



Detained Discussion Guide

Directors: Shaon Chakraborty, Anna Persson
Year: 2015
Time: 99 min

You might know these directors from:

This is the debut full-length film from Shaon Chakraborty.

Anna Persson:
I Am Dublin (2015)

FILM SUMMARY

Sweden has received many accolades over the years, including being named the world's most socially advanced country and the most modern place to live. It is a country that is known for its high quality of life, but just like many countries in Europe it is now raising walls against refugees and migrants. Even in Sweden, people who have not committed a crime can be imprisoned in detention centers if they are not Swedish citizens.

Co-directors Anna Persson and Shaon Chakraborty were the first documentary filmmakers ever given access to film inside a Swedish detention center for rejected asylum seekers awaiting forced deportation, a place where cameras are usually forbidden. Portraying the daily workings of the Flen Detention Center from the inside, where approximately 30 detainees await their fate in an environment of tense uncertainty and structured civility, *DETAINED* is nothing shy of a stark wake-up call to anyone living in the "civilized world," Swedish or not.

"I'm not here because I'm a criminal. You can't lock me up and not give me food," Sami, a well-spoken unofficial spokesperson for the people, declares. With straightforward efficiency, he summarizes the plight of many refugees and migrants, who face a potential rejection that sends them back to the instability and potentially fatal conditions awaiting them back home. Offered little information and strict guidelines, detainees await their fate. When certain members of the staff attempt to infuse instances of warm humanity into the center, their actions are reprimanded and they are reminded, "They (detainees) must know that I can never put my role as civil servant aside." With great sensibility to its characters and environment, *DETAINED* depicts the psychological stresses faced in modern detention centers and questions this crucial, global phenomenon. With an observational stance and incredible access, the film casts a stark light on a harsh reality kept tucked just out of sight.

FILM THEMES

With kindness discouraged and life balancing on a fearful line for those held at a Swedish detention center for rejected asylum seekers, time is filled with the anxious unknown, as what defines us and what divides us is brought into focus.

THE ART OF WAITING

Time inches by in Flen. Cigarettes are smoked, endless grey days tick by, and conversation ping-pongs around the detention center. With little information offered and an environment of entrapment presiding, residents have no other choice than to make do with the few amenities and answers they're offered. With freedom elusive and fear pervasive, how to pass the time is a delicate art. As the human mind turns in on itself when faced with the unknown, everyone is challenged with the daily grind of surviving, of waiting. Civil servant Sophie offers a hand. "Don't stop fighting... Think positively, although you're in here."

IDENTITY

Defined as case numbers, the detained are treated as files to be managed. Having abandoned their homelands, status at a detention center threatens individual identity. Suspended in a no man's land, where one's future is left in the hands of a distant magistrate, control of one's identity remains a final grasp on an otherwise powerless existence. For Aina, that entails withholding her real name. "I can't tell everything," she declares. Sami explains how he retains personal control ever so eloquently, "They think I'm locked up, but no. Freedom is inside, in your chest." Personal identity is a human necessity and an essential right.

FOR WHAT CRIME?

Detaining people, who haven't committed any crime, without a trial, but who have just used their human right to seek asylum and been denied permission to stay in Sweden clearly shows how fundamental principles in rule of law are put aside when it comes to asylum-seekers. Refugees who flee their homeland and seek safety generally do so out of necessity. Threatened with the unlivable, people seek places of peace, locations with more civility. Yet rejected asylum-seekers are treated as criminals and not as innocent individuals looking for a safe place to carve out a life, and when they are detained they are subjected to prison-like conditions. Sami reminds those in charge, "I live here. I need to have a life here... We're humans. We have all the feelings you have."

TOWING THE HARD LINE

Everyone involved in protecting a nation's border must find a way to handle it. Some shut off their emotions to protect themselves and appear "cold," but the film also explores strategies people have to stay human in an inhumane system. When training new civil servant recruits to the detention center, the manager explains their most important task: maintaining a distinct distance, drawing a clear line between themselves and the detainees. Kindness threatens that authoritarian line, and the tenderness Solveig and Sophie bestow upon the detainees calls their roles into question.

"I haven't done anything wrong to come here. Earth is one of the smallest planets, a tiny round ball, and I'm not allowed to be on it?"

Sami Hsini

"They think I'm locked up, but no. Freedom is inside, in your chest."

Sami Hsini

"It's very important to remember that we are civil servants."

Head of Flen Detention Center

FILM FACTS:

- **DETAINED** was met with critical acclaim in its native Sweden upon its release, winning Best Documentary Film at the 2016 Guldbagge Awards, Sweden's leading film awards since 1964.
- Prior to co-directing **DETAINED**, Chakraborty received a degree in fine arts and photography from the Nordic School of Photography and worked as a photojournalist. Alongside the film, she devoted time to a long-term photo project in Bangladesh on rediscovering her past.
- Co-director Anna Persson has a degree in documentary directing, and also studied political science, gender studies, photography, and journalism. For her thesis she directed a film entitled "The Case Officer," in which she told the story of an officer deciding on a Bosnian asylum-seeking family's future. Through this film she gained access to the Swedish Migration Board, enabling her to do so again for **DETAINED**.
- **DETAINED** is produced by Anna Weitz who is part of RÅFILM, a filmmakers collective connecting film and activism.
- In 2007, 1,735 people were held at detention centers across Sweden. In 2015 that number increased to 3,959. At the time of filming, 30 people were held at the Flen Detention Center. The average detention time in 2015 was 21 days, but people can be lawfully detained for as long as 12 months. In 2016 the government decided to expand Sweden's detention facilities.
- The UNHCR (U.N. Refugee Agency) classifies "persons of concern" into various categories: refugees (those receiving protection), asylum seekers (sought protection but not yet received it), internally displaced persons aka IDP (forced to leave home and not yet crossed international borders), returned refugees (those who have returned home but not yet fully integrated), returned IDPs, and stateless persons (individuals who do not possess any nationality).
- Sweden has generally been considered to have one of the most generous asylum policies. From the end of 2015, however, there has been a drastic change as the government has acted to deter people from seeking asylum in Sweden. Border controls and a strengthened police force has been put in place, and in June 2016 the Swedish parliament passed a temporary law that that will limit the number of people granted permanent residency and make it more difficult for families to reunite. The new stricter legislation brings Sweden's rules of asylum to the minimum level in EU law and international conventions.
- The Swedish Migration Board received 162,877 applications for asylum in 2015 alone, due in large part to the Syrian Civil War.
- The U.S. maintains the most extensive system of detention centers in the world, with the first dating back to 1890 on Ellis Island. In 2007 there were 961 centers, compared to Sweden's 10.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Support** the work of the [The Global Detention Project](#)—established in 2005 to research the use of detention centers for asylum seekers with the aim of maintaining transparency.
2. **Support** The [UNHCR](#) (United Nations Refugee Agency), who plays an active role in championing refugee rights, including implementing a strategy entitled "Beyond Detention" in 2014.
3. **Learn** about your country's regulations regarding refugee detention. If you yourself are an asylum seeker, there are national organizations providing assistance and information. A few examples: [U.S.](#), [U.K.](#), [Australia](#).
4. **Donate** to the [Red Cross](#) and/or [Save the Children](#), who work directly with refugees as they make the perilous journey to a place of safety.
5. **Engage** with a local advocacy group (or start your own) supporting the rights of refugees and migrants.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.