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Documents, Destiny and Returning to Pakistan Making Sense of (Im)mobility

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Author's Note

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Abstract

In this article, I inquire how rejected asylum seekers and returning migrants make sense of their (im)mobility. More specifically, I focus on the idea of *taqdeer* (destiny) to explore how irregular Pakistani migrants experience and interpret restrictive mobility regimes. I outline the complex and equivocal attitudes of these migrants or more appropriately mobile bodies upon the rejection of their asylum — the only means of acquiring *kagaz* (papers) available to them in Germany. By contextualising the value of destiny in their migratory lives, I give an insider's description of how perspectives and narratives of destiny form an integral part of the affective and social lives of (rejected) Pakistani asylum seekers, returnees and deportees. While a shared understanding of *taqdeer* primarily serves as a means to communicate affective states, it also serves as an important way to accept (or contest) legal realities, for example, the rejection of one's asylum and eventual return to Pakistan. As such, *taqdeer* which is an integral part of the affective economy of remigration, not only aids returnees in meaning making but also provides people a way to engage with the vulnerabilities and gendered burdens of irregular migration and return.

Short Abstract

In this article, I explore the ways Pakistanis challenged by restrictive mobility regimes experience and interpret them through the perspectives and narratives of destiny.



تقدیر بنانے والے تو نے کسی نہ کسی
اب یہ مقدر کی بات بھی کوئی ملا

Transliteration: *Taqdeer bananay walay tu ney kami na ki*
Ab yeh muqaddar ki baat hai kisi ko kia milla

You could not have been more gracious, the author of *taqdeer* (destiny)
Who gets what is now up to *muqaddar* (fate)

Introduction

Hakeem, an asylum seeker friend, had penned down this verse on the side of a kitchen cabinet at his *Flüchtlingsunterkunft* (refugee accommodation) in Krailling. The accommodation is one of many similar living spaces — commonly dubbed *Kontainerdörfer* (container villages) — that were set up in 2015 around the city of Munich to house refugees and asylum seekers in the wake of the so-called “refugee crisis.” Was it Hakeem’s *taqdeer* (destiny) to end up in one of these containers hurriedly set up to “manage” and “control” migration in general and the newly arrived “conditional guests” in particular (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, Anderson 2014a, De Genova 2016a)? He certainly thinks so, and many other Pakistani asylum-seekers¹ feel the same. Such a perspective of destiny, I argue, serves as an affective recourse to deal with the liminality and adversity that comes with their (im)mobility. In other words, an affective and narrative understanding of destiny provides irregular migrants and asylum seekers with a way to engage with their vulnerabilities and make sense of their situation. The value of this understanding of destiny becomes especially clear once one gets familiar with their hopes and experiences; before departure or in transit, as well as in the host country or those of deportation or return. Khosravi’s (2010) monograph is a valuable personal and ethnographic account of some of these experiences (for other examples and experiences of deportation; legal precarity in the host country; and migratory hope see Peutz 2006, Castañeda 2010, Kleist 2017 respectively).

In the body of text that follows, I try to contextualise how this understanding of destiny forms an integral part of the affective, social and narrative lives of a particular few (rejected) Pakistani asylum seekers. Ideas and narratives of destiny become central to their feelings and affective states as (im)mobility intertwines with, amongst other things, their familial responsibilities, personal desires, gendered obligations and hopes. The Pakistanis I have been engaging with over the last year — i.e. my interlocutors — are at different stages of their migratory trajectories. Some of them are rejected asylum seekers who are still in Germany and have appealed against their rejection or plan to move elsewhere in Europe as a worst-case scenario. These interlocutors use a word that epitomises hope and *taqdeer* for many Muslims. “*Inshallah!*” (if Allah wills) they say each time I inquire about their asylum status or work permit in person or over the phone. Whenever they talk about their asylum status they use the term *kagaz* (literally paper[s] but used in the sense of legal documentation). Apart from its bureaucratic and legal value, *kagaz* in this case is the material and symbolic proof that Allah had written Europe in their destiny.

Others, however, experience a more dire state of “*illegality* lived through a palpable sense of *deportability*, which is to say, the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state” (De Genova 2007, 426). These asylum seekers cannot bear the fear of deportation, detention and *illegality* in their quotidian lives, which adds to the crushing weight of various familial pressures and responsibilities while they wait (De Genova 2002, Anderson 2014a,

¹ I use the term ‘asylum seekers’ not as an analytical category but simply as a way to allude to the common denominator amongst my interlocutors. Given the very limited migration options, getting legalised by seeking asylum is the only option available to them. Here it would also be worth pointing out that I bracket out the specific claims of asylum for the purpose of this essay. For me, there are no “bogus asylum seekers” and everyone has a legitimate reason to be mobile in their own right. Amartya Sen’s *freedom of opportunity* and Seyla Benhabib’s conceptualisation of Hannah Arendt’s *right to have rights* into a non-state-dependant concept of political membership come to mind.

De Genova 2016b). “Voluntary” return is their only option if they are not already back in Pakistan². “*Jo Allah ko manzoor,*” (what Allah wills) these interlocutors tell me.

***Taqdeer* and (Im)mobility**

Destiny does not only aid Pakistanis in making sense of their (im)mobility. It is a fact of life for Pakistani Muslims and various terms³ are employed to capture the different subtleties of this way of viewing and experiencing the world. Hakeem’s poetic expression above is just one example and terms like *taqdeer* and *muqaddar*⁴ (fate) are a staple in the everyday Pakistani lexicon. My interlocutors routinely use such terms to communicate, and as such, see and make sense of their situation in Germany. It would not be wrong to say that *Kagaz* is the “cat in the box” if their asylum application is the allegorical Schrödinger’s cat experiment. As far as my interlocutors are concerned, their *Kagaz* or chance to stay in Germany is equal parts possible and equal parts not possible and only Allah knows what will happen. Until the metaphorical box is opened, it is equally dead and alive — just like Schrödinger’s cat.

“People have the freedom of choice, but we get everything according to Allah’s will ... we can try and change our fate with prayers and effort, but in the end, what happens is what is willed by Allah” Gujjar, another Krailling resident and Hakeem’s roommate once said to me. Gujjar then went on to explain the role of “luck”⁵ and how some people get asylum even when they do not pray or may have done many wrongs, while others who pray and do their best are stuck in a miserable situation or worse yet get deported. Alluding to his own case, he elaborated “I only worked legally, paid taxes, abided by the law of the land and asked Allah for help and still got a rejection ... others who have carried out illicit activities or cheated ... taken welfare support from the Germans while working illegally have been granted *kagaz* ... Allah knows best.” Shedding additional light on how Allah works he said, “Hindus pray to several completely different Gods, but Allah is the one who gives.”

Conceptual or discursive differences and everyday-theological interpretations of *taqdeer* and *muqaddar* abundant, these two terms are perhaps best explained in Hakeem’s poetic expression about his pending asylum appeal: Allah has graciously authored destiny, and the outcome is not in his (Hakeem’s) hand now. Nor is it in the hands of the German state; “*ab yeh muqaddar ki baat hai*” (it is now up to fate). Such a way of being in the world is not just intertwined with economic, but more importantly, social and affective lives of many Muslims. In that way, perspectives and especially narratives of destiny form an intrinsic and valuable part of the emotional economy of

² The interlocutors who are already back in Pakistan returned through “voluntary” return programs or were deported.

³ Such as but not only *naseeb*, *kismet*, *taqdeer*, *muqaddar*. NB: Etymological roots of *muqaddar*, *taqdeer* as well as *qudrat* (nature but literally creation of Allah) lie in the Arabic term *qadar* (which means predestination but literally power).

⁴ *Taqdeer* and *muqaddar* are casually interchangeable terms for many Pakistanis, as perhaps their translations in colloquial English (destiny and fate).

⁵ Luck in this case should not be thought of as pure chance, as there is no such thing for Gujjar; for him everything happens for a reason which only Allah knows.

remigration⁶. Firstly, such narratives provide my interlocutors with a way to not only create and share meaning with their family, friends and peers but also a way to share the emotional burdens that come with their situation. Secondly, it allows them to make sense of their situation in a manner not afforded to them by the “objective” German state and its asylum or migration laws. Thirdly and perhaps most intriguingly, it provides rejected asylum seekers, particularly those who are back in Pakistan with an opportunity to challenge undesirable social burdens.

I will try to shed light on some of these values, particularly the last one, with the help of a “voluntary” returnee, Alam. At *Eid-Milad al-Nabi* (prophet’s birthday), a few months after his return from Germany, Alam and his wife had invited some members of their *biradari* (patrilineal kin) to their new house in Mandi Bahauddin. This auspicious occasion also served as a house-warming party, so I too was invited and introduced as a “good friend from Germany.” After the guests had left and only a few close members of the extended family remained, a discussion took place between Alam and his brother-in-law who did not approve of Alam’s “voluntary” return. Alam looked at me, indirectly telling his brother-in-law that it was “Allah’s will,” not his lack of commitment or effort that he was back. While Alam was declared “weak” by his brother-in-law for not trying hard enough, Alam to the contrary thought that there was no way he could have tried harder. He was destined to not get papers in Germany he asserted with “*jo Rab chahe*” (what Allah wills).

There was a particular reason for this exchange between the two men. Alam’s brother-in-law had spent over a decade of his life working in a Spanish coal mine eventually securing a Spanish passport. Everyone in the *biradari* knows about him and his stories⁷ of bravado, efforts and struggle to get legalised in Spain when he was young. I imagine, these stories not only served to establish him as an ideal masculine figure of authority in the family, but also ignite a fire of migratory hope in the eyes of the younger generation (like Alam’s son). Such notions and stories of success through masculine effort, of course, play a significant role in the resolve of many Pakistanis to never give up once they have made it to Europe (see next section for more details). Owing to these very standards of masculinity, Alam was not “man enough” to get legalised in Europe according to his brother-in-law. However, by evoking destiny and the will of Allah, returning migrants like Alam can keep their social identity as a male intact while resisting the culturally mandated obligations that are placed upon Pakistani males. It was not his “weakness” or lack of effort and struggle that resulted in his return, in fact, his return was the will of Allah. It is perhaps paradoxical to think of return as a means of empowerment but as Alam’s interaction with his brother-in-law shows, attributing the return to Allah’s will or destiny can help returnees challenge masculine societal demands. Alam told me that he was happy with what he had achieved by Allah’s grace; a home, a small shop, mother’s *Hajj* (pilgrimage) and his daughter’s wedding. Adding a small but essential caveat, he said: “If I would have gotten the *kagaz* that would have been great, but you can’t argue with Him [Allah].”

⁶ Understood as the production, exchange and circulation of emotions in the entangled relations, experiences, obligations and expectations between (returning) migrants, their kin, other stake holders such as but not only volunteers and non-governmental organisations.

⁷ Some of which were shared with me. These stories not only included narratives of suffering, hard work and struggle but also tales of corrupting Spanish women who’s carnal desires and impure advances had to be resisted.

Alam's example of this empowering use of *taqdeer* shows that perspectives of destiny and especially the narratives informed by it are not only valuable whilst in Germany but equally important once the returnee is back in Pakistan.

Taqdeer: The Vehicle for Hope

Arriving in Europe for many irregular (Pakistani) migrants marks a pivotal moment in their lives. Regardless of their many pains and reasons for leaving, the suffering along the way and the precarious legal status within the European asylum regime, the past, present and future come together as one⁸ and make sense through the *floating signifier*⁹ of *taqdeer*. With the help of this floating signifier not only does hope take what Anderson (2014b) calls a “phantasmatic quality” but *koshish* (effort) and belief in destiny become a cathartic experience. For many irregular migrants, the phantasmic hope of acquiring *kagaz* and the cathartic effort towards that end becomes the impetus for the realisation that they cannot return until they have tried every possible means to acquire the piece of paper that will allow them to stay.

It is worth noting that ‘trying every means possible’ is a very subjective and temporal threshold and enacted through shifting hopes carried through the mantle of *taqdeer*. I have met people who have persevered for over a decade, moving from Greece to Italy to Germany and back to Italy and I have met people who return to Pakistan after a couple of years. But, almost all of them “know that they will have to live a miserable life full of hardship and struggles for at least two to three years,” as a young university student in Pakistan, whose father was in Europe for many years trying his best to get his paper(s), told me. Depending on people's subjective threshold, which is influenced by a host of factors¹⁰, they try for as long as they can. And once they have tried everything in their power, they are left with one choice, to eventually give up on their dreams and hopes or to put it more precisely, they are made to do so. As such, they enter a *point of return*¹¹. This point of return is borne out of a mixture of hopelessness and hopefulness, transposed over time. Some form of hopelessness in Pakistan breeds with a hopeful future in Europe giving birth to peoples' migratory journeys. However, over time, the hopeless experiences with the German state seem to ignite a hopeful imagination of destiny in Pakistan.

⁸ In philosophy and particularly phenomenology this temporal configuring of a *three-fold present* is not only lived but narratively structured (Mattingly 2019).

⁹ Buchanan (2010) defines a floating signifier (sometimes called an ‘empty signifier’) as a “signifier that absorbs rather than emits meaning.” *Taqdeer* too, in my opinion, is a signifier without a specific signified and anything can be interpreted as *taqdeer*. And since *taqdeer* “does not have a specific meaning itself, but functions primarily as a vehicle for absorbing meanings” it is a floating signifier (Buchanan 2010). For an anthropological view/discussion on the matter (see Mehlman 1972, Lévi-Strauss 1987).

¹⁰ These factors include age, marital status and health; their psychological state vis-à-vis pressures of deportability; the responsibilities and duties towards family and kin; conflicts, persecution and difficulties in the country of origin; social support and network in the host country; financial situation and so much more.

¹¹ It is worth noting that a rejection of one's asylum is only the beginning of the journey and the point of return comes much later, as I have noted above, for some after a decade or more.

Taqdeer: Rejection to Return*Rejection and the Curse of Duldung*

Rejected asylum seekers appealing against their rejection require a piece of document called *Duldung* (literally toleration; i.e. their presence is tolerated) to remain in Germany (Castañeda 2010). While this document allows the provisional suspension of their deportation, my interlocutors see it as a *manhoosat* (curse) and *bemari* (ailment) for the prospect of their stay in Germany. Shedding light on this precarious line of support, Castañeda (2010, 254) notes, that people with a “*Duldung* status for six months and certainly by eighteen months are eligible to receive a residency permit.” However, the law that was put in place in 2005 is rarely implemented to regularise people with a *Duldung* (ibid 2010). As such, most rejected asylum seekers have to renew their *Duldung* every few months if not every month and remain in a legal-status-limbo until their return or asylum approval; in the case of my interlocutors, whatsoever Allah wills. It is worth noting that during the renewal process, they are almost always recommended to visit the so-called “voluntary” return counselling centre to avoid deportation as I was told by a Caritas return counsellor in Augsburg.

Duldung or the temporary suspension of deportation and its subsequent renewal not only adds to the “affective labour” (Rutherford 2016) of asylum-seeking but coupled with *deportability* makes the monthly trips to the foreigners’ registration office for renewal, a scary and burdensome endeavour. Perhaps that is why my interlocutors see it as a curse. And what adds to their concern is the fact that the process is mostly dependant on the discretion of the registration/case officer handling the paperwork. Or as Gujjar¹² once put it “on the mood of the person sitting behind the desk.” While telling me this, Gujjar imitated his case officer typing annoyedly and not looking towards him. According to him, the renewal and validity period had more to do with the person’s situation at home than anything else: “whether or not they had fought” with their partner that day. Gujjar’s observation here helps us in understanding the subjective workings of the German state bureaucracy, that regularly aims to establish itself as an objective arbitrator of human rights — separating the “deserving” from the “undeserving” (see Sökefeld 2019). Gujjar’s instinctive analysis of how the asylum system works is not far-fetched considering a recent study of 207,000 asylum case judgements¹³ in the United States (US). In their study, Heyes and Saberian (2019) show that after controlling for all other variables, an increase of 5.56 Celsius degree in temperature results in a 6.55% decrease in grant rate of asylum applications¹⁴.

Hakeem — perhaps with his pending case in mind — invoked the divine domain towards the end of the conversation and reminded Gujjar that the officials can do what they want, but in the end,

¹² During conversation about his rejection, subsequent appeal and asylum status over dinner in February; two other Krailling residents were present (Hakeem and Bhatti).

¹³ Decisions made by the immigration judges were decisive and those denied asylum were subjected to deportation.

¹⁴ Perhaps the comparison between the renewal of a *Duldung* in German and an asylum hearing at a court in the United States is slightly unreasonable, but my point here is not to lay specific claim to the workings of the former based on the workings of the latter but a more abstract one. In that, seemingly objective state apparatuses or domain(s) are subject to very human proclivities and subjectivities determined by context, setting and a host of other mundane factors like temperature.

nothing that Allah does not wish can be done¹⁵. Bhatti another Pakistani who was also present, only nodded at Hakeem's remark. His asylum application and his appeal¹⁶ had been "discarded." He had told me this at another occasion and using the word *hisaab* (reckoning/calculation) he had expressed his feelings about his rejection¹⁷: "They will have to give an account/reckon with [Allah] ... one day they will have to give an account." At the time of this meeting, Bhatti was planning to leave Germany and move to another European state, not confirming where he only hinted at Italy. After border restrictions had been put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he contacted me to inquire if it was safe for him to travel to Italy — perhaps to get another view on the information he had access to in the refugee accommodation and on social media.

Point of Return

Kamran a recent "voluntary" returnee from Munich gave some insight into what might be seen as a *point of return*. A couple of weeks before he left for Pakistan Kamran told me that he had decided to return and asked me to accompany him to the return counselling centre to intermediate for him. Shedding light on his decision, he told me that he was not given a work permit even when he had a €2200 work contract and was threatened with deportation multiple times. It is tough he argued "when you have to beg them to let you stay ... not knowing what will happen ... now I have decided to go back ... look, what is written in my kismet [sic], I will get." It took over five years and several asylum appeals in at least two different European countries for his initial point of no return; or plan of not returning without *kagaz* to transform into a point of return; trying to imagine what destiny might have in store for him back in Pakistan. And a world seen through the lens of *taqdeer* — seemed to be at the heart of this transformation. Though not without sharp disapproval of the German state: "I did not get *kagaz*, I have no remorse about that, but this coercive force that they use is unfair; they should say to our face, there is no place for you here," said Kamran rather rebukingly of the German state.

Kamran was eager to return and took one of the last flights before the Munich airport shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic — a decision he is very happy about. Over the phone he recently told me that he was particularly delighted to be with his family at this time, whilst in Bavaria he would have been stuck inside a camp without any friends, family or opportunity to work. It was meant to be in this way, he implied though without using the work *taqdeer*.

¹⁵ Had I shared the result of the Heyes and Saberian study with Hakeem, he would have told me that whether one ends up at the asylum court in the US on a warm or a cool day is in fact a matter of *taqdeer*.

¹⁶ Talking about his appeal on another occasion he had told me that it had been rejected. Using the words "*bar sutt diti hai*" (to have been discarded or thrown out) to emphasise the use of power and lack of compassion on part of the German state who had treated him like "trash."

¹⁷ Unlike Gujjar and Hakeem, Bhatti does not speak Urdu often and prefers to express himself in Punjabi.

Entangled Domains: State and Divine

The migration and especially remigration¹⁸ of Pakistani asylum seekers is negotiated with the help of two *entangled domains*. The first is simply the domain of the German bureaucracy or state. An asylum seeker's interaction with the German state take place within this domain. In other words, the *state domain* is a field in which all the interactions between the asylum seeker and the state take place; from filing an asylum application and working within the formal system to working with its formal and informal "loopholes¹⁹." As far as my interlocutors are concerned this domain is just a means to an end; a "game" that one needs to play to unfold fate. This domain is as such the "door" one needs to open and enter to find out what destiny has in store. The second, based on my interlocutors' ideas of *jahan ka malik*²⁰ (owner of the universe) or more commonly *Allah-malik* (Allah, the owner) can be called the *divine domain*. Within the divine domain, my interlocutors engage with their creator and that of their destiny. Praying, making an effort, hard work and acting virtuously towards fellow humans are all a part of this domain, but most importantly keeping faith that life will unfold as is willed by Allah. While it is hard to exist outside the state domain as an asylum seeker in Germany, it is the divine domain that one really exists in as far as my interlocutors are concerned.

Gujjar's explanation at the being of the article exemplifies the entanglement of the state domain with the divine domain; his mistrust in the former and his unwavering trust in the latter come together to make his situation intelligible to himself and others around him. The author of *taqdeer* "knows best" and all you can do is to pray for his mercy and try your luck according to Gujjar.

Such an understanding of how the European asylum system works in conjunction with the destiny can perhaps give us a profound insight into why many Pakistanis take upon the infamous and risky *dunkey* (a shorthand for an undocumented cross border journey through clandestine means) in the first place (see Mahar 2020b). According to the European or German asylum regime, people require protection or refuge based on particular criteria²¹, but for most Pakistanis, acceptance is also a matter of *taqdeer* or as Gujjar sometimes translates it into English "luck." "*Dunkey* is a game of chance" I was told by a group of young men in Pakistan hoping to play this "game" some day. And, sometimes — as in the case of Kamran and Alam — living and working in Europe is not meant to be. Their *taqdeer* beheld no *kagaz*, but they had to try to find out. They had to probe the state domain as a means to explore the vastness of the divine domain.

¹⁸ The general use of the term remigration is captured by the Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition. It defines remigration as "the act of migrating again" usually back to the place of origin or decent. A more political and particular understanding of the term is rooted in the argued forced repatriation of non-whites from Europe to their supposed places of origin; the German far-right has, for example, repeatedly asked for the "remigration" of people who are ethnically "not German" (Matthes 1996, Hille 2019). For the purpose of this essay, however, remigration alludes to the act of going back to the country of origin (in this case Pakistan) through state-assisted "voluntary" return or deportation upon the rejection of one's asylum. The term returning migrant may be used to the same end.

¹⁹ For example, enrolling in an *Ausbildung* (vocational training program) to avoid deportation.

²⁰ The word *jahan* (universe) is not always used. Other Urdu or Punjabi words such as but not only *kainat* (universe), *dunia* (world), *zameen* (earth), *dharti* (earth), and *har cheez* (everything) are also used to allude to Allah's or *malik's* (owner's) domain; hence, divine domain.

²¹ In practice, however, it can at times be no different than a game of chance or "lottery" (for the creteria and its flaws in the system see Bartsch et al. 2019, Schumacher and Elizabeth 2019).

It may seem counterintuitive²² but the latter domain allows asylum seekers an empowering experience in the face of their rejection or “removal” (Peutz 2006) from Germany. By removal, I mean deportation following Peutz’ (2006) study of Somalian deportees, but also “voluntary” return which I consider to be a coercive and indirect form of removal (see Mahar 2020a). And by empowering experience I mean two things: Firstly I mean, the relief that one may get because the “aetiology” or cause of a difficult situation is beyond one’s control, i.e. under divine control. Bhatti’s plans to move to Italy, for example, point out to such a feeling of empowerment. His example also points out to the lived experiences of the state domain and the divine domain and their entangled workings; the former is only valuable as a means to an end, and the latter is used as a way to interpret, accept or sometimes contest the former. Bhatti plans to contest the former by trying to figure out a way to get asylum in Italy if not in Germany. The powerful floating signifier of *taqdeer* allows him to interpret anything as his destiny as long as his affective and embodied experience supports this interpretation. Some strive on, others return; either way it is *taqdeer*. Secondly I mean, social empowerment through the strategic evocation of *taqdeer* or divine will as in the case of Alam. By evoking Allah and *taqdeer*, Alam as you may remember, was able to unburden himself from the crushing weight of (highly gendered) social responsibilities that were placed upon him.

Concluding Remarks

Taqdeer in combination with hope asserts itself in the ordinary and extraordinary lives of Pakistanis and thus in my opinion, merits a closer anthropological examination when it comes to their rejection, deportation and “voluntary” return. Perspectives and narratives of destiny not only provide rejected asylum seekers from Pakistan a view that shapes how they see and experience the world but also with creative and agentive ways to deal with their situation. For my Muslim interlocutors, the abstract notion of divine will captured by commonly used phrases like “*jo Allah ko manzoor*” or “*jo Allah ka Hukkam*” (what Allah’s wishes or orders) in conjunction with “affect” (Massumi 1995 in Rutherford 2016)²³ is a valuable way to make sense of their migratory trajectories. I argue that it provides them with a reason to struggle until the point of their return or removal from Germany, at which point the same ideas of destiny and divine will help them to engage with their rejection and the subsequent removal/return and reintegration. While such a situation is bound to make one feel helpless to some extent, trusting in Allah and his plans, helps many deportees and returnees deal with adversity in positive ways. “Man can only make an effort/struggle, the rest is in Allah’s control,” Kamran told me while sharing his plans for leasing a small farm in Pakistan, just before his “voluntary” return to Pakistan.

A world in which *taqdeer* defines one’s life trajectory, is helpful for many deportees, returnees as well as asylum seekers waiting for their asylum decisions. It is a view that is validated if things work out as wished, but also if not. Since both — in fact, multiple — scenarios are possible as an

²² Counterintuitive because it contradicts their hopes but also because of questions of agency and free will vis-à-vis Allah’s will.

²³ In the cited text it is defined as “collectively recognised ways of describing embodied experience” making it something “other than emotion” (Massumi 1995 in Rutherford 2016).

outcome of *taqdeer*, I consider it a valuable floating signifier for (rejected) asylum seekers. Such a view gives them hope for a better future but also a way to engage with a vulnerable situation like rejection, deportation and “voluntary” return. Perspectives and narratives of destiny are thus not only an important avenue for negotiating with uncertainty but is also a source of hope.

This does not necessarily mean that every (returning) migrant gives up on their hope to settle in Europe upon their “voluntary” return or deportation, certainly not upon their rejection. Three volunteers who assist asylum seekers around the area of Munich have told me that each of them saw more than a dozen of their “Pakistani mentees” move to other European states and only a few went back to Pakistan²⁴. Most of my asylum seeker friends indeed plan to go to Italy or Spain if their struggles do not pay off in Germany. An acceptance of *taqdeer* does not always take place immediately and is dependant on the context. Even those who return or are deported to Pakistan might make yet another attempt at *dunkey*, after some time. Provided they have the resources and a renewed hope for a different *taqdeer*.

While *taqdeer* may be strategically employed or work as a coping mechanism aiding in reintegration for some families and their migrating member, for others, it may lead to the exact opposite effect. Alam for example, saw a silver lining in his return: One night over a poetry session with a cousin who had lived and worked in Saudi Arabia during his youth and a great uncle of theirs, he told me that now he could finally enjoy the fruits of years of hard work. His cousin agreed and recited a poem about the tolls of being away from the family. Conversely, Hassan, a younger returnee I met in Pakistan, accepted his situation only temporarily. Once he was able to gather some money and find a connection that promised him a job in Dubai, he gave his destiny another chance. Some deportees that I met in Pakistan have similar plans for re-migrating. This is what I mean when I say *taqdeer* may lead to the exact opposite of acceptance and return. *Taqdeer* is known only to Allah until the allegorical box is opened.

²⁴ In Krailling, Bad Tölz and Starnberg each of these volunteers acted as a mentor for the 15-20 Pakistanis in their respective towns. Out of the 50 or so Pakistanis they worked with only 4 returned to Pakistan.

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