, outnumbered as they are by the security and escort teams. Hence experts made a case that there should be independent monitoring of these forced return flights, conducted by professionals with the relevant (e.g., legal and medical) expertise, and encompassing all stages of the process (such as reception in the destination country) (Pirjola 2015). The normative and legal case for flight monitoring is now recognized in EU law. Article 8 paragraph 6 of the EU's Return Directive (2008) states that all member states 'shall provide for an effective forced return monitoring system' (quoted in Pirjola 2015: 315).

In this paper I show that by combining the inspection reports and the notion of microphysics, we get a richer, more material and more corporeal account of deportation by air. I use the reports to identify a number of these little devices, operations and mechanisms, these air forces of deportation. These include mechanisms of *force, containment, agency, surprise and reserve.* There is an important line of scholarship, especially within political science, that highlights the limits of deportation policy (Ellermann, 2008; Gibney and Hansen, 2003; Phoung, 2005; Collyer, 2012). It shows that a range of factors frustrate the state in its exercise of this special power. For example, how do states manage the social protest and obstruction that deportation inevitably generates? How do states ascertain official identities regarding people who have destroyed their own papers? How do they get other states to accept the 'return' of people who may not be their citizens, or when it is not readmission but remittance that these states value the most? Such research is important because it shows that deportation is not merely a policy or a power, but itself a dynamic machine or apparatus that is constantly improvising new ways of removing people, and continually pushing at the limits of law and ethics in the process (De Genova and Peutz, 2010; Fekete, 2005). In this paper I suggest that a microphysics lens offers something important to this literature on the deportation machine. Microphysics shows how this innovation happens not just at the level of interstate relations, or

bureaucracies, but within heterogeneous spaces and on the scale of bodies, spaces, temporalities, vehicles and feelings.

But there is a more specific factor behind my interest in reading these inspection reports in terms of a microphysics of air deportation. Here I return to my earlier point about the marginality of aviation within the study of deportation. One reason the world of the flight has been relatively marginal within deportation studies is surely the presumption that compared to the time spent in detention, or the precarity generated by deportability, the flight is a somewhat minor factor. This is mistaken. I argue that we should not take this speed and brevity for granted. It does not come from the propulsion of the engines alone. Just as commercial air travel requires myriad mechanisms for it to work – including the active compliance of passengers – then, in different ways, so does forced removal. In examining the microphysics we get a glimpse at the *production of speed*, that is, some of the practices that enact the deportation flight, and a sense of the enormous amount of work that goes into making up deportation. Put differently, if we liken air deportation to an iceberg, the actual flight is the visible tip. With microphysics we glimpse the vast mass lurking below the surface.

The remainder of this paper is organized into two sections. First, I consider the relationship between inspection and method, and ask what it means to read inspection reports critically. Second, and this is the main part of the paper, I propose some analytics and reflections on microphysics and the ethicalization of deportation.

Inspection and Method

Very briefly, let me summarize the benefits of using inspection reports.

First, inspection takes us into times and places within the deportation system that are otherwise very difficult for a social researcher to access. This makes them a valuable resource when conducting research on the more opaque aspects of immigration control. Inspectors have an eye for detail which can give us rich material on the little practices that interest me here.

Second, inspection is typically a recurrent practice. It is sensitive to shifts in practices over time, allowing insight into changing forms, relations and devices. For example, the fact that the buses now take detainees directly to the plane on the tarmac whereas they used to drop them off at the airport terminal: this hints at the mutability and dynamism of deportation's carceral geography.

Third, inspection is a problematizing activity. It is true that a reading of manuals and handbooks will tell us about norms of deportation procedure. However, inspection reports describe both the way procedures are supposed to operate as well as some of the actual practices in play. Moreover, like ethnography, inspection is alive to informal practices and procedures: it captures certain acts which might not be written down but whose practice can be very instructive.

Fourth, because they are produced by state agencies, or third parties authorized by the state, inspection reports have a certain epistemic robustness. This can be useful when engaging in a highly contested and controversial field like air deportation. It is certainly not the case that we lack other accounts of what happens on these flights. For example, there are websites like Detained Voices (https://detainedvoices.com), which publicize detainees' own testimonies and demands, and present first-hand accounts of deportation experience. But skeptics are always going to charge that these sources are not 'objective', that, of course, they will make things sound really bad. We can assume the state's own inspectors might not face the same charge.

The inspection report is not without problems as a data source. Let me now say something about the limits of inspection reports, and how the critical reading I propose in my title seeks to negotiate these limits.

Some readers will be skeptical of my proposal to research the microphysics of air deportation – or any aspect of deportation – using inspection reports as an archive. For some, these reports are little more than a legitimation exercise, an attempt to confer a veneer of transparency on a secretive, violent process. I argue that inspection reports are a valuable resource but one that has to be approached with care. There is, of course, a famous precedent here. It was Karl Marx who drew on the factory reports of the Victorian inspectorate to document the obscured world of industrial capitalism (Gidley, 2004). He recognized that inspection reports should not be dismissed out of hand, but neither should they be regarded as a neutral or self-evident practice. Hence, let me make several critical points here.

First, a critical reading entails that we read the inspection reports alongside other accounts of deportation. It requires that we 'triangulate' the observations of the inspectors with, say, the first hand accounts of detainees themselves, and other fragments of information that might circulate within the public sphere.

Second, a critical reading requires that we think about what might be happening offstage (Makaremi, 2018). Inspectors do not monitor all charter flights from the UK, only a small sample. Nor are these visits unannounced, perhaps in part because of the difficulties of finding seats on a plane at the last minute (HMIP 2011a: 4). It is quite

likely that inspection changes the way officials and authorities conduct themselves when they know they are being watched. Just as the monitoring of police by anti-torture experts does not necessarily end all abusive practices so much as reconfigure when and where they happen (Bahcecik 2011), then we should assume that flight monitoring reshapes but does not end the geography of violence that underpins deportation. Human rights oriented reporting about deportation operations suggest violence is an ongoing problem (Medical Justice, 2008).

Third, we cannot treat the language used in the reports as neutral. Inspection is a regime of knowledge which in part constitutes deportation in a particular way. Is it really 'return' if you are sent to a country you have barely ever lived in? If charter flights are 'forced removals', is that to say that all other removals are not forced? That they are voluntary? Or take the word 'restraint' which is how the violence of deportation is often codified. The term suggests a holding back, as though the subject is a priori struggling. But the reports document situations where people are leaving peacefully, compliantly, and still they are put in handcuffs, braces, straps, etc. Or, finally, there is the fact that the term 'detainee' is used uniformly to describe all people in the report. Technically, inasmuch as they are all under detention, you could say they are all indeed detainees. Yet the term is not without consequences when used in this way. It places all people in the plane on the same level. The reports themselves give us little glimpses of the individual stories, the biographies that have put people there. Some are ex-criminal offenders. Some are refugees denied asylum. Many are being torn away from families, jobs, and communities. But detainee effaces such differences, conferring a uniformity of condition. Charter flights have been criticized for lumping different cases and situations together, allowing for a generalized stigma (Holbourne/Guardian 2018). The category of detainee does little to challenge that.

Finally, one should highlight the geographical and political limits of flight monitoring as it presently exists. A 2011 study by the European Commission found that while a majority of the member states participating engaged in pre-departure monitoring, only 13% of those surveyed followed what happens post deportation (Podeszfa and Vetter 2013). Sociologies of ignorance and anthropologies of non-recording (Rappert, 2012; Kalir and van Schendel, 2017) insist the exercise of power consists not just in that which states make visible, but what they refuse to see or acknowledge. As things stand there is a cruel irony. Monitoring only covers the processes, places and events up to the return, up to the exact point at which the detainees are transferred into the hands – sometimes quite literally – of police and immigration authorities on arrival. This means the inspector can rightly highlight the denial of hot drinks or blankets on long flights as an unreasonable deprivation while

the official record remains silent about the much more serious deprivations which may then follow once the deportee is handed over. Social struggles have won recognition for the norm of return monitoring. It remains to be seen how growing political and scholarly mobilization around the timespace of post deportation might extend and transform this gaze (Khosravi, 2018; Lecadet, 2018; Kanstroom, 2017).

Towards a microphysics of air deportation

Reading the inspection reports I analyze mechanisms and techniques of removal under five headings. I do not claim these as exhaustive so much as illustrative. Many others could be added. Note also these headings are not usually those used by the reports themselves, in part because of the problems of terminology identified above. What I attempt is a transversal reading that respects empirical contents but refuses the official categories in favour of forging new lines of analysis.

Force

> 'Waist restraint belts were used excessively. Coach commanders made what they described as "dynamic risk assessments" before the use of such belts. In the event, all but one detainee was fitted with a belt…. Belts were used on detainees who were compliant throughout and who the Home Office considered to present little or no risk…. For these detainees, the risk assessment consisted merely of asking them whether they wished to go to the third country, whether they were happy to do so, or whether they had any problems about going. If they said they did not wish to go, this was considered on its own to be sufficient justification for the use of restraints, which was an incompetent approach to risk assessment. There was a clear presumption in favour of using waist restraint belts.' (HMIP 2018a: 10).

Let me make two points in light of this passage which comes from an inspection report into one of the UK's first 'Dublin' charter flights.

First, a microphysics of power insists that any given practice, any given relationship of power, has to be interpreted in terms of its complicated history of emergence and transformation. It has to be assessed in light of the other practices it has either displaced, mutated out of, or which might compete with or even haunt it. In the case of forced removals it's a matter of recognizing that other ways of restraining, pacifying, neutralizing and controlling have been used in the past but have, whether through political struggle, legal challenge, or sheer unworkability, been rendered questionable, suspect or even taboo – at least within official policy discourse. One of these is gagging with adhesive tape, a practice that burst before the public in

the case of the unlawful killing of Joy Gardner during a deportation attempt (The Times 17/5/1995). Another is the use of drugs to sedate deportees. Official policies disavow and prohibit the use of sedatives, reserving them for exceptional circumstances.[2] Yet reports circulate about the authorities' use of sedatives on deportees which suggest this practice is not at all rare (e.g., Radio Sweden 2014). The point is that at present official policy discourse actively distances itself from sedation as a control practice. What it favours, at least in the UK case, is an approach to force which combines the muscular but regulated agency of escorts and what are called 'mechanical restraints', such as handcuffs and waist restraint belts.

To suggest that corporeal and mechanical restraint are the privileged modalities is still too general. We can be more specific and identify the way in which particular holds applied to the body have been problematized and outlawed and others approved. Here one sees how recommendations have begun to build in appreciation for the specific features of the aircraft cabin. Some practices employed in remand centres and prisons cannot simply be transposed to the cramped environment of the cabin. We see how they have also built in the lessons of previous practices that have been associated with death and violence, such as 'positional asphyxia' (Walters, 2016). It is possible to discern here a political anatomy of deportation, one that has broken down the body into zones in terms of minimizing the risk of lasting injury. Whereas the political anatomy of the body that interested Foucault was oriented to optimizing the productive capacities of the labouring and fighting body, the one at stake in air deportation is closer to the genealogy of non-lethality (Anaïs 2015) and the whole question of the political management of the struggling, recalcitrant body (Walters, 2017; Makaremi, 2018).

Second, let us note that the exercise of force is bounded and rationalized in particular ways but in its actual exercise it will surpass those boundaries. In the passage above, the inspector sternly reproaches the conduct of this particular operation. The model, which the inspector upholds, the model that is prescribed in various manuals and official guidelines, calls for a form of risk governance that is individualized, proportionate and graduated. Physical restraint should not be the default position but the exception, a violence held in reserve, something to be used only in cases where an individual's file indicates a high risk of violence, or when recalcitrance is encountered in the course of the operation. It should be applied in a framework of ongoing dialogue with the subject, oriented towards de-escalating the situation (HMIP 2018a: 11). Yet inspections find in a number of cases that the assessment is made not on an

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[2] According to the EU's Return Handbook: 'The use of sedatives to facilitate the removal is forbidden without prejudice to emergency measures to ensure flight security' (European Commission 2017: 117).

individual basis, but at the level of perceptions about the 'route', the 'nationalities' of the detainees. In other words, racialized perceptions of the deportee powerfully mediate the way in which force is administered in practice.

Agents

The reports comment on the conduct, identity, expertise, and decision-making of a variety of actors involved in forced removals by air. They mention the powers and responsibilities of managers, medical experts, security teams, coach commanders. But they accord special attention to the escorts. In the UK case these are privately contracted. A microphysics insists power is something diffuse and generalized. The escorts may have a core responsibility for controlling the detainees, yet escorts are targets of governance as much as the detainees, as the following discussion will explore. This is evident, for example, in the regime of visibility which traverses their actions. Key stages in the charter flight are filmed. When force is used it is to be documented, etc.

The reports are not slow to commend the escorts in many places for calmness, preparedness, and for going out of their way to assist detainees. The reports are pleased to see escorts build up a 'rapport' with the detainees under their authority (HMIP 2011a: 17). This fact is worth underscoring since it echoes a much wider point that follows from ethnographic studies of what some scholars have called 'soft deportation' (Leerkes et al., 2017; Kalir, 2017). It is that there is a power of care as much as force. But this power of care is no less rationalized and calculated as is the exercise of force. To take just one example, an early report affirms the fact that there was a division of supervisory labour between a small G4S security team and the rest of the escorts. At the 'key moment of boarding' the detainees were 'escorted by members of the security team in order to avoid undermining the rapport built up by the staff who had escorted them thus far, and would do so during the flight' (HMIP 2011a: 10). A sort of good cop/ bad cop routine.

One concern that comes up frequently is the adequacy of training. Were the escorts equipped to deal with the unique situation inside a plane? Aside from overuse of restraint, the inspectors frequently note the tendency of escorts to crowd around, talk over, insult or ignore the people they are helping to expel.

There are also not infrequent and grave concerns expressed over the identity, attitude and demeanour of staff. One of the most striking comes in an early report on Jamaica. Here it was noted that there was 'an overall impression of a largely white escort group', and that some officials made 'sweeping generalisations about different

nationalities, thereby undermining the objective of treating detainees as individuals' (HMIP 2011a: 16-17).

The criticisms of racist attitudes and language on the part of the escorts exemplifies a wider absence/ presence of race within the reports. There are strong grounds for considering racism as a set of forces that structure the entire deportation project (De Genova, 2013; Fekete, 2005). However, the racialized culture of hostility and xenophobia that finds expression in the politics of deportation lies well beyond the remit of the inspection report. Instead, the report effects a kind of displacement. The inspectors confine themselves to criticizing discrimination at the level of staff behaviour. So the reports do not completely ignore racism so much as render it in a form that makes it manageable – in this case with better training and recruitment practices.

Containment

> 'Detainees were collected on separate coaches from four immigration removal centres […]. Searching by escorts was thorough but sensitive. However, it was sometimes hindered by the fact that detainees did not understand what was being asked of them in the absence of an interpreter […]. Once they arrived at the airport, detainees were searched again by airport security staff following their own procedures […]. Detainees spent too long waiting outside the terminal in coaches, and most were stationary for three to four hours. The first detainee to board the coach at Brook House near Gatwick airport did not get off at Stansted until seven hours later.' (HMIP 2012: 8).

Aircraft are pivotal to deportation, but so are coaches. A fleet of these vehicles funnel deportees and their escorts from the Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) to the airport. Many of the reports mention the coaches, each overseen by a 'coach commander', due to the fact that deportees can spend many hours contained on these vehicles. Once on the coach, their opportunities for communication are strictly controlled. Their cell phones have been removed. They are assured by the officials they can check in with friends and legal support by borrowing phones from the security agents. One can imagine that the prospect and the act of borrowing a phone to make an urgent call sets up a new power relation in which access to vital means of communication now becomes a bargaining chip to be exchanged for compliant behaviour (IMIP 2011a).

The IRCs, coaches, airport terminals and planes make up a shifting continuum of fixed and mobile spaces which serves to contain, channel, and segregate deportation mobility. This dynamic continuum serves as a material correlate to what

scholars have identified as corridors of expulsion (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2003; Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2014). The exact features of this mobile continuum itself changes over time. The earlier reports describe deportees being taken to airport terminals where they undergo a process of security clearance similar to any passenger. At London's Stansted airport the Inflite Jet centre was used rather than the normal terminal (HMIP 2011a: 7). Inflite is an executive facility, designed to offer celebrities and elites a higher degree of invisibility as well as comfort than regular departure areas (Bridle, 2015). With the charter flight programme this geography of discrete space is assigned to the task of hiding the deportation process. However, one later report notes the use of a 'new system of transit directly from coach to aircraft'. This is rationalized as a benefit since it spares deportees the 'demeaning process of being marched through airport security' (HMIP 2017: 13). We might wonder whether it also affords the authorities with greater invisibility for actions that have sometimes been the target of protest and politicization.

Vehicles and their infrastructures are active elements in deportation, but not simply by virtue of transporting, segregating or secluding bodies. They also shape the psychology of deportation, fostering certain moods which are a significant element in the removal process. The cramped space of the cabin has the potential to amplify protest and disturbance when proceedings get out of hand. This makes the aircraft cabin a delicate environment that calls for active management. But the aircraft, once airborne, can also generate affects of resignation and defeat which authorities seem to count upon. It appears the moment of take-off is a threshold for the deportation process. 'It was a G4S policy for refractory detainees not to have cuffs removed until after take off' (HMIP 2011b: 10; see also CPT 2003: 3; but see HMIP 2018a: 6). Some officials have mentioned in interviews that it is not uncommon for deportees to 'kick off' but that they usually settle down after take off.[3]

I think this little observation tells us something quite important about the way in which deportation weaponizes the airborne. By airborne I mean not just the status of being in the air, but the entire range of feelings that the experience of flight can generate. Scholars of border politics have explored at some length the way in which state authorities utilize the cruel inhospitality of the desert and the sea to control migratory movements, often with deadly consequences. You don't have to patrol those sections, which the sun or the terrain render virtually uncrossable (Squire, 2015). By comparison migration studies has surprisingly less to say about the air. With air deportation we see how the airborne becomes an active element. The plane is a more

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[3] "'You get a lot of agitation', says David Wood [a senior UK Borders Agency official]. But once the plane is airborne, deported criminals 'know the game is up'". The Times, 13.9.2009.

absolute, hermetic form of transport than other modalities. Once airborne there really is no way out.

Reserve

> 'The Home Office immigration enforcement (HOIE) directorate and Tascor managers communicated regularly by phone about changes to the list of passengers. This included three detainees at Brook House who had climbed over the railings on an upper landing walkway to the safety netting at 9.10 pm. They were removed from the flight list because of the delays involved. Their removal from the list at this late stage meant a coach assigned to Brook House was diverted to Yarl's Wood to collect several women who had been on the reserve list. On 7 March about 50 people were designated for removal, but 18 were removed from the list and 32 flew' (HMIP 2017: 9).

This passage underscores that air deportation is a zone of interaction where commercial aviation logistics, immigration enforcement's desire for efficiency, cost-saving (and sometimes face-saving), and the recalcitrance of people targeted with deportation all come into conflict. Acts of resistance (like the one just profiled), ill health, and, in particular, last-minute legal injunctions all create the possibility that there will be empty seats on the deportation flight, which, in the hands of a press that is hungry for immigration scandals, translate into stories about incompetent authorities wasting tax payers' money. It also means escorts might be in over supply, creating problems of workforce management. One workaround that British agencies have devised is the reserve list. The mobilization of reserves is a long-established device in military and sporting worlds for managing contingency. A campaign is more likely to succeed when it can draw reserves of force when faced with sudden or unexpected losses. Deportation campaigns are no different it would seem.

But reserving exacts a huge emotional cost and provokes pushback. This mechanism of reserving first came to light during inspections of removals in 2011. At that time detainees were not told they were on a reserve list. During an inspection of one IRC the inspector condemned this as an 'inhumane practice' that should cease (HMIP 2011c: 5) due to the additional distress it posed for detainees who, after preparing for removal, were brought to the airport only to find they were not in fact flying, and were returned to the detention centre (HMIP 2011c: 17). The inspector's criticisms gained public and parliamentary attention (Guardian 25/7/2011). Yet the immigration authorities have persisted with the policy. As a concession to these criticisms, it seems they now inform detainees in advance when they are on the list (CPT 2013: 10).

We could consider reserving to be a limit practice which operates on the threshold of public, political and ethical acceptability. Rather than see deportation as a fixed power or instrument, I highlight here its tactical and experimental qualities. You try out new moves, face resistance, modify. Some moves are abandoned, others get institutionalized. It is a dynamic assemblage: it does not unfold according to a neat logic so much as adding bits and pieces, pushing at limits, withdrawing here, extending there.

Surprise

> 'Many detainees were unaware of the exact date of the flight. All had been served a notice that outlined a period in which they could be removed, but some only became aware of the exact time when they were woken in the middle of the night [see also HMIP 2018a: 15]. Three detainees were also being removed under 'operation perceptor' which involved Home Office immigration enforcement teams arresting people deemed as having no legal right to reside in the UK and taking them to a flight on the same day; all three were removed from the escort before they boarded the aircraft following legal intervention. At Yarl's Wood, detainees were given no time to pack their own property, which staff had to do for them' (HMIP 2018b: 9).

Scholars have noted that a key aspect of the deportation turn has been the drive by governments to 'accelerate' removals (Fekete, 2011). In Britain this has for some time had the matter of deportation targets as one of its more public elements. Target has a twofold meaning here. Targets are numerical benchmarks, which drive performance, guide policy evaluation and can be offered to publics as evidence of 'toughness' on immigration. But targets can also mean particular social-administrative groups/ categories. If deportation policy multiplies categories this is tied in part to perceptions that some are easier to deport than others (Fekete, 2011), whether due to their nationality/ destination, their legal status, or public opinion. 'Operation preceptor', which the inspector mentions above, is one such instance of targeting. It zeroes in on people in the UK with no family ties on the assumption they will be easier to deport (Guardian 28/4/2018). It is one of a number of ways in which rules and procedures have been changed so as to lessen the chances for appeal, and increase the exposure of migrants to removal.

Microphysics is attentive not just to programmes, but second order effects, to power relations that are perhaps tiny and only very partially formalized. When people are rushed into removals it is not uncommon they do not get the chance to pack their possessions properly. On several occasions the reports note how staff would assure

distressed detainees that if they would just get on the bus, and not slow down the departure, they would ensure their bags were not left behind. The promise of a bag delivered and precious possessions secured becomes a form of leverage (HMIP 2018a: 7) and sometimes betrayal.

However, there is something about the image of people being woken in the night and hurried towards a waiting plane that necessarily exceeds any discussion of deportation as a process states seek to speed up.[4] It is an image that summons disturbing associations with secret police, renditions, and mechanisms which govern through fear and surprise. The image of a power that acts unannounced with suddenness and resolve, which capitalizes on drowsiness, obscurity and confusion. My point here is not to make a facile likening of the immigration authorities and the secret police. That said, precisely because it does seek to grasp power at the level of its operations, devices, mechanisms and affects, a microphysics of deportation enables us to see resonances and resemblances across very different domains. Theorists of military strategy and geopolitics (Virilio, 1986) as well as studies in the political anthropology of power (Canetti, 1973) have long recognized how speed itself is a weapon, a property that can be engineered, and whose efficacy relies not just on its capacity to inflict actual damage on the adversary, but its power to generate fear and to demoralize. A fuller account of the micro- as well as the macropolitics of deportation would do well to incorporate such insights into its framework, broadening the conceptual vocabulary which migration studies uses to think about power.

Conclusion

I will make just two points in conclusion.

First, I have argued there is a whole political logistics to deportation. This is made visible by bringing the concept of microphysics to bear on the topic. Taking the case of enforced and escorted removals from the UK, I have shown that this logistics is vividly and graphically documented in the inspection reports. Hitherto largely

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[4] This power of surprise was greatly enhanced by the Immigration Act 2014. After 2015 the UK government instituted a 'removal window' which was a three-month period in which someone could be removed without notice. Before the window opens there is a period of notice when you are told you are liable to removal but during which you can make a challenge. For people on charters this notice period is set at five working days (see https://www.righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/removal.html). Before 2015 the procedure was quite different. The government was legally obliged to issue 'removal directions' which specified a time, date, and flight number.

ignored, inspection reports offer researchers a trove of information regarding the mechanisms and procedures of deportation. These mechanisms, techniques, and operations of deportation have been largely overlooked by political scientists, who have tended to ask questions about the *why* more than the *how* of deportation. A focus on the how, a focus on these operations and logistics, and in particular the relationship of these operations to aviation, underscores that deportation is an enormously complicated, and in some ways quite delicate procedure. It is underpinned by an enormous investment in technologies, personnel, knowledge, as well as force.

This is not to say that deportation *is* a technical procedure and nothing more. Microphysics is not a claim that these practices are simply instruments that are applied with predictable outcomes and effects. Each operation, whether it is the reserve, the power of surprise, a new form of restraint, the charter flight itself, or the technology of inspection reporting that now shadows it, answers to existing problems, obstacles, blockages and dilemmas while raising new ones. Each one operates in a field of struggles, forces, and counter-forces. There is a play of order and disorder in all of this. Given its associations with flight, but also its power as a metaphor, it might be appropriate to speak not just of the microphysics but the *turbulence* of deportation.

Second, this focus on microphysics can speak to questions about the ethics of deportation. I have not done so sufficiently in this paper, but I will draw out this point here. One way to read the reports would be in terms of the ethicalization of deportation. What do I mean by this? I mean that rather than treat ethics as something that is universal, or purely deliberative, we can be quite empirical and study the way in which particular domains of practice are brought under the sign of the ethical (Collier and Lakoff, 2005; Osborne, 1994). For example, there is the rise of research ethics as something that has reconfigured the way scholars work in universities, or fair trade coffee as a way in which the consumption of certain beverages has been ethicalized. It is a matter of attending to forms, rationalities and transformations. The inspection reports show how ethical considerations have been inscribed into the practices of deportation. For example, in the regulations and inspections, there is the insistence that the use of mechanical restraints should be a proportionate use of force, and that proportionality should be governed by an individualized risk assessment and monitoring of the subject.

What is at stake in this ethicalization of deportation? That is a question I don't have space to unpack here other than to insist that it is not a question of making deportation somehow fairer, softer, or more acceptable to the public. What I will say, however, is that an adequate answer would have to acknowledge that it is mirrored by an ethicalization of resistance and opposition to deportation. The fact that anti-

deportation has become not just an activity, but an identity, attached to a whole ethos of how to protest, where to protest, when to protest, and what to protest confirms this (Nyers, 2003). So does the fact that this ethics is attached, no less than the removals themselves, to a whole set of material practices. On 28 March 2017, 15 protestors managed for the first time to stop a UK deportation flight. They did this by breaking through the perimeter of Stansted airport and attaching themselves to the Titan Airways Boeing 767-300 that was scheduled to take 60 people to Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. If waist restraint belts feature prominently in the ethicalization of deportation, it was a different kind of restraint that underpinned this protest: the protestors used metal tubing to lock themselves to the undercarriage of the plane. It took the police 10 hours to detach this human anchor. Arrested, tried and facing sentencing on aviation terrorism-related charges they have become the 'Stansted 15', a collective figure of direct action and conscientious objection that has given a rather different kind of visibility to the charter flight than the inspection report.

Postscript: Response to Derek Denman

I am extremely grateful to Derek Denman for a set of comments that have very eloquently identified some important theoretical, political and ethical assumptions underpinning my paper, while raising some provocative and valuable questions (Denman, 2019; in this volume). Let me speak briefly to two issues he raises before attempting to answer one of his questions.

First, Denman offers a much richer, philosophically informed account of some of the stakes of microphysics than I have managed in the paper. I agree with him that a microphysics should start not with big questions and concepts like 'sovereignty' or 'the border' but with immersion in what he calls sense-data. It entails a commitment to the empirical understood as an ethos, a responsibility of the scholar to grapple with a world that is conceptually inexhaustible and radically multiple, and therefore one that calls for a degree of modesty on the side of 'theory' and 'theorists'. It is not a matter of dismissing the big concepts and questions that animate debate, whether in migration studies or elsewhere, but of registering, as he puts it, 'a whole material apparatus that must be accounted for to understand these macro-political domains'. And not just registering, but forging provisional and situated concepts out of that material. This is what I have tried to do, for example, in my discussion of the power of reserve. Future analysis could usefully read the power of reserve in terms of what Marx, in his use of factory inspection, wrote about the relay system. Factory bosses used the relay system – which was essentially the genesis of shift work - to ensure their looms and their mines, their fixed capital did not lie idle. It is a line of inquiry that would open up questions about the political economy of deportation, about the economics of the deportation machinery, a topic that has hitherto been insufficiently engaged by scholars.

Second, Denman describes microphysics at one point as an analysis of 'the workings of power smaller than the scale of the subject'. I find this a tremendously helpful observation. It is, of course,

to be understood not in quantitative terms: as though one is interested in units that are somehow smaller than humans. Rather, it is an appeal to think on the scale of forces, affects, elements, and relations that both traverse and compose us, our desires, our identities, our motives and our interests. It is a call to take seriously little things. At one point Denman asks what my reading of the inspection reports reveals about informal practices, about practices and procedures that appear in no law or manual. One of these appears very briefly in my paper. It is the way in which people being expelled often experience great anxiety about the whereabouts and fate of their luggage. We imagine deportation as a removal of people from a territory. Yet, from a logistical and also a very human point of view, it is also about the movement of goods, or better, objects that are always more than goods: things that are possessions, treasures, valuables, repositories of memory, and so much else. Incidents involving the misplacing of these goods, or promises to ensure they make it onto the plane, occasionally surface in the reports, and in other testimonies. Get on the plane quietly and we will make sure your things will be OK. But will they? What micropolitics of expulsion plays out around the handling of these treasures? It is not uncommon when visiting today's museums of immigration – like the one at Ellis Island – to encounter the display of immigrants' luggage. These suitcases, pictures, toys, blankets, pots and pans tell a poignant story about the people who moved. I suspect the luggage of the deported is no less a material and psychic repository of hopes and fears, promises and betrayals, and one path to a more human understanding of today's expulsions.

Finally, Denman asks a very specific question about airplane pilots and the pivotal role they sometimes play in determining whether someone will be deported on a particular flight or not. He cites Jörg Luyke, a journalist who claims that stories about significant numbers of German pilots refusing to fly deportees from Germany to Afghanistan were inaccurate. The journalist claims that, contrary to earlier reports, the pilots were acting not on the basis of political conscience but professional duty, that is, out of concern for flight safety. It is an interesting situation, one that actually speaks to themes of ethics and migration. For if a pilot takes what we might call an 'ethical' stand, if she or he refuses to fly the deportee out of humanitarian concern, she or he quite likely faces professional and perhaps legal sanction. To cite aviation security as a reason to refuse the deportee, on the other hand, might well be a way to circumvent such an outcome. I don't know whether pilots, taken as a social group, are more or less sympathetic to the plight of deportees than the public at large. But I do imagine that, like the public at large, they are capable of *strategic* action. My point is this: might we not find here a kind of micropolitics, one that resembles James Scott's 'everyday resistance' in locating its efficacy precisely in the avoidance of highly prominent political acts and visibly 'ethico-conscientious' identities? Now, the ethical action we identify with the conscientious objector, the one who refuses to buckle in the face of unjust laws and actions, is important for the signal it sends to a watching public. It is important for its power to inspire other similar actions; to instantiate other possibilities. But it would be a mistake to deem this the only form of resistance to deportation. One possible political ethos for microphysics is precisely to register the more molecular ways in which the regime of deportation is shot through with uncertainty, subversion, reversal, and hesitation.

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