

Chapter 8

“We Belong Together!” Collective Anti-deportation Protests in Osnabrück



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8.1 Introduction: Deportability and Anti-deportation Protests

Deportation [...] continues, through its routinized practice, to obscure the historically particular and administrative processes by which deportability is produced and imposed. (Peutz and De Genova 2010, 6)

In recent years, there has been an increasing academic engagement with deportations (see Rosenberger 2018). One important theoretical contribution to these debates has been the concept of “deportability” (De Genova 2002; Paoletti 2010), which refers to the omnipresent possibility of being deported. As De Genova (2002) and Hasselberg (2016) have argued, migrants’ deportability is “embedded in their daily lives, social relations and sense of the self” (ibid., 96). Studies on protests against deportation have tended to focus on protests by citizens against the deportation of individuals (e.g. Rosenberger and Winkler 2014) or on those that are part of broader refugee protests (e.g. Ataç 2016). These studies discuss such protests in the context of contestations over belonging (Anderson et al. 2011), or as forms of activist (Nyers 2003; Isin 2008) and radical egalitarian citizenship (Schwartz 2016). Few of these works, however, have explicitly applied the analytical concept of deportability to anti-deportation protests. The exceptions being for example, McGregor (2011) who has analyzed the consequences of deportability for political agency, arguing that detained and designated deportees, lacking other possibilities for political action, tend to use radical forms of protests such as hunger strikes. And Schwartz (2016), who notes that the undocumented youth movement in the US does not only challenge concrete deportations, but “directly protests subordination and the fear of the permanent threat of deportation” (ibid., 616).

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We argue that taking the analytical insights of deportability into consideration when analyzing anti-deportation protests may be revealing. This is because such an approach can shed light on dimensions of the protests that might be overlooked if we only focus on the efforts to prevent the act of removal. The framework of deportability may therefore provide a broader understanding of the struggles that anti-deportation protests encapsulate and their possible consequences.

We will lay out this argument by discussing the anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück, a mid-sized city in the German state of Lower Saxony. Between March 2014 and July 2015 the *Osnabrück Alliance against Deportations* (henceforth referred to as the *Alliance*) prevented 36 Dublin deportations through collective actions held in front of accommodation centers for asylum-seeking persons. As we will show, the practices connected to these protests were not restricted to the moment of deportation, but confronted deportability more broadly. We therefore believe that this case study can contribute to the ongoing debate on deportability and anti-deportation protests.

One of the reasons why we chose this case for a closer investigation was the composition of its participants. The *Alliance* brought together a wide range of actors with different legal and social statuses. To define our terms, we understand these protests as collective actions¹ in the sense of “contentious politics” (Ataç et al. 2016). Originally coined by McAdam et al. (2001) in a different way, contentious politics has been defined by Leitner et al. (2008, 157) as “concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries”. We were particularly interested in the role that collectivity played in the struggles of the *Alliance*.

What also makes the case of Osnabrück interesting is that; unlike in other deportation protests, the main aim was not to prevent the deportation of one or several well-known and particularly “deserving” persons. Instead, in this case, some of the beneficiaries of the deportation preventions were not known among the protest participants.

To explore how the collective anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück effect and were affected by deportability, we consider three dimensions that are crucial for the understanding of deportability: isolation, in/visibility and uncertainty. Peutz and De Genova (2010, 23) have pointed out that deportation “tends to operate as a radically individualizing and thus also [...] isolating event.” Unlike citizens, people in a state of deportability suffer from what Arendt has described as public invisibility, that is, they are denied access to the “space of appearances” (Arendt 1958, 198–199) where individuals speak and are also seen and heard (Borren 2008). At the same time, bereft of their legal personality, people threatened by deportation become privately visible (ibid.). Lacking the social and legal security of citizenship, they can be

¹ Despite a slightly different use, this conforms to Ataç’s (2016) definition of collective action. With reference to Isin (2008) and Nyers (2010), Ataç defines collective actions as “performative acts and as moments of rupture that challenge power relations and open up new political possibilities” (Ataç 2016, 632).

apprehended by the police at any time. This insecurity, or private visibility, is closely tied to potentially the most critical characteristic of deportability: The uncertainty over whether the affected persons will be able to stay (De Genova 2002, 427, Hasselberg 2016, 96–97).

How people are legally categorized is at the heart of struggles against deportations. Thus, for scholars who (co-)produce categorizations, there is a need to be highly sensitive to the terms employed. We refer to all persons who actively contribute to the prevention of deportations either as members of the *Alliance* or activists, instead of distinguishing between “asylum seekers” and “citizens” or “refugees”² and “supporters”. Our choice is also connected to the above-mentioned conceptualization of the anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück as collective protests. However, given that the social position assigned by legal status decisively influences the scope of possible action, we distinguish between activists with and activists without secure residence status. In the case of designated deportees we recognize their particular and precarious legal position. However, mostly we refer to the protesters as the *Alliance*. We chose this general terminology despite these differences between participating groups and individuals (Stockmann 2015; Doppler 2015), because we are, above all, interested in the collective acts of the people involved. Where necessary, we give more detailed information and differentiate e.g. between activists with a background in a local anti-racist initiative and members of a neighborhood welcome initiative.

The chapter is divided into seven sections: Following this introduction and a short overview of the data and methodology we will briefly present the *Alliance against Deportations* in Osnabrück. Subsequently, we will focus on the aforementioned aspects of deportability – isolation, in/visibility, and uncertainty – in the context of the collective struggles of the *Alliance*. We conclude by summarizing how these aspects are negotiated and the consequences of this, before finally discussing the benefits of a broader deportability perspective.

8.2 Data and Methods

This article is based on qualitative fieldwork. We draw on 11 interviews³ that we conducted in person with protest participants in the summer of 2015 (for a complete list of interviews see [Appendix](#) below). The semi-structured interviews were partly based on interview guidelines developed in the context of the project Taking Sides:

²The term “refugee” is frequently used as a self-identification of persons seeking asylum, whereas the term “supporters” commonly denotes activists with a secure residence status supporting those without such status (Tsianos and Kasperek 2013; Ataç 2016). The people we interviewed often used these terms.

³All interviews were conducted in German except for the interviews D5_9 + 10 and D5_11 + 12, in which Urdu, English, and Somali were spoken as well as German. In the following citations all translations into English are by the authors.

Protests against Deportations in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The questions were adapted for each interview, depending on the interviewee's legal position and role in the protests. The interview D5_11 + 12 with two interviewees was made available to us by the theatre group *Bühne für Menschenrechte* who conducted it for the documentary theatre play *Asyldialoge*. Even though this interview was not based on the same interview guidelines, it covered relevant topics, and thus could be used to complement our data set alongside local newspaper reports and official documents.

Based on our engagement with the material – especially the interview transcripts—and theoretical discussion on deportability and anti-deportation protests, we developed five codes (in/visibility, framing, voice, political subjectivities and social ties) that helped to structure the analysis. In our analysis we also drew on our personal experience as participants in several of the protest events and group meetings. Through this participation we have been able to follow the developments of the protests since March 2014. Accompanying the *Alliance* over this extended period gave us access to background and insider information, which proved vital in the analysis and interpretation of the interviews.

8.3 The Alliance Against Deportations in Osnabrück

The protests against deportations in Osnabrück began when residents of a recently-opened municipal accommodation center received letters announcing their deportations to Italy (and other first-entry countries according to the Dublin III regulation) and showed them to other people they knew in the city (see Fig. 8.1). These contacts had mainly developed through the activities of two groups: The antiracist initiative *No Lager Osnabrück* (henceforth referred to as *No Lager*) and the neighborhood welcome initiative *AG Flüchtlingshilfe*.⁴ Following the assumption that the newly arrived asylum seekers would be allowed to stay, many of the supporting activities (such as German classes) provided by members of the *AG Flüchtlingshilfe* were aimed at facilitating “a good start to life in Osnabrück” (Interview D5_13). Yet, the deportation letters confronted those involved in these groups with a different reality. Nina,⁵ who intended to give German classes, remembered:

Until then I had always thought that people flee to Germany and ask for asylum, and then it takes two months and the people know that they can stay. [T]hen I heard about a Dublin regulation for the first time, and that [for] so many people, once they have come through [...] the Mediterranean Sea [...], the actual forced migration begins from one European country to another. (Interview D5_6)

Learning about the Dublin regulation caused a “moral shock” for Nina. According to Jasper (1997) “‘moral shocks’ are often the first step toward recruitment into

⁴The informal working group *AG Flüchtlingshilfe* became the association *Flüchtlingshilfe Rosenplatz e.V.* in February 2016.

⁵For anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for all interviewees.

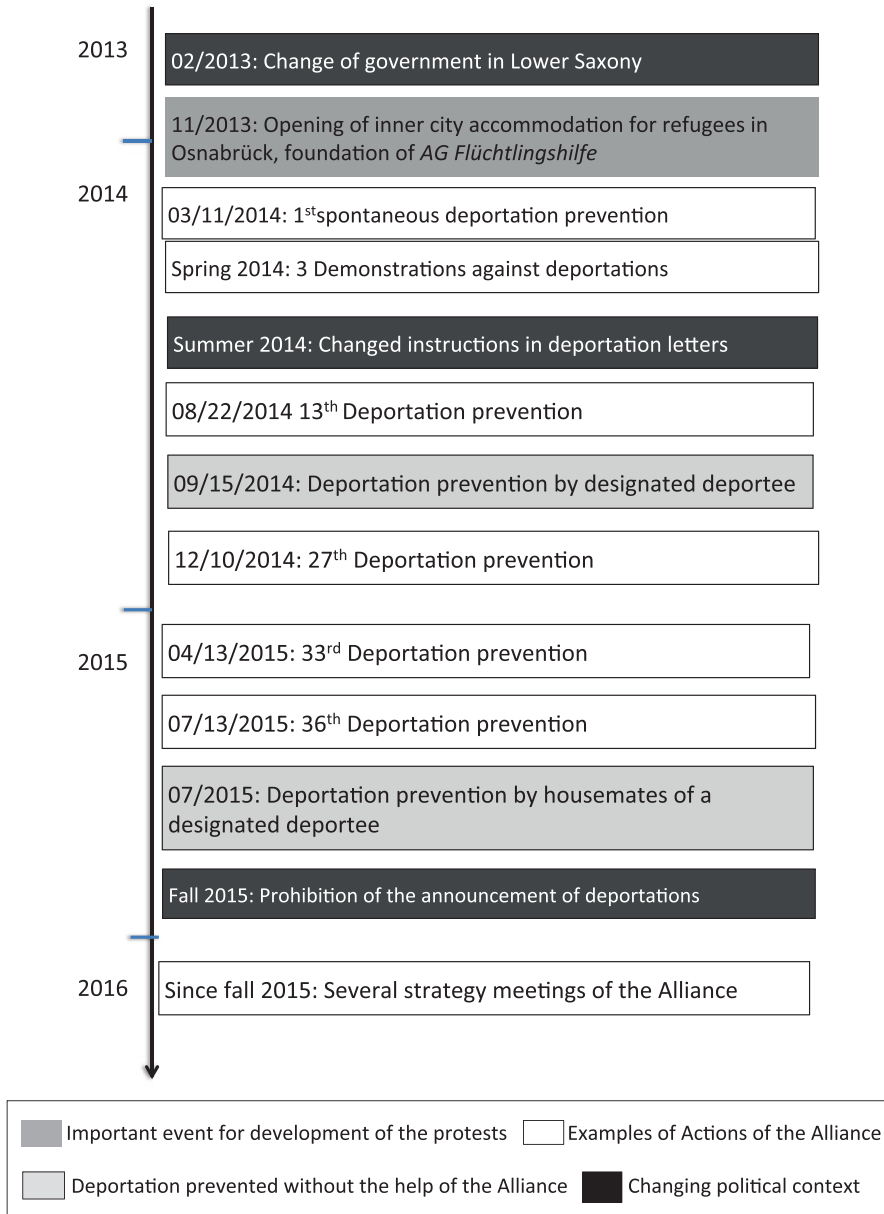


Fig. 8.1 Timeline of the anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück
 Own illustration. In addition to the disruption of deportations three general demonstrations against deportations were organized in the spring of 2014. In two cases deportations were prevented in Osnabrück without the help of the *Alliance*

social movements: when an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action.” (ibid., 106) After the first spontaneous assembly⁶ (which included about 40 participants) at the scene of an announced deportation resulted in the police officers and representatives of the Immigration Authority (*Ausländerbehörde*) leaving without the designated deportee (see Fig. 8.1), members of No Lager and AG Flüchtlingshilfe got together to evaluate the situation. They had the information that around 80 other people in the city fell under the Dublin regulation and thus risked deportation. After researching the legal framework of Dublin deportations, the activists came up with a strategy; their idea was to prevent the removal of the designated deportees until the end of the six-month period in which Dublin transfers had to take place. If deportations took longer than 6 months, the asylum request would eventually be taken over by the German authorities (Interviews D5_6, D5_1).

Activists decided to connect via a telephone list (which was later transformed into a web-based texting and emailing list) so that they could quickly organize assemblies whenever a deportation was supposed to take place. This community was later given the name *Alliance against Deportations*.⁷ At the time of our interviews, more than 300 people had signed up for the list, including antiracist activists, church representatives, members of different political parties, students, pensioners, and people with and without secure residence status. As Brigitte, a protest participant with secure residence status described: “These are people from the age of 18 to 80 [...], many groups of society are represented [...]. And I think, that’s the strength” (Interview D5_2). What united these diverse actors⁸ was their shared disagreement with the practice of deportations. The focus on Dublin deportations was not only a strategic choice because of the six-month timeframe described above (see also Kirchhoff et al. 2018), but also because it became a common target, uniting protest participants in the course of the protests. No Lager activist Bruno remembered that, “even [...] the Catholic Church [representatives] [...] bluntly said: ‘Dublin needs to stop!’” (Interview D5_1). There was also a focus on the Dublin deportations in the official framing of the protests, as the call for the second demonstration organized by the *Alliance* on April 26, 2014 illustrates:

⁶The question, which terms (not) to use – an issue already discussed in the introduction – must also be posed with regards to the protest repertoire. Whereas the gatherings in front of the accommodation centers are frequently called ‘blockades’ by activists, media and others, some of our interviewees insisted that ‘blockade’ was not an adequate way to describe the collective “breakfasts” and also made them more vulnerable to attempts at designating their actions illegal (Interview D5_1). We have thus chosen the more neutral terms gathering and assembly.

⁷This name had already been used by a different union of initiatives in Osnabrück that had been active against deportations between 1997 and 2005 (Avanti! 2005).

⁸The question, how broad alliances come together is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it seems fruitful to explore this question further both to elucidate the dynamics of the *Alliance* and to contribute to social movements literature more broadly. Especially Gould’s work on the emergence of alliances across chasms of perceived differences and the role of emotions would provide a good starting point for such an undertaking (Gould 2015).

Here we want to voice our demands to end all deportations according to the EU-DUBLIN agreement, both in Osnabrück and in the whole of Germany. (No Lager Osnabrück 2014a, original in English)

The political demands to end Dublin deportations were supported by humanitarian arguments against the severe conditions in countries of first residence, which included homelessness and detention (see Bündnis gegen Abschiebungen 2014). The *Alliance* also emphasized the peaceful nature of the protests (ibid.). That the actions remained non-violent were not only important to a majority of the participants (Interviews D5_2, D5_6), but also resonated with the broader conception of Osnabrück as the City of Peace.⁹ Although the *Alliance* used arguments that focused on the bad humanitarian conditions in some Dublin countries as cited above, Paul, another activist with secure residence status explained that no distinction was made between people facing deportation to a supposedly problematic country like Hungary, or to a country like Norway, “about which you only hear good things” (Interview D5_3). In discussions over such differentiations, it was agreed within the *Alliance* that what mattered most was where a person wanted to live (ibid.). Nina underlined this point stating:

If a person [...] says ‘I am supposed to be deported to Italy but I rather want to stay here in Osnabrück’, then this is reason enough for me to become active on that person’s behalf. (Interview D5_6)

In contrast to what has been described for other cases of anti-deportation protests (e.g. Rosenberger and Winkler 2014, 181), the protests did not rely on deservingness frames. This absence can be partly explained by the composition of the beneficiaries of the protests. The designated deportees in the Osnabrück case were not individuals or families who had been living in Osnabrück for a long time, most were single men and many of the protest participants came to the assemblies without knowing them beforehand. Deservingness thus would not have worked as a strategic frame and consequently did not play a role in the protests. The absence of deservingness as a frame also resonated with the primary form of protest utilized in the struggle: The disruption of deportations. In contrast to, for example, negotiations with politicians, disruption did not require deservingness claims in order to positively influence the protest outcome.

None of the 36 assemblies were dissolved by force, irrespective of whether 100 people or, as in one case, “only very, very few [...] maybe 25” (Interview D5_6) had followed the protest call via the SMS list. In each case the immigration officers left without the designated deportees and physical force was never employed.¹⁰ This can partially be understood as resulting from the fact that the *Alliance* was confronted

⁹Osnabrück is commonly referred to as the *City of Peace*, a name that commemorates the signing of the *Treaty of Westphalia* in the city in 1648.

¹⁰Despite this, several measures were taken by the authorities to discourage the protesters: When confronting the gatherings, the immigration officers threatened the protesters several times that their action would have negative consequences. Furthermore, No Lager received an e-mail by the provincial *State Protection Office* concerning their involvement with the deportation preventions (Interviews D5_1, D5_6; personal communication with the interviewee of D5_6 on 09/24/2016).

with different (local) state agencies with somewhat diverging interests or instructions (Stockmann 2015, 42–43): The Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) issues deportation orders to the local Immigration Authority. If conflict develops, the Immigration Authority is dependent on the local police to enforce the deportation order, who are subordinated to the State Ministry of the Interior. In November 2014, the Minister of the Interior of Lower Saxony and former Mayor of Osnabrück, Boris Pistorius, said that he saw no reason to change police strategy in dealing with the protest actions, nor did he condemn anyone participating in the protests (Fisser 2014). In contrast, the local Immigration Authority reacted to the protests by exerting more pressure on the designated deportees to cooperate in the deportation enforcement, which will be discussed in more detail below. However, without police enforcement the immigration officers were not able to challenge the protest strategies of the *Alliance* and carry out the deportation. This points to the importance of the specific political context in which the protests took place.

The collective actions against deportations in Osnabrück can only be understood within the context of the change of government in Lower Saxony in 2013. The new government coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party introduced several changes concerning the accommodation of asylum seekers and deportation procedures. The new policies were presented as “more humanitarian” (Lower Saxony Ministry of the Interior and Sports 2014), possibly as a reaction to the harsh critique against the strict enforcement of deportations promoted by the former conservative Minister of the Interior. The new approach entailed the announcement of deportation dates so that the designated deportees could “prepare themselves” (*ibid.*). Also new was the transfer of asylum seekers, including those affected by the Dublin regulation, from first reception centers (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung*) run by the State to municipal accommodation centers, which in the case of Osnabrück are partly located in inner-city residential neighborhoods.¹¹ Both the announcement of the deportations and the inner-city residency of designated deportees played a decisive role in the emergence and development of the anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück. However, the political context changed drastically in late 2015 (see also Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2018). The “summer of migration” (Kasperek and Sperr 2015, translation by the authors) was followed by an “autumn of reaction” (Schwiertz and Ratfisch 2015, 19, translation by the authors). In September 2015, with only few exceptions, the government of Lower Saxony decided to no longer announce deportations. In October 2015, a general prohibition on announcing deportations was integrated into the Residence Act (§59 (1) Residence Act of October 24, 2015). Since July 13, 2015 no further deportation preventions have taken place. However, members of the *Alliance* have met several times to discuss the changing legal and

¹¹ In Lower Saxony, before the change of government, state-run reception centers did not only serve as a place of “first reception”. It was common practice to keep asylum seekers supposedly “without a perspective to stay” in the centers for months in order to hinder their integration into local communities and to facilitate their deportation (Pieper 2008, 205–266). The Asylum Procedures Acceleration Act (*Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetz*), passed in October 2015, generally foresees that persons from so-called safe countries of origin and others without a perspective to stay, have to stay in first reception centers until the end of their asylum procedure.

political context and to think of anti-deportation strategies in the absence of deportation announcements.

In the following section, we analyze the collective protests against deportations in Osnabrück between March 2014 and July 2015. By focusing on the three dimensions of deportability – isolation, in/visibility and uncertainty – it becomes apparent how the *Alliance* not only prevented deportations, but confronted deportability more broadly.

8.4 Breaking Isolation

[...] in the end we said, the least we can do is to accompany this person to his accommodation, to stand by him before his deportation [...] and to not leave him alone with this [...]. (Interview D5_1)

This is how No Lager activist and member of the *Alliance*, Bruno, described the decision reached in the No Lager group the night before the first deportation prevention in Osnabrück. Confronted with a scenario they had not experienced before, the group members had little time to think about how best to react. They agreed to literally take sides with the affected person. Thus what was at first a spontaneous reaction would later become a core feature of the deportation preventions of the *Alliance*. Through confronting the officers arriving at an accommodation center to carry out a deportation with the presence of a group instead of an isolated individual, the *Alliance* acted against the logic of individualization and isolation inherent in the deportation practice (Peutz and De Genova 2010, 23).

As the letters announcing the upcoming deportations in Osnabrück during this period show, the practice of deportation was supposed to be a confrontation between the designated deportees with the immigration and police officers. Initially, the recipients of the deportation letters were asked to await their deportation inside their rooms. However, the demands of the letters changed after several deportations had been prevented by the *Alliance* through assemblies in front of bedroom and building doors. Isolation, which aimed to simplify face-to-face communication and physical contact between the officers and the targeted individual, was then stipulated more directly. The recipients of the letters were asked to present themselves in front of the accommodation centers and later, following another change in the letters, to also “stay away from a demonstration that could possibly take place.” (Interview D5_6). Despite this, the protesters continued to prevent the physical isolation of the designated deportee; now they either stood side-by-side with, or in front of, the designated deportees outside of the accommodation. Besides being a strategic reaction to the authorities’ instructions, this can be understood as an expression of collectivity: Protesters and designated deportees formed a group as they were physically and symbolically standing together. The centrality of this collective bodily practice in the protest of the *Alliance* underlines the centrality of the bodily dimension of contentious politics that has been observed elsewhere (see Häberlen and Spinney 2014).

Furthermore, our analysis shows that participating in collective action at the moment of the attempted deportation, allowed protest participants to question isola-

tion more broadly. For example, Paul, a member of the *No Lager* group, expressed that for him “one of the most important forms [of protest] is the getting to know each other;” the mixing of people with and without secure residence status. He explains his argument by pointing to structures that are put into place to prevent such contact and experiences of solidarity: Persons whose deportations are prevented by the *Alliance* have to live in designated accommodation centers for asylum seekers, and are neither allowed to work, nor to attend school, university or state-sponsored language courses (Interview D5_3). These conditions, linked to the state of deportability, are indeed likely to produce isolation from the local community. Furthermore, they are experienced as a barrier to political self-organization (Schwenken 2006, 144–145). Naife, an activist living in an asylum seeker accommodation center, remembers the situation before joining the *No Lager* group:

We made up our own refugee group in one of the Heime [accommodation centers] to find a way to handle the situation. But we did not know anything about the laws of Refugees in Lower Saxony and we did not have the resources (money, people, knowledge, etc.) to organize our own protests. (Cit. in: *No Lager Osnabrück* 2014b)

However, our interviewees described numerous and diverse practices through which structurally conditioned isolation could be disrupted: Visits to the accommodation centers by *No Lager* activists and members of the neighborhood initiative AG Flüchtlingshilfe, political and festive get-togethers in the autonomous social center as well as encounters through German classes, bike rental offers and other forms of voluntary support. Notably, some of these practices preceded the first deportation preventions and had the explicit aim of questioning the social marginalization of asylum seekers.

The described encounters challenge deportability not only through acts of support and collective protest, but also by making the danger of deportation “sometimes simply irrelevant” (Interview D5_3). While the logic inherent to deportability tends to make a person’s legal status the all-dominating frame of their daily life and social ties, the interviewees described how friendship created spaces and experiences beyond deportability (Doppler 2015, 7–8; see also Mokre 2018). In a group interview with her friend Wazir, Linda, an activist with secure residence status recalled:

We really became friends between the demonstrations and your [attempted] deportation [...] I remember this one night, [...] we simply stayed longer after plenum, turned on some music, got drunk, and talked so much [...] and yes, then we realized that we like each other a lot. (Interview D5_11 + 12)

Besides breaking down the isolation in Osnabrück, the social ties formed in the context of the collective protests also enabled the members of the *Alliance* to make connections to activists in other cities and to the transnational refugee movement. Wazir described how his involvement in the *No Lager* group encouraged him to participate in the Refugee March for Freedom 2014 from Strasbourg to Brussels:

I went with [the other members of the *Alliance* participating in the March], because I thought, the people fight for themselves, the refugees, and why don’t we, too? Most fighting takes place in Osnabrück at the moment, and I also belong to this group, and that’s why I went with them [...] After all, we also belong to them! (Interview D5_11 + 12)

When Wazir joined the March for Freedom, he had to violate the obligation for rejected asylum seekers to stay within a restricted district (*Residenzpflicht*). His participation in the local activist group led him to challenge the state-imposed isolation through connecting with a refugee movement and attending events happening outside of Osnabrück.

Against this background, we argue that social ties and friendship, which are a precondition for anti-deportation protests (Rosenberger and Winkler 2014) as well as an outcome of protest movements (Ataç 2016), should also be understood as constituting their own form of protest or resistance. In the case of Osnabrück, the activists of the *Alliance* questioned the isolating logic of deportability in various ways—both in the moment of an (attempted) deportation and in the daily lives and relations of the people involved.

8.5 Reversing In/Visibility

While “getting to know each other” (Interview D5_3) is indeed vital in the struggle against deportations, it does not automatically lead to trust or actions of resistance. As Susanne, a member of the AG Flüchtlingshilfe made clear: “[...] many refugees, I realized, are rather reserved when it comes to talking about problems [...]” (Interview D5_13). Instead, trust and ultimately resistance depends on the agency of the designated deportees to share their problem with others. It requires hope¹² that the deportation decision can be revised as well as courage to ask for support. In the interview with the close friends Linda and Wazir, Linda made clear that she was very surprised when and how Wazir announced his upcoming deportation to the No Lager group:

What I found so impressive was that you came to the Plenum and said yourself that you had received a deportation date. Before it was mostly the friends of people who were supposed to be deported [who came to the plenary and] sometimes the persons were not even there themselves. They took a back seat for understandable reasons. But you just came and said: Hey guys, it’s my turn. Here is my letter. I want a blockade. (Interview D5_12)

Wazir— an active member of the No Lager group who speaks English and has already experienced the success of earlier deportation preventions - chose this rather public way to speak about his deportation. Other designated deportees lacking these skills and experience had to find people who could translate, and whom they trusted enough to speak on their behalf.

In this section, we argue that the difficulty for people with an insecure residence status to reveal their status and to talk about an upcoming deportation can be better understood if we consider deportability in the sense of in/visibility. From an Arendtian perspective, being a citizen means having the right to be publicly visible,

¹²The centrality of emotions for (collective) political (in)action, such as hope and fear in our case, has also been highlighted by various social movement scholars (see Goodwin et al. 2001; Goodwin and Jasper 2004).

that is, to have a voice and to appear in public, as well as the right to be privately invisible; to retreat into a private realm of protection and security (Borren 2008). The reverse is true for people in the state of deportability: They often have to stay in assigned accommodation centers with little or no privacy. Moreover, even those who live in a private room or flat know that their home can be inspected and their life interrupted at any moment. This can be framed as a condition of harmful private visibility (ibid.). At the same time, people with an insecure residence status lack political rights, or in the words of Arendt, they are denied access to the “space of appearances” (Arendt 1958, 199). For Arendt, such public invisibility means not to be recognized as a human being and to forego the chance to lead a meaningful life: “Whatever lacks this [public] appearance comes and passes away like a dream” (ibid.). The state of deportability and enforcement of deportations are indeed, often invisible to the public eye. However, based on the case of Wazir and others, and in line with studies on “acts of citizenship” (Isin 2008; Nyers 2010; Darling 2014) or put differently, the political agency of non-citizens (McGregor 2011), we argue that people threatened with deportation and those acting in solidarity with them, can reverse harmful public invisibility and private visibility by engaging in contentious politics.

One way for people with an insecure residence status to reverse public invisibility is to reveal their condition to others as Wazir and others did. In US-American social movement and broader academic debates, revealing one’s insecure residence status to others has been described as “coming out of the closet” or as “coming out of the shadows” in accordance with the practices of “coming out” in the LGBTQ movement (Nicholls 2013; Schwiertz 2016). The practice of coming out about a pending deportation turns what is otherwise experienced as an individual problem into a public or collective issue. It opens up possibilities for the creation of new political subjectivities, relationships, and ultimately new ways of thinking citizenship.

In Osnabrück, following the first act of coming out—through the public statement of deportation—a further step toward public visibility and political claim making was taken through organizing the first assembly. Those who took part in the first assembly underlined that they wanted “to get this [issue] out of the shadows and to show us and our protest” (Interview D5_1). The action was directed at the authorities (“we [...] show the deportation authorities that we don’t agree”, ibid.), but also to a wider public. Nina, an activist, stressed that she preferred the assemblies that took place in front of one of the inner-city asylum seeker accommodation centers, because people who passed by noticed the protests (Interview D5_6).

The *Alliance* also organized demonstrations to raise more awareness of the issue and to make the protest more visible. One week after the first deportation was successfully prevented, about 600 people – with and without secure residence status – walked through the city to demonstrate against the deportations. Public marches can be a powerful means to transform the presence, or recognition, of people with an insecure residence status in public spaces; another step in challenging their in/visibility (Monforte and Dufour 2013, 87). Such public manifestations can work as

“acts of emancipation” (ibid.) and as a platform for people without secure residence status to present themselves, their stories, and claims, in public and to the media. Even during the first demonstration in Osnabrück, some people – under the threat of deportation – seized the chance to talk about their situation:

We didn’t have any speeches prepared [...]. We just handed around a loudspeaker. Speeches were held spontaneously with spontaneous translations. (Interview D5_12 + 13)

Two interviewees (Interviews D5_1, D5_3) explained how difficult it was to create a platform for the voices of people dealing with both insecure residence status and an imperfect command of the German language. This was not only because of exclusionary policies, but also because of other actors and practices that enabled the public visibility of some, while contributing to the public invisibility of others:

Often the press says: ‘No, that’s not possible [to do interviews in English]. We have to do it in German.’ That’s really stupid, because it is such a misrepresentation of the people in the group, because almost half of us have experienced forced migration and they can represent themselves very well. (Interview D5_3)

One time, a local television group wanted to film an interview with an activist in one of the accommodation centers. Bruno, an activist with secure residence status and the only German native speaker present, was asked to give the interview. When he suggested conducting it together with one of the activists without secure residence status, the journalist told him that he had no time and if he did not do the interview they would leave right away. In the end, Bruno told us, he gave a “shitty interview”, and the journalists ended up doing another one with Sam – one of the activists without secure residence status – in English, and in the final clip only Sam was included. Bruno concluded that this was the first time “a refugee was given a chance to talk [in front of a camera] but only because we always systematically include them and say: ‘Here, they are with us too [...].’” (Interview D5_1). The above situation highlights that it is possible to reverse the public invisibility of people with insecure residence status. At the same time, it also points to the difficulties within collective protests to challenge power asymmetries and the dominant differentiations e.g. between activists with and without secure residence status (Mokre 2015).

As Bruno remarked, reversing the public invisibility of people without a secure residence status often depends on those with a secure residence status to act as a mediator. This became obvious in a self-organized deportation prevention by the residents of an accommodation center. The incident took place in the summer of 2015 in an accommodation center for women and families. Unlike the previous deportation preventions most of the people involved were women. The deportation was unannounced because Maria, the designated deportee, had not been present at the first announced deportation date. Her roommate, Semira, called the downstairs neighbor when the immigration officers, accompanied by the police, entered the house early in the morning. Soon, several residents, some accompanied by their children, stood in the staircase of the house and screamed. In contrast to the other cases in Osnabrück, the officers tried to force the designated deportee out of the building. According to Semira, the officers tried to pull Maria by her arm, but her

housemates also held on to her so that the officers eventually left without her. While the media had covered most other deportation preventions in Osnabrück this attempted deportation – including the physical violence exerted – was not reported. This was to some degree, due to the fact that the people involved did not want any media coverage. Their hesitation must be understood in context, as political action of non-citizens can be criminalized.¹³ Maria’s housemates eventually chose another way to share their experience with others: Sometime after the event, Ahmed, one of Maria’s neighbors and a friend decided to go to a plenum of the No Lager group to talk about the incident (Interview D5_9 + 10).

The *Alliance* attempted, through multiple ways, to create a sphere of private invisibility and thus protection for the designated deportees. During the first anti-deportation actions, this was simply done by assembling in large numbers in front of the person in question in order “to block the view of the officers” (Interview D5_3). As one of the activists described: “the idea was that the person [supposed to be deported] stays in the back area of the protest and is ready for the departure [...]” (ibid.). When the letters changed and the authorities asked the designated deportees to make themselves visible by verbally identifying themselves, the protesters’ counter-strategy was a collective identification with, or as, the deportee: “We then decided when they [the authorities] come [asking]: ‘who is the one?’ We will all say: ‘It’s me! It’s me!’” (Interview D5_11 + 12).

While collective protests like those of the *Alliance* cannot fully restore the private invisibility and public visibility of people in a condition of deportability, they can create (temporary) spaces where the harmful politics of in/visibility are reversed. In the interview with Linda and Wazir, they explained that Wazir, on the day of his own deportation, did not stay in the back of the crowd that had gathered to prevent it. “You just bopped around outside and you made breakfast and distributed tea”, recounted Linda. Underlining this (temporary) reversal of in/visibility, Wazir added that after the authorities had left, he made a speech and he stressed: “I was the first [of the refugees] who held a speech.” (Ibid.)

8.6 Lessening Uncertainty

Linda:

When we dissolved the blockade and Wazir went away with a good friend, I relaxed. When not even a police car stops, this shows that nothing serious will happen, if you do a blockade. Even if we always wonder ‘what will they come up with next?’ this somehow give us security.

¹³Semira, Maria and some of the other housemates had to report to the local authorities after the incident. They were told that their behavior was “completely unacceptable”, that it could count as a criminal offense, and that they would have to leave the accommodation center if they got involved in this kind of action again (Personal communication with interviewee of D5_7, 09/07/2015).

Wazir:

Until my interview, it can take six or eight months. And after this, I don't know. [...] I think I have a 60 to 70% chance that I may stay, thus 30% that I cannot stay. (Interview D5_11 + 12)

As the above quote indicates, insecurity and uncertainty pervade anti-deportation protests in Osnabrück in different ways. In the short-term and especially at the beginning of the protests, insecurity and uncertainty dominate the moments of deportation prevention, whereas in the long-term it shifts to the likelihood of being allowed to stay. Hasselberg (2016) has shown that deportability affects “the everyday lives of migrants facing deportation” (ibid., 97) as they internalize and embody an acute uncertainty “as to whether or not they will be able to remain” (ibid., 96).¹⁴ We argue that even though insecurity cannot be (fully) dissolved, the different practices of the Alliance show that the feeling of uncertainty inherent to deportability can be lessened through collective actions.

As described above, the first deportation prevention was organized spontaneously out of the conviction that the designated deportee should not face his deportation alone. Although unexpected by protest participants, the assembly in front of the accommodation managed to prevent the enforcement of the deportation. Despite this initial success one of the policemen told them that this might have negative consequences for the affected person. As members of the *Alliance* were unsure whether, and how, the authorities would try to enforce the deportation a second time, some tried to reduce uncertainty by organizing a church sanctuary. As Bruno remembers, “this was a reaction to the fear that we could not cope with [another removal attempt] and that he would be deported by force.” (Interview D5_1). Although it turned out that this case – as well as several following cases – was successful in the long run, the initial insecurity remained for some time. As Nina, one of the activists with secure residence status, told us:

For the first times [...] the designated deportees packed their whole properties as they didn't know if the police would cross the blockade [...]. And we always wanted to make sure that they are ready for their deportation like the authorities demand in order to avoid negative consequences. (Interview D5_6)

To reduce uncertainty with regards to possible negative consequences, members of the *Alliance* were in constant contact with lawyers. They carefully developed their protest strategy to fit within the small space available for possible action that would not harm those facing deportation. Furthermore, the (gradual) predictability and reliability of the behavior of both protesters, and immigration and police officers, contributed to lessening uncertainty: With more and more deportation preventions, a certain routine developed, which partly consisted of a breakfast ritual with protest participants bringing their picnic blankets and refugees preparing tea (Interview D5_7).

¹⁴Hasselberg (2016) analyzes different modes of coping with uncertainty. Some of these coping mechanisms are also reflected in our interviews. However, we will not concentrate on these rather individual mechanisms, but on how uncertainty is dealt with collectively.

The procedure was clear for all involved. Firstly, the officers arrive and the designated deportee is in the house. Later, as requested, the deportee moves outside where the participants are assembled in front of the accommodation; when asked it is the participants who identify themselves as the designated deportee, at which time the officers leave. In some cases the officers did not show up or even get out of their vans. This collective protest routine reduced the insecurity for all participants. As *Alliance* member Brigitte, when referring to the sanctuaries that were organized to handle the initial insecurity of the situation, concluded: “By now we do not need a church sanctuary anymore!” (Interview D5_2).

However, the impact of these routines is moderate given that uncertainty remains for the affected people, because of their insecure residential status. Besides the need to conform to the orders of the Immigration Authorities in order to avoid negative consequences, the designated deportees packed their belongings so as to be ready for their deportation as they could not be sure that it would be prevented. Furthermore, they had to rely on other activists, people they frequently did not know. The intensity of insecurity is thus incomparable to what is felt by activists with secure residence status. As Bruno reflected: “I have no clue how stressful this is for the refugees who have to trust that it will function outside” (Interview D5_1). Additionally, the success of the protests was dependent on other factors outside the participants’ control. As described previously, Ahmed and a friend went to the plenum of No Lager to speak about the self-organized deportation prevention of Maria. The participants of the plenum told Ahmed to call them if the police showed up again. Still, this did not alleviate Maria’s security concerns who, after the incident, was too afraid to stay in her own house at night. While Ahmed appreciated the offer, he remained somewhat skeptical about the prospect of such deportation preventions: “You might call without answer, or [people] sleep. When there’s a fixed day it’s super, but without it...” (Interview D5_9). Ahmed’s comment points to an important limitation of direct interventions in preventing deportation enforcement: The announcement via letter of a concrete date of the deportation had been one of the requirements for the success of the protest (see also Kirchhoff et al. 2018).

Furthermore, uncertainty is not restricted to the moment of direct intervention against deportation enforcement but lingers long after the assemblies, as the following example of Amir shows. After Amir’s deportation was prevented through an assembly of the *Alliance*, he had to get his passport renewed at the local office of the Immigration Authority:

[...] he really didn’t dare to go there [as he] thought that if he appeared there, they would immediately call the police and they would arrest him to deport him and for a couple of nights, he also didn’t sleep at his place, because we thought that the police would come again a few hours later or the next day. (Interview D5_6)

Amir no longer felt secure in his own home, as he feared that the authorities could deport him at anytime and anywhere. As we have illustrated above with reference to isolation and in/visibility, protests also took place beyond the moment of attempted deportation through non-public processes. With regards to lessening insecurity and uncertainty, sleepovers became a regular action in the post-protest reper-

toire of the *Alliance*. Many people who were concerned about future deportation attempts stayed over at other people’s houses in order to avoid the authorities.

In addition, Nina started what we call ‘follow ups’ to ensure “that people are better off afterwards” (ibid.); that the blockades actually improved the situation of those whose deportation attempts had been prevented by the *Alliance*. In the beginning, the activists assumed that the responsible authorities would automatically proceed with asylum applications once the timeframe for transfers had expired. However, it turned out that the first person whose deportation was prevented did not receive any information from the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) for many months (ibid.). Nina invited people with pending asylum procedures for such “status meetings” (ibid.) in order to discuss what information they wanted from the authorities. She took care of these requests and constantly checked if there were any updates, to confront and counteract uncertainty resulting from the long waiting period:

Someone is invited to the hearing, gives the interview and then absolutely nothing happens for one and a half years. Nothing! This is really [...] demoralizing. (Interview D5_6)

This follow-up work turned out to be crucial in those cases where the authorities had noted that the designated deportees had “absconded”, as absconding resulted in the transfer time frame being extended from six to 18 months. In most of the cases, in which Nina spoke to the BAMF officers, the prolongation of the time frame was eventually withdrawn. However, this was only possible because of the involvement of lawyers and a member of a local charity organization who had personal contacts within the authorities. Even though insecurity cannot (fully) be dissolved by collective action, the described practices arguably lessen some of the demoralizing effects of deportability (Hasselberg 2016, 99).

8.7 Conclusion

Peutz and De Genova have pointed out how deportation “through its routinized practice” obscures how “deportability is produced and imposed” (2010, 6). The case of the *Alliance against Deportations* shows that employing the broader meaning of deportability can lead to a deeper understanding of anti-deportation protests. This framework makes visible the struggles and consequences of the protests that go beyond the moment of a deportation or prevention. For our analysis, we have looked at isolation, private visibility/ public invisibility, and uncertainty as crucial dimensions of deportability. Through applying these concepts, we asked how the collective protests in Osnabrück, which brought together a wide range of participants with and without secure residence status, confronted these dimensions.

We found that the collectivity of the protests in Osnabrück was, in itself, part of how the participants questioned deportability. Namely, by getting to know each other and in some cases also building relationships of trust, people with different positionalities were challenging the isolation produced by the exclusionary policies

and practices of the deportation regime. We therefore argue that encounters and friendships between people with, and people without, a secure residence status may not only be a precondition for – or result of – protest actions, but can also be considered as part of the protest. Such relations can furthermore facilitate the difficult process of coming out about one's own deportability and a pending deportation. By revealing their status to others, people without secure residence status are engaging in a dissonant speech act, which opens up possibilities for formal political claim-making, the emergence of new political subjectivities and thus the reversal of public invisibility. While it is beyond the scope of collective action to dissolve the insecurity, or what we have described as private visibility, of people threatened by deportation, collective acts can create (temporary) spaces of security and protection. In the case of the *Alliance*, this was done, for example: through shielding the designated deportee during the attempted act of removal, through church sanctuaries, and sleepovers after a prevented deportation. Finally, our research suggests that contentious politics can lessen the uncertainty tied to the state of deportability. In our case, this was supported through establishing a certain routine around deportation preventions, as well as through follow-up work to inform people after the prevention of their deportations about the status of their case. Although some of those whose deportations were successfully prevented still face uncertainty about the outcome of their asylum applications, the possibility of a Dublin deportation could at least now be ruled out.¹⁵

The case of Osnabrück suggests that collective protests against deportation might be better understood as struggles against deportability than merely trying to prevent the act of removal or deportation. In how far this is true for other forms of anti-deportation protests remains an open question. The ongoing debate on anti-deportation protests would thus profit from further case studies applying the concept of deportability.

The actions of the *Alliance* also raise questions regarding the meaning of deservingness frames in anti-deportation protests. As we have illustrated in the case of Osnabrück, it was the general disagreement with the Dublin regulation as well as a concern for those threatened by deportation, rather than a focus on individual cases that was conducive for collective action against deportability. Perceiving or claiming certain designated deportees as especially deserving is thus neither a necessary precondition for people to become engaged in protests, nor a characteristic feature of such anti-deportation protests. We propose that the employment of deservingness frames in anti-deportation protests represents a strategy that is connected to protest forms that heavily depend on public or political support. In contrast, disruptions of deportations, as in the case of the *Alliance*, can be successful without this framing.

¹⁵At the time of the interviews, German authorities declared themselves responsible for processing asylum claims of those people whose Dublin deportations had been prevented (Interview D5_6). While some people are still waiting for their decision, between 10/2015 and 03/2016, four men came to the No Lager meetings to celebrate the fact that they had been granted a residence permit for 3 years (Personal communication during No Lager plenum on 10/22/2015 and 3/3/2016).

Another point brought up by this case study – one that is closely connected to current debates within the *Alliance* – regards the meaning of success in anti-deportation protests. Success in preventing the actual act of removal is both the motivation for, and goal of, collective actions against deportation. However, from a deportability perspective, practices that break isolation, reverse public invisibility, and (to a lesser extent) reduce private visibility go beyond a narrow understanding of success: Rendering deportations, persons in a state of deportability, and anti-deportation protests visible, can be a powerful means of contentious politics when changes in the (political) opportunity structures make it more difficult to prevent the enforcement of deportations.

Finally, the deportability perspective that we have developed in this article brings to the fore the importance of questions of citizenship that are negotiated in contestations over deportation. Despite the lack of a formal status or recognition, people without secure residence status become “(activist) citizens” (Isin 2008) through dissonant speech acts. They thus call “into question the givenness of [the] body politic and open its boundaries wide” (Isin 2009, 384), or, in the words of Sandro Mezzadra (2004), they bring citizenship “into motion”. In Osnabrück these dissonant speech acts were part of a process in which people with different legal status, and from different groups of society became active as a community, thus creating new political subjectivities and understandings of belonging. This dynamic is captured in Wazir’s speech after the successful prevention of his deportation, in which he not only thanked the members of the *Alliance*, but made clear that he saw the action most of all as part of a common struggle for a society where everybody enjoys the right to have rights:

Good morning! Thank you all so much for coming here today۔ We belong together. There’s our fight for residence, our rights and the life of the human beings. I hope we will have more peaceful fights in future. Thank you all again my friends! – and the۔ means: We all belong together in Urdu. (Interview D5_11 + 12)

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Appendix: Interviews

All interviews were conducted in person by the authors, except for interview D5_11 + 12, which was conducted by Michael Ruf for the documentary theatre play *Asyldialoge*. All interviews took place in Osnabrück (Germany) in German except for the interviews D5_9 + 10 and D5_11 + 12, in which Urdu, English, and Somali as well as German were spoken.

Abbrev.	Interviewee(s)	Date	Comments
D5_1	“Bruno”, activist with secure residence status, <i>No Lager</i>	07/06/2015	
D5_2	“Brigitte”, activist with secure residence status, <i>AG Flüchtlingshilfe</i>	07/08/2015	
D5_3	“Paul”, activist with secure residence status, <i>No Lager</i>	07/16/2015	
D5_4	Lawyer	07/20/2015	Not cited
D5_5	Neighbor, accommodation center	07/20/2015	Not cited
D5_6	“Nina”, activist with secure residence status	07/21/2015	
D5_7	“Heiko”, activist with secure residence status	07/22/2015	
D5_8	Church representative, <i>AG Flüchtlingshilfe</i>	07/22/2015	Not cited in this article
D5_9 + 10	“Maria” & “Ahmed”, participants of spontaneous protest, insecure residence status	09/15/2015	
D5_11 + 12	“Wazir”, activist with insecure residence status, <i>No Lager</i> & “Linda”, activist with secure residence status, <i>No Lager</i>	12/10/2014 & 12/14/2014	Provided by <i>Bühne für Menschenrechte</i>
D5_13	“Susanne”, activist with secure residence status, <i>AG Flüchtlingshilfe</i>	09/17/2015	

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