

[En]gendering Migration, Development and Belonging: The Experiences of Recently Arrived Afghans in Europe

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Navigating the Violence of Precarious Legal Inclusion: Everyday Lives of Afghan Refugees in Germany and Switzerland

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Abstract

This paper engages with the effects of neoliberal trends in European migration and asylum governance. We explore how and with what consequences conditions of continuous precarity in conjunction with an integration imperative affect the lives and self-images of recently arrived African refugees in Germany and Switzerland. In both countries, we observe a shift from granting residence permits based on humanitarian reasons to granting permits based on labour market performance. As a result, refugees increasingly face the pressure to *earn* their right to remain. Building on qualitative interview data, critical engagements with the principles and politics of integration and theories of violence, we argue that persons holding a precarious legal status are under great pressure to fulfil neoliberal integration requirements in order to secure their legal residence in Europe and to prevent being deported to their country of citizenship. Employing the continuum of violence as an analytical entry point adds important facets to our understanding of the effects contemporary asylum governance has on its subjects. While enabling us to specify causes and effects of experienced violence, our findings also illuminate how those affected by structural and symbolic violence are pushed into a situation in which they unknowingly and unwillingly contribute to upholding precarity as a central instrument and effect of contemporary asylum governance.

1 Introduction

Fawad is an Afghan national in his early 20s whom we met in Switzerland in 2018. At that time, he had lived in the country for three years. Like many other Afghans of around the same age, Fawad faced high levels of personal insecurity in Afghanistan and therefore endured a difficult journey to Europe in search for asylum. Instead of obtaining a refugee status according to the Geneva Convention, the Swiss authorities granted Fawad an F permit, meaning temporary admission. This legal status requires annual renewal and it comes with several restrictions. For instance, Fawad has confronted difficulties when looking for work because employers are reluctant to hire somebody who only holds a temporary right to remain in Switzerland.

To our surprise and despite such struggles, Fawad emphasised that there are several positive aspects about holding an F permit rather than the legal title of a political refugee. For instance, Fawad finds that the welfare entitlements that are tied to a formal refugee status discourage people from looking for work and striving for financial independence. Conversely, he sees the F permit as a suitable means to motivate people to intensify their efforts to find a job or a language course. As paradoxical as it may seem, Fawad is in favour of authorities granting temporary admission rather than long-term protection to asylum seekers.

Fawad's quote exemplifies the central issues we engage with in this article. First, the neoliberal framing of immigrant integration and the prejudice that refugees abuse the welfare system of their host countries (cf. Bauder 2008), largely obscure structural aspects that prevent refugees from entering the labour market. Second, in line with other scholars (see e.g. O'Sullivan 2019), we observe a trend among state authorities to grant refugees a temporary residence permit and thus a precarious legal status instead of long-term legal protection. Yet at the same time, states are opening possibilities to secure one's legal status depending on a person's performance, which is mainly measured in terms of employment, economic self-sufficiency and language competencies (see e.g. Matejskova 2013; Rytter 2018). Third, we illustrate how refugees internalize this neoliberal understanding of integration requirements, which becomes an integral part of their everyday lives as people experience a strong pressure to work and a high degree of insecurity at the same time.

This paper thus engages with the contemporary integration imperative that is widespread across Europe and shaped by neoliberal and individualist principles (e.g. Rytter and Ghandchi 2019; van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). We ask how and with what consequences current integration policies affect persons with precarious legal status – in our specific case Afghan nationals in Germany and Switzerland. Theoretically, we draw on critical engagements with the principles and politics integration (cf. Rytter 2019; Schinkel 2018) and theories of violence (Bourdieu 2000; Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). We argue that persons holding a precarious legal status are under great pressure to fulfil integration requirements in order to secure their legal residence in Europe and to prevent being deported to their country of citizenship. The weaker someone's legal status, the more limited are his or her access to support services and the labour market; yet, the stronger are the expectations for him or her to integrate. We observe a shift from residence permits granted for humanitarian reasons to residents permits that are based on labour market performance (Scherschel 2016). In other words, people are increasingly required to 'earn' their residence permit.

We focus on the specific case of Afghan refugees who – like Fawad – rarely receive political asylum but mostly hold a temporary legal status or are denied protection altogether. This yields disciplinary effects in the sense that people feel urged to achieve economic success so that they fulfil their host country's requirements and prove their deservingness. Given their temporary legal status, however, people face significant difficulties to access the labour market. Thus, being economically successful represents a challenge, which is often hard and sometimes

impossible to tackle (Wyss and Fischer under review). At the same time, our qualitative interviews with Afghan refugees reveal how persons with precarious legal status often internalize the pressure to integrate and their narratives emphasize how integration is mostly seen as an individual effort while structural inequalities are side-lined. Such pressure to fulfil integration requirements in conjunction with legal restrictions and the insecurities resulting from an ubiquitous threat of deportation (Sökefeld 2019) cause great pressure and anxieties among our interlocutors.

We expand on theories of violence to theoretically frame such social and political conditions and their effects on a specific group of persons. That violence is not a purely physical and political phenomenon but can be subtle and invisible while still having severe effects on those concerned is now well established in social science (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004b). Although violence is a widely recognized reason for forced migration, the concept is rarely employed to analyse the reception conditions of refugees (see the work of Canning 2017; Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Menjivar and Abrego 2012 for exceptions). However, thinking of violence as a continuum not only helps to capture its multiple articulations, but also enables us to show how these affect the lives of refugees at different points in time and geographical localities. More specifically, we demonstrate how theories of structural (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969) and symbolic (Bourdieu 2000) violence lend themselves to generating original insights to modes of contemporary asylum governance and their effects on those seeking protection.

2 Context: Forced Migration from Afghanistan to Germany and Switzerland

According to the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019), Afghanistan is the least secure country of the world. In 2018, the highest number of victims of war was counted in the country and the power and influence of the Taliban grows continuously. Afghanistan has been a scene of war, violence, insecurity and extreme poverty for many decades. As a result, Afghan nationals used to be a group that enjoyed favourable access to protection across many countries in the Western industrialised world (Fischer 2015, 2019). However, this has changed markedly in recent years. Despite the continuing war, violence, insecurity and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan we observe that the protection of Afghan asylum seekers in Europe becomes increasingly precarious (cf. NOAS 2018; Klöckner 2018). Our focus in this paper is on the situation in Germany and Switzerland. While we do not aim for a proper comparison, we hold that the data we generated in both countries exemplify important dimensions of contemporary trends in European migration governance.

Since 2011, Germany has registered more than 200.000 asylum requests from Afghan nationals (BAMF 2019, 12). At 18.000, the number of asylum requests registered in CH for the same period is much lower. Yet, given an overall population size of roughly 8.5 million, it is still significant, and Afghanistan is among the three most important countries of citizenship for asylum seekers in Switzerland. Generally, the majority of Afghan refugees are men who travel to and arrive in Europe on their own (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017, 3; NOAS 2018, 11).

In both countries, Afghan asylum seekers tend to live under precarious conditions, meaning that their residence permit – if they obtain one – is temporary and accompanied by restrictions regarding family reunification and other elementary rights. As a result, the persons concerned live in a state of continuous insecurity. In Germany, many Afghan nationals receive a so-called *Duldung*. A *Duldung* is nothing more than a suspension of deportation. It is subject to frequent renewal and can be revoked at any time, depending on how German authorities assess the situation in the country of citizenship. Access to work or education is conditional for persons holding a *Duldung*. In Switzerland, most Afghan asylum seekers receive a so-called F

permit, meaning temporary admission to Switzerland. Compared to persons holding an official refugee status, access to work, support programmes and social welfare as well as family reunification is more difficult for those living with an F permit (SFH 2015, 394; see also Bertrand 2019).

Whether Afghan nationals deserve legal protection in the first place, is often called into question. In Germany, the existence of ‚safe areas‘ in Afghanistan to which rejected asylum seekers can be deported without facing significant physical threat has been debated for some time (Sökefeld 2019; Stahlmann 2019). Since Germany has signed a bi-lateral agreement with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2016 (Joint Declaration 2016), German authorities have been organising group deportations on an irregular basis. As a result, the fear of getting deported is widespread and constantly present in the lives of many Afghan refugees in Germany. Similarly, Swiss authorities consider deportations to Afghanistan under certain circumstances reasonable (SFH 2019). Until now, deportations from Switzerland to Afghanistan are exceptional, but they do occur and therefore cause concerns among Afghan nationals seeking asylum in Switzerland.

Against this backdrop, we illuminate the slim line between protection and labour migration-based admission and integration policies in the context of Germany and Switzerland. However, before proceeding with our empirical analysis, we provide a brief overview of the methods we employed to generate and analyse our empirical data.

3 Methods, Data and Analysis

This article is based on interviews we conducted for an international project entitled ‚Engendering migration, development and belonging: The experiences of recently arrived Afghans in Europe‘.¹ Funded by the Swiss Network of International Studies (SNIS), the project explored how gender shapes understandings of home, belonging and the self among recently arrived Afghan nationals in Europe. While the overarching project covers four European countries, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, this article is exclusively based on the data we generated in Germany and Switzerland.

In 2018 and 2019, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 persons of Afghan citizenship in Switzerland and with 14 persons in Germany. Our interlocutors held different legal statuses. Some of them were still in the asylum procedure, some had been granted refugee or temporary protection statuses while the asylum application of others have had been rejected. We explored multiple channels to identify research participants, including NGOs, Afghan organisations, refugee shelters and personal contacts. On average, the interviews lasted two hours and were carried out in German, English or French. In some cases, we benefited from the help of a translator. During the interviews, we asked questions about our interlocutors’ legal and socio-economic situation in Switzerland or Germany, their experiences upon arrival, their social contacts and networks, but also their aspirations for the future. In addition to interviews with recently arrived Afghan nationals, we interviewed eight experts in each country, who mostly work in the field of refugee support such as legal counselling or are employed by state institutions promoting integration.

After transcribing our interviews, we coded and analysed them using a qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo). We paid due attention to protect our interlocutors’ identity and therefore not only used pseudonyms but also decided not to disclose their ethnic background,

¹ For more information, see: <https://snis.ch/project/engendering-migration-development-and-belonging-the-experiences-of-recently-arrived-afghans-in-europe/>

their region of origin and their current place of residence as such information is not relevant for the argument we develop in this article.

4 Violence, precarious inclusion and the integration imperative

The notion of ‘integration’ figures prominently in contemporary public and political discourses on migration and it also played a central role in our interviews. It emerges that the integration imperative imposed by host societies puts individuals with precarious legal status under a lot of pressure. This pressure derives from the imperative to find work, to learn the local language and to blend into a new social context. It causes much stress, insecurities and instability for our interlocutors. Such feelings were additionally aggravated by past experiences of trauma, constant worries about family members abroad and conditions of ‘precarious inclusion’ (Rytter and Ghandchi 2019) in the receiving country that go hand in hand with the fear of deportation to the country of citizenship (see also Wyss and Fischer under review). We argue that the suffering resulting from this tension can be framed as experiences of structural and symbolic violence. Both forms of violence derive from the denial of rights, on the one hand, and an increasing neoliberalization of integration policies, on the other hand.

4.1 Structural, symbolic and legal violence in the context of precarious migration

Defining violence in catch-all terms is impossible (cf. Canning 2017). This is why Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois refer to it as a ‘slippery concept’ (2004a, 1). Instead of offering a conclusive definition of what violence is and what it does, the authors propose to think of violence as a continuum that includes its manifold articulations. ‘Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault or the infliction of pain alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim’ (ibid., 1). This continuum not only entails different forms of violence but also enables us to explore how they are mutually intertwined and often mutually constitutive. ‘Violence gives birth to itself’ (ibid., 1). However, one specific articulation of violence not only reproduces itself, but often promotes other forms of violence that involve different actors and yield different consequences on the part of those affected. Like articulations of violence themselves, the harm and suffering it causes can be more or less visible. For this article, we focus mostly on rather invisible and non-physical forms of violence, which have been conceptualised as structural (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969) and symbolic (Bourdieu 2000).

The term ‘structural violence’ allows us to grasp precarious living conditions as a form of violence imposed on marginalised persons. Focusing on structural violence, Galtung (1969) spearheaded an extended understanding of violence from physical to psychological damage, which includes alienation, repression and deprivation. Violence that is built into structure and manifests itself as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances without actors inflicting direct physical harm is structural violence according to Galtung. Farmer (2004) underlines the historicity of structural violence, which roots in long-term global inequalities and at the same time helps reproducing these inequalities.

Canning (2017, 47) explores forms of violence, which cause ‘physical, social or emotional harm’ in the context of the UK asylum system. She argues that in ‘looking at policy and practice relating to destitution, detention, housing and deportation [...] violence is structural, intentional and deliberate’ (ibid., 48). We can further identify structural violence in contemporary state strategies to deter ‘unwanted’ migrants by making their life as intolerable as possible (cf. Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg 2019; Weber and Pickering 2011). One such

deterrence strategy is the denial of protection statuses or the withdrawal of rights from specific legal statuses (e.g. family reunification or access to the labour market or social welfare) to certain groups of persons (Rytter 2018).

As demonstrated above, most Afghan refugees are kept in a tenuous legal situation in which their rights are severely curtailed and where uncertainties about their future predominate. Such legally imposed '*facilitation of suffering*' (Canning 2017, 48) is anticipated and exerted on unwanted migrants in order for them to leave or to refrain from coming to Europe in the first place. The violence which Afghan refugees experience in Europe is thus not only a consequence of global inequalities and a result of decadelong wars in Afghanistan but also, and importantly, a direct outcome of European migration policies (cf. *ibid.*, 86). The precarious inclusion and '*the violent inaction in the form of minimalist welfarism or formal abandonment*' (Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg 2019, 93; in reference to Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017) can thus aggravate the structural violence refugees are exposed to.

Persons have been found to internalise such forms of violence as norms (Walby 2013, 98) and normality. This is what Bourdieu (2000) refers to as '*symbolic violence*', a term that captures specific forms of domination that are frequently misrecognized and perceived as natural by those subjected to them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004, 272). Symbolic violence is inscribed in and works through the '*imposition of divisions of social categories*' (Bourdieu 2000, 175), which are applied not only by the dominant but also by the dominated. Therefore, those affected often remain unaware of the symbolic violence they experience. It may even be the case that persons experiencing symbolic violence become complicit in the reproduction of social inequalities (Schmidt 2014, 231). This happens in situations where prevailing social divisions are internalised and incorporated, regardless of their detrimental effects on those who are subjected to dominant classifications.

Drawing on the concepts of structural and symbolic violence, Menjivar and Abrego (2012) introduce the term '*legal violence*' to grasp the harmful effects of law. They argue that in the context of migration, '*legal violence is rooted in the multi-pronged system of laws at the federal, state, and local levels that promotes a climate of insecurity and suffering among individual immigrants and their families*' (*ibid.*, 1387). Harmful effects of law include family separation, exclusion from education or exploitation on the labour market (*ibid.*, 1384). The term legal violence thus highlights how the law exerts normalising power and legitimises social inequalities by categorising groups of people. The naturalisation and normalisation of harmful effects which the law yields for certain groups of persons thus reinforces structural as well as symbolic violence.

4.2 Precarious inclusion as a form of violence

The attribution of legal statuses is an important element of migration control (Landolt and Goldring 2015; Wyss 2019). It divides a country's population into groups of persons with differential access to rights. In the context of migration and citizenship legislation, we find a plethora of legal statuses that define the rights and duties a person holds. The more temporary someone's legal status and the more it restricts access to work, education and support, the more precarious it is. Legally imposed categorisations and their implications promote significant inequalities among refugees as well as between citizens and non-citizens more generally. Such categorisations resulting from social inequalities are an expression of structural violence, which is stipulated in the law and which structures individual experiences, access to resources as the narratives of the persons we interviewed demonstrate.

However, differential inclusion (cf. Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) not only promotes structural violence – in the sense that a precarious legal status causes high degrees of stress and a general state of insecurity (cf. Rytter and Ghandchi 2019). It is also a source of symbolic violence as people tend to internalize and normalize their own marginalization. The legal system of categorisation perpetuates colonial systems of differentiating between groups of persons. Encarnación Rodríguez (2018, 20) draws a link between the contemporary division of refugees into different status groups which are tied to different entitlements and restrictions and ‘the Orientalist and racialised practices of European colonialism and imperialism’. This ‘coloniality of migration’ (ibid.) legitimises and normalises the differential and often racialised treatment of different groups of legal subjects and the imposition of restrictive rights on some of them (Encarnación Rodríguez 2018; see also Wyss and Fischer under review). It also legitimises the precarious inclusion of refugees originating from non-European countries of the global South (cf. Konczal and Varga 2012, 91). A normalisation of such postcolonial inequalities needs to be understood as symbolic violence. In our analysis below, we will demonstrate how this symbolic violence is not only imposed by the powerful but also internalised and reproduced by the dominated, in this case by persons holding a precarious legal status.

Obviously, the forms of violence sketched above are very different from threats or experiences of physical assault and damage that in many cases leads people to flee their country of origin. Yet, they reiterate the usefulness of understanding violence as a continuum, whose multiple articulations may occur to the same person, sometimes at different points in time and in a different geographical location. Still, these different forms of violence are interlinked in the sense that one would not have occurred without the other happening before.

4.3 Neoliberalisation of integration policies as a form of violence

Recent studies highlight the increasing neoliberalisation of contemporary integration and migration policies (Matejskova 2013; Rytter and Ghandchi 2019; Schinkel 2018; Sparke 2006). This trend follows a general turn towards an activating welfare state, which replaces *welfare* by *workfare* (Lanz 2009, 111). This activation imperative also constitutes the neoliberal core of the contemporary integration discourse and integration policies, which address individuals as entrepreneurial subjects who are responsible for their own material existence (ibid., 112). Similarly, Rytter (2018, 12) shows how the ‘current neoliberal trend works through [Danish] welfare state institutions and becomes manifest in the ongoing demand for integration’. As a result, refugees confront integration requirements that emphasise ‘values like responsibility, self-sufficiency and independence’ (ibid., 12), while welfare state programmes aim for refugees to start working as fast as possible upon arrival. If necessary, repressive enforcing measures are applied to oblige individuals to take on certain jobs (Lanz 2009, 112). Such trends in the governance of refugees can be seen as a subset of broader developments towards neoliberal citizenship through work-based immigrant integration (Matejskova 2013). As part of these developments that turn migrants into ‘workfare subjects’ (ibid., 988), while structural unemployment is re-framed ‘as a behavioural problem of inflexible and work-resistant welfare recipients’ (ibid., 988).

Individuals seeking protection are confronted with increasingly refined and restrictive measures of migration control which target migrant subjects whose labour power is deemed unprofitable (cf. Canning 2017, 52). The prevailing integration imperative is particularly effective in relation to persons holding a precarious legal status who face the constant risk of being illegalised and deported to their country of citizenship. They are urged to prove their

labour market performance and economic utility as this might enable them to obtain a more secure status.

In the case of Germany, Scherschel (2016) observes a shift towards rewarding successful integration into the labour market with better chances to obtain a more secure residency status (*ibid.*, 246). States thus lure migrants with the promise to gain more rights if they perform well enough in professional and economic terms. In the case of forced migration, Scherschel (*ibid.*, 245) argues that paid employment can take on existential significance. Likewise, Wernesjö (2019, 3) suggests for the case of Sweden that ‘the ability to work takes precedence over humanitarian protection and is a further example of how Swedish integration policy has become more focused on the labour market and employment’. Based on our findings from Germany and Switzerland, we concur with these observations. Our interview data exemplify a shift from obtaining residence papers for humanitarian reasons to being granted a legal status based on successful performance on the labour market and in the host society more generally.

In this context it is important to emphasise the dynamic nature of legal statuses (*cf.* Landolt and Goldring 2015). Depending on the situation, they can be withdrawn or stabilised. Importantly, individuals are increasingly responsible for securing – or indeed ‘earning’ – their status, which becomes particularly problematic in the case of precarious migration where structural inequalities render labour market participation more challenging. At the same time, however, the risk of deportation forces persons with a precarious legal status to find employment in order to secure their stay in the country of residence. This becomes particularly salient in the case of Afghan refugees who either hold a temporary legal status or whose asylum application was rejected.

The more precarious somebody’s status is, the more they are forced to perform as an ideal citizen in order to prevent losing their legal status altogether. In their study on migrant dairy workers in the US, Lindsay Harrison and Lloyd (2012, 366) found that the precarious living conditions and the ubiquitous ‘deportability’ (De Genova 2002) produce ideal migrants: ‘compliant at work and invisible otherwise’ (Harrison and Lloyd 2012, 366). Conditions of general insecurity thus foster exploitative working conditions (*ibid.*). In the end, integration policies support a trend towards granting a secure legal status not only to those who are judged as making a credible case for their vulnerability but also to those who are assessed as fit, professionally well-performing and thus economically beneficial (see also Basok, Bélanger, and Rivas 2014).

Whereas Weber and Pickering (2011) explore the violence caused by borders, thus exclusion, we focus on the violence caused by precarious inclusion. The allocation of precarious legal status helps producing docile subjects who become a useful workforce for their host states (*cf.* Rytter and Ghandchi 2019). Building on Hiemstra’s argument, we hold that precarity

‘turns immigrants into receptors of blame for neoliberal dislocations. It circumvents the conceptual inconsistency within neoliberalism between the idealized neoliberal worker and the marginalization of hard-working immigrants by twisting the neoliberal emphasis on personal responsibility against immigrants. Immigrants are thus deemed blameworthy for social instability caused by neoliberal deregulation and reduction in social programs’ (Hiemstra 2010, 95)

As we will show below, the insecure conditions imposed on Afghan nationals in Germany and Switzerland force them to prove their deservingness and hence, to work hard in order for them to deserve their right to remain. However, we will also demonstrate how in some

cases, people resist externally-imposed undeservingness by claiming self-ascribed deservingness.

5 Work in order to Stay

In the current asylum-migration nexus, the ‘refugee’ has been reduced to a potential worker. Asylum policies seem to be turning into a new way of regulating and controlling racialized labour migration. (Encarnación Rodríguez 2018, 25)

This quote by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez summarises the observed trend in migration governance to place newcomers’ profitability centrestage, which we will substantiate with empirical findings from our project. In fact, the perceived pressure to work was a salient theme in our interviews. Holding a precarious temporary legal status, participants felt forced to find alternative ways to secure their stay in Europe. Below we draw on recent policy developments to explore how employment or enrolment in vocational training opens possibilities for asylum seekers to stay in their country of residence without receiving formal refugee status.

In Germany and in Switzerland, there are two different bodies of law which regulate the admission and residence entitlements of non-citizens. On the one hand, there is the Asylum Act, which stipulates who deserves state protection according to the Geneva Refugee Convention and other national and international regulations. On the other hand, there is the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration in Switzerland and the Residence Act in Germany. Both bodies of law regulate whether non-citizens have the right to enter and remain in the given country. Under these laws, residence permits are mostly issued to satisfy the country’s need for foreign labour but also for reasons of family reunification or for educational purposes.

We observe that the legal residence of persons seeking protection increasingly depends on their performance on the labour market. It is therefore regulated by the Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration and the Residence Act. However, all our interlocutors had previously applied for asylum in Germany or Switzerland and their cases were therefore considered under the asylum law. Asylum determination procedures often result in negative decisions or in the granting of a precarious status, which are both unsatisfactory outcomes for our participants and many were searching for ways to legalise their residency via alternative legal channels that regulate residence entitlements of foreign nationals. In the following, we will zoom in on two policies that could potentially consolidate the residence permit of persons holding a precarious legal status. These examples also demonstrate how our interlocutors try to navigate the restrictive European migration regime.

In Germany, there are two possibilities for rejected asylum seekers to obtain a legal status based on employment. First, there is the *Ausbildungsduldung*, a leave to remain for the duration of vocational training, which was introduced in 2016 in its current form (ProAsyl 2018). Rejected asylum seekers who find an apprenticeship will be issued a so-called *Ausbildungsduldung* status, which allows them to complete their vocational training. If they succeed to work on the job they were trained to do for two years after completing their apprenticeship, they can receive a residence permit. After working for five years they will have ‘earned’ the right to stay in Germany. Second, a new law – the so-called *Beschäftigungsduldung* – will enter into force in 2020 (BMI 2019). Rejected asylum seekers will be able to obtain a *Duldung* status for 30 months if they find a job, work at least 35 hours per week and are able to cover their living expenses. Additionally, they must prove their ability to speak German and pass an integration course. This way, Germany tries to react to the growing shortage of skilled labour which the country has been facing for some time (Scherschel 2016, 49f; see also Bauder

2008). Additionally, as a representative of the city of Berlin told us, authorities try to find solutions for rejected asylum seekers. The *Bundesland* Berlin actively supports people with a *Duldung* status who are eager to enrol for vocational training. Strategies like those pursued by authorities in Berlin are geared towards turning undesired migrants into desirable members of the national labour force.

Since most Afghan nationals receive an F permit in Switzerland, which can be withdrawn in case the situation in the country of citizenship improves, they face considerable insecurities. Additionally, the F permit renders access to the labour market, family reunification and travelling beyond Swiss borders difficult (SFH 2015, 394). Therefore, also in Switzerland people seek ways to improve their legal status. Through so-called hardship cases it is possible to change an F permit into a B permit, which implies more security. However, obtaining a B permit is tied to a set of conditions, including the proof that a person does not receive welfare benefits, that she or he does not have a criminal record and that she or he can prove a certain degree of integration.

In both countries, Afghans holding a precarious legal status are thus urged to explore alternative legal means that promise to be a pathway to more secure residency, however without providing any guarantee. In most cases, this presupposes fulfilling the host countries' integration requirements, including good behaviour and labour market performance, and which are extremely hard to meet.

6 Manifestation of current admission and integration policies in persons' lives

The following examples illuminate how laws and regulations are internalised by those who are directly affected and how they substantiate social inequalities – and thus inflict structural violence. The fact that people naturalise these laws, instead of confronting problems of racialised global inequalities moreover reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. Here it is important to note that people not only passively internalise but also strategically engage with the regulations and imperatives to which they are subjected. Finally, we show how the internalisation of these policies in combination with continuing precariousness and deportability (De Genova 2002) have disciplinary effects in the sense that people feel a constant urge to behave correctly and to become useful parts of the national workforce.

6.1 Internalisation of integration imperative

Jahed (26) was one of the few Afghan men we interviewed who had been recognized as a political refugee in Switzerland and who had received the relatively secure B permit. He had come to Switzerland in 2014 and been able to build up a stable social network. Jahed also found an apprenticeship and was fluid in Swiss German. Overall, his situation seemed to be good. When Anna asked him to compare his situation to other refugees from Afghanistan living in Switzerland he replied:

I think, it depends on the person. [...] For example there are Afghan people who have been here in Switzerland for five years, and they've made a lot and have a very good life, they have tried and done something. But there are other people who may even have been here in Switzerland longer and they have problems, because they haven't tried [hard enough]. [...] They don't speak German well and hardly any Swiss German. And a lot of them simply haven't tried. Like if you just stay at home, on the bed, nothing happens. And if you really look for it and knock on the door, for sure you'll find something. [...] I just tried to find contacts or look for

where the opportunities are, to learn something, to do something. (Interview in 2018)

This quote exemplifies how people internalize the integration imperative they are subjected to. It also shows how integration is seen as an individual responsibility that pushes migrants into the role of entrepreneurial subjects who work hard for a permission to stay in the receiving country. Whilst people internalize this pressure to integrate and emphasize that integration requires individual effort, structural inequalities remain side-lined. This makes it easier to blame the individual, no matter who is speaking, whether it is immigrants themselves, politicians or the wider public.

Said who was 30 years old at the time of our conversation emphasises similar points. He had obtained a deportation ban – the most precarious protection status in Germany. However, Said seemed to be content with his life in Germany – not least because he had managed to find work as a mechanic, which was the job he used to do back in Afghanistan. During our interview, Said was eager to demonstrate how much effort he had put into learning the German language and proudly told us that he achieved the best result when completing an integration course. In the following quote, he reflects on the importance of making an effort to become fit for the labour market.

My opinion is that before one gives in their request, before one gets an answer, one really needs to push oneself to learn the language. This can be a chance to stay. The government can easily say that there are so many people here and that they don't see a need to have someone who only sleeps and eats. They would need workforces, just people who would do something, who can stand on their own feet and not live on the costs of the city. It's just my opinion. (Interview in 2019)

Again, this quote reflects that receiving a residence permit is seen as a matter of personal efforts and the host country's need for skilled labour force. During the interview, Said criticised Germany's assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and implicitly claims moral deservingness (Ravn et al. 2020). Given the highly insecure situation of his country of origin, he considers it highly problematic that Germany started deporting Afghan nationals. However, he did not criticise Germany for nudging people to prove their economic usefulness regardless of their precarious living conditions and the resulting perpetuation of structural inequalities. By complying with German integration requirements, Said contributes to reproducing the dominant integration discourse to some extent. Whilst exemplifying symbolic violence, such acts of self-positioning can also be understood not least as a form of strategic action, because Said succeeds to navigate given restrictions and to create an environment where he feels at home despite Germany's efforts to deter Afghan refugees.

Jahed's and Said's examples illustrate how individuals internalize the dominant integration imperative and how their lives are marked by interlocking articulations of structural, symbolic and legal violence as a result. First, they comply with the expectations imposed on them by learning German, finding vocational training and making sure to behave well in general. Second, similar to other interlocutors, they distance themselves from co-nationals whom they accuse of being lazy. By doing so, they implicitly highlight their deservingness and accept the necessity to work hard for their entitlement to stay in Germany.

We interpret such internalisation of the integration discourse as legal and symbolic violence. The acceptance of individualised integration and the observed disregard of structural inequalities experienced by the Afghan nationals we encountered, reflects what Menjivar and Abrego (2012) define as legal violence – harmful effects of the law that produces uncertainty, precariousness and the pressure to become a beneficial part of the host society. At the same

time, self-ascribed deservingness and the necessity to be hard-working reflect Bourdieu's (2000) notion of symbolic violence. However, while the above-mentioned interlocutors succeeded to fulfil their host countries' requirements, it is important to note that the unpredictability and insecurity that are inflicted by a temporary legal status pushes some to be very hard working, while others remain completely demotivated and lost in a limbo-like situation.

6.2 Discipline through Precarisation of Legal Status

In Germany, we interviewed a woman working for an NGO that supports refugees, many of whom are Afghan nationals. In the following quote, she remembers participating in a workshop together with her clients. At this workshop they received advice on how to get along and do things well in Germany.

And then [the man who led the workshop] said: '[...] Just get an apprenticeship, even if you hate it! [...] You should have it because it is your guarantee! Even if it is nursing or elderly care it is [something that is] required. [...]'] So, he was really realistic to them. He said, 'It's good to dream but your dream now is to work hard.' He is always like this: 'Work hard, hard, hard. Push yourself.' [...] He opened their eyes about some things like that the most important thing now is to secure your status, to work hard. And it does not come so easily. This is the problem. [...] Because now there is no deportation [from Berlin] but if there will be deportation, they are in danger. So, you must be so fast to save your ass. (Interview in 2019)

The instructor tells workshop participants to be docile, to work hard and 'earn' their lives in this country. There is no entitlement to security without hard work and people are left with no choice but to succumb to these requirements and perform well in the eyes of the authorities. This example demonstrates how so-called integration programmes but also services offered by NGOs contribute to shaping migrant subjects who are beneficial to the host countries. Whereas many of these programmes certainly are well-intended and merely conscious that excellent performance in the labour market might be the only option to avoid deportation to Afghanistan, they also perpetuate the neglect of people's individual competencies and aspirations.

Like many other refugees, Esmat (28) arrived in Europe in 2015. Being young, healthy and male, his asylum application was rejected, as were the asylum claims of many other men with Afghan nationality (cf. Sökefeld 2019; Wyss and Fischer under review). Esmat had appealed against the rejection. While he was awaiting the decision on his appeal, he explored alternative ways, which would enable him to obtain a residence permit. Esmat established many contacts in his city of residence, found a job in a restaurant, and volunteered in an advice office for refugees, which backed the generally active impression he made at the interview. He told us:

I believe that I can stay here, and I will try a lot in order to do so. I collected all of my tickets. I don't have any minus points until now. All I did is positive. I never took a bus without a ticket. I never took the metro without ticket. [...] When I did the German courses... I got all my degrees here. When I worked... the work certificates are here. Everything! All the things I did positively/ I will continue to do positive things until I see... positive is right, isn't it? [...] Positive needs to win! Yes! Positive... I did nothing wrong. I got to know many Germans. (Interview in 2019)

Esmat's quote exemplifies what we call the disciplinary effects of precarious legal statuses and what has been described as the disciplining of the migrant population and migrant workforce (cf. Basok, Bélanger, and Rivas 2014; Kalbermatter and Richter 2015; Wicker 2010, 240). Esmat hoped to stabilize his insecure status by doing everything well and by complying with the requirements of the integration imperative. In several of our interviews, our interlocutors told us that they always make sure to stop at the red light, to have tickets when using public transport, to learn the local language and that they are extremely hard-working – in case they managed to find a job. Moreover, they frequently mentioned that they are in contact with members of the local non-migrant population to prove that they are 'socially integrated'.

Like Esmat, Mukhtar (28) whom we also met in Germany appealed against the rejection of his asylum claim. While waiting for the decision of the court, Mukhtar continues looking for ways to obtain a residence permit in Germany. To this end, he considers addressing alternative policies that may open a path to legalising his status:

But I must work better. But I want to work a little more, 8 hours. Now I am working six [a day] hours [but] I want to work 8 hours. Full-time. If you work for 5 years, full-time [...] it becomes possible. Or do an apprenticeship for 3 years and then work for 2 year... (Interview in 2019)

Whereas he first turned to asylum law, he was now exploring ways to obtain a residence permit by referring to policies under the Residence Act. Mukhtar's example illustrates how someone's economic usefulness replaces his or her need for protection. At the same time, the perceived necessity to work hard has disciplinary effects in the sense that people continuously seek to improve their professional performance, hoping that this will ultimately enable them to stabilise their precarious situation. Regardless of the disciplinary effects deriving from the internalisation of behavioural requirements, participants employ such top-down requirements and a docile response to them to claim deservingness, on the one hand, and to retain some hope for a future life in Germany or Switzerland, on the other hand.

The assessment of deservingness in economic terms as it is carried out by the state authorities our participants are confronted with can be understood as a form of structural violence. It reinforces structural inequalities and puts certain groups of persons under pressure to perform in a particular way. Such articulations of structural violence in turn are incorporated and internalised in people's everyday life and thus promote symbolic violence. People assess themselves, their work and their potential future prospects in terms of their professional performance and their willingness to further intensify their efforts. Returning to the idea of violence as a continuum, the cases of Esmat and Mukhtar demonstrate, how different articulations of violence may interlock. In these specific cases, experiences of structural violence in terms of denial of protection and exposure to strict and restricting requirements promote symbolic violence in terms of internalised imperatives. At the same time, however such experiences of structural violence also trigger acts of self-positioning in terms of claims for performance-based deservingness (cf. Chauvin, Garcés-Mascareñas, and Kraler 2013).

6.3 *Perpetuation of Social Inequalities*

Parwin, a woman in her mid-50s, has been living in Switzerland with her husband and her three children since 2015. Like other members of her family, Parwin holds an F permit, which she is very unsatisfied with. She finds it difficult to see how her children are held from living similar lives as their peers. For instance, they are not allowed to move beyond the Swiss territory and thus can't participate in school trips abroad. Parwin also explained how her status makes it very difficult for her to find a job.

P: With the F permit it is difficult to find a job and normally with this permit you need to stay for five years. And after that, it will change but only if you're working – otherwise they won't change it. So, I'm trying to find a job somewhere, [...] but it's impossible. This is also something that's hurtful. My husband also has the permit F, but he is an old man, he can't work. [...]

A: And what would you like to work?

P: It doesn't matter for me, I've devoted my life to hard work, I'll do whatever I find to change my permit. (Interview in 2018)

As we see in Parwin's case, a precarious legal status can 'make refugees enter the labour market as quickly as possible' (Rytter 2018, 14) and push them to take on jobs no matter what they are and regardless of their personal aspirations, skills and experiences. Compared to citizens and noncitizens holding a secure legal status, persons with tenuous legal statuses are thus severely disadvantaged and exposed to precarious living conditions. Concurring with Canning (2017, 47f), we consider such harmful effects of policies as an expression of structural violence.

Parwin's quote also exemplifies that people find themselves in paradoxical situations: on the one hand, it is the F permit that renders access to the labour market difficult. On the other hand, holders of this status are required to have a job in order to change their permit and stabilise their living conditions. People are deliberately pushed into such precarious conditions as part of states' deterrence strategies, which make it almost impossible to fulfil the given integration requirements at the same time.

The above quote also sheds light on the fact that a more secure status is only available for fit persons, which is another articulation of structural violence. Thus, Parwin's narrative illuminates the nexus between structural and symbolic violence. The latter articulates itself in her seemingly unquestioned devotion to hard work and her willingness to do anything for a more stable situation. However, it is important to also acknowledge how Parwin turns against the mechanisms that render her life in Switzerland uncomfortable. Still, she plans to remain in Switzerland despite her temporary permit. Even in her insecure and arduous living conditions, she seeks to find ways out of precariousness. Parwin's case exemplifies how global inequalities are perpetuated by the way newcomers are pushed into situations from where there is rarely any upward social mobility and by the severe inequalities articulated and produced by the insecurity of their residence conditions in host countries. Again, these observations need to be interpreted within a context of legally induced violence, which contributes to cementing inequalities between people of different origin.

In the following quote, Esmat reflects on how class differences play out in the host context. Persons lacking language skills or any other skills that might be relevant in the receiving context have lower chances to secure their stay – and thus are under greater risk to be deported to their country of citizenship.

[Me and my friend] went to school for 12 years [...] I also learned English at school. I could also learn German here. I collected information. I went to university and learned about asylum and labour law... [...] Even though I have so many contacts and intelligence, I still have problems. But the Afghans who don't speak a word of German and don't know [German friends] and don't have any contacts... What is with this kind of people?

A: Yes, what is with them?

E: It's very clear. They have many problems, too. That's my stress. That's my fear. Because... of the residence permit. Even though I speak German. And I told you that I did everything positively. I didn't sleep at home. How's the situation for the others? That's very clear. It's clear that they have more stress than we do. I was best at school. I could do everything. (Interview in 2019)

Given Esmat's comparatively high-level of education, he has easier access to employment, social networks as well as information which can be essential to find alternative ways to legalise one's status. Esmat's situation in Germany is better than that of many other refugees, because he can mobilise valuable cultural capital and – at least partially – convert it into social capital (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 118f). This might, in turn, protect him from being deported to his country of origin in case he manages to 'earn' a residence permit – at least he has better chances than his friends with less socio-cultural capital. In this case, structural violence prompts the perpetuation – or perhaps even an amplification – of social inequalities.

Drawing on Hiemstra's (2010) helps us situate such observations in a broader context of migration governance in the neoliberal era. In fact, the emphasis on the centrality of integration and the way integration is cast as a state of being of the individual (Schinkel 2018) contributes to downplaying the importance of immigrant labour in the contemporary economy. As Bachmann (2016) or Rytter and Ghandchi (2019) demonstrate, integration programmes for refugees often aim at keeping them in low-paid jobs while their certificates from prior education in their countries of origin remain unacknowledged, so that they fill the gaps deriving from labour shortage. Holding asylum seekers accountable for their own fate in the receiving society effectively provides a cover for neoliberalism's intrinsic violences. 'As such, while the labor itself remains visible, the conditions that made that labor possible are made invisible' (Hiemstra 2010, 95). As a consequence, the emphasis on integration at the same time masks and legitimizes the precarious situation in which many of our participants find themselves. Ultimately, such conditions further facilitate continued neoliberalization (see Hiemstra 2010). Linking legal precarity, integration and neoliberalism, scholars are better able to understand how the violence of neoliberalism can be embodied.

7 Conclusion

Based on a case study of Afghan refugees in Germany and Switzerland, this article employs theories of violence to illuminate important trends in contemporary asylum governance. To this end, we think of violence as a continuum that encompasses different forms of physical and psychological harm (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004a). This theoretical entry point enables us to unpack the effects that conditions of continuous precarity in conjunction with the requirements deriving from integration imperatives have on the everyday lives and self-images of Afghan refugees in both countries under study. We argue that such trends in migration governance need to be situated in the context of neoliberalism. More specifically, our findings illustrate what Hiemstra (2010, 77) refers to as the 'scattered, indirect impacts [of neoliberalism] that include both state and non-state actors'.

In times that are heavily marked by anti-immigrant politics across the so-called global north, we observe an important trend in the governance of asylum and refugee protection. This trend implies a shift from formal refugee protection according to the 1951 Geneva Convention to earning one's status through work and successful economic performance. At the same time, it implies a shift from asylum law to foreigners' law and the attribution of deservingness based on performance rather than vulnerability (cf. Chauvin, Garcés-Mascareñas, and Kraler 2013). Such conditions and conditionalities of deservingness are strongly shaped by the neoliberal

integration imperative and its impacts on the reception conditions which refugees confront in Germany and Switzerland. The integration imperative, in conjunction with a precarious legal status, are important structuring forces of peoples' everyday lives.

While their arrival in Germany or Switzerland generally saves refugees from exposure to physical violence or the threat thereof as experienced in war-torn contexts', it does not set an end to experiences of violence in a broader sense. We have shown how the pressure deriving from a precarious legal status, looming deportability (De Genova 2002) and integration imperatives produce conditions of structural violence. Clinging on to the idea of a continuum of violence, we see how experiences of structural violence promote symbolic and thus even more subtle articulations of violence. The analysis of our interview data clearly shows how our research participants naturalise structural violence resulting from their exposure to precarity and concomitant integration imperatives. We demonstrate how participants feel forced to not only make efforts to comply with the given requirements but also accept and reproduce them as a yardstick for assessing their own performance in the receiving country and the performance of others who find themselves in similar situations. In such instances, the dominated apply the very social categories that are imposed on them by the dominant and thus become complicit in the reproduction of social inequalities (see Bourdieu 2000).

However, whereas Bourdieu (2000) defines symbolic violence as unconsciously lived and thus co-constituted by those subjected to it, we also discern elements of resistance in the way our participants claim deservingness by underlining their compliance with given requirements. In this regard, our findings correspond to Hasselberg's (2016) reflections on compliance as a form of resistance. Our participants certainly are not mere victims of the violence they experience as integral part of their daily lives. Regardless of their restrictive living conditions, they exercise agency by countering dominant representations of the undeserving, fortune-seeking refugee (Mainwaring 2016) with their own views and claims. This however, has no transformative effect on the unspoken perpetuation and reproduction of social inequalities. Ironically, experiences of structural and symbolic violence lead participants to unwillingly contribute to reproducing structural violence.

What we learn from our analyses is that integration measures are effective in the sense that they promote the 'disciplining of good citizens' in terms of what people do and feel obliged to do and in terms of how they perceive and judge themselves and others. Ironically, it remains unclear if people are ultimately rewarded for their efforts. Deportations to Afghanistan continue to take place, especially in Germany and reports in critical but also in mainstream media outlets often describe deportees as 'well-integrated' and 'deserving' if they report on individual cases. In the end, it is street-level bureaucrats who assess individual performance and who make decisions based on these assessments, which can be and often are arbitrary (Eule et al. 2018). Employing the continuum of violence as an analytical entry point adds important facets to our understanding of the effects contemporary asylum governance has on its subjects. Although it is one of the principal aims of asylum legislation to protect people from the risk of and exposure to violence in terms of persecution and physical harm, our study shows that the way asylum legislation is employed and transformed can also contribute to producing forms of violence. The latter do not leave physical imprints but nevertheless cause harm. In addition to helping us specify causes and effects of experienced violence, our findings also illuminate how those affected by structural and symbolic violence are pushed into a situation in which they unknowingly and unwillingly contribute to upholding precarity as a central instrument and effect of contemporary asylum governance.

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