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Migrant Smuggling, Reasons for Fleeing, and Uses of Asylum Capital among Afghan Asylum Seekers in Sweden

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In 2015 Afghans were the second largest group of asylum seekers in Sweden (and Europe). In this article, I analyze interviews conducted in early 2017 in Scania County with six adult male Afghan asylum seekers, an executive officer at the Swedish Migration Agency, the head of a private asylum seeker camp, and a voluntary worker. I show how the asylum seekers made their way to Sweden not so much through a pre-meditated choice, but by the combined effect of a worsened security situation in Afghanistan since the 2014 withdrawal of foreign troops, increasingly harsh measures against Afghans in Iran and Pakistan, and the migrant smuggling industry. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, I then focus on practices surrounding the interviewed Afghans in the time encompassing their arrival, asylum application, and waiting for a decision in a privately run asylum seeker camp. I introduce the concept of asylum capital as a means to spell out the opportunities and constraints for being granted asylum in Sweden as an Afghan.

Keywords:
Afghan asylum seekers, the right to asylum, Swedish asylum policy, private asylum seeker housing, voluntary associations, asylum capital, migrant smuggling

INTRODUCTION

Afghans are, since 2015, the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Sweden (and Europe).[1] They were the single largest group of refugees in the world between 1980 and 2012, when Syrians rose to first place on that tragic list (Crews 2015, 271). In this article I draw on nine interviews conducted in early 2017 in order to shed light on three crucial but contentious dimensions of Afghan asylumhood in Sweden today: migrant smuggling, the asylum seekers' reasons for fleeing Afghanistan, and the constraints and opportunities for being granted asylum as an Afghan.

There are three reasons for bringing these three dimensions together. First, they capture a perspective "from below" (Thompson 1963; Lüdtke 1995), that of the interviewed asylum seekers. If we are to understand asylumhood from the asylum seekers' perspective, we have to "follow the lights of their own rationality, honed by experience" (Lüdtke 1995, 21-22). Simply put, the Afghan asylum seekers narrated their asylumhood in relation to their experiences of being smuggled, their reasons for fleeing, and their experiences of legal and institutional conditions not of their own choosing. Second, these dimensions provide ample space for studying those "from above," and how they interact with asylum seekers. In this case, those from above are an officer from the Migration Agency, the head of a private asylum seeker camp, and a voluntary worker – all of whom partake in practices that either constrain or enable, or both, Afghans to obtain asylum in Sweden. Third, highlighting these three dimensions in this manner is intended as a critique of the standard way in which asylumhood is understood by the state and humanitarian law – namely, as a strictly legal system premised on international human rights law as applied within national asylum law, where only those human rights violations recognized by the law count as legitimate grounds of asylum, while other equally damaging deprivations of human rights do not.

In section 2 I give an overview of the literature on Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Section 3 briefly discusses the methodology of this study and provides social profiles of the interviewees. In section 4 I examine why the six interviewed Afghans left their country and how they were able to make their way to Sweden while persevering through numerous hardships. I show that their flight was prompted not so much by a pre-meditated individual choice, but by the combined effect of a worsened security condition in Afghanistan, increasingly harsh measures against Afghans in Iran and Pakistan, and hardened border controls in the EU, which ironically opened the door to Western Europe for the migrant smuggling industry. [2]

Section 5 presents the key arguments of this article. It introduces the concept of asylum capital, which draws on Pierre Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu 1977) as a means to conceptualize and explain the opportunities and constraints for being granted asylum as an Afghan in Sweden in the current historical conjuncture, characterized by the privatization of migration services (Menz 2013) and restrictionist laws premised on national security discourses (Skodo 2017b). By asylum capital I mean those experiences of human rights violations, cultural and social skills (or social and cultural capital), dispositions, narratives, and documents recognized by a state migration agency – according to the historically malleable norms, rules, and practices governing the field of migration – as sufficient for the granting of refugee status determination or subsidiary protection. Rather than detailing this concept theoretically, I use it to elucidate the interviews that I conducted with six Afghan asylum seekers, an executive officer at the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket), a voluntary worker, and the head of a private asylum seeker camp. All the interviewees interacted with each other, directly or indirectly, in or through an asylum seeker camp in a small Scanian town.

I argue that a successful asylum application depends on the possession of experiences, narratives, skills, and so on, that are recognized by the Migration Agency as asylum capital, and that such recognized asylum capital is shaped by a variety of preferences, assumptions, and policies that strongly disfavor Afghans. Moreover, I argue that the lack of established Afghan networks and the social and cultural capital of well-off asylum seekers has made it difficult for Afghans to perceive what counts as asylum capital in the eyes of the Migration Agency, leading the Afghans to produce narratives of experience that the Migration Agency deems as "counterfeit" asylum capital. Finally, I argue that there are opportunities, albeit limited, for the Afghans to either acquire asylum capital, or convert their already acquired social and cultural capital into asylum capital, through the help of the voluntary worker and the camp manager.

1 41,564 Afghans, mostly single men and unaccompanied male children, sought refuge in Sweden in the latter half of 2015. The Migration Agency received a record 162,877 asylum applications in that year (Migrationsverket 2016). With its roughly 54,000 applicants, Scania was the largest receiving county (SOU 2017:2, 16). Less than 50% of all processed Afghan asylum applications are successful (Skodo 2017a).

2 It also created a legal structure which brought to life the view of Afghan asylum seekers as "illegal migrants" (Schuster 2011).

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

There is certainly no lack of research on Afghan refugees, but most studies have focused on Afghan refugees in Pakistan (e.g. Shahrani 1995; Anderson and Dupree 1990; Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1988; Monsutti 2005). Although this research has revealed the political, social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Afghan refugehood in Pakistan, occasionally it has lionized Afghans as "refugee warriors" who "voted with their feet" against the Soviet occupation (Shahrani 1995). This empirically questionable description (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1988) dovetails a broader problem in the research on Afghans from the 1980s and the 1990s: the assumption that the Afghan refugee problem was essentially solved in Pakistan, a country that welcomed its Muslim brethren and fellow Pashtuns in the North West Frontier Province with open arms and culturally sensitive help. Yet, Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont (1988) have shown that Pakistani authorities had, at best, mixed motives and policies toward the Afghans. Pakistani refugee policies were governed, as the situation dictated, by Islamic rhetoric, national interest, security concerns, or pragmatic politics. The focus on Pakistan is understandable – after all, the majority of Afghan refugees are to be found there – but surely there is a benefit in studying Afghans who made their way to the West as well.

The studies on displaced Afghans in the West are small but growing (e.g. Lipson and Omidian 1996; Schuster 2011; Stilwell 2003; Dimitriadi 2017). Given their presence in countries like Australia, the United States, Germany, Greece, and Sweden since the Cold War, a focus on Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the West can tease out broader patterns in the global, regional, national, and local history and sociology of the right to asylum and refugee rights. As Schuster (2011), for example, has shown in her study on Afghan asylum seekers in Paris, studying Afghans can reveal much about the dynamics of EU asylum law. And, to take one more example, Dimitriadi (2017) has demonstrated in her study on Afghans in Greece that Afghans provide an excellent case study for unpacking the logic of detention. Although these studies provide useful analyses and insights, there is clearly a need for more research on this group. In this study I contribute to this literature by focusing the three dimensions of Afghan asylumhood mentioned above.

METHODOLOGY AND BRIEF SOCIAL PROFILES OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Following the historian Peter Gatrell (2013) and Bourdieu (1977), the methodological assumption of this study is that asylumhood and refugehood is constituted in multiple and overlapping fields (or what Gatrell calls "regimes") by multiple and interacting agents who interpret, apply, contest, and negotiate doctrines, laws, and policies at a state, inter-state, and non-state level. Agents do so against the background of unequally distributed possession of various types of capital, which allows them to be more or less successful in their applications, contestations, and negotiations. Here I focus on the interpretations, applications, contestations, and negotiations of doctrines and policies of asylum as they play out at the private asylum seeker camp between the agents mentioned in the introduction. As noted above, this study is based on nine interviews that I conducted in early 2017. All interviews were semi-structured according to a protocol with open-ended questions revolving around themes tailored to role of the interviewee in the field of migration as it relates to the Afghan asylum seekers in the camp.

In what follows I provide, where available, information on interviewees' ethnicity, gender, province of origin, age, educational level, occupation, marital status, stated ground for asylum, time of entry to Sweden, the place and time of interview, and the language of the interview.[3]

• **Ehsanullah.** Ethnicity: Pashtun. Gender: Male. Province of origin: Helmand. Age: Early twenties. Education: None. Occupation: Small-scale farmer and street vendor (Afghanistan). Marital status: Single. Stated ground for asylum: Persecuted by the Taliban. Time of entry: September, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, February 3, 2017. Language of interview: English.

• **Ilhan.** Ethnicity: Arab (in Afghanistan, Arabs are a small Dari-speaking group that are ethnically unrelated to the Arabs of the Middle East). Gender: Male. Province of origin: Balkh. Age: Mid-twenties. Education: Two years in elementary school. Occupation: Taxi driver (Afghanistan). Marital status: Married with undisclosed number of children (wife and children did not accompany him to Sweden). Stated ground for asylum: Persecuted by the Taliban. Time of entry: September, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, January 26, 2017. Language of interview: Dari (interpreter).

• **Jawid.** Ethnicity: Hazara. Gender: Male. Province of origin: Ghazni. Age: Early thirties. Education: High school. Occupation: Officer in the Afghan National Army. Marital status: Married with

3 To ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees, I have fictionalized all names and chosen not to disclose the location of the camp or the name of the voluntary association in which the interviewed voluntary worker is a member.

undisclosed number of children (wife and children did not accompany him to Sweden). Stated ground for asylum: Persecuted by fellow army officers after refusing to partake in corruption. Time of entry: September, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, January 25, 2017. Language of interview: Dari (interpreter).

• **Mansoor.** Ethnicity: Tajik. Gender: Male. Province of origin: Herat. Age: Late teens. Education: One year in elementary school. Occupation: Construction worker (Iran). Marital status: Single. Stated ground for asylum: Persecuted by an individual of another family with which Mansoor's family had been in conflict. Time of entry: November, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, January 24, 2017. Language of interview: Swedish.

• **Mohammad.** Ethnicity: Hazara. Gender: Male. Province of origin: Balkh. Age: Early thirties. Educational level: Two years of higher education. Occupation: Teacher (Afghanistan). Marital status: Married with three children (wife and family accompanied him to Sweden). Stated ground for asylum: Societal discrimination on account of his ethnicity. Time of entry: September, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, January 24, 2017. Language of interview: Swedish.

• **Nadir.** Ethnicity: Tajik. Gender: Male. Province of origin: Kunduz. Age: Early twenties. Education: None. Occupation: Small-scale farmer (Afghanistan). Marital status: Single. Stated ground for asylum: Persecution by the Taliban. Time of entry: December, 2015. Place and time of interview: Scania, January 24, 2017. Language of interview: English.

• **Martina.** Age: Undisclosed. Gender: Female. Education: Undisclosed. Occupation: Site manager of a privately run camp for asylum seekers in Scania. Place and time of interview: Scania, February 3, 2017. Language of interview: Swedish.

• **Mona.** Age: Undisclosed. Gender: Female. Education: Undisclosed. Occupation: Executive officer at the Swedish Migration Agency – southern region (responsible for overseeing Martina's camp). Place and time of interview: Scania, January 27, 2017. Language of interview: Swedish.

• **Birgitta.** Age: Undisclosed. Gender: Female: Education: University degree. Occupation: Retired IT worker. Birgitta volunteers as a Swedish language teacher in the camp run by Martina. Place and time of interview: January 26, 2017. Language of interview: Swedish.

SMUGGLED TO "EUROPA"

THE IMPORTANCE OF SMUGGLING NETWORKS

> If this [Hungary] is Europa, I'll stay here, what can I do. He [the smuggler] said: no this is not Europa. They made a group, and said, follow this guy [another smuggler]. When he says here you stay, then he'll leave you. We travelled by train, car, [we] walk, [we took the] train, car, [we travelled through] good cities [in Austria and Germany]. I came to Malmö by train, Here the guy [the smuggler] said: this is your place. See you, bye (Interview with Ehsanullah).

Like the other five Afghan interviewees, Ehsanullah told me about his harrowing journey to "Europa" and the maze of events that led to his flight from Afghanistan. The Migration Agency has recently stated that the asylum seekers who arrived in 2015 "moved through different countries [in the Schengen area] and chose the country in which they would seek asylum" (SOU 2017:2, 291). This statement lacks an empirical foundation while it insinuates an image of asylum seekers as having the luxury, information, and intention to pick and choose the best country of asylum. It fits neoclassical economic theory of migration, which sees migrants as utility-maximizers who, against the background of sufficient knowledge of opportunities and constraints, make a decision to migrate to a specific country because it would maximize their well-being. This theory has rightly been criticized as being individualistic, ahistorical, and founded on spurious psychological assumptions about human decision-making (Castles and Miller 2009, 22).

Three of the interviewed Afghans learned that Sweden was a country at the time their smuggler told them that they had reached their final destination, while three learned about it haphazardly in one of the transit countries. Ilhan related: "When I came to Turkey, one family told me, we're going to Europa, they don't have war, nobody will kill you. I told the smuggler that's where I want to go. I knew the name Europa, Europa was one country. Now I know how many countries there are in Europa" (Interview with Ilhan). Jawid explained: "The smuggler in Iran divided us in two groups. When our group came to Sweden, they said, this is Sweden" (Interview with Jawid). Nadir had learned about Sweden when he met a fellow Afghan at Victoria Square in Athens, which is known as a gathering place for Afghan asylum seekers (Gaglias and Seferoglou 2015). Nadir described how he aimlessly learned about Sweden:

> I met a very kind Afghan person by the name of Naim. He had a brother in Sweden. He was living in Jönköping [in Småland County]. He found

> a phone for me so I could call my father. My father was very happy, and he was crying [when I called him]. It was a long time [since I had spoken to him]. He told me to just be safe. Naim said [I] can come with [him] to Sweden if [I] want. So I went with him. He was very kind. In Hungary, he told his smuggler that I was coming with him. The smuggler was angry that Naim wanted to take me with him. I had about $300. Eventually the smuggler said it was okay (Interview with Nadir).

Mansoor discovered Sweden by researching potential countries after he arrived to Greece and was able to access the Internet. He liked Sweden because he read somewhere that it offered freedom of religion. Mohammad said that he learned about Sweden through a friend who had come before him.

Three of the interviewees, then, ended their journey in Sweden because they were told to do so by their smuggler. Smuggling networks are a lucrative part of the migration industry – one interviewee that was not included in this study told me he paid $5000, and he reckons that his fellow Afghan asylum seekers paid around the same amount. Smuggling networks exploit the opening created between an effectively managed border control, both nationally and supranationally (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2015; Mungianu 2013), on the one hand, and the neoliberal privatization and deregulation of the public sector, on the other (Menz 2013). Indeed, major neoliberal magazines like *The Economist* have hailed the informal migration economy as more in keeping with the economic times than regulated economic activities (D.K. 2015).

Smuggling networks are essential in determining the routes Afghan asylum seekers take and the countries in which they end up. Business was good in 2015 since the combined effect of the worst fighting season in Afghanistan since 2009 in terms of casualties (Crews 2015, 289), mass deportations of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran (Human Rights Watch 2017), and diminished legal paths to enter western countries all led to the flight of a large number of Afghans beyond the region even as Europe closed the door to legally exercising Afghans' right to seek asylum. Through various techniques employed in the calculus of profit – such as bribing border patrol guards or police officers, knowing about unpatrolled border crossing points, abandoning asylum seekers if they risked exposing a smuggler, knowing about countries with the most "generous" asylum policies, and having an effective payment system – smugglers provided the transnational network which brought the interviewees from Afghanistan or Iran to Sweden.

Ehsanullah explained that there was no personal trust involved between a smuggler and an asylum seeker or whoever was paying for the safe arrival of an asylum seeker. It worked like a contract regulating the provision of a service, but one that guarantees neither the safety of the client asylum seeker nor adherence to the initial terms of the contract. It is a voluntary contract for those who have no other choice. Ehsanullah explained the contract his father made with the smugglers:

> This is the way it worked. There was no option. They [the smugglers] say, I need this money and I send your son to Europa. When he arrives to Europa, you give me money. But they have to see money first. You are smuggler, I am person [paying]. There's a third person. I phone, okay I'm here, then they give the money to the third person (Interview with Ehsanullah).

Nadir described how each smuggler – from the driver to the person selling food and water along resting points – demanded payment upon taking charge of an asylum seeker: "In every place when they change people, they take some money from everyone because of the driving, although they have no right to take money, because my father had already paid" (Interview with Nadir). Nadir felt that different smugglers "were selling people to another" (Interview with Nadir).

Arjomand (2016) has interviewed Afghan smugglers in Turkey and his description of the smuggling system broadly matches Ehsanullah's and Nadir's accounts. A well-connected chain of smugglers in different countries from Afghanistan to the Balkans would hand groups of asylum seekers to one another along an established route. For additional payments along the route, asylum seekers would agree with the smuggler on a price "and then give or have the money transferred via the *hawala* system [an informal money transfer system] to an Afghan *sarraf* [a money exchanger] at a call shop or other front. The sarraf would hold the money and give the migrant a numerical code to memorise. Upon arrival at their destination, the migrant would call [the smuggler] or a subordinate and tell them the code, which would allow them to collect the money from the sarraf" (Arjomand 2016).

REASONS FOR FLEEING AFGHANISTAN

If the final destination became apparent at a very late stage for the interviewed Afghan asylum seekers, they were clear early on about why they had to flee Afghanistan. The Taliban directly targeted Ilhan, Ehsanullah, and Nadir. Jawid, who was stationed in Helmand as an officer in the Afghan National Army, had received repeated threats to his life by fellow officers after refusing to partake in widespread corruption schemes centred on defense procurement. Mohammad pointed to the extreme discrimination he experienced as a Hazara. Apart from Jawid who was a relatively well-salaried army officer, all other

interviewees worked precarious jobs: street vending, taxi driving, construction work, or small-scale farming. Yet regardless of their class status, none of the interviewees expressed a pronounced disaffection with their economic situation. Ehsanullah and Nadir both said that although they did not have much money, they were overall happy as long as they were safe with their families. It was only when they experienced direct threats and violence (Ehsanullah, Ilhan, Nadir, Jawid, Mohammad), or when they were no longer able to work even in the informal Iranian labor market (Mansoor), that flight became a necessity.

As discussed earlier, neither internal nor regional migration was an option for a variety of concerted reasons. Ilhan, whose father worked for the Karzai government and was killed by the Taliban, had survived a grenade attack and managed to flee with his family from his home village to Mazar-i-Sharif. In Mazar-i-Sharif he asked government officials that he knew to help him. One night in Mazar-i-Sharif two armed people on motorcycles came to Ilhan's house and threatened him. "Afterward I was so afraid. The government didn't help me. I took my cab and left. I went to Kabul, then Kandahar, Helmand, Nimruz, then Iran" (Interview with Ilhan). Ilhan sent back his wife and children to live with his father-in-law in their home village, thinking that they would not be targeted. In Iran, he managed to find work with his brother for around a year, before he was caught by the police and deported back to Afghanistan. With internal or regional flight no longer an option, he was able to get to Sweden with the help of smugglers. After his arrival, he learned that his wife had been beaten and threatened by the Taliban, and told her to flee to Ghowr province. Mansoor also described the harsh environment in Iran: "In Iran, when they arrest undocumented Afghan, they deport you directly. They discriminate Afghans a lot. […] You don't have any social rights in Iran. […] If they catch us, they can also say, you're going to go to [war in] Syria" (Interview with Manssor). As an army officer unwilling to partake in corruption, Jawid could not leave the army since the Taliban "know everyone, they know everything," and they even have access to biometric government data (Interview with Jawid). The Taliban had already warned Jawid that he should not join the army.

Ehsanullah, who had been a farmer in Helmand, had fled with his family to Kandahar after a bomb (which seems to have been a stray in a battle between the Afghan army and the Taliban) hit his home and seriously injured him. In Kandahar, Ehsanullah earned a living as a street vendor and by buying and selling electronics for a big electronics store. He also took private English lessons. At some point, Ehsanullah began receiving threats both in writing and through his employer:

> Somebody sent a paper to my father saying I'll kill your son, he works with the government [and the US], you're all non-Muslims. We were all afraid. My father spoke to my boss, but he said leave it, your son has a good job and a bike, the people are just jealous of him. My father said, you are a big man, and you know everything. Two or three weeks later, one night I was at a friend's house. Four people came to my home. Three inside, one outside. They had a gun and an Afghan langota (Afghan turban). They beat my mom, my sister, my baba [father]. My father was ill. They asked where their son was. My mother was crying. We will kill your son and then all of you, they said. (Interview with Ehsanullah)

After this episode, Ehsanullah's father paid a smuggler to take Ehsanullah to safety. The Taliban had already kidnapped Nadir's brother. He remembers the day they came for him:

> They spoke in Pashto [the Taliban are predominantly Pashtuns]. You have to do jihad, you have to take the cause of Islam [they said]. I saw that the village elder was with them. They were pushing me to come with them. My father fell down to their feet and said that you have taken my other child, I am not able to live my life. I tried to pick him up. They were very harsh. They tried to hit my father, and they had a gun. It's okay to show you? [He shows me a deep scar on his hand] (Interview with Nadir). .

The Taliban were convinced by the village elder to come back in the evening for Nadir. Before they could do so, his father told him to flee Afghanistan. "My father came to me and said I have to go away. I was crying. I didn't want to go. My father was so weak. And my sisters and brothers, my father wasn't able to protect them. But I was also not able to protect myself and my family" (Interview with Nadir).

All of the interviewees were smuggled through the Balkan route. All experienced some form of deeply traumatic events, such as taking fire by the Iranian army, being lost in forests for over a week with no food or water, suffering repeated hunger and thirst, watching fellow asylum seekers being left behind by smugglers because they were too old or sick, seeing people drown in the waters between Turkey and Greece, and suffering repeated physical abuse and threats from smugglers.

THE ABSENCE OF AFGHAN NETWORKS IN SWEDEN

Although Afghanistan has seen the creation of seemingly endless numbers of refugees and asylum seekers since the late 1970s, in Sweden Afghans have not established those transnational familial

and economic networks that recent transnational theory argues is foundational to modern migration (Castles and Miller 2009, 30-33). Moreover, as Cecilia Menjívar has shown in the case of Salvadorans in San Francisco, class and gender can render even an established network of family, friends, employers, and social workers inutile in the search for a safe life. Lack of money effectively bars poor migrants from using opportunities offered within the network, while gender norms can prevent a woman from seeking help from males outside the immediate family (Menjívar 2000). Most Afghans in Sweden are single males who lived in poverty or with very limited means. Even though, as in Mohammad's case, there may have been a network in Sweden to provide an opportunity for entering Sweden, his poverty ensured that he could use those opportunities only to the extent that an unemployed person can buy an expensive house after he or she hears from a friend or family member that it is being sold well below market value.

The housing market and migration networks both follow what Bourdieu (1977) called the logic of practice, that is, the situational norms, rules, dispositions, and types of capital inherent to specific fields of practice (such as migration, education, or academic research) which set the boundaries for successful and unsuccessful moves within the field. The logic of practice in a certain field becomes practically meaningful for agents within that field only once they possess a minimum quantity of the right kind of capital – for example, enough money to put down a down payment on a house, enough money to pay for legal services or a smuggler, or enough cultural and social capital to procure a visitor visa to enter a western country and then seek asylum.

USES OF ASYLUM CAPITAL

THE MIGRATION HABITUS AND ASYLUM CAPITAL

Once they arrived to Sweden (at some point between August and September 2015) all six of the interviewed asylum seekers were put up in a hotel in Malmö for a few nights before being moved to temporary housing for asylum seekers (*anläggningsboende tillfälligt*), better known in everyday life as a "camp." Some had been in the privately run camp where I interviewed them for close to a year, while others had been moved there more recently from other camps. This particular camp in a small Scanian town, together with hundreds of others, closed down during the first half of 2017. These closures were preceded by a drastic drop in the number of asylum seekers as a result of the internal border controls that were introduced in November 2015. When I left them, five of the interviewees were still waiting for a decision on their asylum application while one, Jawid, had received a negative decision and was in the process of appealing. Mona told me that roughly five percent of those who appeal their rejected asylum application see the initial decision overturned. Only a quarter of adult male Afghans were granted asylum in the first seven months of 2016 (Skodo 2017a).[4]

If the interviewees were at the mercy of smugglers when making their way to safety in Sweden, once temporarily settled in the camp their asylum applications and everyday life came to be structured through their interactions with officers from the Migration Agency (including Mona), the head of the asylum camp (Martina), and voluntary workers (including Birgitta, the Swedish language teacher).

The Afghan asylum seekers were now in a position where the habitus of migration governance, to speak in Bourdieu's useful terms, was made up of an overarching state practice which stands for something resembling a national habitus (Johansson 2005; Le Hir 2014). The habitus, Bourdieu reminds us, is a fuzzy set of behavioral dispositions, on the group and individual level, which "makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes [from individual to individual in the same group in old and new fields, interactions, and situations] permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems, and thanks to unceasing corrections of the results obtained, dialectically produced by those results" (Bourdieu 1977, 83).

The national habitus has a privileged position to determine the logic of all social fields within the nation state – such as education and migration – and produce or recognize what counts or does not count as capital in each field (a diploma or permanent resident status, for example); how to legitimately acquire capital (through state-licensed schools or an asylum investigation, for example); and how to convert one form of capital into another (how to use one's diploma to get a job or which narrative form one's fear of persecution must take for one to be granted asylum).

However, the national habitus is diversified, enacted, contested, and negotiated through various non-exhaustive agencies and fields in various non-exhaustive situations. In the case of the Swedish migration field, the habitus is internally diversified through the Ministry of Justice, the Migration Agency, counties, and municipalities. Externally it is diversified through state contracts with private asylum housing companies, made possible with the 1992 Public Procurement Act (Lagen om offentlig upphandling 1992), and a state governance policy of including civil society, non-market, and non-state organizations working for the "public good"

4 In my last communication with the asylum seekers, in September 2017, I learned that Ehsanullah's application and first appeal had both been rejected.

(SOU 2017:2, 276).

In the camp, Birgitta and Martina were disposed to see national asylum laws and regulations as providing an overarching set of limiting criteria, requirements, and behaviors for asylum seekers, as well as conferring value on asylum seekers' accounts and narratives of persecution as capital for a successful asylum application. To be sure, in the eyes of Birgitta and Martina specific applications of laws could be creatively interpreted or contested, specific laws could be seen as unjust or unfair, but I did not observe any one of them questioning or breaking the orthodoxy or orthopraxis of the habitus. This acceptance of the habitus as orthodoxy (rather than doxa) allows for the "regulated invention" within, or even "regulated revolutions" of, the habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 82). Even Mona was aware of this regulated inventiveness, this limited space for negotiation and contestation between different fields, allowed by the national regulatory framework that she is charged with enforcing. This migration habitus, then, was inherent to the interactions between Mona, Birgitta, Martina, and the asylum seekers.

COMPARING THE ASYLUM CAPITAL OF AFGHANS AND SYRIANS

> As more and more Syrians were being granted asylum, more and more Afghans were being denied. We're talking August-September 2016. (Interview with Martina).

Regulated inventiveness or deviation within the bounds of Swedish asylum law and regulations have allowed, after 2012, Syrians to be processed faster than Afghans. It has also meant that the asylum capital of Syrians has been recognized seemingly without question (a similar logic seems to be at work in Germany as well: Vo 2016). Mona sought to explain this state of affairs by pointing to "ministerial rule" (*ministerstyre*), which means that the government has unofficially influenced an administrative branch to apply the law in a certain way, namely to give Syrians preferential treatment. According to Mona, the government is only interested in seeing results – fast decisions on asylum applications – without regard for methods and human cost. "The Migration Agency has considered this and said okay this'll mean that many Afghans and Iraqis will have to wait. We'll first take those that are easiest. […] All Syrians, or stateless people from Syria, have gone through a simplified asylum investigation, which simplifies making a decision" (Interview with Mona). The Migration Agency has developed practices that do not always cohere with those of the government, and Mona has in turn expressed personal frustration over seeing asylum seekers sometimes being treated like commodities.

Martina and Birgitta, for their part, voiced stronger critiques of the Migration Agency's differential treatment of Syrians and Afghans, where, in their eyes, Syrians have sailed through the asylum process while Afghans have been placed in a protracted asylum limbo and ran a high risk of being deported.

According to Mona, apart from ministerial rule working for them, the Syrians seemed better equipped than Afghans to navigate the asylum process. Implicitly, she seemed to be saying that Syrians possess more recognized asylum capital than Afghans, which in this case means that Afghans often do not speak English, and they do not publicize the moral indignity of their situation to attract voluntary associations and journalists that can advocate on their behalf, that is, "convert" this moral and cultural capital into asylum capital recognized by the Migration Agency. "I don't think that the volunteer workers do this systematically, I think there's a general shyness among Afghans," Mona suggested. She added: "With volunteer workers, you have to shout and yell, and especially those that speak English have done well here" (Interview with Mona).

Martina entertained the idea of Afghans as passive asylum seekers – as too humble, too shy, too polite – as well. She reflected on the Afghans' moral disposition and self-presentation and the way these traits present them in the eyes of the Migration Agency as lacking asylum capital:

> Afghans are grateful, they're kind. Their problem, as I see it, is that they lack language skills. Unless you have an interpreter it's hard, and it's hard to find Dari interpreters. When you come to the Migration Agency for the most important interview of your life, and a lot of Afghans are ignorant in the educational sense, they're very subdued; they're really afraid and uncertain, more uncertain than Syrians. A Syrian comes here tells me he's a doctor, and is really self-confident. An Afghan wouldn't even tell you he's a doctor. If that person gets a bad interpreter, and is too afraid and kind to say he's a bad interpreter, now that's a hell of a problem. (Interview with Martina).

Whatever their differences, Mona, Martina, and Birgitta all implied that the passive Afghan asylum seeker is in a weak position to traverse the asylum landscape and be granted asylum. This ethnicized thinking about asylum seekers expressed by Martina, Mona, and Birgitta was simultaneously taken for granted and criticized for being paradoxical and problematic. In other words, this kind of regulated critique bears the marks of orthodoxy.

Birgitta, a self-professed liberal who believes in the philosophy of self-help, was acutely aware of the fact that Afghans, under such conditions, need to acquire asylum capital to increase their chances of

staying in Sweden. She explained that this capital was comprised of having demonstrated knowledge of Swedish, showing that you are employable, and acting strategically in the new restrictionist environment:

> I tell them, you have much better chance of staying if you learn Swedish. One of them, he just quit after hearing about the new [restrictionist] laws [of 2016]. And he'd learned so much. I tell him, it's now you put in the extra work. Because if you get a job, and you can, then you can earn the amount required by the Migration Agency, and then you can stay. Just read on the website, you know how to read Swedish now! He was granted temporary status, for three years. I use this, I tell them [the Migration Agency], he's been diligent, he knows Swedish, he can speak, joke. He's worked hard to get a job, to adapt. He's had an internship. (Interview with Birgitta).

Birgitta was able to use her knowledge of the most recent asylum laws and her connections in the Migration Agency in helping this particular asylum seeker convert his acquired cultural and economic capital into asylum capital. Birgitta and Martina took pride in being personally familiar with officers from the Migration Agency, as well as being friendly with each other, in their work with Afghan asylum seekers. Although Martina could not directly interfere with an asylum seeker's application, she could, and did, in informal conversations with Birgitta happen to mention that one of her asylum seeker students might be having some problems, without mentioning any details. Birgitta could, and did, pick up on this coded message and simply turn to the asylum seeker to find out which problem he or she was experiencing before proceeding to help through her voluntary association or personal engagement.

USES OF ASYLUM CAPITAL AMONG AFGHANS

It is safe to say that the interviewed Afghan asylum seekers were only vaguely aware of what, in the eyes of the Migration Agency, counts as asylum capital and how to acquire it. But, importantly, there were no cultural or religious barriers – such as refusing to take help from Martina and Birgitta because they were women, or because Martina and Birgitta were outspoken about the "backwardness" of religious values – to forging new social relationships that could help their asylum applications. As Monsutti has shown, although male Afghans in Afghanistan are often bound by kinship norms (such as the pashtunwali among Pashtuns), they are equally keen on creating pragmatic ties with members of other ethnicities and tribes to evade the limits imposed by kinship solidarity norms on furthering individual economic interests. (Monsutti 2013). Economic liberalism works here not in opposition to a traditional egalitarian-collective society but within it, and is imprinted in a structurally similar manner in Afghan myths of tribal origin. In these myths, tribes are "seen as huge agnatic kinship groups; each tribal segment is supposed to stem from a common male ancestor, himself related to the ancestors of collateral branches" (Monsutti 2013, 153). These collateral branches can be creatively extended situationally and so this logic does not exhaust the possible alliances or conflicts between and within Afghan families, which in turn help reshape Afghan genealogies. Monsutti notes that this logic is at work among Afghan refugees in Pakistan as well. In the 1990s he observed how an Afghan from Herat in Quetta had married three of his six daughters to relatives at home and three to men outside of kith and kin in order to diversify the family's social capital for future needs of cooperation or conflict. (Monsutti 2013, 151).

But being in Sweden where they could not rely on pre-established networks and information from their close relatives and friends, the Afghan asylum seekers are forced to rely on the Migration Agency, rumors, risky assumptions based on uncertain knowledge, and in some cases knowledge provided by voluntary workers, for their determination of what counts as asylum capital. Unsurprisingly this has led to some instances of acquiring what the Migration Agency can deem to be "counterfeit" capital – such as converting to Christianity, which I observed in two cases (Jawid and Ilhan).

Moreover, being in a situation where the Swedish Migration Agency harbors strong misgivings on whether Afghanistan is even in a condition that causes a well-founded fear of persecution (according to the 1951 Refugee Convention) renders Afghan asylum seekers' claims inherently dubious. In such an instance, the state agency that determines what counts as asylum capital will have developed an orthodoxy that questions how someone could possibly need asylum when their country or part of the country is safe from persecution.

The Afghan asylum seekers did not seem to pick up on this misrecognition on the Migration Agency's part. Jawid could hardly understand why his application was rejected, because he clearly explained how both army officers and the Taliban threatened his life, forcing him to flee. "Migrationsverket told me that they interrogated and found that Hazaras easily can find work in the army. I didn't say that Hazaras don't find work in the army easily, I said that I had a problem with them" (Interview with Jawid). It does not seem like the Migration Agency was willing to explore whether Jawid's asylum capital had value for categories other than refugee status determination (such as "in alternative need of protection," *alternativt skyddsbehövande*)

that would allow him to stay in Sweden. Jawid said that they offered him money to voluntarily return to Afghanistan:

> Migrationsverket told me: we'll you give you this money and you go back to Afghanistan. I said no. I don't have money problems. If I go back they give me 30,000 kronor. I don't have a money problem, I have a problem with my life. If I die, what will I do with 30,000 kronor? What will my wife and children do? (Interview with Jawid).

As Johansson (2005, 111-112) has shown, "voluntary" return of asylum seekers, which remains an option even after the granting of asylum in the guise of voluntary repatriation, has been a part of Swedish migration policy since the 1990s. Through informing asylum seekers about their "option" to return and incentivizing them through a one-time financial resettlement contribution, the state hopes to solve the problem of integration for large numbers of asylum seekers who are not considered to be "true" asylum seekers.

This policy affected groups like the Somalis and Bosnians in the 1990s, and has been affecting the Afghans since the 2010s (Bergman 2010, 23-24). In November 2016, Sweden and Afghanistan signed a bilateral memorandum regulating the return of rejected Afghan asylum seekers, by force if necessary, in a "dignified" and "safe" manner in line with human rights law. (Samförståndsavtal 2016, 1). The memorandum states that an individual returnee will receive 30,000 Swedish kronor ($3,665 USD) as a resettlement contribution and that Sweden will help with various resettlement projects in Afghanistan (Samförståndsavtal 2016, 11). This kind of practice follows the policy of humanitarian development and "vicinity" aid (*hjälp i närområdet*), touted by Sweden and other western governments as offering a durable solution to the global refugee problem (Bergin 2016).

Mansoor and Ilhan expressed bafflement over some of the questions and requirements posed by the Migration Agency at his asylum interview. Mansoor said: "There is one problem with all that come here. They [the Migration Agency] say that they want a document from the man who threatened you. But that man will not give you document so that you can take it to Europe. I don't have a document" (Interview with Mansoor). Ilhan recalled one question in particular that he found difficult to answer: "When they killed your father, why did they not kill you? When some people take money from government, it's *haram*, that money is *haram*. They will kill your whole family. You are a *kafir* to them." (Interview with Ilhan). There was a sense in Jawid, Mansoor, and Ilhan that something was not quite right with the questions they were being asked. Their experiences and stories were not being recognized as asylum capital.

CONCLUSION

Two key conclusions can be drawn from the preceding sections. First, the asylum seekers' traumatizing journey to Sweden points to the importance of international, regional, and national politics, and the migration smuggling industry as determinants of forced migration patterns among Afghans. Second, the interviewees experiences of the asylum process reveal an intricate system of dispositions regulating an asylum procedure in which certain national groups, such as Afghans, are structurally disadvantaged but in which they have a limited space for being granted through the acquisition of asylum capital (narratives, experiences, and traits recognized by the Migration Agency as sufficient for the approval of an asylum claim) with the help of voluntary workers who can also help them acquire social, cultural, and economic capital and convert these into asylum capital.

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