Migratory Improvisations and Affect

Navigating Migration and Return as an Irregularised Migrant from Pakistan

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For Baba

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Summary

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnographic study of the affective migratory lives of irregularised Pakistani men navigating regimes of restrictive mobility and (in)voluntary return. Taking the interaction of several Pakistani citizens with the German migration and asylum regime as a point of departure, the dissertation theorises how people manage situations of despair imbued with forms of hope. Empirically, it focuses on the affective lives of people subjected to irregularised migration and (in)voluntary return as a means of understanding unequal mobility. In distinct spaces, in several directions and along various trajectories, I follow over time the lived experiences of irregularised Pakistani migrants denied asylum in Germany and subsequently ordered to leave. Tracing unique as well as common affective experiences of (im)mobile subjects, I show how irregularisation curtails both efforts to migrate and voluntariness in return. These experiences are unique in that they are personal, subjective, and biographically informed trajectories of their affective migratory lives. And they are commonplace because of their often shared quotidian experiences of irregularisation and (in)voluntary return based on gender, ethnicity, class, religion and nationality, but also because they are lived through somewhat similar social realities in Pakistan, which shape their aspirations, hopes, navigation of despair, choices and actions.

While acknowledging that seeking asylum is one of the few ways available to certain Pakistani (labour) migrants for regularising their stay and labour in Germany and the European Union (EU) more generally, the dissertation does not enter into discussion on the legal reasons (or debates) around the acceptance or rejection of people's asylum. Instead, I turn my attention to people's experiences once they are denied the only chance to regularise their stay by asking a few pertinent questions: How does the so-called "voluntary return" policy impact Pakistani men facing return in Germany at the affective level, in practice? How do irregularised migrants and their families cope with and react to such a return? What strategies are developed to avoid such a return, and what does this mean for the agency attributed to the migrants through the term "voluntary"? Moreover, how do people make sense of their post-return life? What role do restrictive mobility, irregularisation and precarity in Germany play in people's affective decisions to struggle further or return, and what does this look like in everyday life?

In this manner, I address the conjunctive affective reasons that lead people to take up initial irregularised migration and subsequently apply for asylum as a way out of irregularity. Through paying such particular attention, I am able to examine the intricately interlinked, pre- and post-return affective lives of migrants as well as their efforts to avoid deportation and return without talking about their asylum cases or deservingness based on European ideas of humanitarianism. Such a view allows me to probe what happens when people find themselves in a setting where their desires to be mobile and their migratory efforts in that vein are endlessly irregularised through an ever-restrictive, racist and discriminatory migration regime without falling for the trap of legitimising (im)mobility based on norms and (asylum) laws with the EU. Thus, by effectively rejecting the premise of deservedness based on European ideas of (im)mobility and humanitarianism, I bring a migrant perspective to the study of irregularised migration and (in)voluntary return. Although I do not explicitly develop this as a methodological approach in the dissertation, this perspective tacitly undergirds my ethnography through what I make visible and what I keep out and render invisible. My standpoint and positionality as a migrant (albeit a relatively privileged one) from Pakistan play an implicit role in this regard and are explicitly reflected upon and discussed as part of my methodological approach.

One of the core aims of my dissertation is to unpack the everyday impact of so-called "voluntary returns" proposed to my migrant interlocutors as the only way out of the often Kafkaesque irregularisation of their migration whilst they are simultaneously threatened with deportation in Germany. This leads me to follow several trajectories in the lives of irregularised migrants as they unfold. As such, the role of affect in understanding (im)mobility, irregularised migration and stay, as well as (in)voluntary return, was essential for my research. It was not only vital to comprehend and analyse the issues that my interlocutors faced but helped me theorise what I call "migratory improvisations" based on what my interlocutors sometimes referred to as "*jugaad*" (a Panjabi word meaning an improvised solution or action in response to an issue). Through ethnographic examples, I highlight how irregularised migrants make efforts to manoeuvre themselves and find wiggle room in a system founded on—from their perspective—arbitrary power and rules. A system that is, in practice, not very different from what they may have encountered in or around (rural) Punjab, where one can often find themselves at the receiving end of the arbitrary power of a "*chaudhry*" or local headman. In the migratory context, ad-hoc manoeuvring is, in essence, improvisation;

however, it is more than mere strategic heuristics. Improvisations are, I argue, highly affective and moderately effective in finding an alternative way out of the irregularisation dilemma that many encounter in different parts of Europe but also upon return in hopes of another migration or in order to deal with various norms and pressures at home.

Carrying out fieldwork in Germany, Italy and Pakistan, my key research partners and interlocutors are comprised of thirty-six migrants in three different but interconnected situations. The first group is those who were pushed towards (in)voluntary return upon the rejection of their asylum application or who were on the cusp of such a situation in Germany. This phase of my fieldwork was spread over approximately six months between 2019 and 2022 and included sitting through return counselling sessions for migrants as well as deep hanging out with migrants at their camps in and around Munich but not only. Second were those who moved to Italy as a way to avoid (in)voluntary return, i.e. who overcame the double bind of choosing between deportation and so-called "voluntary return" from Germany. This phase was a serendipitous outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic and led me to spend two months mostly living with the migrants in Brescia and Bolzano, two cities in Northern Italy. Third and lastly were those who returned to Pakistan as they could not find a way out of the aforementioned double bind. Split into two phases, this part of my fieldwork consisted of roughly eleven months in Lahore, Mandi Bahauddin and Gujranwala, amongst other places. Beyond sharing these times and spaces with my migrant and returnee interlocutors, I kept in touch with some via social media and continue to do so to this day. While the data collection for this dissertation may be over, the relationships and reciprocities established during this time persist. My secondary interlocutors include families of migrants, aspiring migrants, governmental and non-governmental officials, citizen volunteers and activists and the general public in the three countries. While I do not directly refer to the data collected with my secondary interlocutors often, interactions with them tacitly inform my understanding of the field of research.

In the ethnographic sections, I begin at a general level by grounding the complex nature of so-called "voluntary returns" through the experiences of my interlocutors and ethnographically dissect the issue of voluntariness as entangled with affect. The aim of beginning my ethnographic insights in this manner is to set the stage. By contrasting the everyday experiences of people who made different choices given similar structural constraints, I show how "voluntary return" is a problematic signifier and, at best, an incorrect descriptive term for what happens in practice. I

foregrounded my insights into the topic with the help of eight primary interlocutors. Six of these men returned to Pakistan (albeit not necessarily permanently), and two did not.

Through critical literature, I ground my ethnographic insights in established theories that link deportations and "voluntary returns" and hence often allude to such returns as (in)voluntary. Subsequently, I gradually expand on specific aspects of the migratory lives of these eight interlocutors but also rely on other migrant and non-migrant interlocutors to highlight the significant role of gender and everyday Islam as it shapes people's migratory struggles, secondary migration, eventual return or re-migration upon return. Many of my interlocutors' migratory efforts and improvisations to avoid return through a secondary migration are motivated by a common fear of returning empty-handed after years of struggles. However, this fear does not end its affective hold on those who return by at least temporarily overcoming this fear. In that sense, as imagined "on paper" in various European migration policies, return is not stable or final. It is often just another improvisatory step in the lives of people whose mobility is continuously restricted. As I discovered during my research, in many cases, the "decision" to return had become part of a person's migratory improvisation, a necessary move to save their moribund migratory project. Sometimes, however, a return can be ambiguous or even function as an acceptance that the migratory project is over. Nonetheless, the enforced death of the desire to be mobile is often not long-lived. That is to say, a return due to coercion or the lack of other options in Germany (i.e. enforced volition) is rarely long-term or permanent unless there are determinant factors such as age or capital that limit another migration regardless of the contextual intent at the time of return.

Altogether, the ethnography in this dissertation captures the various ups and downs, heres and theres, backs and forths in the quotidian lives of my migrant interlocutors. I accomplish this by shedding light on the everyday mundane ways in which the temporal and oscillatory "decisions" and the complex improvisations of my interlocutors are deeply influenced by ideas of *taqdeer* (Urdu, emic conception of destiny) and gendered ideals and pressures. In this vein, I argue that these aspects, amongst others, are entangled with the migratory lives of my interlocutors in Europe as well as the post-return context at the affective and practical level. For example, I underscore how masculinities and *taqdeer* play out in the affective and moral economy of irregularised migration and return. In the discussion on masculinities, I demonstrate how people constantly try to overcome (in)voluntary return and live through the difficulties, precarity, waiting, and vulnerabilities of

irregularisation or moving within Europe and those in the return context. When addressing *taqdeer,* I demonstrate how it plays a role in making sense of precarious situations and navigating hope and despair. As such, not only are people's onward improvisations or contemplations to return shaped by the perspectives of *taqdeer* but whatever decision they take in the end can be socially validated by attributing the outcome of their action to the divine.

My dissertation connects and contributes to three main strands of research and literature. Firstly, it connects literature on irregularised migration, the irregularised stay of migrants in Europe and (in)voluntary return and sees the three as interconnected processes rather than discrete stages. Secondly, it relies upon theories of affect and the impact of everyday mundane processes of affect to deepen our understanding of the decisions and actions of irregularised migrants and (in)voluntary returnees within contemporary border and migration regimes largely focused on behavioural and cognitive processes. Thirdly, it focuses on the citizens of Pakistan, one of the top ten national groups who have to resort to irregularised modes of migrating to Europe and asylum as a mode of regularising their stay. With an asylum acceptance rate of around 5% in countries like Germany, they are most likely to be affected by the most recent EU migration deal (2023), according to which national groups with an asylum acceptance rate of less than 20% should face tougher collective restrictions and removal.

Zusammenfassung (German translation of the summary)

Diese Dissertation ist eine ethnographische Studie über die Rolle von Affekten für das Leben irregularisierter (irregularised) pakistanischer Migranten, die sich in Regimen restriktiver Mobilität und (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehr bewegen. Ausgehend von der Interaktion mehrerer pakistanischer Staatsbürger mit dem deutschen Migrations- und Asylregime wird in der Dissertation theoretisiert, wie Menschen mit Situationen der Verzweiflung umgehen, die mit Formen der Hoffnung durchsetzt sind. Empirisch wird das affektive Leben von Menschen, die von irregularisierter Migration und (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehr betroffen sind, als Mittel zum Verständnis ungleicher Mobilität untersucht. In verschiedenen Räumen, in verschiedenen Richtungen und entlang verschiedener Wege verfolge ich im Laufe der Zeit die gelebten Erfahrungen von irregularisierten pakistanischen Migranten, denen in Deutschland das Asyl verweigert wurde und die anschließend zur Ausreise aufgefordert wurden. Indem ich sowohl einzigartige als auch geteilte affektive Erfahrungen (im)mobiler Subjekte nachzeichne, zeige ich, wie Irregularisierung sowohl die Bemühungen um Migration als auch die Freiwilligkeit der Rückkehr einschränkt. Diese Erfahrungen sind insofern einzigartig, als es sich um persönliche, subjektive und biografisch informierte Verläufe ihres durch Affekte geprägten Lebens als Migranten handelt. Und sie sind alltäglich, weil sie oft die gleichen alltäglichen Erfahrungen mit Irregularisierung und (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehr machen, die auf Geschlecht, ethnischer Zugehörigkeit, Klasse, Religion und Nationalität beruhen, aber auch, weil sie ähnliche soziale Realitäten in Pakistan durchleben, die ihre Bestrebungen, Hoffnungen, Verzweiflung, Entscheidungen und Handlungen prägen.

Ich erkenne zwar an, dass die Beantragung von Asyl eine der wenigen Möglichkeiten ist, die bestimmten pakistanischen (Arbeits-)Migranten zur Verfügung stehen, um ihren Aufenthalt und ihre Arbeit in Deutschland und in der Europäischen Union (EU) im Allgemeinen zu legalisieren, aber die Dissertation befasst sich nicht mit den rechtlichen Gründen (oder Debatten), die mit der Annahme oder Ablehnung von Asylanträgen verbunden sind. Stattdessen richte ich mein Augenmerk auf die Erfahrungen, die Menschen machen, wenn ihnen die einzige Chance, ihren Aufenthalt zu legalisieren, verwehrt wird, und stelle dazu einige relevante Fragen: Wie wirkt sich die Politik der sogenannten „freiwilligen Rückkehr" in der Praxis auf pakistanische Männer aus, die in Deutschland mit einer Rückkehr konfrontiert sind? Wie gehen irregularisierte Migranten und ihre

Familien mit einer solchen Rückkehr um und wie reagieren sie darauf? Welche Strategien werden entwickelt, um eine solche Rückkehr zu vermeiden, und was bedeutet dies für die Handlungsfähigkeit, die den Migranten durch den Begriff „freiwillig" zugeschrieben wird? Wie gestalten diese Männer ihr Leben nach der Rückkehr? Welche Rolle spielen restriktive Mobilität, Irregularisierung und Prekarität in Deutschland für die affektive Entscheidung, weiter zu kämpfen oder zurückzukehren, und wie wirkt sich dies im alltäglichen Leben aus?

Auf diese Weise befasse ich mich mit den miteinander verknüpften affektiven Gründen, die Menschen dazu veranlassen, zunächst in die irregularisierte Migration zu gehen und anschließend Asyl als einen Weg aus der Irregularität zu beantragen. Durch diesen besonderen Fokus ist es mir möglich, das eng miteinander verknüpfte affektive Leben von Migranten vor und nach ihrer Rückkehr sowie ihre Bemühungen, Abschiebung und Rückkehr zu vermeiden, zu untersuchen, ohne über ihre Asylanträge oder ihre Bedürftigkeit auf der Grundlage europäischer Vorstellungen von Humanitarismus zu sprechen. Eine solche Sichtweise erlaubt es mir, zu untersuchen, was passiert, wenn Menschen sich in einem Umfeld befinden, in dem ihr Wunsch nach Mobilität und ihre diesbezüglichen Migrationsbemühungen durch ein zunehmend restriktives, rassistisches und diskriminierendes Migrationsregime endlos irregularisiert werden, ohne in die Falle zu tappen, (Im-)Mobilität auf der Grundlage von Normen und (Asyl-)Gesetzen der EU zu legitimieren. Indem ich die Prämisse der „deservingness", die auf europäischen Vorstellungen von (Im-)Mobilität und Humanitarismus beruht, ablehne, bringe ich eine Migrantenperspektive in die Untersuchung von irregularisierter Migration und (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehr ein. Obwohl ich dies in der Dissertation nicht explizit als methodischen Ansatz entwickle, untermauert diese Perspektive stillschweigend meine Ethnographie: sowohl durch das, was ich sichtbar mache, als auch durch das, was ich ausschließe und unsichtbar mache. Mein Standpunkt und meine Positionierung als Migrant (wenn auch ein relativ privilegierter) aus Pakistan spielen in dieser Hinsicht eine implizite Rolle und werden als Teil meines methodischen Ansatzes explizit reflektiert und diskutiert.

Eines der Hauptziele meiner Dissertation ist es, die alltäglichen Auswirkungen der so genannten „freiwilligen Rückkehr" zu entschlüsseln, die meinen Gesprächspartnern mit Migrations-hintergrund als einziger Ausweg aus der oft kafkaesken Irregularisierung ihrer Migration vorgeschlagen wird, während sie gleichzeitig in Deutschland von Abschiebung bedroht sind. Dies veranlasst mich dazu, mehrere Lebenswege irregularisierter Migranten zu verfolgen, während sie

sich entfalten. Daher war die Rolle des Affekts für das Verständnis von (Im-)Mobilität, irregularisierter Migration und Aufenthalt sowie (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehr für meine Forschung wesentlich. Sie war nicht nur für das Verständnis und die Analyse der Probleme, mit denen meine Gesprächspartner konfrontiert waren, von entscheidender Bedeutung, sondern half mir auch dabei, das zu theoretisieren, was ich als „migratory improvisations" bezeichne, basierend auf dem, was meine Gesprächspartner manchmal als *„jugaad"* bezeichneten (ein Panjabi-Wort, das eine improvisierte Lösung oder Aktion als Reaktion auf ein Problem bedeutet). Anhand von ethnografischen Beispielen zeige ich auf, wie irregularisierte Migranten versuchen, zu manövrieren und Spielraum in einem System zu finden, das - aus ihrer Sicht - auf willkürlicher Macht und willkürlichen Regeln beruht. Ein System, das sich in der Praxis nicht sehr von dem unterscheidet, das sie vielleicht im oder um den (ländlichen) Punjab herum kennengelernt haben, wo man sich oft der Willkür eines *„chaudhry"* oder eines lokalen Vorstehers ausgesetzt sieht. Im Migrationskontext sind Ad-hoc-Manöver im Wesentlichen Improvisationen; sie sind jedoch mehr als nur strategische Heuristiken. Improvisationen sind, so behaupte ich, hochgradig affektiv und mäßig effektiv, wenn es darum geht, einen alternativen Ausweg aus dem Irregularisierungsdilemma zu finden, mit dem viele Migranten in verschiedenen Teilen Europas konfrontiert sind. Dies gilt auch nach ihrer Rückkehr: etwa, wenn diese mit der Hoffnung auf eine weitere Migration verbunden ist oder sie mit verschiedenen Normen und Erwartungen in der Heimat umgehen müssen.

Meine Hauptforschungspartner und Gesprächspartner sind sechsunddreißig Migranten, die sich in drei verschiedenen, aber miteinander verbundenen Situationen befinden, die ich in Deutschland, Italien und Pakistan erforscht habe. Bei der ersten Gruppe handelt es sich um diejenigen, die nach der Ablehnung ihres Asylantrags zur (un-)freiwilligen Rückkehr gedrängt wurden oder die sich in Deutschland an der Schwelle zu einer solchen Situation befanden. Diese Phase meiner Feldforschung erstreckte sich über etwa sechs Monate zwischen 2019 und 2022 und umfasste sowohl die Teilnahme an Rückkehrberatungen für Migranten als auch das intensive Zusammensein mit Migranten in ihren Lagern in und um München, aber nicht nur dort. Die zweite Gruppe waren diejenigen, die nach Italien gezogen sind, um eine (un-)freiwillige Rückkehr zu vermeiden, d.h. die sich der Zwickmühle, zwischen Abschiebung und sogenannter „freiwilliger Rückkehr" aus Deutschland wählen zu müssen, entzogen haben. Diese Phase war ein zufälliges Ergebnis der Covid-19-Pandemie und führte dazu, dass ich zwei Monate lang hauptsächlich mit den Migranten in

Brescia und Bozen, zwei Städten in Norditalien, lebte. Der dritte und letzte Teil betraf diejenigen, die nach Pakistan zurückkehrten, weil sie keinen Ausweg aus der oben erwähnten Zwickmühle finden konnten. Aufgeteilt in zwei Phasen, umfasste dieser Teil meiner Feldforschung etwa elf Monate in Lahore, Mandi Bahauddin und Gujranwala, neben anderen Orten. Ich teilte diese Zeit und diese Orte nicht nur mit meinen Gesprächspartnern, sondern blieb mit einigen auch über die sozialen Medien in Kontakt und tue dies bis heute. Die Datenerhebung für diese Dissertation mag zwar abgeschlossen sein, doch die in dieser Zeit entstandenen Beziehungen und Reziprozitäten bestehen fort. Zu meinen sekundären GesprächspartnerInnen gehören Familien von Migranten, angehende Migranten, Regierungs- und NichtregierungsbeamtInnen, ehrenamtliche BürgerInnen und AktivistInnen sowie die allgemeine Öffentlichkeit in den drei Ländern. Ich beziehe mich zwar nicht oft direkt auf die mit meinen sekundären GesprächspartnerInnen gesammelten Daten, aber die Interaktionen, die ich mit ihnen hatte, informieren mein Verständnis des Forschungsfeldes.

In den ethnografischen Abschnitten beginne ich auf einer allgemeinen Ebene, indem ich den komplexen Charakter der so genannten „freiwilligen Rückkehr" anhand der Erfahrungen meiner Gesprächspartner erkläre und die Frage der Freiwilligkeit als mit dem Affekt verwoben ethnografisch analysiere. Dabei ist es mein Ziel, durch diese Vorgehensweise zunächst eine Grundlage zu schaffen. Indem ich die Alltagserfahrungen von Menschen kontrastiere, die unter ähnlichen strukturellen Bedingungen unterschiedliche Entscheidungen getroffen haben, zeige ich, dass „freiwillige Rückkehr" eine problematische Bezeichnung und bestenfalls eine unzutreffende Beschreibung für das ist, was in der Praxis geschieht. Ich habe meine Einblicke in das Thema mit Hilfe von acht primären Gesprächspartnern vertieft. Sechs dieser Männer kehrten nach Pakistan zurück (wenn auch nicht unbedingt dauerhaft), zwei nicht.

Mithilfe kritischer Literatur stütze ich meine ethnografischen Erkenntnisse auf etablierte Theorien, die Abschiebungen und „freiwillige Rückkehr" miteinander verknüpfen und daher diese Art der Rückkehr als (un-)freiwillig [(in)voluntary] betrachten. Anschließend gehe ich schrittweise auf spezifische Aspekte des Lebens dieser acht Gesprächspartner ein, stütze mich aber auch auf andere Gesprächspartner mit und ohne Migrationshintergrund, um die bedeutende Rolle von Geschlecht und Alltagsislam hervorzuheben, die die Migrationskämpfe, die Sekundärmigration, die eventuelle Rückkehr oder die erneute Migration nach der Rückkehr prägen. Viele der Migrationsbemühungen und Improvisationen meiner Gesprächspartner, um eine Rückkehr durch eine Sekundärmigration zu

vermeiden, sind durch die gemeinsame Angst motiviert, nach Jahren des Kampfes mit leeren Händen zurückzukehren. Diese Angst hört jedoch nicht auf für diejenigen, die zurückkehren, auch wenn sie für ihre Rückkehrentscheidung diese Angst zumindest vorübergehend überwinden. In diesem Sinne ist die Rückkehr, wie sie in verschiedenen europäischen Migrationspolitiken „auf dem Papier" vorgestellt wird, weder stabil noch endgültig. Sie ist oft nur ein weiterer improvisierter Schritt im Leben von Menschen, deren Mobilität ständig eingeschränkt ist. Wie ich bei meinen Recherchen feststellte, war die „Entscheidung" zur Rückkehr in vielen Fällen Teil der „migratory improvisations" einer Person geworden, ein notwendiger Schritt, um ihr marodes Migrationsprojekt zu retten. Manchmal kann eine Rückkehr jedoch auch zweideutig sein oder sogar aus der Akzeptanz resultieren, dass das Migrationsprojekt beendet ist. Dennoch ist das erzwungene Ende des Wunsches, mobil zu sein, oft nicht von langer Dauer. Das heißt, dass eine Rückkehr aufgrund von Zwang oder fehlenden anderen Optionen in Deutschland (d. h. erzwungenes Einverständnis/ „enforced volition") selten langfristig oder dauerhaft ist, es sei denn, es gibt entscheidende Faktoren wie Alter oder Kapital, die eine weitere Migration unabhängig von der kontextuellen Absicht zum Zeitpunkt der Rückkehr einschränken.

Insgesamt fängt die Ethnografie in dieser Dissertation die verschiedenen Höhen und Tiefen, das Hier und Dort, das Hin und Her im Alltagsleben meiner Gesprächspartner ein. Dies gelingt mir, indem ich die alltägliche Art und Weise beleuchte, in der die zeitlichen und oszillierenden „Entscheidungen" und die komplexen Improvisationen meiner Gesprächspartner zutiefst von Vorstellungen von *taqdeer* (Urdu, emische Vorstellung von Schicksal) und geschlechts-spezifischen Idealen und Druck beeinflusst sind. In diesem Sinne argumentiere ich, dass diese Aspekte, neben anderen, auf der affektiven und praktischen Ebene mit dem Leben meiner Gesprächspartner in Europa sowie dem Kontext nach der Rückkehr verwoben sind. Ich betone zum Beispiel, wie Männlichkeiten und *taqdeer* in der affektiven und moralischen Ökonomie der irregularisierten Migration und der Rückkehr eine Rolle spielen. In der Diskussion über Männlichkeiten zeige ich, wie Menschen ständig versuchen, die (un-)freiwillige Rückkehr zu umgehen und mit den Schwierigkeiten, der Prekarität, dem Warten und den Verletzlichkeiten der Irregularisierung oder der Bewegung innerhalb Europas und denen im Rückkehrkontext zu leben. Wenn ich mich mit *taqdeer* befasse, zeige ich, wie es eine Rolle dabei spielt, prekären Situationen einen Sinn zu geben und Hoffnung und Verzweiflung zu überwinden. So werden nicht nur die Improvisationen oder

Überlegungen der Menschen zur Rückkehr von den Perspektiven des *taqdeer* geprägt, sondern jede Entscheidung, die sie letztendlich treffen, kann sozial validiert werden, indem das Ergebnis ihrer Handlung dem Göttlichen zugeschrieben wird.

Meine Dissertation verbindet und trägt zu drei Hauptsträngen der Forschung und Literatur bei. Erstens verbindet sie die Literatur über irregularisierte Migration, den irregularisierten Aufenthalt von Migranten in Europa und die (un-)freiwillige Rückkehr und betrachtet diese drei als miteinander verbundene Prozesse und nicht als getrennte Phasen. Zweitens stützt sie sich auf Theorien des Affekts und der Auswirkungen alltäglicher Prozesse des Affekts, um unser Verständnis der Entscheidungen und Handlungen irregularisierter Migranten und (un-)freiwilliger Rückkehrer innerhalb zeitgenössischer Grenz- und Migrationsregime zu vertiefen, die sich weitgehend auf verhaltensbezogene und kognitive Prozesse konzentrieren. Drittens konzentriert sich das Projekt auf Menschen aus Pakistan (in diesem Falle in erster Linie Männer), eine der zehn größten nationalen Gruppen, die auf irregularisierte Formen der Migration nach Europa und Asyl als eine Form der Legalisierung ihres Aufenthalts zurückgreifen müssen. Mit einer Asylanerkennungsrate von etwa 5% in Ländern wie Deutschland sind sie am ehesten vom jüngsten EU-Migrationspakt (2023) betroffen, demzufolge nationale Gruppen mit einer Asylanerkennungsrate von weniger als 20% mit strengeren kollektiven Beschränkungen und Abschiebungen/Rückkehr (removal) rechnen müssen.

Migratory Improvisations and Affect
Navigating Migration and Return as an Irregularised Migrant from Pakistan

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Migratory improvisations of irregularised migrants: departure to return and beyond

At *eid-milad al-nabi* (the prophet's birthday), Alam and his wife Nabeela invited some neighbours and members of their *biraderi* (emic kinship concept in Pakistan) to their new house in Mandi Bahauddin, a small city in Northern Punjab. A few months after Alam's return from Germany in August 2019, this auspicious occasion allowed him to celebrate and share his material and non-material migratory "success". Travelling to Pakistan for fieldwork around the same time Alam had returned, I was invited and introduced as a "good friend from Munich". 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 disapproved of Alam's "voluntary" return. I might have instigated the conversation by asking Alam and his brother-in-law, Yaseen, about their return to Pakistan from Germany and Spain, respectively. However, I was unaware that the different circumstances of their respective returns would bring many ambivalent personal feelings to the affective and discursive surfaces.

Albeit decades apart, both men had travelled to Europe from a region that has, over the last few decades, locally established itself as the "*gardh*" (stronghold or hub) of (irregularised) emigration. Yaseen had done so in the '80s when he was young and when walls in Europe were literally and metaphorically falling, and Alam, more recently in 2015, as a middle-aged man when the walls and fences in Europe had proliferated to an unprecedented scale only to crumble temporarily at the plight of Syrians fleeing a brutal civil war. While Yaseen's journey to Europe in the '80s was relatively easier, he had to spend over a decade working in a Spanish coal mine, eventually regularising his stay and securing a Spanish passport. When his children moved to the United Kingdom as adults, he decided to return to Pakistan as a retiree travelling to Europe when he wished. On the other hand, Alam only left for Europe in his 50s and, after three years of trying to regularise himself, decided to return with a one-way ticket and some financial assistance provided through "Coming Home," a so-called "voluntary return counselling centre" in Munich. While everyone in the *biraderi* knew about Yaseen's stories of bravado, male effort, and struggle to get legalised in Spain when he was young, Alam was portrayed as his exact opposite in this

conversation. The very different times, spaces and political contexts under which their respective migration took place and unfolded in Europe were never compared.

As I had presumed, such arguments were not a one-off instance and certainly not only happening because of my presence or "instigation". My presumption or feelings about the situation based on Yaseen's imposing demeanour, absolute self-assurance, and highly opinionated views about others in the family were later confirmed when I stayed with Alam and his family for extended periods on a few occasions. During this time, I got to witness what Alam called his relatives, but particularly Yaseen's "*tok marna*" (to be hit/struck by speech), an idiom in Urdu and Punjabi which describes a range of devices for veiled criticisms from elliptical condescending comments to gentle chides and surreptitiously insinuating or catty comments to ones with a subtext of blame or shame.

Later in my fieldwork, I would discover that it was this kind of speech, perhaps one could say *doublespeak*, that my interlocutors feared when they used the ubiquitous words "what will people back home say" to explain their fear of returning even under the most precarious of conditions in Europe. "*tokan mar mar, mar dena mainu*" ([they]will repeatedly strike and kill me through their *tokan* [plural of *tok*]) as someone in Europe explained why he would never return without a passport. What is striking (no pun intended) about the expression, particularly the way this person used it, was the use of the verb "*mar*", which can mean "to hit/strike" but also "to kill". Hence people's "striking" him with repeated "*tokan*" is something he implied he could not emotionally bear. That these "*tokan*" would "kill" him on the inside.

Such existential angst about what others would say was well-founded, I discovered in Pakistan. For instance, at Alam's home in Mandi Bahauddin, when Yaseen used Alam's younger brother Ahmad's example to argue that Alam was not "man enough" to struggle for longer, the mood in the room changed, and the place transformed into a different affective space. Ahmad and Alam had started their journey to Europe together, but Ahmad had been caught in Iran and severely beaten before he was deported back to Pakistan. "It was not his fault," Yaseen said, pointing at Ahmad and alluding to his deportation, but "what is your excuse," he asked Alam. To dispel the affective burden of Yaseen's claims of what success and effort in irregularised migration and return mean, Alam exclaimed that his return was "Allah's will," and referring to his remittance house along with a few other accomplishments, he added that he had achieved his "*maqsad*" (purpose; goal).

The following day when I talked to Alam's son Shakeel, he told me that his father was quite old and that if *he* were to make it to Europe, he would struggle to get a passport like Uncle Yaseen: "*Abu ki Umar nai hai na ... mai gaya to Passport le ker he aun ga*" (Abu's quite old ... if I go, I will only return with a passport)[1]. For boasting in the absence of his father, his mother teased him by reminding him that he "can't even fry an egg" whilst his father could cook a "*deg* [cauldron] for the whole neighbourhood". In the winter of 2021, when I returned to stay at their house a couple of times[2] as part of my fieldwork, both Nabeela and Shakeel asked me for a favour: Before leaving for Germany, I had to convince Alam to allow Shakeel to go to Europe. Something I did not have to do as before I left, Shakeel was engaged with a girl whose brothers were "settled in Italy", and the hope was that they would convince Alam and find a way to bring Shakeel over.

Economic hyper-rationality only exists in theoretical models. The statement is true for any part of human life, but particularly when it comes to migration and return, there are hardly ever simply "rational" or purely "economic" decisions[3]. The vignette above hints at some of the affective, social and temporal complexities associated with migration and, more importantly, return migration. The complex nature of human mobility and concomitant decisions are rendered more complicated for irregularised migrants who wish to overcome immobility and seek mobility in our seemingly mobile, globalised world. Questions of capabilities and limited opportunities for regularised modes of mobility combined with restrictive mobility regimes and unjust national borders add weight to people's mobility-seeking choices and actions (Nussbaum 2011; Sheller 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2022). Despite the limiting physical, legal, sociopolitical and mundane everyday structures that function like a global caste system of mobility, many people try to enact their agency to overcome immobility. Recent scholarship has highlighted many aspects of such "unjust mobilities" (Sheller 2018). Ruben Anderson (2014), for example, talks about the structures of immobility as an

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[1] The Urdu expression "*umar na hona*" literally means "to not 'have' the age [for a particular activity]", and is translated as "quite old". NB: Unlike his parents, who spoke Punjabi, Shakeel often spoke Urdu with me. With many of my other interlocutors, I spoke a mixture of Punjabi and Urdu depending on the context and their level of comfort with the language.

[2] Since they did not want to accept rent, I paid for a water heater in the bathroom.

[3] Defining *return* at the onset is essential. While all forms of return can be collectively analysed under the rubric of "return mobilities," as argued by King and Christou (2011), following Ellen Oxford and Lynellyn Long (2004: 4), I distinguish between "*return migration*," defined as a temporary or permanent physical relocation of the migrant to the country of origin and the "*return*", a broader concept which includes return migration, deportation, repatriation (where the return is forced but legally different from deportation) and so-called "voluntary" return. This dissertation focuses mainly on the last form of return, i.e. *"voluntary" returns of irregularised migrants* and as such, "return" in the body of the text that follows may be used synonymously with the said form of return. However, as much as possible, the term (in)voluntary or "voluntary" (in quotations) will be explicitly used as a prefix to demonstrate the ambivalence of migrants' agency and the mix of hidden and overt use of power by the host state in such returns. Furthermore, (in)voluntary returns or so-called "voluntary returns" can be seen as a form of removal along with deportation due to the interlinked politics of migration control, as has been argued by prominent deportation and critical border studies scholars (De Genova 2002; Peutz 2006; De Genova 2017; Collyer 2018; Khosravi 2018; Turnbull 2019).

economic resource to be extracted. Without the "extreme zones" purposefully created by borders, this extractable value would not exist. Neither would a profit that amongst other stakeholders benefits "the security forces, research institutes, and aid organisations that increasingly compete for funds in the new Europe of outsourced public services" (Anderson 2014: 14). Addressing the legal sides of borders, Henk van Houtum (2010) talks about the European Union (EU) Schengen visa criterion based on its so-called "positive and negative" list and terms it as a form of "global apartheid". Many have highlighted the socio-political production of borders and unequal mobility through humanitarianism (Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2012a; Pallister-Wilkins 2022). Yet, others point to the functioning of borders within a state's territory by excluding people through mundane everyday forms of borders or more severe acts of forced and "voluntary" removal (Kalir 2017; Sökefeld 2019; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). William Walters' (2006b: 152) metaphor of the border as a "firewall" is, as such, more relevant than ever in understanding the EU's idea of the border, which is not "a wall designed to arrest all movement but more of a filter that aspires to reconcile high levels of circulation, transmission and movement with high levels of security" (see also Keshavarz and Khosravi 2020).

On the one hand, this simultaneous hardening of borders for many and softening for a few means that most people seeking mobility must resort to long, arduous and dangerous journeys to cross nationalised territories (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). On the other hand, overcoming the physical hurdles of restrictive borders does not equate to the mobility people seek or wish for, and the "structural violence of the global border regime" follows them into their desired destinations (Jones 2017: 27). Their aspirations and hopes upon arrival are seen to be as worthless as their lives on rickety boats in the open seas. Based on ideas of "deservingness", irregularised migrants are given few opportunities to regularise their stay, and, as unwanted outsiders, they are often forced to navigate return or re-migrate[4] (Streinzer and Tosic 2022). These moves and ways of navigating restrictive mobility regimes and enacting agency are what I term *migratory improvisations* in the title. Under the limiting structures of unequal mobility regimes, migratory improvisation is a mode of navigating mobility and second-guessing the power holders and their use of "legal" force, administrative control and other forms of power. Simultaneously, it is a means to cope with various

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[4] Unlike (at times) in German scholarship, "re-migration" here does not allude to return migration but to an onward or subsequent migration following a period of stay in the first country of destination. As such, it denotes an ongoing process of migratory movement. This is the manner in which I have employed the term throughout.

affective and contingent forces or pressures, such as but not only responsibilities, desires and social hope. In this improvisational "theatre" of unequal mobility, the performer's actions are as unplanned and unscripted as any improvised theatre performance but carry real-life consequences. They are created "collaboratively"[5] with other human and non-human agents that manifest "different expressions and forms of power" (VeneKlasen and Miller 2007: 55). Borders, passports, migration laws, officials, activists, volunteers, family, friends, peers, and so on all enact different forms of relational and at times "magical" powers (Keshavarz and Khosravi 2020). Visible and invisible forms of power—over, to, with and within (see VeneKlasen and Miller 2002)—impact the subject of improvisation, the improvisation "performer", pushing them forward or setting them back. I should be quick to note that such improvisations, for me, are more than a form of "hidden resistance" or a "weapon of the weak" before such an idea generates and gestates in the text or the mind of the reader (Scott 1985, 1990). Firstly because as I envision migratory improvisation, it is neither a hidden transcript, "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by power holders" (Scott 1985: 4), nor is it a public transcript, "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate," (Scott 1985: 2) nor are its performers, those engaged in mobility improvisations limited to either or. Instead, as the first part of the term suggests, they are involved in an improvisation of mobility, discursively and in practice, that unfolds in the present without using any normative or prepared trans-*script* or mode of performing (carrying out agency; acting). Migratory improvisations show that the relationship between agency and power "is dynamic and multidimensional, changing according to context, circumstance, and interest" and that its "expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation" (see VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 39). It shows how new possibilities and openings are created by people at the micro (individual) scale or meso (relational/network) scale to navigate the world of restrictive, precarious and unequal mobility shaped by dominant regimes of mobility, established power structures and macro scale normative policies or ideologies.

The vignette above gives insight into another aspect of migratory improvisations. The entanglement of the economic with sociocultural, religious, emotional and highly gendered ideals of migration. These, in turn, shape the collective pressures and moral obligations and work in conjunction with sometimes competing personal desires (Mortensen 2014). In the theatre of unequal mobility, the

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5 Not collaboration in the sense of only cooperation but more a mixture of collaborating with some and second-guessing others like an improv artist who "collaborates" with their fellow artists and the audience.

experiences of (in)voluntarily (im)mobile[6] people, the performers of this improvisation, are weaved into temporal and relational affects, obligations, desires and hopes, which require an ethnographic engagement and description to be better comprehended.

Lastly, the vignette highlights how migration and return are not two separate parts of people's lives nor something that can be categorised as clearly individualistic or collectivist. On the contrary, departure, transit, arrival and return (and everything in-between and around) are connected in a complex and relational manner through expectations and reciprocities that circulate materially and as affects between friends and family over generations and are entangled with individual desires, goals and aspirations influenced by our contemporary access to a vast amount of information (Appadurai 2016). Moreover, as Alice Elliot (2021, 2022) points out, religious cosmologies that intrinsically impact and structure people's migratory lives further complicate this entanglement. In other words, return is just one of the "scenes" of the affective migratory improvisation and, in most cases, not the last.

Situations around people's irregularised departure, arrival and return are also interconnected due to the politics of migration control and mobility under what Lauren Berlant (2022) calls "world-national-capitalist theatre". Berlant (2022: 20) argues that the *world-national-capitalist theatre* "manifestly and incoherently (re)shapes many processes of value creation" through forced precarity and fragility. Giving an example of incoherent "global" national-capitalist processes of value creation through migration, they state: "the liberal nation's historic ways of inviting immigration for the purposes of exploitation and shunning immigrants for the purposes of ethnopride" points to "the centrality of racial and gendered exploitation to the image of an economic system that figures itself as democratic in its exploitation and not inherently racist and misogynist and so on" (2022: 20). In such an incoherent and unjust world, it is no wonder that my interlocutors rely on their religious life words and cosmologies to make sense of the injustices of borders in the world-national-capitalist theatre, and on improvisations to enact power-agency (cf. Elliot 2016).

Irregularised migration and its concomitant decision-making processes involve constant mediation by the subject of migration with a host of other human actors and institutions. As such, a migrant

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[6] Involuntarily immobility, following Carling (2002), entails people who have the desires or "aspirations" to migrate but have limited opportunities or "capabilities" to do so. (In)voluntary mobility, for the purpose of this dissertation, refers to return through so-called "voluntary return programs," where the difference between voluntary and involuntary is blurry at best.

manages many temporal relationships, reciprocal commitments and ambiguities within various social, political and legal contexts. Often interlinked with these relational concerns are hopes and desires for a better life and ideas about belonging, identity and freedom that do not exist in a vacuum. Like any other migratory stage, return, whether forced, voluntary—or, as I will show, an ambivalent mix of the two—also involves temporal and affective mediations that form the foundation of any decision-making process. As explained at the beginning of this section, this process is even more striking in the lives of irregularised migrants as their mobility is subject to various forms of control and exclusion; social, legal, political and so on.

1.2 The research and its aims in chapters

How does the so-called "voluntary return" policy impact the Pakistani men facing return in Germany at the affective level, in practice? How do irregularised migrants and their families cope with and react to such a return? What strategies are developed to avoid such a return, and what does that mean for the agency attributed to the migrants through the term "voluntary"? Moreover, alternatively, how do people make sense of their post-return life? What role do restrictive mobility, irregularisation and precarity in Germany play in people's affective decisions to struggle further or return, and what does that look like in everyday life?

Through my research and hence in this dissertation, I address the cluster of questions above and the interleaved spaces in between by inquiring into the intricately interlinked pre- and post-return lives of irregularised migrants with Pakistani citizenship. Focusing on affect to understand (im)mobility, irregularised migration, and (in)voluntary return is at the core of my research and was vital to addressing the questions above. I draw attention to my research scope and theoretical aspects in a more channelled manner, starting with the following chapter, where I discuss relevant literature and theory by highlighting the value of an affective lens in studying (im)mobility, irregularised migration and particularly (in)voluntary return (chapter two). This will be followed by a chapter on methods and methodology, including a comprehensive section on my positionality as an integral research component to studying irregularisation and (in)voluntary returns (chapter three). Subsequently, I present my observations and empirical analysis in three ethnographic chapters. I start at a general level by grounding the complex nature of so-called "voluntary returns" through the experiences of my interlocutors and ethnographically dissect the issue of *voluntariness* as entangled

with affects (chapter four). In the following two chapters, I unpack the role of gender (chapter five) and zoom in on Muslim ideas of destiny (chapter six) concerning irregularised migration and return. Throughout, I discuss affect and emotions as relevant to the motivations, expectations and experiences of my interlocutors in different situations: Prospective (in)voluntary returnees in Germany, those who (in)voluntarily re-migrate elsewhere in Europe and those who (in)voluntarily return to Pakistan. For analytical purposes and to frame the methodological domain of this dissertation, these situations can be categorised as such: 1) the "pre-return" phase of people's lives in Germany; 2) the "post-return" phase in Pakistan; 3) the "non-return" or re-migration to Italy; 4) the oscillatory "choices", temporal decisions and improvisations during these different "phases".

The "choices" and decisions people make in the pre-return phase are not linearly linked to return; indeed, they are oscillatory and temporal in that people constantly keep changing between them due to various contingent factors. Building on ethnographic examples of what I call people's migratory improvisations, this is indeed what I will show in the main body of this text. I also show that in many cases, people may only have one "choice", which logically and practically speaking cannot be considered a "real" choice or "voluntary" action. A *real* choice, hence voluntariness, implies the possibility of enacting a particular choice out of various theoretical options that may be present due to internal or external capabilities (Nussbaum 2011) . For instance, without a transnational network, some recognition as a trustworthy person, material resources or objectified cultural capital that can be turned into one of the other capitals, it would be hard for a person to find shelter as an illegalised person in Germany or re-migrate to another European country (Bourdieu 1986). For such a person, preparation for return through a "voluntary return program" may be the only option and hence not a choice or voluntary action (cf. Mahar 2021c). For someone with the necessary resources and capital (social, symbolic, economic, cultural), not returning and resorting to irregularised intra-European re-migration might only become a choice because of an improvised action.

The post-return phase is also not stable or final, and people's initial intentions may not match the outcome. As I found out, in many cases, the "decision" to return was part of a person's migratory improvisation, a necessary step backwards in the present for a step towards mobility in the future. Thus, a return due to coercion or the lack of other options in Germany is rarely stable. For example, a return which may initially be thought of as temporary due to the lack of agency in the return process may turn out to be permanent due to temporal and contextual factors and vice versa (see

Cleton and Schweitzer 2020; Mahar 2020d; Schweitzer 2022; Schweitzer, Humphris, and Monforte 2022). Furthermore, as King and Christou (2011: 453) remind us, "return can represent a variety of emotions and outcomes." Therefore, return, more specifically what I term here the post-return phase, can be filled with hope but also despair and a host of other affects and emotions (cf. Strasser and Sökefeld forthcoming); it can be an "unsettling path" (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004) that can disrupt the "moral economy of migration" (Kleist 2017a) and is often the "beginning of the next cycle of migration" (Khosravi 2016; Sökefeld 2019). In the local communities, returnees may be seen as "weak" or a "failure" (Mahar 2023), are often "stigmatised" (Schuster and Majidi 2015), and return might feel like "another arrival" (Peutz 2006). In that vein, I try to make ethnographic sense of the dilemmas and realities that my interlocutors with Pakistani citizenship face in their pre- and post-return lives and everything that circulates in-between and around their irregularised migratory experiences and actions theorised as improvisations.

1.3 Terminology, context and thematic focus

Before I proceed further, it is crucial to establish the terminology and context at this stage. By using the term "irregularised" migrants rather than the more commonly used terms like "irregular," "illegal," or "undocumented" migrants, I stress two critical facts. Firstly, the unequal power relation between the non-citizen and the state, where the latter enforces its will to restrict the former's rights through *irregularisation*. Secondly, the chronotopic construction of irregularity, illegality or undocumentedness: While terms like "undocumented" and "illegal" or even "irregular" allude to a legal situation in the present whilst concealing its constructed-ness (Chomsky 2014), "irregularisation" speaks of the process that takes place over time in different spaces and through policy and discourse to render the migrant as not "regular". As such, the term (irregularised; irregularisation) highlights the precarity of residency and lack of agency and rights that people experience when they are not granted "regular" authorisation to stay in the country and conjunctively allows for a situation where they can be subjected to the politics of migration control and deservingness[7] (Streinzer and Tosic 2022).

I acknowledge that there are nuances between different categories of irregularised people that I will overlook through my approach. Nevertheless, I prefer the loss of such nuancing over reproducing

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[7] Moralised and legalised ideas of deservingness which shape people's classification into those deserving of mobility and those who are not.

the hierarchies created by state systems and policy discourse that use terms to differentiate between "categories" or "kinds" of people to moralise ideas of deservingness and restrict the mobility of certain people. While most of the irregularised migrants I worked with were refused asylum and refuge, I do not see them as any less deserving of mobility than those deemed worthy of asylum and refuge. Following Pallister-Wilkins (2022: 11), I see the "different rights" attached to different categories as a "symptom and cause of unequal mobility". How so-called "liberal democratic states" employ their power, often violent and necropolitical forms of power[8], and deem specific modes of migratory movements as "regular" and others as "irregular" or how they channel unequal mobility for their own social, political and economic goals is nothing new (see Mbembe 2019; Sharma 2020; Bradley and De Noronha 2022). Neither is my aim to show how, despite the European efforts, be it outright brutality and necropolitics or based on disciplinary or discursive forms of power to restrict and remove people, they cannot stop people from seeking mobility. Even as specific people are forcibly removed (deported) or forced/coerced to return (through other means), migratory efforts, improvisations seeking mobility and affective ideas about migration remain alive in communities unjustly subjected to restrictive mobility is also an empirically established fact. My novel contribution here is that I give ethnographic insights into the migratory improvisations (including return) of a particular group of people—namely men with Pakistani citizenship—seeking mobility due to affective pressures faced in a vastly unequal and unjust country of birth and world. However, parallels can be drawn with "life seekers" from other parts of the world who face unequal mobility and figure out different strategies to overcome immobility and forced return (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). According to Pallister-Wilkins (2022: 62), life seekers are people seeking life elsewhere than their countries of birth due to "wars, injustice, inequality, human rights abuses, endemic poverty, and lack of opportunities", often in stark contrast with the relatively peaceful and prosperous Global North, they seek new lives in.

In terms of context, something I will address in detail in chapter three, I carried out research primarily with irregularised migrants facing migratory vulnerabilities in Germany—and Italy, where some re-migrate to avoid deportation from Germany—and in Pakistan, where I mainly followed "voluntary" returnees with "interrupted" migration journeys (Cassarino 2014b).

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[8] Hence bear the responsibility!

The initial focus of my research was the deportation and "voluntary" return of irregularised migrants with Pakistani citizenship, and as such, the context was primarily envisioned to be post-return. However, in Pakistan, I realised that locating deportees was difficult, but gaining their trust was even more complicated, so I primarily conducted my post-return research with "voluntary" returnees. Earlier, when I started fieldwork in Munich to meet "potential" returnees (and deportees), I realised that a better understanding of removal and return required that it be seen as a process that is intrinsically associated with my interlocutors' hopes of—and improvisation towards—staying in Germany or Europe more generally. As such, their improvisational struggles and accompanying hopes and desires of acquiring "*kaghaz*" (papers or documents) through asylum, waiting for an amnesty scheme or other means could not be separated from a return, and so pre- and post-return scenarios were neither binary situations nor was the connection between the two a linear progression.

The legal process of an asylum application[9] is based on affective ideas of hope that one's stay in Germany can be regularised. For many of my interlocutors, it is an essential component of their migratory improvisations. However, due to their Pakistani citizenship, it is often an improbable means of acquiring long-term regularisation, given the legal and political circumstances in Bavaria, Germany, where I started my research in 2019. These circumstances are certainly influenced by the mobility, border and asylum regimes in Germany and, more generally, Europe. As such, the "pre-return" European or German context, rather than just being a point of departure for getting to know potential returnees (and deportees), became intrinsically bound up with "post-return" scenarios and everything in between, including efforts and improvisations to avoid return or deportation by moving to another European state.

In the case of my interlocutors, many of whom entered Germany in or around 2015, applying for asylum meant that they ended up in or around Munich, Bavaria, by no choice of their own[10]. People often end up where they do as per a quota system called "*Königsteiner Schlüssel*" (Koenigstein Key) that determines, among other things, the reception capacities for the sixteen "*Deutsche Bundesländer*" (German Federal States). According to the Asylum Act (2008 [2016]), sections 55(1)

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[9] Applying for asylum is a right afforded to everyone within the borders of Germany. This means that very few people are actually pushed into undocumentedness upon arrival; another reason for not using the term undocumented migrants. Most migrants register themselves with the German state and remain legally recognised but practically irregularised.

[10] Asylum seekers in Germany do not have the right to choose their place of residence as per German law, and their freedom of movement within the Federal territory may also be restricted.

and 56 (1), an asylum seeker's right to remain as per their "*Aufenthaltsgestattung*" (permission to stay) can also be limited to the district where their assigned "*Ausländerbehörde*" (Foreigners Office) or the reception centre is located. However, the severity of the restriction varies from state to state—with Bavaria having the most severe constraints due to its closed reception centres—and can increase once the asylum (or subsequent appeal) has been rejected (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2022).

Once people are served an "*Ablehnungs-Bescheid*"[11] (rejection notice), which is the "fate" of more than 94% of Pakistani asylum seekers, they are given a provisional suspension of their deportation for administrative reasons (Mahar 2023). While a suspension of deportation, even if temporary, legally speaking, might be the only thing protecting people from a life-threatening post-deportation scenario (particularly for those fleeing wars and sectarian persecution), its effects on the migrant in the host country cannot be ignored. The administrative (non)status under which the suspension (or legal "stay" on deportation) occurs is known as "*Duldung*" (literally, toleration), giving us some insight into its practical working (and affect on the person being "tolerated"). Theresa Schütze (2022: 2) frames the paradoxical working of this (non)status as "*de facto* recognized but *de jure* illegalized (emphasis original)", which highlights how the rights of people are influenced through the "post-entry" irregularisation and management of irregularised migrants. In 2019, around the time I started my research, the German government introduced "*Duldung light*"[12]—an even more restrictive form of *Duldung*—for people with "*ungeklärter Identität*" (undermined identity) (Schütze 2022; "Duldung für Menschen mit 'ungeklärter Identität'" 2023).

As per a German embassy official[13] who contacted me upon reading my interview in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* (Mahar 2020a), people's "safe" country of origin (such as Pakistan) is a big "reason for them to conceal their identities". Indeed many officials in the Foreigners Office approach the situation with a heavy-handed approach to what they deem as "uncovering the truth", and the *Duldung light* can be a useful psychological "torture weapon" in that regard. The "light toleration" can be used to make the migrant realise that they are hanging by the thinnest of

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[11] Enclosed in a yellow envelope, it informs the applicant of one of three types of reject "*offensichtlich unbegründet*" (manifestly unfounded), "*unbegründet*" (unfounded) or "*unzulässig*" (inadmissible) that affect their provisional status and appeal prospects differently. The fact that it is served in a yellow envelope is not only so migrants can decipher its legal significance but makes it identical to how garnishments are served in Germany, thereby implying, in my opinion, that the state is there to take back the conditional hospitality it once offered (Agier 2021; Mahar 2022).

[12] English term *light* here refers to the amount of *toleration* (i.e. a "light" toleration) for those with "undeclared identity", often seen as "less deserving".

[13] I met on Zoom and subsequently in person in Islamabad.

threads—at times even more sadistically, how lightly their rights can be taken—in order to push them to prove their identity to the Foreigners Office (for example see Shabani 2022). Until the migrant with a *Duldung light* does so, they are placed under a *"Residenz-Pflicht"* (mandatory residence) restricting their movement beyond a specific area[14], their *Arbeitserlaubnis* (permission to work) and *"Sozial-Leistungen"* (social benefits) taken away and their access to a possible *Ausbildung* (vocational training). While with a normal *Duldung,* some of these restrictions may be placed on the migrant[15], a *Duldung light* requires the implementation of all these restrictions, amongst others[16], to force people to "cooperate". Thus, the light version combines more significant limitations with less security, creating tremendous pressure on people to declare their identities. More so than a *Duldung*.

Most of my interlocutors refuse to "cooperate", telling me they know they will be deported as soon as Germany establishes their Pakistani nationality and only do so if they decide to return. A *Duldung,* whether *light* or not, deprives people of the few rights afforded to them as irregularised immigrants in the first place, further restricting their mobility and rights. This allows the German government to simultaneously mount pressure on people to return "voluntarily" while initiating the administrative and legal processes of their deportation. As Carola Tize (2021: 3028) argues, people with a *Duldung* are subjected to the "mental and physical toll of permanent temporariness" of *deportability* for decades (De Genova 2002). Shedding light on this precarious status more than a decade ago, Heide 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" according to a law that was introduced in 2005. However, the law was rarely implemented to regularise people, and significant changes negatively impacting the chances of regularisation have occurred since then. Amongst the irregularised Pakistanis, it is seen as a *manhoosat* (curse) and *bemari* (ailment), and they address it as such, particularly when they talk about the prospects of their stay in Germany.

In addition to all of the above-mentioned severe restrictions that accompany this "curse", my interlocutors see it so because a *Duldung* and its subsequent repeated renewal becomes a scary and

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[14] This area can be the state, district or municipal area for which the Foreigners Office is responsible (and the decision is up to the discretion of the officials in that office) (Project Welcome 2020).

[15] As per the discretionary powers of the Foreigners Office (Project Welcome 2020).

[16] Such as the migrant needing more frequent renewals sometimes monthly or biweekly. Schütze (2022: 3) for instance discusses the issue of *"Kettenduldung"* (chain tolerations) which is true for both kinds of *Duldung* but the frequency and duration of a *Duldung light* make more precarious and less secure.

burdensome endeavour due to the fear of apprehension and deportation detention and adds to the "affective labour" of regularisation (though asylum) (Rutherford 2016). It is worth noting that during the renewal process, people are almost always recommended to visit the so-called "voluntary" return counselling centres to avoid deportation, a Caritas return counsellor told me in Augsburg. Adding to their concern is the issue that the process is partially dependent on the so-called "*Ermessensspielraum*" or discretion of the official at the Foreigners Office handling the paperwork and the unofficial policy at the district level.

In light of the kind of pressures that irregularised migrants face (*Duldung* being an essential part of the equation), so-called "voluntary return" can be seen as an administrative and policy counterpart of deportation, which Bridget Anderson et al. (2011: 549) see "as the expulsion of individual non-citizens from the territory of a state by the (threatened or actual) use of force." Under that definition, it is seen by many as not only a part of the same policy but as another form of deportation because of the threat of force used to induce such a return (see Mahar 2020d; Schweitzer, Humphris, and Monforte 2022). In the ethnographic parts of this dissertation, I will repeatedly return to unpack and establish the relationship between deportation and so-called "voluntary returns" within the German migration regime. Furthermore, the experiences of my interlocutors (which cannot be delinked from the workings of techniques such as *Duldung*) will be analysed in more detail to unpack how people engage with such pressures and forces insofar as they can through their mobility improvisations.

Faced with deportation in Bavaria, Germany, many irregularised migrants, including my interlocutors, are ultimately left with three choices: They can (1) hide from the authorities and "go underground," (2) move to another European state, or (3) return to the county of origin (Pakistan in the case of my interlocutors) through so-called "voluntary return programs". Most of my interlocutors resort to the two latter options. As such, I follow both these migratory decisions and associated improvisations of irregularised people with Pakistani citizenship in and around Munich, Germany. I thus view their choices from that point onwards as intrinsically connected to their experiences with the German—more precisely, the Bavarian federal—state and its policies. Asynchronously, by accompanying some of my interlocutors to various cities in Punjab, Pakistan, and Northern Italy (a serendipitous outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic to be discussed in the next chapter), I follow their migratory improvisations beyond Bavaria, Germany. More specifically, I

follow their temporal hopes and desires and their improvisatory actions to comprehend the precarious experiences and affects of migratory journeys outside the purview of the state and mainstream science. By following various migratory trajectories and conjunct contexts, I unpack the intricate entanglement of emotions, affects and temporality in irregularised migration and trace the contours of what can be called the "affective economy of return" in irregularised migration. This affective economy is the entangled production, exchange and circulation of material and non-material remittances and temporal and relational emotions or affects.

Moreover, the complex biographical, sociocultural and religious lives of irregularised migrants play a pivotal role in this affective economy. Thus, I envision the migration, return and all the improvisational actions of irregularised people in-between departure and return as more than a mere economic process throughout the dissertation and analyse it as such. That is to say, through an affective lens.

Chapter 2: Grounding the Research in Scholarship on Irregularised Migration and Affect

2.1 Migration management

Under contemporary mobility regimes, the movement of certain people is not only considered unwanted but is actively curtailed in space and over time due to economic reasons and affective politics. Much has been written against this curtailment of migration from an economic point of view. This body of literature argues for unrestricted migration from various economic/functionalist angles and includes utilitarian arguments highlighting economic gains (Clemens 2011; Kennan 2013; Caplan 2022), libertarian views highlighting the moral-economic dimension of rights (Carens 1987), economic benefits to societies welcoming migrants (Nathanael 2012) and economic benefits to emigrant societies through remittances (Clemens 2011) or human capital flow. Literature that supports the curtailment of migration (or argues against unrestricted migration) does so more subtly by hinging on a mix of economic and affective political reasoning without a clear conclusion. For example, by highlighting (short-run) social costs to host societies (Putnam 2007) or the potential economic impacts of "brain drain" on emigrant societies (Capuano and Marfouk 2013).

Even though the domination of economic and functionalist models and theories regarding migration seems to be over in many disciplines conducting migration research (see the following section for details on paradigm changes in migration research), it is well and alive, and policies continue to be shaped by such views. For instance, the EU's migration policies show that the bloc sees managing external migration as essential for its economic growth and reducing inequality (only) within Europe (Fischer and Strauss 2021). Since restrictive borders do not fully function to unequally enforce territorial boundaries and deter unwanted migration in line with the EU policies, "voluntary" return migration and deportation are employed as a strategy to maintain and carry out the job of borders within the state territory (De Genova 2018; Sökefeld 2019). Studies on deportation and "voluntary" return migration have, therefore, become indispensable to migration and mobility research. They point out that deportation and return migration occurs in a complex field of practices and structures, expectations and (power) relations in local, national and transnational contexts. And like migration control, both deportation and "voluntary" return are a part of what has come to be known as "borderisation". Achille Mbembe (2019: 99) convincingly asserts that the "problem is neither the migrants nor refugees nor asylum seekers", nor is it a nation

state's ability to not distinguish between them but "'borderisation' … the process by which world powers permanently transform certain spaces into impassable places for certain classes of populations". However, borderisation, as Anderson et al. (2011) and Martin Sökefeld (2019) argue, does not only take place at the edges of the state but within its territory. In that vein, removal, i.e. deportation and "voluntary" return, can be seen as a form of "extended border control" for those who are somehow able to pass impassable places they are not supposed to (Kanstroom 2007). Thus the state's sovereign power to exclude, which was enforced only at its borders (or within, under exceptional circumstances), is now extended inwards and employed within its territory as a normalised practice of removal with impunity (cf. Sökefeld 2019).

Much has been written about the politics of deportation and the affects that circulate due to various removal practices (see esp. Peutz 2006; De Genova 2016; Khosravi 2018; Sökefeld 2020). "Voluntary" returns have also received a significant amount of attention, including a recent special issue in the journal *Migration and Society* (Schweitzer, Humphris, and Monforte 2022) and (as a thematic focus within) a comprehensive edited volume titled "Handbook of Return Migration" (King and Kuschminder 2022a). However, research remains primarily focused on migration management aspects and the administrative domain, the policies and practices of return in host countries or reintegration and development in countries of origin (in addition to the special issue and edited volume above, see Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Kalir 2017; Lietaert, Broekaert, and Derluyn 2017; Collyer 2018; Cleton and Schweitzer 2020). While the affects of and in "voluntary" returns have been given some attention recently, they primarily focus on the African and Latin American contexts (King and Kuschminder 2022b). Not much has been written about the affects of "voluntary" returns of Pakistani citizens, specifically from Germany (cf. Erdal and Oeppen 2017).

When it comes to "voluntarily" returning to the country of origin with the "assistance" of the host state, two broad categories of returning migrants exist. Firstly those with a legal possibility to stay and still wish to return, and secondly, those with the wish to stay but no legal options. The first category of return migrants can be considered *voluntary*[17] returnees as it consists of non-citizens with the legal authorisation to remain in the host country but nevertheless want to leave. However, the question of *voluntariness* is more muddled in the second category of returnees, which applies to

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[17] Here too, we can question structural forms of discrimination and Othering that may be impact their return.

my interlocutors with an "*Ausreisepflicht*" (obligation to leave[18]) but a wish not to follow this state-imposed "obligation". As I will show, the ultimate goal for many is a European (these days preferably German) passport, Shakeel's aspiration in the opening vignette hint at this too. However, few have legal recourse to such aspirations and, once in Germany, find themselves in a bind when they receive a *Duldung*.

2.2 Irregularisation and return: on voluntariness

As is evident from the research questions presented in the previous chapter (see section 1.2), the main focus of my dissertation lies on the horns of the dilemma of volition discussed in the first ethnographic chapter (see chapter four). Thus I take the question of voluntariness—at the level of practice and affects—as an essential point of departure in this chapter to make sense of the "affective economy" of irregularised migration and return.

Political decision-makers and policy experts in Germany consider voluntary return a "more humane" and "more affordable" alternative to deportations of the second category of people (Schneider and Kreienbrink 2010: 11). Implications of this "change of heart" towards a more "humane" approach are not lost on scholars who see "voluntary return" as "not devoid of relations of force" (Sökefeld 2020: 2). This has led scholars to view them as "soft deportation" (Kalir 2017) or at best "a desperate strategy to escape deportation" on the part of the returnees (Sökefeld 2019: 95). Others have offered concepts such as "forced-voluntary" to capture the complex experiences of return that are "neither completely voluntary nor forced" and to "nuance the spectrum between voluntary and involuntary departure" (Aberman 2022: 13, 25). Since no physical coercion, corporal force or somatic violence is used in "voluntary" returns; in that sense, perhaps it is more humane than deportation.

However, coercion and force have many non-material, psychological and affective forms. Through their research in Austria and the Netherlands, Cleton and Schweitzer (2020), for instance, show how "return counsellors" induce return aspirations in their "clients" who are ordered to leave but have little to no desire to do so. In an edited volume contribution, I myself have highlighted three factors—the lack of alternatives or choice; lack of transparent access to information; and the

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[18] *Ausreisepflicht is* also translated as order(ed) to leave in certain parts of the text. See sections 34-43 of the Asylum Act for more details on *Ausreisepflicht* (German Federal Office of Justice 2008 [2016]).
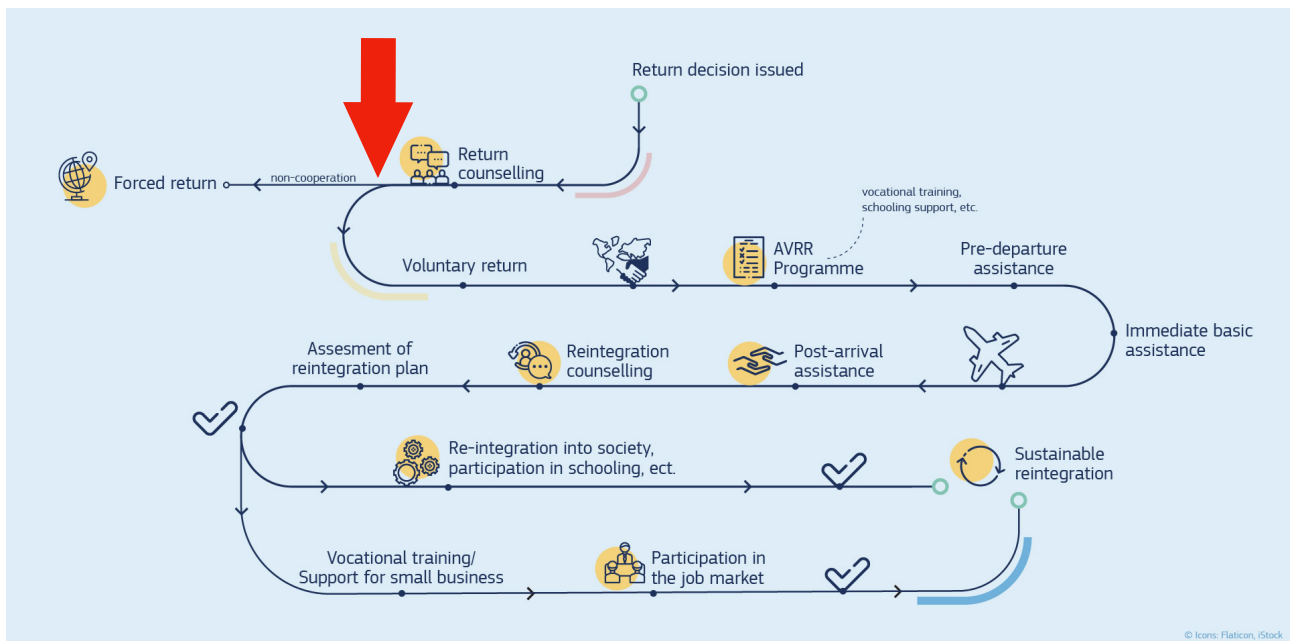
Figure 1: Flow chart of return process as per the European Commission

The process starts at the top marked "return decision issued" (i.e. the person is ordered to leave by the respective host state) at which point they have to attend return counselling and in this "counselling" they have to agree to a "voluntary" return other wise as per the flowchart they will be forced to return (i.e. deported). This point of coercion has been marked by me with a red arrow. Source: European Commission Website.

negative role of financial incentives—which affect people's agency and can play a coercive role, particularly when people have no legal possibilities to stay and face deportation (Mahar 2020d). The European Commission's stance, depicted through a diagram on their "return and readmission" policy webpage (see Figure 1), demonstrates that there is only one way to "cooperate" and "non-cooperation" leads to a forced return (i.e. deportation). As pointed out earlier, such an approach indicates that deportation is used as a threat to push people to resort to a "voluntary" return. At an analytical level, this puts the "voluntary" in "voluntary return" as part of the EU's return directive in question (something discussed in chapter four). Nonetheless, at the policy level, the threat of deportation to encourage "voluntary" returns may be a practical decision. Removal only through deportation is as expensive as it is unpopular. A single deportation can cost tens of thousands of Euros in transportation alone. Chartered flights for deportees and sometimes more than two security personnel per deportee cost Germany millions of Euros each year. For example, in 2018, on average, it cost Germany upwards of tens of thousands only in flight costs per deportee (Bundestagdrucksache 2019b). In addition to the transportation, there are associated costs for security personnel, bureaucratic management, policing, apprehension and detention before deportation, not to mention the cost of all the unsuccessful arrests (Mahar 2020d). Thus a mixture of

deportations and "voluntary" returns might be optimal for states like Germany. With just enough deportations, they can create enough pressure on a similar number to leave "voluntarily".

Between 2010 and 2020, 172,000 people were deported[19] from Germany compared to 197,000 people who were repatriated through the so-called "voluntary returns programs[20]" (Biehler, Koch, and Meier 2021). According to the data, "voluntary" returns have become the preferred mode of repatriating irregularised migrants, failed asylum seekers and other unwanted non-citizens. However, one cannot say that such returns are separate from deportation, as the diagram above clearly shows. Statistically, there has been a relative decrease in the prodigious rise in *brutal* deportations in European liberal democratic states like Germany since the 1990s (cf. Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011). Nevertheless, this change in policy does not mark a clear end of the "deportation turn" (Gibney 2008).

On the contrary, it just makes the turn to deportation more blurry and trickier. As such, it would not be wrong to see returns within the current blurry mix of force and volition or *enforced volition* as "(in)voluntary return". Under current circumstances, the difference between voluntary and involuntary returns is, at best, unclear and contrived. An entanglement of outright force, or threat thereof, creating a hostile environment for unwanted migrants through policies and structures of discrimination (e.g. through *Duldung*), combined with the threat of deportation, coercion and assistance, marks this "soft" turn to (in)voluntary returns within the broader "deportation turn" identified by Gibney (2008). As soon as we discuss an (in)voluntary return in that manner, the "voluntary returnee" category becomes problematic. Within the hyper-rational economic model of "voluntary returns," the "voluntary returnee" is imagined to be a hyper-rational agent without regard for their affective, emotional, relational and social lifeworlds and how such returns impinge on people's decisions beyond economics.

A focus on the affective aspects of irregularised migration and (in)voluntary return is currently lacking. Mainstream framing and understanding of mobility as primarily economic needs to be augmented by other essential modes of viewing, dissecting and analysing mobility and its

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[19] This includes intra-European transfers and deportations under the Dublin regulation so the actual number of deportations to non-EU countries can be rightly assumed to be considerably less.

[20] In Germany two main funding programs existed during this period. The "Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum Seekers in Germany" (REAG) and the Government Assisted Repatriation Programme (GARP). Commonly they are alluded to as the REAG/GARP voluntary return programs.

connections to immobility, i.e. (im)mobility. A more holistic approach toward understanding (in)voluntary return must recognise that situations around (im)mobility are biographically heterogeneous, context-dependent and always entangled with affect and emotions in addition to being shaped by macro and micro socioeconomic and political factors.

2.3 Migration, borders and return in literature

Despite significant growth in the scholarship on return migration in recent years, the return of irregularised migrants remains a small and relatively disconnected theme within mainstream migration studies (King and Kuschminder 2022b). In the last two decades, a plethora of "rich and wide-ranging literature covering many types, geographies, temporalities and other nuances of return migration and its effects" has come out of various fields, including anthropology (King and Kuschminder 2022b: 1). However, the field still lacks an ethnographic focus on the affects of (im)mobility and more generally anthropological attention on the diverse human understandings and lived experiences of (im)mobility and irregularisation as intrinsically linked to coerced and forced forms of return. The lack is further evident in the case of people considered "economic migrants" from so-called "safe countries of origin" like Pakistan, who are seen as "voluntary" migrants as opposed to "refugees" from war-inflicted territories who are categorised as "forced" migrants. Based on ideas and politics of deservingness, certain people's (im)mobility, return, or even removal are often not of interest due to the taken-for-granted voluntary/forced binary in migration studies. Well-established migration binaries, such as forced/voluntary, settler/labour, temporary/permanent, legal/illegal and planned/flight, are not irrelevant to my research on the return of people with Pakistani citizenship (for more on migration binaries or dyads, see Cohen 1995: 5-7; King 2002). Like in migration, the simple dichotomy of forced/voluntary or temporary/ permanent does not work in return for many reasons, as I will demonstrate through this dissertation (cf. Erdal and Oeppen 2017).

To begin with, most of my interlocutors do not neatly fit into any such dichotomous categories. I hope to problematise, blur and unpack many, if not most, of these often-taken-for-granted terms and premises that are made two-dimensional due to the lack of ethnographic focus on the lived experience of irregularised Pakistani citizens and their (in)voluntary return. In that light, seeing

migration and return as connected, I consider (in)voluntary (im)mobility (Carling 2002; Drotbohm 2012) and forced return migration (Sökefeld 2020) as two sides of the same coin.

Research on migration and, as such, return (though often indirectly or through its invisibility) has undergone several paradigm shifts in its development. As per the equilibrium theory in neoclassical economics, migration was considered "a function of market forces" for a long time and thus mostly thought of as unidirectional (Hollifield 2004: 885). Under this hypothesis, economic and market concerns were primary motivational factors for migrants but equally essential for sovereign states seeking to keep their competitive advantages, security and sovereignty (Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 903; Hollifield 2004). Push-pull migration models dominated this era of migration theory in combination with other functionalist theories, such as the human capital theory that saw human skills and knowledge as resources to be selectively exploited by the state and capital owners. Essentially, these models argued, migration occurs "from low-wage, high-unemployment regions" in the Global South "to high-wage, low-unemployment destinations" in the Global North (King et al. 2022: 14). Migration stops according to this model once the supply and demand of labour in each location has recalibrated to equalise wages, taking away the push-pull economic factors according to the laws of the market (cf. Brettell and Hollifield 2000). However, we now know that several other factors apart from the market economy impact the movement of humans, rendering such simplistic economic models a small role in a highly complex sociopolitical puzzle. Contrary to such theoretical models, human mobility is highly influenced by political, social and affective forces and is anything but *unidirectional*. The empirically founded realisation regarding the *multidirectional* flows influenced by complex forces led Russell King (2000: 7) to point out over two decades ago that "return" mobility was "the great unwritten chapter" in the book of migration.

Around the same time as King (2000) wrote about the need for more focus on return migration, another set of scholars began to unsettle the notion of one-way migration through the concept of transnationalism. Transnationalism ushered in a multi-directional paradigm—or set of theories— that challenged the assumption of unidirectional *South-North* migration. Structural approaches were foregrounded during this period (de Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020). Early critiques of functionalist explanations focused on the exploitation at the hands of the Global North or, as it was then called "developed world" and were provided by the *dependency theorists* (see Frank 1967) and later incorporated into the more comprehensive *world systems theorists* (see Amin 1974; Wallerstein

2011a, 2011b). Theorists like Andre Gunder Frank (1967) and Immanuel Wallerstein (2011a) argued that global capitalism resulted in the *development of underdevelopment* by draining so-called "poor countries" or peripheries of their riches and resources, making it impossible for them to "catch up" as imagined by development models. Underdevelopment, in this case, was seen as a result of an exploitative relationship that depended on the resources, including labour and (im)mobility in the peripheries, first through mechanisms of colonialism and in the post-colonial period due to hegemonic and, at times, outright oppressive power relations. As King et al. (2022: 14) argue, such historical-structural models inspired by Marxist theory maintained that "migration serves only to reproduce the structural inequality between poor, peripheral countries and regions – which are reservoirs of surplus labour – and the destination 'core' regions and countries whose growth is further enhanced by supplies of cheap labour".

Early *globalisation theories* and theorists of the 1990s acknowledged the critiques above of their forerunners but were more optimist about the kind of relationships globalisation would foster between the "core" and "peripheries"; they envisioned an interconnected world and the eventual disappearance of the North-South divides (for a review see de Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020: 48-52; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019: 9). Ideas of globalisation at the time led to imaginations of a post-migrant borderless world in flux; a prefigurative demise of physical national borders and possibilities of multi-directional movements, in conjunction with super-diversity in origin, identity and belonging, were all the rage (cf. Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995; Hannerz 1996; Vertovec 2009). However, failure to account for two interconnected outcomes of neoliberal hyper-mobility perhaps led to the premature imagination of human hyper-connectedness and the movement of people based on the liberalised flow of goods and services. Firstly, the inequality produced by free-market globalisation processes and, secondly, the scourge of "ethnopride" (Berlant 2022) and resulting anger and hate towards the "Other" intrinsically linked to nationalism (Appadurai 2006).

Thus, today, globalisation, far from eliminating borders, has turned them into "sorting points" through which the "function of sorting humans and things is sought", as argued by William Walters (2006a: 197-99). With the flow of goods becoming more liberalised, people's movement has become "more monitored and, in important ways, restricted – indeed, this is much of what is commonly meant by so-called 'globalisation'" (Heyman 2004: 305). As a result, mobility as "the

uppermost among coveted values" has become a fiercely contested resource in the global economy, as Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 2) predicted. For the last two decades, migration theory and social science research have critically grappled with the inequality and contestation around mobility as per Bauman's (2000) prognostication.

Similarly, Josiah Heyman and Hilary Cunningham (2004) suggest that borders are sites of mobility and enclosure—or (im)mobility—that simultaneously hinder and enable movement. They argue that "so-called 'globalisation' … can be observed and analysed in the shifting treatments of a combined enclosure/mobility dynamic, rather than the replacement of one by the other" and borders, as such, "represent important sites for understanding how movement between socially unequal spaces is regulated in a global context" (Heyman 2004; Heyman and Cunningham 2004: 297). More recently, Ayelet Shachar (2020: 2) has argued that today's borders have become simultaneously "more open and more closed … they expand or shrink, selectively and strategically, depending on the target populations they encounter." That is indeed part of the "magic of borders," as critical border studies scholars Mahmoud Keshavarz and Shahram Khosravi (2020) point out.

Keshavarz and Khosravi (2020: NP) write: "Magic changes our perceptions of the real: something turns into something else. Like magic, borders engender new perceptions. Borders turn neighbours into enemies. A short distance suddenly becomes farther. The skin of people on the other side becomes darker. Nomadic tribes become illegal border crossers. Cousins from the next village become illegal transgressors. Traders become smugglers. The value of commodities increases and decreases."

That globalisation does not dissolve national boundaries or increase mobility is an empirical reality established through the vital work of critical border studies and border regime research (Sökefeld 2019). Instead, as Sökefeld (2019: 93) puts it, "borders have been tightened to serve the channelling function of granting passage to some while stopping others." And as Mbembe (2019) points out, borders have become indispensable to the "necropolitics" of the state. The "magical function" of borders (Keshavarz and Khosravi 2020) in a "globalised" world not only entails unequal access to mobility for various reasons (see Bauman 1998; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Fassin 2011) but also points to the paradoxical nature of borders, whereby "the decreasing importance of borders is based on the recognition of those very borders" (Diez 2006: 237). In other words, it is ironic how

important borders have become for the proponents of borderless mobility, as is evident in the case of the EU and its contradictory policies (concerning the movement of Europeans vis-a-vis non-Europeans). Moreover, national boundaries by no means only mark the territorial edges of states or physical borders but "structure societies and their practices" (Sökefeld 2019: 94) in the sense of "everyday bordering" (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019: 17), that is, quotidian practices of exclusion.

Given the insights of critical border studies and a critical review of migration literature, irregularised migration and subsequent (in)voluntary return cannot be seen as discrete events but interconnected processes within affectively charged social and political fields. While scholars like Nathalie Peutz (2006: 218 emphasis added) argued almost two decades ago that deportation should be studied "as *something other* than an inevitable component of migration," hence the call for an "anthropology of removal," I am adamant that that is not entirely possible or creates a somewhat false separation between deportation and (return) migration. As Peutz's case studies show, the separation of migration from removal and return is, at best, contrived. Even as studies of deportation try to fill the epistemological gap in a manner that draws attention to biographies of deportees and following Walters (2002: 266), who compares the systemic processes of deportation to shocking forms of expulsion (through ethnic cleansing and forced exile but not only) it is nevertheless not able to disconnect itself from the topics of (restrictive) migration, (unequal) borders and (im)mobility in general. Nor do I think it should. While it is essential to draw the connections of forced removal in liberal democracies to its darker past (or that of humanity in general), it is also important to not lose the connection to more mundane forms of violence, be it the "structural violence of borders" (Jones 2017: 27) or the subtle violence of "voluntary" returns (that unfold in the lives of returnees and re-migrants trying to improvise their mobility) as I will show.

Furthermore, studies of deportation primarily research the deportation of people to particular regions affected by war or civil unrest. This may make sense from a utilitarian and moral point of view as the potential for suffering in such cases may be more acute and, potentially, life-threatening. However, this leaves ample room for studying the experiences of people from other geographical territories like Pakistan, where suffering may unfold more slowly over time due to structural issues of inequality and access to fundamental rights. Unpacking such slow suffering and people's efforts

to overcome or deal with such a situation through their mobility improvisations or enduring return requires an affective analytical approach.

2.4 Turning to affects

2.4.1 Affect theory to the era of affectivism

The recent "rise of affectivism" has led a group of natural and social scientists to ask if "the increasingly recognised impact of affective phenomena" has "ushered in a new era, the era of affectivism" (see Dukes et al. 2021). As a prelude to this era, "affect theory" has been slowly but effectively brewing in various academic fields[21] over the past several decades since Silvan Tomkins first started to work on it "from the perspective of an empirically oriented academic psychology" (Frank and Wilson 2020b: 2). Tomkins, widely considered the founder of modern affective sciences, developed his theory over four volumes of the *Affect Imagery Consciousness (AIC)* (1962, 1963, 1991, 1992). Displacing "the centrality of cognition", his work aimed to explain emotion, motivation, behaviour, survival strategies, and personality, amongst other aspects of human life, as influenced by affective experience (Siegworth and Gregg 2010: 5; see Frank and Wilson 2020b). It was perhaps Lauren Berlant's (Berlant 2010, 2011) cultural criticism of the American Dream as a "cruel optimism" or a condition where one's desire is also an obstacle to their flourishing that resulted in affect theory's popularisation[22]. However, the turn to affect in critical theory had already emerged in the works of prominent social and critical theorists by then (see, for instance, Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004a, 2004b; Clough and Halley 2007; Siegworth and Gregg 2010). Patricia Clough (2007), for example, identifies an "affective turn" already in the 2000s.

According to Brian Massumi (2002), affect operates independently of systems of signification or language and should be configured differently from the sociolinguistic conventions of emotion. In his view, the two (i.e. affect and emotion) "follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (Massumi 2002: 88). However, Ben Highmore (2010: 120) reminds us that affects do not operate independently of language[23] but that "words designating affective experience sit awkwardly on the borders of the material and the immaterial, the physical and the metaphysical: we are moved by a

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[21] Anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, psychoanalytic studies, and literary studies just to give a few examples (see Frank and Wilson 2020).

[22] According to Hua Hsu (2019), it was particularly her book on the topic that despite being "dense and academic … proved enormously influential."

[23] He is alluding to the English language here.

sentiment; our feelings are hurt; I am touched by your presence. ... The register of hot and cold, of warmth and frost, of passion and dispassion, is an emotional and affective register. It is also, as is immediately suggested, a register of sensorial perception and sensual expression." Going beyond the communication of affect through language, Woodward and Lea (2010: 5) interpret affects as "those forces through which bodies bind and separate, attract and repel, and which further increase or decrease in their collective capacities to act. Affect is the medium through which bodies sustain and transform each other, and, as such, it is fundamentally social." In a similar vein, Sarah Ahmed (2010) defines affects as "sticky", something that "sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects."

The locus of anthropological interest in affect initially focused on cultural differences in emotions and the cultural modelling of affective processes (Lutz and White 1986). However, unlike some other fields that reproduce ideas of static "cultural" emotions and affective processes for better "intercultural" communication, in anthropology, there was a reflection to consider affective processes as dynamic social and cultural practices. Ethnographic studies since then have relied on several aspects of emotions and affect, from their intracultural plurality to intercultural similarity, from their role in social collectives and politics to experiences of being illegalised and in waiting (see Rosaldo 1984; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Wierzbicka 1999; Khosravi 2010; Beatty 2013; Shoshan 2016: 17; Stodulka 2017: 26; Khosravi 2021).

2.4.2 The need for affect in migration research

Theoretically, my research fuses *migration research* with the emerging field of *affective sciences,* which argues for an increased focus on the undeniable power of emotions, feelings, motivations, moods, and other affective processes in everyday life. The latter has become increasingly important in understanding migration and mobility in our contemporary national-capitalist world and valuable for me on two fronts. Firstly, an affective approach allows me to go beyond behavioural and cognitive approaches to studying migration and mobility that primarily focus on models of behaviour (push-pull models of migratory behaviour and voluntary or involuntary conditioning that may encourage or discourage migration etc.). Secondly, it allows me to ethnographically engage with phenomena beyond behaviour and cognition (after all, reasoning, "rational" decision-making, network learning etc., is not only cognitive, as affect theory tells us). My aim here is not to supplant the behavioural and cognitive approaches but to supplement them through a better understanding of

affect(s) in the lives of irregularised migrants. According to Dukes et al. (2021: 816), including affective processes in research "not only explains affective phenomena but, critically, further enhances the power to explain cognition and behaviour." Researchers have previously pointed out that behaviourism alone fails "to solve basic questions about human thought and action, and memory in particular", which gave rise to the cognitive approach to understanding human memory, thought and action (Mandler 2002: 339). In the last two decades, we have witnessed the limitations of the cognitive sciences in understanding particularly social phenomena, which has given rise to affectivism in various fields, as per Dukes et al. (2021).

More specifically, an affective approach in the context of migration research (i.e. synthesising the fields) allows much-needed access (and view) into the perspectival blind corners in migration research. Most notably by highlighting connections between the agency (or the limitations on agency-power) and the affective experiences of people seeking mobility in an unequal world: People who are (1) forced to seek dangerous modes of migration, (2) irregularised on their arduous journeys and upon arrival and (3) subsequently compelled, coerced and forced to return. At the empirical, analytical, and theoretical levels, I am able to capture the varied affective "pressures" my interlocutors face in all three scenarios and how they deal with their situations and pressures in everyday life. Moreover, the combination of affectivism and a critical approach towards migration research allows me to understand my interlocutors' practices and "strategies" from their (emic) points of view.

Reviewing the notion that migration is primarily a consequence of rational-economic decisions, research on migration (and with migrants) could benefit from focusing on affect (and other affective processes; feelings, moods, emotions etc.) (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015: 74; Brettell and Hollifield 2000). Indeed, even economic aspects of migration are often affectively charged (McKay 2007). Moreover, regardless of the migration decision, migrants often maintain affective relationships and ties across borders and distances to the family and build new ones in the host country, but not only (Skrbiš 2008). Within the transnationalism approach, affects become particularly important regarding ideas of belonging and identity between the country of origin and residence (see Ewing 2007; Röttger-Rössler 2016; Svašek 2010).

Framed within the context of the *affective turn* (see section 2.4.1 above), my research is not only about the affective experiences, feelings and emotions of the migrants themselves. It is also about the affective relationalities, structures, processes and spaces that shape and are shaped by people's affective experiences. That is to say, affect can help us better understand the structuring relationship between departure, arrival, and return processes in irregularised migration and people's migratory improvisations to deal with limiting (legal/administrative) procedures and navigate spaces that can, at best, be conceived of as a limbo.

As I will show in the main ethnographic body of my dissertation (chapters four through seven), administrative processes and legal procedures lead to temporariness or the affective state of precarity in the lives of irregularised migrants. This is intrinsically different from the felt "precarity" used in the sense of the gig economy-induced job insecurity that many citizens of the so-called Global North find themselves in. Irregularised migrants, unlike citizens, do not have the political right to demand any change, and their feeling of precarity is coupled with prison-like helplessness at times (cf. de Noronha and Bradley 2022). Nevertheless, the affects of such structural, administrative, and legally difficult situations are dealt with by seeking the help of citizens, "voluntarily" returning or through an illegalised secondary migration. No matter how migrants act, the administrative and legal processes are constantly being amended to produce specific affects that, in the minds of policymakers, will induce a return (cf. Anderson 2015).

It must be highlighted here that the affects produced by physical spaces, such as camps, can be both negative and positive. For example, some of my interlocutors in Germany experienced the welfare state provided amenities available to them at their camps as "*muft*" (free) and at times "luxurious" compared with their homes in Pakistan, where they could never afford an induction oven, washing machine or clean running water let alone a place to stay funded by the state. Their new material conditions were felt and experienced, manifesting in positive bodily and psychic states. However, as time passed (or in times of despair because of their legal situation), the welfare support felt like unwanted charity, and the camps felt more like prisons than fancy accommodations with amenities they had never experienced before. Spaces and occasions (public or private) that initially evoke a feeling of being welcomed and taken care of in comparison to the often drab and gloomy politics at "home" slowly start to evoke feelings of being unwanted. In such a context, some resort to the solace of returning to a materially deprived but familiar environment, and others move on in search

of another welcoming host elsewhere. There is a similar but inverse affective transformation of space upon return to Pakistan; after a few months or years of return to a "welcoming" home, many of my interlocutors who were initially pleased with their decision feel stuck in a drab again, as I will show with the help of a few ethnographic case studies.

In other words, affects can be contextually produced and held but are constantly in flux due to our very human, sometimes conscious, and at other times subconscious interactions with felt affects. Anyone familiar with early affect theory will claim the theoretical assumption that we try to minimise "negative" affect and maximise "positive" affect (Frank and Wilson 2020a). However, the equation becomes complex—perhaps unmanageable through the rule of maximising some and minimising other affects—when we introduce multiple actors and competing affects and affective politics (see Ahmed 2004b). Lauren Berlant's (2022) posthumously published reflections, "on the inconvenience of other people", with the same title mentioned in the first chapter, takes up this issue in detail. For my research, the politics of affects are essential if one wishes to understand what I have called the "migratory improvisations" of my interlocutors in the opening chapter (cf. politics of emotions as per Ahmed 2004b). Their migratory improvisations form the core of what can be called the "affective economy" of irregularised migration and return. This is an economy or exchange—perhaps more appropriately flow—of feelings that exist prior to people's initial decision to migrate and continue to function long after their return (whether forced, voluntary or on a continuum). Take, for instance, the experiences of despair upon return which, as I will show through ethnographic examples in the subsequent chapters, is intrinsically linked to the hopes, expectations and pressures that prompt people to migrate in the first place. Ghassan Hage (2003: 3) cites societies as "mechanisms for the distribution of hope" and emphasises that "the kind of affective attachment ... that society creates amongst its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope." He points to an "economy of hope," that is to say, to the circulation—social exchange—and availability of hope (ibid: 9). A deficit in societal hope or a surplus in despair—through the social production of hopelessness—may be a crucial moment to seek hope elsewhere, for example, through migration.

Similarly, Nauja Kleist (2017b) analyses how socially unfulfilled promises of hope produce disillusionment and disappointment amongst Ghanaians leading to emigration. On the flip side, she also discusses how deportees and returnees manage and deal with the hopes and expectations of

others upon return (Kleist 2017c). Seeing deportation and return as a part of an affective migratory journey makes it clear why a sudden and empty-handed return would be perceived as a catastrophic failure. Returning as such counts as a termination of the migration project, not without an emotional side and possibly the burden of stigmatisation. Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi (2015) argue that most Afghan returnees migrate again soon after returning to escape stigma, shame, and debt. According to Schuster and Majidi (2015), the degree of stigmatisation can depend on the amount of financial investment in migration and often carries a mixture of blames from laziness to criminality and cultural contamination to a betrayal of one's own culture (ibid: 635). An exceptional economic situation or a substantial investment upon return can alter the returnee's standing in the community, other scholars argue: In that case, aspects regarded as otherwise contaminating might be considered desirable, and migration as a whole is perceived to be successful (Kleist 2017c). Through my ethnography (in the following empirical chapters), I hope to describe beyond the materialist or financial and even cultural readings of "stigmatisation" or "success." Here I will discuss the other forms of affective "investments" that go unnoticed or, sadly, are at best measured in monetary terms: Migrants sacrifice their time (sometimes years if not decades of youth and health) and bear pains (physical, psychological, affective) to keep their migration improvisation going. What was an unpleasant realisation for me as a researcher was that people in Pakistan often find it hard to comprehend the return or even the difficulties faced by my migrant interlocutors in Germany and Italy (cf. Drotbohm 2015). That said, it must be noted that the return affects the close/dependent relatives as much as the returnees themselves.

2.5 Affective pressures in a moral economy of migration

Kleist (2017a: 331) speaks of a moral economy of migration and points out that migrants are often not self-interested and profit-driven but face moral and reciprocal commitments towards extended family and even their local community (cf. Fassin 2012b; Thorsen 2017). Therefore, to understand irregularised migration and return from the point of view of migrant and their communities, a contextual understanding of the moral economy of migration/return and its relation to affects is necessary.

As briefly highlighted pertaining to methods in the following chapter, and as I will ethnographically demonstrate in the chapters after that, none of my interlocutors can be considered poverty-stricken,

at least not in the crude black-and-white sense of the word that helps citizens and volunteers to divide "undeserving economic migrants" into "more" and "less" morally deserving kinds of "economic migrants" after the first division based on the humanitarian refugee/economic migrant divide of (un)deservingness (cf. Streinzer and Tosic 2022). Through migration, they are sometimes not trying to escape extreme economic destitution or dire circumstances but hope to challenge relative poverty and the functioning of social reproduction in a country like Pakistan that does not allow them to do so. To be able to buy a house, to be able to get married, get a decent education for their children, have better healthcare access for their families and so on. While they would be able to "survive" in Pakistan, migration to Europe gives them hope of not merely surviving but achieving economic capital that may allow them to gain more cultural, human and social capital for their family and future generation. As Kleist (2017c: 182) points out, all of this is more than mere material success: "Cars and houses do not only constitute material goods and comfort but also represent security and autonomy for the individual and his or her family". Through examples of my interlocutors, I will show how such wants are affective needs weaved into moral and affective economies of migration in myriad ways. Take the example of Aman, who, before his "voluntary" return to Pakistan, told me that being in Germany had allowed him to become a more suitable candidate for marriage. He was disappointed about going back without regularising himself but happy that he would now easily be able to get married. While I will discuss Aman's case along with others in the coming chapters to highlight different affective facets of return or refusal to return, the purpose here is to call attention to how people's remittances and earnings abroad, or imaginaries thereof, form a moral obligation towards the self and others. Within such a moral economy, migration and striving against (forced) return become indispensable ways to deal with all kinds of affective pressures. Moral economies and affective economies, thus are not disjunct but interwoven in the context of migration.

Moral economies also relate to the family and social networks that people utilise for their migration—for example, to finance their migration—thereby implying commitments and reciprocities (cf. Kleist 2017a: 336). Thomas Stodulka (2014) alludes to an emotional economy in the sense of certain emotions' situational value to improve economic opportunities. Building on this, I demonstrate how material and financial relationships in migration are superimposed and permeated by the production, exchange and circulation of affects. In simple words, money (and

capital more generally) is an important means to exchange feelings. For instance, expenditures by family, relatives and friends (e.g. to cover migration costs) can be linked to feelings of commitment, gratitude, or responsibility. The inability to reciprocate through remittances to pay affective and financial debts and to change the situation of those left behind may turn those emotions and feelings of responsibility sour and laden with shame or guilt. The very production (and circulation) of such affects is bound with the capability to reciprocate and is subject to migrants' position within host states like Germany and their migration policies. In other words, the host state can create conditions that have the potential to enhance or reduce a migrant's capacity to fulfil their moral obligations and affective pressures; to act in ways one wishes to.

In the main body of the text, I will discuss in detail how my migrant and returnee interlocutor experiences and act upon the affective weight of expectations and gendered pressures. I will also discuss the material and non-material desires and their unfolding in the lives of irregularised migrants and returnees and how complex conjunctions of religion and emotion add yet another layer of complexity (Utriainen 2019). First, however, some discussion and scrutiny of the methodological aspects of my research are in order before I dive into the ethnographic insights and analysis.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

Before proceeding into the empirical-cum-theoretical body or ethnographic contents of my dissertation, in this chapter, I discuss the research methods employed during my research, along with a reflection on a wide range of methodological issues and insights divided into seven sections. Having briefly introduced the socio-geographic and spatial-temporal context in the introductory chapter, I will start by delving into that information in detail. After this, I will discuss the methods employed and the reasons for doing so, briefly reflecting on the specificities of my multi-cited fieldwork. This will be followed by the necessary "deviations" and serendipity in research (particularly because of the Covid-19 pandemic), leading to what I call a *ralli* (mix) of research. After that, I share details about my primary research partners (irregularised migrants) as well as secondary ones and discuss the issue of access. Subsequently, I highlight several methodological aspects of studying affect, having discussed it from a theoretical point of view in the previous chapter. Lastly, my position as a researcher will be "objectivised" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 71) and reflexively unpacked through a discussion of my positionality "within" and "outwith" the field and the difficulty of that separation, particularly as a migrant in Europe but not only. Throughout, I will discuss the various ups and downs of my research and how I navigated the difficulties I faced.

3.1 Research time-spaces

Geographically speaking, the research was conducted in three countries: Pakistan, Germany and Italy. In Germany, the focus was primarily on Munich and a few surrounding areas of the Bavarian capital. Fieldwork in Italy was an unexpected outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. That is to say, travel restrictions to Pakistan allowed me to follow a few of my interlocutors and their re-migration[24] from Germany to Italy, where I conducted over two months of research, mainly in Brescia but also in Bolzano and Portomaggiore. In Pakistan, where I spent about eleven months, I focused on the most critical emigration region, i.e. northern Punjab, especially the cities of Gujranwala, Mandi Bahauddin and Lahore.

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[24] Re-migration as I explain in the introduction chapter alludes to a secondary migration and does not signify return migration.

The research was carried out in several phases between 2019 and 2022. Before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted our lives around the globe, fieldwork was planned and divided into four phases (two in Pakistan and two in Germany) for practical and methodological reasons. Practically speaking, as a migrant with a temporary work visa tied to my employment at the University of Munich (LMU), I could only stay outside of Germany for less than six consecutive months. A day longer would result in the termination of my visa. This limitation meant I had to complete my fieldwork in Pakistan in two phases. Hence, the plan was to conduct around five months of fieldwork in Pakistan and return to Munich for a month or two, fulfilling the requirement of the visa regime before returning for a second stint. However, methodologically speaking, dividing fieldwork into phases allowed for a period of separation which allowed for certain advantages such as trust building. For example, meeting people during the first phase and returning to them after some time often meant that the "in-between" time allowed people to see that I brought no danger or adverse impacts through surveillance or any other doubts they might have about me. Furthermore, when I reached out to people after a longer gap, they were often happy to engage and glad to see me (one could say, in many cases, this was a realisation that we might be friends now). While I knew this in theory, my experience has proved that a return to the field of research usually takes relationships with research partners to a new level, creating greater confidence and access that would otherwise be impossible (for a detailed discussion of the methodological significance of time spent in and recurrence of visits to the field, see Jeffrey and Troman 2004).

After about four months[25] of fieldwork in Munich, Germany, in the summer of 2019 (or *phase a*), I first travelled to Pakistan for about five months in August 2019 (*phase b*)[26]. In January 2020, I arrived back in Germany to ensure that my German work visa did not expire and to conduct two months of fieldwork in Munich (*phase c*) before returning to Pakistan for another five-six months in March 2020. However, my travels to Pakistan for a second fieldwork stint were delayed by over a year due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. This was because LMU had paused the issuance of research travel permits for different parts of the world for different durations. Luckily, despite being unable to visit Pakistan in this period, I could remain in contact with my interlocutors there. Staying

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[25] Initially, only two months were planned for this phase, however, I needed a new German visa with a longer duration that would allow me to come back from my fieldwork in Pakistan. This took a couple of months and quite a bit of bureaucratic work to manage after which I could finally leave for Pakistan without any fear of being stuck there and applying for a visa from there which can take a lot longer.

[26] Please see the table below.

in touch, mainly via WhatsApp, enabled me to continue with research partially, something I will discuss in detail below. More importantly, it allowed me to maintain trust, which was necessary to return to the field. At the same time, due to strict travel restrictions and lockdowns, I could also not meet my interlocutors in Germany during specific periods. Nonetheless, I stayed in contact with most of my interlocutors throughout and tried to use the time on my hands to organise data, conduct initial analysis, write articles and present at conferences via Zoom.

Eventually, with the easing of travels, at least within the European borders, a serendipitous opportunity to follow Pakistanis leaving Germany, not for their country of origin, but for Italy[27] to avoid deportation opened up (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). It was in July 2020, when deportations to Pakistan resumed after a brief break due to international travel restrictions brought about by the pandemic, that I learned that some of my interlocutors were leaving Germany for Italy to escape deportation. With no opportunity to travel to Pakistan for research (as per LMU requirements), this coincidental knowledge of a "secondary intra-European migration" led to fortuitous fieldwork in Italy (Benedikt 2019). Thus, at the end of August 2020, when the first wake of the pandemic had subsided, I received permission from my university, LMU, to travel to Italy. I spent two months in northern Italy, living with migrant interlocutors in their often crowded flats (*phase d*). This research in Italy allowed me to compare the affects (and effects) of the removal regimes of the two EU states on Pakistani irregularised migrants. For instance, deportations to Pakistan do not take place from Italy, unlike from Germany, in addition to the overall lower "rate of return" (i.e. the proportion of people ordered to leave who actually return or are deported) in Italy compared to Germany. The Atlas of Migration (2020: 14, 36, 44) places the figure for the total "rate of return" in Germany between 2016 and 2019 at about 63%; in Italy, this figure lies at about 20% and the overall "rate of return" within the EU at about 35%. By analysing the source data based on migrant citizenship and comparing the "returns" of Pakistani irregularised migrants with the total number of Pakistanis ordered to leave Germany, I discovered that out of all of the people ordered to leave between 2016 and 2019 one-third (about 30%) returned[28] to Pakistan (Eurostat 2020).

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[27] In order to avoid deportation from Germany irregularised Pakistanis move to several southern European countries through clandestine means. However, Italy is the most preferred destination for several reasons. Amongst others, it has the largest population of Pakistanis in mainland Europe meaning people are more likely to have transnational connections that not only enable the move but aid in initial housing and work opportunities.

[28] This figure includes both "voluntary" returnees and deportees.

More importantly, the fieldwork in Italy allowed me to follow and observe my interlocutors' non-repatriation "strategies" and practices, or as they sometimes refer to such improvised solutions: *jugaad*. While the term is often used in the sense of frugal solution finding when it comes to technical issues (i.e. to refer to an improvised solution; improvisation), it is also used in social situations. I indeed witnessed and understood the ethnographic meaning of *jugaad* through the *migratory improvisations* of my interlocutors and borrowed it from them to develop this concept. Therefore, the idea of migratory improvisations defined in the opening chapter and ethnographically captured in the chapters to come is based on the concept of *jugaad* and my interlocutors' practical migratory *jugaad* or improvisations. These I show are essential to understanding the affective economy of irregularised migration and return.

In July 2021, with Pakistan taken off the list of Covid-19 "risk countries" by the German government, LMU finally allowed me to travel to Pakistan. In August 2021, I eventually returned to Pakistan and "concluded" my fieldwork (*phase e*) by visiting mostly old contacts but also a few new ones. During this final phase of fieldwork in Pakistan, I made Lahore my base, which allowed me to travel to meet interlocutors in the so-called emigration hubs in the region, such as Gujrat, Gujranwala and Mandi Bahauddin. These cities in northern Punjab are considered "emigration hubs" or places of origin for many irregularised Pakistani migrants in Europe. In Mandi Bahauddin, I arranged for several longer stays with one of my interlocutors, a returnee from Munich. Alam, this returnee whom I introduce in the opening vignette, hosted me for the entire duration in Mandi Bahauddin each time I visited the city. While my host in Mandi Bahauddin belongs to a small group of returnees who saw himself as "successfully reintegrated" after a "voluntary" return (at least for a couple of years), most of the other returnee/deportee interlocutors felt dissatisfied with their "decision" to return. They wished to leave again if and when the opportunity presented itself. Working with different individuals allowed me to conduct a comparative analysis of the differences between people. It enabled me to better grasp the dynamics of the purported resettlement and so-called "reintegration" in Pakistan upon "voluntary" return more comprehensively. During my second visit to Pakistan, I gathered ethnographic material necessary for understanding such dynamics and the social and familial environment where resettlement (or the lack thereof) occurs. Most importantly, it helped me better understand the affective contexts and Muslim ideas of destiny

(*taqdeer*) within which return, readjustment in the country of origin, or yet another departure unfolds.

The timeline of my fieldwork is chronologically organised below and accompanied by a few maps for a quick geographic overview:

Fieldwork Timeline and Field-sites		
Months (from - to)	**Location**	**Fieldwork Phases** (with a brief overview)
Apr 2019 - Jul 2019	**Germany**	***Phase a***: Counselling centres; "voluntary" return programs; establishing contacts with Pakistani irregularised migrants in/around Munich.
Aug 2019 - Jan 2020	**Pakistan**	***Phase b***: Establishing contact with returning migrants though contacts in Germany and research with returnees already acquainted with from Germany.
Feb 2020 - Mar 2020	**Germany**	***Phase c***: Followed-up initial contacts/established network with various groups of people; research with irregularised migrants, volunteers, civil society, governmental officials and non-governmental organisations.
Sep 2020 - Oct 2020	**Italy**	***Phase d***: As a result of not being able to travel to Pakistan, followed interlocutors to Italy as the lockdowns eased within Europe.
Aug 2021 - Jan 2022	**Pakistan**	***Phase e***: Conducted remaining fieldwork in Pakistan (initially planned for 2020 that could not be carried out due to Covid-19). Followed-up with contacts and met new returning migrants; hosted in Mandi Bahauddin for longer durations.

I was based in Munich, Germany, for the periods between March 2019 and March 2023, which are not mentioned in the fieldwork timeline nor in the explanation before that. However, I was still engaged in research during this period. I do not wish to assert with the list above that during the months mentioned, I was exclusively living with my interlocutors through the whole period. While I stayed with my interlocutors in Italy and Pakistan for longer durations—anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks at a time—whenever possible, I would rent a small apartment or room for myself to take some distance and not burden them. For instance, my key interlocutor in Brescia, Italy, welcomed me for more than two weeks in his two-room (shared) flat, where more than ten men often resided at a time. Eventually, I decided to rent a room at a hostel not to burden him and his housemates but also to be able to visit other interlocutors freely.

On the one hand, during the time noted as fieldwork, particularly in Germany but also in Pakistan, I was not only engaged in fieldwork but simultaneously presented at various public forums and conducted outreach (e.g. Mahar 2020a). In addition, I was engaged in migration-related social projects that blurred the line between work and life for me. On the other hand, I conducted research during times I have not explicitly noted in this timeline above. This included using social media platforms such as WhatsApp to keep in contact with interlocutors and informed about their most current (social, economic, affective etc.) situation whilst not in the field (Kaye, Monk, and Hamlin 2018). But also to conduct supplementary "instant messaging interviews" when I observed certain information missing in my notes or felt the need for a follow-up question in light of reflecting upon an interview or my notes (Kaufmann and Peil 2019). At times I met key interlocutors and inquired about their situation or caught up over dinner if we happened to be in the same city, for instance, while on holiday in Italy or in Munich, even after "concluding" my fieldwork. Indeed a clear separation between field and home is only possible for anthropologists who work in far-off "remote" societies and particularly not when you work as an engaged anthropologist on a topic like mine.

As I have garnered several friendships with irregularised migrants, volunteers and people engaged with the topic of (irregularised) migration and return in one way or another, research has become entangled with my life, especially here in Munich, where I am currently writing up. For instance, I regularly participate in the activities of "The Long Run", an anti-racist solidarity initiative which brings together citizens and non-citizens and creates an opportunity for making the strange familiar

and the familiar strange through sports and other social activities. I also regularly participate in events organised by "Bellevue di Monaco," an organisation that is sociopolitically engaged in building a community of citizens and non-citizens; refugees, asylum seekers, migrants; irregularised and regularised that act in various ways towards a diverse Munich and by extension Germany (some public anthropology examples of my engagement: Sökefeld, Stahlmann, and Mahar 2020; Mahar, Sökefeld, and Khan 2021). I have written about individual stories and provided "expert" advice to volunteers and social workers engaged with irregularised Pakistani citizens (Mahar and Sökefeld 2020; Mahar 2021c, 2021b). I have worked with *Der Spiegel* in my own time to conduct interviews around the unfortunate death of an irregularised Pakistani migrant on the Greek border and his wife's efforts to get justice (Christides et al. 2020). Thus my "research" and "life" cannot be neatly separated; my life and engagements constantly inform my research and vice versa. Although I tried my best to quantify my time in the field and specific places, for the sake of transparency, I simultaneously highlight the issue of lived ethical and methodological entanglements as an engaged anthropologist. I see such involvement as not only valuable for methodological opportunities but they were also necessary for me to "endure" researching such a topic (something I could not have done as an "objective" and detached researcher). My engagements which were asymmetrically reciprocal in nature, gave me the energy to continue my research.

3.2 Multi-sited fieldwork

As can be seen from the timeline and discussion above, my research does not encompass a single anthropological "field site" in the traditional sense of the word. A thematic singularity (separating forced from voluntary) or isolation of pre- from post-return return was also not the case. In essence, it would have been impractical to research in a singular geographic field or merely a specific migratory position in time while researching with people more or less constantly on the move. To study the impact of (in)voluntary returns only by analysing people's post-return lives in the so-called "society of origin" (e.g.. in Pakistan) as the "end" of their migratory improvisation and separate from the time spent in the host society (e.g. in Germany) as disconnected from the future and past, or vice versa, to study merely people's time in Germany without studying their migratory improvisations, i.e. what happens when people (un)willingly return or avoid return by moving to another European country (e.g. Italy) would, at best, give an incomplete if not a misleading account of (in)voluntary returns.
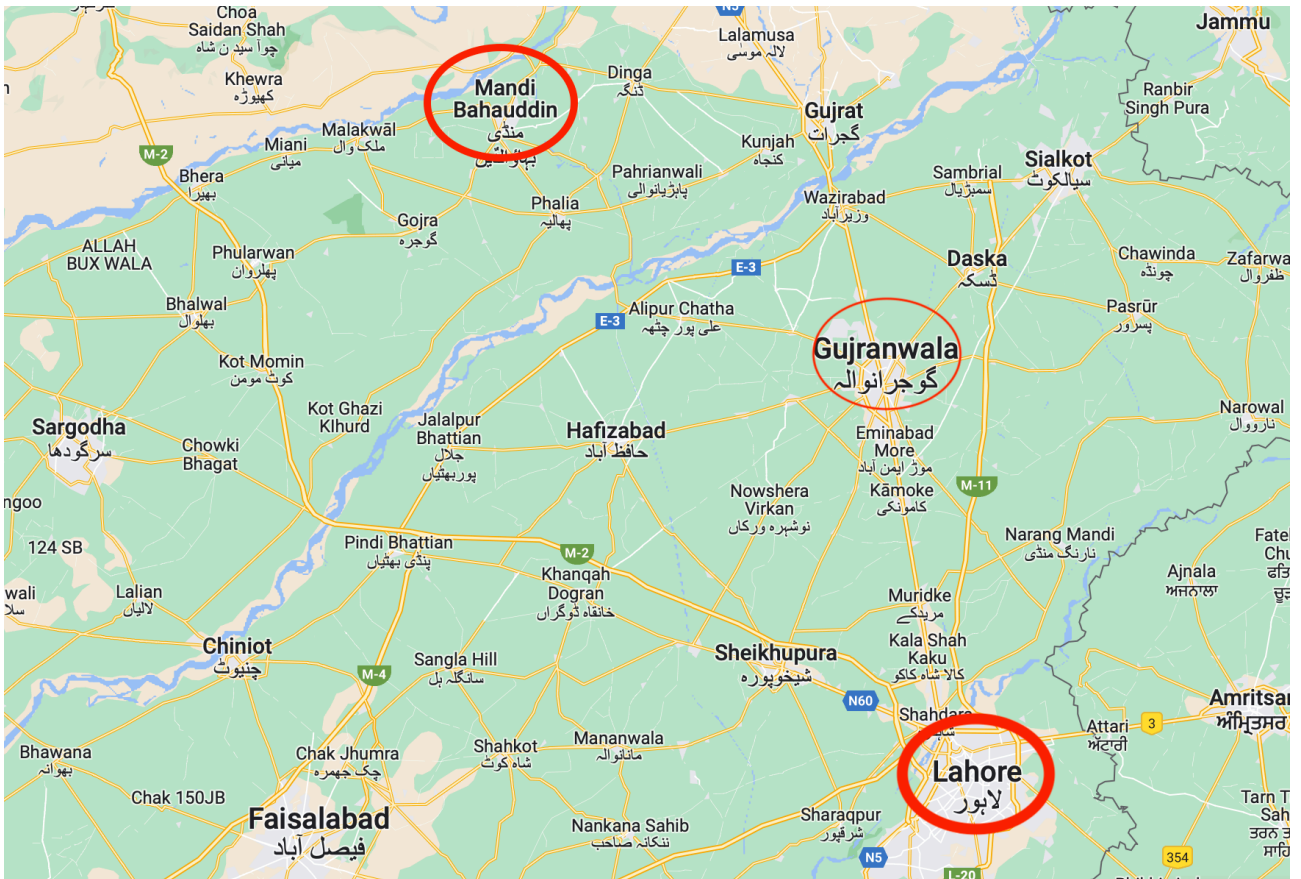
Figure: 3 Map of main fieldwork sites in Punjab, Pakistan

Cities marked with red depict my stay. However, I also visited other places for interviews such as Gujrat (east of Mandi Bahauddin) Noshera Virkan (south-west of Gujranwala) and Kotli (north-east of Gujrat outside Punjab; not on the map).
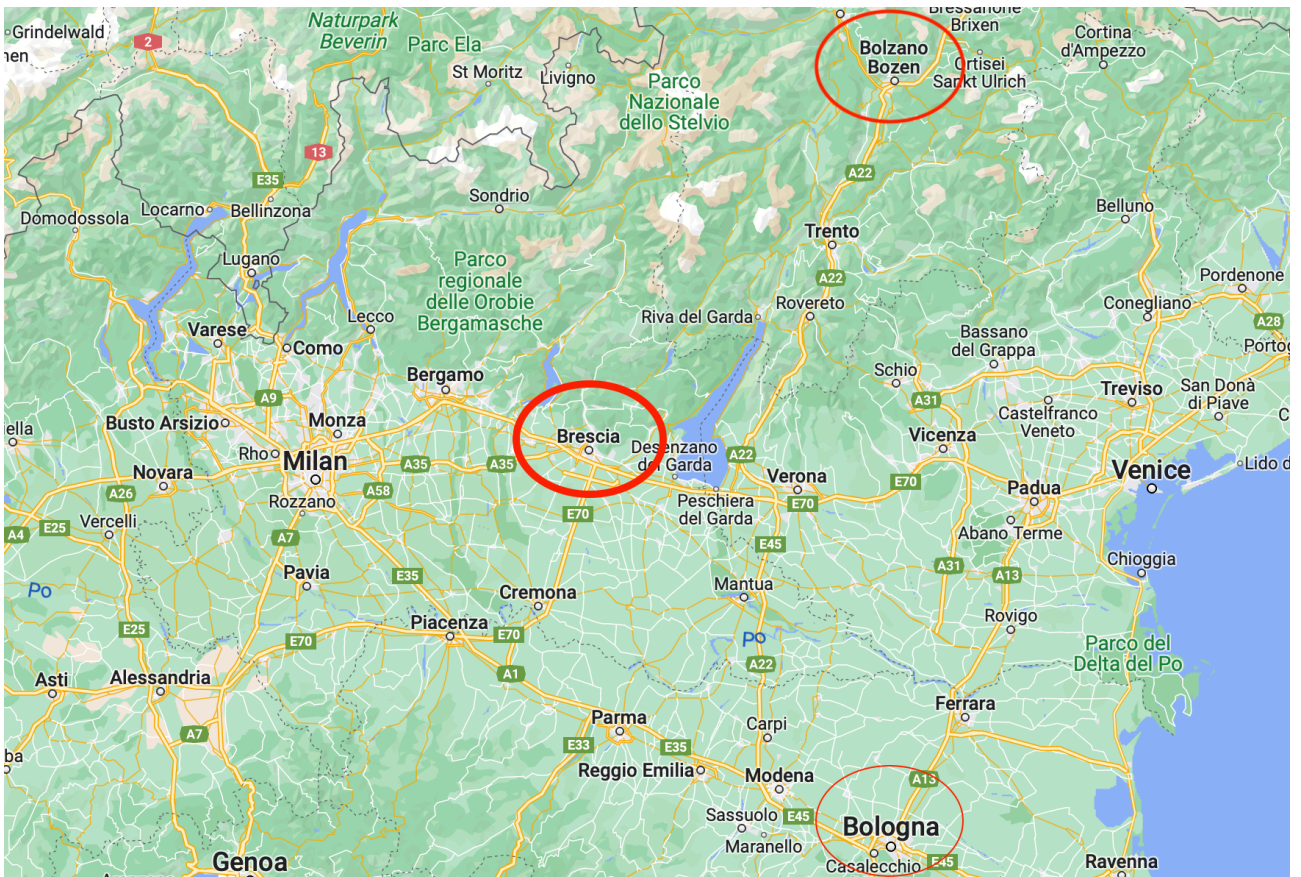
Figure 2: Map of main fieldwork sites in Northern Italy

In Italy too I visited places for interviews and shorter visits not marked on the map such as Feltre (a small town close to Trento located between Bolzano and Brescia) and Porto Maggiore (on the outskirts of Bologna).

Given "the context of an historic and contemporary world system of capitalist political economy", George Marcus (1995) identified two modes of ethnographic research. One that was "intensively-focused-upon single site of ethnographic observation and participation while developing by other means and methods the world system context", for instance, through archives or secondary data by macroeconomic and macro-political theorists (ibid: 96). The second mode, hitherto "much less common" was "ethnographic research that was self-consciously embedded" in various local and global political economies to examine the circulation of amongst other things "cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space" (ibid). This latter form or mode, which he termed "multi-sited ethnography", has become the dominant mode of ethnographic research today (ibid). Given my research topic and the phenomenon of unequal mobility and (im)mobilities in general, deeply embedded within the global capitalist political economy and (im)mobile lives of my interlocutor, it can be said that carrying out multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork was not a choice but an essential requirement. Following (im)mobile people on their contingent journeys, affective trajectories and their improvisations in time and space became intrinsic to the project.

"Following the people" in different (pre-and post-return) phases of their migratory journey and process allowed me to experience and observe what happens to irregularised migrants and returnees in various sites and understand their affective, temporal, relational and thus rational migratory improvisations (ibid: 106). In fact, the act of following was indeed what made me realise that such improvisations are very rational; reason, as I learned by spending time with my interlocutors in different settings, cannot be separated from affect.

In the words of Marcus (1995: 106), the act of following helped me form connections "between ethnographic portraits" of people in Germany, for instance, and the "relationship of these portraits to the fates of these same subjects in other locations" in Italy or Pakistan. It allowed me to follow and engage with people's biographies, plots and stories as they unfolded in time and space (ibid: 109). As people's lives changed in real time because of economic, social or legal realities, it influenced their agency and hence their affective migratory improvisations. Being able to move within the different spaces *with,* if not *as* my interlocutors, aided me in tracing "the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors", particularly "discourse and modes of thought" (108). "Following the metaphor", as Marcus (1995: 108) calls it, enhanced my ethnographic understanding of people's (im)mobility, irregularised migration and "voluntary" return and helped me ground it in various

social contexts. For instance, I followed my interlocutors' ideas of hope and imagination of destiny in Pakistani peri-urban areas, German "refugee camps", and Italian migrant flats to make sense of their rational-affective take on migration and return.

However, it must be pointed out that my "research mobility" went beyond that. This is to say, I also moved between and amongst various kinds of research partners. In addition to migrant, returnees and their families, my other interlocutors included people working within organisations that manage migration, particularly ones that administer so-called "voluntary return programs", such as return counsellors in Germany and partners in Pakistan (e.g. IOM). Following the work of organisations working in the field of migration management in Germany and return and reintegration in Pakistan provided essential insights that supplemented my understanding of the experiences of my migrant interlocutors.

3.3 Methods and data

Through the foundational ethnographic method of participant observation, I shared affective spaces and emotional lives of my interlocutors (e.g. camps, migrant flats, family homes); witnessed various events (e.g. counselling sessions, farewells, celebrations); listened to many narratives (e.g. of hope, despair and destiny); and most of all, shared their experiences (e.g. being profiled by the police as irregularised migrant or as a returnee by junior IOM staff in Pakistan). I primarily relied on field notes to record the quotidian practices, (shared) experiences and narratives of my interlocutors, their peers and families in detail (but to a lesser extent also counsellors, officials and other relevant actors such as volunteers). In addition, I conducted in-depth interviews (narrative interviews) with irregularised migrants and returnees. The collected material relies on but is not limited to (1) an inquiry into the experiences, hopes and aspirations of Pakistani irregularised migrants in different settings; (2) discussing life before and after return with returnees and their families in Pakistan[29]; (3) observing return counselling sessions and discussing "voluntary" return with official stakeholders[30].

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[29] In Pakistan, I often met people in their homes, but also in public spaces/restaurants; I only stayed overnight with a few trusted interlocutors.

[30] Such as return counsellors or "voluntary" return program coordinators at public forums (e.g. Bellevue di Monaco) and policy exchange forums (e.g. International Exchange on Return Counselling Augsburg).

Recorded and transcribed interviews comprise only a part of my data, as voice recording was sometimes not feasible. Decisions about whether to record or not were based on my affective impressions of the situation. In terms of a methodological strategy, as Didier Fassin (2016: 23:30-25:30) reminds us, it is often wise to consider what kind of an impact pulling out a notebook or recorder will have on your interlocutors. I certainly did not want to alarm (irregularised) migrants and returnees who fear surveillance and control, among other threats or seem like a callous researcher who was only there to mine information and churn it into data. When I felt uncomfortable taking out the recording device, I made notes either on the spot or immediately after, again, based on my sense perception and relation to the interlocutor. At times I chose to record notes after the meeting to not be disrespectful to people who shared their stories, frequently filled with feelings of despair and unfulfilled hopes and to decrease the observer-observed distance. That said, over time, I became more comfortable around certain key interlocutors and asked them if I could record for memory's sake.

The gathered research material is further augmented by serendipitous conversations in Pakistan with those "left-behind": aspiring migrants on buses, in shops with people who had a family member abroad, or on the street about imaginaries of life "outside", as Elliott (2021) does in her ethnography, viewing migration and the "outside" from the inside.

As mentioned, field notes were the primary mode of recording data. However, this approach and the process involved in the digital age are more complex than keeping an analogue diary. A few words in that regard clarify my approach. I often wrote brief notes or logs as soon as possible on my phone but sometimes in a pocket diary; if not in the moment, then as quickly as possible. I found this practice helpful in alleviating the trust factor mentioned above and in cases where I felt it was more important to be present in the affective space and not just note the conversation but feel it—to not lose the affectivity of the moment. Of course, one can argue that, on the other hand, affectivity can be altered or lost because of its reliance on memory.

I used the Evernote application to record the in situ notes which automatically synced my phone and my laptop. The application allowed me to write down quick notes on the go through my phone, which I could later access from my laptop to augment my memory while writing more detailed logs. In Evernote, I categorised my "notebooks" according to fieldwork phases (thus, according to time

and country). I added a few tags for quick access at a later stage, and with more time on my hand, I would fill in some more details/reflections and create additional tags for the Evernote files. This process, as I discuss in the subsequent paragraphs with the help of literature on qualitative data analysis, not only enabled quick access to specific data but served as helpful for coding and categories for analysis. Later, with time, emotional energy and space for reflection, I revised my shorthand notes into extensive, detailed impressions on my laptop. These detailed notes are archived in a text document organised within annual folders[31]. Missing details or updates were added to the logs whenever available (e.g. during a repeat visit or over a phone call).

Coding and analysis, as is the case for ethnographers, was an ongoing process due to our personal engagement with the data collection, unlike in some other fields where qualitative data might be collected by someone and subsequently coded and analysed by others. With regards to researchers collecting their own data, Johnny Saldaña (2015: 8) notes that "researchers will code their data both during and after collection as an analytic tactic, for coding is analysis". Furthermore, Saldaña (2015: 9) argues, "[y]ou use classification reasoning plus your tacit and intuitive senses to determine which data 'look alike' and 'feel alike' when grouping them together". I would add to that, in the case of ethnographers, the added value of being in the field; memory, senses, subliminal as well as obvious affective experiences that shape feelings and so on. Thus relying not just on the data but my experiences of collecting data, I put together my research which felt like piecing a puzzle that I myself had created. That is to say, I had prior and personal knowledge of the different "pieces" to stick with my puzzle analogy—where the different "pieces" came from, the associated context, feelings and much more. Practically speaking, for example, I relied on the excerpts of interview transcripts combining them with data in relevant notes based not only on certain categories/codes but a tacit and intuitive sense because of having collected the data. Thus a clear separation between gathering ethnographic data and coding or analysis is neither possible nor desirable. Furthermore, "continuous" coding and analysis can inform emerging theoretical insights and allow researchers like me to identify which people to "follow", i.e. navigate theoretical sampling (Conlon et al. 2020). This mode of sampling, data collection and coding formed the bases of the ethnomethodological and grounded theory approach to my research (Spradley 1988; Charmaz and Mitchell 2001).

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[31] Within each annual folder, I keep four files. Within each file, I keep all the logs for a particular quarter of the year. Each record or log starts with information on the place, occasion and date. And the person or people present for quick access (as memory cues).

Whilst I will discuss my positionality in detail towards the end of this chapter, I would like to acknowledge here how my ethnographic endeavour was shaped by my subjectivity in many ways—specifically in terms of data collection, coding and analysis. That is to say, my research; collection of data, coding and analysis were shaped by my subjective perspective on people, issues, things and a plethora of other reasons, including my fears and joys, the bonds built, and so on (see section 3.5 - 3.7), which I do not see as a limitation but as enabling factors. The usual critique of such a research undertaking as mine is its alleged loss of objectivity and hence not being "scientific" enough. However, the enabling factors of a researcher's subjectivity, perspective and position and the acknowledgement of these are in no way conflictual with scientific and scholarly principles of asking pertinent questions, rigorous reasoning, transparency and accuracy. In fact, if anything, I would consider this approach more scientific than approaches that sweep the researcher's subjective role under the rug. Declaring the researcher's biases upfront, in my opinion, can only make scientific research more valid and transparent (cf. Ortner 2019).

Coming back issue of data and coding at hand, this excerpt from Lawrence Sipe and Maria Ghiso (2004: 482-83) highlights my point about the valuable role of subjective judgements as an ethnographer:

> "All coding is a judgment call, and as such opens up possibilities, but always obscures other potential alternatives. For ethnographers, several implications about the nature and process of coding data can be drawn from this narrative. Building conceptual categories is an intellectual challenge that demands all the creative energies researchers can bring to the task; it is not a dull and mechanical exercise at any point. If it becomes so, then something is probably very wrong. The unexpected, the surprising, the puzzling, and the downright frustrating points in our data should be prized, rather than lamented. This may seem a difficult task when grappling with mounds of data and continually rethinking what we notice (or think we notice), but this recurrent questioning and reworking is what characterizes data analysis of ethnographic research. As we construct these categories through our coding, they should be heuristic for us, enabling us to see things we haven't seen before."

Two points are worth drawing from this quotation. Firstly, that coding is a judgment call influenced by the researcher's subjective perspective (no matter how objective they try to be) as much as the data collection to begin with. Thus a discussion of the ethnographer's positionality is key to

highlighting how s/he is situated in this world and views it. Secondly, it should be noted that what proved to be very helpful with regard to a heuristic approach that "enables us to see things we haven't before", as mentioned in the excerpt above, was that the data, analysis and interim insights were not only simultaneously discussed with my supervisor and peers but at several workshops[32]. This back and forth between data collection and discussions allowed me to, in practice, challenge the epistemological separation between "theory" and "methodology" in line with Bourdieu (1992: 225), who argues that "this division into two separate instances must be completely rejected". He notes a little further down on the same page: "Indeed, the most 'empirical' technical choices cannot be disentangled from the most 'theoretical' choices in the construction of the object."

To take one example, discussions at a panel where I presented a paper on the notion of *taqdeer* (destiny) and its role in my interlocutors' lives right after the first phase of fieldwork in Pakistan were constructive. The discussions enabled me to realise early on that I needed to not only go back to my previously collected data but also look for and codify the more subtle allusions to destiny in speech through metaphors, proverbs or poetry and so on from then on. It also made me more cognisant of what I needed to pay attention to in the future, for instance, specific emotional or affective responses and contexts. Undoubtedly, it shaped my questions and the stories and people I wanted to follow.

3.4 Multi-sited ethnography to *ralli* research: a mix of research methods under Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent limitations, travel restrictions, and ethical concerns made it difficult to carry on with some of the classical methods in the ethnographic toolkit—employed during the first phases of the fieldwork in 2019 and early 2020—for quite some time. While I did my best to carry on with my research in the "traditional" ethnographic manner by following ethical guidelines and the respective Covid-19 restrictions of the places I travelled to, I sometimes resorted to digital research methods. I relied on alternative data-gathering techniques when I could neither conduct fieldwork in Pakistan nor visit interlocutors in Europe. Simply put, I wish to discuss here my serendipitous reliance on virtual qualitative research methods to augment my ethnographic research. A combination of "mobile and cultural probes" (Albrechtsen et al. 2017; Schofield et al.

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[32] These included workshops and conference panels organised at the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), German Anthropological Association (GAA), Swiss Graduate Program in Anthropology (CUSO), Peace Research Institute OSLO (PRIO), University of Munich and University College Utrecht (UCU) but not only.

2018) and "app-based methods" (Kaye, Monk, and Hamlin 2018; Kaufmann and Peil 2019) helped me in that vein. These mobile probes compromised several small "tasks" that my interlocutors in Germany, Italy and Pakistan could carry out if they wished. Such as sharing a photo or poem that captured in some way or formed their surroundings or current situation, view on a particular issue, or interpretation of a term or concept. App-based interviewing methods, through voice notes, for example, allowed my interlocutors to take the time to think and respond at their convenience. This made their answers richer and more reflective and allowed me to respond in kind. In other words, it allowed me to take my time to think about their answers before I posed a follow-up question or response. Alluding to a past utterance also became more manageable; I could reply to a particular voice note in WhatsApp and ask them to clarify a specific message or point to my further interest in something.

In that sense, research can be viewed as an ethnographic "patchwork" that Günel et al. (2020: NP) define through its opposition as "not to one-time, short, instrumental trips and relationships à la consultants". Rather they envision "research efforts that maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterises so-called traditional fieldwork." In that spirit, my patchwork is not a ragbag or hotchpotch of "data" but rather what I would like to call a holistic *"ralli"* of ethnographic material collected under different constraints, circumstances and affective atmospheres, at different times and in different spaces, through various methods and modes. I take this name (i.e. *ralli*) from beautiful patchwork quilts (and other textile goods) made in the Cholistan desert region of Pakistan, where my (once pastoral) Saraiki paternal family[33] comes from and still resides, practising mainly agriculture.

The noun *ralli* comes from the Saraiki verb *"rallana"* (to mix or connect). Making a *ralli* quilt, like a "patchwork" or *ralli* of ethnographic material, "is not an excuse to be more productive" for the sake of being productive (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). Instead, it is a more organic and effective way to use the available materials, turning one's limitations into an advantage and staying

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[33] My great-great-grandfather "Nathu" (I reckon a Hindu but no one acknowledges this nor seems to know his full name) first exchanged part of his livestock (cows, camels, etc.) for land but did not commit to a completely sedentary life or so the tale goes. While my great-grandfather Mahar Khuda-Baksh further reduced the size of the herd he had inherited, he nevertheless favoured the pastoralist lifestyle of his ancestors, according to oral history, in Jamaplur, the village where his family eventually settled. Older people, like the potter with donkeys who lived right next door, Chacha Thrapar (as he was called with love and humour), would often come to our place and attribute to my great-grandfather quotes along the lines of "a horse or camel enables me to travel as far as I want, but land binds me one place". My grandfather Mahar Muhammad Nawaz and his five brothers completely disassociated from their pastoralist past and became agriculturalists but nevertheless had much of their savings in cows that were not herded but fed through farming. Aslam Mahar, my father, unlike his brother, only had three cows and neither did he increase his inherited land over his lifetime, choosing instead to invest in the education of his children.

true to the holistic spirit of anthropological research. Such a way of doing research, in my case, is fully attentive to the mobile and precarious lives of irregularised migrants, which are highly context-bound—as I will show in detail in the following ethnographic chapters—but also my limitations. For instance, certain temporal parts of my interlocutors' lives can only be experienced, shared or talked about in Europe and certain only in Pakistan. Yet, other sides can only be accessed by surveying social media, which has been found to be effective, for instance, in nuancing certain gender performativities (Stahl, 2020). In that sense, the contact with interlocutors and the field may be fragmentary and episodic rather than one long stretch but is nonetheless faithful[34] to the anthropological endeavour and the "reflexivity," "openness," and "serendipity" that are so "characteristic of [the] ethnographic method" (Rivoal and Salazar 2013: 178; Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020).

That said, adopting a *ralli* approach to gathering research material does not devalue classical ethnographic field research techniques—such as using participant observation combined with open or semi-structured narrative interviews—during periods I could not freely travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic or perhaps faced other limitations. My necessary tinkering or *jugaad* concerning data collection came about partly due to the constraints of my topic and partly due to the Covid-19 induced restrictions. In other words, endogenous restrictive challenges specific to a particular field site or theme of research and exogenous events like the Covid-19 pandemic can be partly overcome through such a method. As discussed above, it would not be wrong to attribute my *jugaad* in research to my interlocutors' migratory improvisations and resourceful attitudes or *jugaad* in mobility. Seeing them facing their mobility difficulties pushed me to resort to resourcefulness in approaching mine in research. Their *jugaadi* (noun; one who resorts to *jugaad)* attitude inspired mine.

However, it must be noted that *ralli* research can only function by building upon the essential foundation of classical methods that make ethnographic research *ethnographic*. As such, *ralli* research is the extension of core ethnographic methods, not a transpositional technique. I want to reassert that no amount of virtually collected data can replace witnessing events and sharing of spaces, especially for research like mine where affects are inherently linked to contexts; spatial,

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[34] Faithful to the anthropological endeavour in the sense that it is committed to consistent and longterm engagement with the other to make sense of people's perfectly valid reasons to do the things that they do. Reflection and engagement with the self is equally important, at least with regards to one's positionality.

relational and temporal. Listening to the experiences, hopes and aspirations of Pakistani irregularised migrants at different times[35] and in various settings, such as a park as opposed to a return counselling centre or their camp; spending time with returnees (and in many cases, their families) at their homes in Pakistan and before their departure in Germany; or talking to return counsellors in person and discussing repatriation with them at public forums all revealed different and extremely valuable aspects and insights. None of this would have been possible through research relying solely on virtual or digital methods.

As mentioned above, I engaged migrants and returnees at different (pre-and post-return) phases of the migratory process, sometimes meeting the same interlocutors in different places and, at other times, new ones in the same places (often through old interlocutors). This again was made easier due to the temporal "stretching" of my research caused by the Coivd-19 pandemic. The extension of my research in time due to the pandemic allowed for the kind of duration that allowed me to meet the same interlocutors in different places in addition to different interlocutors in the same place. For instance, it allowed me to meet an interlocutor in Germany before their return or further migration and then, respectively, follow up upon their return to Pakistan or after their move to Italy. This "sampling" method or engaging interlocutors could be termed an asynchronous matched sample. The method bares some resemblances to Valentina Mazzucato's (2009) simultaneous matched sample (SMS) methodology. However, instead of several researchers simultaneously researching different social network nodes, I created that web of connections asynchronously over time and space as a single researcher. Obtaining information from an interlocutor in one locality and asynchronously matching it up with information obtained from a person in their social network, if not the same person, upon their move to a second locality.

3.5 Research partners and access: whatever works methodology

As discussed above, this dissertation is the outcome of research that spans almost two years between 2019 and 2022 (including remote or App-based research and duration spent outside what is mentioned in the fieldwork timetable above). During this period, I spent varying degrees of time with irregularised Pakistani migrants in Bavaria, Germany and Northern Italy and "voluntary" returnees in Punjab, Pakistan. As I have already discussed above, multi-sited fieldwork is at the

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[35] Administratively speaking time can be based on the status of people's asylum situation or their legal status in general or affectively speaking time could be different based on their state due to administrative or personal reasons.

foundation of studying the complex issues of our times (see section 3.2). However, what does that look like methodologically and particularly in terms of access to research partners in vulnerable or precarious situations who may be, and perhaps for valid reasons, worried about surveillance or might not be interested in research? At times there is no minimum shared understanding of the value of research because our potential research partners have not encountered the world of education and research as anything other than a privileged lifestyle. Certainly, my research and its output were of no real value to many who had their own issues to worry about. Establishing initial contact with prospective interlocutors in/around Munich also proved complicated because a trust deficit resulting from their precarious legal situation kept people from engaging with a stranger (albeit from the same country). These fears were particularly heightened in people whom I met at the Munich-based return counselling centre "Coming Home", who perhaps saw me as part of the repatriation machinery, like the translators (whom I later found out they did not trust). My nationality, Muslim name and ethnolinguistic identity as an "insider" (something I unpack in detail in section 3.7 below) was of no use at best and perhaps even had the effect of betrayal when people encountered me in that setting. At Coming Home, after the return counselling session, prospective "voluntary" returnees would pass me their number upon my request and agree to meet at a later point but then not respond when I would call to set up a meeting. While one of the counsellors thought it was because these people did not plan to return and were just buying time, people who actually returned to Pakistan (as per the flight booked by the return counsellor) were also non-responsive when I contacted them via WhatsApp to set up a future meeting in Pakistan. This realisation made me recognise that it was more than just people trying to "game the system" that was keeping them from trusting me. It was my perceived association with the removal mechanism of (in)voluntary returns.

A few "strategies" helped me in that regard. Volunteering at Bellevue di Monaco, a Munich-based organisation that supports irregularised migrants in various ways, along with other social engagements, proved immensely helpful (besides the personal/ethical reasons for an engaged anthropology discussed at the end of section 3.1 above). For example, at events organised in Bellevue di Monaco, I met several German volunteers who acted as gatekeepers for many of the people they supported in Munich and various Bavarian towns around Munich. In addition to introducing me to the Pakistani men they helped in their hometowns, they put me in contact with people who had moved to Italy or returned to Pakistan. (Un)surprisingly, it was easier to build

rapport with people introduced to me by the German volunteers than to reach out to people directly. This realisation was surprising because it unsettled notions of being an "insider" researcher and the benefits that supposedly come with that position (see section 3.7). And it was unsurprising at the same time because the notion of an "insider" I very well knew is not only based on identity markers but built over time and through trust that made some Germans more of an "insider" for irregularised Pakistanis than me, a national fellow who could be anyone, at best a Pakistani stranger.

The initial migrant contacts through trusted volunteers snowballed into a irregularised/return migrant network of my own, which allowed me to build reliant long-term relationships necessary to move between multiple field sites and carry out participant observation. Regular meetings with interlocutors in Munich and staying with my interlocutors in Italy and Pakistan were essential for my participant observation. However, this establishing of rapport was not as straightforward as it seems. Within the migrant community, identifying the "right" irregularised migrants to be key interlocutors and creating a minimum shared understanding about my research through them was as important as meeting people through volunteers. For example, someone who became a key node in my irregularised migrant network had a bachelor's degree and the sister of another studied sociology at the university level. Thus they not only understood my motivations but showed interest and helped me build trust with others who sometimes mistrusted me and indeed told them that I might be someone who gets people deported. I would like to acknowledge that these relationships were built through mutual respect and reciprocity, I would try to help people find jobs or other forms of assistance (e.g. legal advice) through volunteer friends.

None of these "strategies" were planned, and Sherry Ortner's (2019: NP) words come to mind, who writes:

> "Ethnographic fieldwork has always involved a great deal of creativity and improvisation. This is in the very nature of a form of research that is specifically committed to remaining open to the unexpected, and to coming to see the non-obvious."

Building on that, she argues for a "whatever works methodology" to overcome issues "related to questions of accessibility, which tend to come to the fore when the practices and effects of unequal power are central to the project: both the powerful and the powerless tend to be shielded from normal social access and from the ethnographic gaze" (ibid).

My methodological improvisations (whatever works methodology) allowed me to record in varying detail the migration trajectories, stories and experiences of *twenty-six* irregularised migrant men in Germany and Italy and *seven* returnees in Pakistan. I also interviewed *three* deportees, of whom I was able to meet two in person and one over the phone. However, it could be said that while I "chose" my interlocutors, they also "chose" me. During my research, I met and tried to talk to several more irregularised and returning migrants than the thirty-six that I have tallied above. However, I could only build a rapport with less than thirty of these men. And within this group, I followed their migratory journeys to different extents due to various constraints as well as the development of friendship and trust to different degrees. With about ten of these men, I built long-lasting friendships and thus remained in touch[36]. My interviews and participant observation with these men form my dissertation's ethnographic spine—their intricate and affective stories, aspirations, imaginations, and complex experiences of hope and despair, led me to grasp their migratory improvisations and struggles. I introduce eight of them in the following chapter and draw from a few additional cases in the chapters that follow. Acknowledging the disjuncture between people's migratory aspirations and capabilities to realise mobility (cf. Appadurai 2004; Nussbaum 2011; Carling and Schewel 2018), I unpack the multidirectional and reverberating affects and pressures that influence my interlocutors' migratory improvisations and (in)voluntary return in myriad ways.

While I consider irregularised migrants my primary interlocutors and their insights my primary ethnographic material, I began my research by investigating the procedures and workings of "voluntary" return programs in Munich, as shared above. During this period, I became aquatinted with return counsellors and their work (e.g. at Coming Home). My research with irregularised migrants, returnees, volunteers and return counsellors is further augmented by focus groups and interviews with government officials and NGO staff working with (returning) migrants or implementing relevant (return) migration programs and policies in Pakistan. During my initial visit to Pakistan, I reached out to the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), WELDO, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and was contacted by an official at the German Embassy, thus creating crucial relationships for the research. I engaged at least one employee within each organisation and gained access to important

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[36] The migratory status and location of many people have changed over the last four years and are changing as I write my dissertation. Their improvisations are ongoing.

official, policy and personal perspectives on (return) migration management (apart from WELDO, as they seemed suspicious of my research) from the administrative or functionary side of things. This knowledge gave me a more holistic view of the field and allowed me to discuss issues with (returning) migrants in light of mechanisms that were not obvious or transparent to them.

3.6 Methodological approaches to studying affect

The exploration of affect as a methodological tool and analytical lens to understand the lived experience of returning and non-returning irregularised migrants was more complicated than I imagined. Indeed, accessing affects (and emotions) was as complex as analysing and writing about them. A framing of "affect(s)" in those regards would be helpful at this point and augment the key theoretical assumptions and definitions shared in the previous chapter.

Affect influenced my work at different levels, which needs to be addressed before being unpacked methodologically in the rest of the section. Firstly, my ethnographic fieldwork was not only informed by the affect-laden and affect-inducing narratives and stories of my interlocutors but also by nonlinguistic affects "in the air" during my observations and experiences of living or spending time with them. Getting access to the affectively charged lives of our interlocutors (particularly from an emic perspective) is complex and painstaking for many reasons. It not only requires trust garnered through patience, compassion and longitudinal engagement but the willingness of the ethnographer to be *moved* by the lives of their interlocutors: As they say in Urdu, to have the "*ehsaas*" (sensibility) to relate. In other words, mutually experienced moods, atmospheres, and feelings inform my ethnography as much as the interviews and stories of my interlocutors. That is to say, the sense of alienation or despair in an interlocutor's voice not only made it to my voice recorder but made my palms clammy. The anger on someone's face altered my heart rate before it made it into my notes. The joy in their laugh was mirrored in my smile and made me fill up with the feeling of warmth before I decided to keep that memory in my diary. A subtle but critical difference was having access to the affective lives of my interlocutors during their decision-making and at a later stage. This temporal position, like the socio-spatial context, allowed me to make sense of the important but temporal role of affect in the migratory improvisations of my interlocutors. For instance, the despair in someone's voice or the humiliation in their body posture while sharing the news of an unfavourable decision by *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchlinge (BAMF)* (German

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) or their permission to work being taken away with a *Duldung* (*light*). Such instances led us to not only talk about how battered they felt on the inside but allowed me to trace rather clear connections between their decision-making process to the affect of the news they had recently received. People would often tell me in these instances how Germany had "broken their heart" (*dil tor dena*[37]) or, inversely, how their hosts were "*pathar dill*" (stone-hearted) who had "trashed" their dreams. There is no doubt that their initial ambiguities about what to do were fuelled by the despair of a sinking heart at receiving some form of negative news or vice versa. Adverse information from the state and associated affects lead people to scramble for migratory improvisations, whatever they may finally turn out to be: Hiding at a friend's place to figure out a formal or informal possibility to stay in Germany, a secondary migration to another European country, or returning to Pakistan. Such moments in the lives of my interlocutors, where they scrambled for migratory improvisations, were not as alien to me as one may think. In fact, before I started my PhD, I was in a similar affective situation (of course, under completely different and relatively privileged circumstances). Having finished my master's degree in Heidelberg and not being able to find employment in the field of my studies, a requirement for the renewal of my visa at the time, meant that I was trying everything in my power not to return to Pakistan. My biggest concerns were that I would be returning without a job after having spent years abroad and that I would lose my life in Germany. Such concerns resurfaced in the last few weeks of writing this dissertation when I found myself unemployed and needing to renew my visa. Again, I was thrown into a vortex of insecurity created mainly by a restrictive migration regime but luckily managed to pull myself out just as I revised my final draft.

Secondly, affect became vital during the analysis and writing-up phase. Methodologically speaking, it is not only accessing and recording affect that can be complex, but their analysis and elucidation is intricate too, especially retrospectively (Copp 2008; Davidson, Liz, and Smith 2007). That is to say, analysing affect asynchronously through notes and transcripts is complicated and so is writing about them. This much is clear chronologically: The shame or despair in someone's eyes crept into my soul—and made me uncomfortably look around at that moment—before it did my analysis, for example. As such, analysis and writing need to be augmented by jogging affective memory. This can be done by going through photos, re-listening to recordings and going through personal diaries.

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[37] This Urdu expression not only evokes feelings of sorrow the broken-hearted subject experiences but also incorporates the callousness of the perpetrator.

Additionally, in my case, it sometimes happened serendipitously due to my own visa and job issues in Germany that were unfolding in my life at the time of analysis and writing. Another issue in this regard is the communication affect through text.

In that vein, creative non-fiction writing is a valuable tool for the simultaneous interpretation and communication of affects. The plot, setting and narrative structure central to such a form of writing allows for revealing emotions and situational affects to the reader rather than a simplistic description of how someone felt. As such, including affects in the analysis is not only organic but also discursively evocative. In other words, the reader is not merely left with the scholar's commentary and a hand full of adjectives but is allowed to analyse the (con)text for themselves. The creative writing maxim "show, do not tell" captures the essence of this method I hope to employ in various parts of the dissertation where I share my interlocutor stories.

While the genre of non-fiction provides me with the tools to elucidate, illuminate and communicate the intricacies of affect to you, the reader, how did I access the fluid affects of (return) migration as data in the first place? In other words, before being *moved* and my cognisance of moods, feelings, and affects, and as I discussed above, how did I ensure I was allowed access to such affective moments as a person with sensibility (*ehsaas*), which is not a given due to many of the challenges already discussed. Affect theorist Sara Ahmed helped me immensely in that regard. Reading her work not only made me more cognisant of how to approach affects that often circulate "in the air"[38] but pressed me to reflect on how to methodologically approach studying affects as an ethnographer. "Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively," writes Ahmed (2010: 36). She (2010) further reminds us that how we read or "feel the atmosphere," in turn, affects how things move along; what happens; whether one feels anxious and tense or feels light and energetic. She (2010: 36) writes, "we may walk into the room and 'feel the atmosphere,' but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point." Keeping her insightful words in mind, no matter the affective "angle of arrival" of my interlocutors, my task was to as best as I could ensure that they were in a safe and trusting space, where they could share their feelings, emotional states and affective realities.

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[38] Compared to emotions that start in the body and then come to the surface, several scholars highlight how affects circulate in the air and enter our bodies; i.e. affects flow between bodies, spaces and over time (Gregg and Seigworth 2010).

Furthermore, drawing on James Spradley (1988), I relied on ethnosemantic elicitation techniques to do this in part: Relying on my Punjabi Muslim heritage from my mother's side and my Punjabi and Urdu language skills, I not only "arrived" as a person with a common ethnic-religious background but actively learned several emic terms that irregularised migrants and returnees employ so as not to come across as an "affect alien" due to my relative privileges; of class, education, "legal" migration status and so on (Ahmed 2010). This provided me with the means to discuss issues in a manner that would have otherwise been difficult and, more importantly, provided my interlocutors with a space of trust and shared understanding. To take Ahmed's (2010) metaphor, somewhere they could feel the atmosphere was positively angled, and the air was right to share, even if the angle of initial arrival was not favourable. For example, Pakistani migrants use the term "*dunkey*"[39] to allude to their irregularised migration or so-called "illegal" migration. Using this emic term instead of the etic Urdu term *"ghair qanooni"* (unlawful), which is often used by mainstream media and "legal" migrants like myself when alluding to such forms of migration enabled affective access to their lives and perspectives. Such linguistic sensitivity communicated not only a better understanding of their lifeworlds but also created an atmosphere where they could open up without feeling judged or, worse yet, having a double consciousness regarding their normalised position as an "illegal" (Fanon 1956).

Interaction with interlocutors structured around critical events and contexts allowed for a glimpse of shifting affects (e.g. hope to despair). People's social media activity often helped me in that regard and allowed me to discuss particular temporal or contextual affects which can be considered analogous to the photo-elicitation technique (Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Pauwels 2015; Stodulka 2017). There were apparent differences in talking to informants before and after their hearing, upon the suspension and resumption of deportations in Germany or social, political and personal events that affected their lives (cf. Das 1995). For example, through people's WhatsApp statuses, I would be alerted to the passing away of someone's mother (often with a photo of the deceased and prayer) or

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[39] *Dunkey,* is the punjabification of the English word "dinghy" that serves as an essential transportation tool for many irregularised migrants to cross into Europe. It is worth noting here that the word dinghy itself finds its roots in the Urdu/Hindi word *dongee* (a type of small rowing boat used in 19th century India). And the ongoing reclaiming of the word as *dunkey* by irregularised Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan hints at the kinds of connections, mobilities and immobilities at play. The entangled nature and colonial histories of such words are witness to the subjugation, extraction and control during colonialism and the struggles of post-colonial subjects. It is also a term that allows my interlocutors to bypass loaded language that turns something that should be an essential right, that of movement, into legal and illegal by the old colonial rulers, who carry on with their cruel practices under the guise of the national rule (Sharma 2020). As such, my interlocutors' use of *dunkey* gives attention to the mode of transportation that enables mobility rather than the processes of control meant to restrict mobility but also hints at a history of colonialism resulting in unequal access to mobility.

a coded but somewhat obvious cry of despair through a poetic expression. At other times, particularly once rapport was built with certain people, I would also receive a direct text message regarding certain events and changes.

Situational and (co)incidental affects were also produced and, as such, studied or considered through "*situational maps* that lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analyses of relations among them" (Clarke 2003: 554). Take this interesting development that coincidentally emerged during fieldwork in Pakistan as an example of how affects in different social worlds grounded my research and my understanding of my interlocutors' lifeworlds: A deportee had agreed to meet but was only willing to do so in a public place (people are generally afraid of state surveillance in Pakistan; a deportee's situation exacerbates such legitimate fears). A relatively central location in Lahore was chosen as a meeting spot, and it was decided that we could have lunch at a nearby Nando's restaurant. This middle-class establishment seemed to have a particular affect on my interlocutor, who had entered such a place for the first time. Space and social context alien to the interlocutor led to conversations about structural inequalities pertinent to this interlocutor's initial departure, the affective pressures and hopes related to migration and despair upon his forced return.

Reflection on this incident (and my conversation) led me to conclude that specific contexts and spaces outside an individual's daily life elicit affects and emotions that would be difficult to access under familiar situational maps and can be seen as a methodological approach to studying affects and feelings as a part of this research. To that end, I argue that elicitation is most easily achieved if the researcher shares "his/her" spaces with the interlocutor instead of only sharing the latter's spaces. As such, in addition to sharing their spaces, I also tried to share my spaces with my interlocutors when possible, which led to many interesting conversations. Taking interlocutors to the pride parade in Munich or a church concert in Brescia, for example, led to discussions about identity, Islam, Christianity, social control and ideas of home that were otherwise unimaginable. At best, the interlocutor would have perceived such a discussion on specific topics as forced, if not outright provocative, was it not for the context that led to this "mutual dialogical production of discourse" beyond the ideology of "observer-observed" (Tyler 2010: 126).

3.7 Objectivation of the researcher: analysing my positionality and experiences

An aspect of going beyond the "observer-observed" ideology is putting into question the observer's objectivity or, at the bare minimum acknowledging their sociological presence as more than a mere "fly on the wall". A few prominent anthropologists highlighted the "poetics and politics of ethnography", undoing the facade of the objective ethnographer writing "culture" (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

More generally, reflexivity, however, has been an essential tool in addressing that issue since the early sixties (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The dynamics of the observer and the observed can be and should be upset by observing the observer. Beyond naval gazing, a critical reflection upon the researcher's social and political position in the field and at "home" in terms of knowledge production and other epistemological issues is necessary (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In that sense, my participant observation was what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 68) call "participant objectivation" or "full sociological objectivation". Bourdieu (2003: 282) writes: "By 'participant objectivation', I mean the objectivation of the subject of objectivation, of the analysing subject – in short, of the researcher herself." In that vein, I wish to bring to light many a few different aspects of myself in this section in an effort "objectivse" my role as a subjective observer. I will discuss the issue of my position (gender, class, nationality, religious affiliation, education, etc.) and, thus, my subjective standpoint. I will share my experience as an "insider" and an "outsider", as well as neither and both, highlighting the impact of experiences that cannot be captured by the insider/ outside duality (Narayan 1993). Of course, it is equally important to share my politics, the funding of my research, my motivation to carry out this research and the kinds of collaboration, reciprocity and activism I was engaged in during my work as an anthropologist.

Going into my research armed with texts about "insider" perspectives, "halfie" anthropology and "native" anthropologists, I was overly confident (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1996). This purportedly "advantageous position" in "understanding the emotive dimensions of behaviour" that "are hard for outsiders to understand" proved not so easy for me as an "insider" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 584). During one of my first interactions with an irregularised migrant for my research in Munich, *meri hawa nikal gye* (literally, deflation), as they say in Urdu. In other words, the air of my so-called "insider", "native", and "halfie" advantage was instantly deflated!

When I saw this irregularised migrant from Pakistan at Bellevue di Monaco[40], I went straight to him and, uncritically flattening all the differences—that I will shortly address—introduced myself as a "Pakistani brother" doing research "on" irregularised migrants. I still cringe, thinking about that moment. I *thought* (in my imagination) we were having a good conversation when someone came and addressed him with a completely different name than he had just told me. I acted like I had not heard his real name and was incredibly embarrassed that my "Pakistani brother" trusted me so little that he did not even tell me his real name and left in a hurry like air leaves a punctured balloon. Another conversation I had with a Punjabi asylum seeker who thought I was an Indian because the friend that had introduced us had told him I was employed at the university is also insightful. "I have never met a Pakistani who works at the University," this person[41] said when we first met, reminding me of something similar that happened to me during my undergraduate years that I will shortly discuss. In the first few weeks after moving to Munich, such conversations made me realise that my interlocutors and I might share Pakistani citizenship and a few languages (mostly Urdu or Punjabi). Still, I was not an insider to their worlds, and I would have to work hard on being sensitive towards specific customs, codes and practices and nevertheless remain, at best, a "native" outsider (Narayan 1993). Thus I realised repeatedly that my "halfie" position came with as many disadvantages as advantages.

Having addressed the forming of trust only as a methodological issue above, further discussion is needed regarding my positionality. Beyond the generalised insider/outsider binary based on a few obvious identity factors, establishing trust with interlocutors, particularly in instances like my research, requires emotional labour and empathy informed by lived experiences on the part of the researcher (cf. Ortner 2016). As a man with Pakistani citizenship and a Muslim name in Europe, I am similar to my interlocutors in many ways. However, the simplification of shared gender, nationality, language and ethnicity (only partly, as my maternal ethnicity is Punjabi and my paternal ethnicity Saraiki) must be contested and unpacked at the experience level. Even though I am a first-generation university graduate, that is a significant privilege that allows me a different experience of social and cross-border mobility compared to my interlocutors, who are often not educated beyond primary or middle school, barring a few exceptions.

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[40] During one of my first few visits to the place, and when I was not an active volunteer known to the people working, visiting, volunteering there.

[41] I introduce him as Gul at a later point.

This difference is stark, but I was naive when I first arrived for my undergraduate study in Europe. I saw the scholarship I received in Utrecht as an individual achievement, particularly as someone from the Pakistani middle-class climbing up the mobility ladder and moving across borders. So during a visit to Barcelona during a break in my first year, when I encountered irregularised Punjabis selling beers and samosas on the beach, I was as confused as they were to see me. As I conversed with one man in his early twenties—around my age at the time but someone who looked significantly older, probably due to the weight of his experiences—he told me that this was the first time he was meeting a Pakistani university student and that he assumed I was an Indian. Many years later, when I started my research in Munich, as discussed above, I received a similar remark. This time, however, I was better equipped to think about how disconnected our worlds were in Pakistan: the disconnections and differences that shaped our lives and structured our unequal capabilities in Pakistan and as migrants in Europe. But also how, in the age of digital social media, perhaps our mobility aspirations were not that different despite our different "capacity to aspire" that Appadurai (2004: 68) rightly identified as something that was "not evenly distributed in society." That is to say that due to structural reasons, I have what Appadurai (2004: 68) calls a "more fully developed capacity" or "metacapacity" to achieve my mobility aspirations (still much less compared to a German citizen). Thus while mobility aspirations may not differ from those of my interlocutors' the ability to realise them does differ.

I have been asked, perhaps rhetorically told, on different occasions about the advantages of my being an "insider" (i.e. male Pakistan migrant). However, how I experienced this position was much more complicated. While I am a cisgender man, like most of my interlocutors, I carry additional social privileges through my education that allowed me to acquire different forms of capital over the years. And though I have faced my share of discrimination, prejudice and racism as a person of colour with a Muslim name in Europe, my interlocutors experienced a much harsher form of intolerance in Europe that I could perhaps not bear. The kind that would most likely break my spirit and trust in our common humanity.

Our privileges and resilience aside, indeed, some aspects made things easier for me. For example, alluding to our shared understanding of the difficulties people face in Pakistan, one of my interlocutors pointed out, "Europeans don't really understand" the issues and circumstances of initial departure whilst discussing how volunteers who supported him suggested a "voluntary"

return. This led him to stop trusting them, and he eventually moved to Italy. However, to get to that stage of trust, I had to overcome my interlocutors' fears that rightly alerted them to my presence (and interest in their lives) initially, which I imagine not to be the case with a European researcher who would not be seen as a threat in that sense. In the Pakistani context, people with wealth and privilege often have a very exploitative relationship with the rest of the country. In a purely economic sense, it might not be very different from class relations elsewhere under capitalism. In Pakistan, like most of the world, the disproportionately higher rates of return on capital help the rich to amass more wealth and power to keep the exploitative relations in place (Piketty 2013). However, inequality is, as Piketty (2019: 7) points out first and foremost, "ideological and political" and "the elites of many societies, in all periods and climes, have sought to 'naturalise' inequality". Many parts of the world have tried and, in many ways, succeeded in undoing this "naturalisation", at least at the *national* level (for citizens), through universal suffrage, free and mandatory education, universal healthcare, progressive taxation systems and allowing specific quotas for marginalised groups whilst simultaneously trying to dismantle institutions and laws that are at the foundation of inequality (Piketty 2019). However, countries like Pakistan have not paid heed to such necessary measures but have exacerbated inequality through an ideology and politics that supports only its elites or, as some have called it, "elite capture" (Gul 2017; Armytage 2020). Whilst I am not ignorant of the global community and its role in the structuring, institutionalisation and "naturalising" of inequality between the Global North and South—the management of mobility through passports is a case in point—in this section, I deliberately restrict myself to a national focus to discuss my position vis-a-vis my interlocutors (Bradley and De Noronha 2022).

Thus, returning to my position as a man and citizen of Pakistan, who might also be ethno-linguistically related to my interlocutors or share (as far as my interlocutors were concerned) a religious identity, does not equate to being an "insider". Due to a set of discourse and institutional arrangements that justify and structure economic, social and political inequalities and form the bases of the "inequality regime" in Pakistan, at first encounter, many of my interlocutors rightly perceive me as an outsider (Piketty 2019: 2). I am after all a product of a colonial institution called Aitchison College that to date functions in particular ways as to keep the inequality regime in Pakistan in place (Mahar 2021a). The functioning of this particular cog in the inequality machinery is so evident that in specific years more than half of the "Supreme Court judges and members of the

federal cabinet come from just one school: Aitchison College in Lahore" (Ismail 2022). Even though I come from a humble background compared to the traditional patrons and members of this elite fraternity and embrace a politics opposed to the exclusive ideologies based on colonial forms of domination, the fact remains.

However, some contextualisation is necessary. My late father, a Saraiki man brought up in rural Southern Punjab without schooling, had practical Bourdieuan insight into the circulation of different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). While we could have lived with plenty through farming on his lands—a holding of about 50 acres inherited from his father—he decided to move us some 400 kilometres to the city of Lahore for our education and away from blood feuds that had resulted in the death of amongst others, his maternal uncle[42] and a first cousin who was also his best friend. The two reasons combined meant that our migration to Lahore in the 1990s was essential in his eyes, no matter the sacrifices he and our mother had to make.

As Bourdieu (1986: 252) notes, "different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question." Years of private education for the children and moving to a city meant not only strictly economic investments but on the part of both our parents a "gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern" (Bourdieu 1986: 252). They sacrificed many of their desires to invest their time, energy and resources, I imagine, in fact, I know, into a process that was alien to them compared to our peers' parents, many of whom had gone through a similar process of education and more broadly *Bildung* (a broad term for education in German to include cultivation and formation) before their children. To highlight a small dimension of this aspect, let me share a brief example: Whenever our maternal grandmother was over, she would rebuke our mother for waking up at 5:30 am, sometimes earlier, to prepare our breakfast and lunch so we could leave home by 6:30 am to catch the school bus at 7:00 am. Education for her brought nothing, and particularly outrageous was the kind our parents had sought for us with the varied forms of "high investment". Sometimes, when our mother was displeased with our father, she would wield this perspective of her mother's and tell our father that she was tired of the labour and would rather bring us back to the village to live with him. This would alarm us kids, especially

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[42] The mother's brother is often a very close relation in the region, and sometimes boys have a closer relationship to a maternal uncle than their fathers. This was indeed the case with my father and his uncle.

because this had been tried once, but rather than us "all" going back to the village, some of us (my brother and I) ended up in the boarding school. Thanks to my endless crying in the boarding house, we were eventually withdrawn from this horrible condition, but, every time a situation arose that we saw could potentially lead to a second attempt, we had to plead with our mother, hoping to defuse the situation. However, our family faced bigger, more challenging issues.

The direct and indirect expenses of our education, combined with a few bad years of harvest and a flood, meant that for many years our father would remain indebted and his lands pledged to the bank until his death in an accident at the age of forty-two. He had been travelling between Lahore and our village for about a decade, at least twice a month, but his accident occurred on a small rural road connecting our village to the nearest city of Hasilpur when his motorbike was hit by a bus. The next few weeks at various public and private hospitals were an agonising experience for us as a family with bank debts and no savings in a country with a neoliberal healthcare system. This was further complicated by my father's older brother's opinions as the patriarch who—I hope only in naivety and not mal-intent—delayed an essential operation. Towards the end, my father was placed on a ventilator that cost 20000 Rupees a day (which was about four times the monthly minimum wage in Pakistan at the time). When people we could potentially borrow money from had run out by the third day, we could not afford this amount anymore and "decided" to transfer him to a public hospital, where he passed away the same day.

His passing away was a shock that led me and especially my younger brother[43] not to talk about his death for a couple of years, but at the same time, we could ignore the reverberations left by his absence. Amongst countless other crises, within a year of his death, we could not afford an education at Aitchison College anymore and finished our schooling elsewhere. However, over the nearly a decade we spent at this exclusive sanctuary for the elite, we acquired essential social and cultural capital that—despite our *ehsaas-e-kamtari* [feelings of inferiority; inferiority complex] and feeling like imposters and outsiders in this environment—would shape the trajectory of our lives. A life my father had, in some ways, wished for his children but could not live to see.

Without any knowledge of my biography, what becomes obvious to my interlocutors in the first instance is what Bourdieu called the "embodied state" of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986: 244).

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[43] Our sisters were too young to talk about the matter; one was born that year and the other had recently completed kindergarten education.

Immediately, some perceive me as a symptom of the pathological elite capture in Pakistan and part of the inequality regime that disenfranchises them. As such, I had to work hard to create trust, but this was impossible when people did not even want to engage with someone who may be a part of the oppressing group. In many cases, however, this effort culminated in convivial relationships where my interlocutors could make fun of me for being a "useless" and "overthinking" academic or how I say certain things in Urdu and Punjabi or my "*burger bacha*" (burger kid) lifestyle. While the implication of being a "*burger bacha*" behind someone's back is often negative and implies holding embodied, objectified, institutionalised states of cultural capital perceived as "Western" and thus being detached from *desi* or "authentic" Pakistani "culture," I saw my interlocutors' overt and joking use of it with me as a dialectical opportunity for discussing identities and going beyond superficial similarities and differences.

If not through such discussions, then being reflexive about my varied experiences helped in understanding the position and perspectives of my interlocutors and relating to them not only at the affective level but also at the social and political level. For example, I will never forget when my father once came to fetch me from school. He only did so on rare occasions, as he spent most of his time tending to the farm in our village. On this particular occasion, a school fellow thought he was my driver leading me to pick a fight with this "burger"! Not only have I treaded both sides of the "burger" divide over my lifetime, but most of my cousins, especially from my mother's side[44], are not very dissimilar to my interlocutors, particularly in their socioeconomic standing and demographic factors. In fact, one of my interlocutors lives in the same neighbourhood as my maternal aunt and her five children. As such, my "ordinary" lived experiences, in addition to more traumatic experiences such as my father's death—which I blame on structural inequality in access to basic needs such as healthcare and education—give me a crucial biographical understanding of the lives of many of my interlocutors. My family has not only lived through social and economic precarity in Pakistan, particularly after my father's death, but even as my siblings and I have secured more comfortable and privileged positions in life over the years, we encounter difficulties, if not practically, then emotionally when we see our loved ones making difficult choices that should not be so. Even today, albeit with relative privilege compared to my interlocutors, as an early career anthropologist and migrant with a temporary visa, I can understand and relate to the affective

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[44] The only main difference on my father's side is that there is some agricultural land ownership which saves that side of the family from extreme hardships. However, with each generation, the amount of land is divided many folds and I foresee the children of our cousins resorting to a *dunkey* if structural changes do not take place to create opportunities for future generations in Pakistan.

pressures my interlocutors face. After all, I left Pakistan because, despite my "elite education", I could not overcome the workings of social reproduction. The door to elite spaces remains, and more importantly, meaningful opportunities closed for a "farmer's boy" without a big family name or relatives in Pakistani corridors or power: military, judiciary, political dynasties. I can only imagine the need and pressure to leave to be tremendously more significant for my interlocutors.

In other words, my past and current experiences make me sensitive to the experience and affective hopes of acquiring mobility (social and physical). I draw more concrete parallels and differences between my experiences and those of my interlocutors in the ethnographic chapters, for example, through our encounters with the healthcare system in Pakistan as a factor motivating us to leave in addition to other issues. However, before I could draw those parallels in text, it was essential to reflect on them and put in the labour and effort during fieldwork to communicate to my interlocutors how I share particular perspectives with them despite my relative personal privileges.

To that end, accompanying my interlocutors in various contexts and places and throughout their migratory trajectories allowed me to reflect on my positionality as a migrant researcher and our (dis)similar circumstances as Pakistani migrants in Europe. While my interlocutors and I may share many common emotional burdens and everyday experiences as "migrants from a Muslim country", the privileged reality of being a "highly qualified" migrant and the mobility afforded to me as such is quite contrasting to the restriction and (im)mobility that my interlocutors face as "unskilled" (and unwanted) irregularised migrants. This overlapping and disjuncture between our (im)mobilities gave me a much-needed complex perspective beyond the insider/outsider binary. At an abstract level, I share with my interlocutors the process of dealing with emotions intertwined with motivations, expectations and experiences that come with being a Pakistani migrant in Europe. Despite having more agency in such decisions, I, too, have to go through the repeated process of deciding whether to return to Pakistan or struggle against the racist German visa regime each time I have to renew my visa. However, as in other ways shared above, my precarious mobility as a non-European early career researcher is still a privileged form of uncertain mobility relative to the harsh lived experience of my (im)mobile interlocutors. Though problematic, my experiences of being racially profiled while crossing the borders between Germany, Austria and Italy (a border route that I frequented during my fieldwork) are not comparable to what my interlocutors face at the so-called

open borders of Europe. The semi-permeability of European borders ensures that I can pass along with the Europeans while they cannot or must resort to irregularised forms of cross-border mobility.

Despite the privileges that protected me from the precarity and danger faced by my interlocutors on an everyday basis and the temporality of my embeddedness in their environments, my ethnographic research was "based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space" (Wacquant 2003: 5). That means, notwithstanding all our similarities and differences shared above, I shared my interlocutors' ups and downs, was able to experience their moment of joyful feelings and the troubling whirlpools of despair. At the affective level, I was with them if they felt like being sucked into a sinkhole or when they relished in the joy of sunshine after a tempestuous night at sea—allowing me to understand better the affects and effects of asymmetries of mobility and how people navigate unequal mobility whilst having little agency and power. This, in turn, allowed me to theorise better and grasp their mobility improvisations, particularly when the only choice it seemed they had was to "voluntarily" return or be deported.

I hope this information is something other than naval gazing and gives the reader some idea about how my analysis may be partial in specific ways, for better or worse.

Chapter 4: Voluntariness Affects

In this chapter, I will start by grounding the faceted character and impacts of so-called "voluntary returns programs" through the experiences of primarily eight interlocutors. These include people who returned and those who, at different stages of the (in)voluntary return process that initiates with the rejection of one's asylum and the subsequent obligation to leave, opted for a secondary intra-European irregularised migration (i.e. irregularised re-migration with the EU). In these ethnographic introductions to some returnee and non-returnee interlocutors, I will focus primarily on their pre-post-and non-return narratives, affective experiences and agentic improvisations to reflect on the paradoxes of "voluntary" returns. I consider these introductions more than vignettes (or a stand-alone collection of vignettes) as they are not only individually or separately employed to highlight a particular aspect of my research or to analyse specific sides of the affective lives of my certain interlocutors. In addition to doing just that, the order of their presentation and their collective reading will, I hope, weave together important parts of different yet, in many ways, also similar lives to give insights that are not only ethnographically rich but diverse in terms of biographic experiences and personal/familial situations. This will, in turn, highlight the lived aspects of *volition* and *voluntariness* through the standpoint of many irregularised migrants/returnees but without compromising on the necessary depth and holism required. I imagine it to be a patchwork of ethnographic vignettes that is no less than a complete ethnographic vine. Moreover, the lived ambiguities and difficulties of different people surrounding so-called "voluntary returns" will help me ground a nuanced view of voluntariness and how it plays out in the lives of people who are subjects of such returns. In the remaining part of the chapter, I will call attention to the current migratory regimes and politics shaping (in)voluntary returns by drawing on concrete examples from the cases shared.

4.1 To Return or not: voluntariness and the affective routes of migration improvisation

4.1.1 Aman

Despite being a skilled *fliesenleger* (tile layer) and having a full-time job offer in Munich, Aman was not allowed to stay after his asylum application and appeal were refused. In 2019 he started facing pressure from the *Ausländerbehörde* to leave. However, he also felt the affective pressure to not return without getting the *kaghaz* or documents. He tried seeking help from volunteers and his

(ex)employer, but "threats from the *Ausländerbehörde*" increased to the point where deportation seemed imminent if he did not take any action. Finally, in March 2020, he "voluntarily" returned to Pakistan on one of the last flights before the world, and particularly international travel came to a near halt. Sometime after his return, when we talked via WhatsApp, using the term "*kismet wala*" (someone favoured by destiny), he told me how lucky he was to have returned at the right time and how it was better being stuck with family than being lonely and unemployed in Germany. That day it seemed like Aman had made his peace with a decision he initially did not see as wholly his own. However, like many others, Aman's view and feelings about his "decision" to return changed several times due to the lack of voluntariness in the initial decision. The following discussion during our farewell meeting sheds light on the matter (Gul, another irregularised Pakistani and a mutual friend, was also present):

> Aman: It's not right. They [German officials] shouldn't force; it's fine; they can say leave our country but in a straightforward manner.
>
> Me: What do you mean?
>
> Aman: They [German officials] won't say it straightforwardly but will threaten you in subtle ways. [Jumps into the role of an official to show how] "*Okay, hast du Reisepass da?* (Do you have a passport there?)"
>
> Gul: [impromptu starts to act as Aman]: "*Nien!* (No!)"
>
> Aman [replies as the official]: "*Warum? Warum keine Reisepass?* (Why? Why don't you have a passport?)"
>
> Aman [this time as himself]: "*Ich habe kein Reisepass* (I don't have a passport)"
>
> Gul [chuckles and this time takes the official's role but also corrects Aman's German]: "*Warum hast du keinen Reisepass?*"
>
> Me: What happens if you give them your passport?
>
> Aman: Deport[ation]. They didn't give any Pakistani a chance. Even those eager to enrol in an *Ausbildung* (traineeship) [indirectly pointing to Gul's situation, who had spent significant time learning German and had at the time decided to start a traineeship as an emergency responder, subsequently switching to a bakers apprenticeship because of difficulties].

Aman and Gul explained in detail how there is a difference between asking for the sake of helping or even knowing and interrogating, hinting at the "atmosphere" or affect in such meetings with officials at the Foreigners Office. Through the example of a few deported friends, Aman pointed out

what happens when one is asked for their passport or national identity card. "It just means they want to deport you," he told Gul and me. In his view, at this point, it is clear that you have to leave, or they will deport you. So he decided to return to Pakistan for the time being, but also to get married. That's why from day one, he told Gul he had decided to work and earn, unlike Gul, who had decided instead to work on "integrating" by making German friends and learning the language instead of earning money. Even though coerced and pressured to leave, he shared that his return with a "*raja tid*" (an expression that denotes being financially secure through the analogy of a "full belly") would not carry shame. Through almost four years of hard labour, he had managed to save money that would ensure no loss of face. Keeping his personal expenses in Europe to the bare, he told us he had sent "40 to 50 lac [hundred thousand] rupees" to Pakistan since his arrival in Germany. Nevertheless, he was still ambiguous, if not anxious, about his return and shared hopes of returning to Europe someday:

"For example, I am nervous about what I will do when I return to Pakistan. Okay, I can pass the first 10 to 20 days easily, but after that? My family will start to ask me about my plans … to do something. What will I do? I have to do something, right? I have a brain. And if I have life in me, then I have to do something. It's fine; I worked here for three to four years, have no tension about money, and can manage [something] with 40 to 50 *lakh* (hundred thousand) rupees. If I can't return to Europe, I will do some work. I can lease 30 or 40 acres of land and earn from that. It's just a plan, an idea. If it's too difficult [to execute], then a small business or a taxi or a car, anything, for example, I can buy. I will do something after my return [to Pakistan]. I have to."

A few days earlier, at the return counselling centre, where I had accompanied Aman (upon his request), he shared none of his concerns or his hopes of returning to Europe with the counsellor. Rightly so, as my observations during such sessions showed that the more convinced this particular counsellor was about the prospective return, the more financial assistance he would seek for the returnee in question. That is to say, this particular counsellor managed decisions of how much financial assistance to offer to whom through which packages intuitively, through a gut feeling about the prospective returnee and their return. Aman though not entirely convinced himself at the time, had managed to convince the counsellor of his plan to lease land around Gujranwala. However, the counsellor advised him to put down "dairy farming" in the paperwork for in-kind assistance as it would make it easy for Aman to get help from the project partner in Pakistan.

4.1.2 Alam

Alam, the returnee from Munich first introduced in the opening vignette, received in-kind assistance of €2000 for a "dairy farm" in addition to a flight to Pakistan and €1500 in cash in several instalments (including the €200 pre-return cash). Like Aman, Alam had worked in Germany; however, unlike Aman, he was mainly engaged in "kala kaam" (literally black work; irregular labour) as a chef for a mosque and at different restaurants. Sometimes when he had no work, he "picked up bottles and cans" for their deposit, he told me:

> "I won't lie; I did everything I could to earn and save every cent (*paisa*) I could. I've even picked up bottles and cans from the trash. Sent everything [welfare] they [Germans] gave me back home. That's how I built this house ... finally, we have a house of our own."

At almost 60, Alam arrived back in Pakistan in 2019. After spending four years in Germany, when I first met him during the first phase of my fieldwork, he was more or less content with how things turned out. In his hometown of Mandi Bahauddin, Alam shared with me in great detail why he would never be able to forget the German "*mehman nawazi*" (hospitality) and "*insaniyat*" (humanity); "*wadia log ne*" (they [Germans] are amazing people). Alien to the concept of social welfare, he shared his gratitude for "the Germans", who had given him "a place to stay and money". Talking about a bicycle accident he had had, he said that his healthcare was taken care of even though his asylum was rejected, "they ensured that I was healthy and fit to return".

In contrast, in Pakistan, he had worked for decades but could not even ensure a decent living for his family. "Here, there is no humanity," he told me, discussing the terrible motorcycle accident in which his wife was seriously injured and broke her arm (which, after several treatments, has not regained full functionality/mobility). The medical expenses paid through personal loans and the existing wish for a small home forced him to seek employment in Saudi Arabia (and Dubai for some time). The move allowed him and his family to pay off their debts slowly. Still, this move was not enough to change the broader circumstances of his family or even fulfil the wish of a small dwelling within his lifetime. Then, an acquaintance in the Middle East told him about the "opening of borders" in Europe, and he decided to venture on that migratory journey improvising as he went along. The decision may have turned out to be fruitful with regard to some of his goals, but it was

not without many challenges; he particularly told his son, who wished very much to pursue his own dreams in Europe:

> "Life in Europe is very tough, I tell him [Shakeel; the son] ... and they beat you so much in Iran, hasn't your uncle told you [Alam's younger brother was brutally beaten and subsequently deported by the Iranian authorities] ... you have a house, your sister is married, and we have the shop ... you have everything here."

4.1.3 Jamshed

Facing a difficult situation in Germany, Jamshed, like many of my other interlocutors, was "advised" by his district administrative office (Landsratamt) handler to visit the same return counselling centre in Munich. Sharing in detail how little agency he had in this process, Jamshed emphasised it was more an ultimatum than advice. As such, the instruction to visit the return counselling centre was the only option available to him upon the rejection of his asylum application and his appeal. He was told that 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 a "voluntary" return program. Having no understanding of the Dublin regulation, he asked if he could go to Spain and apply for asylum there. He was told he would be apprehended and deported to Germany, where he would face detention and deportation to Pakistan. The laws did not make sense to him, and he found the asylum procedure unfair. In his view, as someone who belonged to the Shia minority group, he deserved "panah" (asylum or refuge) based on "insaaniat" (humanity or humanitarianism). He told me about the violence that his community faces and how he does not feel safe in Pakistan. However, in his view, the officials and even some of the volunteers in Germany don't understand:

> "They told me, why don't you move to another city [internally migrate in Pakistan]? Then they say, isn't your family in Pakistan, that means they are safe ... that's because it's so hard for them to join, but you cannot say this ... they all try to convince you that going back is the best option ... you cannot argue with them ... you can only ask".

According to Jamshed, if you "speak the truth" and are "a straightforward person who abides by the law", the only option you have is to return through a "voluntary" return program. He repeatedly emphasised that he "would have never returned" if he had a "real choice", but with the threat of deportation looming over his head, he had no other option. Many, he said, find a "jugaad"

(improvisational solution) to stay in Europe, but he had already "wasted many years". Migratory improvisation to remain after all needs time and hope, sometimes an endless amount of waiting he thought he could not afford. In many cases, "wasting" time is a prerequisite for migratory improvisations or jugaad and the serendipitous openings that make it possible. However, as his wife and children were being supported by his in-laws, considered a source of shame in Pakistani society, he could not wait and hope any longer. He had to accept that there was "no future in Europe" for him. He told me that he did not see the return counsellors as people who cared about his "razamandi" (consent) and "marzi" ([own] accord), and neither did he trust the translator:

> "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 ...".

Image 1: A view of Jamshed's in-laws house

I was only invited to this house in Gujrat with a Shia "greeting to Hussain" sign and Alam (flag) that play a major role in the lives to commemorate the martyrdom of their third Imam (Imam-al-Hussain; the son the first Imam [Imam Ali] and the nephew of Muhammad. The limited number of invitations had nothing to do with my very obvious Sunni name but more to do with shame of inviting guests to a house that was not his own. He preferred to visit me in Lahore or Mandi Bahauddin where he was originally from.

While Germany, as a path to security and the betterment of his family, had ended. Jamshed still felt frustrated and irritated about the whole process. In communicating this frustration to me, in his voice, he had the conviction of a person seeking justice or at least the acknowledgement of injustice done to them. According to him, it was the injustice of subjecting him to the shame of "returning empty-handed" and "being dependent on the in-laws". During our meetings in Gujrat, he would often not invite me to his place like some of my other interlocutors. This mystery later solved itself as, one day (in Mandi Bahauddin, where he was from), he confided in me by sharing that the house he resided in Gujrat actually belonged to his brother-in-law, who lived abroad. That day, he shared how his biggest shame and burden was being dependent on his brother-in-law and feeling like a "servant" and a person "without a soul" living under such circumstances. Jamshed carried on with his post-return migratory improvisations and eventually left for Abu Dhabi, where he now drives a truck. He dreams of buying a house for his family, ridding himself of the shame of being dependent on his in-laws.

4.1.4 Haroon

After spending almost eight years in Greece and a few months in Italy, it was a shame of a different kind that led Haroon to improvise his way to Germany in 2016. The shame of not being able to send anything back to his family for over eight years. However, his fingerprints taken upon arrival in Greece or, as irregularised Pakistanis usually term it, "finger", made him ineligible for asylum in Germany as per the EURODAC directive and Dublin Regulation. In 2017 he had just appealed against his removal to Greece when the heavy blow of his father passing away reached him. He felt helpless as even if he wanted to, he would not be able to get back for the funeral. For almost a decade, his father had wondered and asked him about his regularisation in Europe. After spending all his life in Saudi Arabia as a migrant, he supported the family back in their hometown of Kotli[45], bought his older son a taxi, and financed Haroon's (the younger son) journey to Europe. This already weighed heavy on Haroon, and the news, in his words, "mentally disturbed" him to the point where he could not continue struggling and improvising to stay anymore.

Like Jamshed, he is unhappy about his decision to return to Pakistan but says that nothing else seemed possible at the time, alluding to the psychological pressures created by the endless struggle

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[45] Kotli is in Azad Kashmir and was as such an exception to my regional focus on a few cities in Punjab as discussed in chapter three.

to get regularised in Europe. His father's death was the final straw, forcing him to take the difficult decision to return, even though he knew if he returned at this point, he would be sacrificing all the efforts and improvisation of the past decade. As a result, he returned with zero savings and never even received the money promised to him by the return counselling centre in Munich. According to a German volunteer who had taken it upon himself to "help the twenty or so Pakistani asylum seekers", Haroon had "integrated" quite well during his time in Bad Tölz. However, according to him, it seemed that Haroon could not cope with the pressure and precariousness of waiting and the possibility of rejection.

When Haroon decided to return in 2018, his "appeal" was still being processed, according to him. He also knew that his brother would not accept his decision. As I will explain in the subsequent chapters, his family does not know that he returned through a "voluntary" return to this date. In their eyes, he was deported. As such, Haroon's story is a prime example of the affective ambiguities around voluntariness in so-called "voluntary returns" and how migratory improvisations do not end with the migrant's return.

4.1.5 Mubeen

Mubeen first thought about returning in 2019 and eventually returned towards the end of 2020 due to a different set of affective ambiguities. The back and forth in his decision to return came from him, but his return was also complicated by the global pandemic. I first met him at Coming Home in 2019, the return counselling centre in Munich and then coincidentally at his camp just outside Munich through a volunteer who lived in the nearby town of Planegg. Unlike many other Pakistani contacts I made at this camp (thanks to this volunteer I got to know at Bellevue di Monaco), Mubeen would always be there. This was the case before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the Pakistanis I knew, including the ones at this camp, had jobs, even if under the table and some even during the lockdowns. Those who could not at some point moved to Italy, Spain or Portugal. Mubeen's issue (as I would later find out) was the need to turn his "mobile intimacy" (Raiti 2007) into intimacy proper. While many of his peers in Germany had hinted at the possibility of a long-distance romance explicitly or implicitly, Mubeen only told me about this in Lahore when we met in the city sometime after his return (during my second phase of fieldwork in 2021). Now married, he felt comfortable opening up about the topic that he saw as sensitive at the time, given the difficult

circumstances. Moreover, for many Pakistanis[46], the sensitivity around love can get complicated due to ideas of honour around the possibility of someone perceiving the female partner-to-be as a "time pass" girlfriend and hence not to be respected or taken seriously (Abraham 2002). As such, I never pressed him during our meetings in Germany which remained rather superficial at the time.

A few months after his return to Lahore, he told me that he was pleased to be back and was now married. He acknowledged that he had promised his now wife that he would return to ask her hand in marriage before her parents married her off to someone else. Unfortunately, the decision to return and marry his long-distance love resulted in him disappointing his father and elder siblings, who believed he wasted so much time and resources. Luckily, his mother was "happy to have her youngest [child] back" and thus supportive. Over the several months I spent in Pakistan during my second visit in 2021-22, I witnessed Mubeen's attitude regarding his decision to return change, particularly after the death of his teenage nephew in a motorbike accident (something I will discuss later in the chapter). Towards the end of my fieldwork, I asked Mubeen and two other interlocutors (Alam and Tanseef) to join me at an event in Lahore organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for some reason, at one of the fanciest hotels in Lahore. An interlocutor working for IOM had asked me for this favour as many of the returnees they invited had decided not to join, which for me, said a lot about the organisation's relationship with returnees and, more importantly, the prospects of their so-called "returnees as messengers". Yet another hyped (for donors) but doomed-to-fail "awareness campaign" to curb[47] irregularised migration from Pakistan. I say this because I saw first-hand how they worked when I joined an awareness campaign run by the so-called Migration Resource Centre (MRC)[48] (a daughter organisation of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)) with the help of a friend who runs a small media production business in Pakistan. This campaign—that my friend's firm was supposed to film—went to some of the cities, I conducted fieldwork, and often, the only people who would show up were paid to come with the help of a local NGO so that photos for pamphlets and films for presentations could be recorded.

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[46] It must be quickly pointed out that this notion is changing amongst the younger more educated youth but the majority of South Asians (regardless of religious, ethnic or national affiliations) still practice more conservative ideals of intimate partnership alluded to in Mubeen's case.

[47] Officially they are supposed to "raise awareness" about the dangers and risks of "illegal migration".

[48] Funded by several European countries.

The futility of such campaigns aside, let's return to this IOM event, where I was asked to invite a few of my returnee interlocutors. During the event, Mubeen, who mostly sat quietly, was asked if he was interested in sharing his story and future plans like the others. The audience, particularly some administrative officials and the IOM representatives, were shocked, like deer caught in headlights, when he shared his plan nonchalantly: "*Europe wapsi hor ki*" (a return to Europe, what else). This episode was an indication of how out of touch the local and international "implementation partners" were with the worlds of people whose mobility they were trying to manage on behalf of the Europeans. When they pressed him for his motivations, Mubeen argued that he now had a (nuclear) family of his own. He might be the youngest [child/sibling], but he cannot rely on his parents and brothers to support him like a child. Three other returnees at the event essentially backed his

Image 2: Alam, Mubeen and Tanseef with two other returnees at the IOM Event in Lahore

In one of the fanciest hotels in Lahore only two of the many returnees IOM invited committed to joining. A day before the event I was contacted by a staff member in panic and asked if I could ask some of my interlocutors to join. On such short notice it was difficult to convince people to join but Alam (from Mandi Bahauddin), Mubeen (who was already in Lahore) and Tanseef (from Gujranwala) obliged me by sparing a day. The contrasts of their stories filled with struggles and sorrows and with the casual opulence of the Pearl Continental Lahore where the organisers were staying for a few days could not have been greater and opened space for many interesting exchanges. Tanseef's fiery speech at some point about the piercing inequality was apt and caught many off guard but was treated with purposeful ignorance common in Pakistan towards people considered to be of lower socioeconomic standing and hence less worth.

decision by sharing how the businesses they had started upon return, a Döner shop, a toy shop, and a wholesale business for Sunday bazaars, were fast going belly up due to covid-19 and the economic downturn. Only one, and that was Alam, said he was content with his return during the event (while this was somewhat true, he also wanted to get something out of the IOM, and he eventually did: "Five goats!" He announced triumphantly on the phone a few months later). On the other hand, Tanseef[49], who ran the Döner business, has closed shop and, like Mubeen, is now looking for a way out of Pakistan again, and more than a few goats will be needed to keep them in Pakistan.

4.1.6 Jameel

While keeping returnees in Pakistan can be hard, some never return. Having spent a couple of years in Turkey and Greece, Jameel made his way to Germany in 2015. After four years of hopelessly trying to regularise himself, he diced with the idea of a "voluntary" return to Pakistan. In 2019 he visited Coming Home, the central return counselling centre in Munich, but eventually decided not to return. However, registering with the counselling centre and initiating the bureaucratic process of return temporarily relieved his fear of deportation. For instance, being able to continue his informal employment without the fear of being detained for deportation during a "*kontrolle*" or check was a welcome relief. However, the time also allowed him to improvise his next moves and gather the needed money. He eventually committed to a secondary intra-European migration to Italy after considering options of going to Spain and Portugal. Such intra-European re-migration is a common way for irregularised migrants to avoid deportation in many European states and has, as such, been termed an "inverted flight movement" (Benedikt 2019: 18). Inverted flight movements are improvisational by nature. They can never be planned ahead as they are primarily an outcome of being unable to regularise oneself in the primary host country and the growing certainty of deportation. Thus they can be seen as improvised re-migratory efforts.

Furthermore, as Jameel explained, the destination depends on "who is willing to help you" get where and based on "what is possible" at the time. While he had many stories about regularisation being easier in Portugal than in Italy, some factors affecting his migratory improvisations were that he could not find an affordable "solution" and reliable contacts to help him get to Portugal. As

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[49] Tanseef's return is not discussed in detail in this chapter, and he was not added to the eight people introduced in this chapter along with a few others for theoretical and practical purposes.

Alessio D'Angelo (2021) reminds us, often the "boundaries of these journeys are hard to pin down and comprise long chains of decision-making, serendipitous events and fleeting encounters."

Going back to Pakistan, though, a thought that crossed his mind when he was in Germany would not really have been a "voluntary" decision. As such, Italy proved to be a way out of his double bind in Germany; being there meant "*zalalat*" (a situation or state of living in humiliation/with shame), and so did going back to Pakistan. In Italy, Jameel has yet to regularise himself but told me he has no fear of deportation and can work more freely than in Germany, even if it means more exploitation by "Capos" or gang masters who offer "black work" (cf. Gatti 2014).

4.1.7 Qabeer

Lake Jameel, Qabeer left Germany in 2019; however, there was more behind his departure to Italy than just fear of deportation. He did so soon after one of the volunteers recommended that he visit Coming Home. That day, he felt betrayed by the very people he thought were supposed to help, he told me in his room in Bolzano using the Punjabi proverb "*kutti choran nal ral gaee*" (the [guard] dog aided the thieves). The volunteer was the proverbial guard dog, and the authorities who wanted to kick him out of Germany were the proverbial thieves. His use of the Punjabi proverb to explain how he felt hints not only at the feeling of betrayal. Breach of trust, in this case, as he saw it was coupled with active collusion by someone who is supposed to protect you from the very agent they are now colluding with. He was initially nonplussed by the actions of the volunteers, then felt betrayed and once in Italy, this betrayal fuelled his resentment towards the volunteers at his camp in a rich town named after a lake just outside the city of Munich. Particularly because he had "told everyone the truth" that he was "there to work". In fact, "*gurbat*" (destitution) was his answer when some of them would ask him why he had come to Germany (sharing with me that he preferred to tell people the truth and not make stories for asylum). I could feel his resentment and anger when he told me during my stay with him in Italy that he would "return [to Germany] with permanent documents" (he has yet to revisit) so that he could "tell them" that they had no right to "play judge". He told me he would never like to move to Germany like everyone else after they get their documents in Italy, even if "there is more money" there.

Talking about his situation in Germany, he told me that "you fear deportation all the time" and "they tell you to go to school, go to school, go to school…" but "getting permission to work is so hard."

Why would he "want to go to school" and integrate if he is "not allowed to work", he pointed out. Juxtaposing his situation in Italy, where he had found work and was able to support his family, he said, "when I can work and send money ... I have a fresh mind and [the desire to] learn." He pulled out his notebook from a drawer in his room in the attic of the hotel and restaurant where he worked and said, "look, I have [note]books filled with Italian." In Germany, he said he "never wrote a thing", as "learning German was the last thing on [his] mind."

In Italy, he was about to get his documents at the time of this meeting in late 2020 and was pleased with this decision to make the migratory improvisation necessary to remigrate from Munich[50] to Bolzano. In 2021, he received a work permit through a regularisation amnesty scheme[51] which enabled him to not only visit Pakistan to get married but has opened the possibility of bringing his wife and son (born in 2022) to Italy (for a critical view on this regularisation program adopted in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, see Human Rights Watch 2020). Despite his dream coming true, the time soon after his "inverted flight movement" or improvised re-migration to Italy was not easy. Qabeer showed me the places he slept rough for over four months. He told me that he wished that the Italian government would allow him to put a small door and roof in this one particular spot next to a bridge. Enclosed by a massive concrete pillar that supported the bridge on the right side, the wall of an elevated pedestrian way on the back, which also provided a partial roof and a staircase that went up to the walkway on the left, the place only needed a door at the front. The barely one square meter, he told me, would have made him the happiest person in the world at the time, and he spent hours of his time thinking and dreaming about it: How he would set up this home and how he could return to his own bed after a long day at work.

> "But Allah always has plans, look at my place now ... I have my bed, a kitchen, and so much more ... the almighty had all this in store for me [a reference to *taqdeer* or destiny without explicit mention of the word], so how could I get that little square that I prayed for?"

Now, with his Italian documents and a permanent job at a restaurant where he has worked his way up as second to the chef, he can voluntarily return to Pakistan anytime he chooses. But, for now, he only returns to visit his family during holidays.

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[50] From a town close by.

[51] Most of my interlocutors applied for this program, many were scammed by Italian and Pakistani middlemen alike. A few like Qabeer were lucky enough to get the permission.

Image 3:The place Qabeer wished he could have and his current room

While sleeping rough in Italy Qabeer wished for this small corner (left); a place that he could turn into his own space and spend ours imaging how he would do that. However, something much better was written in his *taqdeer*; a comfortable room in the restaurant/hotel where he works (right).

4.1.8 Hammad (and Kristina)

As a collaborative experiment, Hammad's slightly longer[52] story was drafted in collaboration with his now-wife, Kristina. Whilst editing Kristina's first-person narrative for clarity, structure and anonymity, I asked Kristina and Hammad some concrete questions (e.g. regarding the impact of their situation on their daily lives and associated feelings) and weaved the answers into the text (keeping Kristina's first-person voice). I prefer this to my third-person depiction of Hammad and Kirstina's story as it is more personal and allows for communicating issues that would have been watered down through my, as they say in Urdu, "*tashreeh*" (interpretations or explanation) of their feelings and the representation of their voice. Furthermore, it gives insights into how a German volunteer sees Pakistan and, more importantly, how intimate relationships develop between citizens and so-called "economic refugees", putting into question the normative ideas of "deservingness"

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[52] The story is also longer as it documents detail about the administrative processes, which are not only part of their story but highlight such processes excluded from the other stories. Thus their inclusion here perhaps explains some of the questions I deliberately left unanswered in the previous seven stories. *Any footnotes in the story are my additions or reflections.*

and its moralisation in Germany (Streinzer and Tosic 2022). It also shows how irregularisation and "voluntary" returns can be indirectly experienced by citizens of Germany and shape their view of the German state and trust in it:

"My fiancé Hammad was born in Pakistan, a country in Asia which is rarely known in Europe. It's an impoverished[53] country (let's say most of it), and people are struggling with hunger (according to the world hunger index). There is a lack of drinking water. Unemployment is rampant, and there are bomb attacks carried out, for example, by religious fanatics. However, there is no "real war" in Pakistan, so Hammad came to Europe as a so-called "economic refugee". He left his parents and sister behind, trying to find a future where he could somehow care for them. He came to Italy in September 2014 and managed to travel to Germany. Here he entered straight into the asylum system. As it was before 2015 and the "year of escape", he had the chance to go to school and build a future for himself. He learned German, took some integration courses and finished secondary school, *Hauptschulabschluß*, within two years. He completed several internships and already had an apprenticeship contract as a motorcar mechanic in his hands. But due to a change in German law, the *Ausländerbehörde* refused to accept this contract. They told him that he was only allowed to work until his asylum application was being processed and, therefore, he should look for temporary work. As he really wanted to work, he started a job as a service staff in a fast-food restaurant. Soon, the *Bundesamt für Migration and Flüchtlinge (BAMF)* (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) rejected his asylum application as Pakistan was classified as a so-called "safe country of origin". From then on, he only had a "*Duldung*", which means you do not have a legal right to stay in Germany. As deportations started again to Pakistan, he was in a panic. He had spent several years in Germany, learning the language, trying to integrate himself, worked not to have to take money from the system, and now he would be deported back to his country with empty hands. It was the most challenging time in his life, made worse by his father's death. At this point, he planned to go to Spain or Italy to start a new, to try again to build a future, to try again to help his relatives waiting for him back in Pakistan. We got to know each other and fell in love during this challenging time. However, Hamza told me he had to leave for another country as Germany had no future for him. I was so sad and could not believe that German laws do not even give people who have done everything to integrate a chance. People who have

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[53] The original term used was "poor". I would point out that more than being poor or even impoverished at the hands of the Global North it is an extremely unequal country and as much fault lies with local power holders as with the global powers.

learned the language and who want to work. If you listen to the news, you get the impression that Germany only deports offenders or people who take only advantage of the social system, but that's politics, I think. So, after several discussions with lawyers, we knew that if we wanted to have a tiny chance to live together, we had to get married.

Here our story begins again. Hammad's lawyer applied for a *"Folgeantrag"* to restart the asylum process, so we would not have to fear deportation on a daily basis. Due to this, Hamza had to go to the asylum centre and stay there. In the first *Lager* (camp), they had beds on the ground in a big hall. No privacy, no place for yourself. Nothing. No real meals, only once a day, they would get something warm. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he had to quarantine there for five days. After a negative Covid test, he was transferred to the next *Lager*. There, he was in a room with eleven other young men from different countries. They were checked every time they entered the building, and many items, including food, were forbidden. Security officials were there day and night, and they had the authority to enter the rooms whenever they wanted. Here, Hamza had to stay another five weeks, and in these weeks, he did not even get a *Duldung*, so it was not possible for us to go to the *Standesamt* (registry office) to ask which papers we needed for our marriage. After five weeks, they took him to a so-called *"Ankerzentrum"* (a closed reception centre), far away from the city where we lived. The authorities knew that I was his wife-to-be and also that he would have a workplace in our town, but they refused to transfer him to someplace closer. At least they gave him a *Duldung*, and we could go to the *Standesamt*. At the *Standesamt,* we learned we need several papers from Pakistan (Hammad's birth certificate, family registration certificate and marital status certificate confirming he was single). We had to get all these documents, then as soon as they arrived in Germany, we had to bring them to the *Standesamt*, and they would then send them back to the German embassy in Islamabad to be checked.

We were told this would take a minimum of 10 to 12 months. And it's not possible to inquire about the status. So as we started the marriage process, Hammad had to live in this dreadful *Ankerzentrum*, away from me and again in a room with other men. I could tell many bad stories about this time—partly frozen food; showers, toilets and rooms without locks; and midnight security controls in the rooms. We always had to file an application if he wanted to visit me for a few days. At official appointments in the *Zentrale Ausländerbehörde* (Central Foreigners Office), they took the phones away, and once they told us, I, his fiancee, was not allowed to come with him to an appointment. It was a lie, but a lot of such things happened. Finally, after

two difficult months, they took his passport and sent him to another accommodation where he had to live.

During this time, we had our Muslim *Nikkah* (marriage contract as per Islamic law). I cried a lot these days, knowing Hamza had to be in this *Ankerzentrum* with all these terrible conditions while it would have been easily possible for him to stay with me in my flat. But this is not intended in the German asylum system, that immigrants live in a private place[54]. They have to live wherever authorities put them. In December 2020, the BAMF also rejected the *Folgeantrag*; in January, the *Landratsamt* (district office) told Hamza he had to leave the country until mid of February. They were not interested in our marriage (papers had been in Pakistan for verification since October 2020), nor were they interested in the fact that Hammad had a German school graduation, the possibility to work and a place to live, etc. Again, they

Image 4: Kristina and Hammad after their wedding (photo courtesy of the couple)

While this was supposed to be the happiest day in their lives their happiness unlike "normal" couples was marred with a start of new struggles against the German state. Figuring out how Hammad could stay or come back if he returned (*caption mine*).

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[54] As we found out, because of the Ukraine war this is indeed possible legally speaking, but the xenophobic and racist interpretation of laws meant that people from Asia and Africa could not benefit from such legal possibilities. Up until the arrival of Ukrainians private hosting migrants was seen as a legal impasse, but suddenly it was not (which is how it should be for everyone).

said, Pakistan is not dangerous enough. He should leave the country "voluntarily", or they would put him in *Abschiebehaft* (detention for deportation) and deport him.

After many conversations with local politicians and the Foreigners Office, I could convince them that they let us get married. But as in Germany and especially in Bavaria, they do not allow the so-called "*Spurwechsel*" or change of migration track. That meant that in order to get a spousal visa, Hamza would have to fly back "home" to Pakistan, a country he left seven years ago. Meanwhile, his mother had also died, so he had to go to a "home" with no parents to go through the visa process. Why could he not go through the process here with his German wife? For this piece of paper, he will have to leave me and wait one year (that's, according to the German Embassy's homepage, the waiting time to get a date to apply for the visa), lay down a large amount of paper and then wait for another one to thirteen months until he gets his visa and can come back to Germany and to his wife. If he refuses to go "voluntarily" to go through the visa process, they still can deport him, even though he has a German wife!

It's not easy to live as a couple or a married couple when you know that your husband will have to leave the country and you don't know how long the separation will be. You know it's not in your hands, and this makes you so helpless and so angry. And also, it's so scary because your love, relationship, and future are in the hand of the government and not yours. So daily life always is influenced by these feelings. You can not plan for the future as you have no guarantee when your beloved one will return.

All these things influence our relationship. "Normal" German or European couples might enjoy their time together, especially in the first years. However, we must first "legalise" his [Hammad's] stay before we can live a life as an ordinary married couple. So we had to fight for our happiness from the first day on. And it's such a big thing that so many decisions are not made by yourself but by the government. On top of that, they make you do things through the fear of deportation. It is a big fear because it's the worst thing which could happen. First, there is a three-year ban and second, Hammad would have no chance after that in Pakistan. Family and friends expect you to come successfully back from Europe. They will think you are incapable or lazy if you do not make it. They do not know or understand the German system. And you probably will not find any workplace or any recognition anymore. Even I, on some nights, was so afraid they would take him from his room and bring him to the airport that I could not sleep. That's such a nightmare. I am so angry with the government. It just makes no

sense. The asylum politics are old-fashioned, unworldly, unfair, inhumane and cruel, as are our authorities. I have lost faith in my country. I feel so helpless in this system, and for Hammad, of course, it's even worse.

Still, I would like to end on a positive note. It makes me happy that although we come from different cultures and religions, we still love and respect each other. We try to find joy in small things—Hammad's driving licence; days off in the mountains to clear our heads; the day he was allowed to leave the *Ankerzentrum*; the day we got permission to marry. We have made it through this authority madness until now and will make it all the way."

Indeed they did, and in the summer of 2022, after spending several months in Pakistan as a "voluntary" returnee, Hammad was able to come back to Germany on a spousal visa. Kristina accompanied him to his appointment at the German embassy in Islamabad after a couple of months of separation due to his "voluntary" return.

Image 5: Hammad and Kristina at the Rakaposhi base camp (photo courtesy of the couple)

Once Hammad received his spousal visa for Germany the couple travelled to the north of Pakistan because of their love for hiking which they often do in Bavaria. Here they can be seen with the 7788m Rakaposhi mountain in the background accompanied by a local guide (*caption mine*).

4.2 The who, why and how of "voluntary" return

As is clear from the example above, so-called "voluntary return" denotes repatriations carried out by states hosting migrants[55]. The primary targets of such repatriation programs (return regimes) are irregularised migrants and (rejected) asylum seekers. According to Lietaert (2022: 108), "programmes to support the return of migrants from Europe go back to the 1970s" but grew in popularity "from the 1990s onwards" (cf. Black, Koser, and Munk 2004; Kuschminder 2017). Since then, "voluntary" returns have become an important migration management tool and function well beyond the scope of an instrument to alleviate the social suffering of migrants wishing to return "home", as it is sometimes argued (Lietaert, Broekaert, and Derluyn 2017). As van Houte (2022: 156) argues, practices and empirical research on return show the development of "a situation where the facilitation and the control of mobility go hand-in-hand" and constitute the "return migration industry". A central component of this industry and the EU migration policy is "voluntary" return (Lietaert 2022). Not only have individual state budgets significantly increased to the end, but the EU Return Fund generously supports such efforts, particularly in light of the EU "Return Directive" of 2008, with revisions proposed in 2017 (Baldaccini 2009; Statewatch 2021; Lietaert 2022). It informs the bulk of "the procedures for the removal from the EU of non-EU citizens, so-called third-country nationals (TCNs), who are unlawfully present" (Desmond 2022: 137). Although "the main body of the Directive is devoted to setting out the formalities, procedures and safeguards for enforced removal" for EU member states, a "preference for voluntary return" is stated (Desmond 2022: 138). The Return Directive is the policy behind the return diagram shared in the introductory chapter to highlight the intrinsic link between deportations and "voluntary" returns. In order for "voluntary" returns to function within the broader "return industry" that is imagined and structured through the Return Directive, a "wide range of professional actors, including public, private and social or non-profit actors", are needed (van Houte 2022: 156). Like any other exploitative industry, structural and power inequalities at the core of the relationship between the subjects of return and the state and its agents are ignored, as demonstrated by some of the examples shared. Subjecting people in the situations described above to a return alone makes the "voluntariness" in a "voluntary" return questionable.

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[55] In addition to "voluntary" returns, carried out by host states across Europe function under various formal and informal designations such as "assisted voluntary return", "assisted repatriation", "assisted return", "voluntary repatriation" or some other combination of the aforementioned.

While "voluntary" return is considered a better alternative to deportations by some, the Return Directive shows how such returns are part and parcel of a removal mechanism that combines force, coercion and volition. In the eight cases above, I have highlighted different aspects of this (in)voluntariness that cannot exist without deportation and the threat of deportation. In that sense, it is a part of the removal spectrum with deportation on one end. This has led some scholars to think about return migration on a continuum of voluntariness (Aberman 2022; Erdal and Oeppen 2022). Others have equated "voluntary return" with "deportation" using terms such as self-deportation and "soft-deportation" (Kalir 2017) to highlight not only the coercive techniques and hidden forces employed to induce return but also the inhumane treatment that irregularised migrants face in Europe (Kalir 2022). Many have noted that the subject of return (i.e. returnee) has little actual choice. For example, Cleton and Schweitzer (2020) discuss techniques employed by return counsellors in the Netherlands and Austria to induce or use aspirations of return. I myself have questioned the functioning of such returns in Germany and Austria through public scholarship (Mahar 2020a, 2021c, 2021b). As it is clear from the stories shared in this chapter, the ethics and practices of such repatriation are questionable[56]. Hence my use of quotation marks when alluding to "voluntary" return or at other times alluding to it as (in)voluntary.

In Germany, "voluntary" returns are carried out through a mix of governmental and non-governmental efforts. In Munich and Augsburg[57], where I conducted part of my fieldwork on "voluntary" return programmes, I found that in addition to the EU and German funding, the State of Bavaria and the city of Munich also incentivise "voluntary" returns (e.g. returnees from Munich received an additional "bonus" of €500). A much bigger mix of actors is involved in managing returns through such programmes. Organisations like Caritas and the IOM work with the city of Munich and Augsburg at different levels to conduct counselling, administration and operational tasks in Germany. In Pakistan, depending on the country of removal, partner NGOs such as IRARA and WELDO are contracted on a yearly basis to deliver "reintegration support" and "assistance" to the returnees in Pakistan (cf. WELDO 2019; IRARA 2021). For instance, the year Haroon returned, IRARA was the "return partner" in Pakistan for Germany, but WELDO has since then won these

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[56] To avoid confusion, I would like to clarify that my use of "return migration" and "return" (noun: returnee) in the stories of my interlocutors is synonymous with "voluntary" return. That is to say, I do not assume full volition on their part even if I allude to their return without the pre-fix of "voluntary" in quotation marks.

[57] In Augsburg, I did not sit through counselling sessions but visited a return counselling centre run by Caritas and remained in contact with the staff over the course of my research. I was also invited to speak at a conference they organised for return counsellors wishing to know more about the post-return context in Pakistan.

contracts due to IRARA's non-compliance and failure to deliver support to many returnees, including Haroon. In recent years, Frontex has started to take over many of these activities and is beginning to crowd out local civil society actors from several host countries in Europe and "sending countries" around the world alike. On the one hand, the exclusion of civil society from these processes has sparked a debate about the possibility of "voluntary" returns becoming even less voluntary than they currently are (Schweitzer 2022). However, on the other hand, the involvement of civil society is also seen as a legitimisation of the actions of the state, making "voluntary" returns seem more voluntary than they are (Kalir 2017). Whether the limited involvement of civil society is good or bad for the execution of such returns might always remain unclear, but it is clear that the greater involvement of Frontex is bound to impact the voluntariness of the "voluntary" returnees negatively.

Even now, while Frontex is not in charge of returns to Pakistan from Germany, the assistance that returnees receive is not given to them in Germany and is primarily handed to them in Pakistan and, for the most part, "in kind" through partners such as WELDO (and IRARA) in cooperation with IOM. Returnees only receive €200 in cash "for shopping". When I asked one of my return counsellor interlocutors, she said that "the authorities in Pakistan [Federal Investigation Authority (FIA)] take most of the money"; hence they prefer to pay people once they are in Pakistan. However, in meetings with other stakeholders, such as IOM, I discovered that the practice of post-return payments was primarily a matter of "return compliance". In their view, people would not return if given the money in advance.

Furthermore, it is ensured that the "return assistance" of €1500-2000[58] that people receive is given "in-kind" after six months. This rationale is based on paternalistic management of people's financial decisions who are seen as victims of "greedy" family members or not wise enough to manage their cash. The practice also ensures that people do not set upon another irregularised journey for at least six months. However, my interlocutors highlighted that this kind of paternalistic control means that they cannot invest this money in existing projects, such as the construction of a home and have to bear an unnecessary loss by exchanging the materials or, in many cases, cows received in the form of "in-kind" assistance for cash.

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[58] This number varies every year based on the country of origin, host country, funding structures and a host of factors such as the duration of stay and outcome of asylum etc. Some additional cash assistance can be added, as mentioned €500 in Bavaria.

4.3 The process of return: a returnee perspective

"Voluntary" returnees constitute a group of people who return "under very particular circumstances, being explicitly selected and targeted by migration policies because they are not allowed to stay in the host country" (Lietaert 2022: 109). From the state's point of view, often, if not always, people within this group are legally obliged to leave (see section 1.3). However, from the perspective of returnees, as seen with the examples of some of my interlocutors above, the decision to return is not as straightforward as being legally obliged to leave. Over the last two decades, much critical attention has been paid to the politics and practices underlying such "legal obligation" that is accompanied by coercive factors such as the threat of deportation, which not only impact the material and non-material lives of irregularised migrants in the host country but influence their decisions to return "voluntarily" (to take some examples, Black, Koser, and Munk 2004; Schneider and Kreienbrink 2010; Lietaert 2016; Kalir 2017; Lietaert, Broekaert, and Derluyn 2017; Collyer 2018; Schweitzer 2022). In addition, some studies look at various forms of actual returns to (post-)conflict societies (e.g. van Houte and de Koning 2008; Majidi 2013; van Houte, Siegel, and Davids 2015). However, research generally, and ethnographic attention, in particular, is lacking when it comes to connecting the pre-return and the post-return contexts. Irregularisation and the legal obligation to leave are entangled with personal or social affective pressures that (temporarily) affect the decision to return but also with what happens once the decision is made and the actual return has taken place. Research either focuses on the former or the latter but often does not connect the two comprehensively.

Cleton and Schweitzer (2020: 11, 17), for instance, show how return counsellors in the Netherlands and Austria actively use the two to induce the desire of "returning home (to one's family)" through "migration aspirations management" and by evoking "feelings of longing, missing and sometimes even sorrow." While they clearly show how coercion, manipulation and incentives work to realise "voluntary" returns, their examples of affective pressures due to the nature of their research with counsellors remain general and pertain more to how counsellors use them in the host country. For instance, counsellors "remind potential returnees of their family and friends" or of "warm" comfortable weather in the "home country" (ibid). However, what do more concrete and idiosyncratic feelings, longings, or affective pressures look like? Particularly upon actual return and over a more extended period? To take three examples from above, Alam's, Mubeen's, and

Jamshed's powerlessness to regularise themselves and their obligation to leave Germany was combined with the following respective affective pressures: The first, mainly due to his age had a desire "to retire at home," to see his "children get married" and let his family "take care of everything". The second needed to be back with his lover and get married before her family arranged her marriage with someone else. The third could not support his family given the situation and needed to reevaluate his plan to buy a house and live independently of the in-laws, which he could not do given his precarious situation in Germany.

Whilst return may, at some point, seem like the best option (some of the references above show how that is achieved in the pre-return context, i.e. how (in)voluntary returns are made to seem like a feasible option), in many cases, the complications of returnees do not end with a return but start anew, demonstrating yet again (this time through their post-return context) that a return was never a feasible option for the returnees in question. In other words, my interlocutors' post-return situation and discontentment put not only their "voluntariness" into question but the basic functioning of "voluntary" returns, as many end up leaving again. After some time of being back, Jamshed and Mubeen (respectively quoted) realised that the "*system* [of familial life] won't work like this" and that to "keep the *circle* going", they would have to leave again (Jamshed already has). Even Alam, who seemed content with his return for more than two years and in front of IOM officials, now also tells me from time to time (over the phone) that he "made a mistake" by returning and that "there is only misery here." In the case of Jamshed, having to live at his brother-in-law's house and associated shame was one of the driving post-return affective pressure, and in the case of Mubeen, amongst other things, the acute realisation that in Pakistan, the life of his newborn child would be as expendable as his nephew's. Someone whom Mubeen is rightly convinced died due to their economic circumstances, even if no one draws that connection to act on it politically. Had his nephew had a different socio-economic background, he would have been taken to a hospital where a fracture and some wounds in the boy's leg would not have resulted in an infection that eventually needed amputation. That too, so late—partially because of the late diagnosis and partially because of indecision on the part of the family—that it led to his demise. Along with the case of another interlocutor presented at a workshop (Sökefeld and Mahar 2022), Mubeen's encounter with death in the family due to an accident reminded me of my own experiences, as alluded to in chapter three. Deaths of our loved ones were not only the result of road accidents, but the consequence of a highly

neoliberal healthcare system made more complicated by social and economic insecurities and, at times, entangled with contingent practices and structures of honour or tradition we usually term "culture."

Thinking about Mubeen's nephew's late diagnosis and—the affective, financial and custom-dependent—indecisions on the part of the family evoke a procedural or structural Deja Vu in me: While doctors focused on my unconscious father's head injury for several days, unbeknown to us, his intestine was critically injured. The doctors only probed into the matter once his abdomen had swollen to an aberrant extent. At a critical moment, the doctor came to my uncle, my father's elder brother, informing him of this grave and urgent issue. They advised an immediate operation, but my uncle asked for a few hours to consult "a doctor in the family" as he preferred not to have a scar on his brother's body. This confused me since, firstly, we had no doctor in the family, and secondly, did he not hear the doctor? It was urgent, and even I, a 14-year-old at the time, could make the easy choice between a scar and risking the possibility of death. My uncle, however, believed that "they are just trying to make money". He then proceeded to give my father an enema. As I protested, he gently squirted saline solution into my unconscious father's rectum without the doctor's knowledge or advice. He told me not to worry, that my "baba just had constipation," and that he knew what he was doing. A little while after, he handed me my father's *shalwar* (loose South Asian trousers) with his pasty brown excrements, claiming "for this, they would have charged hundreds of thousands", and instructed me to wash off the faeces if I wanted to do something useful for my father. The various factors that played a role in my father's death are perhaps different from Mubeen's nephew's, yet the viscously unequal neoliberal healthcare system of Pakistan and the "cultural" norms, hierarchies and practices have left similar scars. Every other household has a story to tell, and with many unique stories, the plot is awfully similar and tragically so.

After the death of his nephew, he is more committed to returning to Europe. His rhetorical "*Europe wapsi, hor ki*" at the IOM meeting was meant to communicate "what else" people expect if not a renewed effort to "return to Europe" given the circumstances in Pakistan. If his return was indeed "voluntary", should he not have the right to reevaluate his return decision at any point?

Debates around power and consent in contemporary times can help us evaluate the practice and processes of "voluntary" return. Beyond questioning the initial "voluntariness" in such returns, as I

reflected on Mubeen's remark, voluntariness in returns has to incorporate a changing position on consent and decision-making.

According to my interlocutors, whether in Europe as irregularised migrants or back in Pakistan as "voluntary" returnees, a voluntary and consensual return after their perilous and piecemeal migratory journeys to reach Germany (not to mention the years of precarity, discrimination and exploitation they face/d in the country) would only be possible with a travel document. A document or situation that would allow them to "move freely between Pakistan and Germany". No doubt, returning for my interlocutors, even the three who were deported, also entails some feeling of pleasure and joy[59]—the kind that one experiences upon seeing family and friends after a long time or the delight of a familiar sight, sound or taste—the kind that is sadly also exploited by counsellors to induce return (cf. Cleton and Schweitzer 2020). Nonetheless, this successful exploitation only proves the reality of such joy, which I witnessed on many occasions at Alam's home, where I spent the most time out of any interlocutors' homes. Alam's joy at his daughter's wedding or son's engagement, for instance, but beyond such special moments, the everyday mundane moments of happiness and satisfaction are also vital: The delight of home-cooked *roti* (local flatbread); sipping sweet *chai* (milk tea) with friends in winter; mother's *pyar* (love and blessing) on the head, to give a few examples.

However, as exemplified by Mubeen and Jamshed for many of my returnee interlocutors, return also meant many troublesome feelings. A few introduced in this chapter had their own complex relations with returns beyond the joy of being home:

Although Hammad was eventually able to return to his wife after his unnecessary "voluntary" return, going to Pakistan held the possibility of losing his life in Germany and putting his relationship in jeopardy (in case he had not been able to come back).

Haroon's use of deportation as a "shield" against his family's expectations and hiding the circumstances of his "voluntary" return from his family and framing it as deportation, does not mean there will be no new expectations.

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[59] While I do not discuss deportees in significant detail, through my interactions with deportees, I do know there is some joy in returning to one's family and a place that is familiar (no matter how partial and overshadowed by their forced return).

Each time his agriculture business is not doing well, particularly in light of the great flood of 2022 and inflation, Aman is reminded of his considerably higher wage through his *fliesenleger* job.

I began this chapter with a brief insight into Aman's story, his pressures, and his decisions that were not final in any sense but had to be taken as per his affective judgement, given the situation. Aman's view and affective state, his feelings about his "decision" to return, changed several times, like many others, some of whose stories I shared after his. Whilst the German state mounts pressure on irregularised people to leave, combining it with a threat of deportation, there is a counterforce at play that guides the decisions and improvisations of people to remain, particularly through remigrating within Europe. Return is only the (temporal) last resort. Social and affective pressures on migrants to break out of inequalities passed through social reproduction in Pakistan lead many to not just leave for Europe in the first place but affectively resist removal for as long as possible. Through the stories and interview excerpts shared in this chapter, I have tried to problematise the idea of "voluntariness" in so-called "voluntary returns" and the concomitant impacts on the lives of my migrant interlocutors before departure and upon return. In the case of others, like Jameel and Qabeer, they sought alternatives outside Germany to avoid return.

All eight examples show that migratory improvisations are not individual efforts but, as D'Angelo (2021: 488) points out, essentially reliant on social networks that influence people's "decision-making process and at every single juncture of their complex, often very long, sometimes serendipitous journeys". This is particularly true for people like Jameel and Qabeer, who decided to avoid return and struggle further. In fact, only a relatively small proportion of those with an obligation to leave do so (through deportations and "voluntary" returns combined) and the "rate of return" for Pakistani irregularised migrants in Germany lies at about 30% (see section 3.1 for details). While there are no concrete figures on what happens to the rest, we can deduce that they move to another EU member state, and indeed my discussion and observations with my Pakistani interlocutors suggest that the majority (about two-thirds) resort to an intra-European re-migration (secondary migration), primarily to Italy, but also France, Spain and Portugal. Thus it can be said that a single person's detention (for deportation) or coercion to leave through a "voluntary" return leads about two others to flee southwards from Germany. This phenomenon can be termed the *re-migration multiplier effect of forced return*, which I explore in depth in subsequent chapters through

the experiences of people moving from Germany to Italy in parallel to the experiences of those who (in)voluntarily returned to Pakistan.

However, those who return are not excluded from complex and serendipitous journeys in the future, and their returns, after all, might indicate a (temporal) lack of social networks and other resources required to continue with their migratory improvisations in Europe. Furthermore, a return, as in the case of Aman, Alam, Mubeen, Jamshed, Haroon and even Hammad, does not mark the end of ambiguity regarding their decision to return. Several factors at "home" and "abroad" play a role. For some, like Hammad, the ideas of "home" and "abroad" have shifted significantly, if not flipped completely. His connection to Pakistan after the death of his father and mother weakened, whilst Germany seemed more and more like a home due to his wife and familiarity with local customs and socialisation over several years spent in the country (cf. Pérez Murcia and Boccagni 2022). For almost all, Pakistan's structural socioeconomic issues combined with sectarian divides and complex biographies make the return itself an act of improvisation, as I show with the examples of Haroon and Jamshed but not only.

Beyond the social, material and sociopolitical circumstances upon return, an imagined life in Europe hinders people's chances to flourish upon return, as was the case with many. The waxing and waning of such imaginations and aspirations as they interact with practical capabilities impact people's feelings of being back and wishes to return to Europe yet again. Mubeen is the primary example here, but so is the case with others like Aman under the post-flood grinding economic and unstable political situation of Pakistan, which has pushed about another 5% of its population, about ten billion people, below the poverty line[60] (Pasha 2023). In a recent WhatsApp call with Tanseef— whom I briefly allude to while discussing Mubeen's return—he told me that since the closure of his Döner shop, "*sharam ati hai*" (the feeling of shame takes over) him every time he enters his home. His intense feeling of indignity at his failure to give proper education to his children and a comfortable life for his wife was expressed in the following words: "I have two options left, to leave the country and do something or to leave this world". He then went on to comment on the sociopolitical situation that is leading many to take their own lives and his frustration with the Pakistani politicians, which he often did. If fact, at the IOM event in Lahore (see section 4.1.5), when asked to share his post-return experiences, he went on to address us in the audience as he was

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[60] Calculated as being below the baseline income of $3.65/day.

addressing a political rally. At the end of this fiery speech about self-serving politicians and terrible living conditions for his ilk, he asked the audience if they [people like him] were even considered Pakistanis. Even if one sees Tanseef's statements as hyperbole (as some Pakistani officials present at the event did), they show just how strongly he felt about the situation and how unsatisfied he was with his post-return situation. His frustration, borne especially out of a situation where one sees themselves failing to provide for their loved ones no matter what they do, is an affective burden that is difficult to put in words. It is a state or feeling that can not be explained, but perhaps it can be shown through the practical outcome of what people in Tanseef's situation often do.

Tanseef's remarks both at the event and over the phone made me realise that sometimes the affective weight of unfavourable material conditions is so much that people find taking their own lives easier. His anecdotal claim about suicides made sense; the risks posed by a dangerous journey to Europe may still be a better alternative to suicide. The former has some hope in the end, even if the slightest. In mainstream media, the recent and dramatic rise in suicides in Pakistan is blamed on "mental health" issues (Tribune 2022; Mujtaba 2023). However, according to research that looked into 2295 unique cases of suicide in Pakistan between 2019 and 2020, only about 3.3% of these reported suicides were due to "mental illness", whilst more than 90% of those who took their lives did so because of "financial reasons", "domestic conflict" and "failure in love or marriage" (Naveed et al. 2023). The three issues leading to most suicides are often entangled and cannot be neatly separated. Tanseef's hint at taking his own life or dying en route to Europe as being the only two options was highlighted by the case of Shahida Raza, a female footballer from Pakistan who died in a shipwreck off the coast of Italy in February 2023 because that seemed to be the only way to seek better healthcare for her partially paralysed three-year-old son (Davies 2023). More recently, the tragic choice between taking one's life or giving it up at Europe's borders was highlighted yet again with the deaths of hundreds of Pakistanis, Syrians and Egyptians (believed to be the three biggest national groups) on a boat that capsized off the coast of Southern Greece in June 2023 (Smith et al. 2023). This particular incident led the Pakistani government to declare a day of mourning to share the grief of an estimated 200 hundred families in cities like Mandi Bahauddin, Gujranwala and Kotli who lost their loved ones (mostly young men escaping the crushing and dire situation in the country at many different levels) (Baloch 2023; Smith and Chrisafis 2023). The talk in the country and on local media was yet again about arresting the "smugglers" and "human traffickers" deemed

to be benefiting from a "heinous" trade in human lives (Naqash 2023). However, the discourse on the connection between the economic and affective lives of people that leads to seeking certain modes of mobility and the unequal access to mobility that structure the violence and difficulties they face (indeed, sometimes a tragic death) is missing for the most part. Not many officials in Pakistan seem to be asking how irregularisation and (in)voluntary returns by the EU keep the business of so-called "smuggling" alive.

4.4 Closing thoughts on the paradoxes of "voluntary" return

Economic challenges can make "reintegration" and resettlement upon return challenging (Cassarino 2008, 2014b). Under such circumstances, yet another out-migration becomes a real possibility, particularly for those who can figure out how to make it possible. Difficult material conditions in the post-return context are intrinsically linked to burdensome affective states. In such a condition/ state, it can seem like all the emotional, social, and financial hardships and sacrifices that pushed the migrant to return were their failure and lack of resilience (Lietaert 2020). It leads many to question their return and, in many cases, their external critics, take a seat in their own conscience. Lately, Alam, for example, has been regretting his decision. To me, it seems like his brother-in-law's disparaging comments (see introductory vignette) are now being inflicted on the self. In chapters five and six, I will further unpack this issue through the lens of gender and destiny, respectively.

In addition to being affected by factors in the host country, returnees' deliberations include powerful processes "in which migrants weigh up practical and emotional, real and perceived challenges and opportunities in their country of origin" (Mortensen 2014: 32). Decisions over return are not as simple as an individual making a choice to "follow the law" but constrained by powerful social pressures, collective influences, and emotional realities on the one side and coercion, lack of agency and legal precarity on the other. An irregularised migrant's voluntariness in return is, therefore, a paradox shaped by moral obligation and ideas of pride, shame, fear, vulnerabilities, limited capabilities, and (lack of) agency. This stretching and compressing from multiple sides underline how questions of return, particularly in "voluntary" return, are partly questions of affects and affective pressures. But is it at least a better alternative to deportations, and if so, for whom is it better?

Whether "voluntary" returns are more ethical than deportations is debatable. Nevertheless, they seem to be politically less divisive in Germany, and there is an important economic aspect to the propagation of "voluntary" return programs (Schuler and Zacharakis 2016; Biehler, Koch, and Meier 2021). Deportation infrastructure and processes have cost Germany millions over the last few years (Schuler and Zacharakis 2016; Bundestagdrucksache 2019a; Macgregor 2019; Vettori 2019). A single deportation can cost tens of thousands of Euros in transportation alone, as briefly discussed in chapter two (see section 2.2). On the 31st of July 2018, for example, a chartered flight carrying only eight Pakistani deportees and fifty security personnel cost Germany €462,685 (Bundestagdrucksache 2019a: 48). At the cost of around €60,000 per deportee, this particular flight was relatively expensive[61], but even the cheapest charted flight to Pakistan cost the German state around €10,000 per deportee in 2018 (ibid., 2019a: 48-50). These are only charter transportation costs and do not include other direct and indirect costs that need to be considered to get a better estimation of how expensive deportations end up being for the exchequer. Consider, for instance, 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 are flown back on chartered flights instead of commercial ones due to practical and political reasons[62]. In comparison, a "voluntary" return compensation[63]—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.

Undoubtedly, "voluntary" returns are cheaper and politically less divisive than deportations; however, whether they are a better alternative for the returnees is very questionable (Mahar 2020a). The ethics of deportation are routinely (and rightly) questioned based on ideas of human agency and freedom to move. Sökefeld (2020), for example, brings into question ideas of choice, will and agency when he questions whether a "deportation is a form of forced migration?" However, the ethics of "voluntary" returns are questioned comparatively little. On its surface, the term *voluntary* takes care of any doubts that may otherwise arise. However, reflecting and ethnographically engaging with the assumed voluntariness is essential to a critical understanding of "voluntary"

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[61] Since pilots and crew on such chartered flights refuse to fly without security, each deportee is accompanied by multiple security personnel, adding considerable costs and making such efforts expensive.

[62] Apart from the visibility of resistance on the part of deportees (in cuffs, sometimes chained to ankles) leading many passengers to boycott certain airlines, a furtive chartered flight avoids staged protests and activist interruptions.

[63] Below I have given some concrete figures.

returns and necessary for this form of social instrument to function sustainably (Lietaert, Broekaert, and Derluyn 2017).

The voices of the subjects of (in)voluntary returns, their perspectives and experiences of voluntariness are intrinsic to any debate on the topic but are often missing. Building on my patchwork of ethnographic vignettes, I wish to present a full ethnographic *vine*, as I mention in the introduction to this chapter. Thus is the following chapters, I will thematically address the dynamic role of affects in the lives of my interlocutors and their improvisational decisions to return or not. In other words, drawing from my longitudinal engagement with the people introduced in the chapter and a few others, I will thicken and expand the collective vignettes into a vine. More specifically, the two subsequent chapters will weave more ethnographic detail into the already laid out vine and make it richer by unpacking the affective and temporal migratory improvisations to highlight how gender and (ideas of) destiny are entangled with people's lives.

Chapter 5: Gender Affects

5.1 Irregularised migration and "voluntary" return as experienced by Pakistani men[64]

As an irregularised migrant, Jameel, whom I introduced in the last chapter, struggled to regularise himself by seeking asylum in Germany for a few years. Subsequently, when his asylum application was refused, he was told by the authorities and volunteers that returning to Pakistan was his only option. However, going back home as a "voluntary" returnee or, perhaps worse yet, a deportee would have meant the *breaking up* (relational dysfunction) of his already *broken apart* (geographically separated) family, he once told me using the Punjabi phrase "*mera te ghar tut jana hai*" (my home [family] will break). In this way, he not only justified why he opted for an intra-European irregularised re-migration from Germany to Italy but demonstrated how gendered affective and emotional vulnerabilities unfold in the lives of irregularised migrant men. For many like him, being away from their "homes" (i.e. families) for years through a series of contingent and unplanned migratory improvisations to overcome the condition of precarity and irregularisation, along with other issues, makes the decision to return more complex. Particularly returning *khali hath* (empty-handed) can lead to ruptures in people's gendered self-conception, if not a crisis of masculinity, that opens up discussions about gender, affect and return in the lives of irregularised migrants. Thus it would not be incorrect to say that migratory improvisations are meant not only to overcome restrictive mobility but entwined with several vulnerabilities that have a gendered and affective dimension. Since almost all my migrant interlocutors were men, I wish to theorise the migratory vulnerabilities that irregularised men and returnees face in this chapter through a few ethnographic case studies.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, about two-thirds of Pakistani citizens legally obligated to leave Germany strive to remain, if not in Germany, then elsewhere in Europe through what I have termed migratory improvisations. Between 2013 and 2020, more than 12,000 irregularised Pakistani citizens, primarily men, were ordered to leave Germany (Deutscher Bundestag 2019, 2020, 2021). During the same period, 2,400[65] of these "failed" asylum seekers were forcibly removed through deportations, and 1,729 returned to Pakistan "voluntarily" through so-called "voluntary return

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[64] Parts of this chapter have been published in an edited volume (Mahar 2023).

[65] The deportation data for some of the years include deportations to other EU states as per the Dublin regulation. As such the number may not be an accurate depiction of deportations to Pakistan.

programs", which I have discussed in detail in the previous chapter (for more information on figures see Mahar 2023). That means about 8000 of those ordered or obliged to leave avoided returning and removal through a secondary irregularised migration within Europe (or some other means).

In the case of my interlocutors, the refusal to return and secondary intra-European migratory improvisations as an alternative has many reasons. Not only are returns often equated with failure, but they also compromise men's role as masculine figures in a patriarchal and hyper-masculine post-return context, unfurling a bundle of affective dilemmas. As the statistics, ethnographic material and discussions in the preceding text and the rest of the dissertation depict, irregularised Pakistani citizens rarely decide to return to Pakistan of their own volition; the willingness to return is, at best, induced (see discussion on voluntariness in chapter four). For instance, through examples, I have highlighted how various actors in Germany exert considerable pressure to induce return in the previous chapter. If not outright forced, "voluntary" return results from coercion and the preclusion of other options (cf. Schweitzer 2022; Schweitzer, Humphris, and Monforte 2022). I have discussed elsewhere in detail how the availability of choices, access to more information and ethical reviews around payments as incentives to leave could decrease coercion, if not eliminate it outright (Mahar 2020d).

The current functioning of "voluntary" returns and the concomitant coerciveness interact with the pressures and aspirations of irregularised men to produce highly gendered affects and actions— affective migratory improvisations. The lives of irregularised people are shaped not only by ideas of economic success/failure but also by their capabilities or the lack thereof to achieve higher-order relational goals; dignity, stability, respect, and a decent life for themselves and their families. By ethnographically inquiring into their gendered everyday life as irregularised migrants and returnees, I argue that the economics of success or failure in people's lives can, at best, be considered a proxy for the sentiments and affects not easily explainable outside the scope of an ethnography. Affects that shape the lives of irregularised migrants in the country of destination and origin and their decisions to return or not. Since research shows that gender highly influences the affective expression of personal narratives, I take my male interlocutors' affective stories as a point of departure to make sense of their lives below (Fivush and Grysman 2019).

5.1.1 Waiting, hoping and improvising to avoid emasculation: Jameel's "strategy"

When I met Jameel in Italy in the late summer of 2020, he had just filed to be regularised there through an "amnesty scheme" introduced to reduce labour shortages created by the Covid-19 pandemic. By then, he had been in Europe for about a decade. He told me that his son, a toddler when Jameel left Pakistan, was now old enough to ride a motorbike. During all this time, his relationship with his son and wife was based on his material remittances (economic capital) and the respect (symbolic capital) he had because of being in Europe. He asked me what he would be in the eyes of his family and society if he returned without a European passport or enough capital to start something in Pakistan. Alluding to the possibility of deportation in Germany as an interruption in his migratory hopes and so-called "voluntary" return as giving up on his migratory journey, he conveyed the sentimentality of his resolve to stay through an improvised remigration to Italy. It was not ideal that he could not see his son grow up or that he had not held any of his family members in his arms for years, but the alternative of returning was just as troubling for Jameel, who said:

> "You know how in-laws are, they will humiliate me ... my wife will be the first to lose respect for me ... and my son will look down on me. My child can ride a motorbike now. I left him crawling, and now he can ride [a motorbike] all by himself. If I go back and take that [motorbike] away from him, which I will need if I go back, he will ask me to buy him one. Where will I get the money? My wife will think I am back to control her; you know it's better if I just send money. If I go back and sit on her head, she will say, 'he's back to control me but can't even provide,' and her family will start to brainwash (*feed*) her ... far away (*pardes*) is better."

Waiting, hoping and improvising to get regularised was the only option for Jameel. Every few months or years, he has to improvise and act to remain in Europe, and then again, he has to wait and hope that it works, and when it does not, it's time for another improvisation. His migratory improvisations led him from Turkey to Greece, to Germany and finally to Italy. None of it was thought through, planned, or part of a grand plan to exploit the riches of Europe or, as purported by alarmist discourse, another "Muslim conquest" of Europe (Hirschkind 2021: 2). Tracing European history, Charles Hirschkind (2021) uses connected history approach to detail and critique Spain's and by extension, Europe's feelings toward its Muslim others that were a part of the European civilisation for many centuries but are consciously kept "outside the confines of [European]

civilisation"[66] (Hirschkind 2021: 13). This reference is important here as views ignorant of a connected history combined with outright racist and Islamophobic imaginations of the future are rife in Europe. Fears of "replacement theory" and "Islamisation of Europe" are also sometimes even held by volunteers working with refugees and migrants. For instance, upon hearing my name, an individual whose affiliation I will keep hidden made what he thought was a "witty" connection between the Ottoman siege of Vienna and the current situation of many European cities being "taken over" by people like me[67]. Even a volunteer with whom I participate in activities for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Munich (and know to be a very compassionate human being) cannot seem to rid himself of orientalist images of Muslims cemented in the European affective consciousness (Hirschkind 2021). These often come to the discursive surface in the form of seemingly banal and harmless comments, but this is how perhaps they are reproduced and work.

On a 32 km solidarity night walk in Munich, walking next to me and a couple of meters behind my partner, Clara, this volunteer could not help but make a remark about her carrying the one common bag that the two of us had: "You guys love to make your women work for you, don't you?" To prove that his humour was rooted in a "sociological" observation, he told the story of his father, who had spent time in Iraq during the world war and seen misogynist Iraqi men comfortably riding donkeys while "their poor women" had to walk. The fact was that Clara had wanted to keep the bag because she preferred to have the water (and her precious snacks!) on her; however, using that argument as a justification would have been problematic too. It would have meant that I consider it my duty as a man to carry weight for "my" woman, or worse yet, that Clara should not be burdened because she is a woman. This was an affective catch-22 for me, and I could not tell this person off, it seemed. At the least, it would have meant I was not a "good sport" or, even worse, proven "true" yet another trope about Muslims: that of the short-tempered Muslim man. Thus I chose to remain silent or, more appropriately, could not speak. The personal irony in all this was that I don't even consider myself a Muslim, which I have told this person multiple times (not that it makes any of this less problematic). Merely my Muslim name is enough to evoke all kinds of stereotypes about

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[66] Hirshckind (2021: 13) notes that "[m]any in Europe today view Muslim immigrants as representatives of an alien civilisation, one incompatible with and a direct threat to modern European values and freedoms." He asserts that the likes of Jürgen Habermas and their ideas of Judaeo-Christian European civilisation are a "part of the intellectual scaffolding that sustains the day's anti-Muslim polemics in Europe."

[67] While I do not identify with any religion and consider myself an agnostic (whilst being open to seeing all religions as systems in themselves), I am often placed into that category of a European Other based on my name alone (sometimes my country of citizenship).

Muslim men. What was and still is troubling for me is that his idea of women-oppressing-and-unchanging-homogeneous-Muslims same throughout the world (from Iraq to Pakistan) straight out of a V. S. Naipaul novel will remain unchallenged (and I am to blame for that), but let's come back to the issue at hand.

All this to say that beyond all the legal issues of restrictive mobility that irregularised migrants face, such images[68] impact irregularised migrants like Jameel in many ways. People like Jameel, subjected to various forms of marginalisation and inequalities, have few options, so they wait, hope and improvise. They use whatever resources or migrant networks they have to let their "serendipitous journey" unfold as they go along (D'Angelo 2021), which for Jameel meant that at some point, returning to Pakistan became akin to social death.

The only "plan" in his life now—slowly entrenching over the past decade or so on the move—was to wait and hope for regularisation and documents. Employing waiting as an analytical lens, Christine Jacobsen and Marry-Anne Karlsen (2021) have argued that time is a mode of governing migration and is meant to produce what others have previously called "liminal legality" (Menjivar 2006) and "permanent temporariness" (Tize 2020) in different contexts (cf. Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2021). The role of power should no doubt be acknowledged as irregularisation as a mode of migration governance leads to endless waiting and hope to deter and discourage migrants and make "voluntary" removal easier. However, beyond that, I wish to focus more on the affective impacts of legal or administrative conditions (such as "liminal legality" and "permanent temporariness") and irregularisation in the lives of my interlocutors. Research on migratory masculinities and mobilities could benefit from this focus on affects (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015: 74; Brettell and Hollifield 2014), particularly the gendering of sentiments and affects. As can be seen in Jameel's example, even economic aspects of migration are often highly gendered and affectively charged (cf. McKay 2007). This leads people not only to wait and hope in often terrible conditions but also not communicate their constant suffering to their loved ones in their country of origin.

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[68] Particularly when they are held by the very people who are supposed to support you, citizens whose political solidarity is essential due to their privileges and political rights in the nation-state.

Image 6: Dinner at a Pakistani migrant flat in Feltre

After spending some time in Bolzano, I travelled to Feltre where an interlocutor of mine from Munich was planning to stay upon this re-migration from Germany to Italy. While he could not travel during the period I was in Italy (improvisations rely on windows of opportunities) I decided to visit his friends in Feltre anyway. This was a fruitful decision in hindsight as I met a person who not only invited and hosted me in Brescia but put me in touch with people in other cities like Jameel who had spent time in Germany. It was a coincident that this "gatekeeper" to be was in Feltre around the time of my visit. He was there to renew his six-month permit called "*Permesso di Soggiorno*" as he was officially registered in the area but living in Brescia for work. Here I also made a few other acquaintances who had re-migrated from Austria, for example. Such networks and interaction worked for my "research journey" much like they do for irregularised migrants and their improvised journeys to and across Europe. Many such flats become physical nodes of migrant networks moving between European states as part of their migratory improvisations.

5.1.2 Self-curation and representation: Amir's (in)visible suffering

It is arguably the knotted processing of the economic, social and affective through a gender identity that leads most of my interlocutors to share an exceptionally curated view of their "European" lives with loved ones. Their claims of "success" and averring that everything is "under control," even when that is not the case, point to the need to fulfil family and friends' material and non-material

expectations and to live up to male ideals more generally. Shedding light on this, Kukreja (2021) argues that masculine migratory social pressures are structured through practices to conform to the hetero-patriarchal "male breadwinner" ideal, and Ahmad (2015) argues that the display of wealth and consumer goods, not easily attainable in the countries of origin, provide migrants with the opportunity to live up to the hegemonic masculine status (cf. Osella and Osella 2000). Economic success has been equated with male success for time immemorial in many societies. However, what is new is that masculinity and emotions are increasingly defined by neoliberal processes and consumer culture (Illouz 2007). Gendered and affective ideas of success are further complicated by the hyper-circulation of images and ideas that impact notions of modernity, identity and, more generally, people's "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004: 64).

My interlocutors have to manage the dissonance between their aspirations (individual and collective[69]) and their capabilities to achieve them in various ways. However, most commonly, they resort to what could be considered deception regarding their depictions of themselves. Upon my inquiry, many of my interlocutors claimed they only share parts of the truth and that not showing aspects of their life in Europe is not akin to lying. Furthermore, some of my interlocutors think that honesty is not a virtue if it leads to emotional distress and pain for their families and friends. Thus highlighting that they, as (migrant) men, must juggle fact and fiction and assume certain roles and the burden that comes with it.

Amir's story left an indelible impression on me and not only exemplifies such behaviour but also shows the entanglement of migratory masculinities with migratory vulnerabilities. Though Amir has never spent time in Germany, I got to know him while I stayed at a migrant flat in Brescia with about nine other migrants, three of whom had spent time in Germany. In this three-room flat, three people slept in each room (including the living room), but the capacity per room was often four as people who lived in other cities spent nights there on a weekly basis for work. While I was offered the fourth bed in one of the bedrooms, their friends with weekend jobs in the area would come from other cities and regularly set up a fourth, sometimes even a fifth, bed in the living room.

Everyone would leave early in the morning, some waking up as early as 4:00 am preparing a quick roti and chai for breakfast, packing a couple for lunch and coming back late, especially those

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[69] Heavily influenced by the circulation of images in the world of social media but not only.

Image 7: View of the room in the migrant flat in Brescia where I slept

This was the main bedroom of the flat and upon my arrival a fourth bed was promptly set up next to the window (with a red sofa cushion as an improvised "pillow"). Normally, three people slept in another smaller bedroom and about four in the main living room. The number of people sleeping would change depending on the day of the week as some of the residents moved around for work on a weekly basis. The rent and food (grocery) costs were divided amongst the nine main tenants and others who came and went contributed as per their situation. While my hosts refused to pass any costs onto me as a sign of their hospitality I would invite them for a meal or coffee every now and then and sometimes chipped in for groceries .

working in the agricultural sector or "zamindari" (landlord-ship) as they call it to take away the negative connotation of farm labour for people back in Pakistan. So I often left the apartment by 8:00, which is when the last of my migrant housemates left for work. I would make my way to the city centre often by bus and write my notes at a cafe, and twice a week attended an Italian course organised by Caritas for migrants from Egypt, Pakistan, India and Algeria but not only.

Lest I digress into another direction, the purpose of sharing my routine was that when I would return home, Amir would often be the only one there, especially when he had an early shift at the restaurant. Thus through our conversations, I learned about his health condition, which, as I mentioned, left a lasting impact on me. However, for the first week or so, I did not really know what

was the exact issue. As he had explained, I thought he had some cyst on his "back", especially because he would always point to his lower back when he told me about this chronic ache that made his job at the restaurant difficult. Amir sometimes also called it "cancer" because of its chronic nature and cited his horrible journey from Libya to Italy as the source. The embodiment of suffering caused by how rows upon rows of people were made to sit for dozens of hours inside a ship out in the open sea. His description reminded me of chickens packed in caged vans on their way to butchers, often seen on the roads of Pakistan. At each turn, the unfortunate "domestic" fowls that are next to the bars of the cage are shoved into it with all the weight of the others, the ones in the middle crushed between poultry bodies covered in blood, droppings and sweat. This process repeats itself hundreds of times due to the abrupt breaks, sudden turns and bumpy roads, which are part of the common traffic experience in Pakistan—as anyone who has been there knows. Not much different from the ill-treated birds, Amir's dreadful travel experience—like so many irregularised humans who travel under inhumane conditions due to restrictive European borders—left its mark on his body, he thinks. A doctor had, in fact, removed whatever it was (a benign tumour, I imagined at the time) a while back, but after a year or so, it had reappeared.

One evening at dinner, he asked me if a PhD student had medical knowledge. Nonplussed not by the question but by what might be coming next, I told him that I didn't have any medical knowledge but could try and give him some basic advice if he shared his concern with me. He walked into the room where he slept, and I followed him there to follow the conversation. Naeem, his roommate, was already there, and they asked me to close the door behind me. I was still unsure of what was going on when Amir said: "I've been telling you about my problem; now you can see it." He then lowered his pants from behind and lay on the bed with his feet still on the floor so that his backside was exposed. It seemed like this was a routine procedure as both did not talk much, but their actions were coordinated. Naeem took out a needle from the adjacent cupboard, heated it with a cigarette-lighter fire and then separated Amir's butt cheeks, exposing an abscess (about two inches in diameter) with a yellow pus point. He popped the abscess and pressed the contents out. Cleaning it with tissues, he repeated the process a few times. I was of no help and stood there, shocked into silence. In the end, when they told me they have to do this on a regular basis (something I had already guessed), I said to Amir, "I think you should really go to the doctor".

However, he refused to have the abscess removed. It was not simply a surgical procedure for him. It would have meant taking at least a month of holidays, and he would have had to reveal his medical condition to his family, whom he speaks to every other day if not every day. Given the loss of work he had endured due to the first Covid-19 lockdown in Italy, this was something Amir could not afford at the time. When Italy started to reopen in the late summer of 2020, Amir owed his Italian boss, peers, friends and Pakistani housemates a few hundred euros. As a form of remittance, he mainly sent this money to friends and family in Pakistan to keep up his "breadwinner" status and masculine notions of having made it in Europe. Even though he had no money to spare, when a friend in Pakistan wanted to borrow PKR 40,000[70] for a wedding obligation, Amir borrowed this money from his housemates and duly transferred it to his friend in Pakistan. Amir's "biographically subjective" (Calhoun 2004: 127 in Beatty, 2013) explanation, filled with gendered notions of pride and shame (cf. Beatty 2013), was that if he, as someone working in Europe, would not help his friends and family in Pakistan, then who will?:

> "We should feel [for the people in Pakistan]. We travelled outside [abroad] according to our will. We come to Europe with such difficulty. For whom? [In Pakistan] there are only problems. If we won't help, then who will? We are fine; we have this [points to his hasheesh joint]."

His medical condition and pain—so much so that he could often not sit or lie on his back and regularly used hasheesh to deal with his situation—were less of a burden than the affective weight of masculine expectations or *migratory masculinities* that, according to Jonathan Allan (2018), leads to a particularly masculine kind of "cruel optimism" (cf. Berlant 2011). This may seem like an extreme example of comparing bodily states/feelings with relational states/feelings, but many Pakistani migrant men commonly practice such sacrifices; affective, material, and physical. And I consider these a part of their affective migratory improvisations, which are not only about overcoming restrictive mobility but about managing relationships as an irregularised migrant.

5.1.3 Migratory masculinities upon return: Alam's struggles

The affective and masculine burdens of returning migrants do not end upon their return. In fact, they are compounded by moral obligations and responsibilities towards the (extended) family. The failure to fulfil expectations or the disgrace associated with "voluntary" return can mean they have

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[70] Roughly € 200 according to the exchange rate at the time.

failed as men. During my fieldwork in Pakistan, a set of meaningful affective and moral exchanges specific to (return) migratory masculinities in the Pakistani (Punjab) context became apparent. While many of the moral obligations faced by returning migrants in the Punjabi context are similar to those that exist elsewhere in the Global South (cf. Kleist 2017a), the nexus of Punjabi masculinities and local Islam creates a different lived experience of "voluntary" return (and deportation). That is to say, personal desires, familial responsibilities, relational/collective aspirations and social expectations that shape people's hopes and decisions/actions are entangled with their everyday religious and gendered worlds. In the next chapter, I will explore how religious cosmologies form an integral part of irregularised migrants' pre- and post-return social and affective lives in detail through what I call the hope-destiny dyad. Paying attention to emic concepts of *umeed* (hope) and *taqdeer* (destiny), I will be analysing the sociolinguistic construction of emotions (Pritzker, Fenigsen, and Wilce 2019) and the conjunctions of religion and emotion (Utriainen 2019) as they affect irregularised migration and return. Before expanding on the issue in the following chapter, I wish to unpack the gendered dimension of this dyad here.

Alam, whom I mentioned briefly in the opening vignette and then as part of the collection of vignettes weaved with experiences, migrant narratives and interviews in chapter four, exemplifies the workings of the hope–destiny dyad and the possibility it offers to migrants in negotiating their migratory masculinities upon return. Alam's brother-in-law not only openly disapproved of Alam's "voluntary" return but called him "weak," among other things. Thus, Alam's masculinity and social roles as a man (son, husband, brother, father, etc.) were questioned. As I have argued elsewhere, *muhim'juhi* (adventurism), *bahaduri* (bravery) and *azam* (determination) are considered particularly desirable masculine traits in the Punjabi context—something instilled in boys from an early age (see Mahar 2020b). Of course, individual biographies have the potential to undo the socialisation, mimesis, and gendered narratives that begin at birth, but their affect is nevertheless felt. The consequences of stepping outside the gender binary can be real, which is why they impact us at the *affective* level. That is to say, we feel the possibility of consequences before we face the possible consequences. Thus even those of us who are able to undo many ideas of gender or sexuality in our minds (due to our privileged exposure) may remain bound by them at the affective and, therefore, practical level due to consequences in certain contexts. For instance, when Clara visited me in

Pakistan, we pretended to be married. And if I had a male partner, we would have certainly pretended to be heterosexual friends, as I would in a conservative European context.

In his post-return return context, Alam was not only seen as "weak" and a "coward" for not trying hard enough, as was made explicit by his brother-in-law, but I imagined hegemonic masculinity at work affecting his self-perception. Nevertheless, Alam perhaps saw this as an opportunity to redefine himself by asserting what Emily Wentzell (2017) calls a "mature masculinity" rather than a "youthful machismo." Alam declared that there was no way he could have tried harder. Regardless of his hopes of attaining legal status in Germany, he asserted it was destined to be otherwise (see chapter six for details). Alam contended that he had achieved what he had wanted, "*apna maqsad pura kita*" (completed my goal; mission[71]). Among other things, he had managed to build a *makkan* (dwelling) according to his wife's wish, financed his mother's *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), funded his daughter's dowry and marriage, and helped his son start a corner shop. Now, at almost 60, he had fulfilled his duties as a man—a son, husband and father—and it was a time not for further struggle, but instead, for retirement, he argued with a sense of what could be called mature and age-appropriate masculinity. In reflecting on his migratory journey, Alam asserted, "If I were young, I would have stayed longer … the Germans need young men for work," which expressed his ideas concerning migratory masculinities and male responsibility being bound to age in addition to concepts of destiny (for more on ageing and masculinity see Mahar 2020b).

Most returning migrants return under more precarious financial circumstances than Alam did, and certainly not because they are old enough to "retire," as in the case of Alam. In most cases, returnees also lack the required materiality of a "successful" return symbolised by a "remittance house" (Pérez Murcia and Boccagni 2022) or remittance business. Alam's case highlights how constructing a house and shop with remittances combined with a relatively stable economic situation upon return builds up an affective hierarchy of return and returnee masculinities. This aspect needs some unpacking and contextualisation of the situation of men in Pakistani (Punjabi) society. To begin with, particularly those from the rural and peri-urban areas straddling the ever-expanding gulf between a constantly lowering socio-economic status and the same if not increasing demands of what it means to achieve manhood compared to their fathers. Structural unemployment issues (e.g. lack of vocational schools or state-funded apprenticeship programs) combined with a

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[71] He often also used the English term "mission" to discuss his migratory goals.

Image 8: A view of Alam and his family's house from the inside

This was the main living area that one walked into from the main entrance. I took the photo with the main gate behind me. The staircase on the left goes up to the first floor with two rooms and a bathroom where guests were hosted. During my stay I was given the whole portion on the first floor. On the ground floor as can be seen most activities happened in this open area. For instance food was prepared in the kitchen on the left (with the closed door and clock on top) and eaten here; next to it is the washroom and the two main sleeping rooms also opened into the living room. Opposite the house was the plot where Alam had opened his "corner shop".

simultaneous loss of income from traditional modes of existence such as farming and a host of other factors mean that particularly young men in Pakistan are worse off than their fathers. However, they are held to the same standards for achieving manhood, if not more. Today they must not only be a "breadwinner" to be able to marry and start a family but should also be able to afford a decent house (independent from the family), an income that affords some luxuries of the cosmopolitan life and so on. Otherwise, they are likely to be considered a "failure".

Research from different parts of the world confirms that housing is a key component in the spending of remittances or the money that returning migrants bring back (Airola 2007; Suleri and Savage 2006). There is no doubt that building a house is part of a migrant's effort to improve their

family's standard of living and, in many cases, that of their extended family[72]. However, as Marta Erdal (2012: 633) points out, in addition to the practical reasons, houses are important "for the social status of migrants and their families in the local community." As such, she argues that "migrant's houses are clearly linked to social capital," which in turn impacts aspirations and desire for migration; i.e. for non-migration households, they symbolise opportunities for wealth and higher status (ibid 635). There is a similar impact on returnees under different material and financial situations. The materiality of "success" permeates everyday life, and those who cannot produce *concrete* evidence, as Alam did by constructing a house, face several challenges.

As Kleist (2017c: 173) points out, to return without something to show upon return is "considered a personal and collective catastrophe" that should be avoided at all costs. Returning "empty-handed" is a termination of the migration project, not without an emotional side, and possibly carries a stigmatisation burden, she argues (ibid). As exemplified above, Alam may have been seen as "weak" or someone who did not try hard enough, which is a continual concern for migrant men whose masculinities are questioned upon return. This situation would have been exacerbated if he had arrived empty-handed. As a result, most of my interlocutors took care to perform identities which guard against the characterisation of shame. Drawing on research conducted with Afghan returnees, Schuster and Majidi (2015) argue that most men migrate again soon after returning to escape these feelings of stigma, shame and debt. This is not so different in the Punjabi context, where men can be labelled as "lazy or unlucky" and sometimes not smart enough (for the necessary *jugaad*) or without grit (required for continued *jugaad*) (ibid: 640). Especially when, like Alam, they try to argue that there are no long-term opportunities in Germany, their claims and arguments (for instance, his regarding his age) are seen as excuses meant to mask the inability for deft improvisations or *jugaad*. The degree of stigmatisation and shame, or type of label, can depend on the nature of "investment" in the migration, amongst other contextual factors in which return occurs and, as shown by the examples above, unfold differently, though with similar affective force in different people's lives.

More importantly, Schuster and Majidi (ibid) claim that in the Afghan context, deportation and return can also carry a stain of cultural contamination or a betrayal of culture. Similarly, scholars

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[72] Often several generations and siblings live in the same house in Pakistan. After Afghanistan, Pakistan is the country with the least amount of people who live by themselves (citation).

have also claimed that returnees can be seen as criminals or, at best, unwanted human "rubbish" to be disposed of in the country of origin, contributing to the legitimisation of deportation structures (De Genova 2018: 254; Sørensen 2010). However, my research suggests that the situation in Pakistan is not as morally or affectively charged about returnees being seen as criminals, culturally contaminated or people who have betrayed their culture because they left or have spent time abroad. Instead, my research material indicates that they are seen as people who have, at the very least, seen "the rich world" and must maintain those gendered expectations around other aspiring men. Thus the most pressing issue for returning migrants revolves around their masculinity being put into question when people start to recognise that they have "wasted time *outside* [abroad]*" (*bahir time zaya kita*). They can be seen as someone who did not try hard enough; could not struggle for long enough; was not smart enough to improvise; or could not bear the necessary suffering like a "real Punjabi man" should. Thus they have to find ways to manage not only the expectations and hopes of their family and kin but also their position as men, which I also see as a part of migratory improvisations, as hinted earlier. As part of the—affective, discursive and practical—improvisation that continues upon return, many try to maintain the "breadwinner" status by instilling new hopes for the future in family members who can feel let down upon an "unsuccessful" return. They reassure their families that they are only back temporarily, hence, affectively and effectively, committing to another irregularised migration within a year or two of the return due to such expectations. For example, Jamshed, who lived in his brother-in-law's house upon return (see chapter four), left for Abu-Dhabi within a year and a few months of his return as he could not bear the social pressure and shame of living with one's in-laws. A few others, as I have shared, are preparing to leave again (perhaps have done so by the time this sentence is being read).

Those who intend to stay or have a slim possibility of migrating again adopt a different strategy. For example, they try to frame their "voluntary" return as deportation—faced due to their Muslim faith. In this way, people not only protect their self-worth and guard themselves against feelings of shame but also delegitimise deportation structures as part of Islamophobic policies and nationalist projects (cf. De Genova 2007, 2018). Haroon's case demonstrates this improvised strategy to save face and his standing as a man. It is worth noting here that actual deportees also talked about their religion being a part of why they were removed from Europe. I do not talk about deportee interlocutors much as post-deportation affects are much researched since Nathalie Peutz' (2006) call for an

anthropology of removal (e.g. Peutz 2010; Schuster and Majidi 2015; Kleist 2017c; Khosravi 2018). However, this particular aspect of life after deportation requires me to briefly compare the situation of deportees in Pakistan with those in other places[73] with the help of a short and seemingly banal but deeply revealing quote by a deportee I refer to as Kasim here. When I asked this deportee why he thought he was deported—at his three-room home where the families of two of his siblings, along with his and the parents, lived—he said: "Germans don't like us [Muslims]".

The issue of being marked as "failed" men, as discussed above for "voluntary" returnees, equally impacts deportees. One way to challenge this stigma—that targets several aspects of returnee's and deportee's role as men—in a society where migration as a man is tied to the traditional role of male "breadwinner" is to highlight the use of force (i.e. deportation) by countries like Germany. While many deportees and some "voluntary" returnees highlight the European disdain for Islam as a reason for their removal, these claims do not go unchallenged. For instance, Kasim was nevertheless seen as a failure by his older brother, who—whilst not denying his claim about the contempt that may exist for Muslims in places like Germany—thought it was his responsibility to overcome such challenges. In the eyes of Kasim's brother, who was severely angry at him for indenting the whole family, a "return" to Pakistan, whether "voluntary" or deportation, made no difference; for him, Kasim had not given his best.

5.1.4 *"Don't tell my family I returned; they think I was deported": Haroon's improvised depiction of "voluntary" return as deportation*

The framing of "voluntary" return as deportation is perhaps best exemplified by Haroon's return to Pakistan after several years in Europe (see chapter four for details). Haroon, a "voluntary" returnee in his thirties, as discussed in chapter four, attributed his "voluntary" return to psychological problems and despair that were always there due to his precarious legal status but became more acute when his father passed away. However, fearing that his masculinity would be questioned, his mental state and psychological pressures were something he could not talk to his family about, especially not his older brother, the family breadwinner, who—one could say based on the relationship dynamics—saw Haroon's migration as a rite of passage into manhood (Monsutti 2007). While the German state would not allow Haroon to stay, his family expected him not to return, at

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[73] Such as (but not only) Somalia and Afghanistan; see references in the previous sentence for examples or the discussion above.

least not without a long-term visa, better yet, a German passport or, as people usually call it, "*pakay kaghaz*" (permanent documents). Therefore, he had to devise a solution for these incongruous demands whilst keeping his identity as a man intact. He told his family that he was deported, thereby laying the responsibility on the German state and ensuring that his family did not question his "failure" as a migrant and a man. This stratagem of Haroon also hints at the lack of agency he experienced as an irregularised migrant "forced" to return through a "voluntary" return program. "Voluntary" returnees sometimes feel that they need to make such claims of deportation to not only deal with the there (in)voluntary return but to ensure their acceptance and reintegration, which their family, friends and community readily accept based on a shared national belief that Germany can be intolerant of Muslims.

I reckon many "voluntary" returnees like Haroon, who do not wish to bear the suffering caused by violent European (physical and everyday) borders for another prolonged period[74] or have financial difficulties in migrating again[75], would rather be seen as "deportees" in order to legitimise their stay. To endure the return context where many non-migrants (those "left behind") do not understand why someone would return "voluntarily" before acquiring some form of a travel permit—if not a German passport—points to two different aspects of return.

Firstly it points to another dimension of voluntariness in "voluntary" returns, in addition to what I have discussed above, in the pre-return context (see also chapter four). That dimension is the temporal, affective and socially constructed nature of voluntariness as it unfolds in the post-return context. Haroon's return may have had some volition or enforced volition, to be more precise, i.e. given his legal limitations under contemporary unequal and discriminatory migration regimes (Sheller 2018; Sharma 2020) and concomitant despair after years of irregularisation, he thought it was better to return. Giving into the coercion and removal tactics of his host, going back was perhaps the only way forward or out of his European migratory limbo. However, upon return, over time and in a context where people see it as "giving up" that is unbefitting of a man, people start to question the force-volition mixture that may have led to their "decision" to return.

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[74] Haroon spent more than eight years in three different EU states the first time.

[75] That is to say, re-migration upon return.

Secondly, it gives us insight into the (re)production of migratory masculinities, particularly masculine hierarchies of return. For example, Alam's brother-in-law, Yaseen, declared Alam a coward and drew attention to his own success, having returned from Europe only after acquiring Spanish citizenship (see chapter one). While the story of Yaseen's success may have been new to me, it was common knowledge in the extended family that he had spent over a decade working in a coal mine to secure a Spanish passport, eventually upending the lottery of birth. Everyone in the family seemed to know about his stories of bravado, efforts and struggle to get legalised in Spain when he was young. Some of the stories shared with me included masculine narratives of necessary suffering, hard work and struggle and tales of Spanish women and their "corrupting" sexual advances that had to be resisted if one was to "complete" one's migratory project. Such stories not only construct specific ideas of "successful" migrant men and migratory masculinities but also ignite the desire for migratory journeys amongst many younger men, who see personal suffering and legal precarity along with other migratory vulnerabilities as a given for migratory success.

Indeed many aspiring migrants in Pakistan told me that at least three to four years of suffering is something they are well prepared for; this was, according to them, as important as the fee of the "agent" who arranges their journey to Europe. While Haroon did not have such an opinion after more than twice that time of *actual struggle* (unlike the *imagined struggle* of the aspiring young migrants), people back home and certainly his brother still did. This was one reason Haroon could never share that instead of moving to Italy through yet another intra-European re-migration, he visited Coming Home, the return counselling centre in Munich.

5.2 Closing thoughts: avoiding return, if possible, even upon return

In this chapter, I have highlighted how a very emasculating perception of "voluntary" return is prevalent not only among many (Pakistani) migrant men but also among people "left behind" in Pakistan. Most people—friends, family, close relatives and the extended *biraderi* and local community—have little idea of the hardships and precarity that irregularised "economic" migrants—face in Europe. Since migrants usually understate their migratory vulnerabilities, as shown above in the case of Amir. The expectations of the people "left behind" are rarely sensitive to the difficult realities for irregularised migrants in Europe for two main reasons. Firstly because, relatively speaking, many see the conditions in Europe, no matter how terrible, as better (see section

2.4.2 for the example about experiencing "luxuries" at a German camp vis-a-vis Pakistan). Secondly, and what is more relevant for the discussion here, is that people often believe their loved ones to be the exception to the norm which is partly also due to the lives that migrants curate for the imagination of those "left behind".

In addition to Amir, let's take another example. Gul, an irregularised migrant who was present during my farewell conversation with Aman (see chapter four), has kept his precarious situation and legal status in Germany from his family. When I visited his family in their one-room house in Noshera Virkan, a village close to Gujranwala, to collect some documents he had asked me to bring back to Germany, I found that they were under the impression that he had *pakay kaghaz* (permanent documents/residence) and now only needed a job before he could start supporting them out of their bare bone conditions. But in fact, he only received an *Ausbildungsduldung* more recently (about a year after this episode). The German government introduced this particular kind of *Duldung* for *Ausbildung* (vocational training), another form of "tolerance" (non)status but one that works slightly differently from those introduced in chapter one in 2016. Under the so-called Integration Act, the *Ausbildungsduldung* was meant to grant a longer-than-usual suspension of deportation (about three years) for those (rejected) asylum seekers who start a vocational training program and subsequently gave those who complete their vocational training a chance to regularise (Drangsland 2021). According to Kari Anne Drangsland (2020: 1130), through this act, the German state deploys techniques of "future giving" combined with a temporary "suspension and deportability" that makes people comply with the state despite being disposable. While Gul sees a future for himself now, no matter how fragile and insecure, the fact remains that his family has little idea of what he has gone through (and is still going through). Even people with some idea or understanding because of their own European migratory experiences frame it as a necessary struggle associated with one's manhood, like Alam's brother-in-law.

If one loses hope or, more appropriately, is made to do so through despair-inciting practices and policies in Germanys and "decides" to return, such a decision is not readily accepted. Apart from the above-mentioned reason, i.e. asymmetrical knowledge/experience, there are some common yet distinctive reasons at play: Like many others, Haroon's family had, for example, sold some property to afford his journey to Europe. On top of that, his elder brother had to support the whole family by driving a taxi while Haroon was away for more than eight years trying to acquire legal status in

Europe—all the while able to *only* support himself in Europe. How could he tell his brother and the rest of the family that he could not persevere anymore and wanted to return? That he "chose" to return and thereby not fulfil the family's expectations or re-buy the sold property. That he would not be able to build a mansion like many in the area—not even a small house (cf. Erdal 2012). That he

Image 9: A view of mansions built by migrants from the main street to Haroon's place

Harron was the only exception to my mainly Punjabi migrant interlocutor but provided an interesting comparison. Unlike the Punjabi regions where I conducted fieldwork in Kotli Azad Kashmir many "regular" migrants who moved to the United Kingdom have build fancy mansions in their "home" areas where they often do not return to. However, this means that this material and visual sight as a testimony to migration reverberates in the imaginations of the locals. There are such mansion in places like Mandi Bahauddin but their density in certain parts of Azad Kashmir is incomparable to other "emigration hubs" in Pakistan.

"chose" to not only destroy all their hopes by coming back but had no qualms about becoming a "deadweight." What kind of man would that make him, if a man at all? Saying that he was deported and not a "voluntary" returnee was his way out of this affective and gendered dilemma. This improvisation upon return allowed him to manoeuvre himself in the highly masculine return context and live up to the migratory masculine ideals of the community, particularly his brother.

In short, irregularised migrants face affective pressures and social expectations to follow through with their migratory projects on the one hand and encounter restrictive mobility regimes on the other. These two forces not only produce "vulnerable masculinities" (Moliner 2020) but shape and influence migrants' unplanned "*rasta*" (way; but also a solution) and affective actions—i.e. migratory improvisations—to deal with those very vulnerabilities. Hence it can be argued that restrictive mobility regimes not only produce vulnerable masculinities—modes of being a man defined by a constant and protracted threat of losing one's manhood—but reproduce a hierarchy of migrant masculinities when migrants try to overcome restrictive mobility and associated vulnerabilities: Migratory improvisations, after all, work in "collaboration" with social expectations and socially constructed ideas of honour, success and respect that circulate locally and translocally. They are aimed not only at overcoming state borders but also social boundaries that distinguish between their success and failure as a man in Pakistan. The cases of Jameel, Amir, and Gul, amongst others like Qabeer discussed in the previous chapter, exemplify this. Like them, the vast majority do everything in their power to avoid return: Their migratory *jugaad* or improvisations to look for a "rasta" (way) include living through the difficulties and vulnerabilities of irregularisation, re-migration within Europe (and much more) in an effort to overcome returning and being considered a failure. However, as shown by the examples of Alam and Haroon, amongst others like Jamshed and Mubeen shared in the previous chapter, vulnerable masculinities follow men into their "voluntary" return and create affective, social and material difficulties in the country of origin as well. To manage this situation, returnees resort to a different set of improvised "strategies" or *jugaadan*[76] upon return. Some prefer to be seen as deportees; others emphasise the achievement of their personal desires and collective/familial goals, and almost all credit the role of *taqdeer* (destiny) in their return (which is the topic of the following chapter). Paradoxically at the same time, for many irregularised Pakistani men in Germany, a "voluntary" return entails not only succumbing to despair and weakness but is also unbefitting for a good Muslim man. One of my interlocutors in Munich explained while talking about his *Ausreisepflicht* or order to leave notice: "Allah does not like those who lose hope." Highlighting the intersection of the hope–destiny dyad with masculine visions of piety and faith, he implied that losing hope is not only unman-like but means losing faith in his God (Allah). In the following chapter, I will attend to both these sides of destiny and dilate on the matter more generally.

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[76] Plural of *jugaad* (singular).

Chapter 6: Destiny Affects
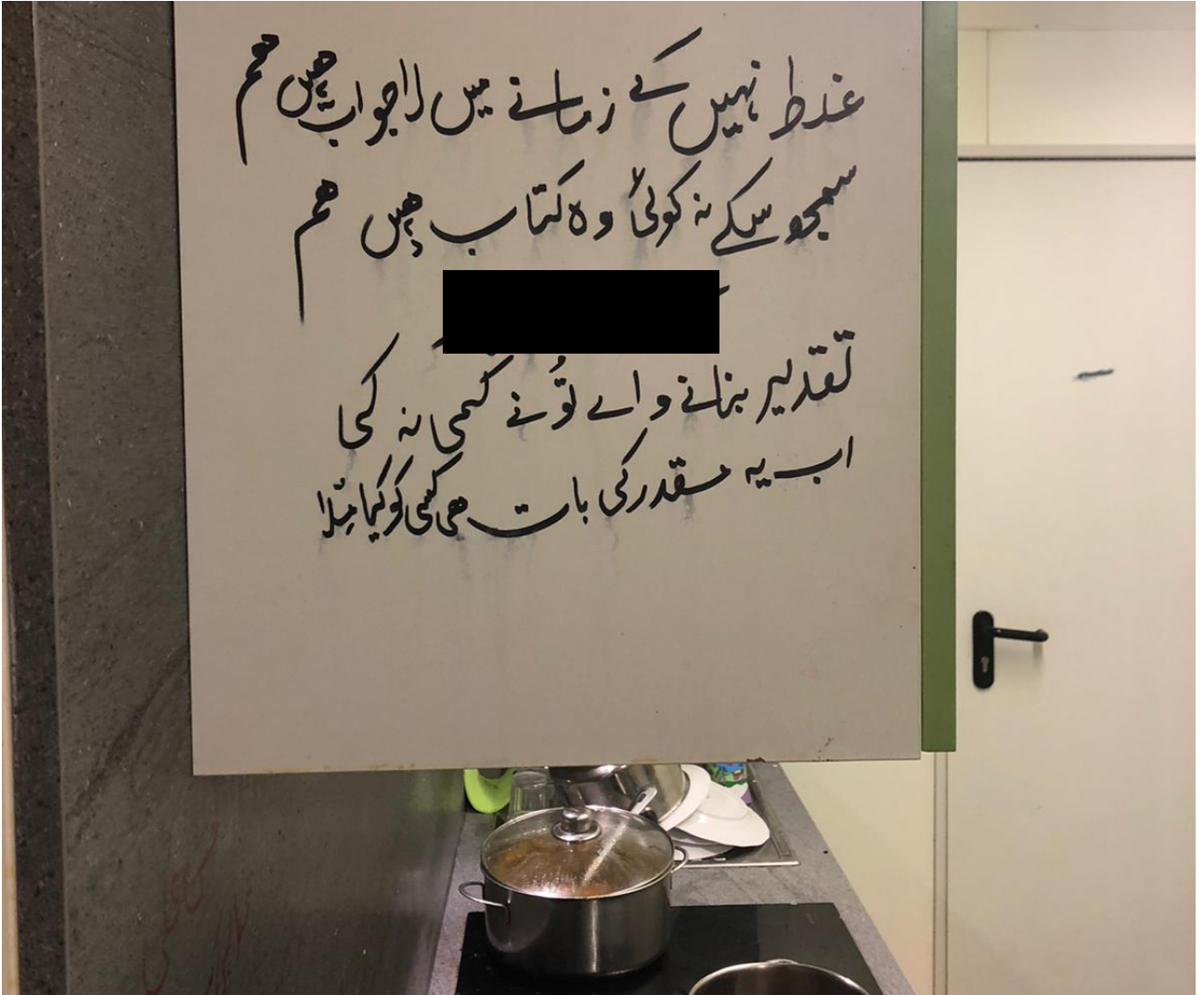
Image 10: Poem on destiny at a camp close to Munich

There were many poems written on different surfaces of this container accommodation at a "refugee camp" just outside the city of Munich. From poems about identity on doors, to the nature and state of being on windows. The poem/verse seen in this photo written below the redacted real name of author is translated below by me.

taqdeer bananay walay tunay kami na ki

ab ye muqaddar ki baat hai kisi ko kya mila

You could not have been more gracious, the author of destiny (*taqdeer*),

Who gets what is now up to fate

(My transliteration and translation)

6.1 At the core of migratory improvisations: *taqdeer* and the unfolding of life

One of my initial encounters with the concept of *taqdeer* (destiny) in migration was literary and poetic in nature at first sight. A poem chalked or, more appropriately, penned down on a kitchen cabinet. However, it was more than a literary encounter because of the context of it being in a Munich "refugee camp" and the author's situation as an irregularised migrant figuring out ways of staying in Europe. It gave me valuable insight into the feelings and affects of irregularised migrants. Hakeem, the author, has since moved to Portugal, but at the time, he was still waiting for the outcome of his asylum (appeal) in Germany. The verse was a way of making sense of the awaited outcome, not just for him but also for the ten other Pakistanis residents of this camp in somewhat different but equally, if not more precarious legal situations.

Methodologically, *taqdeer* proved to be an important linguistic door into the affective lives of—irregularised migrants and people considering returning to Pakistan or migrating yet again (re-migration to another European country)—my primary interlocutors. Over the course of my fieldwork, I realised how this affective signifier shaped and was shaped by the everyday life and migratory improvisations of many of my Muslim interlocutors in Germany, Italy and Pakistan. That is to say, common yet idiosyncratically experienced (and acted upon) ideas of *taqdeer* do not only have an affective value but inform actual decisions at every stage of the migratory improvisations (including return). Perspectives of *taqdeer* serve as an affective recourse to deal with the liminality and adversity that often comes with risky and improvised mobility; provide people with a way to engage with the vulnerabilities and uncertainties in their lives; allow people to make sense of the precarious situations borne out of restrictive mobility regimes. Moreover, through the use of *taqdeer* as a narrative, people are able to communicate and justify their decisions, lack of agency and *juggad* (or improvisations actions) to overcome that lack of agency. The felt, narrative and agentic value of *taqdeer* for my Muslim interlocutors and their irregularised migratory lives becomes especially clear once one familiarises oneself with the workings of *umeed* (hope) and its circulation in their lives.

To begin with, desires, hopes, and imagined futures of a better life through migration function not only at different levels of collectivity (familial, social and societal) but are impacted by biographies or life histories (cf. social and societal hope in Kleist 2017c). Therefore, I would like to demonstrate

the working of the various affective forces at the different levels that form the basis of irregularised migration through Alam's life history, the contingent unfolding of his life. This, I believe, is necessary before I go into more specific matters of what I have previously termed the hope-destiny dyad and its role in migration and return.

Alam was born in a small village on the banks of river Chenab in northern Punjab. The death of his father when he was a teenager, coupled with the lack of land ownership, capital, and a social welfare state, meant that education beyond basic schooling was not a matter of choice. It was a luxury he and his family could not afford. As the eldest of six brothers and one sister, he had to start earning for the family early. In Pakistan, social, political, economic and familial situations often lead people to tragic choices, such as dropping out of school in order to feed their families. To relate my relatively privileged case to Alam's, my father's death when I was 14 meant that my siblings and I had to quit our fancy schools and continue our education elsewhere on scholarships. Even that seemed complicated, financially and otherwise, without a male head in a vastly unequal and patriarchal society with a "Hobbesian twist", prompting us to quit school altogether and return to our village for about a year (Armytage 2020; Mahar 2021a: 257).

In search of human dignity or sometimes to simply survive, people try and make the best of their circumstances. Thus as soon as Alam was old enough, he joined the Pakistani army. This, according to him, brought some "financial stability" to his family for the two decades that he "served as kitchen staff within the Pakistani army." The position also brought social status, especially in his later years of service when he was "working in the officers' mess". However, at the same time, not only did his family's needs grow, but he eventually also started a family of his own. Since he had to move as demanded by the army during his service and took later his wife (and eventually also the two children) with him wherever he went. The thought that he (and later they) needed a house did not occur until his compulsory retirement at the end of twenty years of non-commissioned service.

Over the two decades that he was away working for the army, his mother and his siblings had moved back to the city of Mandi Bahauddin, where she originally came from and where her family and *biraderi* still lived. As a widow, she could move into her family's home and felt she would be supported by kin in her home town. Upon his retirement at the age of almost forty, in the early 2000s, Alam too moved to Mandi Bahauddin but found himself without a place to live and

Image 11: Alam in his army uniform as a young man
Alam asked me to take a photo of this photo with my phone; something I would not have done otherwise.

significantly reduced income in the form of a meagre pension. The pension was barely enough to allow him to run the household expenses and rent a place for his family in a neighbourhood with open sewers, heaps of garbage and unpaved roads. "So much filth [points to a plot filled with garbage and sewage], in Germany, not even animals would be allowed to live like this", Alam shared with me when he took me to the part of town from where he had managed to move his nuclear family out upon his return from Germany in 2019. His brothers still live there, only a few narrow streets and a sewer-swamp away from their previous residence, which was a single room in a relative's home that served as a dwelling for his nuclear family until he returned from Germany.

When Alam moved to Mandi Bahauddin upon his "first retirement" from the military job (as opposed to his "second retirement" or return from Germany), he started his own business and cooked at festivals, weddings and religious events. Though promising, he realised, the business would never make enough for him to buy the house or motorbike he and his family wished for. Moreover, other responsibilities always weighed heavier on his shoulder as the eldest. He had to

support his mother and the family of one of the two brothers, who had passed away. One of the brothers, a *mazdoor* (manual day-wage labourer), had died in a work-related accident, leaving behind his wife and two children. The reasons for the death of the other brother, whose widow moved back to her family, are less clear to the family and failing to name the "incurable" disease that caused the death, what consoles them (and more than that makes sense to them) is the idea that it was "*allah da hukkam*" (Allah's order). Sometimes such diseases are not as incurable as they seem, but the affordability to diagnose them structures people's access and hence their incurability. In simple words, the issue is often that access to good healthcare is unaffordable for the vast majority in Pakistan, making diagnosis difficult and, at best, delayed. Therefore even treatable diseases are effectively incurable for segments of Pakistani society that cannot afford expensive private healthcare facilities. Like the restrictive and unequal mobility regime in Europe, the neoliberal healthcare system in Pakistan can only be endured through ideas of an ordained world by my interlocutors. To endure the hardships (affective and practical) produced by such inhumane systems would otherwise not be possible for many.

By the time of Alam's retirement, his younger brothers were independent and tried to help the families of the deceased brothers. However, their financial situation was much more precarious than his, and according to Alam's wife, "most of the burden" was always passed on to him. Alam does not see such things as a "burden" but as responsibility. Nevertheless, what seems common in either case is the pressure of delivering. His wife, from her perspective, thinking of the immediate needs of her children, perhaps always saw this responsibility as a burden. Still, life was not bad, and Alam is a humble man who can be content with little. However, his wife and children could see people around them with nice clothes, owning a house and motorbikes, if not cars, and the pressure to change that was something he felt. He knew that the seemingly "luxurious" demands of his wife and children for a place and means of transportation were legitimate as they were also linked to being able to live meaningful and fulfilled lives. That staying and continuing work in Pakistan would not help him achieve that. These thoughts were turned into action when his wife had an accident while on a motorbike with her brother. Her broken arm meant an operation and healthcare costs that had to be borrowed; this debt was the last straw that broke the border in his mind.

Alam first moved to Saudi Arabia and then to Dubai, where he worked for over six years as a cook in Pakistani restaurants. Working in the Middle East meant some improvement in the living

conditions of his family and even some savings. Still, he could not fulfil many of his other obligations, such as marrying off his daughter or buying a house[77]. And when someone told him that he could earn much more with his skills in Germany, he started talking to "agents" through these connections.

In 2015 he returned to Pakistan for a "holiday". At least that's what he had told his family when he had quit his job in Dubai in reality. And "without telling anyone", he ventured on the "*dunkey*" to Europe. They only found out once he had crossed the border into Iran and asked them to pay an instalment to the agent from their savings. His youngest brother was also with him but was caught in Iran (severely beaten and then deported to Pakistan after a couple of days). His "wife and mother would have tried to stop" him from leaving had he told them he was going on a *dunkey*. However, once he was in Germany, they stopped him "from returning." When I brought up the topic one evening, his wife said:

> "It's true [of course], we would not have wanted him to [go and] die on this dangerous way, but since he had made it there alive, he might as well have stayed a bit longer … could have gotten us a car [she burst into laughter and clapped her hands]!"

In Holzkirchen and Munich, he mostly "worked at hotels [restaurants]", but also, for several weeks each year, he "cooked *sehri* and *iftari*" (meals for keeping and breaking fast in the month of Ramzan) at a mosque. He worked several jobs, sometimes simultaneously and mainly under the table. If he had free days, he would "pick up bottles and cans" for *Pfand* (deposit). He "did anything and everything" to "fix things in Pakistan".

Now, upon his "second retirement" (i.e. return from Germany), he has a small corner shop and some construction-related equipment (wheelbarrows, ladders, scaffolding planks etc.) that he rents out. The five-*marla* (125 m2) shop and yard where he keeps these things are located right opposite his ten-*marla* (250 m2) house in a small "*town*" (private housing scheme) just outside Mandi Bahauddin city. Property buyers in this town—mostly labour migrants like Alam living abroad in various parts of the world—were promised all the modern amenities (sewage, roads, electricity, water etc.) needed for their future dwellings. However, the developers of this pseudo-urban housing

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[77] What they now had upon his return from Germany was not only because of his time there but also Saudi Arabia and Dubai. Nevertheless, the greatest share he had "earned in Germany".

scheme sold the plots and ran off without delivering most of the promised amenities. Still, Alam and his family are happy that they have a place of their own, particularly ever since they managed to get electricity from someone nearby. Alam also helped his youngest brother buy a two-*marla* (50 m2) plot next to his shop. This (youngest) brother had lived with Alam (eldest) and then with the middle brother after his wedding. However, the last time I visited in December 2021, he had moved into his own house with his wife and newborn and was painting it, which is also what he did for a living; painting (often migrant/remittance) houses in Mandi Bahauddin.

Image 12: Alam's shop

Alam's shop is located opposite his house and on the corner of the street such that the space behind the shop is accessible from the other side and is used to store construction related equipment that he rents out (wooden scaffolding planks, wheelbarrow, masonry tools etc.)

Alam's story, abridged here in the form of a short life history, highlights how irregularised migration and the hope associated with it are shaped by biographies and structural issues. These are, in turn, entangled with the communal social and societal ideas about migration in places like Mandi Bahauddin, where every household has at least one member of the family somewhere abroad.

Therefore, affective pressures linked to migration can be said to have affective and social histories. But how is destiny entwined with hope? And, more importantly, how do the two unfold in the lives of my interlocutors?

6.2 Destiny in Islam: the "malleable fixity" of *taqdeer*[78]

Prima facie, *taqdeer* is predetermined for Muslims, but this belief does not render human agency impossible in everyday life (cf. the protestant understanding of destiny in Weber 2005). A discussion with Hammad and his wife Kristina about *taqdeer*/destiny exemplifies this:

> Kristina: "I don't think everything is written somewhere, and destiny is already made on your birthday or something. I think you have to go for your goals, and you have always to follow your dreams so they can come true. Maybe there is God guiding us, but I think destiny is mainly in your own hands. Well, let's say you can influence your destiny in your decisions and your way of living."

> Hammad: "As I am a believing Muslim, I really believe in destiny (*taqdeer*) and that our life lies in Allah's hands. But I also think that you have to work for your happiness and goals in life so that Allah has the chance to support you."

Alice Elliot and Laura Menin (2018: 293-94) conceptualise this very "peculiar quality" of destiny in Islam as its "malleable fixity." They take it that, on the one hand, Muslim conceptions of destiny have some "fixed" qualities and, on the other hand, a "distinctly malleable nature" (ibid). In other words, a divine or willed decree is rarely encountered "without also encountering manipulation, and negotiation, prediction and divination, interpretation and creativity" (ibid). They exemplify the conjunctive "fixity" and "malleability" of the concept in the Muslim context using Luca Nevola's (2018) ethnographic work with the Zaydi Shiites in Yemen, who simultaneously uphold a doctrine of free will and a "decreeing Muslim God" (cf. 'everyday destiny' and 'enacted destiny' in Elliot 2016; Nieswand 2010 respectively). It seems counterintuitive, perhaps even aporetic, to conceptualise a "destiny" that can leave space for agentive power to inform future possibilities. However, that is what I have also witnessed during my research. Elliot and Menin (2018: 294) point out that this paradoxical nature holds "incredible potential for comparative anthropological work on

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[78] This section and a few other parts of the chapter are being revised for a journal article.

productive tensions between fixity and malleability, human and divine power, freedom and constraint, certainty and unpredictability." An "anthropology of destiny" is, for them, "a comparative anthropology of the multiple ways in which people conceptualize, imagine, and reckon with different forms of" malleable fixity (ibid).

The dualism of divine will and human agency has been an essential part of theological discourse in Islam for centuries (De Cillis 2014). In practice, however, the relationship between divine and free will is confronted by an ineluctable complexity and entanglement that the notion of duality does not capture. Not to mention that such a generalised theological understanding tends to reduce all Muslims into a single subjectivity (cf. the critique of Geertz's assertions about Balinese subjectivity at cockfights in Crapanzano 2010: 73-74). Therefore, the different situations my interlocutors face in their quotidian lives, combined with each person's phenomenological understanding of the divine/free will dichotomy, make "malleable fixity" a better-suited concept to analyse and interpret "destiny" more appropriately *taqdeer*, within my research.

An example comes to mind here. In Pakistan, after his return, Mubeen would "sometimes gamble". While I am not aware of the actual extent of his gambling because I did not stay at his place, as I did with some other interlocutors in Pakistan (e.g. Alam), it was certainly something he indulged in more than just once or twice. On one occasion, meeting me in Badami Bagh[79], an area of old Lahore where he lives, he shared why he was planning to venture on an irregularised migratory journey yet again with the metaphor of gambling. He explained that he could not expect any winnings without placing a bet: The outcome "*haar jeet*" (loss or victory) is in "His [Allah's] hand." I found the metaphor interesting on so many levels. Gambling and *dunkey* (irregularised migration) are two "games" often considered questionable or "illegal" by people who do not "play". Yet, Mubeen's insights show the complexities of such games of chance imbued with hope and their meaning for people like him (cf. Belloni 2016). Yes, these "games" may be rigged, betting by local bookies and mobility through unequal regimes, but "even Allah can't help" if he (Mubeen) does not

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[79] My maternal aunt also lives in this area of Lahore (nearby the walled city) that has deteriorated to almost slum-like conditions over the decades due to a lack of necessary municipal attention (which is mainly drawn to new lucrative projects expanding the city eastwards towards the Indian border). While those who could afford have moved out, the old residents (including families like my Aunt's and Mubeen's) who cannot move out live in this area with resentment towards the newcomers moving in from other parts of the country, as well as Afghanistan (who settle here because of its proximity to the Lahore bus station and affordability). The irony is that many irregularised migrants from this area suffering from xenophobia and discrimination in other parts of the world do not afford newcomers in their neighbourhood the hospitality that they themselves deserve and demand when abroad.

"give it a try". What does he know about "what *taqdeer* has" in store (*ki pata taqdeer da*)? He may have "lost that bet once" (*bazi har janda banda ik ware*), but that's no reason "to be disheartened" (*di chota nai kareeda*). Coming back to Germany was certainly not a plan when he decided to return to Pakistan. At the time, I specifically remember him asking me to help him somehow expedite his return as I had "contacts" (*jan pehchan*) at the return counselling centre. He was "fed up" with the "prisoner-like" (*kaydian aali*) life in Munich and certainly disheartened and told the same to a friend I introduced him to in 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. This friend, a *Der Spiegel*

Image 13: Mubeen and I laughing in disbelief at the ridiculous IOM campaign poster

The poster claims in bold "Voluntary returnees from Germany have a message", with the image of a shipwreck to induce fear (that they hoped would be reinforced by horror stories that returnees will tell). Mubeen's message at the event was clearly not what they had hoped for (instead of stories of horror he shared his ideas of migrating yet again!). When living a fulfilled life in Pakistan seems more difficult than the risky journey to Europe it is no surprise that such messages fall on deaf ears. People like Mubeen think that they do not and any other choice in a country that fails to make structural changes required for hope of a fulfilled life in Pakistan. Particular men from the lower socioeconomic strata are worse of than there parents generation but held to the same standards of success. A solution, a hope, of achieving that through migration leads many to try again and again.

journalist, asked me if she could join me at the camp and, upon meeting Mubeen, conducted a brief anonymous interview with Mubeen with me as a translator. When she learned that Mubeen wanted to return, she said she would like to visit Pakistan to interview him and some of my other interlocutors returning from Germany when I was in the field. She applied for a journalist visa with my sponsorship (due to which the Pakistani Intelligence Bureau showed up at my mother's place) but eventually could not make it due to travel restrictions.

In 2021, when I reminded Mubeen of the time in Munich and what he had said to me (and my reporter friend) back then (at the beginning of 2020), he responded in a playful manner: "There, one misses here, and here one misses there." When I told this to my friend over WhatsApp, as she inquired about Mubeen when I was in Pakistan, her four separate but consecutive text messages were (punctuations added, as in other instances):

> "All you say is crazy interesting; Shocking but also so interring; I mean, he spent years in [camp name], doing nothing, not being given any chance; Do you know when he starts off again?"

6.3 The practical and affective value of *taqdeer*

With its "malleable fixity", *taqdeer* carries two entwined overarching values for my Muslim interlocutors that intersect with affect. Firstly, it allows them to engage with their situation heuristically, developing new improvisations along their multi-directional and unplanned journeys and reworking solutions. Thereby allowing them to manage the circulation of affects produced by actual or potential return and competing hopes of regularisation whilst yielding the power to act and improvise or find *jugaadi* solutions in times of despair. Secondly, *taqdeer* provides a much-needed narrative recourse. This narrative value of *taqdeer* can be interpreted as a process through which my interlocutors make sense of their (past and present) experiences whilst simultaneously deriving meaning and the will to future action. As such, their narratives *taqdeer* become central to people's affective ideas about overcoming restrictive mobility, intertwining with, amongst other things, their feelings ensuing from familial responsibilities, gendered obligations, personal yet relational desires, and hopes.

While the heuristic part allows people to yield agency in contexts that often limit it, the narrative value of *taqdeer* is that it serves as an important way to accept, contest, or make sense of legal realities and mobility regimes in their stories. Moreover, their narratives and stories laden with affective and sometimes literary/poetic notions of *taqdeer* are a means to make sense of the self and their dilemmas and communicate their often difficult situations to loved ones. In that vein, I argue that the heuristic and narrative value of *taqdeer* work together and form an integral part of the migratory improvisations of irregularised migrants. That is to say that the narrative aspect allows for the continuation of the heuristic approach to overcoming immobility (or other unwanted situation), and the heuristically informed actions are supported by the narrative understanding. Together both keep the migratory improvisations of my interlocutors going. Therefore, I claim that the Muslim understandings of destiny (encapsulated in *taqdeer*) form an integral part of the affective, social, narrative and agentic lives of Pakistanis struggling with irregularised migration and return.

6.4 (Im)mobility, irregularisation, *taqdeer*

Gujjar, another resident of the camp where Hakeem and Mubeen had lived, once said to me:

> "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."

He then explained the role of "luck"[80] 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 (as he eventually was in 2023). 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 *papers* … Allah knows best."

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[80] 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. As such, his use of the term "luck" denotes the unfolding of *taqdeer*.

While the conceptual or discursive differences and everyday-theological interpretations of *taqdeer* are abundant, the term is perhaps best explained in Hakeem's poetic expression about his pending asylum appeal at the time: Allah has graciously authored his *taqdeer*, and the outcome is not in Hakeem's hand. Nor is it in the hands of the German state; "*ab yeh muqaddar ki baat hai*" (it is now up to fate). Nevertheless, once his appeal was rejected, and the outcome of Allah's will concerning his stay in Germany became apparent to him, he had to improvise his subsequent migratory actions—figure out a mobility *jugaad.* He eventually re-migrated to Portugal. In other words, while *taqdeer* is graciously "authored" by Hakeem's God, it does not take away from his agency and free will. In this instance, it only helped him understand and make sense of the impossibility of regularising in Germany. Unlike many others, Hakeem did not deliberate about going back or did not even consider going to the Coming Home return counselling centre to buy some time at the last minute. Having spent several years in Greece before coming to Germany in 2015, he had a network of friends who, since then, ended up in different European countries through their own improvisatory journeys. Towards the last few weeks, before the decision on his appeal came, he would constantly be informing himself of where, how, and what he could do if his Allah did not have Germany written in his *taqdeer*.

Such a way of being in the world is not just intertwined with the economic but, more importantly, the social and affective lives of many Muslims. The "malleable fixity" of *taqdeer* allows people to simultaneously uphold ideas of divine decree (willed destiny) and free will, which is particularly useful for irregularised migrants who have to "plan" and improvise on the go. In that way, perspectives and especially narratives of *taqdeer* form an intrinsic and valuable way to deal with precarious mobility and inform the necessary improvisatory actions of my interlocutors. More generally, similar ethnosamentic terms, ideas and "religious cosmologies" function across the world to make sense of, if not alleviate, the liminality and adversity that often comes with irregularised mobility in the lives of Muslims but also Christians (cf. Nieswand 2010; Elliot 2016, 2021, 2022). Fassin (2018) would perhaps say that such a way of seeing and existing is part and parcel of being a "precarious nomad," a contemporary "form of life" which, according to him, includes illegalised, irregularised and undocumented migrants and asylum seekers and refugees, amongst other humans struggling with mobility in a severely unequal world.

For my interlocutors, firstly, such narratives provide them with a way to create and share meaning with their family, friends, and peers and hence share the emotional burdens (and joys) that come with their situation. Secondly, they allow people to make sense of their situation and act in a manner not afforded to them by the "objective" German state and its asylum or migration laws. Thirdly and perhaps intriguingly, they provide "failed" asylum seekers, particularly those back in Pakistan, with an opportunity to cope with undesirable social burdens.

I will try to shed light on some of these values, mainly the last two, by expanding on the occasion at Alam's home I first reference in the opening vignette in chapter one. The discussion that broke out between Alam and his brother-in-law Yaseen after the *eid-milad al-nabi* celebrations was just an initial surfacing of feelings and views about irregularised migration and return. Yaseen's disapproval of Alam's "voluntary" return through rhetoric and personal experience of a "successful" migration was undoubtedly a gendered affair that I have already discussed (see previous chapter). However, the issue at the core needs to be analysed in depth and temporally. Particularly as such incidents have a social past and an equally relational future. Beyond the idiosyncrasies of Alam's case, his experiences give us insights into the kind of affective pressures many irregularised migrants face before departure, during their stay abroad and upon return. And the extreme value of religious cosmologies of destiny in a situation where migrants often lack agency within formal migration structures and face pressures to overcome the status quo (and the systems that safeguard it) through improvisational efforts. As such, it is not just an issue that this only his family faces, but many other migrant men and their families face due to restrictive mobility regimes.

While on the evening of *eid-milad al-nabi,* there was no flareup in the sense of a heated exchange between the two men; their tone, manner and implicit jabs hinted at the rift brewing underneath the surface. The subsurface rift eventually cracked the social surface in 2022 when Alam severed ties with his brother-in-law, whom he now calls a "crook" (*do number insaan*). On that eve where it all *seemed* to start, however, Alam looked at me as if he was addressing me since I was the person researching migration and return but 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, on the contrary, thought that there was no way he could have tried harder. He was destined not to get papers in Germany, he asserted with "*jo rab chahe*" (what God wills).

In the previous chapter, I discussed issues of masculinity and how, for example, Alam had to challenge his brother-in-law's assertions questioning his status as a man. Evoking *taqdeer*—the will of Allah entangled with his actions—played an important role in Alam keeping his social identity as a man intact while resisting the culturally mandated obligations placed upon him. 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. Attributing return to Allah's will can help returnees deal with their ambiguous realities whilst challenging masculine societal demands (at least for a few years). After all, he had achieved a lot "through his labour in Germany" and "by Allah's grace"; a home, a small shop, his mother's *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and his daughter's wedding and much more. However, he added a small but essential caveat: "If I had gotten the *papers*, that would have been great, but you can't argue with Him [Allah]." Alam's example of this empowering use of *taqdeer* shows that perspectives of divine will are enmeshed with human agency, and especially the narratives informed by such views (and attitudes) are not only valuable for irregularised migrants whilst they are in a host country like Germany but equally crucial once they are back in the country of origin.

Though it may seem so from aspects of Alam's return experiences, an acceptance of return and post-return situations is not necessarily always the case, as I have shown through other examples. Even Alam's contentment had a limit. I had initially thought that Alam proved that there are "voluntary" returnees who are satisfied with their lives after returning from Germany. However, I noticed a big difference between his contentedness when I spent some time with him and his family during the first phase of my fieldwork in Pakistan (2019/2020) and during the second phase (2021/2022). Today he is more vocal about his "mistake" but feels "too old to do something" about it (still, he prefers not to say this to IOM). Unlike Alam (primarily due to his age), many migrants do not give up on their hope of settling in Europe upon their "voluntary" return or deportation, especially not upon their asylum refusal in Europe as was the case of Hakeem, Qabeer and Jameel to give a few examples. As I have highlighted, most Pakistanis resort to an improvisational (secondary) intra-European re-migration rather than returning (see sections 3.1 and 4.3 for statistical references). According to three German citizens (volunteers) who support asylum seekers in different Bavarian towns, more than a dozen of "their Pakistanis" moved to other European states. Only a few had gone back to Pakistan[81].

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[81] In three towns close to Munich, each of these volunteers acted as a supporter for the 15-20 Pakistanis in their respective towns. Out of the 50 or so Pakistanis in these three places, only 5 returned to Pakistan.

6.5 The point of return

Arriving in Europe for many Pakistani irregularised 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 one and make sense through the ubiquitous idea of *taqdeer*. Thus for many forced nomads, the hope of acquiring documents and the countless improvisatory efforts 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. That is to say, as time, energy, feelings, and emotions are invested in improvisations, it fuels and demands more improvisations until they crash into the hard wall of deportation or are forced to make a "softer" emergency landing of a "voluntary" return.

It is worth noting that "trying every means possible" is a subjective and temporal threshold enacted through shifting hopes within 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 a couple of years" upon their arrival in Europe, as a young university student in Pakistan whose father was in Europe for many years trying his best to get his *kagaz*, told me. Depending on people's subjective threshold, which is influenced by various factors, they try for as long as possible. 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 much more (Cassarino 2014a). Once they have tried everything in their power, they are left with one choice and have to give up on their dreams and hopes eventually. To put it more precisely, they are made to do so, and for the ethnographer, the (in)distinctions between "voluntary" and "forced" return become clear for analysis in such moments of decision-making as I have discussed in chapter four on voluntariness (cf. Cleton and Schweitzer 2020; Mahar 2020d).

At this stage, people enter what I call a point of return[82]. This point of return is borne out of a mixture of hopefulness and hopelessness, transposed over time. Initially, desperation and boredom in Pakistan or ideas of a better life elsewhere fuel a hopeful future in Europe. This gives birth to peoples' "adventurous" and improvised migratory journeys. However, over time, the hopeless and desperate experiences with the German state seem to ignite a hopeful imagination and taqdeer back in Pakistan. Often, this cycle is repeated several times; returning to Pakistan from Germany is usually only one of many such returns.

6.5.1 Duldung: between rejection and return

A *Duldung,* as I have explained in detail in the introductory chapter (see section 1.3), heavily influences an irregularised migrant's stay after the rejection of their asylum both in affective and practical terms. While this seems like the objective state and "blind" law at work, according to Gujjar, much depends "on the mood of the person sitting behind the desk." While telling me this, he imitated the official at the foreigners" office, typing annoyedly and not looking toward him. As Gujjar sees it, the renewal and validity period had more to do with the officials "situation at home" than anything else. Things like "whether or not they had fought" with their partner that day, he explained. Gujjar's observation here helps us understand the subjective and arbitrary workings of the German state bureaucracy, which regularly aims to establish itself as an objective arbitrator of human rights according to "the rules"—separating the "deserving" from the "undeserving" (cf. Sökefeld 2019). Gujjar's instinctive analysis of how the "asylum machine" operates is not far-fetched considering a well-cited quantitive study of 207,000 asylum case judgements[83] in the United States (US). In their research, Anthony Heyes and Soodeh Saberian (2019) show that after controlling for all other variables, an increase of 5.56 Celsius in temperature results in a 6.55% decrease in the grant rate of asylum applications. The comparison between the renewal of a *Duldung* in Germany and asylum hearings at a court in the United States (US) may seem slightly unreasonable. Still, the point here is not to lay a specific claim to the workings of the former (bureaucratic decisions in Germany) based on the workings of the latter (legal decisions in the US) but a more abstract one. In that, seemingly objective state apparatuses or domains are subject to very human proclivities and subjectivities determined by context, setting, and a host of other

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[82] 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 elsewhere is the paper, for some after a decade or more.

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

seemingly banal factors like mood, atmosphere, or sentiments, as many scholars of affect rightly point out (Dukes et al. 2021). However, it must be quickly pointed out that in her ethnographic study of the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, Laura Affolter (2021) shows that such processes are not entirely "subjective" or "arbitrary." Building on practice theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, she claims that "(new) decision-makers are socialised … and thereby acquire an institutional habitus" (ibid: 5;117). As such, she questions the "subjectivity" of the decisions and actions of people in administrative and bureaucratic positions and reframes it as "subjectivity" that is "socialised" (ibid: 16) or, as she later quotes Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992: 126) their actions are a result of "socialised subjectivity."

6.5.2 A taqdeer beyond Duldung

During my above-mentioned exchange with Gujjar, Hakeem was also present and invoked the divine towards the end of our conversation. Perhaps with his pending asylum case (at the time) in mind, he reminded Gujjar that the officials could do what they wanted, but in the end, nothing that Allah does not wish can be done.[84] Bhatti, another resident of the camp (sitting with us) whose asylum request and appeal had been refused, nodded at Hakeem's remark. His asylum had been "discarded," in his words. Talking about his appeal, he told me that it, too, had been rejected. Using the phrase "*bar sutt diti hai*" (to have been discarded/trashed or thrown out), he emphasised the use of power and lack of compassion on the part of the German state who had treated his appeal, and as such him, like "trash." 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. Sometime later, when border restrictions had been put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he contacted me to inquire if it was possible to travel to Italy—perhaps to get another view on the information he had access to. He eventually reached the point where he could not strive anymore and ended up "voluntarily" returning to Pakistan in August 2021. Some months earlier, Hakeem, as per his poem, accepted "Allah's will," communicated through the rejection of his asylum appeal in Germany and moved to Portugal.

Like Bhatti and Hakeem, many either return or struggle further in Europe after a continuous back-and-forth in their decision-making process. This temporality can be viewed as a pendulum of affect

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[84] 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*.

that "oscillation between hope and despair" (Strasser and Sökefeld 2020, forthcoming). The affective decisions of my interlocutors are laden with emotions and affects of hope and despair borne out of various duties, desires and (relational) temporalities (cf. Karlsen 2021). Neither the decision to "voluntarily" return nor the resolve to stay and struggle is a straightforward decision (Erdal and Oeppen 2022).

In addition to the examples above, we can draw on Aman's experience to gain some insight into return decisions or what I have called the *point of return* earlier. A couple of weeks before he left for Pakistan, Aman 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 ... what is written in my kismet, I will get." It took many years and several asylum appeals in at least two different European countries for his initial point of no return—i.e. the plan of not returning—to transform into a *point of return*—trying to imagine what *taqdeer* might have in store for him back in Pakistan. Again, 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 my papers, 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 ... it's wrong; they shouldn't force, fine, they should say it straightforwardly 'leave our country' ... All right. You will attain it [what's written] regardless you are here or there if [I] didn't get the documents, no issues, no complaints ... look, our family gave birth to us; [I] lived in Pakistan for 19 to 20 years and survived. We [general; I] ate food and worked [at the family farm]. Good or bad, it worked, right? Somehow, our system worked. And now, too, *inshallah* [God willing], once I return [to Pakistan], I will take a stand ... look, whatever is written in *kismat, naseeb, taqdeer*, call it whatever, one will get."

6.6 Two entangled domains: state and divine

The return or secondary migration of irregularised Pakistani migrants is navigated within two *entangled domains*. The first is simply the domain of the German bureaucracy or state. Their

interaction with the state as asylum seekers after their irregularised journey to Germany occurs within this domain. In other words, the *state domain* is a field in which all the interactions between them as asylum seekers and the state occurs, from filing an asylum application and working within the formal bureaucratic system to relying on the state's legal apparatuses. However, 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 what their migratory future may hold. As such, this domain is a "door" one needs to open and enter to find out what *taqdeer* has in store.

Based on my interlocutors' religious cosmologies and ideas of *jahan ka malik* (owner of the universe) or *allah-malik* (Allah, the owner), the second domain can be called the *divine domain*. Within this domain, my interlocutors engage with their creator and that of their *taqdeer* without losing free will. Praying, making an effort, hard work and acting virtuously towards fellow humans to alter one's *taqdeer* are all a part of this domain, but simultaneously one must keep faith that life will unfold as is willed by Allah. So while it is hard to exist outside the state domain as an irregularised migrant seeking asylum in Germany, it is the overarching divine domain that one exists within, from the perspective of my interlocutors.

My interlocutors' narrative experiences and explanations highlighted throughout the dissertation, but particularly in this chapter, exemplify the entanglement of the state and the divine domain. My empirical observations demonstrate that their mistrust in the former and unwavering trust in the latter come together to make their situations intelligible and bearable to themselves and others around them. According to Gujjar, the "author of *taqdeer* knows best', and all one can do is pray for His mercy and try their luck. Understanding how the European asylum system works in conjunction with *taqdeer* can give us a profound insight into why many Pakistanis take upon a risky *dunkey* in the first place (for an example of the risks involved due to the securitisation of borders, see Mahar 2020c). According to the European and German asylum regimes, people require protection or refuge based on particular criteria[85]. The European standards notwithstanding, 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" someday (see also Mubeen's analogy of gambling in section 6.2). And, sometimes—as in

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

the cases of my returnee interlocutors—living and working in Europe is not meant to be. Their *taqdeer* beheld no *kaghaz,* but they had to try to find out. They had to probe the state domain and deal with the precarity it produces to explore the vastness of the divine domain and what it had in store for them. However, as my ethnographic comparison of people in different situations and contexts shows, it is also not the final. Gujjar, who was deported in 2023 after crossing into Denmark and being caught recently, called me to tell me that he will be back soon; deportation may have been written in his *taqdeer,* but he triggered it by making the "foolish decision" to go to Denmark. This time might be different. Mubeen's second efforts are also underway.

6.7 Closing thoughts on navigating precarious mobility: *taqdeer* and migratory improvisations

To summarise, in this chapter, I traced out the "affective economy" (Ahmed 2004a) of hope through an emic understanding of destiny, more appropriately, *taqdeer*. If *economy,* in the traditional sense of the word, alludes to the management of financial, commercial or material resources, affects become the resource to be managed in an *affective economy,* according to Ahmed (ibid). This affective resource can then be channelled for social and political goals of all kinds. While I follow Ibbett's (2017) "don't fence me" approach to affects (i.e. not strictly trying to define it, particularly as something different from emotions) in the other chapters of my dissertation, in this chapter, I use the term *affect(ive)* in a slightly contained manner. Particularly when used as a prefix to the term *economy,* it alludes to how affects and emotions become a social and political resource that aids people in engaging with the vulnerabilities and burdens of restrictive mobility, irregularisation and their improvisations to overcome the difficult situation (Cottingham 2022). In such an "economy," emotions and affects informed by ideas of destiny "circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field" and become an essential tool for interpretation, meaning-making and action (Ahmed 2004a: 120). They help people "identify and overcome everyday life problems like fatigue, degrees of comfort or discomfort in situations, our levels of anxiety, and/or our feelings of anger or fear, degrees of our happiness or unhappiness." (McCarthy 2023: 1). Thus emotions and affects not only circulate socially and morally but have the potential to become "practical resources that help us cope with or conquer the dilemmas we confront in everyday life situations" (ibid). The Muslim conception(s) of *taqdeer*, through its role in the ordinary and extraordinary lives of Pakistanis, plays an undeniable role in the affective economy of hope in irregularised migration and return.

Thus, in my opinion, for a better understanding of irregularised migration and precarious mobility, particularly people's deportation or "voluntary" return, *taqdeer* merits a closer anthropological examination. Perspectives and narratives of *taqdeer* not only provide rejected asylum seekers, returnees and deportees with a view that shapes how they see and experience the world but also with creative and agentive ways to deal with their situation. A vision of the world in which *taqdeer* defines one's migratory journey and life trajectory, in general, is helpful for many deportees, returnees as well as asylum seekers who are refused asylum or are waiting for their asylum decisions. It is an affective view that is validated if things work out as wished, but also if not. Since both—in fact, multiple—scenarios are possible as an outcome of *taqdeer,* it acts as an adaptable and valuable lens for irregularised migrants and (rejected) asylum seekers. Such a view gives people hope for a better future and a way to engage with vulnerable situations ensuing from the refusal of asylum, deportation or "voluntary" return. Thus, *taqdeer* becomes an integral part of the "affective economy" of irregularised migration and return due to its relation to hope entangled with religious optimism, as outlined at the beginning. As demonstrated through various ethnographic examples throughout the chapter (and the dissertation), such hope is essential for negotiating with uncertainty, especially the precarious mobility that Pakistani irregularised migrants experience. In essence, precarity in the lives of my interlocutors, or more appropriately, their precarious mobility, gives birth to several concurrent and sometimes competing hopes that only make sense through a concept like *taqdeer*. This concept does not only aid my Pakistani interlocutors in making sense of the ambiguities of choice and agency that come with their precarious mobility. It is a fact of life for many Pakistani Muslims, and this chapter tries to capture some of the ontological subtleties of this way of viewing and experiencing the world as mobility-seeking irregularised migrants. With its abstract notion of "divine will," captured by commonly used phrases like "*jo allah ko manzoor*" or "*jo allah ka hukkam*" (what Allah wishes or orders), *taqdeer* is able to do that without contradicting my interlocutors' ideas of free will and agency as highlighted in the stories, lived experiences, and affective expressions above. They demonstrate how the concept of *taqdeer* is used by my interlocutors to make sense of their situations in Germany, Pakistan and elsewhere and is part of the everyday experience of Pakistanis more generally. At the bare minimum, it allows my interlocutors to structure their narratives and, as such, functions as a valuable tool for the value of diverse cross-border (im)mobility experiences and situations. A common tool for precarious nomads who "share a common form of life" yet varied

experiences of (im)mobility and exclusion (Fassin 2018: 40). A tool that allows them to not only make sense of precarious situations of exclusionary migrant-hood otherwise filled with existential angst and other affective states in flux but also devise improvisational solutions to deal with the situation.

Perhaps as I started this chapter, ending it with an appropriate verse to make sense of the social world of my interlocutors. A Punjabi proverb recited to me and some others by Alam's 90-year-old[86] uncle in Mandi Bahauddin stuck with me and sheds light on the core argument of this chapter. That destiny may be ordained, but its (pre)fixity does not justify inaction. Migrants engaged in constant improvisations are the proverbial gardeners trying to water the plants:

mali da kam pani dena, bhar bhar mashqan pave
te malik da qam phal phul lana, o' lave ya na lave

It's the gardener's job to water the plants with water skins full of water
the bearing of fruits and flowers is Lord's work if he wishes so

(My transliteration and translation)

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[86] No one really knew his age, and this was the estimate given.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Many of my other interlocutors' migratory efforts and improvisations to avoid return are motivated by a common fear of returning "*khali hath*" (empty-handed) after years—at times more than a decade—of struggles. This is evident from the action of people like Jameel who re-migrate within Europe but also ones like Jamshed who do end up (temporarily) returning when faced with a lack of alternatives in Germany combined with state coercion to induce departure. On the surface, the expression *khali hath* conveys the lack of medium- to long-term economic perspectives upon return. Undoubtedly, financial aspects play an important role in the decisions of interlocutors and particularly their post-return situation, as demonstrated through the case of Alam. More generally, none of us can deny that material and economic conditions are intrinsically linked to achieving essential human needs in our capitalist societies across the world—in some places more than others. Particularly in places like Pakistan, as compared to social welfare states like Germany, economic conditions fundamentally determine human well-being and flourishing but also access to essential needs such as shelter, education and healthcare and so on. As such, material condition and its link to migration and return functions within specific moral and affective economies.

For instance, through ethnographic evidence in chapter four, I highlighted how material conditions in the post-return context can produce burdensome affective states in the lives of (potential) returnees. As such, many do their best not to return by re-migrating to another European country. The hardships and coercion faced lead some to "voluntarily" return; however, this can seem minuscule in the post-return "here and now", leading to yet another migratory effort. In chapter five, I highlighted the role of gender, more specifically, masculinity, in the affective and moral economy of irregularised migration and "voluntary" return. I argued that people are constantly involved in migratory improvisations to overcome returning and being considered a failure which can include living through the difficulties and vulnerabilities of irregularisation, re-migration within Europe, precarity and endless waiting. In chapter six, through the concept of *taqdeer,* I unpack the key and ever-present role of religious cosmologies in irregularised migration and return. I demonstrate how at the affective level, it plays a role in making sense of precarious situations and navigating hope and despair (e.g. when issued a *Duldung*). However, I also show that its paradoxical essence—combining divine predetermination with human will and agency—is a key

component of migratory improvisations and, more generally, a "perspectivism" with which my interlocutor's approach restrictive mobility regimes in Europe. It is a lens through which, for example, they interpret everything from the asylum laws in Germany to the order to leave the country. As such, not only are their onward improvisations and contemplations to return shaped by the perspectives of *taqdeer,* but whatever decision they take in the end can be socially validated by attributing the outcome of their action to the divine.

7.1 "Life *outside* is not so easy": the who and how of a difficult migratory life

Alam often reminded Shakeel, his son, who wished to go abroad, that "life outside [abroad]" (*bahir di zindagi*) is not as easy as it seems, particularly for an irregularised migrant (*dunkey ala [wala]*). He, like many others in his condition, had used his time *outside* (i.e. in Germany) and all the *waiting*—which, as I have discussed along with improvisations, is often an intrinsic part of an irregularised migrants life—to work many underpaid odd jobs "no matter the weather". While Alam's improvisations to remove the hard but invisible line between his national *inside* (Pakistan) and *outside* (Germany) created by national borders did not work, his return to Pakistan came along with a change in the situation of his family. However, he thought that Shakeel was incapable of doing either. Securing a passport or legal residence to overcome the legally enforced divides between national insides/outsides was something Alam himself could not do, like the vast majority of his peers from Pakistan and from the Global South more generally. In Alam's view, Shakeel would also not be able to make the sacrifices necessary to earn (and remit); i.e. to make the affective burdens of being *outside* worthwhile in the sense of effectively changing something *inside,* which is important because it holds the possibility of breaking the invisible and visible forces that structure social reproduction in Pakistan. One evening he burst out at Shakeel: "*ki 'bahir jana', 'bahir jana', lai a*" (what is this, "I want to go *outside*", "I want to go *outside*). Apart from critiquing the work ethic of the "*nawi poodh"* (an expression that translates to "new seedlings" and denotes "new generation"), he would sometimes evoke images of "lethal" winters in Germany as per Punjabi standards: "*barfaan nai bardasht honi, bara shouq a bahir da*" (So keen on *the outside* [going abroad], [you] won't be able to bear the snow/ice [cold weather]).

Yet, many young men from Pakistan follow through on their ideas of "life outside" (*bahir ki/di zindagi*) through irregularised migration. In many cases, people seeking a "life outside" are first-

generation migrants, but there are also those who carry out what I would call intergenerational migratory improvisation. That is to say, they continue the migratory improvisations of their fathers because, despite the prior efforts, they face structural issues of social immobility and inequality in Pakistan combined with unequal access to mobility. One would be correct in thinking that structural issues cannot be addressed by improvisations. However, an improvisational approach to mobility is all people in their position have, sometimes for generation after generation.

Regardless of the number of generational cycles, be it one or multiple, their ideas and aspirations of such a life in the literature, broadly speaking, are often problematically framed under the rubrics of individualistic, materialistic or even sexual migratory "desires" and "adventurism" (Ahmad 2015). Based on such perceptions about the migrants and other broader sociopolitical assumptions about the conditions of Pakistan, such as the (relative) lack of violent conflict and war or state persecution[87], my interlocutors and their causes of migration are often seen as different from "real" and "deserving" asylum seekers and moralised as such (cf. Streinzer and Tosic 2022). However, as Anna Triandafyllidou (2023: 14) highlights, the causes of irregular migration of "fake" and "real" asylum-seeking cannot be neatly separated and "lie in the intersections between people's search for better work and life prospects, the lack of security at their places of origin, labour market demand and supply dynamics at destination countries, the absence of viable refugee pathways and, of course, highly restrictive immigration controls". Furthermore, irregularised migration with concomitant decisions about return and particularly associated improvisations and "waiting is never an individual action"; it involves "multiple and relational temporalities," i.e. it constitutes "different geographies, other people and different phases of life" (Khosravi 2021: 203).

Triandafyllidou (2023) unpacks the categories and conditions of irregularity and irregularised migration to show that a clear distinction between deservingness and un-deservingness[88] only exists in policy and law meant to control migration or in media discourse. Such distinctions are often reproduced in the study of irregularised migration, and she calls for a need to appreciate "the complexity of the phenomena on the ground", i.e. at the level of practice (ibid: 15). In that vein, I have attempted to question at the most foundational level not only the distinction between forced

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[87] I refer to Punjab and Punjabis here, and the situation is different in other parts of Pakistan and ethnic groups like the Baloch or Pashtun and other minority communities like the Hazara who face various forms of state and non-state violence. Nonetheless, Pakistan as a whole is deemed a "safe country of origin" and often, people subjected to complex and intersectional violence are seen as a part of a monolithic nation that seems to be "safe".

[88] While she does not use these terms explicitly she draws on them and certainly scholars who have.

and voluntary migration but also forced and voluntary returns. This is no novel effort, and there is ample critique of the forced/voluntary binary in migration (e.g. Ottonelli and Torresi 2013; Erdal and Oeppen 2018; Bakewell 2021) and return (e.g. Erdal and Oeppen 2017; Kalir 2017; Aberman 2022) from various analytical angels. However, the difference lies not in "what" my research and this dissertation address but in the "who" and particularly "how". Being cautious of claiming any novelty, I would say that my work challenges *academic borders,* that is to say, borders created—consciously or without intention—through the distinction between the mobility of some as more deserving than others in migration research. I do this in the following ways.

7.1.1 Focusing on a different who

The "who" of my research, i.e. Pakistani irregularised migrants and returnees, are often considered "voluntary" par excellence both in terms of migration and return because of their country of origin. Citizens of a Muslim nation-state with massive military spending and nuclear capabilities are perhaps not seen as deserving research partners when just across the border in Afghanistan (and in other parts of the world), there is much greater and more acute suffering. Thus, while I do not try to equate such extreme suffering in Afghanistan with the structural inequalities that shape people's relatively desperate living conditions in Pakistan, I do think that mobility is a right that should be afforded to people regardless of their (relative) suffering. Therefore I turn to what I would call the voluntary escape of those not facing acute violence but relatively desperate living conditions in hopes of finding a better life and resisting a "voluntary" return to achieve that life. Such complex migratory lives and efforts are something I can relate to as a migrant who, every now and again (even with all my privileges), experiences the exclusionary practices of the European migration regime and tries to overcome them for a better life (as alluded to in chapter three).

7.1.2 Focusing on a different how

Methodologically, I combine the depth of ethnography and the attention and sensitivity of affect theory to shed much-needed light on the lives of my interlocutors and their irregularised migratory practices (including return) that are neither completely voluntary nor completely forced. Theoretically, I see migration and return as conjunct in the lives of my interlocutors to present a holistic view of their improvisations which I show are not only related to material conditions but entangled with affective ones. I unpack the complex subjectivities of irregularisation and return

(gendered, temporal, religious/cosmological, deontological/moral etc.) through various examples in diverse sites that are in no way fixed but at cross-roads, in flux due to many forces: emotional/ affective, relational, legal, social and indeed economic/material. In doing so, I not only highlight how such forces shape the people's subjectivities but how they negotiate with such forces.

However, this endeavour of mine was not without challenges and pitfalls. Presenting a holistic view of the irregularised migration and re-migration, as well as the return of those denied a stay in Germany and obliged to leave, was a complex and troublesome task. While I have addressed some of the methodological challenges, there remain many aspects of conducting research with irregularised migrants and returnees that were ethically and emotionally challenging. I would like to mention two here. First, the dilemma of discussing the lives of people who are, in popular but also in much of academic discourse, seen as "economic" migrants (i.e. split along the voluntary/forced lines as just discussed) but nonetheless marginalised sometimes beyond the most marginalised of citizens (e.g. lack of not only de facto [in practice] political rights but even de jure [on paper]). Highlighting aspects of their lives (despite my aims and intentions just mentioned in section 7.1.1) is a tricky ethnographic project as my descriptions and interpretations without my intentions, aims, and perspective can be used to justify why, exactly, their removal under the humanitarian reason and laws of Europe makes sense. That is to say, my ethnographic insights into their efforts to overcome immobility or difficulties upon return that lead to yet another migration would not be read as a plea for change in our approach to managing migration but turned on its head. The possibility of such a bleak reading of my ethnography troubled me a lot and still does. However, I felt that the task of bringing the rich affective and agentic lives of my interlocutors was important and that I could abandon my efforts for fear of cynical interpretations or negative use of my work.

Second, the issue of presenting the complex lives in flux not only in terms of emotions and affects but in space and time. My strategy, to the end, was to incrementally expand on the story of one key interlocutor, i.e. Alam. My conscious attempt was to bring out his perspective over the chapters, gradually providing the reader with more details about his migration and return and the role of his life history, family and broader social context and circumstances. Around it, I weave the stories of others, examining the differences and similarities to provide the complexities and intricacies of the distinctive yet common struggles of many in the face of unequal mobility. Through my ethnographic insights, I theorise the important role of moral and affective economies that influence

the dynamics of irregularised migration and return—that, too, without refuting economic aspects (such as labour supply and demand but not only). Some intellectual reciprocity I feel is due on the part of quantitive migration scholars who neglect the important relationship of social, affective and moral lives of migrants and returnees and how these factors interact with so-called economic drivers of migration (World Bank 2018).

My argument is that the analysis of irregularised migration as primarily materialistic or economic and the framing of people's motivation to migrate as such fails to address the complex realities of people seeking mobility. In my view, even the economic or materialistic wishes of people are linked to challenging the functioning of social reproduction in Pakistan and are deeply entangled with social ideas of hope, feelings of responsibility and affective visions of a better life. Tanseef's framing of the choice between suicide and yet another irregularised migration (*dunkey*) as the only two choices for people in his situation (returnees as well as first-time migrants) is not rhetoric and perhaps key to understanding the lived-out realities of people like him from across the world (see section 4.3). The countless deaths in the Mediterranean (and elsewhere in the world) to overcome borders are proof that the despair in people's countries of origin is a more powerful affective driver than the fear of dying en route. Despite all the dangers created for them along the way and hostilities upon arrival (including removal), they are hopeful about changing their lives through migration—so much so that many try migrating multiple times, and some see suicide as the only alternative.

Even those who leave Pakistan out of purely materialistic motivations or selfish personal desires (if such labels can be applied to people who struggle to meet basic needs such as clean water, education and healthcare) feel the burdens of expectations that were not there before taking affective shape in Europe. Under such circumstances, returning to Pakistan does not only become difficult, but the last option, and people do everything in their power to avoid a return that would potentially end not only their migratory journey but associated hopes. Thus people's migratory improvisations—to stay *outside* of Pakistan and return only when they have no other choice—are almost always affective, relational and temporal in addition to the obvious material motivations.

7.2 Disentangling legal and ethical registers through improvisations

Although borders *legally* do so, can they *ethically* justify excluding people from essential needs such as education, healthcare and equal opportunities to labour, based merely on nationality? Again, while they *legally* do so, can they *morally* justify structuring the capabilities of people to live a fulfilled life differently based on nationality? While racist mobility regimes in the so-called Global North would like to obfuscate the registers of legal and ethical vis-a-vis migration and question the morality of people pushed to seek mobility through irregularised means, this moralisation of unfair laws needs to be questioned and thoroughly critiqued instead of being taken on face value. I believe this can be done by showing how people involved in crossing-national borders through irregularised means have the moral right to do so and often only do so because they face ethical, relational and existential quagmires. History is full of examples of how laws were used to rid humans of their rights based on the whims of those in power, and certain racist practices may have been *abolished* (I use that word with much care) and their pseudoscientific justification deemed invalid, but their legacy continues under the guise of citizenship (Sharma 2020). Thus I see the migratory improvisations of my interlocutors as tantamount to enacting their rights and agency, which the unethical and genealogically racist mobility regimes of Europe would not otherwise allow them.

Ever-stricter border controls and asylum policies and an ever-narrowing understanding of the right to mobility frame not only the access to asylum but also the right to being "outside" one's country of citizenship. Overcoming the sedentary bias Europe imagines, especially for its "Others" from the Global South, is becoming increasingly difficult. People like my interlocutors and many of their brothers and sisters from around the world from various ethnic and religious communities are not only discouraged from being mobile and migrating but their efforts are actively curtailed through violent and everyday borders under the euphemism of "migration management" (Deleja-Hotko 2023). Those who somehow manage to defy the violent borders of "Fortress Europe" (Geddes 2000) often face not only racialised and xenophobic treatment within Europe but a strategically devised "hostile environment" that is geared towards "fortifying the European fortress from the inside" (Delvino 2020: 74). As Nicola Delvino (2020: 74 emphasis original) highlights, "*policies on*

irregular migrants discouraging irregular stays strongly resemble *policies on irregular migration* preventing arrivals"[89].

The ultimate goal, in either case, is deterrence, but research shows that there is no clear evidence on whether policies of exclusion and coercion work to reduce migration (Leerkes 2016 in Delvino 2020). Such policies are also not effective in encouraging irregularised migrants to leave, as I have shown with ethnographic examples as well as statistics on the removal of Pakistanis from Germany (see section 4.3). Furthermore, their ineffectiveness in the post-return scenario is lacking attention. As I have shown, many who return eventually (plan to) re-migrate. Not only that, despite countless efforts by main implementors of "voluntary" return programs like the IOM to use "returnees as messengers" for deterrence campaigns on behalf of countries like Germany, there is no evidence that this is working. The only fact that is evident is that Germany is IOM's biggest partner worldwide in terms of the number of "voluntary" returns. For example, in 2018, IOM helped Germany with the departure of 29600 "voluntary" returnees to various countries of origin, more than any other European country. However, there is little qualitative or quantitive research on the sustainability of such returns (Triandafyllidou and Bartolini 2020).

More research is needed to disentangle legal and ethical registers, especially with regard to irregularised migration and its "management". We must ask that while all that is being carried out by states like Germany in collaboration with "migration management" organisations like IOM or, worse yet, ICMPD (see Deleja-Hotko 2023) may be legal, is it ethical or morally justified? Is it ethical to place people under exclusionary policies that infringe on their fundamental rights only to produce negative affects that will lead them to consider a "voluntary" return? If European states like Germany are not willing to consider the dubious ethics of such practices, perhaps they can at least consider their efficacy. As Delvino (2020: 81) observantly points out, "just like EU borders—no matter how technologized or strictly controlled—have never been sealed off to unauthorised arrivals, return policies in Europe have not been able to either eradicate the presence of irregular migrants". The improvisations of my interlocutors provide deep and powerful insights, both in terms of ethics and efficacy of the German approach towards the restriction as well as removal and return of irregularised migrants. Their affective and practical recourse to improvisations hints at

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[89] Not to mention that such policies, in essence, seem to be out of touch with the structural needs of European countries like Germany for more workforce and people who will fund pensions for an ageing population.

how irregularised migrants consider the pressure to return imposed by the German state unethical and hence worth challenging, but also how they make the German return policy inefficacious.

7.3 Closing thoughts on improvisations as an analytical lens

Improvisations, as I have theorised, play both an affective and practical role in the lives of my Pakistani interlocutor and become important for the analyses of "voluntary" return within the broader context of restrictive borders and irregularised migration. Keeping in mind the cluster of questions that I began with (see section 1.2), my theoretical and ethnographic insights into migratory improvisations provide pertinent knowledge about the workings of policies such as "voluntary" returns in the lives of the targets of such policies. This epistemological exercise is not supposed to be a policy appraisal and goes beyond the success and failure of such policies to focus on their human impact. In that vein, I highlight how such policies and "migration management", in general, play out in the lives of human beings seeking mobility but are deemed not worthy of it. While I have presented the specific case of Pakistani men, many of their experiences, improvisations, and difficulties are generalisable to some extent for people from the Global South who seek to exercise agency within a system that tries to limit their mobility and induce return. A system that would work in a simplified world where human agency was merely a function of incentives and disincentives. However, we know that human actions are influenced by a host of complex factors.

To that end, I theorise the complex functioning of people's multi-layered improvisations in a way that allows me to not only connect the different themes addressed in the three ethnographic chapters but also to show how restrictive migration and "voluntary" return are questioned in practice given that people have little power (political or legal) to question it otherwise. Furthermore through their improvisations, people are not merely trying to overcome borders and "earn" their way out of difficult material and affective conditions but also trying to overcome restrictions of different kinds veiled behind ideas of territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

Migratory improvisation also points to the hardening of borders which is not only structured through physical borders and racialised migration policies but also takes place through anti-immigrant discourse and politics, which depict migrants as outsiders or, worse yet, dehumanise people as aliens or criminals. Improvisations as such become a part of navigating the hostile "host"

society as "integration" alone is often not enough (e.g. Mahar 2021b). Even those who try to integrate are often seen as difficult to be absorbed into the national body as they are seen as permanent outsiders due to their ethnicity or religion (Appadurai 2006). The feeling of history (Hirschkind 2021) or emotions (particularly of hate and fear) (Ahmed 2004b) are often employed against them. Keeping this in mind, I have tried to reclaim the emotional and affective lives (shaped by various motivations, desires, pressures, and responsibilities) and conjunctive improvisations of irregularised Pakistani migrants and "voluntary" returnees—and to take a stand for them (and myself as an *Ausländer*). The mobility of people from the Global South due to the lack of agency and choice is inherently improvisational as we seek to figure out our next move to remain mobile.

Furthermore, my ethnographic inquiry into the affective impacts of (in)voluntary return would not have been possible without considering the initial migratory journeys and subsequent improvisations of my interlocutors to avoid such return. This, in turn, cannot be understood without knowledge of the gendered nature of migration from and return to Pakistan and the role of destiny and *taqdeer,* which I try to provide. I argue that such affects and actions—steeped in my interlocutor's gendered and religious realities—shape emic ideas of deservingness. Indeed they view their mobility as morally and ethically justified, even as European migration regimes deem it not to be the case based on their ideas of legality and sovereignty, as discussed in the previous section. The issue of power and agency comes to the fore whenever we have contestations of any kind, and questions of law, ethics and deservingness are no different. In the context of unequal global mobility and its justification through laws and national sovereignty, new vocabulary is needed to discuss the agency of migrants from the Global South, often at the receiving end of power held by the Global North. In that vein, migratory improvisations provide us with a lens to talk not only about the limitations placed on irregularised migrants of all kinds but how they enact agency given the limitations. It enables us to talk about marginalisation, discrimination and injustice towards people seeking mobility from the Global South without painting people as helpless victims. It emphasises people's ingenious ways of dealing with restrictive power through piecemeal guesswork. It gives us a window into the heuristically determined and "collaboratively" envisioned world of people subjected to power. People who do not take restrictive power (in this case, exercised by the state and its functionaries trying to "manage" migration) as a given but something to engage with through their ad-hoc experimentation(s), i.e. *migratory improvisation(s).* In short,

improvisations allow those with little or no political or legal power on paper [de jure] to enact power in practice [de facto]. Furthermore, such improvisations are also different from the "strategies" that I first thought I would uncover, as can be observed through one of my research questions (see section 1.2). As I began my research, I discovered that the term "strategies" does not capture what people, like my interlocutors, do. What they do and how they act is far from a strategy in the sense of a "detailed plan for achieving success", as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary. Instead, lacking many precursors for strategising, such as but not only various forms of capital, they have to devise actions impromptu and without a fixed goal. The "plan" only becomes so (i.e. a strategy or plan) post hoc in narratives and conversations about the past. In the present, people resort to feeling and affects to decide and act. Thus, while I started with the term "strategy" based on my initial approach to research, I deliberately avoided using the term in the dissertation for the most part. When I do so, I place it within inverted commas or only do so initially to highlight how my discovery changed my approach to the issue and how the etic differs from the emic.

Admittedly, my research on the improvisations of irregularised migrants is not exhaustive and only considers the practices of Pakistani men. As such, further comparative ethnographic research with different ethnic and national groups as well as women across Europe is needed to understand better the variance in a situation in different European countries and how that influences irregularised people's migratory improvisations. The conditions and vulnerabilities of those with no choice but to resort to "voluntary" return need to be studied in comparison to those who are able to continue with their migratory improvisations. While I have given some general insights into what shapes this difference or ability not to improvise and stay in Europe (from networks to resources and personal reasons), this aspect, too, requires deeper comparative analysis.

7.4 Closing thoughts on affect as an analytical lens in migration research

Shedding light on the emotional and affective lives of irregularised migrants and returnees is of extreme value but significantly lacking in an overcrowded field of migration research geared towards streamlining policy and administration. Even within more critical scholarship, there is the domination of what I would call a European-utilitarian optic since, with the exception of a few research foundations, much relies, in the end, on funding through European donors to whom outputs must be justified. The affective lives, particularly of irregularised migrants, are not deemed

important enough to be studied, or it is wrongly believed that there is not much practical or epistemological value in such a purist. I not only disagree with this presumption but have empirically highlighted how affects are at the core of the migratory improvisations of my interlocutors and instrumental to the failure of migration control and removal policies in Europe. The affective lives and improvisations of my interlocutors point to the inadequacy of an approach that deems migration to be some "gate" that can be controlled through the key of visible and invisible (dis)incentives. My interlocutors and their affective lives give us, if only a peak, into the fundamental fault in European migration management, based on the idea of a gate, much like castles and walled cities in mediaeval Europe, with walls, moats and secured entrances to keep the vagabonds and wayfarers out. The only difference is that today border surveillance technologies (Keshavarz and Khosravi 2020) and "interoperable" databases (Casagran 2021) are used alongside physical walls to control the movements of the "unwanted". However, this hybrid visible-invisible border is causing more rights concerns than solutions for the migration "crisis" that Europe imagines to be facing (e.g. Jones 2019).

In such a context, an ethnographic view into the affective lives of people trying to overcome immobility and those physically removed from Europe but with their hopes of a future in Europe often intact or, at best, hampered only temporarily (e.g. Mubeen) can prove to be utterly valuable. At the most basic level, it can provide some wiggle room for empathy and understanding: An opportunity to exercise a "side switch" or switching of position to understand the perspective of people who are on the move and whose movements European authorities are trying to manage and control. A better understanding of the perspectives of people subjected to restrictive mobility and removal by comprehending their affective lives can not only be a means to humanise them, their mobility aspirations and improvisations but give us access to knowledge hitherto devalued.

Furthermore, ethnographic accounts of the affective experiences and motivations of people over space and time—before departure, in transit, in the host country and upon return—can be a much-needed qualitative evaluation tool to understand the impact negative impacts of migration management and control policies. For example, they can provide a valuable means to contest the knowledge and policy advice of institutions such as the ICMPD that not only take as a starting point the biased premise that migration of a particular population is a "problem" and their return is the only "solution" but do that without even considering the view of people supposedly being helped

(i.e. the migrants). In doing so, we can not only question how such institutions bypass the democratic and liberal norms and structures of Europe but also their failures in delivering what is promised at the cost of such illiberal actions (Deleja-Hotko 2023).

7.5 Going forward: counter currents to migrant irregularisation and exclusion in Europe

In the end, I would like to acknowledge that there are various local and civil society counter-responses to exclusion, irregularisation and removal by European states (see C-MISE 2019-2022). While this cannot be deemed a *turn* or *shift* in the European approach to "migration control", it is a much-needed breath of fresh air when policies and practices around irregularised migration and migrants are largely based on a mixture of exclusion, deterrence, restrictiveness and removal (see Spencer and Triandafyllidou 2020; van Liempt, Schapendonk, and Campos-Delgado 2023). There may be many reasons for municipalities to slowly "break the mould", but two immediately come to mind (Spencer 2020). These reasons are, in essence, different from the kind of local welcome culture that Michel Agier (2021) calls "municipal hospitality" seen across Europe in 2015 and 2016 in the wake of the so-called "migration crisis" of European states in that they are functional and not ideological.

Firstly, the "common sense" measures targeting irregularised migrants are not working (Leerkes 2016). As I have also shown through the examples of my interlocutors that many persist and improvise to stay in Europe despite the hardships that they face due to the lack of (legal) alternatives. The victimisation and deliberate exposure to (structurally produced) vulnerabilities at the hands of European states is not as successful as the "common sense" view of exclusion, deterrence, and removal would have it.

Secondly, there is a recognition at the municipal level that the pressure placed on irregularised migrants to leave and national-level policies of exclusion targeting them with the aim of deterrence invariably act as an impediment to social cohesion, public health, and a host of other (welfare) goals at the local level (Delvino 2020). That is to say, such policies do not only negatively impact the migrants but also host societies. This realisation has led some cities to take an inclusionary approach. There are, however, cities like Munich that prefer to support the national level policies and give an additional small grant to incentivise "voluntary" returns instead of taking a more progressive approach of funding "social entities" that help people regularise themselves as in

Barcelona (Spencer 2020: 196). As examples of such functional counter currents to migrant irregularisation and exclusion increase across Europe, at least at the municipal level, I can only hope that they shift the window of ideological discourse on irregularised migration and pave a path for challenging the removal of migrants in all its forms.

Coda

Through my insights and descriptions, it becomes obvious that my interlocutors are not the most marginalised in Pakistan[90]. However, this ethnographic observation can never be seen as a reason for denying people mobility or justifying the attempts to render them immobile. Two thoughts come to mind in that regard and are worth sharing here (I briefly touched upon the topic in section 2.5 but could not dilate out of fear of losing focus on the main aims of my dissertation):

Firstly, do the restrictive mobility and removal that irregularised migrants face somehow help the more marginalised populations in their countries of origin? For example, there are millions of irregularised Afghans in Pakistan, sometimes born there with a constitutional right to citizenship, but not given their due rights so that they can be exploited on a daily basis and scapegoated in times of a national crisis (Alimia 2023). Are they likely to benefit from rendering the relatively better-off citizens of Pakistan, a so-called "safe country", immobile? Another remark from the German embassy official I met in Islamabad comes to mind (see section 1.2). This person shared with me with great enthusiasm, as if they had discovered something utterly novel, that irregularised migrants are not the "poorest" (or most marginalised) in Pakistan. Unsurprisingly, this claim did not lead them to question whether Germany would be ready to welcome the most marginalised Pakistani citizen or even Afghans who live in the country with barely any rights. This person was merely trying to delegitimise the mobility whilst legitimising the deportation and "voluntary" return of irregularised migrants from Germany, just as the Pakistani state tries to legitimise the deportation and return of Afghans from Pakistan (in many cases under the auspices of European countries). Had I probed the official on this matter, the answer would have probably relied on some justification evoking national responsibility as if Pakistan exists in a (geographic, political, and historical) vacuum. As Sharma (2020) reminds us, the propagation of national responsibility and sovereignty (whether locally or internationally) is how imperialism is reproduced in the post-colonial context. The notion of national responsibility falsely assumes that previously colonised parts of the world are really sovereign. Through different mechanisms, from alliances with local elites and military or autocratic leaders to fiscal measures (aid, loans, etc.) and the outright use of force to soft power, previous colonisers and settler colonial powers like the United States essentially control the Global

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[90] The most impoverished and marginalised communities in Pakistan simply do not have the means to escape and remain trapped within different forms of "modern slavery" (ILO 2022).

South (ibid). Even if it were the case that Germany would start welcoming the "poorest of the poor" from Global South countries like Pakistan, it would merely create yet another category of deservingness besides the current humanitarian one in which many of my interlocutors try to fit themselves in through their asylum applications. The issue at hand cannot be solved by creating new categories of separating those deserving of mobility from the undeserving since it seems to be a structural one: While there are limited policies for legal labour migration to Europe (i.e. de jure possibilities) for people like my interlocutors, their irregularised presence (i.e. de facto availability) is rather in line with the EU's structural need for labour migrants, particularly in low-skill sectors (Delvino 2020; Triandafyllidou and Bartolini 2020). Pragmatically speaking, it can be said that "semi-compliance" (Ruhs and Anderson 2006) on the part of European employers is part of the European labour-migration configuration that relies on the irregularisation of migrants to function. Giving us a more critical reading of the situation, Barak Kalir (2022: 88) writes that "economies of Western states benefit enormously from the cheap labour that disenfranchised, unprotected and readily exploitable illegalised migrants" since they are "forced to sell their labour under the most unfavourable conditions" and can be removed at first sight of demanding any rights or protection (cf. Mbembe 2019).

Secondly, the relative capability to be mobile due to economic circumstances can be addressed independently of the human right to be mobile. Our right to be mobile as humans on this one planted that we have to share, which the vast majority of this world is devoid of, needs to be addressed at the same time as our access (or the lack thereof) to mobility due to economic inequality, much like our access to education, healthcare and dignified life in general. The issue of inequality, with its colonial and capitalist genealogies shaping our capacities and capabilities, is a pertinent question for the 21st century (see Nussbaum 2011). However, the issue of *relative* economic difference (between those facing economic destitution and those who are just above the simplified notion of a poverty line) cannot be used to justify the immobility people face due to racist and restrictive migration regimes (be it Pakistanis in Germany or Afghans in Pakistan). The deterrence and exploitation techniques that so-called liberal democracies in Europe carry out through illiberal institutions under the guise of "migration management" (for example, see Deleja-Hotko 2023) are only the newest manifestation of colonial practices of separation and subjugation (Kalir 2022, 2023). Both inequality and immobility need to be challenged simultaneously, and

rationalising one to justify the other is, at best, avoiding the ethical responsibility and liberal ideals[91] that Europe claims to espouse.

All that said, of course, as I have highlighted, people's improvisations are influenced by the economic resources and networks at their disposal, and there is no denying that, to begin with, different forms of resources (including economic) are required to initiate an improvised journey of irregularised migration. While being cognisant of the material realities of "world-national-capitalist theatre" that we find ourselves in, to quote Berlant (2022: 20) again, my aim was to focus on the affective aspects of irregularised migration and return that are so often ignored. Migratory improvisations may be enabled or influenced by material conditions and goals, but equally, if not more important, are the affective and moral economies that shape human choices and influence human actions.

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[91] The fact that post-colonial states like Pakistan cannot claim to espouse liberal ideals or their undemocratic politics, is not supposed to justify the abhorrent treatment of Afghans in Pakistan, or even its own citizens, at the hands of the military and political elites. However, It is the illiberal turn of liberal democracies on several fronts that is the point of discussion here (Koch 2018).

Glossary of Acronyms and German and Urdu Terms

(BAMF)	(German) Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; *Bundesamt für Migration and Flüchtlinge.*
(EU)	European Union.
(ICMPD)	International Centre for Migration Policy Development.
(IOM)	International Organisation for Migration.
(IRARA)	An NGO that provides "return and reintegration" support to several European countries, particularly in countries of origin like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka but not only.
(MRC)	Migration Resource Centre.
(WELDO)	Previously "Women's Education and Development Organisation", this NGO now works in different development aid sectors as a local implementation partner for international donors; particularly in the field of return migration supporting several European countries in their "return and reintegration" efforts in Pakistan.
Ablehnungs-Bescheid	Rejection notice, given to asylum applicants upon the rejection of their application.
Abschiebehaft	Detention for deportation.
Ankerzentrum	A closed reception centre, particularly part of the Bavarian asylum regime.
Arbeitserlaubnis	Permission to work.
Aufenthaltsgestattung	Permission to stay.
Ausbildung	Vocational training.
Ausbildungsduldung	A temporary suspension of deportation for a vocational training (see *Duldung*).
Ausländerbehörde	Foreigners Office.
Ausreisepflicht	Obligation to leave; order(ed) to leave.
azam	Determination.
bahaduri	Bravery.
Bildung	A broad term for education in German to include cultivation and formation.
biraderi	Kinship concept in Punjab; usually agnatic.
burger bacha	Of lifestyle; a "burger kid" implies being "Westernised".
desi	Authentic; local; literally "of the soil".
Deutsche Bundesländer	German Federal States.
Duldung	Literally, toleration; it is a temporary suspension of deportation and refers to the toleration of an irregularised migration in the territory of Germany.
Duldung light	A weaker version of *Duldung* (see above).

dunkey	An emic term (verb) for irregularised modes of migration; a term used for carrying out clandestine migration by the migrants themselves (noun *dunkey-wala*); etymologically it is the punjabification of the English word dinghy, which is an essential transportation for many irregularised migrants to cross into Europe.
ehsaas	sensibility; feeling; compassion.
eid-milad al-nabi	The Muslim prophet Muhammad's birthday.
Ermessensspielraum	Discretion or discretionary power (here in reference to the power that lies with the officials in the *Ausländerbehörde* (see above).
Folgeantrag	A subsequent asylum application that is filed on the bases of a change in the original case/situation, thus "restarting" the asylum process.
hajj	Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.
Hauptschulabschluß	Secondary school.
kaghaz	Papers; documents (used here in the context of residence documents).
Königsteiner Schlüssel	Koenigstein key; a system that is used to calculate the division of resources within the sixteen states of Germany, among other things, it helps the federal governments in determining their reception capacities.
Lager	Camp.
Landratsamt	District office.
makkan	Dwelling; house.
maqsad	Purpose; goal.
maqsad	Goal.
muft	Free.
muhim'juhi	Adventurism.
nikkah	Marriage or the marriage contract as per Islamic law.
offensichtlich unbegründet	Manifestly unfounded (refers to asylum claim; type of rejection).
pakay kaghaz	Documents that establish a more permanent residence.
Pfand	Deposit (against something).
Punjabi	Language spoken in Punjab province of Pakistan; ethnic group.
ralli	Patchwork textiles, especially quilts that are local to several regions of Pakistan, particularly Cholistan.
rasta	Way.
Residenz-Pflicht	Mandatory residence (limitation).
Saraiki	Language spoken in Southern Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan; ethnic group.
Sozial-Leistungen	Social benefits.
Spurwechsel	Change of migration track; in migration debated, it is used to argue how an asylum seeker on an asylum "migration track" cannot switch to another "track" such as work visa unless they return to their country of origin first.
Standesamt	Registry office.

taqdeer	Destiny.
umeed	Hope.
unbegründet	Unfounded (refers to asylum claim; type of rejection).
ungeklärter Identität	Undermined identity.
unzulässig	Inadmissible (refers to asylum claim; type of rejection).
Zentrale Ausländerbehörde	Central Foreigners Office.

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