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The Management of Refugee Repatriation: How Voluntary are 'Voluntary' Returns from Germany?

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Conflict-induced migration led Germany to welcome over a million people following the "long summer of migration" in 2015. As a consequence, getting asylum in Germany is becoming ever more difficult. Amongst other so-called undeserving economic refugees, the Afghan and Pakistanis are suffering from such a shift in the German asylum regime that aims to restrict migration. Increasingly strict asylum policies frame the right to stay according to an ever-narrowing understanding of forced migration in Germany. While the right to the refuge is increasingly being defined by narrow ideas of deservingness and humanitarianism to seek out deserving political refugees, two forms of removal are simultaneously employed to deter the people considered undeserving economic refugees. These two forms of removal are termed as 'deportations' and 'voluntary repatriations'. Focusing on the latter form of removal, this chapter discusses the voluntariness and sustainability of return to Pakistan by assessing it through three scales; the role of coercion, information, and assistance in "voluntary" return. It starts by questioning contemporary ideas of deservingness when it comes to the right to be mobile, and rather provocatively tries to blur the alleged humanitarian division between two categories of mobile bodies: the so-called deserving political refugee and the underserving economic refugee/migrant. Respectively, the two are differentiated as the victim of various forms of persecution and the seeker of better economic conditions. Then, using ethnographic material and three particular case studies, the chapter takes a critical look at the practices, facilitators, and subjects of "voluntary" assisted returns of rejected asylum seekers in Germany. Questioning this very voluntariness via the three scales, it asks if "voluntary" returns can be sustainable as a mode of repatriation.

Introduction

Two legalized forms of expulsion are at the disposal of any government that wants to send back displaced populations, irregular migrants or other illegalized "undesirables" (Agier, 2011) to "safe countries." Namely, deportations and

"voluntary" repatriations. The discourse on deportations in Germany is fraught with controversy for various contemporary but also specific historical reasons — the German word for deportation '*Abschiebung'* comes with particular historical baggage (Estrin, 2016; Sökefeld, 2019b; Stokes, 2019). Keeping that in mind, as well as the fact that there is ample work addressing the issue of deportations in Germany and elsewhere (see De Genova & Peutz 2010; De Genova 2016; Peutz 2006; Sökefeld, 2019b), this chapter will not address this particular form of removal. Instead, the body of text that follows will be focusing on the "voluntary" returns of rejected asylum seekers.

More and more people are starting to show up at the doorsteps of *Fortress Europe[14]* for various reasons, and according to some estimates, the number of successful entrants will reach 200 million[15] by 2050 (Smith, 2019). For various sociopolitical reasons, some of them defensible but most of them based on unfounded claims[16], the EU (in general), and Germany (in particular) are taking various steps. These steps include an array of arsenal to guard *Fortress Europe*, from the securitization of its physical borders to questionable deterrence techniques employed in the countries of origin and transit (Meany, 2019). Concurrently, based on particular ideas of "deservingness" stricter measures are being taken to control, manage and if necessary then remove[17] those who have somehow made it into the fortress (Sökefeld, 2019b, a). In the policy quarters of Europe and beyond, it is being argued that Europe needs protection against exploitation at the hands of "bogus" asylum seekers and *economic* refugees. A clear difference, it is asserted, needs to be drawn between a *genuine* refugee (henceforth *political* refugee) and a *chancer* migrant (henceforth *economic* refugee) so that the limited capacity to dish out compassion can be effectively employed. Such a vision and form of humanitarianism seems to fuel our collective apathy, even antipathy towards "bogus" asylum seekers, irregular migrants and undocumented citizens today — epitomized in the old German term- *Wirtschaftsflüchtling* 'economic refugee' (Stokes, 2019).

An ever narrowing understanding of a victimized (deserving) *political* refugee and an ever-expanding idea of an exploitative (undeserving) *economic* refugee are simultaneously defining the difference and vision mentioned above. Somewhat provocatively, however, I would like to blur the distinction between the *political* and the *economic refugee* by taking a different approach. Instead of seeing the two through the humanitarian lens, the treatment of the two

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[14] The European Union is a major site for both internal migration and immigration from other parts of the world. The term 'fortress Europe' is sometimes used to refer to the way Europe controls its borders and detains immigrants, as well as to its negative attitudes towards immigration (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2015).

[15] I would like to point out that Smith's (2019) figures and alarmist arguments have been challenged by Anderson (2019).

[16] The rhetoric of the alt-right and ultranationalist parties who claim foreigners are responsible for the exploitation of state support and stealing of the jobs amongst other unfounded claims.

[17] As mentioned above, through deportation or various forms of "voluntary" remigration/return; sometimes also known as assisted voluntary return/repatriation or 'self-deportation'.

categories of people needs to be analyzed through the lens of social responsibility. It should be quickly pointed out that in no way whatsoever does this argument aim to reduce the suffering of a person — *a refugee* — who flees a war, political and religious persecution, or any acute form of violence (Galtung & Fisher, 2013). Nevertheless, some profound questions need to be reflected upon. Should ideas of deservingness[18] be predicated on forms of violence and suffering? Should it be evaluated according to the generalized situation of the country of origin? Where does our collective responsibility start and end? Should we, for example, differentiate between someone who flees from war or acute violence fearing for his life and someone who fears for her life due to economic or structural violence (Farmer, 2006; Galtung & Fisher, 2013) as far as the right to asylum is concerned? While it is reasonably easy to furnish a *yes* to such a question based upon utilitarian[19] ideas of pain and suffering, it is perhaps easier to argue for a *no* using the Kantian notion of the categorical imperative (Driver, 2014; Rohlf, 2018).

In reality, however, such questions rarely make it outside the classrooms of moral philosophy, and political realism seems to be in control when it comes to the topic of migration or refugees. Sökefeld (2019b) for example, shows us how the "politics of deportation" in Germany point out the thinly veiled attempt at curtailing extreme right-wing support. Parties like *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) have gained considerable electoral ground by positioning themselves in radical opposition to the CDU's "open door policy" towards refugees and "economic migrants". Epitomized by the '*willkommenskultur*'[20] attitude and '*Kein mensch ist illegal*'[21] movement the German centrist parties feel that their hospitality towards the alien-other may be alienating people at home. The solution seems to lie in the strict differentiation between the economic migrant and the refugee based on ideas of deservingness and humanitarianism. Here it is worth mentioning that this is a trend that is not unique to the politics of mobility and migration in Germany but resonates with the refugee politics of western Europe since the so-called refugee "crisis". Germany is, however, unique in the sense that it has been in a "permanent state of refugee crisis" as noted by the historian Lauren Stokes. In a recent article Stokes (2019) traces the roots of the current politics of deportations in Germany as far back as the 1950s and 60s. He recounts how in 1965 four hundred people were deported from the Zirndorf camp near Nuremberg on account of being "economic refugees". In the preceding years, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had

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[18] As dictated by current regimes of (im)mobility and humanitarian vision.
[19] Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill would certainly back such a stance.
[20] *Willkommenskultu* is a German term which means "welcoming culture", it expresses the wish that all foreigners and migrant people encountered by these institutions may be accepted and particularly not be exposed to discrimination.
[21] *Kein mensch ist illegal* is an international network of local immigrant and refugee rights advocacy groups. It began as a conference on June 28, 1997, and later developed into a national campaign. Additonlly, more than thirty anti-racist groups present at the conference issued an appeal for greater attention to migrant workers' rights, such as healthcare, education, and housing for migrant workers.

decided to allow, even encourage people from the socialist East to apply for asylum in order to access the labour market in Germany. However, when people were able to acquire a work permit to move out of refugee camps with relative ease, several experts started to raise questions about the asylum procedure. Stokes (2019) quotes the Bavarian Interior Ministry's "foreigner expert" Werner Kanein who at the time complained that the refugee camp had become "a central employment agency for citizens of certain states, and the filing of an application for asylum is only a necessary formal requirement" (p. 33). While the Bavarian Interior Ministry was worried that refugee camps had become "labour recruitment agencies" the neighbors of the Zirndorf camp saw its inhabitants not as a pool of labor but as unwanted criminals in their town. Stokes further noted that the term "economic refugee" appears to have developed around this time. With such competing political interests and demands from the refugee, the development of a new category was inevitable.

Deservingness and Deportability: Cause and Effect

Today, the ideal migrant should be someone who offers excellent human capital to the host nation. Shukla (2016) claims that in practice the demand to be a "good migrant" is even more extreme — which only an outstanding athlete, a scientific savant or an artistic prodigy can fulfill. In such times, a refugee not only gets the short end of the stick but seems to be stuck in a paradox. On the one hand, he or she should be able to scarcely function to even claim asylum (see Ticktin, 2011). On the other hand, he or she should be ready and eager to integrate and not become a burden on the state's welfare system. If a person tries to act out of self-interest or employ his or her human capital, chances are he/she will be marked as an *economic* refugee; someone who "deceitfully tries to blur the distinction between the political and the economic status out of self-interest" (Meany, 2019). However, if a person is not able to learn the local language or not able to get off of social welfare, then he or she is not trying hard enough to integrate. Apart from drawing a strict differentiation between the *deserving* refugee[22] and the *undeserving* "economic" migrant/refugee[23] the state simultaneously places one's efforts to integrate as a caveat (for a detailed discussion on deserving/undeserving see Sökefeld, 2019b).

When faced with such a predicament an asylum seeker is bound to think and act out of insecurity. Here, drawing upon Nicholas De Genova's (2002, p. 439) idea of 'deportability' it is argued that the possibility of deportation is not the only source of insecurity and anxiety, so is one's ubiquitous chance of being considered an undeserving[24] refugee. This insecurity as such is not only a legal

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[22] Someone who is worthy of humanitarian aid and refuge.
[23] Someone who is seen as exploiting and undermining those very humanitarian values.
[24] For Pakistanis in Germany being considered a deserving refugee is largely based on hope. Hopes of a better future that rest on the shoulders of the "humanitarian" German state. Most of my interlocutor's talked about the "*insaniyat*" 'humanity' or 'human kindness' in Germany. They presented me with anecdotal examples, comparing Germany to Pakistan where there is no humanity "*koi insaniat nahi*" (see section 'Three Returnees').

worry but something that continually affects a refugee's subjectivity. Whereby an existential fear dictates their actions, choices, and decisions in the host country. As such, deportability in the broadest sense of the word is used here to ask the following question. Why is the German state resorting to a strict division between the *political* and the *economic refugee,* bringing an ever-increasing number of people into the fold of deportability?

In his essay *Nations Rebound*, Sökefeld (2019b) points out that the very process of limiting the movement of particular foreign bodies and not others is a way to re-territorialize and rebind nations, ironically, to counter the re-emergence of rightwing nationalism. Seemingly, challenges by rightwing nationalists can be nipped in the bud by this logical differentiation between the *political* and the *economic* refugee[25]. However, Sökefeld (2019b) asserts that "a neat analytical distinction between 'refugees' and 'migrants' is as impossible as is the distinction between deportation and ['voluntary'] remigration" (p. 94). If deportation and "voluntary" return cannot be neatly separated into two distinct categories, it would make sense to question the voluntariness of "voluntary" returns. While political and social activists regularly challenge deportations on various grounds[26], "voluntary" return seems to be accepted on face value and goes mostly unchallenged. As such, this chapter tries to problematise the issue of *Assisted Voluntary Return* (henceforth AVR) programs. Moreover, it challenges some of the uncritically accepted tenants of AVR.

AVR Over Deportation?

Apart from being considered, more ethical as compared to deportations and politically less divisive, there is an important economic aspect for the propagation of AVR programs (Schuler & Zacharakis, 2016). Deportation infrastructure and processes have cost Germany in the millions over the last few years (Bundestagdrucksache, 2019; Macgregor, 2019; Schuler & Zacharakis, 2016; Vettori, 2019). Single deportation can end up costing tens of thousands of Euros in transportation alone. On the 31st of July 2018, for example, a chartered flight carrying only eight Pakistani deportees and fifty security personal cost Germany €462,685 (Bundestagdrucksache, 2019, 48). At the cost of around €60,000 per deportee, this particular flight was relatively expensive, but even the cheapest charted flight to Pakistan cost the German state around €10,000 per deportee in 2018 (Ibid, p. 48-50). In addition to the transportation costs, one must consider the fee of hiring the security personnel; the bureaucratic expenses; the policing, apprehension, and detention before deportation, not to mention the cost of all the unsuccessful arrests. Deportees

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[25] Sökefeld (2019b) uses the term migrant (while I use the term economic refugee).
[26] It is worth mentioning here that more and more deportations are only challenged based on ideas of "deservingness" and integration efforts of the refugee rather than a principled stance of one's right to refuge or better yet to be mobile (Gerver, 2018; Peutz, 2006; Sökefeld, 2019b).

are flown back on chartered flights due to practical and political reasons[27]. Since pilots and crew on such chartered flights refuse to fly without security, each deportee[28] is accompanied by a minimum of three security personnel, adding considerable transportation costs. In comparison, an AVR compensation[29] — or reintegration support/payment as it is called — ranges from a few hundred Euros to a couple of thousand, and an economy class airfare on a commercial airline.

There is no doubt that "voluntary" returns are cheaper and politically less divisive as compared to deportations. However, whether they are voluntary is a lot less clear. We know that the ethics of deportation are routinely (and rightly) questioned based on ideas of human agency and freedom to move. Sökefeld (2019a) for example, brings into question ideas of choice, will, and agency when he questions whether a "deportation is a form of forced migration?" Should we not hold all forms of return migration — forced or voluntary — accountable to the same standards? On its surface, the term *voluntary* takes care of such doubts in the case of "voluntary" returns. However, reflecting on the assumed voluntariness is not only essential to a critical understanding of "voluntary" returns but also necessary for this form of repatriation to function sustainably.

The Research Material and Methods

Before proceeding further to what AVR entails — as far as the subjects of these returns are concerned — it would make sense to address some methodological concerns. In the absence of an anthropological 'field site' in the traditional sense of the word, multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork was carried out around Munich, Germany, and various parts of Punjab, Pakistan. Returnees at different (pre- and post-repatriation) stages of the repatriation process were sought after as interlocutors. Other important research partners included individuals and organizations that manage and administer AVR programs, such as return counselors in Germany and reintegration partners in Pakistan.

A mixed-method ethnographic approach was adopted. In addition to a detailed recording of behaviors, witnessing of events, and sharing of experiences through participant observation, the ongoing research has already recorded several hours of qualitative interviews with returnees and return counselors over six months. The gathered research material is further augmented by twenty-five semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This included but was not limited to: (1) Listening to the experiences, hopes, and aspirations of Pakistani asylum seekers in different settings (in refugee camps as well as AVR counseling centers); (2) listening to return counselors and

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[27] Apart from the visibility of resistance on the part of the deportee (which had led many passengers to boycott certain airlines), a furtive flight avoids staged protests and activist interruptions.

[28] The deportee is already in handcuffs that are sometime chained to his/her ankles.

[29] Below I have given some concrete figures.

discussing AVR with them at public forums; (3) spending several days with returnees and their families at their homes in Pakistan talking about their return and reintegration. Using this material and three case studies in particular this chapter tries to contextualize AVR for the readers.

Three Returnees

Ali R.

After spending four years in Germany Ali R. recently arrived back in Pakistan at the age of 55. He was assisted by a voluntary return counseling center in Munich. Ali received a letter of deportation once his application for asylum and the subsequent appeal was rejected. Around the same time, Ali had a bicycle accident and had to go through a surgery. Owing to his medical condition Ali was allowed to stay in Germany for another year. Once he had healed and saw no prospect of getting legalized, he approached *Coming Home*, a return counseling center in Munich. At Coming Home, he was promised around €1500 with in-kind assistance of €2000[30] and a flight ticket to Pakistan. Ali accepted and returned to Pakistan within a month. He is more or less content with how things turned out. In his hometown of Mandi Bahauddin Ali shared with me in great detail why he would never be able to forget the German *mehman nawazi* (hospitality) and *insaniyat* (humanity). Expanding on this, he explained how he was given a place to stay and a stipend by the Germans. Talking about his accident, he said that even though his asylum was rejected, they made sure he was healthy and fit to return — *wadia log ne* (they [Germans] are amazing people) he added. Whereas in Pakistan he had worked for decades, but he could not even ensure a decent living for his family. He explained how he was able to build a modest house, get his daughter married, and is now busy setting up a small corner shop — all with his European savings plus the return assistance.

Jamshed B.

Jamshed B. was "advised" by his district administrative office (*Landsratamt)* handler to visit the same return counseling center in Munich. Sharing in detail how little agency he had in this process, Jamshed explained how it was more an ultimatum than advice. As such, the *instruction* to visit the return counseling center was the only option available to him upon the rejection of his asylum application and his multiple appeals. If he did not want to be deported or take the risk of becoming an absconder by leaving for another country, he better return through AVR, he was "advised". Jamshed was told if he tried to leave for Spain (his second choice after Germany) he would be apprehended and returned to Germany where he would face prison as punishment and then deportation. According to Jamshed, only a s*ach bolne wala* (someone who

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[30] Plus another €1000 after 8 months of his return.

speaks the truth) and *kanoon ki pasdari kerne wala* (someone who abides by the law) would return through AVR. The rest he said, find various ways to cheat the system. He repeatedly emphasized that he would have never returned if he was presented with another choice. However, with deportation looming over his head, he had no other option. He confided in me that he will be leaving for Dubai soon because it was not safe for him in his village as an ex-leader of a Shia youth-group. He said he would have moved to another part of Pakistan, a bigger city perhaps, only if he had the recourses to move his family. He, along with his wife and children currently lives at his in-laws which is considered to be a source of shame in Pakistani society. Jamshed's failed migration to Germany and the current effort to move to Dubai is a way to find a solution to get rid of this shame and as well as the sectarian troubles. Jamshed, unlike Ali, regrets coming back.

Jamshed was very clear that he did not trust the Afghan translator but had no choice but to go through the process. Moreover, neither did he see the return counselors as people who cared about his *razamandi* (consent)[31] and *marzi* (accord). Speaking about AVR subjects in general Jamshed said: "Wouldn't they have tried to help us stay in Germany if they cared about our consent […] they only wanted us to leave and we had little choice in that […] if there would have been consent, I would not have returned […]".

Hassam A.

One of my other interlocutors took back his asylum appeal before it was processed to return through the same program. Hassam A., like Jamshed, regrets returning to Pakistan and holds social and psychological pressures responsible. These were exacerbated by his father's death — forcing him to take the somewhat risky decision to return to his village in Azad Kashmir[32]. He came back with zero savings and has yet to receive the money that was promised to him a year ago.

According to one of his friends — a German volunteer who had taken upon himself to help the twenty or so Pakistani asylum seekers in his village of Bad Tölz — Hassam had integrated quite well during his time in Germany. However, it seems that Hassam could not cope with the pressure and precariousness of waiting and the possibility of rejection. In other words, he was not sure if he will make it into the category of deserving, a question that his ill father had often asked. When his father passed away, he broke the chain of insecurity (and deportability) by forfeiting his asylum appeal and "voluntarily" returning. Sökefeld (2019), in this edited volume also discusses deportability in the case of an Afghan asylum seeker which may be worth reading for a more comprehensive understanding of the term. The case of Asif N. discussed in Sökefeld's essay is particularly insightful.

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[31] 'wilful agreement' — from "*Razi*" which means to agree.
[32] Some thirty kilometres from the Line of Control between India and Pakistan.

Voluntariness and Sustainability of AVR

Keeping AVR counselors, facilitators, and subjects (or clients as they are called) in mind, this section will focus on the voluntariness and practices of AVR to determine its sustainability as a mode of repatriation. Taking a critical look at some of these practices voluntariness and sustainability of such returns are put into question. This section starts by introducing three complex and important situations that involve return facilitators, return counselors and especially returnees, by placing them on a scale. It is then argued that these situations and their respective scales can help third party observers and host countries to determine the voluntariness of AVR-subjects and hence the sustainability of AVR programs. Furthermore, these scales can help to address legitimate concerns around such forms of repatriation. The scales have been termed as follows (1) The Choice Scale; (2) The Information Scale; and (3) The Assistance Scale.

The rest of the text draws upon examples and material from my ethnographic fieldwork in addition to the three particular stories of "voluntary" return mentioned above to address each of these scales in detail. The concerns brought to the table will not only help in a better understanding of AVR as a form of repatriation but also show how it affects various stakeholders — from the client or the subject of a return to the counselor.

Scales of Voluntariness

i.   The Choice Scale

While return counselors and facilitators[33] are supposed to only advise and assist, at times, willingly or unwillingly they become part of a system — a mobility regime if you will — that wants particular asylum seekers and refugees to remigrate to their country of origin. This call to remigration is often based on a very limited understanding[34] of human suffering, deservingness, and one's right to be mobile. When harsh conditions and policies[35] make the lives of asylum seekers difficult in the host country and lead people to return to their country of origin through AVR, how can we distinguish choice from coercion? If the decision to return is made out of free will/choice, there should be no coercion on the part of the returning state. If living in a state of insecurity and deportability (De Genova, 2002) is a structural part of the refugee condition and a source of humiliation, social isolation, and other forms of unfreedom, then it can be argued that the decision to return cannot be based on choice but rather coercion. By removing such pressures as much as possible, policymakers in host nations like Germany can ensure that what counselors are providing is

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[33] In Germany, Pakistan or elsewhere.
[34] See discussions on deserving/undeserving; acute/structural violence; political/economic refugee good/bad migrant; (Farmer, 2006; Shukla, 2016; Sökefeld, 2019b, a).
[35] Such as but not only prohibition on work.

only objective advice and the returnee's decision to return is informed mainly by free will and choice rather than coercion.

Another pressure that leads to coercion is the pressure of performance on counselors and AVR program coordinators — whose performance is mainly measured by the number of people they can swiftly remove from the host country. Shedding light on this issue a return-counselor in Germany shared how a colleague of her's felt guilty, was severely unhappy, and left as soon as she was able to get another job. This counselor was about to leave the return counseling center herself and was glad that she will leave the [emotional] stress behind. Here, I want to argue that AVR can only be a sustainable mode of repatriation — in the eyes of facilitators as well as returnees — when coercion is largely if not completely taken out of the equation[36]. If it is used as a last resort on the part of the returnee to escape imminent deportation, it is very likely to put the voluntariness of "voluntary" returns in question. The Choice Scale can help us understand how choice or coercion is experienced or deployed by various stakeholders of AVR.

ii.   The Information Scale

The Information Scale can help us understand the varying levels of 'information' and 'misinformation' that inform a returnee's decision to return. For example, asylum seekers might return due to *misinformation* when they come to believe that their asylum-application stands little to no chance — in the case of Pakistanis, this might be statistically correct. However, that is at best an assumption based on a simplified understanding of deservingness and needs to be carefully assessed on an individual basis rather than probability. In most instances, there is so much pressure on counselors that they do not even want to listen to the stories of their clients. During my observations, the counselors would stop the clients if they tried to talk about their asylum cases. Their stories and asylum applications were irrelevant; they were told far too often. Essential information, like the asylum seeker's religious affiliation, was ignored (this becomes esp. important if the client, or the subject of a return, belongs to a persecuted minority). During one of my observations, the counselor was unaware that the client was a Christian, even though it was quite evident from his Pakistani Christian name.

The point here is not whether the returnee will be in any real danger once he or she is back in the country of origin. In most cases, the question of safe return[37] has already been decided upon by the time the asylum seeker comes to the return counseling center. A significant number of prospective returnees only visit a return counseling center once all other doors have closed — they are

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[36] Amongst other things, deportability or fear of deportation should not inform an asylum seekers decision to return.

[37] Legally speaking, and with regards to Pakistani asylum seekers, refoulement is generally not an issue.

likely to be placed on a deportation list if not already on one (see choice scale above). What I hope to inquire here is much more straightforward than the principle of nonrefoulement: How likely is it that the client (potential returnee) is being misinformed by counselors? With confidence, I can assert that such is indeed the case.

Logic dictates that the information required to make a choice should come before the action of decision making. But clients in the Munich based return counseling center were provided with most of the necessary information only *after* they agree to return. The "counseling session" only begins once the client has provided the counseling center with their identity documents. Many clients try to delay that process to get a concrete understanding of what they might be getting themselves into. However, it was noticed during counseling sessions that counselors carefully maneuvered themselves not to provide any information that could lead the client to say no to the expected "voluntary" return. While counselors see their engagement as "open and unbiased," Cleton and Schweitzer's (2020) analysis of "voluntary" return counselors' strategies resonated with my own. According to them, counselors use one of three strategies to induce return upon the rejection of asylum: "Firstly, by identifying existing aspirations [to return] among potential returnees […] Secondly, by merely obtaining informed consent to return 'voluntarily' […]. Thirdly, by actively inducing the wish to return […]" (Ibid).

All the strategies as outlined by Cleton and Schweitzer (2020) were observed during my fieldwork at the counseling centers in Munich and Augsburg, however, the second strategy was the most practiced. For example, Pakistani returnees have to sign a waiver that they will be fully responsible for whatever happens to them upon return — especially with regards to legal repercussions they may face as a consequence of leaving Pakistan through "illegal" means. This information is only given to the client once they have signed the "voluntary" return consent, rather than during the course of the counseling session[38]. At this point, it is quite difficult for the prospective returnees to reassess their decision to return for various reasons. Firstly, due to the absence of a "firewall" between the different authorities involved, all the information and documentation provided during the return counseling session make it harder for the client to reevaluate the situation (in the context of legal formalities). Deportability starts to play an even more significant role in how the subjects of return see themselves at this point. "Illegality" and deportation not only seem more probable than before, but the clients are constantly reminded about this during the counseling session if they share their reservations about the return. Secondly, by this time, the clients have likely already informed the family that they are heading back[39] home, which is likely to desensitize the effects of information that discourages return. Thirdly, most

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[38] See the choice scale for the kinds of pressures on counsellors that lead them to use such techniques of what I would call misinforming.

[39] Which may also kill the collective familial hope of getting legalised in Germany.

Pakistani returnees are not only illiterate but have little to no understanding of the kind of legal consequences they may face upon return. To make sure that the clients sign the waiver, they are told that it is a mere "formality" and no-one has ever landed into any trouble. A caveat is sometimes added in the form of a lighthearted joke about the possibility of a corrupt official demanding a bribe. No effort is made to inform the clients about the legal consequences, as that may add to their reservations.

Another form of misinformation is miscommunication that mostly occurs due to language barriers but also other kinds of cultural misunderstandings and mistranslations. During my observations, translators rarely spoke the native language[40] of the client and only spoke very basic Urdu. On one occasion, apart from mistranslating, the translator started to diagnose a client who wanted to have a medical checkup before departure. "You are fine, it's just stomach gas," the translator said to the client who had hoped to get his abdominal pain checked before his prospective return. The client was not convinced by the translator's prognosis, nevertheless, the translator proceeded to communicate his intuition to the counselor instead of the client's concerns.

iii.   The Assistance Scale

The Assistance Scale helps disentangle necessary 'financial assistance' from questionable 'financial inducement' that may affect the voluntariness of return. As already explained above, returnees receive a 'reintegration payment' for returning. In the case of my interlocutors, the EU and Germany, for the most part, fund such forms of repatriation through various programs. The amount can vary depending on the client's legal and application status; whether it is pending or processed, accepted, or rejected. And, is given in various forms; pre-departure cash in Germany, post-departure cash in Pakistan, as well as in-kind assistance[41]. Governmental and non-governmental partner organizations are tasked with carrying out this assistance in Germany and Pakistan.

Firstly, I claim that such payments need to be carefully made so that they do not set a bad precedent for the moral imperative attached to giving refuge. The philosopher Micheal Sandel (2012) argues against such an economic approach in his book *The Moral Limits of Markets*. Citing a plethora of examples, he states that money is not the right tool to tackle certain issues. Especially if the issue at hand has a moral or social aspect, monetary payment should be used with utmost caution as it has the propensity to crowd out ethical and social responsibilities. In that vein, I argue that something such as giving refuge or in this case, ensuring reintegration should be a social responsibility rather than a financial obligation. Mollie Gerver (2018) makes a slightly different but equally valid point in her book on the ethics of refugee repatriation and argues

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[40] Punjabi in most cases.
[41] For example, purchase of assets or stock for a business i.e. not in cash.

that such payments may reinforce the idea that refugees are unwanted members of society — an idea that is already propagated for various political reasons.

Secondly, monetary incentives may be counterproductive to reintegration. As such, figuring out the right balance between financial assistance and inducement is essential. In other words, fiscal incentives to the point of inducement are not only questionable when it comes to determining voluntariness, but can be detrimental to well-intentioned reintegration support. Like Jamshed, some of my other returnee–interlocutors, are already preparing to leave Pakistan again after their "voluntary" return. In line with Cleton and Schwitzer's observations (2020) my returnee interlocutors did not want to return but were coerced, misinformed, and or induced into taking that decision and hence most of them want to leave again. They will probably do so through the very high-risk irregular means that the reintegration support is supposed to discourage!

Conclusion

Deportations and repatriations (whether involuntary or "voluntary") have a chequered history in Germany. At times, the removal, even extinction of the "undeserving" has been legitimized based on nationhood or religion. At other times based on a differentiation between the *economic* and the *political* refugee[42]. The politics of removal in Germany points to a constant negotiation between competing political, economic, and social forces. In this process, it seems that the refugee or the migrant *Other* lacks any real agency or choice.

The recent German law which makes it easier for companies to hire skilled labor from outside Europe is a reflection of this negotiation. While the law aims to boost Germany's economy through an injection of foreign labor, it simultaneously incorporates obstacles to prevent *economic* refugees from using the German asylum system as a backdoor. One would assume that the reason would be to deter *economic* refugees as they might take the place of more "deserving" political refugees, but it is more likely that such measures are intended to counter challenges posed by right-wing parties like the AfD. This is not the first time that *economic* refugees and migrants are portrayed as chancers and scroungers threatening German prosperity and resources (see Stokes, 2019). Amongst others, people affected by such discourses are Afghans and Pakistanis[43].

In the text above, I try to show how a newcomer's time in Germany is marked by differences and lack of agency in the process of integration. Rather than being seen as a newcomer, the person is seen as an asylum seeker, an *economic* or *political* refugee, a migrant worker, an undocumented/irregular migrant, or through another category that defines his or her legal status and rights. The legal

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[42] Often founded upon ideas of deservingness.
[43] Most of whom have a job and contribute to the German economy.

status, in turn, structures their respective deportability and insecurities –
– affecting their choices and agency with regards to their potential and actual
return or removal[44]. This leaves ample room for a social responsibility based
debate about mobility and migration but for this chapter, I tried to problematize
the process of removal and in particular the so-called AVR or 'voluntary
returns'. I took three rather simple concerns and placed each of these concerns
on a scale with two opposing factors. The difference in the two factors of each
scale, I argue, can help in assessing the voluntariness of return in AVRs.
Moreover, the scales make visible certain practices of AVR that are integral to
understanding a form of repatriation that is being advocated as a sustainable
and ethical alternative to unethical deportations. Using examples from my
fieldwork and the perspectives of my interlocutors, I first addressed what I
called the *Choice Scale* by characterizing the difference between choice and
coercion in the decision to return. The second scale, namely the *Information
Scale*, grappled with the issue of information versus misinformation. The third
scale looked at the subtle but vital difference between financial assistance and
inducement and is hence called the *Assistance Scale*. As the names suggest,
each of these scales points to a problematic situation that needs to be addressed
if returning countries like Germany[45] do not want AVR's voluntariness to be
put into question. Critically assessing AVR with regards to coercion,
information and assistance can not only help make AVR more voluntary and
sustainable[46] as a mode of repatriation but should be the only way to proceed
with AVR if at all.

Acknowledgment

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[44] In addition to the example of Hassam A. above, see the instance of Asif N. provided by
Sökefeld in this very edited volume.
[45] Perhaps also Pakistan when it comes to the repatriation of Afghan refugees.
[46] 'Sustainable' alludes to a dependable/longterm solution for the repatriation of irregular
migrants.

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