

Stolen time

Shahram Khosravi

The most remarkable reason for deportation I have seen is from 1914, when a Russian Jew was deported from Sweden after six years. A short sentence in the police report, explaining why he should be deported, reads: 'He was a bad shoemaker.' It was not enough to be a labourer; one had to be a good labourer. In the same year, two other Russian Jews were deported because one lacked 'a sense of rightness' and the other one had 'venereal diseases'.¹ The religious undertones concerning chastity, virtue and the Protestant work ethic that were used to justify deportation of these three men are obvious. Almost a century later I witnessed how the Protestant ethic was also used to rationalise rejection of an asylum seeker. In 2007 I accompanied a young man who had been living in Sweden without a residence permit for a period of several months to a meeting with a lawyer to formulate an asylum claim. I helped with translation. The lawyer asked what he would say if the authorities asked why he had not sought asylum when he had arrived in Sweden several months earlier. The young man said he would lie and say that he just arrived. The lawyer got upset and said: 'We in this country are Protestant, and we do not lie.' The man was later deported.

Following Carl Schmitt's idea that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts', I would say that the current deportation regime has an inherently religious dimension.² The introduction of 'crime involving moral turpitude' (CIMT) in US deportation law demonstrates very well the link between the notions of sin and deportation. The term CIMT is vague and lacks definiteness and clarity. Deeply rooted in religion and loaded with religious overtones, CIMT is a grey zone in which the distinction between the unlawful and the sinful has disappeared; subsequently, legal conceptions of crime and religious conceptions of sin become indistinguishable. Sin is thus a violation not

only of divine rule but also of society's well-being, and a non-citizen sinner is subjected to criminal law. The lack of precision means that the application of the law regarding what is 'contrary to the rules of morality' is left to the discretion of the judges, who can deport non-citizens not only for criminal offences but also for sinful acts.³

There is a fundamental sinfulness in being a foreigner: the unforgivable sin of being on this side of the border with a 'foreign' skin colour, language, name, face or religion. Foreigners are undesired ones who never stop being seen as foreigners, no matter how long they have lived in the country, no matter how integrated they are in the society, no matter whether or not they were born in the country. A long-term, sometimes lifelong, re-entry ban for deportees discloses the fact that foreigners' sins are imprescriptible: never forgotten; never forgiven.

Even now people are deported because they are bad crafts(wo)men, or face denial of admission at the border because of disease, or simply because of the sin of lying in a Protestant land. In 2017 Norwegian immigration authorities started a deportation process of a whole family of twelve people, a couple who received asylum in Norway in 1990, their children (only four and nine years old when they came to Norway) and grandchildren (born in Norway). Their Norwegian citizenship was withdrawn, and they were ordered to leave the country after 27 years. The couple are accused of having lied about their nationality when they sought asylum in 1990. The authorities claim that they are Jordanian nationals and not Palestinians. The sin of lying to the state results in collective punishments of denaturalisation and deportation almost three decades after the alleged sin of lying. Expulsion of what is believed to be foreign and harmful is, in this way, part of nation building, part of a secularised state with an inherently religious nature.

Deportation is also part of the border regime that aims to keep people in their places within the class hierarchy. As Nicholas De Genova argues, the condition of deportability renders migrant workers a distinctly disposable commodity and creates a flexible and docile labour force. Deportation as a way of controlling the mobility of workers is crucial for maintaining the wage gap between citizens and non-citizens and also between the global North and the global South. There is a direct link between outsourcing to countries with low wages and the restrictions placed upon the mobility of the people of those countries. Recently a number of US academics have been exploring the relationship between mass deportation and outsourcing and offshoring. Mass deportation provides a flexible and culturally suitable labour force that is bilingual and has the 'right' cultural capital for transnational corporations; for example, in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. Deportation preserves and reproduces social inequalities and global injustices. Deportation aims to maintain the unequal access to resources, and upholds unequal distribution of wealth.

For instance, keeping Afghans in Iran 'deportable' has been a strategy to allocate them to specific regions of the country with need of a cheap labour force and also to specific occupations. Through the discriminatory policies of the Iranian authorities, the Afghan presence in the labour market is so firmly established that many Iranians use the word Afghani synonymously with 'unskilled worker'. Depriving non-citizens' chances to improve their socioeconomic conditions is a global trend. In July 2018 a new law in Sweden gave a second chance to 9,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (the majority of them Afghans) with a deportation decision allowing them to stay to attend upper secondary school. After they finish school, however, they have to leave the country, unless they have a job. That means these youngsters should forget their dreams of a higher education. Many young Afghans, who were born in the condition of undocumentedness in Iran and never had a chance for higher education, face the same barrier in Sweden. They are destined to remain 'unskilled workers' wherever they go. Deportability at the global level generates a removable underclass of workers in both

the country that one escapes from and the country in which one seeks refuge. Deportation has been added to neoliberal policies of social abandonment, which expose vulnerable groups to multiple expulsions from communities, the labour market, the housing market, the spheres of security, the health care system, the education system and state protection.



Moreover, deportable Afghans in Iran are used to trigger divisions within the working class by engendering a circuit of paranoia among Iranian workers who believe that the real threat against their class interest is migrant workers and not the widespread un(der)employment, political oppression, institutionalised corruption, regularly unpaid salaries and financial insecurities. When Iranian workers got permission to celebrate May Day in 2015, thousands of them demanded expulsion of the Afghan labour force from the country. I cannot agree more with Günther Anders, the German Jewish philosopher, who in another deportation context put it this way: 'to have a faithful slave, give him an under-slave.'⁴

Deportation is not only a spatial expulsion, but also a temporal one. Deportability is a statement of a spatial as well as a temporal dis-belonging. The deportee's *tomorrow* belongs elsewhere. Expulsion is nothing less than robbing an individual of the viabilities of life. It wipes out the vision of a better future. To unfold the brutality embedded in the deportation regime, we should examine the deportee's time. Similar to the case of human trafficking, deportation is forced and coercive. There are explicit

elements of exploitation in deportation. As part of the global apartheid of the right to mobility, removal of migrants is part of a brutal neoliberal political system that is also inextricably intertwined with an exploitative economic system. Both human trafficking and deportation lead to accumulation of wealth through the stealing of time. In modern societies, time is associated with success and money. It has become a form of capital that, similar to money, can be invested, saved or wasted. Capital grows through stealing of time. When people are spatially removed, they are automatically robbed of an amount of time.⁵ People, particularly long-term residents, have worked, built networks, paid taxes, spent time learning the local language and becoming accustomed to the culture, fallen in love, and maybe had children, before being sent to countries to which they may have little connection. The time people have *invested* to achieve these goals is lost by deportation. The time people have *spent* to accumulate social and cultural capital is thwarted by deportation.

Sudden arrest and deportation means having no chance to prepare for the journey, to sell accumulated property, to claim wages owed or to collect one's belongings. Being deportable usually means that one has lived an informal life, with a job that was not registered, with no insurance and with belongings that were not documented. An illegalised life (time) is unreclaimable, since it is not considered to have existed at all.

A not unusual consequence of deportation is losing money in the form of unpaid wages. The deportees' worked time is stolen. Many deportees believe that their employers reported them to the police to save the money they owed them in the form of unpaid wages. Lacking the right to have a bank account, many undocumented migrants ask others to save their money. Undocumented people buy cars and properties registered in the names of documented people and citizens. Deportation makes it difficult if not impossible to regain all these. What about taxes and social security contributions people may have paid before being removed? What about unused holiday? How many working hours are stolen? How much money did their employers save in the form of unpaid wages? How much money does the state save in the

form of unpaid pensions? How much surplus value has been produced for capitalists through deportation globally?

We live in the age of mass deportation. Almost three million people were deported from the United States between 2009 and 2016, and several million more are scheduled to be deported in coming years. Europe is organising the deportation of almost a hundred thousand people to Afghanistan alone. Agreements with states, like Turkey, are signed; huge amounts of money have been paid to alleviate removals. Likewise mass deportation is growing outside the global North. Saudi Arabia has deported hundreds of thousands of migrants every year in recent years. Since 2016 more than a million Afghans have been forcibly sent to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan. How much time has been stolen?

In some deportation regimes the link between deportation by states and accumulation of wealth by private actors is explicit. The Iranian and Pakistani authorities force Afghans to pay the cost of their own deportation. The travel costs across the border to Afghanistan for a large family, all the bribes they have to pay and the initial resettlement costs push deportees to turn to moneylenders, who demand high interest rates. The cost of debts results in long-term exploitation. In 2016 a large family were deported from Pakistan to Afghanistan. An Afghan moneylender paid all the costs of their journey, that is, deportation. Since their deportation, all the members of the family – from the grandmother to the youngest child, only eight years old – have been working on the moneylender's farm for free. This is an example of how deportation and human trafficking knit together.

Besides the time invested economically, what about all the time spent on building networks, friendships, emotional relationships? For long-term residents, deportation means leaving their youth and childhood behind, and all the memories they formed in the places they called home. What about all the years deported parents are separated from their children, and their partners? The Windrush scandal is one example of the brutality of the theft of time: long-term residents are denied benefits, access to healthcare, education or housing, and are threatened with deportation after several decades spent in the UK working, paying

taxes and building communities.

Another devastating consequence of stealing time is keeping people in a condition of circulation. A common experience of deportees is being sent back in time, expressed as being sent 'back to square one'. The sense of going back to square one illustrates how deportation deprives people of their time invested in building a life in the host country. Keeping people in circulation is a way to slow down, to defer, to deny future plans and to create disruption in the stages of the life cycle. A life in circulation is an indefinite position of *not becoming* in what is supposed to be a 'normal life course.' In the condition of circulation one never gets the chance to finish anything. This is a way to keep people as permanent 'unskilled labourers' (as in the case of Afghans in Iran and Sweden), and removable when they are not good ones (as in the case of the bad shoemaker). Unlike the Foucauldian surveillance and disciplinary society that operated by confinement, this regime of circulating people is more similar to a Deleuzian control society that operates by keeping people continuously on the move.⁶ This is a controlled movement of people sent back and forth between undocumentedness and deportability: between countries, between laws, between institutions. To keep people in circulation so that their experience is usually one of 'not arriving', an experience of temporariness, being constantly on the move, is a control mechanism that propels them back towards square one. As Clara Lecadet argues, the circulation of manpower is a means of subjugating workers.

The threat of being pushed towards square one hangs not only over the heads of non-citizens but, as William Walters highlights, increasingly also over the heads of racialised citizens. Mahad Abib Mahmud was only 14 years old when he arrived in Norway as an unaccompanied asylum seeker in 2000. He received asylum and later on gained Norwegian citizenship. In 2017, after 17 years, he was stripped of his Norwegian citizenship and had to leave the country. Norwegian authorities claimed that Mahmud was originally from Djibouti and not from Somalia, as he had said on ar-

rival. He has a science degree and worked in a public hospital in Oslo; he had bought a house and had an extended social network. He was forced to leave Norway to seek asylum in Iceland. Earlier this year his application was rejected. In 2018 he is back to the same square he was on 18 years earlier, and his time has been stolen.

As Marx showed, surplus value is generated from time that capitalists do not pay for, the time they steal from labourers. The extra value added to commodities comes from stolen time. Like people who have been trafficked, deportees' time is actively stolen. Using the term *stealing* emphasises how deportation is part of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few by dispossessing the migrants of their *saved, spent* and *invested* time. Demonstrating how deportees' time is stolen repoliticises in this way the concepts of borders and deportations that have been naturalised and depoliticised by the ideology of the nation state.

Image: Shahram Khosravi, Idomeni railway station (2018).

Shahram Khosravi is Professor of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University and author of several books including Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran (2017). He is also editor of the collection After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives (2017).

Notes

1. Tomas Hammar, *Sverige åt svenskarna* (Stockholm: Caslon, 1964), 343.
2. Carl Schmitt, *Political Ecology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).
3. Mary P. Holper, 'Deportation for a Sin: Why Moral Turpitude Is Void for Vagueness', *Nebraska Law Review* 90:3 (2013), 647–702.
4. Günther Anders, *Et si je suis désespéré que voulez-vous que j'y fasse* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2016), 8.
5. Lauren, Martin, 'Deportation and the dispossession of time', *Darkmatter* (2015), accessed 20 October 2018, <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2015/10/05/deportation-and-the-dispossession-of-time/>
6. Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.