

Doubting the national order of poverty

The moral administration of “poor others” in Swiss welfare and migration bureaucracies

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Le doyen
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for all the doubtful bureaucrats

for all the despairing scholars

for all the unordered academics and administrators

for all disintegrated “selves”

for all unintegrated “others”

to Andrea for all in-between-in-limbos

to Dora to Leia may their roaring be felt

to Regula to Nico to Roberto

to Dagmar Roli Kurt

to Salome Saro Jürg Anna Mo

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to Christin, to the new the old past and future christeam—may they continue to rumble

to the laps, to Caroline, Aylin, Mira, Mathis, Léone, Stefan, Yannick,

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to circles, to intimacies, to alienations

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blumen und dinos. s’ecouter et parler. time and space. pioggiarellas e stellinas

Abstract

In Switzerland, the coupling of welfare benefits and migration control has resulted in the increasing banishment of poverty. Residents without Swiss nationality face the general threat of deportation when exercising their right to receive social assistance. Such policies reveal a national order of poverty characterized by a hostile environment and the deportability of wide segments of the population. This thesis descends into the ordinary of this national order of poverty. Through ethnographic fieldwork in welfare and migration bureaucracies, I investigate the everyday construction and administration of “poor others” in Switzerland.

The bureaucratic practices at the center of this research are understood through the concept of “interior b/ordering.” This notion allows to explore how the general menace of deportation is individualized and depoliticized by the (moral) administration of “poor others.” In my analysis, I demonstrate how the production of difference is legitimized through relational processes among various administrative offices involved, leading to a situation where the reception of social assistance is constructed as “self-inflicted.” The latter implies the construction of the person concerned as poor by their “own fault.” Such methods recall colonial practices and constellations of categorizing “others” as “lazy,” “unteachable” and “unworthy,” which is invisibilized through bureaucratization and moral justifications.

Additionally, this thesis explores the importance of dealing with contradictions and uncertainties, within my own practices of writing and abstracting social reality, but also within bureaucracies. I reveal similarities between “doing” science and “doing” bureaucracy and stimulate a connection between the two through the notion of doubts. Doubting implies questioning whether one’s practices are “good” and “true” in relation to what constitutes “the truth” and “the good.” In bureaucracy, doubts emerge when applying the coherency of law and policies on the messiness of the social world. This thesis shows that certain techniques must be applied to govern doubts in bureaucracies and render the administration of “poor others” possible, effective and efficient. By building on the three articles that are part of my thesis, I present three different techniques of governing doubts: rule orientation, documentation and de-responsibilization. These techniques are related to administrators’ own bureaucratic tasks, are conditioned by the morality of state power and facilitate the stabilization of the “banality” and “evil” of the national order of poverty.

Keywords: bureaucracy, anthropology of doubts, migration control, governing poverty.

Résumé

En Suisse, l'intrication entre assistance sociale et contrôle migratoire a eu pour effet de bannir de plus en plus la pauvreté. Les résident-es sans nationalité suisse sont confronté-es à la menace générale d'expulsion lorsqu'ils et elles exercent leur droit à recevoir une assistance sociale. De telles politiques révèlent un ordre national de la pauvreté caractérisé par un environnement hostile et la possibilité de déporter de larges segments de la population. Cette thèse plonge dans l'ordinaire de cet ordre national de la pauvreté. À travers un travail de terrain ethnographique dans les bureaucraties de l'assistance sociale et de la migration, j'étudie la construction et l'administration quotidienne des "*poor others*" ["autres pauvres"] en Suisse.

Les pratiques bureaucratiques au centre de cette recherche sont comprises à travers le concept de *interior b/ordering*. Cette notion permet d'explorer comment la menace générale d'expulsion est individualisée et dépolitisée par l'administration (morale) des "*poor others*." Dans mon analyse, je démontre comment la production de différences est légitimée par des processus relationnels entre les différentes administrations impliquées, conduisant à une situation où la réception de l'assistance sociale est considérée comme "*self-inflicted*" ["auto-infligée"]. Cela implique la construction de la personne concernée comme pauvre à cause de sa "propre faute." De telles méthodes rappellent les pratiques et les constellations coloniales de catégorisation des "autres" comme "paresseux," "impossibles à éduquer" et "indignes," ce qui est invisibilisé par la bureaucratization et les justifications morales.

Cette thèse explore également l'importance de traiter les contradictions et les incertitudes, tant dans mes propres pratiques d'écriture et d'abstraction de la réalité sociale que dans les bureaucraties. Je révèle des similitudes entre "faire de la science" et "faire de la bureaucratie" et je propose une connexion entre les deux à travers la notion de doutes. Douter signifie questionner si ses propres pratiques sont "bonnes" et "vraies" par rapport à ce qui constitue "la vérité" et "le bien." Dans la bureaucratie, les doutes émergent lors de l'application de la cohérence de la loi et des politiques sur la complexité du monde social. Cette thèse montre que certaines techniques doivent être appliquées pour gouverner les doutes dans les bureaucraties et rendre l'administration des "*poor others*" possible, efficace et efficiente. En m'appuyant sur les trois articles scientifiques qui composent ma thèse, je présente trois techniques différentes de gouverner les doutes : *rule orientation*, la documentation et la déresponsabilisation. Ces techniques sont liées aux propres tâches bureaucratiques des administrateur-ses, sont

conditionnées par la morale du pouvoir d'État et facilitent la stabilisation de la “banalité” et du “*evil*” [“le mal”] de l'ordre national de la pauvreté.

Mots-clés : bureaucratie, anthropologie des doutes, contrôle des migrations, gouvernance de la pauvreté.

Abbreviations and Acronyms:

AFMP	Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons
ANAG	<i>Bundesgesetz über Aufenthalt und Niederlassung der Ausländer</i> (Federal Act on the Residence and Settlement of the Foreigners)
CHF	Swiss francs
CMO	Cantonal migration office
DI	Disability Insurance
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EJDP	<i>Eidgenössisches Justiz- und Polizeidepartement</i> (The Federal Department of Justice and Police)
EU	European Union
FC	(Swiss) Federal Constitution
FNA	Foreign Nationals Act (short for: Federal Act on Foreign Nationals)
FNIA	Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (short for: Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration)
OARA	Ordinance on Admission, Residence and lucrative activity
OASI	Old-Age and Survivor's Insurance
Permit B	Residence permit
Permit C	Permanent residence permit
SCA	Swiss Citizenship Act (short for: Federal Act on Swiss Citizenship)
SFC	Swiss Federal Supreme Court
SEM	Swiss State Secretariat of Migration
SKOS	<i>Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe</i> (Swiss Conference of Welfare Offices)
ZEMIS	<i>Zentrales Migrationsinformationssystem</i> (central migration information system)
ZUG	<i>Bundesgesetz über die Zuständigkeit für die Unterstützung Bedürftiger</i> (Federal Act on the Competence for the Assistance of the Needy)

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INTRODUCTION

I look around the brightened room. The autumn light floods through the countless windows and announces the arriving chilliness. Already a few months into fieldwork, I have the possibility to attend this workshop. A heterogenous audience sits scattered around the room—heterogenous relative to what I have encountered up to now in Swiss administrations rather than relative to Switzerland's population. The participants work in the municipalities of the same canton, mostly in the registration services or the social services. And they are here to gain insights into migration law, the procedures of the cantonal migration office [CMO].

The head of the CMO, I call him Jürg, begins his presentation with the question: "Why are we conducting this course?" He provides the answer after a rhetorical pause: "The municipalities are the main gateway of migration [...]. Due to the dismantling of the national borders, it is the municipalities that must perform the function of the borders." He goes straight on to summarize the credo of his presentation: "Report everything. [...] We evaluate integration and, for this, we are dependent on all information available. You do welcome talks with all foreign nationals moving to your municipality [some puzzled looks in the audience] and this is very important. [...]"

...

After some detours and introducing the specificities of the Foreign National's and Integration Act (FNIA), Jürg takes a deep breath for his concluding message: "On the basis of the new FNIA, you can do practically everything: Report like crazy [melden wie blöd]¹." He steps back and gives the floor over to his employee and head of one of several sections of the CMO, Rudolf, before leaving the room for another meeting in his busy daily schedule. Rudolf, a bright smile on his face, starts with some strange jokes which are intermingled with basic information about the organization of his section which is concerned with the regulation of foreign nationals, the official legal term for non-Swiss nationals, under the FNIA. Slowly he approaches the reason for me being here, the subject at the source of my research: the subject of revoking stay permits or downgrading the more secure permanent residence permit to the more precarious residence permit. In January 2019, at the same time as my PhD started, the FNIA was implemented and introduced the possibility to downgrade the permanent residence permit or to revoke it even after 15 years of residence in Switzerland, if the person concerned is receiving social assistance.

"No need for panic," Rudolf assures the people present and looks comforting around the room. None of us might be even slightly touched by the direct consequences of this law. However, downgrading and revoking stay permits has been repeatedly criticized over previous months by people concerned, human rights associations, lawyers, and political parties in the press. He goes on, telling us that his section has examined all persons who have been in Switzerland for more than 15 years and who have a permanent residence permit C. On the basis of this, they have created dossiers on each person and carefully evaluated whether a measure would be applicable. They would only take a measure "if it yields something." According to him, they

¹ Whenever there is the perceived need to provide the original language, I do so in square brackets and italics; in fieldnotes I do the same but non-italicized. This might be for important legal or technical terms or when no accurate translation is available.

target people who have never worked. By downgrading their residence permit, they would now, “hold these people accountable.” However, he clarifies that they would envision the “harsher” revocation order if the chances of a person finding work again are perceived as very low. “Yielding something,” therefore means that the person is capable of activating themselves, that they are (or may become) employed, and thereby independent of social assistance.

One point seems particularly important to Rudolf: “It’s not punishing, it’s more that...yes, they could [find work] if they wanted to... It is about agreements with clients, we provide a service.” He seems to distance himself from punishing and underlines the role of the CMO as helping, supporting, and advising. “So,” he articulates understandingly, “now those who were too lazy ...in God’s name, they did not have to do anything up to now [before the legal changes in 2019].” There are, according to Rudolf, only a few people (he uses the word “cases”) in the focus of such orders that “really make problems and do not want to work, but it is those cases that make bad press.”

The situation seems a bit uncomfortable to him; the subject is delicate, and he knows that he has to legitimize the work of the CMO. By pointing to the “few cases that really make problems” he seems to refer to public pressure on them to implement and do revocation and downgrading order. I wonder if he himself has uncertainties about these new procedures, if he might suppress doubts. He takes a deeper breath and highlights again that the CMO “helps” people and that “before, no one ever told them that they had to do anything.” This indirectly criticizes and devalorizes the work of social service employees—a few are in the room whose job would be exactly this. In this sense, he implicitly suggests that the CMO takes over the tasks of social services. The downgrading, he goes on is “clearly the milder measure compared to the revocation. But it is also a hint that now they have to take action.” His conclusion on the 2019 legal changes regarding downgrading and revocations is as follows: “We evaluate each person case-by-case and situational [...] yes, it [the new law] is an aggravation, but above all it is a concretization of the vague concept of integration.”

Rudolf ends his presentation in a way similar to how Jürg had started: “How you report is not that important. What is important is that you report. You have the people in front of you. The [CMO] only sees the dossiers.” So, when “certain gentlemen—I have to be careful not to get myself on thin ice [he says with a grin]—from North Africa show up...” He doesn’t finish the sentence, but to me the message seems clear: When people are in front of you, racial profiling works better. After a break accompanied by an awkward silence, Rudolf concludes: “It is about the values of the federal constitution [...] it is about reporting an overall picture to the CMO, also the positive things [...] we don’t want the foreigners out. But where it [“integration”] is not possible, we must set signs.” My gaze wanders around the room and meets some indifferent glances, while Rudolf adds, somewhat pathetically: “For just decisions we need you!” (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2020)

If a person is receiving social assistance in Switzerland, it is possible to revoke their stay permit or downgrade their permanent residence permit to the considerably more precarious residence

permit². Given Switzerland's federalist structure, the decision to issue revocation or downgrading orders is the competence of the respective cantonal migration office (CMO) and part of the daily job of the state officials³ working in these cantonal authorities. The issue at stake is deciding on the future legal status of non-Swiss nationals categorized as poor. People eligible for this measure qualify, on the one hand, to receive state support in the form of social assistance granted and organized by the communal (or rarely regional) social services. On the other hand, this poverty and the consequent reception of social assistance legally qualifies them for a revocation or downgrading of their stay permits.

How is it possible to justify the deportation and exclusion of individuals solely based on being affected by poverty and lacking Swiss nationality? How do the actors confronted with taking and partaking in these decision deal with the act of punishing poverty and (re)producing national difference? In this thesis I explore these conundrums by investigating the administration of non-nationals⁴ affected by poverty as "poor others." Analyzing such substantial issues requires opening the black box of decision-making processes and asking a more empirical question that is in articulation with my fieldwork in different cantons of Switzerland: *How do civil servants in Swiss cantonal migration offices and communal (and regional) social services conduct the everyday government of poverty and migration and, thereby, normalize and materialize b/ordering practices?*

The introductory vignette provides initial insights into how I address this question interested in the everyday administration of "poor others" and the larger bureaucratic context of entangling

² In terms of terminology, I will always refer to the "residence permit" when discussing the specificities of the B permit, which is limited in time. I talk about the "permanent residence permit" when explicitly referencing the C permit, which can or may be issued after a minimum rightful stay of five or ten years and based on meeting other (integration) criteria in Switzerland (see also Kurt, 2017a on settlement treaties). If I do not talk about a specific permit, I use "stay permit."

³ I never witnessed people calling themselves bureaucrats. Instead, they employ, as observed also by Eckert (2020b: 7), terms such as "civil servant," "public service worker," "state official," "administrator (*Verwaltungsangestellter*)," and "social worker." As Eckert, Lea (2021), or Hoag (2011) elaborate, the term "bureaucracy" is often used as a criticism. The term emphasizes the notion of being distant or detached that is linked with laws and procedural knowledge rather an understanding of material reality. I use the term "bureaucracy" to refer to its conceptual value in social sciences and as embedded within state power's "success story." However, when referring to the individuals working in bureaucracy, I use one of the terms mentioned above unless I refer explicitly to the concept of "street level bureaucrat" (Lipsky, 2010). Street-level bureaucrats are public service workers who interact directly with citizens on a daily basis, making important decisions and implementing policies on behalf of the government.

⁴ I use the term "non-nationals" instead of "non-citizens" or "foreign nationals" to refer to individuals who do not hold the nationality of the country of residence. While I take nationality as a (legal) category of difference in the national order of the world, I understand citizenship as processual: "Citizenship is not a state or possession, but a process, social position, or orientation that can be precarious and that must be repeatedly asserted and attained" (Muehlebach, 2012: 18).

migration and poverty control. First, Rudolf and Jürg both underline the importance, even necessity, of receiving information from social services in order to make the “right decisions.” Since the new FNIA was implemented in 2019, social services have been obliged to automatically report the reception of social assistance by non-nationals to CMOs. Upon request, social services also need to provide evaluations regarding the targeted individual’s conduct and their “efforts” to become independent of social assistance. This relationality of decision-making processes is not only key to gaining information on the presence of the “poor other” under CMO’s jurisdiction but also because constructing the “poor other” is a laborious process. Second, as is visible in the vignette above, caseworkers charged with taking decisions need to “evaluate integration.” They must evaluate the individuals’ situations in order to provide the proportionality of the measure by demonstrating that the person is individually responsible for being dependent on social assistance, that this reception is self-inflicted. The latter implies the question of whether the person concerned is poor by their “own fault” and how the prognosis might be that the person must become “independent” of social assistance. Third, this evaluation of self-infliction is, as repeatedly underlined in the vignette above, framed by national law. By undertaking a case-by-case evaluation, Jürg and Rudolf promise that the decisions will be fair and accountable to the legal frame and jurisprudence; accountable to what I call the *national order of poverty*.

Finally, this intersection of constructing “self-inflicted behavior” and the national order of poverty is what I investigate as the *moral* administration of “poor others.” Unpacking the decision-making process on the right to stay of “poor others” reveals moral judgments concerning the recipients of social assistance and non-Swiss nationals, a complex picture of involved actors, and interlinkages between varying bureaucratic offices. Rudolf and Jürg’s repetitive efforts to legitimize their actions raises the question of how this construction of deportable “poor others” is perceived as morally just(ifiable) not only bureaucratically but also by the individual executing such measures. Conducting ethnographic research in social services and CMOs, I was confronted with bureaucratic decision-making processes that not only create categorical *difference* (Eckert, 2020b: 19) but moreover produce an *indifference* concerning this production of difference. Disentangling the bureaucratic production of in/difference to make it productive for the rest of my thesis is the focus of the remainder of this introduction.

The national order of poverty: B/ordering “poor others” in Switzerland

My research question mobilizes a b/ordering perspective that implies an articulation between (social) ordering and the (re)construction of social boundaries and territorial borders (Fassin, 2011b: 221; Fischer et al., 2020). Through b/ordering practices (van Houtum, 2012: 406), larger political and societal orders are normalized and processes of othering materialized. Sarah Green (2012: 580) suggests in this context that “borders are both generated by, and/or help to generate, the classification system that distinguishes (or fails to distinguish) people, places and things in one way rather than another.” I therefore refer to the measures that allow the construction of “the poor other” as revocation b/orders. Such measures represent bureaucratic orders (i.e. rulings) that play an important role in upholding both societal orders and borders.

The introductory vignette illustrates how revocation b/orders depend on an order that lies at the intersection of nationality as a racialized conception of the world and poverty as a classist conception of social relations. For revocation b/orders to emerge, borders must be conceptualized as fundamental for the production and maintenance of societal orders (Malkki 1995). Liisa Malkki’s concept of the “national order of things” refers to the ways in which the boundaries and borders of the nation-state are constructed and enforced through policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion. This can include policies related to migration and citizenship, as well as broader societal values and beliefs concerning who belongs and who does not. The “national order of things” serves to reinforce dominant notions of national identity and can contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies and power relations. Malkki and many others have illustrated that the racialized character of the national order of things emerged in interaction with colonial configurations of politics and power (see, for example, Trouillot, 2015).

This is also the case for Switzerland, where, for over a century, a dominant term regarding conceptualizing migration policies has been “*Überfremdung*” (“overforeignization”). The *Überfremdung* discourse can be considered a manifestation of the national order of things in that it reinforces dominant notions of national identity and serves to exclude certain groups of migrants based on a perceived “otherness” or “difference” that threatens national identity, uniqueness and security. In the vignette, the notion of “integration,” which has found its way into the new federal act’s title, receives substantial attention. “Integration” is central to the evolution of migration control in Switzerland and intimately linked to the idea of *Überfremdung* (Piñeiro, 2015). Indeed, “integration” has become a structuring notion for

migration policies in Switzerland (as well as elsewhere) and notably influenced the legal categorization of non-nationals in Switzerland by connecting communitarian visions of belonging with individual effort and deservingness (Di Donato et al., 2020).

In Switzerland, stay permits are currently differentiated between EU/EFTA nationals and third-country nationals. While EU/EFTA nationals have privileged access to both the Swiss labor market and to stay permits, people with these nationalities are also affected by revocation b/orders (although with different implications). This does not indicate a lack of racialization implicit in revocation b/orders. Rather, it points to the aspects raised, for example, by Achille Mbembe (2017) that the coloniality of knowledge⁵ diffuses, affecting an increasing amount of the population. Practices of upholding inequality and reproducing hierarchies are disseminated and applied to populations that are othered (see Germann, 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Stoler, 2018; Turner, 2018). Hence, migration policies legitimize the exclusion of people, particularly those racialized or perceived as "undesirable" based on social class, nationality, and whether their behavior is seen as desirable or deviant. Although revocation b/orders may affect all people without Swiss nationality similarly and on a legal basis, the reasonings behind such b/orders and their actual affects in terms of possibilities are stratified along racist, classist and gendered lines. In line with this, I understand race, class and gender as social constructions which bear material consequences⁶. The conceptual consequences deriving from this intersection of racist (nationality) and classist (poverty) politics is what I term the *national order of poverty*.

Revocation b/orders are, therefore, part of larger hostile policies that serve as a form of "interior b/ordering," meaning that revocation b/orders have the power to regulate and control people within the physical borders of a particular country. In other words and as illustrated by Jürg in

⁵ The "coloniality of knowledge" refers to the ways in which knowledge production and dissemination have been shaped by colonialism and its ongoing legacies. It recognizes that knowledge is not neutral or objective but rather is produced within particular historical and cultural contexts that are shaped by power relations and hierarchies (see Mbembe, 2001; Randeria, 2014). The imposition of one's own worldview or knowledge onto others, often resulting in the erasure or exclusion of the other's knowledge, beliefs, or experiences, is often related to the notion of "epistemic violence" (see Mignolo, 2011; Spivak, 1999, and footnote 57).

⁶ In this context, *racism* is intrinsically linked to nationality and should always be understood "in the socio-institutional sense" (Mills, 2017: 4). Therefore, I refer to racism as a process and an act of categorization by referring to *racialization*. The historical evolutions of racism and *class* are intrinsically linked (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018; Mbembe, 2017). Both have real effects produced through the sociolegal construction of inequalities as a sociological relationship (Simmel, 1908) in capitalist societies (de Swaan, 1988). *Gender* is important to critically examine and challenge the ways in which norms, inequalities and oppression are maintained (see Haraway, 1988; hooks, 2000; Preciado, 2019). Although, I do not explicitly analyze gender as a category of social differentiation and hierarchization, my theory, epistemology, and analysis are informed by feminist thinkers and the capabilities of a gender perspective to unveil structures of dominations and intersectionality.

the introductory vignette, interior b/ordering describes the processes and practices concerned with the internalization of borders or frontiers (Balibar, 1994; Stoler, 2018). Interior b/ordering delineates the historically contingent instances in which ideological and practical frontiers to combat “dangers to society” are internalized; where the boundaries of society become the target of political interventions and policing (Khosravi, 2009; Lavanchy, 2015); where the borders are not stable and fixed but move, expand, and contract (Walters, 2010); where borders are not “just discursive, but played out on [the] bodies” (Andersson, 2014: 137; see also Green, 2012) of those filtered out as “unwanted others” (Achermann, 2013). In my case, interior b/ordering refers to the continuous conditionality of non-nationals’ stay in Switzerland that allows upholding the national order of poverty. Through the simultaneous construction of (symbolic) boundaries and borders, conditionality and deportability are both materially and discursively (re)produced.

The people confronted with revocation b/orders in Switzerland experience a uniquely hostile environment (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021) or hostile hospitality (Khosravi, 2010). While the trend of coupling welfare benefits and migration control is a global, and particularly European, phenomenon (Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018; Borrelli and Bochsler, 2020), the Swiss case triggers a rather dystopic vision of the future considering this entanglement. If affected by poverty and without Swiss nationality, residents exist under constant menace of deportation. The legal options to discipline and deport “poor others” in Switzerland resemble other migration regimes that are notoriously labelled as authoritarian, un-democratic, or un-liberal (see Alloul, 2021 for Dubai; Deshingkar et al., 2019 for Qatar). Hence, the Swiss case opens a window onto several vistas: the “liberal” banishment of poverty under the guise of “integration,” the deportability of an entire segment of the population under the guise of public interest, and the upholding of the national order of poverty under the guise of justice.

The banality of producing difference

The introductory vignette exemplifies that revocation b/orders are part of a larger complex of governing non-nationals’ access to resources and the maintenance of their rights. Just as Ruben Andersson has labeled the monitoring, detecting, and banishing of illegalized human movement the “illegality industry,” one observes here “the economic, material, and productive aspects of control[ing]” (Andersson, 2014: 121) non-nationals with residency rights. This is connected to the second aspect of the research concerning the normalization and

materialization of b/orders in everyday life. I engage with the question of how populations are governed by b/ordering them according to specific procedures and conceptions of normalcy and deviance that are engrained in societal order and bureaucratic offices (Eckert, 2020a; Lavanchy, 2018; Muehlebach, 2012). Linking my thesis with the aims of global ethnography (Burawoy, 2000; Das and Poole, 2004; Sharma and Gupta, 2006b), I am interested in the particularities insofar as they explain and relate to larger sociopolitical processes and transformations regarding governing poverty and migration on a global level. I focus on what the observed phenomena reveal regarding the (re)production of hierarchies and inequalities in society (Fassin, 2001, 2015) and how these disparities might be counteracted and contested (Robbins, 2013).

Moral justifications and the consequent indifferences in everyday practices provide additional insights into the larger implications of the “bureaucratic production of difference” (Eckert, 2020a). Here, b/ordering represents a useful analytical notion because I can turn the analytical lens away from “the population” towards how bureaucracies b/order themselves. The fact that the national order of poverty is upheld and bureaucratically stabilized is linked to Hannah Arendt’s (1973) discussion of the “banality of evil.” Investigating how state officials address procedures geared at punishing the poverty of non-nationals, and what this reveals concerning the “banality of evil” (Arendt, 1973; Kalir, 2019a, 2019b) necessitates to “descend into the ordinary” (Das, 2007) of “administering poor others.” I employ the term “banality” because it refers to the ordinary manifestation and production of “evil”, of how nation-states manage the populations under their jurisdiction, what is conceived of as a “nation”, and what constitutes “the state” (cf. Aretxaga 2003). Banality of evil denotes that what might be perceived as “evil” can be normalized and routinized until considered mundane. The ordinary must therefore be addressed if this banality is to be revealed and the dehumanizing, discriminatory, racialized, and classist aspects of contemporary political programs considered and contested. According to Veena Das (2007), investigating “the ordinary” is based on the idea that everyday life is not a neutral or insignificant realm, but rather a site where larger social, political, and economic processes are enacted and experienced. Das advocates for attending to the subjective experiences of those who inhabit the ordinary, and how their perceptions and interpretations shape the social world around them. “Evil” acts are often committed not by inherently evil individuals but rather by ordinary people caught up in a system that allows or even encourages such acts to take place (Arendt, 1973: 459).

The people who embody the state in daily encounters are those who face the difficult task of translating human lives and realities into the neat representations of the state and the law. This ordinary translation is not a neat process but a messy one, ridden by uncertainties, ambiguities and contradiction when applying the coherency of law and policies on the messiness of the social world. And what emerges in these moments are doubts. Doubts about whether what one is doing is in the service of “justice” and “the good.” Therefore, the ordinary of bureaucratic decision-making must be examined in order to understand how “racist state projects” (Kalir, 2019a: 14) are implemented despite the uncertainties of administrators regarding whether their actions are “good” and “right.”

Producing difference without doubts

Preventing doubts concerning the rightfulness and moral justification of racist and classist state projects is a craft. Crafting a “just decision,” a decision that is viewed as coherent and legitimate, necessitates a wide array of knowledges, interlinkages, and a high degree of differentiation and specialization (see Alberti, 2021)—perhaps one of the reason why “the state” in anthropological writing is often considered a “magical” being or entity (Coronil 1997; Taussig 1997). I therefore investigate the contradictions, uncertainties and instabilities that emerge in the encounter between the everyday (moral) administration of “poor others” and morality engrained in the national order of poverty. I illustrate that what makes the application and administration of the national order of poverty feasible is the absence of doubts. It is the governing of doubts that allows for partaking in the production of difference. To paraphrase Arendt (1973), by scrutinizing the governing of doubts I delve into the banality of evil, a banality where people are deported due to their poverty and nationality.

The Cambridge dictionary (2022) defines *doubts* as “(a feeling of) not being certain about something, especially about how good or true it is.” Doubts are both an individual feeling (“not being certain”) and simultaneously a part of larger sociopolitical structures (“how good or true it is”). This is necessarily reflexive, as uncertainties are positioned, when doubting, in the context of larger questions of “the good” and “the truth.” My research participants engage with specific techniques to govern the doubts that arise in implementing operations that might result in the potential deportation of “poor others.” Techniques to govern such doubts are individual as much as conditioned by the organizational and structural context in which practices take place (Lascoumes, 2004; Walters, 2012). Techniques therefore allow for justification and

accountability as well as comprise and visibilize the individual uncertainties of street-level bureaucrats (Eckert 2020b; Hibou 2015). I call these techniques in the context of the moral administration of “poor others:” *techniques of governing doubts*.

The stabilities arising from governing doubts allow civil servants to (re)produce the righteousness of state power and its morality. It stabilizes the national order poverty and the neoliberal vision of poverty: If it is long and intense enough, it can be due to nothing other than the person concerned, who does not make enough effort. The responsibility is shifted to the individual, while the structural factors that lead to poverty are removed from the equation. The administrative procedures silent racialization and hierarchizations and project themselves as color-blind, neutral and objective (Lavanchy 2018; see also Wissink 2021). Through the decision-making process and pronouncing verdicts of self-infliction, administrative procedures target not “the poor” but those “unteachables” or “lazy” who have failed to become “integrated.” What is observed here is a silencing of race, of class, and of banishing poverty on racialized grounds. As I reveal throughout this thesis, the consequent exclusion of people affected by poverty is not necessarily an intention of the people working in the offices. Rather, the punishment of poverty is linked to the coupling of migration and welfare bureaucracies and symptomatic of both the national order of poverty and the deportability of all those perceived as “others.” This is the morality of state power that facilitates techniques of governing doubts to become efficacious and for people to morally administer “poor others.” This is the (in)humanity of bureaucracy.

The quest and doubts of writing a thesis

This thesis takes a hybrid form between an article-based dissertation and a monography. This decision, as many others over the last four years of my PhD process, is at least partly based on uncertainties—and even doubts. Doubts are an integral part of this thesis, as I perceive the practice of doubting a specific human quality of dealing with the messiness of the social world and with the contradictions of social reality (Berliner et al., 2016). A thesis is also a process of translating social reality into written form. This process of translation is as much entangled in structures of inequality and power relations as is the bureaucratic work investigated in the subsequent pages (see Asad, 1986; Lea, 2021). Doubting may be seen as a challenge to established orders and norms as I consider humans also part of the structures and regimes under which knowledge is claimed to be produced (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004; hooks, 1991).

My planned entry into the field at the dawn of my second PhD year coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved constant renegotiations and dislocations of my fieldwork. Hence, choosing a hybrid form was principally a pragmatic choice addressing the uncertainty of how my fieldwork would evolve and in terms of being able to finish writing this thesis within the funding period provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation.⁷ Apart from these pragmatic and structural aspects of how I governed my doubts, there are also contextual and epistemological reasons behind the choice of undertaking a thesis based on articles—although these reasons largely emerged *ex-post* and due to me reading article-based dissertations of friends and colleagues. As is visible in the thesis of Damian Rosset (2019), an article-based thesis can offer a kind of a genealogy of the research process—and the frustrations and uncertainties that are often an integral part of it. The articles are written at different moments of the research process and represent historicized struggles and question marks.

I attempt to do justice to the hybridity of a monography and an article-based thesis by using my own research and writing process as a part of the structure and analysis of this thesis. Structuring my thesis into four parts allows delving into specific aspects of my thesis and guides the reader more clearly through my own trajectory of writing and thinking. While the thesis should be read as a whole, each part is of specific interest for certain readers and audiences. Part One concerns my epistemology and methodology and serves to illustrate the field, introducing the epistemological, ontological, and methodological elements necessary to understanding the standpoint from which I write, conducted research, and provide my findings. I wrote this part for the person who enjoys reading about the messiness of doing research and writing a thesis. This part is for those interested in the reasons of why I did what I did; for those interested in epistemology and in ontology; for those concerned with methods, the construction of the field, and the ordinary technicalities of fieldwork. It is for those considering positionality as more than methods; and for those considering ethics as more than formal consent. It is written for those who like to encounter questions rather than answers.

Part Two is concerned with situating the context of my research within the national order of poverty. I start with the first article of my article-based thesis, which I have labelled the *caselaw*

⁷ I conducted my research in a project that was led by Christin Achermann and Stefanie Kurt; the research was conducted by Lisa Marie Borrelli, Doris Niragire Nirere and myself. It is entitled 'Governing Migration and Social Cohesion through Integration Requirements: A Socio-Legal Study on Civic Stratification in Switzerland'. This research project took place between 2018 and 2022 in the context of the National Centre of Competence in Research nccr – on the move, phase II, which was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (51NF40-182897).

article. This article examines the legal frame by analyzing how jurisprudence and law naturalize the coupling of welfare benefits and migration control. This naturalization is then recycled in administrative procedures and leads to a circular and relational legitimization of exclusion due to poverty and nationality. This finding emphasizes the (re)production of social assistance, and welfare benefits more generally, as being reserved for the “national community of solidarity” and plays a key role in producing and stabilizing the figure of the undeserving “poor other.” Hence, I introduce here the first aspect of my research question by addressing the globality as well the Swiss particularity of the national order of poverty. In the following of Part Two, I show how menace of deportation is generalized and not targeted at specific individuals but applies to all residents without nationality who are, or might be, affected by poverty. To contextualize this hunt for “poor others,” I explore the empirical, historical, and ideological contexts of organizing poverty and controlling migration in Switzerland. These organizational aspects of poverty are specific to both general Swiss and specific cantonal settings while also representing global entanglements (Adam et al., 2019; Randeria, 2014; Trouillot, 2001). This part is therefore dedicated to the audience of sociolegal scholars but also those interested in more historical details and the articulation of the particularities of the Swiss case with larger socio-political processes of banishing poverty and controlling migration. It might also be of specific interest to practitioners and relevant to politicizing discussions surrounding the systems of social security and social policy.

Part Three details the ordinary of state bureaucracy and addresses the second aspect of my research question: how b/ordering practices materialize and normalize the national order of poverty. While the previous parts are based on theory, literature, and caselaw, Part Three mobilizes my ethnographic material. Therefore, I am concerned with the manifestations of the Swiss particularities of the national order of poverty and the consequent (moral) administration of “poor others.” After an introduction, I start with the second article: the *paperwork article*. In this article, I investigate one specific technology of government: the paperwork produced in the case-making process of deciding on the future stay of non-citizens receiving social assistance. As a fundamental aspect of bureaucratic work, this article discloses how human lives are translated into casefiles that form the basis of constructing a bureaucratic biography of the person concerned. I illustrate how this translation allows CMOs—the offices in charge of enacting the revocation or downgrading of stay permits—to fabricate a person’s ostensible “unteachability” by individualizing and depoliticizing the reasons for receiving social assistance.

In the second chapter of Part Three, I add ethnographic thickness by introducing the third article, the *relational article*. This article offers an additional lens addressing how decisions are themselves legitimized within the bureaucratic field they are crafted in. The article concerns the fundamental question of how decisions that deny the life (choices) of non-nationals can be viewed as not only justified but even as just. The last article uses the concepts of bureaucratic ethics and ethos (Eckert, 2020a) as a way to make sense of this question. It does so by revealing how the relational decision-making between different offices, including the de-responsibilization of state action and the responsabilization of individuals, enables the moral legitimization of punishing non-Swiss nationals' poverty. Part Three is written for those who enjoy coherent and well-presented information, enthusiasts of ethnographically informed arguments and answers, and those who consider articles the currency of universities.

Part Four extends beyond the three articles and situates the practice and doubting within my ethnographic research. Doubts, and their suppression, are part of the materialization and normalization of b/ordering practices and indicate the contradictions of the everyday of bureaucratic life. In this part, I intersect the ethnographic perspective on state power (Part Three) and the organizational as well as empirical contexts (Part Two) with my elaborations on writing doubts and undermining (scientific) authority (Part One). This intersection allows closely scrutinizing the everyday of administering "poor others" and connects both aspects of my research question: the ordinary and the structural. In this part, I propose a recursive anthropology of the state (see Part Four, Chapter 9). This provides a conceptualization of techniques of governing doubts as a framework that connects all my articles and extends my argument to understanding the morality within the administration of "poor others." By reflecting on my own practices of doubting, writing, and abstracting social reality, I provide an additional fine-grained ethnographic investigation into the moral administration of "poor others." I address how both the work of bureaucracy and the banality of evil are made effective and efficient before the law and impartial in the eyes "of and for the state." I analyze this by situating each of my three articles as portraying a technique of governing doubts that allows rationalizing and submerging doubts: the practice of documentation in the *paperwork article*; the ethics and ethos of rule orientation in the *caselaw article*; and de-responsibilization in the *relational article*. Part Four is written to the ethnographer, the admirer of thick description, the advocate of fieldnotes. It is dedicated to the contradictory social theorist, the anarchist, the activist.

The conclusion reviews my findings within my recursive anthropology of the state by underlining the importance of self-infliction as a way to stabilize the morality of state power within the national order of things. Bringing back in the practice of doubting, I conclude that it is the active contesting of the production of indifference which might be a way to break the vicious circle of producing difference. The conclusion is dedicated to the doubtful utopian.

PART ONE

Searching for “the other” and encountering the field

My point is only that the process of “cultural translation” is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power—professional, national, international. And among these conditions is the authority of ethnographers to uncover the implicit meanings of subordinate societies. Given that that is so, the interesting question for enquiry is not whether, and if so to what extent, anthropologists should be relativists or rationalists, critical or charitable, toward other cultures, but how power enters into the process of “cultural translation,” seen both as a discursive and as a non-discursive practice.
(Asad, 1986: 163)

I think we have been [guilty], at least through unreflective participation in the logics, languages and practices of white humanism and through searching for a single ground of domination to secure our revolutionary voice. Now we have less excuse. But in the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. “Epistemology” is about knowing the difference.
(Haraway, 1999: 300)

Often claiming to constitute a vanguard, intellectuals identified the Brazilian other to be known (and brought to modernity) as the poor, the black, the Indian, the members of ethnic minorities, and the working-class organizers of social movements—in short, those whose membership in the modern nation might be problematic. As “national intellectuals” are usually members of a social elite, it is evident that the “self” about which these studies frequently keep silent is the elite, secure in its position of leadership. Otherness becomes again a matter of power relations, but in this case the relations are internal to the society of anthropologists.
(Caldeira, 2000: 9)

Chapter 1

Encountering bureaucracy, (re)producing knowledge

It's my last day in the migration office of a German-speaking canton. I am finalizing my discussions with one of the caseworkers when there is a knock on the door. The head of a section, Greta, who always seems a bit confused or absent-minded, enters the office, greets me, and asks if I would like to come with her to Hans-Rudolf's office for a moment. Of course, I confirm, since I needed to talk to the head of office anyway. Hans-Rudolf greets us in his usual loud and rumbling manner. He immediately gets to the point and tells me that he has now spoken again with the canton's data protection officer, whom he knows “very well.” He now needs an addition to the data protection contract and asks whether I still have it because “I can't find it anymore.” I confirm that I do and am pleased that there is, after all, the possibility of obtaining casefiles and documents. Hans-Rudolf explains that the addendum to the data protection contract should explicitly state that “after completion of the research, all data must be destroyed or anonymized.” I should send him the adjusted data protection agreement later and the addendum with the reference “that all data will be destroyed.” I change this a bit and write, while seeming to feel Hans-Rudolf's breath on my neck, “documents and files.” This would allow me to be clear that I won't destroy fieldnotes. He agrees after some of his customary back and forth. “I don't care what you do with the documents, I'm now legally covered and out of the picture,” he states. The negotiations have ended, and he invites me to his table, where he exuberantly details how to transfer documents to an external hard disk. “It's as easy as it can get,” he says. Greta, meanwhile, sits at the conference table in the corner of the large office, lost in thought.

...

Our conversation is approaching the fact that it is my final day of fieldwork in their office. We come to talk about my research and their reservations or expectations. Hans-Rudolf throws his hands in the air and exclaims his expectation that I “don't produce some crap university paper.” Here it becomes clear once again—and much clearer than before—how critical (or rather skeptical) they are toward scientific work. In fact, they seem almost offended by what is produced at universities. I am amazed, despite having suspected it for some time, that they have never Googled me or looked at my previous work. If they had, they would have quickly realized that I probably belong in this category of persons producing crappy university work. Hans-Rudolf clarifies that whether one likes a piece of research or not is a question of perspective and is debatable, but that there are “objective things.” He continues on (to contradict himself—one of his favorite hobbies, it seems to me), explaining that what is real is always perceived differently. “Everybody has a filter in front of their eyes,” he says. Delighted by so constructivist a statement from so coarse a mouth, I realize how I came to appreciate Greta and Hans-Rudolf over the previous weeks, particularly my interactions with these two very different characters. He goes on to say that this filter leads to different opinions prevailing: “This is also okay and important. We can discuss about it but with good arguments and not simply bashing us. This happens regularly to us; this is a general trend in the criticism of CMOs.”

...

After discussing several other aspects of the approaching end of my visit at their CMO, Greta and I stand in the doorway. Hans-Rudolf clears his throat, preventing us from leaving his office. He takes one last swing and says, “We just don’t want such a university paper criticizing us.” I answer that my work will be critical. Greta produces a kind of shriek and turns to Hans-Rudolf. “See, I told you so. He criticizes us!” Now, their skepticism of university work breaks out completely and the subliminal contempt, which I had suspected Greta harbored, is now clearly accentuated. It was already there in her skeptical approach to my research interest and the constant emphasis on her humane decision-making. I think of the long and extensive access negotiations that allowed me to gradually enter the office.

I try to relativize what might be understood by critical but the question of what I actually understand to mean “critical” blurs in my head. Hans-Rudolf seems to have forgotten his next appointment. I try to appease them and say that it is about understanding exactly why and how decisions are made and not about a general criticism, i.e., a critical reflection on their work. They both state that they were very skeptical at the beginning and did not want to allow field research in their office. With a deep sigh, Greta says, “Then we got to know you and we changed our opinion.” Hans-Rudolf adds that he has a lot of trouble with “all these surveys from universities” in which “they always ask so many things, but we can’t just answer them so briefly.” He underlines that for him, it is very difficult to explain work processes and decisions and so “quickly, quickly, only using surveys just doesn’t work.” He continues on to say that “the consideration of the individual case is lost, and decisions are presented as unified. This is not the case in our reality. Each case is different, singular. All of these very generalizing studies bother us.” This provides an excellent opportunity for me to retort by emphasizing that the fieldwork I conducted here directly concerned these questions and how they relate to individual cases; my work addresses what happens behind the numbers and the short answers collected in surveys. They seem somewhat appeased by this answer, whereas I myself am increasingly doubting whether I really aim at portraying what I encounter, if this is possible anyway, or whether I just superimpose my visions onto my research participants. I wonder if I do not diabolize this “other” I have identified in the figure of “the bureaucrat,” “the migration official,” “the state,” and “the social worker.” (edited fieldnotes, CMO, 2020).

The critical stance toward academic work and the question of what knowledge is produced, as discussed by Hans-Rudolf and Greta, raises important questions regarding how I understand the interrelation of knowledge, “the field,” and scientific knowledge production. By empirically exploring interior b/ordering and bureaucratic practices, this dissertation delves into the everyday “constructions of meaning, [...] the ways people make sense of their everyday activities and surroundings” (Mottier, 2005: 4). Véronique Mottier (2005: 4) explored how this focus on the everyday implies a constructivist and interpretive methodological perspective that apprehends “the social world [...] as a subjectively lived construct” (2005, 4). I do not construct the field as a pool of data, but approach ethnography as a process driven by the interest of being

there and observing events and processes in their everyday form (Bensa and Fassin, 2008). The field is not constructed once; rather, it is constantly recomposed—just as my own perception of the field also perpetually alters and influences me. I am a part of the field.

The interconnections between knowledge, research, and writing are introduced in more detail in the following by examining the theoretical, epistemological, empirical, and methodological context of research. The question of how to imagine and construct the field—with what relations, in relation to what knowledge is produced from these relations, and with what authority—is an ongoing debate. As many others have before him, Didier Fassin (2011a) has more recently linked this debate to Plato’s allegory of the cave. The cave represents the dark, the unilluminated, while the outside represents light, reason, and truth. The people in the cave perceive the outside as only represented in the shadows it casts within. For the cave’s inhabitants, however, the shadows are “real” or “the truth” despite being mere reflections of that “outside” reality. Fassin (2011a: 485), in positioning himself in debates around the authority of critical anthropology, explicates what he understands as the critical potential of anthropology in line with a constructivist and interpretative methodology. As a critical theorist and ethnographer himself, he also addresses what he understands as the authority of the ethnographer engaged in critical enquiries. Thereby, he indicates an intrinsic dilemma regarding scientific research. He states: “I propose to situate the critic on the threshold of the cave, not in an undecided in-between position, but in one from where it is possible to go inside and outside, alternatively.” Fassin acknowledges that reality is not the same for everybody and the “problem” is how to reconcile this ontological multiplicity with the abstracting, analyzing aspects of research. This puzzle is concerned with the contradictory aspect of how to co-produce knowledge (Jasanoff, 2004). He summarizes this in terms of his own research, which relates substantially to my own:

This is what I have attempted to do, for instance, in my research on the humanitarian politics of life: on the one hand, I was attentive to the moral arguments humanitarian workers provided to explain their intervention, to the inevitable ethical debates and contradictions resulting from it; on the other hand, I was analyzing the moral and ethical blind spots of their activity, their untold logics, their unexpected effects, and the ontological inequalities it created or reinforced. (Fassin, 2011a: 485)

I am, similar to Fassin, also interested in uncovering logics and mechanisms in the sense of a “critical” analysis. The moral and ethical blind spots, the unspoken logics, the unexpected effects, and the ontological inequalities Fassin describes are also situated, partial, and are

discovered and constructed from a position that is itself dependent on power inequalities. How can I account for these inequalities that are part of my constructions and representations of reality. It is here that the question of the authority of the ethnographer comes into play, because who is in a position to speak and where does the authority to be heard come from? Who can place themselves in the position of the critical observer, freely choose where to be on the threshold of the cave?

I use several means in order to address such questions: to talk about “stories” rather than “data,” to make the contradictions I encounter and “feel” visible and transparent, to reflect on my own practices as not natural but enmeshed in power inequalities, and to make methodology an intrinsic element of analysis and writing. These approaches acknowledge the fact that ethnographic knowledge is necessarily constructed rather than objective. I am in a position of power as the one performing this analysis and therefore hold the privilege of ethnographic authority. This “ethnographic authority” (Clifford, 1983) results, for me, in some discomfort. I hope the term “stories” makes this clear, despite my not justifying this thoroughly. This does not imply that other authors cannot grasp data as constructed and still believe that they provide important insights. Indeed, Fassin can grasp the construction of the field as a process and simultaneously as a pool of data—a processual pool of data, so to speak.

Taking bureaucracy as the focal point of analysis allows me to pinpoint the question of how it is possible that something which, at first sight, seems absurd (and dehumanizing) is made legitimate for and through bureaucracy (see Vohnsen, 2017). This question is connected to a critical epistemology that aims at denaturalizing bureaucratic actions, laws, and state power. Such a question is also connected to how encountering bureaucracy, or rather the people administering bureaucracy, renders it all too human (Lea, 2021). However, this legitimization is never complete. Doubts necessarily remain—for the researcher, the research participants and perhaps also for the reader (see Chapter 2). Therefore, I am not interested in the exceptional but in the mundane; I am interested in the complexity of social relations that are never static and finished but continuously evolve in a net of relationships (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In the words of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, we might take this excursus as a question of style that is “dictated by the disciplinary matrix and expresses a redundancy in the sense of no cognitive value added” (1999: 15). Moreover, De Oliveira (1999: 16) adds, in the context of “peripheral anthropology” and particularly Brazilian anthropologists, that style allows new forms of narratives to be found that escape the dominating effects of a disciplinary matrix. In other words, a style that allows one to express discomfort, contradictions, and doubts. In line

with this, Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira (2000: 9) provides an adequate understanding: “data and knowledge are produced interactively in relationships framed by the social positions of those involved.” This is a methodological approach that does not gather data and bring it to light. It is both a construction of and a relation to the field that is based on the endless possibilities of stories and realities. Further, the anthropological task of writing, translating, and understanding a story based on one reality is intrinsically linked to all the other stories, to other realities, including my own, which is also an object of inquiry. A core aspect of my methodology is therefore to link the construction of both the field and the theory with epistemological aspects while allowing room for contradictions and doubts.

Bureaucracy as alterity and self

Considering alterity and its scientific as well as sociopolitical production as a power relation (Asad, 1973; Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2020; Caldeira, 2000) allows me to question what knowledge I aim at (re)producing (Coronil, 1996). The questions I address are also linked to coloniality, as the metropolises of colonialism, such as Switzerland (Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, 2015), are as much affected by relations of coloniality as the periphery (Stoler, 2002), if in different ways (Mbembe, 2011). Studying the imbrications of migration control and the government of poverty in Switzerland allows me to demonstrate how continuities between the two are viewed and how these continuities are conditioned by a coloniality of knowledge.

Studying bureaucracies and state power in Switzerland necessitates turning the gaze from the subaltern and toward a critique of coloniality as a system of knowledge and practices (Spivak, 1999; Trouillot, 2001, 2015). Studying bureaucracies is, therefore, often connected to the perspective of “studying up,” which refers to the practice of examining and analyzing the behavior of powerful individuals, institutions, and organizations in society rather than solely focusing on those who are traditionally considered “less powerful” or “marginalized” (Nader, 1969). Additionally, turning the focus to bureaucracies and applying several concepts usually used in relation to the “dominated” enables me to underscore the absurdities encountered in both bureaucratic practices and in the theories and knowledge of the social sciences. Studying public institutions provides an intriguing opportunity to challenge the assumption that those in positions of power are inherently more knowledgeable or trustworthy than others and highlights the ways in which power and inequality shape social relations and practices (see Lavanchy, 2013a; Rosset and Achermann, 2019).

Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2019, 2021), two major figures⁸ advocating for more reflection on the ethnographic research of bureaucracies, underline that:

The anthropology of bureaucracy should take the bureaucrat as the “native”, and acknowledge his/her agency. [...] The natives (i.e., the bureaucrats) must have good reasons for their seemingly “absurd” practices, once you understand the context in which they act. (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019: 3–4)

This represents the classical point of departure for ethnographic fieldwork stipulated by Malinowski (1922) or Radcliff-Brown (1922). The approach proposed by Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan provides further reason to acknowledge the doings of the people I encountered in my fieldwork. Such people are humans who work within specific structural, institutional, and organizational confines. However, as Caldeira (2000) reveals, the bureaucrats are also constructed as an alterity. An “alterity” is always constructed, based on power relations and works on the constant construction of “the self.” Adopting a postcolonial or feminist lens, the perspective in the citation above is reductionist, and the power relations involved in studying bureaucracy diverge from those in an anthropology engaged with “the suffering subject” (Robbins, 2013). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2019: 5) situated state bureaucracies as participating “in the sovereignty claim of the state” but, from my perspective, failed to apply this to an anthropological enquiry into bureaucracy and its implications for research. Just as bureaucracy participates in asserting the state’s sovereignty, anthropology participates in asserting the sovereignty of a supposedly objective and neutral science. Missing the latter point, they conclude:

The ambition must be to learn to think like a native while keeping the necessary distance needed for a social science analysis and developing a competence in handling multi-accountabilities towards different factions and hierarchy levels in the bureaucracy. (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019: 13)

Can one learn to think like a “native?” Further, can research focusing on entities that are fundamentally related to the exercise of state power, and are thus political, be perceived from a non-political perspective? My answer is no. The question is how one makes these political aspects visible and accounts for them in written translations and representations. Learning to think like “a native” or a “bureaucrat” is unsatisfactory and, from my point of view, hides more than it reveals. Instead, revealing the entanglements of politics, inequalities, and human

⁸ Importantly to situate their epistemology and methodology: both authors come from the anthropology of development and have been engaged in studying state-building processes in western Africa through their affiliation with the *Association Euro-Africaine pour l’Anthropologie du Changement Social et du Développement*.

behavior is intimately linked to alterity and the self—and, more specifically, to what I call “relational positionality.”

Visibilizing the entanglements of politics, inequalities, and human behavior implies attentiveness to how alterity and the self is constructed in this context. Bureaucracies are repeatedly treated as amoral and not as being saturated with ethical dilemmas and questions. However, I am interested in the ethical and moral character of bureaucracies in the same manner as ethnography is invested with ethical and moral properties (Lea 2021). Might undertaking research not also be as “experientially absurd” (Vohnsen, 2017) as practicing bureaucracy?

Relational positionality in researching bureaucracies

My positionality within Swiss state bureaucracies is not the same as it would be in an Andean Valley in Colombia. My knowledge, experiences, and output are produced “interactively in relationships framed by the social positions of those involved” (Caldeira, 2000: 9). My appearance allows me to gain access to such institutions (Reyes, 2020), and I am not perceived as any kind of danger. Additionally, I can easily blend in with the social workers or civil servants in social services or CMOs. Indeed, I was repeatedly mistaken for a person working there.

The insider/outsider binary often applied to ethnographic research (Reyes, 2020) is also inadequate in my case, as Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan show:

The upside of these challenges is that the anthropology of bureaucracy has the potential to unsettle traditional distinctions between local actors and researchers, emic and etic, inside and outside. This opens the way for a more symmetric anthropology where researcher and researched meet on a more equal footing, and it is not necessarily the anthropologist who is solely in command of knowledge and power. (2021: 19)

We might question whether this only applies to studies on bureaucracies and organizations, but the important point here is the emphasis on symmetry. In the perspective of a recursive anthropology,⁹ fieldwork itself influences the ontology of the researcher and the knowledge

⁹ Recursive anthropology emphasizes the interdependence and mutual influence of the researcher and the research subject, respectively, on the field of enquiry. In recursive anthropology, the researcher acknowledges their own subjectivity and positionality, as well as the fact that their research subjects are also active agents who shape the

produced (Holbraad, 2013). This has, from my point of view, little relation to meeting on an “equal footing.” Many anthropologists have explained that power relations in fieldwork are neither linear nor one-way (Caldeira, 2000; Khosravi, 2019; Monsutti, 2018). Information is always disclosed, used strategically, or given unintentionally. However, it is noteworthy that, given positionality is relational, processual, and situational, I am significantly influenced by both the field and my research. To employ Plato’s cave again, I, as much as my research participants, am not condemned to the cave’s interior, exterior, or threshold. Relationships are built constantly, and positionality changes in the courses of such constructions. However, this relational positionality does not mean that I act in a vacuum. As Victoria Reyes (2020) argues, we have an ethnographic toolkit that is situational and sometimes unintentional, which leads to different positionalities. We all have different standpoints from which we talk, gain knowledge, and perceive (Brunold, 2020; Haraway, 1999; Harding, 2004).

Methodologically, this implies that I always valued the work my research participants undertook, although I might be opposed to its content and moral justification. Nevertheless, I was—and remain—impressed by and curious regarding the complexity of everyday life and the tasks civil servants are engage with. This is an honest valorization, and I am positive concerning the possibilities this attitude opens and the depth of conversation it allows. I understand both my interlocutors and myself as partaking in a constant process of “meaning-making” or constructing stories and knowledge. Of course, this interaction transpires under considerably different circumstances. While my research participants are constructing meaning in the contexts of undertaking wage labor and carrying out orders, I, as a (paid) researcher, am observing and trying to understand their practices and meaning-making. Compared to Fassin’s elaboration of Plato’s cave, there is, for me, no difference between myself and my interlocutors. I do not see more than they do; but, of course, I see something different, and this includes an idea of what they see. Here again, the connection of the stories comes into play. My story is one that tries to understand their story with the instruments of methodology and theory at hand. However, I partly refer to concepts similar to those my interlocutors employ, and their knowledge and practices enter my own sense-making (see Holmes and Marcus, 2008b).

research process. It recognizes that the act of studying social relations inevitably affects and changes both the researcher and the researched. Recursive anthropology emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, or self-awareness and critical reflection, in the research process. Researchers using this approach aim to understand their own biases and assumptions and how these might affect their interpretations and analysis (see Holbraad, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

Grounded theory provides an approach here that illustrates the implications of a constant back and forth between fieldwork, theoretical embedment, and analysis (Charmaz, 2008; Flick et al., 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 2009). Circularity and processuality enable me to be attentive to emergent findings from the field by carefully and constantly reconsidering analytical categories, theoretical discourses, and coding. Moreover, circularity and processuality permit me to be conscious of elements that might be hidden, overestimated, or recharacterized for the sake of analysis. Within this ethnographic research, I chose a multi-perspectivist (Achermann, 2008, 2009) and multi-sited approach (Marcus, 1986) to more effectively reflect the multiplicity of actors, institutions, materialities, and epistemologies involved in this field of research. A multi-perspectivist ethnography encourages researchers to take into account different epistemologies and ontologies when analyzing “a given phenomenon and the intertwining agency of a variety of actors” (Achermann, 2009: 52). This is in line with a para-ethnography, where the knowledge produced by the participants of an ethnographic study is an important dimension for understanding and reflecting on the phenomena under study (Holmes and Marcus, 2008a, 2008b; Islam, 2015). Aiming at a recursive anthropology (see Part Four, Chapter 9), I do not transform “data” into the form of academic paperwork but aim to use the stories and imaginaries encountered as themselves generative of knowledge and reflective of my own practices (Holbraad, 2013). In accordance with a multi-perspectivist approach, my study aims to leave room for different knowledges, their representations, and their connections. I outline the notion of doubts in the following chapter as a concept allowing for such a recursive and multi-perspectivist anthropology.

Chapter 2

Being a bureaucrat but writing doubts: Undermining (ethnographic) authority

Once again, much too early, I stand with a cigarette and a coffee in a paper cup in front of the huge square block, the centralized dream of bureaucratic work. Although I'm early, all six floors are already lit up, the floors where all the administrative activities of the city are bundled. Indicative of this bureaucratization, and with Béatrice Hibou's text¹⁰ in mind, is that the city rents the offices from a large private company with which the city shares parts of the huge building, the concrete-filled courtyard, and the light-filled canteen. I think back to five months ago when I first stood here, desperately searching for the right entrance.

I enter the oversized reception room of the social service. As in all the rooms of this modernist building, this room is hung with plants—mostly in metal constructions, accentuating the room divisions. There is no sign of Rahel, who I am supposed to meet today and who I have only encountered once before at an online meeting of a social service team. Today, I am here again for the first time in more than a month. And my first time as a guest without a badge to open the doors for me. It's a strange feeling to be here again, but somehow, I'm glad that I'm no longer coming and going every day. Not because I did not meet interesting people or somehow felt unwelcome, but because I still feel the fatigue of fieldwork, of the constant exchanges, constant pretention of being in a good mood, being talkative but without too much of an opinion of one's own. I decide to limit my visit to the conversation with Rahel. I realize that I no longer have the energy for the countless conversations and the endless information.

Slowly, I make my way to the reception desk, a long and slightly curved desk that also demarcates the open office space of the people working in the reception team. In social work jargon, this team is called “take-in” and provokes, in my head, the image of a funnel, a funnel with slippery walls. Contrary to the CMO I just ended my fieldwork at, everything is open here and visible at first glance. While making my way to the reception desk, I stare at the entry hall, from which several doors lead to meeting rooms. These were the only available rooms for meetings with social assistance recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they are now less occupied again since the pandemic measures have been relaxed also in public administration. I report to the reception, not knowing the person present today personally—only by sight. She tells me to take a seat. I ask if I can use the restroom. The visitors' restroom is the one I used most often during my stay, strategically located near the back entrance and hardly used. Back at the entry hall, I sit down on one of the curved seats next to the entrance and am touched by the bored gaze of the Securitas while I wait. My four months here seem to have been swept away, I feel like a “stranger” again.

Shortly after 9 a.m., Rahel strides through the electronic glass barrier that connects the reception area with the lifts and the staircase. She seems rushed and a bit clumsy but immediately makes me out among the handful of people waiting here. She greets me and asks

¹⁰ See Hibou (2015)

me to follow her. All very formal. In the stairwell—the staff hardly ever use the elevator—I manage to switch to “Du,” though she rarely makes use of it during the conversation afterwards. We go to the meeting room located in the same place on all floors: right next to the elevators. The place is starting to feel strange to me as well.

I tell her I’m glad that the meeting worked out after all, although I feel guilty that it was delayed so much. She turns around when she opens the door to the meeting room and declares meaningfully, “We’re not talking about guilt here. That is a very problematic term.” I immediately feel a little more uncomfortable, my gaze towards the plastic floor. While entering the room, she asks me if I prefer to leave the Plexiglas panes on the table, a pandemic measure that divides the table into slices. I answer that, for me, it is not necessary, and she places it on the floor while she frantically opens the window and closes it again shortly after. She sits down impetuously and restlessly, looks at me, fiddles with her computer. Then, the conversation begins.

...

In view of the partly defamatory information she has given me over the last two hours of our conversation, I mention again that anonymity and confidentiality imply that I also can’t talk to anyone in the office about what she told me. She seems relieved, and we step out the door together, where the head of her section and two other people are sitting on long, curved seats, identical to the ones where I waited for Rahel at the reception. A somewhat startled look seems visible on Rahel’s face as I greet the three and head straight for the elevator to leave the building once again. I’m glad to leave it for good. (Edited fieldnote, social service, 2021)

My reencounter with this social service of a larger city in German-speaking Switzerland is noteworthy regarding several of the core aspects I explore. The discussion of positionality in the previous chapter raises the importance of discussing how the field affects me regarding sensorial considerations (fatigue, excitement, etc.) as well as in terms of theory, epistemology, and ontology. In these moments of fatigue, one might most prominently come to grasp one’s own doubts. Doubts often concern insecurities regarding the appropriateness of certain decisions and whether we are doing injustice to our research participants by overinterpreting or diabolizing them. Such doubting was a core feature of my sensory and cognitive experiences of conducting fieldwork. This chapter is therefore concerned with disentangling the notion of doubts in order to provide a way of translating social reality and writing that considers the contradictions of social reality, scientific knowledge production and bureaucratic life.

Engaging with contradictions

It’s taking me a long time to write. By choosing to expose the web of his life through a number of selected facts and details, I feel that I am gradually moving away from the figure of my father. The skeleton of the book takes over and ideas seem to develop of their own accord. If, on the other hand, I indulge in personal reminiscence, I remember him as he was, with his way of laughing and walking, taking me by the hand to the funfair to see the huge, frightening merry-go-rounds, and I forget about everything that ties him to his own social class. Each time I face this dilemma, I have to tear myself from the subjective point of view. (Ernaux, 1993: 37–38)

We reflected on our lives as women. We realized that we’d missed our share of freedom—sexual, creative, or any other kind enjoyed by men. [...] Awakened from conjugal torpor, we sat on the ground beneath a poster that read “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle” and went back over our lives. We felt capable of cutting ourselves loose from husband and kids, and writing crude, raw things. Once we were home again, our determination faded. Guilt welled up. We could no longer see how to liberate ourselves, how to go about it, or why [...]. (Ernaux, 2017: 125–126)

I cite passages from Annie Ernaux’s books—which are “belletristic” rather than “academic”—because her approach is helpful to writing doubts as a means of both analyzing and situating myself. Doubts are key to understanding how the following articles are included in my thesis, what conundrums I encountered when writing in the spaces between an article-based thesis and a monography, what my position toward these articles is, and how I arrived at the analysis I added to the articles.

I found a way of addressing doubts in the books of Ernaux, who calls herself “an ethnographer of the self.” One book concerns her father, the other herself—but not exclusively. These books recall the periods in which Ernaux and her father were raised and are preoccupied with class and alterity, positionality and social relations. The questions she so forcefully poses in her writings include how to do justice to both her father and herself and how not to lose either within her depiction of the structures and necessities accompanying their lives. While his life involved growing up in a poor family in rural France between the two world wars, hers was a history of upward social mobility, of the 1960s in Paris, of being a mother, of being a feminist. While her work is interested in structures and based on a world of hierarchies, she elaborates lyrically on how she can account for the contradictions that mark both human life in general and those that marked her and her father’s lives specifically. Impressively, Ernaux establishes

that it is always easy to criticize “the others,” to point the finger at them (for example, the parental generations). It is even easy to be reflective regarding this pointing of the finger.

I was often astonished to discover how reflexive academics are regarding the application of concepts and theories to “their” field or the uncertainties regarding their own analysis. This is particularly apparent in the field of migration studies, which (at least in the critical and reflexive field of migration studies I interacted with) is highly reflexive regarding the way fingers are pointed toward a process, a research question, or even a group. Questions are asked regarding methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003); regarding the reproduction of hierarchies, differentiations, and categorizations (Anderson, 2021; Dahinden, 2016; Schinkel, 2017); and regarding one’s own participation in the regimes under analysis (Hess and Kasparek, 2017; Scheel, 2017).

However, Ernaux also suggests that one seldom points the finger toward oneself and asks, in a similarly reflexive manner, what we actually do and how this is inscribed into larger structures of inequality. When she articulates these two elements in her writings, her product, the book, becomes part of the process. She expresses her doubts regarding whether what she did and still does is right or true. In my reading of her work, these are no longer moral but political questions. For me, this implies that I must also reflect on my analysis of “things” in my own writing—to identify doubts, to make doubts explicit in my translation of the field and fieldwork, and to express them in the written text.

How do we account for these doubts without making them vanish for the sake of formal coherence and argumentative clarity in writing? Unlike uncertainties, and in line with a recursive anthropology, I think it is important to portray doubts in our writing. Rendering doubts transparent allows a situatedness of knowledge; an acknowledgment that knowledge is being co-produced from individual, collective, and structural perspectives. Hence, doubts operate on a different level than uncertainties. As elaborated in the introduction, doubts imply questions and reflections regarding whether one’s actions are “good” and “true” in addition to what constitutes “the truth” and “the good.” Mathijs Pelkmans (2013), in one of the few contributions to the anthropology of doubts, discusses the ontological and epistemological implications of doubts at length. Similar to myself, he grasps doubting as enclosing a specific human quality and delineates it from uncertainty by providing the example that the outcome of a bio-chemical reaction might be uncertain, but it is not doubting. Uncertainty may be seen as a natural and unavoidable aspect of life, while doubts may be seen as a challenge to established

beliefs or authority. Doubting is intrinsically connected to contradictions and their experience as being fundamental to the human existence (Berliner et al., 2016); doubts are located within a constructivist epistemology, an epistemology based on an ontology that takes contradictions as the point of departure (see Camus, 1942). This is what I label an *ontology of contradictions* that makes an *anthropology of doubts* possible.

Reading Ernaux’ books prompted several questions: Are contradictions not at the very heart of human existence and history? Can contradictions be understood as a fundamental quality of human existence? If so, how does one experience contradictions, how does one live them, accept them, and reflect on them? How does one write them? The scientific term for this state of mind is “cognitive dissonance:” the moment and mental space in which one is confronted with contradictory desires, beliefs, or convictions. This discomfort or dissonance is necessarily present but can lead individuals to modify, alter, or reject a belief or behavior in order to reduce psychological tension and achieve greater consistency and coherence in their thoughts and actions. Cognitive dissonance, in this sense, is a label for the psychological processes that transpire when one attempts to parse reality. When considering the moments in which rules, norms, and routines clash with the world to which they are applied—where cognitive dissonances are exhibited—we find the moments of which Annie Ernaux writes and the moments with which I struggle to translate into words.

Doubts, in the context of my research, are the consequences of cognitive dissonance and the perceptions of contradictory beliefs and actions as elements of larger structures of inequality. Doubts are a questioning of privileged positionings within the social relations embedding people. They are part of a reflective and political cognitive process that presupposes people act in a world that contradicts the mental and social models applied to it and which is not equal for all. I can grasp the humanity of both bureaucracy and academia when investigating the institutional, organizational, and structural (in)formalities in place that allow doubts to be governed. Similar to Anthony Giddens’ (1986) structuration theory, one observes a processual and dynamic interaction between agency and structure. Contrary to his work, however, when considering the social reality of bureaucracy, I find contradiction and not harmony, disintegration and not integration, confusion and not synthesis. Therefore, I deem doubts as the fundamental element of my research regarding how moments of contradiction or cognitive dissonance can be grasped. Doubting one’s own practices does not mean that one must necessarily renounce these practices. However, doubting implies recognizing that our certain

practices (be they academic or bureaucratic) are contradictory or disadvantageous to other perspectives and realities.¹¹

Doubting authority

Women, more than ever, were a closely watched group whose behaviors, tastes, and desires were subject to assiduous discourse and uneasy, triumphant attention. They were now deemed to “have it all” and “be everywhere.” Girls “did better at school than boys.” As usual, people looked for signs of emancipation in women’s bodies, in their sexual and sartorial daring. The fact that they talked about “cruising guys,” discussed their fantasies, and wondered aloud in *Elle* if they were “good in bed” was proof of their freedom and their equality with men. The perpetual display of their breasts and thighs in advertising was supposed to be construed as a tribute to feminine beauty. Feminism was a vengeful, humorless old ideology that young women no longer needed, and viewed with condescension. They did not doubt their own strength or their equality. (But they still read more novels than men, as if they needed to give their lives an imaginary shape.) “Thank you, men, for loving women,” read a headline in a women’s magazine. The struggle of women sank into oblivion. It was the only struggle that had not been officially revived in collective memory. (Ernaux, 2017: 148–149)

Here, I want to take my own doubts to another level—that of the “narrative contract” and “ethnographic authority” in ethnographic writing (Clifford, 1983; Geertz, 1988). The concept of the narrative contract in ethnographic writing refers to an implicit agreement between the author and reader regarding the form and content of the ethnographic text. It encompasses the expectations that readers hold of the way the story is told, the role of the author in the text, and the level of detail and analysis provided.¹² Ethnographic authority, is linked to my elaboration on Plato’s cave and involves a complex negotiation of power, in which the anthropologist may hold a position of privilege or authority that can impact the research process and the representation of people being studied.

¹¹ Does addressing doubts imply that one must forego academic thinking? Does criticizing and questioning my own practices of conducting research imply that I should simply not undertake it? I think not. It is essential to be reflexive towards one’s own practices, as doing so might open new windows and deessentialize what initially seems evident.

¹² There is the danger of the idea of a narrative contract reinforcing a colonial model of ethnographic writing as a one-way communication from the author to the reader. Instead, ethnographic writing should aim for more dialogic, collaborative forms of representation that involve the people being studied as active co-producers of knowledge (Marcus, 1998).

With the further help of Ernaux, I would argue that one does not have a single audience and that there is not a stable ethnographic authority or audience (see also Carbado, 2020; Cornish, 2020). I reproduce therefore a last fragment of Ernaux’s writings:

With the pill, they had become the sole rulers of their lives, but word hadn’t got out yet.

We, who had undergone kitchen-table abortions, who had divorced and believed our struggle to free ourselves would be of use to others, were now overwhelmed by fatigue. We no longer knew if the women’s revolution had really happened. We continued to see blood after fifty. It didn’t have the same color or odor as before, it was a sort of illusory blood, but we were reassured by this regular scansion of time that could be sustained until death. We wore jeans, leggings, and T-shirts like girls of fifteen. Like them, we said “my boyfriend” when referring to our regular lover. As we aged, we ceased to have an age. When we heard *Only You* or *Capri c’est fini* on Radio Nostalgie, the sweetness of youth washed over us. The present swelled and carried us back to our twenties. Compared to our mothers, strained and perspiring throughout menopause, we felt as if we had outsmarted time. (2017: 148–149)

As I ponder the “bureaucratic figure” that so effortlessly dominates my thoughts and to whom I constantly direct my finger, I cannot help but question my own conformity to this archetype, just as Ernaux so eloquently points the finger towards herself. Pointing the finger towards myself, the question of instrumentalizing this thesis emerges. Do I write for an academic audience with the aim of establishing a certain form of discursivity that supports my vision of the anthropologist-ethnographer on the threshold of Plato’s cave? Or, on the other extreme: do I use this as an outlet for “writing as healing,” as proposed by many Black feminist thinkers (see Griffin, 2012; hooks, 2000)? Clearly, the healing is a totally different one for those authors than for me, and my experiences over the previous years are not comparable. Moreover, the political potential of “talking back” differs considerably. I realized after a major “crisis” in the spring and summer of 2022 that I needed to find ways to write, and to write for myself, as a process that allows me to write at all. Hence, this thesis is also the outcome of different audiences and includes myself as an important audience. This is why I have provided space for the fieldnotes and eschewed the constant necessity of analysis. It is also the reason why I empirically concentrated on doubts and allowed myself to be, at least occasionally, contradictory. A principal insight of the preceding three years concerning myself and my actions is that I am contradictory, enmeshed in the inconsistencies of this world, and that I must accept this. This recognition that I have to acknowledge doubts if I want to be serious regarding

a reflexive critical stance is inspired to a considerable extent by Black feminism (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2020; Griffin, 2012; hooks, 2000).

The interweaving of these personal aspects of doubting and the questioning of doubts within the field was initiated through research itself. The aspects of doubts gradually became clearer. It was in the writing phase, this phase in which one's thinking must be recorded on paper or the computer, when one must produce a certain coherence, that I was confronted with the difficult task of how to address the various aspects of this thesis. I was faced with translating social relations into academic writing as a practice enmeshed in power relations (Asad, 1986). Though crucial to approaching this thesis, doubts became a central aspect only toward the end of the writing phase. Indeed, doubts became as much an analytical notion as a form of writing and thinking. Hence, the subject is not explicitly embedded in the scholarly literature that might exist on this theme (see Berliner et al., 2016; Pelkmans, 2013). Moreover, it was in this process of considering doubts as a methodological notion as well as a "political concept" (see Ophir, 2018) that I became aware of a particularly apposite insight. Doubts might allow me to not instrumentalize this thesis as talking to myself but to further the analysis and place it in conversation with my theoretical frame and the articles (see Part Three). Both providing space for and analyzing doubts might offer a means to "really think" the state in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu:

To have a chance to really think a state which still thinks itself through those who attempt to think it, then, it is imperative to submit to radical questioning all the presuppositions inscribed in the reality to be thought and in the very thought of the analyst. (1994, 2)

I claim that doubts are something not envisioned in the "*pensée d'état*." Doubts are perhaps, instead, that which counteracts and destabilizes the state as a homogenous whole, a machine, depicting it instead as an agglomeration of humans. In line with above, doubts may be seen as a challenge to established authority. Humans who work in bureaucracies might therefore employ ways of suppressing, of governing, these doubts in order to avoid challenging the established order of not questioning the authority of state power.

Might I myself and all the people I have talked to not also suppress doubts in order to function, for example, in neoliberal academia? This is not a radical critique, merely an acknowledgment that cognitive dissonances must be addressed. Making them visible and transparent might allow the demystification of important aspects of academia. Moreover, rendering doubts and their

government visible in the study of the state might allow the demystification of the state. When Foucault, himself not unknown for contradictory statements and actions, writes the following:

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (Foucault, 1984: 6)

I do not pretend that inequalities disappear if we all just doubt. Instead, I perceive that a central element of bureaucracies and state power is to suppress doubts. This is intimately linked to the following analysis regarding the reproduction of “poor others” and their deportability within the national order of poverty. How is it that when administrators of CMOs are considering decisions themselves or when conducting interviews, matters seem clear, straightforward, and applicable to a specific set of rules and norms? It seems to me that powerful factors are necessary to make doubts disappear in the process of decision-making—to make them disappear in the name of coherence, of justice, and of the appropriate decision. These powerful factors are what I understand as techniques of governing doubts enabled by the morality of the state. These three factors consist of the legal framework and caselaw, the paperwork that is produced, and the relational decision-making. All three of these techniques enable administrators to portray the world as coherent and clear. They allow their actions to be perceived as just despite the contradictory foundations and inequalities upon which their decisions are built (see Part Four).

However, in terms of writing doubts, each article of my article-based thesis is also a technique to simultaneously govern my own doubts. I govern doubts in terms of content through an academic habitus that necessitates a coherence in argumentation that requires a “flattening” of reality and content.¹³ I also govern doubts through the coherence of form. Articles have a specific structure that must be complied with and are peer-reviewed by academics—again focusing on the clarity of argumentation. I often perceived this as a de-politicization of academic work in neoliberal academia. However, my perception certainly stemmed also from the fact that I am not capable of writing an article that would account for the aspects of writing doubts. The coherence I, and the co-authors, put forward in the articles is only possible through

¹³ This is, for me, expressed in the conferences I have attended. The aim of panels, presentations, and ensuing discussions was to enhance argumentative clarity rather than discuss the political aspects (and potential) of the content.

analytical abstraction, selectively choosing data (not stories), and presenting a convincing and coherent argument. Surely there are scholars who can, in 20 pages, leave room for contradictions. I cannot, and the articles represent how I, in collaboration with my research colleagues, constructed coherence from our field of enquiry in terms of both form and content. This coherence, I feel, is not representative of what I have encountered.

The aim of these lines is to situate my articles and their content while simultaneously valuing what is written in the articles. The articles, as coherent scholarly work, have significant value and allow the abstraction necessary for a global ethnography (Burawoy, 2000). Nevertheless, as Ernaux points out, the difficulty is not losing sight of the humans we are describing while being interested in structures, inequalities, and hierarchizations. Both visions have value, and my aim is to provide a degree of co-production between the two (Jasanoff, 2004). A co-production visible, for example, in the auto-ethnographic work of Shahram Khosravi (2010), in which “the self” is placed into the social context of analysis. In his auto-ethnography on borders, Khosravi enquires into the interaction between structure and agency by offering a “human” portrait of illegalized travelers; a way of “bridg[ing] the gap between the anthropologist’s reality and the reality of others” (2010: 5). This is, to return to the question of ethnographic authority, an ethnographic authority based on the practice and concept of witnessing (Khosravi, 2010: 6). By “writing doubts,” I do not pretend to undertake auto-ethnography, but I claim that it allows me, in the paraphrased words of Khosravi above, to portray bureaucrats as human and to bridge my reality and that of my research participants. This approach aims at undermining ethnographic authority, and authority more generally, by writing of doubts.

Chapter 3

Ethnographically exploring the administration of “poor others”

We are approaching the end of the conversation with two senior officials, Marco and Kaspar, of a cantonal migration office (CMO). The interview was conducted by Lisa, Christin, and Luca. After the last remaining questions from our side are clarified, Lisa switches off the microphone. There is a short silence before we talk about the possibility of a research stay in their office. Contrary to the previous, fluid conversation with a formal character, this part is more like a negotiation. They seem to enjoy this negotiation somehow, as they do not directly refuse the possibility, as was readable in an email exchange before the meeting. Kaspar finally starts to smile from time to time, in contrast with the conversation before, which lasted two hours. We have the feeling that they are more open to fieldwork than we thought. Marco even starts to laugh at several points between our exchanges, leans back more relaxed at some point, and looks a bit amused. Christin explains what our ideal situation would be. I then add to this.

Marco and Kaspar look at each other. After a pause, Marco offers to allow us to take a look at some casefiles. They would make them accessible to us. He adds that employees would not work every day on cases that are of interest to us. The caseworkers are not always in this subject matter; one would have to follow them over a long period. In addition, everything—they underline—really everything, every note and every exchange would actually be purely electronic. People would no longer, or hardly ever, exchange information with each other directly. They do this now by email. For us, this would then also be directly in the case files and visible there. No need to be present in the office. The procedures are, therefore, exclusively in writing. They explicate: “The employees do not go to discuss with the social services or just rather rarely do a phone call. They do it by email.” If we wish, they will also disclose their sample letters to us and show everything that is possible. In addition, he says, everyone is required to make file notes [Akttennotizen], and this is visible in the dossiers.

Lisa remarks, after a short summary of her research so far, that it must be a very quiet office then. They both confirm that since the online/electronic changeover, everything has really become quieter, but, of course (understanding her irony), they still talk to each other as well. To my comment that, of course, the weekly meetings and case discussions would also be interesting, Kaspar remarks that he would be happy to arrange for us to attend a few meetings. However, he would then have to plan to ensure we would not “only catch the meeting where only coffee is drunk.” Everyone laughs. We add that this is precisely why we have rather long research phases.

Kaspar, still smiling with understanding, now remarks that there is, of course, also the question of what one wants to study. He understands that we are not only interested in the dossiers but also in the “life of the staff, which is probably another part of the study.” Therefore, he would understand our perspective. Christin corrects here that we are not interested in employee X or Y, so not in, for example, Mr. Kaspar as an individual, but in how one stands in a context—the organization, other organizations, so how to get from law to implementation. We would be

interested in how the work is done, because it doesn't happen in a vacuum, but directions and other actions are influenced by experiences, the teams, so we want a holistic understanding. Marco and Kaspar confirm their understanding of our request. I also explain that it is possible to come for a shorter time first and then negotiate again, to see how it goes. Kaspar laughs and quips that we would probably always want to negotiate further. They would pass our request on to the head of the office, reminding us that it is not their decision, even though he already reacted negatively (in an initial email).

Kaspar asks about our timeline, whereupon we explain that we would ideally like to start in summer but would also like to have the cases earlier. I ask if there have been similar requests before, to which Kaspar explains that there have already been case analyses, e.g., in the area of hardship cases, but there has not yet been a visit similar to ours in terms of length and the involvement of their employees. (edited fieldnote with Christin Achermann and Lisa Marie Borrelli, CMO, 2020)

The fieldnote should offer a glimpse into one access negotiation. Shortly after this interview, a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic ensued in Switzerland and brought further negotiations to a halt. However, the access was denied shortly after this discussion—not due to COVID but in general terms. It was only after many emails, different phone calls, and fieldwork in (and a connected recommendation from) another CMO that access was lastly granted. Finally entering the above office one and a half years after the access negotiation, again changed my vision of “the field.” Suddenly, the two persons described above became familiar and shared intimate details of their daily work.

How can one comprehend and describe this continuous alteration and construction of the field? How did I end up in this office, having this discussion with two migration officials in the first place? How did I imagine the field before these encounters? How did it evolve due to my accessing it? This was not a singular task. It was a question for our research team to decide. How did working in a team influence the imaginaries surrounding “the field”? With these questions, I aim at grounding the metaphysical and the political elements of the preceding pages in the more ordinary aspects of my research. Before presenting the actual research methods and ethics, the next section outlines how the research process evolved and how I encountered the field over the course of this research. In order to do so, I begin by taking a step back and historicizing my own endeavors to grasp the entanglements of migration control and the governance of poverty.

Encountering and “doing” the field

I got in touch with the subject of my thesis for the first time in the archives of the Swiss Observatory for Foreign National’s and Asylum Law (see Heim and Pfirter, 2018). While working in 2017 and 2018 for the observatory, I stumbled upon cases of social assistance and revocation orders and was confronted with calls from people in a panic concerning the implications of receiving social assistance or other welfare benefits (see Pfirter, 2019a). The procedures involved in the narratives of these casefiles seemed to initially resemble those concerning criminal offenses. I then proceeded to ask myself how it could be that poverty is constructed in the same manner as a crime. Further, how could it be that “integration” seemed to be the magic word bridging poverty and the likening of receiving social assistance as a criminal offence? In short, I was struck by the potentialities of “bureaucracies” in upholding but also concealing the (re)production of difference. I decided to write my master’s dissertation (Pfirter, 2019b) on this topic under the supervision of Christin Achermann. I was still writing the conclusions of my master’s dissertation, when I was accepted as a PhD researcher in the project “Governing Migration and Social Cohesion through Integration Requirements: A Socio-Legal Study on Civic Stratification in Switzerland”—which officially began in October 2018 under the lead of Christin Achermann and Stefanie Kurt.

The beginning of my PhD contract in January 2019 coincided with the introduction of the word “integration” into the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA). When departing from the idea of investigating the implications and consequences of the new integration requirements in the FNIA, we, as a research team, became rather quickly aware that we were confronted with a vast and diverse assemblage of actors, institutions, laws, discourses and so on. Hence, we had to narrow our interest in order to conduct a study that was feasible in four years. In this regard, my master’s dissertation being focused on social assistance was a convenient and obvious point of entry. Linking the two fields of migration control and the organization of poverty convinced the other team members that it was a worthwhile and viable endeavor.¹⁴ It was clear from the beginning—due to Lisa’s and my own research approaches and the project’s explicit goal of

¹⁴ Concentrating on social assistance raised links to previous interests in migration control the other team members had demonstrated. The link to the criminalization of migration was rather obvious and part of Christin Achermann’s thesis ten years ago (Achermann, 2008). Before entering this project as a postdoctoral researcher, Lisa Marie Borrelli conducted her PhD research with a perspective on street-level bureaucracy in the context of the European deportation regime (Borrelli, 2018a). Finally, Stefanie Kurt, as a lawyer and expert in integration and migration law, was keen to explore the imbrications with social assistance, as she holds a professorship in social work.

conducting ethnographic research—that we would conduct fieldwork and aim for longer stays in CMOs. The question then became how to decide on which CMO to work with. Moreover, as the project proposal included a “comparative” aspect in investigating both Swedish and German cases, we had to determine how to include these aspects. We quickly established that I would concentrate on Switzerland while Lisa conducted research in Switzerland, Sweden, and Germany, but deciding timeframes and locations was a rather long process. Moreover, research in social services was only gradually becoming part of this process of constructing the field and particularly my own interest in conducting fieldwork in these offices.

Due to the complexity of the field and the different actors that come into play, we decided to construct our field by “doing the field.”¹⁵ This means that, in order to conduct interviews, we opted for a *preliminary research phase* in which we would attempt to identify actors involved in the intersection of migration control and welfare governance. This research phase started in March 2019 and lasted, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, until October 2020. It included three visits to trials at the Swiss Federal Supreme Court (SFC), participation in two events held by supra-cantonal organizations and one by a migrant rights defense association, 70 interviews conducted in French or German in 15 Swiss cantons, as well as a study of organizational documents and caselaw. For the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Lisa and I (mostly together) conducted 60 interviews. After the fortunate coincidence of Doris Niragire Nirere joining our team in January 2020, I accompanied her on three of the ten interviews she conducted in French-speaking cantons.

The places we would visit and the people we would interview were not clear at the inception of our research. Rather, I would argue, this preliminary research was an integral part of doing the field. We did not have a list of interlocutors but continuously added people of interest. We commenced with a handful of people from the principal supra-cantonal organizations. In addition to providing initial insights into the current and prior situations of social assistance and migration control, these actors allowed a “methodological snowballing” (Charmaz, 2008) of identifying further actors and materialities. I did not analyze these preliminary interviews in depth or decide on specific elements because the interviews primarily served as a means of

¹⁵ Doing the field is an important part of anthropological enquiry because it allows researchers to construct the research from the context in which it occurs and to generate theories that are grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the people being studied. In contrast to grounded theory, doing the field is not (only) in the service of developing theories and presenting results but is additionally part of how the field is imagined and constructed.

outlining the field, its complexity, and which offices and cantons might repay closer enquiry. These aspects reveal how our field, as such, came into existence.

In the ensuing period of this preliminary research, we were confronted with the need to undertake a selection of the cantons to conduct our fieldwork in. First, building on the preliminary research as well as other structural and demographic characteristics, we constructed a list of possible cantons for fieldwork. Second, we were not interested in extreme cases but in “professional” settings. We were interested in how social assistance and migration control were intertwined in offices that were marked by a rather high degree of specialization that involved different sections and teams. Hence, it was important to include cantons in which professional social services were present, meaning that social workers were employed and social assistance governed according to the overall ethics of social work. This is predominantly the case in larger cities. The same applies to CMOs. Small cantons, such as Uri, Jura, Nidwalden, or Schwyz, have only around 40,000 to 200,000 inhabitants and are highly rural. However, the larger and more urban cantons, such as Geneva, Zürich, Neuchâtel, Bern, or Basel Stadt, have highly professionalized CMOs and professional and specialized public services (largely due to the higher population).

As a research team, we decided rather arbitrarily that I would conduct research in two Swiss cantons; Doris in one French-speaking canton; and Lisa in one Swiss canton, as well as in Sweden and Germany. The latter two should serve more as exploratory cases in order to contrast, advance, and situate the Swiss case within larger developments in the area of migration control and welfare governance (Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018). The current thesis is based on my own fieldwork but is nourished by the research conducted by Doris and Lisa. Being embedded in a research project, I am able to triangulate my findings with the research in other cantons and countries. However, being skeptical about a pragmatic anthropology, I am not theoretically interested in the specific cantons and in providing policy advice on how to “improve” such policies. Rather, these cantons represent “cases” that allow one to situate their particularity in larger entanglements of migration control and the organization of poverty (see Part Two).¹⁶ The cantons represent opportunities to investigate bureaucratic offices as “the locus within which societies more specifically and densely aim at guiding human conduct” (Zittoun, 2017: 172).

¹⁶ This is also a reason (apart for facilitating anonymization) why I neither describe the cantons in detail nor enter into the particularities and specificities of their cantonal structures.

Socialities and technicalities of fieldwork

Ethnography comprises a multitude of methods that include observation and/or participation, interviews, and document analysis to understand “how people create and experience their worlds” (Watson and Till, 2010: 122). D. Soyini Madison defines ethnography frankly as

the author or interpreter spent time in a location interacting with others within that prescribed space; furthermore, she interpreted and recorded what she found there and then, through her own interpretative standpoint, represented those findings for us. (2020: 4)

Hence, ethnography involves a highly localized endeavor of encountering people, placing them in context, and interpreting their stories according to the standpoint of the author. These interpretations and their presentations to a public other than the research interlocutors are distilled in representations. As outlined in the preceding chapters, representations are critically enmeshed in power relations. The first subsection, which outlines the methods and actors I engaged with, includes representations of fieldwork that involved gathering stories and information through interacting with people in a specific place. The subsequent subsection involves the more technical aspects of coding, analysis, and writing. Representation is present in both moments and is the defining aspect of ethnography and fieldwork. Indeed, representation and translation lie at the core of ethnographic endeavors.

Productivity of fieldwork: Places, people and methods

Undertaking a multi-sited ethnography and a multi-perspective approach implies collecting and analyzing a variety of stories and materials. Leaving aside the preliminary research and concentrating on the fieldwork in the two cantons, there remains a vast diversity of groups of people, kinds of material, and forms of research. To introduce this diversity, the following table details the form and content of three clusters of research (see Table 1).

Table 1: Type and scope of fieldwork

	Canton 1	Canton 2
Semi-participant observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CMO: 4 weeks (4 full- and 6 half-days) - Social service: 5 full days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CMO: 2 full days - Social service: 3 months (46 full- and 9 half-days)
Semi-directive interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal counselors; Lawyers (2) - Other social services (3) - Church associations (1) - Integration office (2) - Women’s shelter (2) <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Total: 10 interviews</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lawyers and legal counselors (5) - Political representatives (2) - Integration office (3) - Municipal legal services (2) - Integration programs (1) - Social assistance recipients (4) - Emergency and shelter associations (2) - Other social services (11) - Youth insertion programs (1) - Church associations (2) - Cantonal Administrative Court (1) <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Total: 34 interviews</i></p>
Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal basis - Cantonal directives - Internal procedures and regulations - 23 casefiles (CMO) - 8 (CMO) and 5 (social services) internal documents and guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal basis - Cantonal directives - Internal procedures and regulations - 49 (social services) and 13 (CMO) casefiles - 22 (social services) and 5 (CMO) internal documents and guidelines - 17 internal documents concerning meetings and reunions - 3 documents on reporting obligation to CMO (social service) - 13 formation documents (social service) - 2 preparatory documents for interinstitutional exchange social services and CMO - 6 documents on collaboration CMO-social services

Semi-participant observation and Places

Participant observation somewhat represents the principal focus of anthropology and its research strategy of ethnography (Madison, 2020). The idea behind participant observation is an extended immersion allowing one to grasp the world the research participants are enmeshed in and apprehend how they interpret and make sense of it. This is also the key aspect of the present thesis—its backbone. Participant observation is often used as a synonym for fieldwork yet must be clearly disentangled. Although a principal one, participant observation is one method among others within ethnography (Burawoy, 2000: 5). I would not talk, in my case, of

participant observation. Instead, I prefer semi-participant observation, as I did not participate in the daily activities that my research participants are tasked to undertake. This is also an ethical consideration (Burawoy, 2000: 26–27; Lavanchy, 2013a). I do not want to be more a part of the bureaucratic offices that govern the lives of others than I already am. I do not want to take decisions about other human beings, and I therefore refused, during my research, any attempt at including me as part of a decision or procedure. In contrast to, for example, Ephraim Pörtner (2021), I am no defender of total immersion and “becoming native,” although “being a bureaucrat,” just as “being a scholar,” are clearly skills (see also discussion on ethnographic authority, Chapters 1 and 2). This implies I do not think I can ever fully understand and “feel” the way an administrator or a caseworker does when deciding on a case or being in the process of case-making (Burman, 2018; Holmes and Marcus, 2008b; Madison, 2020). What I can do is talk with them, listen to their stories, to their explications of why they do what they do, and to their uncertainties and their aspirations. However, I will never fully grasp their reality, and this is not my aim. I want to understand what happens with law and policies and how bureaucracy relates to such processes (Lavanchy, 2013a). The prefix “semi” is, for me, indicative of this. I do not, as Malinowski or Radcliffe-Brown pretended, pass all my time with my research participants. I am neither in their place nor a colleague. Rather, I partially participate and engage with them. I partially observe them, but I am not one of them, and I made this clear at both the beginning of my research and whenever encountering a new person. The prefix “semi” is, for me, also a political intervention. I am part of the field only inasmuch as it allows me to formulate a critique grounded in the everyday. Therefore, (semi-)participant observation also requires, to a certain extent (hence the semi), that I become an ally. This is part of the process that allows researchers to approach the genuinely germane elements that are not accessible through other research methods (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2008). In the following, I outline the key places and forms in which I conducted (semi)participant observation.

• **Office Space:** My semi-participant observation took place in the offices of CMOs and social services. The offices became an integral part of how I grasped the procedures I was researching. As elaborated in the preceding section, prior to entering the office, I was already in contact with higher officials, who ultimately granted me access. When entering the office, the space normally became, to an extent, familiar to me, and the people working within this space became used to my presence. In all cases except one, I had an office space at my disposal from which I was granted unrestricted access to information systems and databases. It was in this office

space that I routinely held exchanges with employees who either worked in the same space or briefly visited. In one social service, I even had the option to rotate my workspace daily and to therefore be present in different sections and engage with different people. I used the office space primarily to study internal documents and case files in order to prepare case discussions, follow encounters with recipients of social assistance, and familiarize myself with the office’s organizational structures, guidelines, and infrastructure. In addition to these two aspects, the office space was an advantageously situated observational location. I could observe the many phone calls, discussions, and exchanges between co-workers, including their frustrations regarding certain cases or the work they were tasked with.

• **Discussing cases and observing routines:** When I left “my” desk, it was usually to join an employee in their daily routines or to discuss cases. This was the most common form that my stay at the office took and the most important in terms of content and intimacy. I had countless discussions with caseworkers and social workers. These discussions were typically of two types. I could follow cases and social workers’ daily routines, remain next to them and listen to how they proceed, ask questions, and engage in conversations. This is often referred to as *in situ* observation (Burawoy, 2000: 5). Alternatively, we discussed specific cases in which the case or social workers had already made a decision or were about to decide on the next step. In both cases, I was normally seated next to the person, taking notes on what they said. On lazy days, I took my laptop to take notes in order to facilitate the typing and editing due in the evening (if I managed to do it on the same day). I often added keywords to these notes concerning the surroundings and other observations, which I then transferred into my field journal.

With the COVID-19 measures in place, I had to schedule meetings with the persons I wanted to engage with, which rendered this part of fieldwork more formal. However, due to scheduling several meetings with the same persons, these meetings became more informal and intimate. Discussions initially revolved around a specific case, and with the passing of time, I was able to expand these discussions to broader topics and also encounter the people more spontaneously.

• **Meetings:** Attending meetings offered a further method of observing the work conducted in an office. Meetings included team meetings in which the team or members of a team met to discuss cases or a predefined subject. Additionally, there were larger meetings I could attend: meetings of the entire office, of whole sections or teams, meetings of higher officials, internal

training and professional formations, interinstitutional exchanges, and exchanges between the CMO and social services. Except when explicitly asked to contribute, I did not have an active role in these meetings and mainly observed. Additionally, the meetings (except the team meetings) were, in all cases, online and hence a passive and observational role was much more feasible. Therefore, on the continuum between observation and participation, I was clearly on the extreme end of observation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2008). This provided important insights into the topics that were prioritized by the offices, teams, and cantons. Team meetings were of key interest because they principally addressed cases I had already had the opportunity to examine with the responsible caseworker or that I looked at after the meeting.

• **Interviews:** Joining meetings between social or case workers and the persons addressed by their profession offered an additional opportunity to leave my desk. I call them interviews because they were not merely meetings or conversations but took place in an institutional setting and were mostly framed as “client interviews”—meetings between a “service provider” (social service or CMO) and the “recipient of a service.” Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, interviews were held only sparsely. If there was no explicit need to be physically present, the interviews, if there were any, were held virtually. I only attended these interviews on a regular basis in one social service. I did not attend interviews at CMOs with “clients.” This was primarily because CMOs do not conduct interviews in the context of procedures regarding downgrading or revocation orders. The interviews between social workers and recipients of social assistance helped me understand the content of administrators’ daily work more holistically, particularly the social work aspects. Furthermore, these interviews allowed me to engage differently with the social workers and talk about the interactions they have had with their “clients.”

In social services, I joined (always with the consent of the person concerned and an explanation of anonymization) several “initial interviews” (*Erstgespräche*), revision interviews (*Revisions-Gespräche*), and client interviews. Initial interviews are discussions that occur before a person is granted social assistance and in which rights and duties are formulated, post-registration questions are posed and responded to, and the persons involved are familiarized. It is also here that, if the person applying for social assistance has no Swiss nationality, they are informed of the social services’ reporting obligation. The revision interviews are annual interviews in which open questions are posed regarding the bank account and financial situation of the person concerned. These interviews are primarily concerned with detecting eventual “fraud” and verifying that eligibility is still present. Client interviews are meetings between social workers

and recipients regarding all possible subjects, and such interviews vary from case to case. The availability of the social worker to schedule such meetings also varies.

• **(Smoking) Breaks:** Due to COVID-19 regulations, I was not able to freely move in the space and did not feel comfortable doing so. Office capacities were reduced, and people could only visit if they arranged meetings. Breaks provided the most opportune moments to interact with people from other sections who were not directly engaged with my research and did not share the same office space. It was during breaks that I learned the biographical details of various employees, some of the gossip circulating (in parts of) the office, and several intimate details concerning superiors, co-workers, or politicians. Smoking clearly facilitated this flow of information. This was not because smokers are easily reachable or particularly garrulous but because the higher officials in the offices I visited did not smoke and thus did not join the smoking crowd. This also made exchanges often easier and more casual. These breaks, as well as other informal exchanges, allowed me to situate the persons working here more effectively. I could understand their dilemmas and views on the subjects they are tasked to govern: primarily the stay of non-national in Switzerland. These informal exchanges also allowed me to more soundly situate individual employees and higher officials within the office space and grasp some of the “organizational culture,” prejudices, and “invisible” structures.

Semi-directive interviews and People

Interviews are an integral part of field work and ethnography. I would categorize the interviews of our projects preliminary research phase (discussed in the preceding section) as *expert interviews* (Flick, 2018; Meuser and Nagel, 2009). In line with a problem-centered interview, these interviews focused predominantly on a person’s expertise in a certain field of activity and provided insights into said activity’s overall complexity (Witzel, 2000). The form of interviews differed considerably, depending on our interlocutors (Madison, 2020: 28). While we always constructed a semi-structured frame containing the most important topics and questions, several of the interviews were more like discussions, while others were more formal (Bernard, 1994; Kaufmann, 2016). This depended considerably on the position of our interlocutors and their habits in interviews as well as our style of interviewing certain persons. We interviewed lawyers, legal counselors, activists, law clerks of the SFC, employees of the SKOS and other regional social service consortiums, heads of cantonal welfare offices and of communal social services, heads of CMOs or of sections thereof, representatives of the national and regional networks of CMOs, heads of sections of the SEM, representatives of labor unions, people who drafted reports for the legal changes discussed in the legal framework, people in cantonal

conferences on social action and welfare, and people in cantonal and communal integration offices. We had fewer formalized interviews and more (group) discussions with activists or legal counseling offices (often migrant rights' defense groups), whereas the tone was rather formal with higher officials. This is understandable because I feel more comfortable with activists given I am politically sympathetic to their aims and therefore perceive my role as being less intrusive. While we approached recording by stating our anonymization policy and research ethics at the beginning of the encounters, informal settings were often not recorded in order to maintain their informality. This was not a systematic approach, however, and perhaps represented a compromise between Lisa and myself. I was rather against recording, while Lisa was in favor.¹⁷

I would label the interviews conducted during my fieldwork in the specific cantons as *ethnographic interviews*, as they are used within my fieldwork to disentangle the chosen phenomenon (Beaud and Weber, 2003). This does not mean that the persons interviewed here are any less expert than the interviewees from the preliminary research. Instead, these interviews were conducted with people who had both an active role in and insight into the interlinkages of migration control and the governance of poverty. I encountered these people through my engagement with the field and the fieldwork I conducted. They happened in parallel, before or after my stays at the offices. In the following, I provide descriptions of the most important interview partners. This is important as they represent the content and extent of my research, as well as how the field expanded during the fieldwork.

• **Social services and CMOs:** These interviews or discussions took different forms and shapes. The encounters with social workers of other social services were often similar to the discussions in the office in which I conducted (semi)participant observation. While there is (usually and depending on the cantonal organization) one social service in each municipality, there exists only one CMO per canton. Therefore, the interviews with CMOs were with people working in other sections and units of the same office where I conducted semi-participant observation. With both employees of social services and CMOs, I discussed communication and engaged with specific cases in relation to how they were handled, their institutional guidelines, and their daily practices. These interviews helped me to situate other observations and delineate specificities of certain offices.

¹⁷ I realized the value of recording far too late due to my technophobia and dogma of keeping interviews "simple." However, Lisa was aware, due to her experience, of the added value that transcripts provide.

• **Associations:** Another important group of actors are associations. For example, churches and church associations (such as Caritas or the Salvation Army) occasionally run integration programs. Moreover, they also provide emergency aid for people who claim, or cannot claim, social assistance. Churches, for example, might assume the costs of health insurance or provide material aid akin to other emergency and shelter organizations that function on a more activist basis. Associations were often also responsible for Integration and Occupational Programs. These associations running such programs provide the social services and the CMOs with information concerning the conduct of a person. The programs aim at integrating or “occupying” the recipients of social assistance and can often have an evaluative character. Interviews with these associations were insightful, as they also offered insights into deficiencies in the social security system and the nonacceptance of social assistance.

• **Legal actors:** Other interviews, during my fieldwork in the two cantons, were conducted with several legal actors, the foremost of which were with legal counseling advocates and cantonal administrative court judges. These actors are of importance because they actively shape the implementation practices of CMOs and social services. Counseling advocates and lawyers make appeals in a realm that is neither lucrative nor characterized by robust legal protection. In conversations with people in CMOs, lawyers are often portrayed as adversaries who call all the practices of CMOs and social services into question. Interviews with these actors allowed me to gain further insights into the gaps in the social security system and the collective efforts to counteract these unintended consequences.

• **Integration Offices:** Integration offices are both municipal or cantonal and provide counseling for non-nationals regarding the extensive domain of integration. These offices are financed by the canton or the city, and I group Competence Centers for Integration (*Kompetenzzentrum Integration*) and Integration Offices (*Fachstelle Integration*) together. These offices are integral “part of my field” and closely linked to social services. It was principally during my fieldwork that I became aware of social services’ outsourcing of questions regarding revocation or downgrading orders to these entities. It was repeatedly assumed by the social services that these offices have the necessary knowledge and resources to help recipients. These offices gather at national conferences where they have exchanges and consider current issues. I had the opportunity, in addition to conducting interviews, to hold a presentation at such a gathering. Their existence is insightful concerning the sizable specialization of the field of social security and migration control.

• **Social assistance recipients:** Finally, I conducted interviews in the form of discussions (Madison, 2020: 25) with people who receive social assistance and are or were threatened with a revocation or a downgrading order. As previously mentioned, I was interested in the offices and the people working there, those who put the law and policies into practice and not those receiving social assistance or being targeted by migration policies. Focusing more strongly on the people concerned would surely have nuanced the present thesis but would have gone beyond its feasibility and my aim of understanding state-making and bureaucratic decision-making. The people I had the opportunity to meet possess immense expertise in interacting with social services and CMOs, as they might have had longer institutional careers within them. They therefore provided important insights into the interlinkage of migration control and the governance of poverty, as well as into the concrete effects of this interlinkage (see Part Four, Chapter 10 for an example).

A note on Documents

Documents are an integral part of my fieldwork, and I collected these documents and secondary sources during my fieldwork (Leimgruber, 2008; Tanner, 2008). While several documents, such as those concerning legal bases, are publicly available, others were gathered in the offices and their reception was only possible due to data protection agreements. Within my fieldwork, paperwork allowed me to situate that which I was observing. It allowed me to understand not only the case-making and foundation upon which my research participants based their arguments but also how their explications differed from what I observed in the paperwork of case files. Other documents, such as those concerning legal elements, allowed me to understand the cantonal and municipal particularities and appreciate the structuring effects of their application. Internal procedures and regulations, including guidelines and internal documents, allowed me to situate the procedures further within the organizational context. As the procedures are not reserved to one office but wander between them, other documents on interinstitutional exchanges and reporting obligations also helped to further situate these aspects (for more detail, see paperwork article, Chapter 7).

Productivity of methods: Noting, coding and analyzing

During the different episodes of fieldwork discussed above, I was equipped with a jotter at all times. This enabled me to keep track of what people said in what situations and constantly jot down observations (Bernard, 1994: 391). When it was less appreciated or possible to take notes—for example, during strolls through the office or when presented with the employees of

the offices—I did so during toilet breaks or directly after observations or meetings. The issues of notetaking and how to plan my fieldwork included decisions regarding what is important and when it is appropriate to take notes—a difficult task and a long learning process (Alberti, 2020: 89; Beaud and Weber, 2003: 136). In the evenings or at night, I tried to transcribe these jottings into the fieldnote journal on my laptop in an orderly and consistent manner. At the same time, I placed dates, events, and to-dos into a physical logbook. The latter allowed me also to retrace my stays in the offices and the diversity of talks I had. In the logbook, I dedicated one double page to each day. The left page was dedicated to what I actually did, while the right was filled with the “planned” tasks for the day (Bernard, 1994: 392).

At the end of my stays, the logbook, particularly the right side, was repeatedly altered. Tasks were moved and adapted as necessary. This also allowed me to keep track of “the planned” and “the actual” of my fieldwork. While I occasionally managed to actually do what I had planned, the two pages completely differed on other days. Such a detailed and labor intensive task allowed me to keep track of the vast material, talks, and meetings I followed in different places (Glaser and Strauss, 2009: 5). By always writing down these notes in my fieldnote journal, I was able to continuously elaborate interpretations. Hence, in the fieldnote journal I wrote down analytical aspects, provided interpretations, and posed open questions, which I noted in my logbook. This clearly supports the notion that fieldwork and analysis are not separable but interact significantly (Beaud and Weber, 2003). As Camilla Alberti (2020: 94) wrote, “It is misleading to think that when the data collection is finished, the analysis starts from scratch.” Many aspects of the material, discussions, and observations have indeed already been analyzed in the heat of the moment through both the analytical notes while conducting fieldwork and in the field journal (Charmaz, 2008). Hence, analysis is ongoing and always in dialogue with fieldwork and theoretical engagements (Glaser and Strauss, 2009) while remaining an element of the field’s constant (re)construction. Importantly, the planned and the actual also differ considerably in my writing of fieldnotes. While I managed for most of my stays to write my notes down in the evening, this undertaking was rendered occasionally difficult by personal situations, fatigue, social/familial circumstances, as well as unexpected and profound changes in my life. Moreover, I put the field jottings from the social service of the first canton only into the structured and refinished form of my fieldnotes three months after I exited the field.

After leaving the site, my efforts to record, complement, and engage with my notes facilitated their analysis and that of my fieldwork’s trajectory. In order to code the field notes consistently, I developed my own mnemonics that were tailored to the specific site of my investigation. This

was based on a codebook developed with my other team members, particularly with Lisa (Gibbs, 2007: 38–55). While we coded the interview transcripts, the transcriptions themselves were largely outsourced to students who were paid to undertake this work. This approach certainly hampers certain important insights and is perhaps indicative of the neoliberal academia of which I am also a part. This manner of transcription only transpired because our project, being part of the NCCR on the move, had a considerable budget, and part of it was allocated to pay for transcription.

First, we conducted an initial, open, or line-by-line analysis. We read through the documents, starting only with several organizational codes that were deducted from our interview guidelines, which were also altered and adapted through the course of our preliminary research phase. This was also undertaken with the aim of making up for the insights lost because of not having conducted the transcriptions ourselves (Bernard, 1994: 231). In the course of reading the documents, we created new codes that were descriptive, inductive, and based on participants' ideas, beliefs, and arguments. In the next step, we conducted a more abstract and analytical coding of theoretically relevant aspects. Hence, we aimed at a combination of “data-driven” and “concept-driven” coding (Gibbs, 2007: 44). The final step was a theoretical and analytical coding connecting the initial codes and theoretical categories we had created through the prior steps and by engaging with the literature on the subjects (Flick, 2018: 473). This allowed for a thematic analysis. Coding allowed us to connect the varying categories and broader theoretical concepts (Flick, 2018: 476; Gibbs, 2007: 50–51).

The constant conversations and contextualizations imply that my research question and analytical notions were also continuously adapted during the following fieldwork in order to represent what was being observed in the field (Islam, 2015). Practically, this representational labor was completed through the different phases of my research: transcribing interviews, writing field notes and analytical memos, coding all the written text I produced and gathered, and continuously refining these steps through a comparison of my methods. Hence, I also aimed at a combination of concept-driven and story-driven coding for my fieldnotes (Gibbs, 2007: 44). This work of being a constant clerk is significantly in line with the bureaucratic work I observed and reveals how coding and analysis is not secondary to fieldwork but an important component of it.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its waves, we had varying research-intensive periods followed by periods in which fieldwork was not possible beyond occasionally conducting

interviews. Based on the codebook, I analyzed all my data. However, it was not on maxQDA this time but on paper and coded by hand in different colors. This separated my fieldwork even more from both the preliminary research phase and my team members, although COVID-19 had already made contact and exchanges significantly more challenging. Coding on paper had practical as well as structural causes. I was dissatisfied with constantly working on the computer, and I had the feeling that coding with pen and paper made it more of a sensorial experience—more tangible, less technical. Structurally, the university only had a maxQDA license for office computers without a (legal) possibility of using it on one’s own private computer. With the lockdown, home office obligations (and later recommendations), I did not have easy access to maxQDA anymore. Switching to pen and paper made coding and analysis more convenient and proved, ironically, to be a satisfactory decision as the university suffered a hacker attack in spring 2021, just as I was coding and analyzing my fieldnotes. This attack shut the entire system down for several weeks, and all locally saved documents were lost.

However, the comprehensiveness of analysis when coding all notes, interviews transcripts, observations, and documents is, at least in my case, an illusion. I did not code all “data” in detail. Only my fieldnotes were coded and analyzed thoroughly. I speak here of “data” because we accumulated such an extraordinary number of written texts (including transcripts of interviews, fieldnotes, documents, and casefiles) that I feel like a miner when examining them. They are not all stories but, at times, simply material for the sake of material—data for the sake of having data, of displaying the number of interviews, days, and documents in the methodological sections of scientific articles to receive recognition and produce ethnographic authority. I am struck by the vast amount of data displayed on our maxQDA project file. It feels somewhat hallucinatory that I have occasionally used elements of this ocean of data to underline an argument in one of the five written publications I have produced (see for example Pfirter et al., 2021). I am also taken aback by the vast number of uploaded documents that remain unanalyzed, uncoded, perhaps not even looked at more than once. Indeed, I find myself accurately depicted by Andres Burman, who argues:

[R]ather than using our analytical tools and practices to make sense of given ethnographic data, we may use the frictions of such critical engagements to rethink our analytical tools and the tricks and traits of our trade and to critically reflect upon the extractivist nature of ethnography, the reward systems of academia—based on neoliberal metrics of production—and, not least, the Anglophone-centrism of anthropological writing. (2018: 50)

This is certainly also linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that I had delays and phases of increased stress that also led me to lay interview transcripts aside. However, it is also linked to ethical questions of how we accumulate and extract data. Therefore, I now come to the question of research ethics—not in epistemological terms but in those of research practice.

Research ethics and the ethics of researching organizations

The duration and content of my stay within the different offices were already the subject of the access negotiations. Important parts of these negotiations were, in line with Camilla Alberti (2020: 73), the more formal aspects of *anonymity* and *data protection*, as well as the more informal aspects of *respect/flexibility*, *transparency*, and *consent*. I address each of these aspects in the following paragraphs before coming to a processual and situational understanding of research ethics.

Anonymity and *data protection* were more formal because they were also the object of a data protection contract that the whole research team (as all members would have access to my files and work with them) signed. In terms of anonymity, we consented to all personal data being treated anonymously and confidentially. Interviewees and research participants are mentioned unrecognizably in publications. In the data protection contract, we aimed at not defining whether the organization and/or the canton needed to be anonymized in publications. As is visible in the fieldnote at the beginning of Chapter 1, these contracts were also not fixed but processual. In the end, and as visible in my writings, I decided to also anonymize the organizations and cantons, as I do not see the need for disclosing them. I do not engage in a comparative study but situate the phenomena and procedures under study within a larger process (Burawoy, 2000; Zittoun, 2017).

The informal aspects of research ethics (*respect/flexibility*, *transparency* and *consent*) are also linked to this understanding. They were not fixed but emerged from my encounters during fieldwork. In terms of *respect/flexibility*, particularly in the access negotiations, it was underlined that the aim was to minimally disturb the work of the administrators and social workers. I always respected their schedules and was always flexible, accommodating myself to their needs with the aim of respecting my interlocutors' work and disrupting the offices' functioning as little as possible.

This is intimately linked to *consent*. I always asked whether they had time and explained that they did not have to tell me anything if they did not want to. I affirmed that they could always tell me to leave if they felt uncomfortable, if an “urgent” task arose, or if they the need to reschedule meetings. I also reassured them that no personal information would be passed on to co-workers or superiors. I explained my reasons for being there, my aims, and my research methods to each person I met. They could then freely decide if they wanted to engage with me. This, again, is linked to *transparency*. I was always transparent concerning my stay, methods, and interest. While I did not disclose information, I occasionally framed it differently, as evident in the fieldnote at the beginning of this chapter. I was invited at certain moments to conduct a presentation, either within the time frame of research or after having conducted research. As a research team, we wrote a policy brief and held a workshop to which we invited all research participants. A copy of this thesis will be distributed to all offices where I have conducted semi-participant observation, and it will be available on demand to all interviewees.

These schematically separated aspects of research ethics are part of a processual understanding of ethics; an understanding that is not stable but changes through fieldwork, analysis, and writing (Perrin et al., 2018; Schepers-Hughes, 2000). I tried to portray this dynamic and relational understanding of ethics through the different fieldnotes at the beginning of each chapter in this part. Beyond the institutionalized aspects, ethical considerations are, therefore, principally enacted in the encounters with and in relation to research participants. In line with my elaborations in Chapter 1, I consider ethics as:

relational practices taking the form of a number of choices over how to conduct oneself in a complicated political, moral and epistemic context. [...] its goal is to provide grounded answers, often “erased” or “skated over” by purely “philosophical analyses”. (Lavanchy, 2013a: 678)

Whether discussing a specific case or following daily routines, I tried to leave as much space for participants’ own narratives as possible and only asked questions in order to grasp the subject matter and their explications. Only in recurring encounters and toward the ends of discussions did I begin to ask more direct questions related to “how they interpret,” and “what they are doing,” and “how they perceive a letter from or exchange with another office or actor.” In all cases, I sought to valorize participants’ methods of work and was genuinely interested in their actions and the complexity of their work. In this context, Anne Lavanchy (2013a: 684) poke of the capacities of ethnographies of institutions to blur the binary between activist or “neutral” ethnography (see also Burawoy, 2000). I certainly understood my research

participants as agents of state power who contribute to the (re)production of inequalities and hierarchizations. However, I also encountered them with curiosity and clearly situated them within the confinements of working in a bureaucracy that brings with it the complexities and contradictions of daily work (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019; Lavanchy, 2013b; Vohnsen, 2017). In this context, I was also honest with the research participants when they asked my opinion. While I did not engage in my utopia of a state- and nation-less world, I clearly situated my skepticism regarding how one can decide on a person's right to remain in Switzerland. Understanding why a person "lost their right to remain" (as I put it when talking with research participants) often made my stay at the offices clearer for the research participants.

I recall here that I focused on the everyday and on the complexity and diversity of processes. I was, therefore, sensitive to the meaning-making of research participants in everyday practices and encounters. It is methodically important to record stories and asking what participants believe both they and others are doing (Eckert 2020b, 7), as such questions valorize the work my interlocutors undertake—though I might oppose this work's substance and moral justifications. This is also key to understanding the frame in which one is embedded and the standpoint from which sense is made of the actions and meaning-making of oneself and others (see Goffman, 1986; Harding, 2004). What I hope the excerpts from my fieldnotes exhibit is how recurring encounters allowed me to dig deeper, to revisit previous conversations, and to link different subjects. Doing so enabled investigating certain aspects and linkages, as well as the complexities of my research participants' everyday tasks. Being attentive to this complexity aids in demonstrating how my research participants are caught between diverse pressures, guidelines, and expectations. Such implications also illustrate how participants interpret their own role, circumvent certain "rules," and are involved in the ethics of their profession and office. The encounters with my research participants, following their daily routines and discussing specific cases, allowed me to both comprehend and acknowledge these complexities more effectively.

PART TWO

Producing difference in the national order of poverty

In order for it [the state] to exist, the ruled people must submit to the claimed authority of the ruling ones. When and why they do so can only be understood if one knows the internal reasons for justification and the external means on which a rule is based.

(Weber, 1956a: 821, own translation)

[I]n order to not allow the poor person to become an active, dangerous enemy of society, in order to make the diminished power of the poor person once again productive for it, and in order to prevent the degeneration of the poor person's descendants. Therefore, the poor person as a person, the reflection of the situation of the poor in the person's feelings, is just as indifferent as it is for those who give alms for the sake of the salvation of their own soul; the subjective egoism of the latter is indeed overcome, but not for the sake of the poor but for that of society: the poor person receiving the offering is not the goal but a mere means, as in the former case.

(Simmel, 2009: 412–413)

In the national order of things, the rooting of peoples is not only normal; it is also perceived as a moral and spiritual need.

(Malkki, 1992: 30)

Thus, not merely the structure and discourse but the ethos of the liberal state appears to be socially masculine: its discursive currencies are rights rather than needs, individuals rather than relations, autogenesis rather than interdependence, interests rather than shared circumstance.

(Brown, 2006: 196)

Chapter 4

Law in the national order of poverty

As stated above, Mr. O. is permanently and to a considerable extent dependent on social assistance. This constitutes a ground for revocation of his permanent residence permit based on Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNIA. He has been continuously dependent on welfare [Fürsorge] since [...] 2016. From [...], 2015 to [...], 2017, Mr. O. had a funding period with the unemployment insurance fund X. and was able to receive unemployment benefits. Since then, he has not been registered with an unemployment insurance fund or the RAV [regional employment center] and has no longer been entitled to unemployment compensation. From the client account statement of the social services of the City of [...], for a support period starting [...] 2016, only a small and irregular income from the employment contract with the company Y [work integration program] emerges. The proven employment with the company Y does not constitute gainful employment in the true sense of the word. The purpose of employment with company Y is to facilitate the reintegration of persons dependent on welfare benefits into the world of work. Thus, even with an EU/EFTA residence permit (B permit), Mr. O.'s right of residence would have expired on the basis of Art. 61a FNIA (expiration 6 months after the first day of unemployment or with the end of unemployment compensation plus 6 months); the gainful employment with company Y does not extend the right of residence. Mr. O. submitted several job applications and rejections from prospective employers to the [CMO]. He was not able to submit a signed employment contract, which is why the continued and substantial welfare dependency constitutes both a reason for revocation according to Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNIA and a violation of the integration criteria of Art. 58a FNIA, especially since there is currently no registration with the [disability insurance] office of the Canton of [...]. In addition, the [disability insurance] office rejected a claim for benefits from 2015 which became final. Mr. O. is therefore 100% fit for work. Upon request, Mr. O. also stated in writing in [...] 2019 that there is no possibility of a third party financing his livelihood, which also clearly speaks against an early lifting of Mr. O.'s dependency on welfare benefits.

[...]

Likewise, medical treatment is possible [in his country of origin] without any problems. Due to his permanent and considerable dependence on welfare benefits, no consideration can be given to his private interests in Switzerland. It is undisputed that contact with his children is made more difficult but not impossible. The children are accustomed to not living with their father, especially since the children live with their mother. However, he can continue to maintain contact with his children who are living in Switzerland. Mutual visits are still possible (through tourist visits). Taking up residence near the border is possible without any problems by Mr. O. as a [EU country] national. In addition, contact can also be maintained with common contemporary means of communication (Skype, WhatsApp, Viper, etc.). (decision by CMO, casefile 2020, own translation)

This extract stems from a revocation order within the casefile of O. I encountered the casefile in the digital archives of a CMO during my fieldwork. The decision is neither exceptional nor

astounding compared to the countless others I accumulated on my computer during the months of fieldwork. However, in O.'s case, I had the opportunity to talk to both the person in the CMO responsible for crafting the order and to the social assistant who accompanied the person and delivered the "client's information" to the CMO (see Part Four for more on O.'s case). The document itself illustrates several elements: the mobilization of law, the understanding and construction of labor and "normality," the references to other actors, and the repetitive manner of bureaucratic writing. The document also offers insight into the construction of self-infliction, the notion that recipients of social assistance are individually responsible for their own poverty. However, the context that enables such a document to exist and the legitimation on which it is grounded remains unclear. Before delving into the materialization of the current political order through paperwork and bureaucratic decision-making processes (see Part Three), I address the larger picture and the particularities of the Swiss case within it. This part provides this context, presenting a historical, organizational, empirical, and ideological contextualization of my field of research in its contemporaneity.

I begin this contextualization with the *caselaw article*. This article introduces how governing poverty¹⁸ is entwined with migration control. Importantly, opening with this article allows me to contextualize and ground the forthcoming analysis in the contemporaneity of the national order of poverty. The original term "national order of things" was coined by anthropologist Malkki (1992, 1995) to refer to the ways in which nation-states construct and maintain a sense of order and legitimacy within their borders (see also Introduction). Malkki argues that nation-states often rely on various forms of classification (and their conflation), such as race, ethnicity, and nationality, to create and maintain this order. When connecting the concept of "national order of things" to the idea of "governing poverty", one can see how poverty becomes a part of this process of order-making. The concept of "governing poverty" highlights the ways in which poverty is not simply a natural or inevitable condition but is shaped by the actions and decisions of governments and other actors (see for a comparative view, Kiely and Swirak, 2022; Nagy, 2019). By examining the ways in which poverty is governed and organized, I can more comprehensively understand the social, political, and economic forces that contribute to

¹⁸ In this thesis, I prefer the term "governing poverty" over "governing welfare." In my understanding (and in line with authors such as Brown, 2017; Dubois, 2010; Muehlebach, 2012), welfare governance is a broader concept that encompasses the management of all social welfare programs and policies, while governing poverty is a specific subset of welfare governance that focuses on the strategies and policies aimed at reducing or eliminating poverty. However, while poverty is targeted, the goal is not necessarily to eradicate poverty but rather to promote the welfare or commonweal of "the population" and the maintenance of the social and political order.

poverty's persistence and how this is connected to the upholding of deportability. Furthering this connection to deportability reveals how class and race intersect to create situations in which individuals are menaced with deportation from a country (De Genova, 2002; Le Courant, 2022; Wissink, 2021). The concept of deportability highlights the ways in which legal residence status can intersect with other forms of social, economic, and political exclusion, including poverty. By examining the ways in which deportability is (re)produced, the complex relationships between poverty, migration control, and power can be mapped more extensively. This is the goal of reproducing and situating the *caselaw article* in the following.

The *caselaw article*: Legitimizing the deportability of “poor others”

The caselaw article not only introduces the legal framework of revocation b/orders but also provides an initial perspective on the entanglements of migration control and governing poverty. This perspective is the reformulation of social assistance as a means of justifying deportation. This specific instance of deportability is represented in the construction of “poor others” within a national order of poverty. In this article, my co-authors and I place importance on the juridical field (Bourdieu, 1987) and consider how jurisprudence produces legitimization¹⁹ and a specific framework for interpreting the actions and judgments of street-level bureaucrats and different offices. This article therefore allows a perspective that is interested in the nation-state “in terms of the formation, structure, and functions that it adopts” (Alberti, 2020: 98) and how this structures, facilitates, and guides the daily work of street-level bureaucrats in migration control offices. Following the article, a historical as well as organizational and ideological contextualization is added, allowing more proximity with “internal reasons for justification and the external means on which a rule is based” (Weber, 1956a: 821, own translation). The national order of poverty encompasses the state's formal, constitutional aspects and is intrinsically linked to the question of the legality of stateness and the legitimacy of the state's prerogative power (Brown, 2006, 2017). In other words, this article allows me to situate the entanglements of migration control and governing poverty within a historical and conceptual perspective on contemporary state power and control.²⁰

¹⁹ "Legitimizing" deals with the legal or formal recognition of something, while "legitimizing" deals with the social or cultural acceptance of something (see, Rosset, 2019: 163).

²⁰ An article-based thesis contains necessary repetitions, and I apologize to the reader for any inconvenience. Repetitions may be considered as reflecting some of the circularity of academic work and knowledge production.

(Un)conditional welfare? Tensions between welfare rights and migration control in Swiss case law²¹

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Introduction

The dependency is – as the previous instance has rightly determined – to a broad extent self-inflicted. The claimant was warned [by the migration office] on June 4th, 2013, to free herself from social assistance; after this did not happen, she was warned by the migration office on November 18th, 2014, again, without success. [...] it cannot be assumed that a detachment from social assistance will happen within reasonable time, because the claimant did not participate in any work in the first/primary labour market since 2011. (2C_870/2018 2019, own translation)

The role of law, and in the above case the role of legal judgments (see also Johannesson 2012; 2018), has been thoroughly studied through multiple lenses within socio-legal studies (Bourdieu, 1987; Calavita, 2016; Collier and Starr, 1989; Eckert et al., 2012). This literature highlights the relevance of everyday negotiations, but also to what extent legal regulations and law itself contribute to social control, enabling and constraining power (Cotterrell, 1992). Consequently, court judgements, such as the extract above, allow for a careful study of how these rulings contribute to the embedding of legal logics and interpretations in society and how they convey and create normative ideas. The presented extract is one example of how foreign nationals' right to stay is perceived and questioned by public authorities, leading to a withdrawal or a non-prolongation of (permanent) residence permits in Switzerland. A long and significant dependence on social welfare, here deemed self-inflicted, goes against the public interest and is often deemed a sign of lacking integration, leading to the loss of residence permit and therefore eventually to deportation (cf. Bolzman et al., 2002). Such cases reveal how welfare and migration control are heavily intertwined and how tensions between both play out in bureaucratic and legal decision-making. Although one set of policies might grant support

Each article explores different moments and is written by different a conglomeration of authors. This may lead to variations in terminology and concepts used. Inconsistencies might be considered as portraying situated challenges we faced in understanding the subject matter and in producing coherency.

²¹ This article is written in British English. As the article is already published and to keep the content as it is, I did not adapt it to American English.

(social assistance), the reception can at the same time be circumscribed by others (restrictive migration policies) and follow an enforcement logic (Bourdieu, 2012; Spencer, 2016).

Our interest lies in tracing this tension between welfare rights and migration control, for which we propose a case study of Swiss case law (see Pellander, 2019). We ask the following question: What does case law of the Swiss Federal Supreme Court (FSC) tell us about the relationship between the reception of social assistance and non-citizens' legitimacy/right to stay in Switzerland? The focus on case law expands previous research, which rather studied policies (Ataç, 2019) and neglected the relevance of legal decision-making within state institutions, in particular courts. Yet, prior socio-legal work brought forward how courts are constructed as bounded spaces of specialist dialogues which create an "ordered progression toward the truth" (Bourdieu, 1987: 830). Our interest lies in what judgments by the hierarchically highest court can teach us about the establishment of truths, rationalities, symbolic effects and the coupling of welfare benefits and migration control. Such an analysis presents an original way to reveal how states mobilise motivations and arguments in terms of (non-)access to social assistance and how they legitimise their exclusionary practices.

Under certain circumstances (see art. 83 of the Federal Law on the FSC), individuals whose permits are revoked or not prolonged can appeal the decision up to the FSC in order to secure their stay in Switzerland (Spescha et al., 2019). Hence, the FSC represents the last instance of a chain of legitimisation by controlling decisions of lower instances in their exercise of discretion and enforcement of law (art. 96 FNIA). As such, judgments by the FSC legitimise enforcements and decisions by other actors within the chain of legitimisation, down to the street-level bureaucrat. By removing prior logics of enforcement from the "category of arbitrary violence" (Bourdieu, 1987: 824), these judgments legitimately (re)produce power structures within society, manifesting perceptions of normalcy and deviancy (Bourdieu, 1987: 847).

The argumentation within the introductory judgement reflects the conditionality of rights and as such the differentiation between deserving citizens and non-citizens, which are seen as an illegitimate burden to the public hand of the Swiss state. Additionally, we claim that the presented court judgements individualise social assistance dependency (see also Procacci, 2001) and follow a strong neoliberal logic of economic participation. We support this with concepts of "welfare chauvinism" (see Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Huysmans, 2006),

“domopolitics” (Walters, 2004) and “politics of belonging” (Yuval-Davis, 2011) or rather “non-belonging”.

After a brief description of the Swiss legal system and the case selection, we will first elaborate these theoretical concepts and then apply them to our data. The analytical section presents how (past) individual behaviour is contrasted against the public interest, but also how the future is constructed to the disadvantage of claimants. Further, court rulings ascribe significant responsibility to those receiving benefits, not only through constructing social assistance dependency as being self-inflicted, but also through an assumed “unteachability” (Pfirter, 2019a) of foreign nationals, which is considered to show their “lack of integration”.

The revocation or non-prolongation of a (permanent) residence permit in the case of social assistance dependency – The legal perspective

The issuance of residence permits (B permits) and permanent residence permits (C permits)²² is regulated by the FNIA (Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, formerly Foreign Nationals Act, FNA). A permanent residence permit can or may be issued after a minimum rightful stay of five or ten years and based on meeting other (integration) criteria in Switzerland (see also Kurt, 2017a on settlement treaties).²³ Additionally, there is a legal difference between so-called “third-country nationals” and “citizens of the European Union/EFTA” (Spescha, 2011). Although integration criteria as well as the nationality of the foreign national might hinder access to more “stable” permits, those factors also influence the revocation, and respectively the non-prolongation, of permits (for further information, see Spescha 2011).²⁴

Besides convictions for criminal sentences, or violations towards public security, to name just a few reasons, withdrawal of a (permanent) residence permit is possible, if a person or someone s/he takes care of (e.g. spouse) depends on social assistance (Art. 62 FNIA). For the withdrawal of a *permanent* residence permit, these reasons need to be fulfilled on a more extensive level, including a permanent dependence on social assistance to a substantial extent (Art. 63 FNIA).

²² Due to the focus of this research, issued residence permits based on the Asylum Act will not be discussed, because the permits of recognised refugees and temporarily admitted foreign nationals cannot be revoked for social assistance dependency. Yet, dependency affects those groups in other ways (Amarelle and Nguyen, 2014; Caroni et al., 2018; Spescha et al., 2015; Spescha and Zünd, 2019).

²³ An exception are foreign professors nominated at one of the universities or higher education institutes and their family members, who receive a permanent residence permit immediately upon their first entry and stay in Switzerland.

²⁴ To simplify the legal complexity, we will only use the term “withdrawal of (permanent) residence permit” in the following part, despite various legal differentiations between expiry, withdrawal and non-prolongation.

Further, whereas permanent residency holders were protected by their length of stay (if residing for more than 15 years) when depending on social assistance under the FNA (change of Art. 63. Para. 2 FNA; Kurt 2017), the change to the FNIA nullified this safety.

The withdrawal, decided by cantonal migration offices, revokes the person's legal status and allows for his or her removal (Spescha, 2011; Spescha et al., 2019). Based on the jurisprudence of the FSC, the withdrawal of a permit due to social assistance dependency is practised in the case of a concrete danger of (long-term) social dependency (e.g. high financial contributions and no or little indication that the concerned person will become financially independent). Additionally, the withdrawal of a permanent residence permit is possible after receiving around 80,000 Swiss francs of social assistance within two to three years. Financial contributions of labour market integration programmes by the state are also interpreted as social assistance (Bundesrat, 2019: 18). Yet, specific circumstances, such as the family situation or childcare duties, need to be considered. Probst et al. (2019) further underline that despite the possibility to withdraw purely due to dependence on social assistance, many cantons highlight the need to consider the overall case and its individuality to avoid an "automatisation" of the withdrawal procedure.

Whereas decisions by cantonal migration offices can be appealed within the internal cantonal instances (depending on the structure of each canton) and lastly to the cantonal courts, only some cases are taken up by the FSC (depending on the claimant's entitlement regulated by law; see Spescha et al. 2019). This also explains the rather small number of cases dealing with this issue. If the FSC rejects the appeal, the concerned person may appeal before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Methodological case law selection and analysis

Our inquiry of the FSC's case law resulted in 18 cases,²⁵ of which 17 were rejected and received a non-admission decision and one was admitted by the FSC. One case treats the withdrawal of

²⁵ In a first step, we searched case law of the Swiss Federal Supreme Court focusing on Art. 62 para. 1 lit. e FNA (today FNIA) and Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNA (today FNIA), respectively, thus two different searches. We used the FSC's website and searched for cases between the period of 1st January 2008, when the FNA entered into force, and the end of September 2019. This led us to 1124 hits in the case of Art. 62 para. 1 lit. e FNA and 703 hits in the case of Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNA. Subsequently, we added the words "revocation" or "non-prolongation" coupled with "public welfare" in both cases. It resulted in 17/15 exact cases, which fully met the research criteria for Art. 62 para. 1 lit. e FNA and in 10/7 exact cases for Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNA. Subsequently, we took out duplicate cases in each search, reducing the cases to 27 and 22, respectively, and then compared these searches, again taking out duplicates, leaving us with 18 cases in total. All of them were analysed in depth.

a permanent residence permit, whereas the other 17 cases discuss the withdrawal of a residence permit. All cases deal with foreign nationals from third countries. The 18 cases were thematically coded according to their reasons for withdrawal and aspects of the specific case (e.g. legal background, children, social assistance, integration, private interest of stay), which are analysed and described below. During the coding process four supplementary cases (all rejected) were added to our database, which did not come up in our previous search, but were referenced in the other FSC judgements. Three cases are particularly interesting as they are dealing with long term residing foreign nationals (since 1985, 1990 and 1998) and one case with an amount of social assistance over 600,000 Swiss Francs. Thus, we had a total of 22 cases. (18 from the search, and 4 from references cited in jurisprudence).

Hence, the seemingly small number of cases appears in a different light if we consider that they represent the overall standing of legal understandings regarding welfare and immigration control in Switzerland. They contribute to the creation of normalcy and deviancy (see also Soysüren, 2018), universalising specific modes of living, and set how lower legal and administrative actors will handle future cases (Bourdieu, 1987). Within the history of welfare law, Bourdieu (1987) argues that “the body of law constantly registers a state of power relations. It thus legitimises victories over the dominated, which are thereby converted into accepted facts” (Bourdieu, 1987: 817).

Importantly, law neither simply obeys external social forces that ask for mere implementation (of, e.g., restrictive migration policies), nor is law detached from society and its power relations. Instead, law and its related institutions are a specific field with its own logics and power struggles, while in constant interaction with society at large (Bourdieu, 1987). The analysed judgements are part of this juridical field and include sections where new interpretations manifest, as well as sections that are constructed of standardised text modules, which “offer a “yardstick” for how to argue regarding certain assertions” (Pörtner, 2018: 129). The standardisation shows how certain aspects of law and legal interpretation have gained stability and where a common understanding (of case aspects) is carved out and confirms the established order (Bourdieu, 1987: 839).

Theoretical background

Switzerland, as much as other countries, distinguishes between various migrant categories by regulating a differentiated access to rights, not only connected to their entry, but also regarding their stay and based on an assumed “degree of integration” (Morris 2002; Pascouau and Strik

2012; Goodman 2019). Similarly, states classify their poor population into subcategories to establish who deserves financial support from the state (Leerkes, 2016; Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin, Frauenfelder, Togni and Keller, 2008; Wacquant, 2009). We thus argue that “poor” migrants are a specific state category, especially affected not only by the recent slimming down of welfare state expenditures, but also by tightening migration control practices (Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018; Bolzman et al., 2002; Leerkes, 2016; Walters, 2004). The right to have (social) rights (Arendt, 1949) thus becomes a “civic privilege” (Bolzman et al. 2002; Tafelmacher 2010; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Suvarierol and Kirk 2015), linked to ideas of deservingness and conditionality (van Oorschot, 2006). Consequentially, individuals face differentiated allocation of welfare rights based on “civic stratification”, a system of inequality (Morris, 2002) that (legally) in- or excludes (Achermann, 2013), grants or denies rights established by eligibility criteria. The stratification also allows for the “elaboration of rights for categories of noncitizen” (Morris, 2002: 79) that is coupled with the exercise of control and surveillance (Piñeiro, 2015). Here, only citizens are fully recognised as legitimate members of the national solidary group that is entitled to welfare (Bolzman et al., 2002; Mäder, 2009; Maeder and Nadai, 2004). This stratification is not new, because access to welfare has evolved – being expanded and restricted – regarding various groups over time (Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin, 2002; Tabin, Frauenfelder, Togni and V Keller, 2008).

Historical analysis highlighted how poverty was seen as evidence of idleness (Procacci, 2007; Wacquant, 2009), making “the poor” a “political and not a charity problem” (Procacci, 2007: 27) and linking (active) citizenship to the notion of “useful” and hard work (Marshall 1950; Procacci 2001). Over the past decades, scholars have been increasingly interested in the question of how non-citizens became another target group who face “welfare state chauvinism” (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; later ‘welfare chauvinism’, see Huysmans, 2006), which conceptualises the differentiation between citizens and non-citizens regarding welfare policies. This work argues for the emerging notion of a “welfare state [that] should [...] be protected against abuse by people who don’t want to work, or against the burden imposed by immigrants, refugees, and similar outgroups” (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990, 204). Similarly, Huysmans argues that states purposefully and explicitly privilege nationals “in contrast to third-country nationals” (2006, 64), with the effect of creating a widespread suspicion towards asylum seekers and migrants in general. Additionally, Ataç and Rosenberger (2018) argue that there is a convergence of social policies and migration policy, affecting in particular irregular migrants (see also Leerkes, 2016).

We broaden this discussion by showing that besides social policies differentiating access to welfare, migration policy also restricts the right to access welfare services, not only for irregularised individuals, but also for “legally residing” foreign nationals in Switzerland (cf. Bolzman et al., 2002; Pfirter, 2019a). The Swiss state increasingly links welfare benefits with migration control, partly due to the fear of alleged “foreign welfare abusers” (Tabin, 2002). Thereby, welfare benefits and post-entry migration control become increasingly intertwined (Ataç and Rosenberger 2018). This is in line with Walters’ argument (2004) that feelings of insecurity revolving around the geographical and territorial borders have shifted towards a social insecurity, due to which states try to increase trust of their citizens through tougher policies against those deemed not belonging and/or undeserving. Foreign nationals become mere “guests” in a “home” which is not theirs, tolerated as long as they have no criminal record (Achermann, 2013), participate (economically and socially) and do not make any claims towards the “host society”, such as asking for financial support in times of need (Walters, 2004).

States thus establish “domopolitics” (Walters, 2004), referring to the government of the state and further political spaces as a home and of belonging, which needs to be protected. As observed already nearly 20 years ago in the Swiss case, the reception of social assistance jeopardises the right to stay and to family reunification (Bolzman et al., 2002). Further, Swiss belonging as such was historically highly connected to the “hometown” (inherited by one’s father) and determined, for example, which community was responsible for “the poor” individual and which community needed to pay (back) social assistance expenditures (received by an individual) to another community (the hometown or the place of residence; Tabin, Frauenfelder, Togni and V Keller, 2008).

This article shifts the focus from policy analysis towards case law and decision-making by bureaucratic administration that is endorsed, as we show, by the FSC. These “judgment[s] represent [...] the quintessential form of authorized, public and official speech which is spoken in the name of and to everyone” (Bourdieu, 1987: 838) by simultaneously refusing and delegitimising other points of view. Through the hierarchical organisation of the juridical field, these judgments are translated back into bureaucratic decision-making (Bourdieu, 1987). The article thus contributes to studies of publicly available rulings/judgements and verdicts on the national level (Pellander 2019), which are yet often neglected. Much like the work of Pellander, who studied Finnish state “control mechanisms over cross-border marriages” (Pellander, 2019: 12), our findings bring forward how money – and in our context the dependence on financial

assistance – plays a crucial role in the general discourse on migrants’ deservingness and the legitimacy of their stay on the national territory. Studying the argumentation of court rulings informs us on how the Swiss welfare state is thought of (namely as a privilege mainly for citizens of the nationally bound community of solidarity). (Economic) integration is a necessary requirement to belong and functions as a means to sort the “wanted” from the “unwanted” (Achermann, 2013; Fassin, 2011b; Walters, 2004). These court cases are then not only influenced by recent policy developments such as the discussion on abuse of social welfare (Tafelmacher, 2010), but also (re)direct control practices and everyday implementation in bureaucratic offices.

(Un)conditional welfare in Switzerland

The presented, systematic review of FSC judgments elaborates themes which emerged during the analysis. Much like Sales (2002), we argue that welfare rights become increasingly linked to duties one has to fulfil. A lack of “integration” is mobilised to discredit individual efforts and clearly place a focus on “public interest, order and security” (see Art. 121 and 121a Swiss Constitution) against which the personal interest of the accused is weighed. All cases, except one, show how the FSC argues in favour of terminating the stay of non-citizens due to the reception of social assistance. The court justifies such a decision against the arguments of the concerned individuals and families. It considers the claimants’ previous behaviour, their future prospects (here, state institutions are expected to foresee the potential development of not only the person in question, but the financial situation of the entire family), the amount of financial assistance and the personal “integration” (e.g. length of stay or whether they fulfil the legal integration requirements). Reasons for dependency and thus blame (or responsibility) become relevant matters regarding the risk to lose a permit (Pfirter, 2019a), as does the question of proportionality. Regarding the latter, the public interest is weighed against the private interest of the individual, including how the person is “integrated” into Swiss society (see Achermann, 2013 for the handling of criminal offenders).

Cost Avoidance, Temporal Prospects and Suspicion

The cases show quite clearly that the FSC considers non-citizens who receive social assistance as not legitimate and thus undeserving to continue their stay in Switzerland. They are a burden to the nation-state’s financial situation:

It is out of question, that the claimant has received 173,403.55 CHF between January 1st, 2007, and July 31st, 2015, in social assistance. At the moment one

cannot expect that he will be able to take care of his subsistence on his own in the near future, especially since his neediness [Bedürftigkeit] has endured over the past 10 years and he believes himself to be 100% incapacitated. (2C_1048/2017 2018, own translation)

Unlike deservingness frameworks in which neediness could become an advantage for asylum seekers (van Oorschot 2000; 2006; Ataç 2019), placing a (future) economic burden on the welfare state and eventually remaining needy have serious consequences for individuals whose stay is judged under the former FNA. Previous developments of each case have to be weighed and considered in the context of the claimant's current living situation, as well as with a forecast of the foreseeable development of the financial and personal situation. Here, time plays a crucial role to establish claimants as unable to contribute economically, to live independently and to integrate, which justifies withdrawal of their stay permits. The number of years is also used to establish the "unwillingness" on side of the client, underlining the individualisation of the reasons for receiving social assistance (cf. Pfirter, 2019a). Here, responsibility is transferred entirely onto the claimant, who could easily change the situation if they only wanted to do so. The FSC further questions the claimant's perceived inability to work due to health reasons (2C_98/2018, 2018), underlining how the "neediness" is self-constructed, not accepted by the administration and thus illegitimate. His or her poor prospects are perceived as a sign of idleness and an attempt to circumvent "hard work" (Procacci, 2001, 2007).

Within the cases, the need to bring forward evidence of financial independence as well as justifications of the current financial situation and developments weighs heavily on the claimants. This supports an inherent suspicion and the questioning of their deservingness to receive social assistance, a recurrent theme throughout all judgements. Indeed, credibility is primarily given to the arguments of administrative actors who prove their standpoints through paperwork (Borrelli and Andretta, 2019; Borrelli and Lindberg, 2019) rather than to the claimant's own perception of the situation (2C_1048/2017, 2018). This need for evidence is further connected to an assessment of future (or rather temporal) prospects, which become crucial indicators and a valid measure to decide on the termination of someone's permit "in order to relieve public welfare" (2C_1040/2017 2018; see also reference to 2C_1064/2017 2018, own translation). The focus to relieve the public hand creates the image of undeserved support that legitimises the termination of stay of a foreign national. It underlines the differentiation of rights (see Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Morris, 2002), based on migration policies interfering with or rather trumping social policies.

In one judgement, the lack to “integrate into the primary labour market in a foreseeable timeframe” (2C_1040/2017 2018, own translation) is brought up. Yet, if individuals found a job during the revocation process, the court interprets it as an endeavour, which came “too late” and only after migration offices pressured the individual (2C_98/2018, 2018). We also find a mobilisation of other welfare benefits in order to prove the likely future burden for the Swiss state, specifically used against persons who are eligible for supplementary benefits.²⁶ Although these supplementary benefits are in themselves not a legal reason to withdraw a residence permit, they “may be taken into consideration, when assessing the proportionality of measures regarding the termination of stay” (2C_98/2018, 2018, own translation):

In case the claimant would receive her OASI [old-age and survivor’s insurance] pension at an earlier stage, this would cause a life-long shortage of her pension; her future subsistence would need to be covered substantially by supplementary benefits. This would in practice mean a seamless continuation of her existing dependence on social assistance. Through this anticipated life-long dependence on needs-based minimum benefits in form of special services, which are independent of prior contributions, the public hand would continue to be considerably burdened. (2C_98/2018 2018; see also 2C_83/2018 2019)

The weight placed on the “public hand” is underlined several more times in the same judgement and overshadows the rights of the claimant, who is deemed unable to “take care of herself by her own efforts”, because she will soon be retired and receiving an OASI pension. Again, although each retired person is entitled to receive OASI, it is interpreted as a burden in the context of migration law, which causes a conflation of differing welfare state instruments. A husband “at the end of professional life” and his wife, who were denied invalidity benefits, received 440,000 CHF in social assistance. Both lost their permits, despite the husband’s being employed 50% right after the migration office’s decision came, which made them immediately independent of social assistance (2C_83/2018 2019). However, the court argued that the wife had not worked since a prior accident and that neither spouse participated in secondary labour market programmes, so they were responsible for their prior dependency. Thus, the court argued that neither would receive an existence-securing pension. Instead, it speculated (“in all likelihood”) that they would require supplementary benefits in the future. Hence, the verdict was based on a prognosis that “neither would be able to detach themselves durably from social assistance and the general support of the public hand” (2C_83/2018 2019, own translation). In

²⁶ According to the Federal Act on Supplementary Benefits to Old Age, Survivors” and Disability Insurance (own translation, ELG, 6. October 2006, 01.01.2019)

addition to the potential disadvantage of old age, young claimants also face temporal hurdles. The FSC explained that “today one cannot assume that [a younger claimant’s] ability to take care of his livelihood will change in the future” (2C_877/2013 2014).

With the mobilisation of an image of foreign nationals burdening the state in the long run, these rulings place claimants in direct competition with citizens for public money. Even if children support their parents and alleviate their financial dependence temporarily, the court places importance on future developments and their individual efforts and “capacities” for independence from public funds. In the case of an older couple, the FSC not only expected them to have some evidence of the children’s financial situation, but also stated that although they received support from their children, this would not change their individual “incapacities” for independence from welfare benefits. Hence, to provide a positive future prognosis, they had to prove their employability, respectively, and prove that they would earn a generally livelihood-securing wage in the future (2C_949/2017 2018). Although the claimants argued that they would eventually receive invalidity pensions (IV) despite previous rejections in 2009/2010 and 2015, the FSC assessed that this reasoning remained “purely speculative regarding the general entitlement to such a pension, as well as its amount” (2C_949/2017 2018, SFJC, own translation).

Ironically, the element of speculation is also highly embedded in future predictions conducted by state agencies, but these are treated as far more valid and reliable. One explanation lies in the migration offices” belonging to the juridical field, as these offices implement laws partially shaped by the FSC. Their enforcement authority derives from the legitimacy of the law itself and juridical arguments (re)produced and justified in FSC judgements. These judgements become a form of public truth proclamation representing the state’s general position and thus claiming to speak “in the name of and to everyone” (Bourdieu, 1987: 838). The FSC chooses which interpretations are deemed valid and thus produces normalcy in terms of which predictions (or speculations) are legitimate. This reproduces established societal hierarchies and differentiations, specifically through the individualisation of social assistance dependency.

The Individualisation of Economic and Social Integration

The wife’s insufficient interest in learning German is related to her inability to “integrate” into the primary labour market. The husband is further judged according to his “massive unreliability, repeated refusal to work” and scant employment, which only took place in the context of integration programs and

only up to 80% “because the claimant denied the possibility of working full-time to keep Friday free for prayers” (2C_1064/2017 2018, own summary).

As much as the temporal aspects “prove” claimants’ unwillingness, their behaviour and alleged integration also contribute to evidence of the claimants’ undeserving nature. Within the analysed court rulings, pictures of individual failures to comply with expected levels of integration emerge. These failures might be indirectly attributed to religious differences (e.g. praying on Fridays) or a general disobedience to public control. Our analysis also emphasises images of (un)deservingness in which the assessment of the person’s interest in staying is strongly based on ideas of economic deservingness (Ticktin 2006; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014).

The claimant may now have lived in Switzerland for more than 25 years, but regarding his specific [konkret] circumstances, it must be concluded that the length of his residence does not correlate with his economic and social integration. [...] Despite his health problems, it would have been reasonable for him to put effort into finding adequate employment, especially since his ability to work was legally determined to be 70%, and 80% by the IV. Therefore, he is – contrary to his argument – at fault regarding his social assistance dependency. Furthermore, the claimant has accumulated debts that amount to 75,000 CHF, the latest ones from 2015, and he is further reproached for “not having specifically tight social relations in Switzerland, despite his lengthy stay. (2C_1048/2017 2018, own translation)

The presented case contrasts the claimant with the FSC’s “ideal image,” against which foreign nationals’ lives are assessed and judged, and consequently establishes that he does not deserve the right to stay. Migrant individuals are held responsible and culpable for their dependence on social assistance, making them scapegoats that threaten the stability of the Swiss welfare system due to their financial burden.

Most cases emphasise economic independence (no debts, no social assistance and working on the primary labour market) when assessing a person’s integration and right to stay. Integration is reduced to a one-sided performance measurable in terms of monetary possession rather than other factors. Although language skills (see cases 2C_419/2018 2018 and 2C_870/2018 2019) and relationships may be considered factors related to integration, financial independence is the most significant factor on which integration seems to be based:

The claimant has lived in Switzerland for nearly 29 years. Regarding her specific circumstances, particularly her continuous dependence on social assistance and its amount, it must be concluded that her length of stay does not

correlate with her economic and social integration. (2C_953/2018, 2019, own translation)

As this example demonstrates, rulings utilise standardised templates, which come up repeatedly. The repetitive nature of some sections reinforces the power of certain arguments. At the same time, the rulings include a certain storyline that lists progressively severe negative developments. In one case, the FSC mentioned, how despite “massive social assistance”, the claimant was given “a last chance” with the previous extension of his residence permit (2C_1109/2014 2015). However, he did not act upon this “chance”, and thus the public had a “significant” [*erheblich*] interest in his leaving, especially because he was relatively young, and the FSC assumed that he would remain dependent “for a long time”.

Social assistance dependency is indirectly described as self-induced in the case reports (see 2C_1109/2014 2015 or 2C_1040/2017 2018), which allows the FSC to restrict “the right to have rights” (Arendt, 1949) and legitimise their withdrawal. Individuals who justify their dependence on social assistance with their state of health are depicted as not sick enough, malingering patients who pretend to be unable to work (2C_1048/2017, 2018), or idle (2C_870/2018, 2019). The statements of these non-citizens are constantly contested, and the judgements legitimise this contestation by referring to the court’s role of reducing the public burden. They “position themselves as a force for good, acting in many cases to protect [...] their citizens” (Walters, 2004: 248) against those who misuse the welfare system. This can be explained in terms of welfare chauvinism: the courts oppose the financial burden caused by foreign nationals and thus reproduce a picture of their illegitimacy in receiving such benefits, which is supported by the general political discourse directed against foreign nationals and translated into respective legal changes (Spescha et al., 2019).

Family life and childrearing are not relevant to decisions regarding the termination of the stay in cases in which the length of social assistance dependency outweighs “the 17 years of idleness, in which [the claimant] did not contribute to the financial support of the family, despite being warned twice and being offered several integration courses by the social services” (2C_395/2017, 2018). While the court considers children’s needs and their eventual issues, these are only marginally valid for the final decision. Interestingly, even previous employment may be used as an argument of the FSC to disadvantage the claimants’ position. Because one claimant (2C_870/2018 2019) was employed part-time until 2011, it was said that her dependence on social assistance resulted from her “lacking motivation in the following years to seriously seek an existence-securing employment, especially since her son was already in

kindergarten/school” (2C_870/2018, 2019). Here, a lack of motivation is connected to the assumption that one has “the time” to work since children are taken care of. In addition, even if one looks for work, lacking knowledge of the local language becomes a reason for terminating the stay because a lack of serious will to integrate is presumed (2C_870/2018, 2019).

These judgements illustrate how administrations create expectations and norms that are subsequently confirmed and supported in the court’s verdicts. Once a person is deemed undeserving based on previous behaviour, present efforts are not easily recognised. In Bourdieu’s (1987: 847) conceptualisation of the juridical field, court decisions set representations of normalcy and deviation from the norm. This normalising effect of court judgements confirms social assistance as a privilege “reserved” for the citizen population, which additionally enjoys an inalienable right to stay (Marshall, 1950). Foreign nationals are, in turn, required to fulfil increasingly complex integration requirements (Pascouau and Strik 2012; Ataç 2014; Goodman 2019). These are often linked to an individualised and neoliberal logic of economic contribution, responsibility and performance (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005). Court cases thus become tools for social ordering, through which borders (of belonging) become manifest in the everyday lives of foreign nationals who have often resided (and worked) in Switzerland for many years. The judgements reproduce the non-belonging of non-citizens, who were never recognised as fully part of society to begin with (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017). Instead, their already differentiated status is further questioned when they make claims that they are unable to work.

As such, not only policies, but also court cases (and judgements) create hierarchies of deservingness against which claimants are judged and based on which their behaviour is discouraged and categorised as disruptive (Ataç, 2019). By arguing against the claimants and describing their reasons for the dependence on social assistance based on individualised (moral) defects, including idleness or want (Beveridge, 1942; Walters, 2004), states can position themselves as being responsible and protecting their citizens from those allegedly misusing the system (Walters, 2004: 248).

Individual Rights Versus “Public” Interests

Although there is no entitlement for third-country national to enter or stay in a foreign state’s territory (contrary to the human right to exit), the FSC must consider claimants’ private interests to assess the proportionality of state decisions. The termination of their stay may

jeopardise Art. 8 of the ECHR (the right to respect for private and family life), which might be considered by the court.²⁷ The FSC argues that, in the case of a residence of 10 years, exceptional reasons are needed to terminate one's stay "because after this timespan a good integration regularly exists" (2C_291/2019, 2019). Neither the "feasibility of return as reason *per se*" nor the "public interest to manage immigration" is sufficient for a termination. However, if there are reasons such as a perceived prolonged and self-inflicted dependence on social assistance, intrusion into private life becomes admissible and is practised. In one example case, the FSC deemed that the person had "absolutely no valid" claim [*Anspruch*] to private life (2C_291/2019, 2019). Such withdrawals are based on Art. 8, para. 2 of the ECHR if deemed necessary and are "in the interest of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (ECHR, Art. 8 para. 2). The termination of the stay can only be prevented, according to the FSC, if the claimant has an "outstanding social need", but neither what this entails nor what is considered unacceptable is mentioned explicitly (2C_98/2018, 2018; 2C_291/2019, 2019; 2C_395/2017, 2018). Instead all the presented needs within the cases do not seem to be sufficient.

We find in these judgements an overall logic of domopolitics (Walters, 2004), which is aimed at governing political spaces in a manner similar to domestic spaces. When weighing private lives and the public interest, the FSC deems, for example, the separation of families to be justified and proportional (2C_395/2017, 2018). Although the FSC places the responsibility of deciding whether children (and eventually the other spouse) must follow on the claimant whose residence permit is withdrawn (2C_395/2017, 2018), it also discloses an exclusionary logic. If one spouse leaves, eventually the rest of the family might follow, further reducing potential future costs to the Swiss state. This demonstrates that the respective individuals' stay has always been conditional. Similarly, if the court recognises an enduring need for the state to support a foreign national, it tends to attribute responsibility for this support to the state of which the person is a citizen. This applies even if the court acknowledges unfavourable conditions in the country of origin (2C_1109/2014 2015). We find in this reasoning a parallel between the treatment of migrants today and how, in the past, "the poor" were sent back to their respective "home communities", which were considered responsible for their members

²⁷ In the case of the termination of stay of criminal offenders, reasons related to Art. 8 ECHR are the only ones that might lead authorities or courts to consider a revocation or non-prolongation of a permit as being disproportional (Achermann 2013).

(Tabin, 2002). Today's laws serve the purpose of sending those considered to be a burden "back home", leading to their deportation back to their "hometowns" or, in today's context, their home countries. The meaning of "hometown" as such has not lost its meaning, but has been transferred to the national level, and the law no longer differentiates between local community memberships, but between national memberships.

Unteachability, Duties and Responsibility

In its judgements, the FSC insists on non-citizens' duty to actually find work and does not acknowledge their efforts to do so. Thereby, the court not only qualifies people's attempts to re-integrate economically, but also closes off avenues for claimants to advocate for their rights to stay and receive benefits. In one case mentioned above, "the lengthy dependence on social assistance indicates a lack of flawless behaviour" (2C_870/2018, 2019). It is further argued that "a single mother can be expected [*zugemutet werden*] to seek employment [*um Arbeit bemühen*] after the youngest child turns three and that she does not rely on social assistance to finance her life" (2C_730/2018 2019; see also 2C_633/2018 2019; 2C_395/2017 2018). However, despite participation in work integration programs through which the claimant acquired a partial income, the amount was deemed insufficient (2C_730/2018, 2019). Further, we again find that the courts attempt to discipline behaviour. Even the act of fulfilling a duty as a social assistance recipient to participate in integration programs (2C_83/2018, 2019; 2C_395/2017, 2018) can be turned against the claimant. This occurs when (a) participation in these programs is presented as a sign of continued dependence on social assistance rather than a sign of detaching from state support and (b) these programs are interpreted not as a demonstration of a personal effort to change one's situation, but as the consequence of following rules whose disrespect would involve the reduction of social assistance. The court reduces the person's effort and the positive connotations of participation to the fulfilment of a duty and instead emphasises the "socio-legal duty" [*sozialrechtliche Pflicht*] (2C_870/2018, 2019), which obliges them to partake in these programs and which, if ignored, can lead to a reduction in financial assistance and part of the sanctioning system within social policies. Furthermore, it openly admits that this duty "qualifies the meaning of [...] engagement" (2C_870/2018, 2019). With this judgment, the FSC supports the tightening of migration control practices through social policies (Huysmans, 2006; Leerkes, 2016). The qualification of individual efforts increases the requirements for migrant individuals to remain in the country.

Moreover, even difficult family circumstances do not spare claimants from being accused of idleness. A woman who came to Switzerland when she was 19 years old and whose husband lost his employment four years later (one year after the birth of their child) lost her permit (2C_395/2017, 2018). This happened despite her husband “losing hold, consuming drugs and suffering from alcohol abuse”. According to the court, the woman should have sought employment instead of remaining dependent on her husband and hoping he would regain the ability to work.

The focus on duty remains closely connected to the idea that individuals must contribute and make an effort. Indeed, the collected judgements hint at the assumption that some people are “unteachable” and thus undeserving of support (Pfirter, 2019a). In the case of a Bosnian woman, her “unteachability” became the key argument for terminating her stay. Despite the fact that her morbid (health-impaired) husband and 12-year-old son (who was in school) both possessed permanent residence permits, the court ruled that “despite warnings, she did not make any effort to reduce her social assistance dependency and integrate economically or linguistically” (2C_419/2018, 2018). Although the court discussed the potential problems related to re-integrating into her home country, as well as the son’s inability to visit his mother over long periods if he and his father stayed in Switzerland, the claimant’s “minimal effort to integrate” and her “massive, self-inflicted social assistance dependency” ranked higher than her right to live with her family in Switzerland (2C_419/2018, 2018).

Arguing with unteachability allows the court to place full responsibility on the claimant, who has been warned and informed but has “wilfully decided” not to act (2C_83/2018, 2019; Pfirter, 2019a). Here, the temporal aspects used to envision idleness (e.g. the length of welfare dependency) work well together with a presumed lack of motivation to create the “faulty and non-deserving other”. One claimant’s employability was rated at 50% a few months after an accident, and it was determined that “he did not try hard enough” (2C_83/2018, 2019). “He ought to have taken up a job”, the court claimed. Even though local social services attested that the claimant tried and “met his obligations and basic duty to minimise damages [*Schadensminderungspflicht*]”, the court ruled that the permit withdrawal was proportional, even if the claimant fulfilled his obligation, because “foreigner-related procedures follow a sterner benchmark” (2C_395/2017, 2018). Here, the court openly acknowledged a hierarchy of policies (i.e. migration policy trumps social policy). In addition, it confirmed that foreign nationals’ claims to social rights are conditional. In this sense, their claim to social assistance

comes at a high price that leads to suspicion, monitoring, sanctioning and eventually deportation.

Conclusion

Within this work, we elaborate on the question of what FSC case law reveals about the relationship between the receipt of social assistance and non-citizens' legitimacy and right to remain in Switzerland. We have argued that the Swiss state mobilises the receipt of social welfare as a means to establish conceptions of normalcy and deviancy and to question belonging (Walters, 2004) through administrative and legal decision-making. This argument was supported by an analysis of FSC case law concerning judgements on foreign nationals and their legal right to remain in the country when depending on social assistance. Throughout the four analytical sections, we demonstrated how welfare rights function as tools of civic stratification, and we showed how citizens are differentiated from non-citizens. Although the latter are recognised as members of the national solidary group who are privileged with universal social rights reserved for them under certain conditions (Marshall, 1950), conditionality is significantly higher for foreign nationals, who face deportation.

First, we showed how aspects of temporality established the failure to become independent of social assistance and how "late reactions" might have increased suspicion on the FSC's part towards the claimant's willingness to integrate. Second, we found an individualisation of dependency. In addition to the exclusion of "the poor", we also tackled "migrants with poor prospects" (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018). Although there was a change in the 20th century regarding which social and economic processes were seen as the underlying causes of poverty (Walters, 2004), we have today circled back to an image of individuals, especially migrants, as responsible for their dependency. Third, we showed that the presented court decisions, particularly previous decisions by migration offices, cantonal courts and legal representatives, reflect a general binary of "protectionism" towards the welfare state and the citizens who "belong" to it, as contrasted with those groups perceived as non-integrated, undeserving and therefore facing deportation. Fourth, we showed how terms such as "integration", "self-infliction" and "unteachability" became crucial indicators for assuming the failure of foreign nationals to live up to their duties. This supports Huysmans' (2006) argument that the policing of borders and access to social and economic rights are embedded in polarised debates on belonging.

Welfare and immigration policies are strongly intertwined; thus, migrants become the rivals of citizens, with whom they compete for social benefits. As such, welfare chauvinism becomes “a strategy of introducing cultural identity criteria in an area in which belonging is determined on the basis of social policy criteria, such as health, age, disability and employment” (Huysmans, 2006: 78). The court’s wording reflects the expectation of an idealised behaviour on the part of migrant individuals, by which each claimant is judged. The foremost markers of belonging include labour market participation and economic independence, as well as “flawless” behaviour and not showing idleness or insufficient motivation. Doubt surrounding “being integrated” and remaining or becoming independent of social assistance is enshrined in law “as a quintessential instrument of normalisation” (Bourdieu, 1987: 848), which curtails the rights of immigrants and causes serious repercussions, such deportation from Switzerland.

By relating the receipt of social assistance to a potential loss of residence status, current migration control practices call into question the existence of social assistance that is available to everyone regardless of status and origin (Tabin, 2002). Furthermore, these practices redefine and demonstrate who belongs and whose presence becomes politicised (Houtum and Naerssen 2002; Brubaker 2010; Cassidy et al. 2017), establishing a “politics of belonging that is not generated by migration, at least not in any proximate sense, but by various forms of social closure, discrimination, or marginalization” (Brubaker, 2010: 65). The sense of belonging is deeply embedded, as presented here, in the stratification of social rights, and more specifically in the conditions related to the receipt of social assistance.

Interesting for future comparison and analysis is the convergence we identified between how foreign national offenders are treated vis-à-vis foreign nationals who rely on social assistance. Achermann (2013) highlighted the spatial and social exclusion of foreign national offenders and the permanently insecure status, which also affects other migrant groups and disciplines their behaviour. Similar to those sentenced to prison and therefore marked as general security threats to public order and the nation, those relying on social assistance must demonstrate their worthiness to stay, which is assessed based on their performance and their valid and strong relation to (and thus integration into) Swiss society, all of which affect the judgement regarding their future right to stay.

Chapter 5

Ruptures and continuities in organizing the national order of poverty

We know what national military defense is, what it aims at and what it requires. As a small country, concerned with peace and relying on neutrality, Switzerland needs a powerful army to protect its independence and its inhabitants. The field-gray soldier's book is addressed to the soldier. In addition to the soldier's book, there is now this book on the civil defense of the country. In its own way, it serves the same purpose: to preserve and strengthen the resistance of the people, to secure the independence of Switzerland. Even though in our days we are fortunately not threatened by warlike fortunes but can accomplish our day's work in peace, we always need the spirit and strength of the community in order to master the tasks that lie before us and to walk the path into the future well prepared. A small nation is worth as much as—in peace and in danger—its spirit and inner strength are worth. But if we are ever confronted with the test of an emergency, the army can fight as long as the will to live and the will to resist remain alive in the people. To break this will would be the goal of any aggressor [*Angreifer*]. He would not lack the means to do so. The defenseless population would be affected: our families, our homes, and workplaces. One would be out to rob the people of their strength of courage [*Mutes*] and of their faith in the success of the resistance. Therefore, the protection of the life and property of the civilian population is an essential part of the national defense. The forces directed to it [*Die darauf gerichteten Kräfte*] should be kept awake and strengthened, the service to it should be promoted as a precaution.

The aim of this book is to serve as a guide for all citizens and residents of our country, men and women, old and young, to inspire and encourage them to do so. (Bachmann and Grosjean, 1969: 5–6, own translation)

With these words an inconspicuous “red booklet”²⁸ is introduced that, in 1969, was delivered to all households in Switzerland. This political manifesto might initially appear somewhat removed from the subject of this thesis, which interrogates the entanglements of governing poverty and migration control by offering a contemporary ethnographic analysis. However, this post-World-War-II artifact written in the *geist* of the “spiritual national defense” (Löffler, 2004) contextualizes the *caselaw article* that opens my investigation into the ruptures and continuities in Switzerland's constant (re)production as a nation-state. This booklet manifests

²⁸ My thanks go to Mo Brunold whose anti-nationalist August 1st (Swiss national holiday) talk in 2021 inspired me to include this red booklet entitled “Book of Civil Defense.”

the idea that society must be defended not solely by military force but on ideological, cultural, and moral grounds and that the welfare of the population is key to securing “the home.”

The booklet represents a glimpse at the rhetoric and discursive construction of Switzerland as a community of value (Anderson, 2019), a nation built on trust and a commonweal (Eckert, 2020a; Walters, 2004). As Nikolas Rose depicts in another context, “community” emerges here “as a new way of conceptualizing and administering moral relations amongst persons” (Rose, 2006: 147). While the community was the target of this booklet, the *caselaw article* analyzes how the individual is targeted by the political program of combining welfare benefits with migration control. The following pages investigate this shift from community to individual, the ruptures and continuities associated with these evolutions, and how this shift is conditioned by the discourse of *Überfremdung* (overforeignization, see also Introduction) and linked to the notion of “Integration.” “Integration” permits bridging the “nation” with the individual, making the individual the target of state-making to be included within or excluded from the “community of value” (Lessenich, 2015). By emphasizing the nation and focusing on the individual, the deportability of a specific segment of the population is upheld. If the red booklet aimed at educating the Swiss population, now, more than 50 years later, it allows me to pinpoint the ruptures and continuities in how politics are imagined, state(ness) constructed, and otherness both defined and detected (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001b: 6; Thelen, 2022).

To explore this contemporaneity further, I situate in the first two sections, how the legal, organizational, and empirical context of coupling welfare benefits and migration control have historically emerged. This allows me to then address the contemporary context of the organizational and ideological entanglements that facilitate the consequent deportability of a segment of the population due to their nationality and reception of social assistance. Finally, in the third section, an examination of scholarly literature also reveals that the observed phenomenon is not reserved to Switzerland but part of global entanglements. In this sense, the red booklet provides insights into one of many developments that allow for the contemporary entanglement of governing poverty and controlling migration under neoliberalism (Adam et al., 2019; Randeria, 2014; Trouillot, 2001).

De-naturalizing “the law”: Historicizing interlinkages of welfare and migration control

The collaboration of CMOs and communes is by no means new or surprising.²⁹ Rather, the legal entanglements of migration control and the governance of poverty has existed for more than a century. Prior to 1917, immigration was regulated through settlement treaties (*Niederlassungsverträge*), and the entry, control, and residence of non-nationals was solely within the cantons’ jurisdiction. This first federal immigration law was established during the First World War under a state of emergency (*Notrecht*) and on the basis of an ordinance (Achermann, 1999). This development was then codified through the inclusion of an article (*Kompetenzartikels*) into the federal Swiss constitution in 1925 that regulated the shift in competence regarding the terms of the entry and residence of non-Swiss nationals from the cantonal to the federal level (Federal Council, 1929).

This resulted in the introduction and implementation of the first federal act, the Residence and Settlement of Foreigners Act (*Bundesgesetz über Aufenthalt und Niederlassung der Ausländer*, ANAG), in 1934. The ANAG, as the first national act concerned solely with non-nationals, marked the first legal segregation in Switzerland and was therefore an outcome of a larger process that culminated with the First World War. The ANAG’s creation is therefore part of broader sociopolitical and legal processes that forced an abrupt end to freedom of movement and residency. Instead, the political and economic rationales related to the global war economy of the First World War, subsequent recessions, rising nationalist discourses, and increasing unemployment involved harshly controlling movement and residency on a national basis (Holenstein et al., 2018).

The Swiss historical lexicon (Vuilleumier, 2015) points out, paradoxically, that the outburst of previously latent discourse on *Überfremdung* and its related political nationalism was reinforced at a time when the actual numbers of non-national was reducing. This must be contextualized, first, by the general strike (*Landesstreik*) of 1918 and the associated class

²⁹ As a federalist State, Switzerland disposes of a system of government in which power is shared between the central state (federal level) and several subnational regions (cantonal level), as well as the local political level (municipalities). Switzerland leaves a lot of decision-making and juridical power to the cantons and the communes. In terms of migration law, the legal basis is national but implemented by the cantonal authorities, i.e., CMOs. Social assistance, however, is not regulated on a federal level but by the cantons and adapted and implemented by the communes. Similarly, Swiss citizenship is regulated on all three levels. Each person is attributed to a commune, a canton, and ultimately to the federal state. This federal structure influences various aspects of migration policies; in particular, the granting of stay permits or Swiss citizenship and integration policy (see Manatschal, 2014; Probst et al., 2019).

struggles that brought social tensions to the fore (Arlettaz and Arlettaz, 1991). Additionally, as Christin Achermann (1999) argued, the First World War was a further important factor. Switzerland was divided between the French and the German-speaking parts, each of which supported opposing parties in the war. Therefore, the distinction from and exclusion of non-Swiss citizens represented a means to create national cohesion and reinforce a national identity. The frame of reference for (legal) belonging shifted consequentially from the cantonal to the federal level (Achermann, 2008).³⁰ In this context, non-national were constructed as a danger infiltrating the “sanctity of home” (Walters, 2004) alongside unionists, anarchists, communists, and particularly “the poor” (Germann, 2015, 2016).

André Holenstein, Patrick Kury, and Kristina Schulz (2018) aptly demonstrated that it is therefore unsurprising that the ANAG was involved in these developments and intimately linked to the discursive politicization of *Überfremdung* that intensified throughout the following decades:

[The ANAG] advanced to become the legal centerpiece of a restrictive admission policy [*Zulassungspolitik*] that would also have a formative influence on refugee policy. It came into force at the very time when the National Socialists seized power in Germany. What was problematic about the attempt at that time to control immigration [...] was in particular that the "selection" [*Auslese*] was based on social Darwinist theorems, which opened the door for discriminatory practices. In this way, the Aliens Police [*Fremdenpolizei*] pursued an anti-Semitic immigration policy as part of its fight against overforeignization since the First World War. (Holenstein et al., 2018: 352, own translation)

This brief, highly simplified historical excursus exemplifies the centrality of economic aspects and questions of deviancy since the emergence of non-nationals' legal categorization and regulation. The red booklet above is illustrative of these continuities and ruptures. It also indicates how migration policy was remuddled through the focus on the community as a community of values that paved the way for what Adrian Favell (2022) analyzed as the historical evolution of “the integration nation.” These specificities of how migration law was (co-)constitutive of nation-state building in Switzerland at this time must be considered in

³⁰ The prohibition of deporting Swiss citizens from one canton to another within Swiss territory was legally implemented only in 1928 through article 44 of the Federal Constitution. Achermann (2008: 58) convincingly linked the consolidation of the Swiss nation-state to law as an instrument of nation-building.

relation to the present legal regulations and the many revisions that have subsequently taken place.

Legal entanglements: Sophistication and complexification

The ANAG has undergone a variety of major changes in the more than 70 years of its existence, such as the separate regulation of asylum through the creation of the asylum act in 1979 (entry into force 1981) and the agreement on the free movement of people in 2002. Another of the more significant changes was the total revision in 2008 that culminated in the FNA (the legal text that became today's FNIA). Various scholars have observed a legal densification. Particularly since 2008, the increased pace of alterations to the legal frame has led to a growing number of rules and paragraphs providing more guidelines for CMOs and limits to their discretion (Amarelle, 2012; Amarelle and Nguyen, 2014; Kurt, 2017b; Uebersax, 2013). This increase in the number and sophistication of such rules is a central aspect of the legal developments in migration law more generally (Miaz, 2017). One person I encountered during fieldwork and who has been working in the same CMO for over 30 years describes this process rather comprehensively:

Previously under the ANAG and especially until the [agreement on the] free movement of people [for EU/EFTA citizens] in 2002, everything was much clearer. So, there had not been a minimum of working hours to get the right to a residence permit. It simply did not work out, and we gave no permissions. Now, there is the employee status [Arbeitnehmereigenschaft] and people with part-time jobs can come under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons [AFMP]. But it is not clear when exactly this is the case; so how many hours are enough, or what amount must be reached with the hours worked? Each canton must now decide how it is. Here, we have now the informal rule [Handhabe] that we ask for the employment contract in case of low employment or the possibility to increase their working hours. For this, we ask the person concerned in each case. Mainly, this is seasonal work, which is why an L permit [short-term permit] is usually issued. For a B permit, a permanent contract or at least a contract for more than one year is required. [...] In addition, more and more information comes in from other institutions. Municipalities have something to say, social services, employers' associations, rental associations, the schools, and even the churches, to some extent. The laws are becoming more and more and contradict each other to some extent. Everything is more clearly regulated; there is less leeway, less discretion. But at the same time, many things are becoming more unclear, mixed up, and confusing. Training is needed in a wide variety of areas and ongoing continuing education. Our office grew considerably. While 20 years ago I did the whole work necessary to treat a person's residency claims or whatever, we became increasingly specialized; with different units and teams, each responsible for different aspects of the procedures. That was different in the past, when we simply decided. (fieldnote, CMO, 2020)

This fieldnote lends insight into the juridification and sophistication of the law regarding the questions under consideration and has important implications for those falling under the jurisdiction of these laws and for the bureaucracies applying them. The narrative of the person above is certainly romanticizing the past, however, when decisions were also complex, work-intensive, and not always clear-cut. In the context of the talk we had, the passage above serves to clarify the current complexity of her job. The passage also expresses some of the dissatisfaction I have been repeatedly confronted with concerning contemporary legal developments and the perception that administrators' daily work is growing increasingly bureaucratized (Hibou, 2015).

This legal sophistication and complexification hold important implications for governing poverty. The entanglement of governing migration and poverty through legal frameworks and policies is not reserved to Switzerland. Rather, such phenomena can be observed in different global contexts (for Qatar see Deshingkar et al., 2019; for UK see Nagy, 2019; for EU see Paul, 2018; for China and Vietnam see Siu and Unger, 2020). Elizabeth Kiely and Katharina Swirak (2022: 4) stated that increases in the juridification of social policies through other (principally migration and criminal) laws contributing to “the confluence of strategies of government that create suspect populations, stigmatize, exclude and penalize” (2022: 4). Hence, the Swiss case is neither exceptional nor singular but part of larger processes. However, the Swiss case provides insight into the repercussions regarding the entanglement of governing poverty and migration. To provide a globally situated analysis of localized encounters, practices, and experiences, there is the impetus to situate them historically and globally in a larger critical analysis of projects of power and their intimate relation with knowledge (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2020; Burawoy, 2000).

In the next section I first outline the particularities of the Swiss case and of how this (neo)liberal form of organizing poverty and controlling migration is organized and has historically developed. This permits me to approach the continuities and ruptures in relation to global developments and offers theoretical and conceptual insights into such entanglements.

Organizing social assistance: Administering individuals, sanitizing society

As in the case of migration law, Switzerland as a federal state, reserves considerable decision-making power to the cantons and communes in relation to organizing poverty. Each canton

disposes of specific institutional settings grounded in historical developments and federal frameworks. However, within the national social security system, social assistance, earlier often called poor relief (*[Armen-]Fürsorge*), is today generally perceived as the final net in the Swiss system of social security. This represents the fundamental aspect of subsidiarity, as defined in the quote below, in envisioning the functioning and functionality of this system. The Swiss Conference for Social Assistance (*Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe*, SKOS³¹) states the following prominently on their website:

Social assistance is part of the multi-level social security system in Switzerland. At the first level, there is individual security through gainful employment and the provision of basic services such as the legal, health, and education systems. This is followed by the national social security insurances. If these are insufficient, the cantonal means-tested benefits [*Bedarfsleistungen*] come into play and, finally, social assistance. (SKOS, 2022c, own translation)

The system of social security is portrayed in the quote as a linear, homogenous, and extensively considered system. Its official goal is to guarantee that no one is left without any form of income in accordance with article 12 of the Swiss Federal Constitution (FC): “Persons in need and unable to provide for themselves have the right to assistance and care, and to the financial means required for a decent standard of living.” This situation in “absolute need,” viz. poverty, is administrated through social assistance and, for illegalized persons, through emergency aid. Although research has revealed that this holistic conception is an illusion and exclusion from basic assistance is recurrent (cf. Häberli, 2016; Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin, Keller, et al., 2008: 69; Wilopo and Häberlein, 2022), this image of a coherent social security system represents a central feature of how social assistance is both imagined and practiced.

Accessing and monitoring social assistance

Accessing social assistance in practice is a rather cumbersome endeavor. This is also the reason why I am somewhat skeptical of the terms “user” (*Nutzer*in*) or “addressee” (*Adressat*in*), which are increasingly proposed to denominate the recipients of social assistance. Such assistance is not merely a service or resource a person can access and use. Instead, these terms depoliticize a core characteristic of social assistance: its conditionality not in terms of a legal

³¹ The organization’s history of self-reference is already insightful concerning how the role of social assistance was envisioned and developed. Its founding name in 1905 was the Swiss Conference on Poor Relief (*Schweizerische Armenpflegerkonferenz*), which subsequently changed to the Swiss Conference for Public Welfare (*Schweizerische Konferenz für öffentliche Fürsorge*) in 1967, only to obtain its current name in 1996 (see also *Geschichte der Sozialen Sicherheit*, 2020).

right but in the sense of proving the presence of indigence and need. Nor am I fond of the word “client,³²” which is patronizing and again conjures the image of a service provided—a notion that was interestingly used repeatedly by CMOs during my research. Therefore, I adhere to the term “recipients” of social assistance. Receiving is linked to duties, expectations, and possible sanctions. It is a social relation that is established with the inequalities, expectations, and hierarchies that accompany it. Getting access to social assistance is by no means straightforward or without constraint—even if one ignores the “shame” that is recurrently associated with “a walk to the social service” (*Gang auf die Sozialhilfe*; an expression repeatedly heard during my fieldwork)³³.

In order to access social services, all subsidiary services need to have been exploited. This means that people’s unemployment benefits, which last for a maximum of two years, have ended, that their savings do not exceed a certain amount,³⁴ and that no family member can support them financially (SKOS, 2022b: D.4.3.). Already here one sees the importance of a support network for circumventing the “necessity” of accessing social assistance. Aiming at circumventing the “walk to the social services” is not at all surprising. The expansive and detailed screening and monitoring of people’s private lives by the organization of social assistance is unprecedented (Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin and Leresche, 2019)—at least for people not familiar with asylum procedures. This is connected to one of the main principles of social assistance: individualization. The principle of individualization implies a case-by-case verification of whether the person is actually in need. In order to access social assistance, one needs to provide evidence concerning a myriad of conceivable aspects and offering access to records of medical treatments, medical certificates, and the attending physician (to control the possibility of the “Disability Insurance” [DI] procedures); all bank accounts and usually all financial details of the last two years (to control possible reserves and incomes); all information regarding children, parents, and partners (in order to control for the possibility of support by relatives); all information regarding former jobs and access to all relevant unemployment office dossiers; all information concerning living arrangements (to control for possible costs and the

³² See Brown (2006) for a critique of this notion in relation to the masculinist power of the state.

³³ See, for a comprehensive analysis, Maeder and Nadai (2004)

³⁴ The amount depends on the cantonal law on social assistance. If the legal frame leaves room for discretion the municipalities can define an exact amount in their guidelines. I mostly encountered amounts between CHF 5,000 and 7,000.

necessity of moving).³⁵ This is then repeated each year, in what is called *revision*, to evaluate whether neediness still prevails and to control for potential changes in recipients' circumstances and/or additional undeclared income. This yearly revision is part of the following encounter in a social service of a large Swiss city. In addition to other aspects, the encounter allows me to situate the empirical and organizational context of my fieldwork in social services and provide insight into the tensions at the heart of social work and the institution of social assistance:

A month into fieldwork and on a snowy afternoon, I meet a social worker from one of the six teams that are in charge of accompanying the social assistance recipients. We meet at her desk, which is allocated in the big, central building of the social service in the center of a large German-speaking city of Switzerland. The working space of the social assistants and workers is located on the floors above the entrance hall, or take-in, of the social service and the main entrance of the whole building, accommodating a large part of the city administration. Each floor of the social service is designed to have a front-office and a back-office area. On each floor, the front office is located toward the entrance of the social service, where the social workers are located. The back office is toward the main entrance of the building, where the administrative sections are located. These units are again divided in their middle by toilets, staircases, plants, and miniature office-berths (small office rooms, illustrative of the "modern" and, hence, "flexible" work structure), accompanied by corridors on either side. Each floor provides room for two teams of around 15 persons, each separated by this aisle. All offices are open-plan and the heads of office and heads of teams have tables in the front-office area, without the privilege of a separate office. The whole structure creates an open and familiar atmosphere in which the control of circulation is invisible, despite the numerous doors that can be opened only with badges and that channel the movement of workers, visitors, recipients, and myself alike. Due to the pandemic and the measures implemented, the desks are only sparsely populated, and most people work from home. Their presence is alternated according to a complex plan that considers the maximal number of people allowed in the offices, the appointments they have scheduled, and the number of working days, since most people work part-time.

The social worker I am supposed to meet and with whom I have already had several exchanges is on the phone when I arrive at her workplace. She, whom I call Brigitte here, lifts her gaze from the computer in the middle of her untidy desk, indicating that she will be ready for me in a moment. I am a bit lost, loiter around, and soon address a social worker who sits at a desk further on and whose glance seems to indicate interest in my presence. I ask her about the bell hanging on the partition wall next to one of the office-berths as I read the letters on it: "Revision bell" She laughs and says, "Revisions are generally very unpopular. So, we thought we'd implement a reward system. When you complete a revision, you put it in the gray box,"

³⁵ To get a snapshot of the absurdity of the possible lists of things one must provide in order to access social assistance, see the yearly control form (destined for the revision procedure) of the city of Zürich: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/sd/de/index/unterstuetzung/finanz/wirtschaftliche_hilfe.html

she points to the box next to the bell, “and then ring the bell and there’s a round of applause.” She laughs and adds “Of course, this is not as fun now with only few people being here.” In another team, an ice-cream-money box appears to represent team cohesion. In a third team, a radio is always on and entertains everyone.

By now, Brigitte has finished talking and seems a bit stressed, though very friendly. She apologizes after hearing me remark that she forgot to send the “client-numbers” that would have allowed me to have a look at the cases we wanted to discuss today and the “client-interview” I am able to attend later, saying: “There are too many client-numbers and numbers generally in my life.” I wave off her apology to indicate that this is very comprehensible and no problem at all. I also think to myself that I would probably not have had the energy to go through the cases anyway.

She briefly tells me, while copying some documents from a stack of papers, that the couple we are going to meet later was already on social assistance before. She sees my look at the quantity of paper: “I don’t want to scare them with too much paperwork either.” With practiced hand movements that at the same time look very chaotic to me, she pulls some papers out of a clear folder, copies them, stows them away again, and puts the copies in another folder. She packs everything into her bag and gestures to me that I can sit beside her and that we have some time to talk before the meeting.

Her screen’s background is bright violet, in its middle the women’s strike symbol. She is a brash and very sympathetic person. Her desk is still messy despite the folders being put away; there are photos of her children, or so I guess, at the end of the desk toward the window. It seems to me more and more that this team represents the rebellious part of the social service and not one of the “conformist” ones in which I was a guest in the morning. I realize how, after a few weeks, I started to categorize the people according to their working place and adherence to a specific team. I wonder how I align this with my observations of different working attitudes and convictions about the role of social work and social assistance in society. I wonder how this comes about; wonder about both the human and my own need for categorization.

She immediately tells me that in her formation as a social worker she was often investigating and writing assignments concerning the data-sharing in social services. She gears the discussion toward one specific piece of paperwork: the power of attorney [Vollmacht]. All social assistance recipients need to sign this paperwork in order to access social assistance. She emphasizes that there are huge issues regarding data protection and human rights. For her, it is crystal clear “that I would never sign something like that”. [...] She looked at the power of attorney in the context of fundamental rights, the Federal Constitution, and the Data Protection Act. Although she found in her research that the public interest may be invoked to intrude into the private life of persons in social assistance, “this is very quickly the case when money is at stake.” Proportionality, however, was not present, she explained, because “at the time we ask for the power of attorney, we don’t even need it yet. And also, the voluntariness according to data protection law is not given at all. They have to sign the power of attorney if

they want to access social assistance. So, it is all very preventive and a big constraint for the clients.”

However, she underlines that she and other social workers have been criticizing this power of attorney for a long time, but this has not been met with a great response from their superiors, “I also don’t believe that my work [her final assignment] will have any consequences.” She seems a bit annoyed says that, during training, social workers learn that they are obliged to follow three different mandates. This is an aspect I have repeatedly encountered. The social workers, who are at the front-line of counseling and who must (increasingly) fill out reports to justify expenditures, often frame these tensions as the outcome of this “triple mandate.” Most often, a double mandate is envisioned as consisting of accountability toward the public finances and “their clients.” But there is also a third mandate, which one social worker described as “the mandate of the professional ethics [Professionsethik]” and Brigitte calls “social work ethics.” She explains that it consists of “specialist knowledge about what to do in cases of psychological illness and so on. But also, about what it is to be a social worker. Social work has to be understood as a human rights profession. It is at its core a human rights profession.” In the middle of this conversation and while it is still snowy outside, she criticizes the exclusive orientation on finances and reminds me of the existential issues at stake in social assistance. Referring energetically toward our surrounding, which is lit up by countless LED lights since the snow prevents sunlight coming through the glass front, she points at the neat open-office space divided by plants, glass walls, the various office-berths, and slightly bigger meeting rooms: “This building is telling, isn’t it? It has so little space for social workers. The structural conditions are obstructive... Existences, life and death are at stake here. I think it is very problematic if we limit ourselves to purely financial considerations.” I look at the space again, imagining it through the eyes of social workers and realize how the space also loses for me some of its welcoming atmosphere. (edited fieldnote, social service, 2021)

The content of this fieldnote should, on the one hand, provide an initial impression of the second main site of fieldwork: the social services. These are not the social services of small communes but the professionalized services of large cities in which trained social workers are employed and complex structures and interactions are put into place. On the other hand, the fieldnote displays several important facets of a recursive anthropology (see Part Four). My notions of social work, social assistance, and the interaction with migration control were notably co-shaped by the people I encountered—people such as Brigitte.

The fieldnote also importantly displays the contested nature of social assistance’s delivery and the conditionalities of accessing it. Obtaining access to social assistance is no relaxed procedure resembling its popular depiction as akin to entering a hammock. Instead, accessing social assistance is a hurdle in the lives of the persons concerned (Maeder and Nadai, 2004), and comprehensive monitoring and suspicion is a focal aspect confronting people who receive such assistance.

Organizing poverty, promoting individual responsibility

Key to addressing the organizational aspects of social assistance within which the scene above manifested, is how social assistance is considered and constructed within the larger system of welfare and social security. Inconsistency is a core characteristic of the current system of social security and also social assistance. On the federal level, apart from the constitutional guarantee of a life in dignity, there exists only the federal act on the responsibility for the support of the needy (*Bundesgesetz über die Zuständigkeit für die Unterstützung Bedürftiger*, short: *Zuständigkeitsgesetz*, ZUG). The ZUG, implemented in 1977, only addresses the responsibility of providing support according to the canton of residence rather than, as previously, the “home canton.” The cantons and communes being responsible for the implementation of social assistance (Maeder and Nadai, 2004: 32; Sassnick Spohn, 2005) leads to pronounced inconsistencies, as execution is based on cantonal laws but is altered and applied by municipalities.³⁶

In order to counteract these inconsistencies, the SKOS plays a major role. The SKOS aims at a harmonization and professionalization of social assistance by providing guidelines that are a rich source of soft law and are inscribed in the majority of cantonal laws and communal regulations. As a highly professionalized and politically influential actor, the SKOS proposes three principles of social assistance that should guide the organization of poverty and its daily application in social services. The first principle is that of finality (SKOS, 2022b, chp. A.3.). This principle implies that the access to social assistance does not depend on the reasons for being “indigent.” Rather, access should be unconditional and only based on the evaluation of whether a person is “poor enough.” This is important because, for social services and the social workers employed, the question of “responsibility for falling into a position of indigence” (*viz.* self-infliction) does not matter—contrary to the CMOs who investigate this exact question. Second, social assistance is, as stated above, needs-based and related to an examination of the “situated indigence.”

Practically, these two principles imply that there is a twofold support by social services: the “basic need for subsistence” (*Grundbedarf für den Lebensunterhalt*) and “situational benefits”

³⁶ In line with this, another main feature consists of the dualist structure of social assistance authorities (Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin, Keller, et al., 2008). There is (generally at the communal level) an executive administrative body, the social services; and a decision-making committee, the communal welfare authorities (*Sozialbehörde*). In small communes, the local council can decide and execute social assistance, and hence is welfare authority and administrative body in one (Tabin, Frauenfelder, Togni and Keller, 2008).

(*situationsbedingte Leistungen*). The former is the same for all and calculated according to a “market basket” (*Warenkorb*) that takes into account all expenses minus health insurance and rent (see SKOS, 2019).³⁷ The latter are additional payments geared at the individual, such as glasses, child care, integration allowances (SKOS, 2022b: 69),³⁸ or income deduction (SKOS, 2022b: 81).³⁹ This is related to, third, the principle of individualization. This principle implies a case-by-case verification of whether the person is actually in need and what means are required to overcome this situation of need. Although, self-infliction is “not an issue for the social services,” as repeatedly heard during fieldwork, it is here that social workers nonetheless make judgments regarding the behavior of individuals. Recipients of social assistance might be deemed lazy, tardy, or insufficiently motivated.

These situated judgments by social workers need additional contextualization. The principle of individualization in relation to the former two raises important aspects for grasping the particularity of the organization of social assistance in this regard. First, the reception of social assistance is a situation limited in time. The core goal of social services, according to the SKOS, is to get recipients “back to normality,” *viz.* working life and economic independency, as soon as possible. Second, it is the individual who is responsible for becoming employable again. This is a classic element of activation policy and is connected to possible financial sanctions if the person does not do “enough” (see Kiely and Swirak, 2022). Third, the recipient together with the responsible social worker should (ideally) find specific and appropriate measures that need to be taken in order to become employable again. Again, if the person does not follow these measures, sanctions are possible. In their comparative study on the material culture in

³⁷ At the moment of writing, the amount for a single-household is advised at CHF 1,006 per month and, for a two-person household, 770 per person (SKOS, 2022a; SODK, 2020). Additionally, social assistance pays the rent (each commune fixes a maximum amount for rents and can force people to move) and health insurance (absolute minimum). Compared to the median net-income in 2020 of CHF 6,665, this amount seems rather low. This is also because it is stated that the basic needs should be aligned to the last decile of income. These estimations are based on the Household Budget Survey of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. However, Maeder and Nadai (2004: 37) demonstrated in their study that even the amount provided for basic needs varies greatly between communes and how they interpret and implement the SKOS guidelines.

³⁸ Integration allowances (*integrationszulage*) are additional payments (CHF 100-300 per month) that are geared at social assistance recipients who participate in integration programs. This should incentivize and reward “integration efforts.” As the SKOS (2022b: C.6.7) writes, integration allowances “increase the chances of integration, [...] are verifiable and require individual effort.”

³⁹ Income deductions (*Einkommensfreibeträge*) are additional payments (CHF 400-700 per month for fulltime employment) that are geared at social assistance recipients who have employment. Hence, in contrast to integration allowances, income deductions presuppose a salary of the concerned person. However, this salary is mostly part of a workplace in the “secondary” labor market, meaning subsidized work. The SKOS (2022b: D.2) writes in this context: “In this way, an incentive is to be created for the most comprehensive and profitable gainful employment possible for persons receiving support, in order to be able to save on social welfare financial benefits in the long term.”

social services, Maeder and Nadai (2004: 34, own translation) illustrated that, in the cantonal laws, this individualization is exemplified by the “promotion of individual responsibility” or “autonomy.” Finally, the previously mentioned logic of subsidiarity, according to which social assistance is the “last net of social security,” also implies that an individual must therefore “do everything reasonable to remedy the situation of need by using his or her own resources.”

However, Jean-Pierre Tabin, Véréna Keller and Arnaud Frauenfelder (2008) demonstrated that considering social assistance historically allows one to perceive how social assistance has preceded the system of social security and was originally not thought of as part of a holistic approach to the “dangers” of poverty. However, these aspects remain visible today, and there are important continuities and ruptures within the historical development of governing poverty.

Governing poverty, sanitizing “the nation”

Tabin (cf. 1999, 2002, 2017) has illustrated in various instances that the history of social assistance in Switzerland is imbricated with global transformations and processes as well as with internal struggles and particularities. In analyzing the case of the canton of Neuchâtel, Tabin Keller and Frauenfelder (2008) demonstrated how policies to banish begging slowly changed in the 19th century. Public and social policy became articulated more in line with understanding government as the conduct of conduct of society as a whole.⁴⁰ An important part in grasping the population as a field of intervention was the regulation of poverty. The changes in the 19th century were therefore characterized by what we could term, in Foucault’s (2006) words, a governmental approach or, in Simmel’s (1908), a regulation with the objective of society as a whole. Giovanna Procacci (1993) observed this trend on a more global level and wrote that a “government of misery” is becoming tangible.

Hence, it is not unsurprising that one finds in Switzerland at the beginning of the 20th century a concomitant formation of public organs charged with providing assistance to “the poor,” guiding their conduct, and conditioning “help” and “charity” (Tabin, Keller, et al., 2008). While these organs were diverse, the possibility of receiving assistance was based on community membership—non-nationals were by definition excluded. While communes were responsible

⁴⁰ This is often also described as “governing the social”. Rose (2006) refers with “governing the social,” to the ways in which governments and other institutions use various techniques and technologies to shape and regulate social behavior, attitudes, and practices. In this sense, governing the social is not simply about the direct exercise of power by state institutions, but also involves the production and management of subjectivities and identities. Walters (2000) argues that these processes are central to the formation of modern societies and are intimately tied to the emergence of the modern state and its role in shaping social life. For more intimate links to state power, see also footnote 53.

for providing financial assistance, cantonal authorities were charged with evaluating and expelling individuals who were no longer entitled to receive assistance. This entitlement was defined by cantonal membership and the most frequent cases were expelled to other cantons and not to other nation-states (see also Procacci, 2007; Tabin, Frauenfelder, Togni and V Keller, 2008; Wacquant, 2009). The financial and counseling responsibilities of the communes remain intact today in the vast majority of cantons, though political membership and not “bourgeoisie” (*Bürgertum*) status currently defines their responsibilities and the entitlements of those seeking assistance. This historical development of the Swiss welfare state remains visible in the current three-level construction of national citizenship. Each person is affiliated to a commune, the canton of which this commune constitutes a part, and finally to the Swiss nation-state. The change of canton of “bourgeoisie” (*Heimatkanton*) to canton of residence (*Wohnkanton*) was enacted on a federal level only in 1975 through a federal vote that terminated the cantons’ ability to refuse residence to citizens of other cantons. However, the possibility to refuse the change of canton of residence still exists for non-nationals who receive social assistance (based on art. 62 para 2 FNIA). As Tabin, Keller and Frauenfelder (2008: 70) argued, this might indicate who is perceived as a legitimate inhabitant of a territory—the Swiss nation-state, in this case.

This construction of “the nation” is enmeshed with global configurations of power, permanencies, and divisions regarding how inequality has been imagined, regulated and (re)produced. This perspective is important in order to situate the thesis and acknowledge the colonial continuities present in addressing poverty in Switzerland. Pascal Germann (2015, 2016), for example, has investigated how forensic research by the anthropological department of the University of Zürich contributed to a coloniality of knowledge by measuring, categorizing, and disseminating bodily, and particularly cerebral, measurements of South-East Asian populations in the first half of the 20th century. These eugenic and racializing procedures were then adapted to measure the Swiss poor in order to investigate “bodily” and “eugenic” deficiencies that “made” people poor. Germann states,

Colonial experiences and perceptions continued to guide the findings of Swiss racial research even as this research increasingly turned its attention towards Switzerland’s own population and aligned itself with eugenic fields of knowledge and application. (2015: 66)

This postcolonial perspective on how colonial bodies of knowledge and practices have been diffused “within the scientific communities, everyday cultures and political arenas” (Purtschert

and Fischer-Tiné, 2015: 7) is a rather recent appearance in Switzerland that has intensified over the previous 10 years. Social assistance is a specifically interesting lens through which to view whiteness' centrality to the "construction of this racialized unequal world that we all inhabit" (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2020: 3). Hence, the Swiss case of entangling migration control and poverty speaks to the scholarly endeavor of situating the importance and construction of race and class in contemporary political programs and operations.

As I argue, this amalgam of race and class allows me to place my research in larger struggles to unveil the coloniality of state power and knowledge (Mbembe, 2017; Wacquant, 2009) and illustrate why non-nationals are not simply naturalized but instead subjected to a resource-intensive manhunt through deportability (see Chamayou, 2012). While I do not pretend to undertake a postcolonial analysis, the postcolonial perspective is fundamental to contextualizing contemporary forms of government and the later theoretical discussion of internal b/ordering (cf. Purtschert, 2019: 59; Stoler, 2018; Turner, 2018; Vuorela, 2020: 21). The next section addresses how these entanglements are expressed ideologically and organizationally and why the maintenance or even spread of deportability is observable.

Deportability in the national order of poverty: Preying on poverty, hunting migration

Ironically, a May 1st demonstration allows me to illustrate the increases in deportability at the intersection of migration control and governing poverty and contextualize the continuous organizational changes in governing the national order of poverty in Switzerland. It happened in 2007. The habitual revolutionary demonstration that follows the official May 1st Labor Day manifestation arrived on the streets of Zürich. The morning after, the newspapers lamented, just as every year, the "violence" of the radical left, their lack of respect for property, and the millions of francs of damage they produced in only a few hours. While the head of the police department, Esther Maurer, a social democrat, denounced the demonstration and those involved as a "social ulcer [*gesellschaftliches Geschwür*]" (Maurer, 2007). The newspapers teemed with images of the "devastation," a burning BMW prominent among them (Büttner and Marti, 2007). While the images slowly disappeared from daily coverage, the BMW remained in the media and in political discussions. It might be wondered, however, how a burning BMW

in the aftermath of a May 1st demonstration in Zürich connects to how social assistance is entangled with migration control.

What was first depicted as a sign of radical left “violence” (or, rather, damage of private property) turned toward the owner of the car, usually assumed to be a hardworking, middle-class Swiss man suffering from such “violence.” This shift of public attention happened due to the leak of data from the social services to the rightwing newspaper “Die Weltwoche” (see Baur, 2007). The leak of data disclosed, however, that the owner of the BMW was not a Swiss middle-class property owner but a recipient of social assistance without Swiss nationality. This ironic coincidence had lasting consequences. In retrospect, it figured as a catalyst for criticizing the legitimacy and function of social assistance, intensifying the discourse of abuse. It also served to connect racist and neo-colonial narratives and debates with an increased demand to scrutinize the eligibility and deservingness of individuals and to control their “integration.”

This incident catalyzed developments that were already visible (Bolzman et al., 2002; Maeder and Nadai, 2004) but which intensified in the following period. One can observe a problematization of the recipients of social assistance, whose entitlement to receive social assistance became increasingly questioned. Such recipients often had their non-belonging underlined—particularly if they did not have a Swiss passport (as in the case of the owner of the BMW). The period was also marked by another rhetorical figure that evolved in this time: social assistance as a social hammock. This rhetorical figure persists, as I repeatedly realized during my research, and illustrates the idea that people are, and remain, in social assistance because they are lazy, because they themselves are responsible for being in this situation. The hammock metaphor implies that the organization of social assistance is as comfortable as a hammock rather than harsh and incentivizing enough to force recipients out of it.

Following the BMW case, other actual or assumed “abuses” followed and were mediatized, such cases eventually finding their way into the cantonal and national parliaments (Germann and Sulymenki, 2018). While the reasons for receiving social assistance were being depoliticized through the focus on the individual and their eligibility and deservingness, the politicization of the organization of poverty proceeded apace. The debates that intensified over the BMW case illustrate how the social services themselves became subject to suspicion regarding how they monitor and control recipients. The stigmatization and racialization of the people who receive social assistance is not the central focus here. Instead, I aim to outline how connecting the abuse of social assistance and nationality is translated into bureaucratic

structures and approaches. A person I encountered during my fieldwork who had worked half her life in the spheres of social assistance and social security summarized the BMW incident as follows:

With the BMW case, however, the pressure had now become too big, and cantons had to gradually agree to pilot tests for stricter monitoring of social assistance recipients. The cantonal social conferences [often linked to the political sphere of the communes and cantons] are big players, you know. [...] They exerted pressure. The question that arises is how it is that social assistance was of no interest to anyone and then suddenly became the focus of public attention. The BMW scandal is an important starting point. That's my theory... It's also at the time when the exchange of information with migration offices was entering the law in numerous cantons. It all stems from the abuse debate. All of a sudden, social assistance was present in people's minds. But that also had a lot to do with cross-subsidies [Lastenausgleich]. It was also around this time that social welfare costs increased extremely. That was because of the revision of the DI and of the unemployment insurance. The federal government denied this for a very long time, but now they even admit that there was a shift of the burden from the federal government to the cantons and the municipalities. It is also because of the increasing numbers of clients and the higher costs of social assistance that more people are suddenly interested and attacking social assistance in general. (fieldnote, social service, 2021)

Hence, the political reactions to the BMW incident were to tighten control, establish suspicion as an institutional characteristic, and provide accountability to the public. Moreover, as is evident in the citation above, pressure was simultaneously increased on social assistance because of revisions to disability and unemployment insurance programs. Therefore, several concomitant and partially coincidental processes culminated and became expressed through the BMW case and the consequent reshuffling of social assistance and its ideological and organizational entanglement with migration control. In Switzerland, as in many other parts of the world, it is “integration” that facilitates this coupling of migration control and welfare benefits and that is characteristic for how the governmental focus (partly) shifts from society to the individual—the “good citizen” (Cooper, 2017; Lessenich, 2015; Muehlebach 2012).

More integration, more deportation

The notion of “integration” is central to the locate the coupling of migration control and governing poverty in the preceding pages. In the context of migration control, the notion of “integration” is often used to refer to the process by which migrants are expected to adapt to the norms, values, and practices of the host society. In the context of governing welfare, “integration” is often seen as a key component of activation policies designed to move individuals from welfare dependence to paid employment (Lessenich, 2015). The assumption

is that “integration” into the labor market and society at large will provide individuals with a means of economic self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

In Switzerland, this linkage of different organizational and legal spheres through the notion of integration becomes visible in the revision of the SKOS guidelines in 1998. This revision has concretized the “mandate of integration” (*Integrationsauftrag*) for social services, which was already present in the cantonal laws and derived from the three principles (*viz.* finality, needs-based, and individualization) mentioned above (Maeder and Nadai, 2004). This mandate is further based on the logic of reciprocity. Social assistance is interpreted as a societal advance that implies compensatory measures by the persons who receive this advance or aid. This compensation must be provided in the interests of society and of the person themselves, a concept indicated by the notion of “activation.” In this sense, social assistance is perceived as a debt that implies compensation and the effective integration of a recipient. In migration law and discourse, this debt to integrate is linked to the dogma of “requiring and promoting” (*fördern und fordern*). In social assistance, as inscribed in the SKOS guidelines, this “requiring and promoting” is usually circumscribed, as in social policies more generally, by “rights and duties.” In accordance with this dogma, integration “benefits” are coupled with behavioral expectations and a tradeoff in the form of services and results expected from the recipients (Leimgruber, 2008; Piñeiro, 2015).

It is in this context that Stefan Kutzner asks

whether the distinction between legitimate and non-legitimate poverty, practiced during the period of poor relief that preceded social assistance, does not reappear in a modified shape in the current arrangement of social assistance in the form of client stratification. (2009: 15, own translation)

Hence, Kutzner underlines that social assistance’s focus on integration allows for a differentiation between legitimate and non-legitimate receivers. This is a way of “requiring and promoting” “integration” but within social policies rather than those related to migration. This is also a tendency observed by Esteban Piñeiro (2015) in his book on the importance of integration in governing migration in Switzerland. In the principle of requiring and promoting, he identified a form of government that historically encompassed all spheres of society. He noted this in the increasing mobilization of “integration” to justify exclusion, oversee the behavior of individuals, and adjust institutional settings accordingly. This leads to the conclusion that the “integration of foreign nationals” cannot be viewed as a distinct sphere of

politics concerned with only non-national. Instead, he postulates “integration policy means social policy” (Piñeiro, 2015: 322, own translation).

The evolution and mobilization of integration therefore represents a diffusion of means of controlling and organizing society and social relations. Hence, migration law influences (intentionally or otherwise) social assistance’s organization, procedures, and practices and has important consequences for the daily work of social services. This diffusion is not unquestioned as expressed by one interlocutor working for the SKOS:

You can see at the moment very strongly; at the federal level more and more laws are being enacted, especially in the migration area, which directly affect social assistance. This has mainly to do with the fact that the federal government has no competence to directly regulate social assistance, but the federal government has the competence to regulate migration law and at the moment there is a bit of a legal dispute, or different opinions, on whether the federal government is exceeding its competences; yes or no. Because it is issuing more and more provisions that [prescribe] how the cantons have to arrange social assistance for foreigners. But this is actually a competence of the cantons. (Interview note, SKOS, 2019)

“The state,” often imagined as a homogenous and well-functioning entity, reveals here its heterogeneity as an assemblage of power relations and entities that work occasionally in tandem, occasionally in opposite directions, and occasionally without noticing other efforts at all (Kalir et al., 2019; Sharma and Gupta, 2006a). However, the legal and ideological influence is not unidirectional but relational as is visible by more closely examining the notion of integration.

The dream of manufacturing “good citizens”

In studying the complex human experiences and actions concerning the history and presence of “integration,” Flora Di Donato et al. (2020) contributed substantially to investigating the work “integration” does in Switzerland. By using the term "manufacture," they highlighted how “integration” is the result of a long, distributed, and mediated process. They used the imagery of a "factory" to describe a solid institutional framework, a container polished by history and tradition, its practices entailing many hands on an assembly line following rules while relying on experience and resourcefulness. This “factory” affects all those concerned regardless of whether they oversee the files or merely file them. In other words, “integration” is co-constructed by the “factory,” the administration, and by how different lines of manufacturing are interconnected and interdependent.

Relying on this image, the notion of “integration” allows the bridging of different “realms” of state administration and discourse. This is not isolated to Switzerland. Authors such as Aas and Bosworth (2013) argued that the emphasis on integration in European migration policies serves to reinforce exclusionary practices rather than promote social inclusion. They suggested that the focus on integration in social policies places the burden of adaptation on the individual migrant while failing to address the systemic facets of inequality and exclusion (see also Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018 for the case of Austria; Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018 for the Netherlands). More globally, Korteweg (2017) illustrated that “integration” has to be understood as a discursive construction obscuring the fact that “immigrants” have long been part of society. Therefore, requiring “integration” from a specific part of society is necessarily a racialized and gendered project (see also Pfirter et al., 2021). Similar to the governance of poverty, the starting point of any investigation concerning the “immigrant” population should always consider this population as already fully a part of the society it lives in. Hence, attention should be focused on processes of differentiation and othering (Espahangizi, 2018, 2019). It is the labeling and categorization of non-national that (re)produces understandings of belonging and membership as well as the particular meanings of rights (Korteweg, 2017: 440). The language of “integration” obscures these issues that are at stake:

In immigrant integration research, then, “society” has been cast as a whole consisting of parts. And in such a latently organicist conception, historically the concept that has been deployed to mediate between parts and whole is, indeed, “integration”. (Schinkel, 2018: 7)

This intimate relation between “integration” in migration control and the organization of social assistance implies important consequences. When people are differentiated not only between the “well integrated” and the “less integrated” but “between those to whom integration is not an issue at all, and those for whom it is” (Schinkel, 2018: 4), practices of interior b/ordering emerge. Borders are—as the migration official in the introduction so eloquently enunciated—increasingly shifting to the interior of the nation-state’s territory (De Genova, 2017). Borders as such become attached to and embodied by the persons concerned (Andersson, 2014; Green, 2012). More integration, in this context, implies more deportation. It is the codification, mobilization, and inscription of integration onto individuals that legitimizes deportations and the unequal treatment of persons without Swiss nationality. This generalized deportability is grounded in the entanglement of migration control and the governance of poverty.

Chamayou's (2012) critical examination of the history and ethics of manhunting, the practice of pursuing and capturing individuals deemed threats to society or to those in power, is particularly insightful in this regard. The manifestations of this expansion in deportability and the threats associated with it (see also Le Courant, 2022) constitute the focus of the subsequent chapter. It is not people who are integrated but administrative procedures aimed at identifying and impoverishing migrants. Social assistance works increasingly in the service of migration control and vice versa. The effects thereof are hostile environments and endorsing the deportability of a wide segment of the population (for UK see Aliverti, 2021; for the Norwegian case Gubrium and Guilherme, 2014; and for context of COVID-19 Shachar and Mahmood, 2021). People are made poor and deportable (Andersson, 2014). While much research focuses on the deportability of illegalized migration (De Genova, 2013; Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; Nagy, 2019) the context above exemplifies how the notion of integration allows for the manhunting and deportability of people with "secure" stay permits. The role integration plays (Hadj Abdou, 2019) in this context is to racialize poverty and to uphold and legitimize the national order of poverty and the deportability of those who do not possess a nationality considered correct. "Integration" ultimately serves to legitimize hunting migrants and preying on poverty. "Integration" serves to uphold the illusion that "good citizens" exist and can be manufactured.

The preceding sections detail the intertwining of migration control and the regulation of poverty and aim at disentangling these concepts in order to grasp their complexity while rendering them analyzable in the forthcoming chapters. The bureaucratic procedures do not leave broader developments untouched and cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, the procedures speak to how reality is framed and how society is considered by some to be in need of securitizing and sanitizing. Poverty becomes increasingly dangerous just as migration has been bureaucratically, materially, and discursively linked to discourses on the abuses and dangers of non-nationals (Aliverti, 2021; Procacci, 2001; Schweyher and Burrell, 2019). Nevertheless, questions persist regarding how this legal, organizational, and ideological context became reality and exerts itself on the world. How does this manhunt play out in practice and how do the hunters deal with their prey? How is this hounding of poverty and migration legitimized? The manner in which these entanglements manifest in the Swiss context is the focus of Part Three.

PART THREE

The “righteous state” and the “unteachable other”

State idea means quite more than the idea of government. It not only includes the existence of a power situated above society, but it implies also a territorial concentration. The concept of the state implies the concentration of the many functions of life in society in the hands of a few. It implies new relationships between members of society which did not exist before the formation of the State. A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing has to be developed in order to subject some classes to the domination of others.
(Kropotkin, 1898: 8, own translation)

The State, ecclesiastical and secular, served to give an appearance of legality and right to the wrong done by the few to the many. That appearance of right was necessary the easier to rule the people, because no government can exist without the consent of the people, consent open, tacit or assumed. Constitutionalism and democracy are the modern forms of that alleged consent; the consent being inoculated and indoctrinated by what is called “education,” at home, in the church, and in every other phase of life.
(Goldman, 1940: 7–8)

The difficulty of studying the state resides in the fact that the state—as a unified political subject or structure—does not exist; it is a collective illusion, the reification of an idea that masks real power relations under the guise of public interest.
(Aretxaga, 2003: 400)

An anthropological perspective allows us to pay careful attention to the cultural constitution of the state—that is, how people perceive the state, how their understandings are shaped by their particular locations and intimate and embodied encounters with state processes and officials, and how the state manifests itself in their lives. Analyzing these cultural processes through which “the state” is instantiated and experienced also enables us to see that the illusion of cohesion and unitariness created by states is always contested and fragile, and is the result of hegemonic processes that should not be taken for granted.
(Sharma and Gupta, 2006a: 11)

Chapter 6

The materiality of producing difference: Individualizing and depoliticizing the administration of “poor others”

This Part Three addresses how the continuous construction of the nation-state and its imbrication with governing poverty and controlling migration manifest in my research. Therefore, this part examines the manifestation of these entanglements in both paperwork and bureaucratic decision-making.

The first article introduces the material perspective on state power and explores the consequences of what I introduced as the national order of poverty. By analyzing the paperwork produced and stored in the casefiles of those under generalized suspicion, this article provides an encounter with the specific procedures of what I have associated with a manhunt. Such manhunts menace a whole segment of the population that is deportable despite attaining (secure) residence rights. In short, this article provides insights into the materialization of state power and its violence in upholding deportability and creating a hostile environment. Before displaying the paperwork article, I introduce a theoretical perspective on state power necessary to positioning the article epistemologically and delineating the third article in the subsequent chapter.

The *paperwork article*: Exploring and theorizing the manifestation of state power

The *paperwork article* is the first article I wrote in the context of my PhD. This article represents the “materialization” of the transition between my master’s dissertation and my PhD. I decided to write an article on material I had gathered working on the “Swiss Observatory for Asylum and Foreigners” law, which was based on the theoretical work I was doing in my PhD. This was without considering that I would ultimately use this article for my thesis. Only later, when the COVID-19 pandemic set in and delayed my entry into the field, did I decide to do so. The material used for the article consisted of casefiles from the archives of the Swiss Observatory, and my gaze on them was guided by, among other radical critics of the state, Begoña Aretxaga’s (2003) endeavor of maddening the state. “Maddening” in this context refers the ways in which individuals and groups can challenge and subvert state power through acts of resistance or contestation that defy the logic of the state and its bureaucracies. By building

on Aretxaga's (2005) work, I highlight the agency of all individuals, including administrators, in resisting and challenging state power, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

In line with Aretxaga, I have repeatedly referred to my astonishment at how it is possible that deporting people due to their poverty is not only viewed as legitimate but even just, how the nation-state as the legitimate container of policies and politics can justify the entanglement of the two, and how this has contemporary implications. Ingrida Gečienė poses this puzzle in her elaboration on the notion of power:

How does a social system in which a substantial section of the population is obviously disadvantaged and exploited survive without its rulers having to depend on physical coercion for the maintenance of order? (2002: 117)

This question must be situated within what Bourdieu (1993) has termed *la pensée or l'esprit d'État*: “one of the major powers of the state is to produce and impose [...] categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world—including the state itself” (Bourdieu, 1994: 1). Pierre Bourdieu's “thought of the state” has been refined by a variety of authors. Hansen and Stepputat (2001a: 6) revealed that Bourdieu's elaboration is not primarily concerned with whether or how the state governs but rather “how the specific authority of the state, its stateness and its hegemonic location at the center of society, is (re)produced through symbols and rituals.” Further, Sharma and Gupta (2006a) provided a disaggregated view of the state by focusing on particular branches and levels of state institutions and practices to situate what Stuart Hall (2006) has called the conditions under which the state successfully represents itself as coherent and singular. In the sense of Fassin et al. (2015), and reflecting my methodological elaborations, the state is a concrete and situated reality embodied by individuals and inscribed within a specific temporality and territoriality.

In terms of the materialization of state power, Das and Poole (2004) proposed breaking with the metaphysics often associated with the study of the state in order to situate it and make it tangible. To do so, they propose returning to the ordinary, to the everyday encounters with the state. What these authors unite, and what I grasp as the anthropology of the state, is the question of how to analytically comprehend an entity that, at first glance, appears everywhere and nowhere. The “descent into the ordinary” (Das, 2007) allows elaborating on how images, representations, cultural artefacts, stories, and encounters emerge and are manifested while explaining how violence is experienced and agency displayed.

In the article, I therefore argue that paperwork surfaces as material expressions of bureaucracy and performs different functions, such as disciplining and ordering the welfare-receiving non-citizen population (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Navaro-Yashin, 2007). Moreover, this paperwork simultaneously legitimizes CMOs’ measures to other state entities (Gupta 2012). In investigating the materialization of state power, I am interested in what Brown (2006: 197) referred to as the prerogative dimension of state power. In this dimension, the question is: what makes “the state a state?” It might be further asked: What is the stateness that is exhibited? What language and techniques are used to legitimize the state to “put itself [...] at the highest peak of society” (Weber, 1956a: 825, own translation)? We are therefore confronted with the classical question regarding the internally legitimizing and dominating power of the state (Brown, 2006). In this sense, Aretxaga’s work highlights how the nation-state is not just a fixed entity but is constantly being constructed through practices of b/ordering, including the drawing of borders and the creation of national identities. The concept of b/ordering helps to illuminate how the nation-state is a dynamic and ongoing process of boundary-making that shapes social relations and hierarchies within and between societies (Fassin, 2011b; Fischer et al., 2020).

Constructing “unteachability” through menacing warnings: The coupling of welfare benefits and migration control in Switzerland⁴¹

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Introduction

I am sitting in the office of the Swiss Observatory for Asylum and Foreign Nationals Law (SOAFL) and am studying a case file on my desk.

The phone rings.

I hear a voice coming through. The person asks straight away if we have knowledge about the “menace of a warning of the revocation of the residency permit”. I perceive stress in the voice and a need to resolve whatever is bothering. I am unable to ask a question, so fast and energetic is the torrent of words coming through and so far away is the personal meaning of such an official administrative letter for me. The person narrates that the “menace of a warning” seems

⁴¹ This article is written in British English. As the article is already published and to keep the content as it is, I did not adapt it to American English.

to have been issued due to receiving a premium reduction.⁴² The person asks how it is possible to receive such a menace despite the fact that they work, speak the language, have never broken the law, etc. The person considers themselves “integrated” and just because of receiving a premium reduction, they are now menaced with losing the legitimation for staying in Switzerland.

In the context of my everyday work at the SOAFL, I came across a peculiar piece of paperwork: the menace of a warning (*Androhung der Verwarnung*), which represents a bureaucratic artefact (Hull, 2012) revealing the translation, application and materialisation of statecraft (Hull, 2012: 255, 260). The Swiss law on foreign nationals enables cantonal authorities to revoke stay permits of foreign nationals in case they receive social assistance. More specifically, “menaces of warnings” materialise a bureaucratic practice of cantonal migration offices that “inform” people about the possible consequences of receiving social assistance, namely exclusion and deportation. The opening example shows the anxiety and unease produced by the bureaucratic case-making behind these revocation orders. This case-making is carried out entirely through documents sent and received in the form of letters, making paperwork a key aspect of the bureaucratic work involved in crafting such orders (cf. Pigg et al., 2018). This extensive documentation accumulated during the case-making is collected and forms “the case file” and therefore has decisive influence on law’s enactment (Pörtner, 2018: 30–32).

In this article, I investigate the coupling of welfare benefits and migration control. I argue that the access to welfare is not only increasingly restricted for “unwanted migrants” (for a review, see Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018), but that the receipt of welfare benefits itself contributes to the production of the irrational “anti-citizen” (Khosravi, 2009). I consider the specific case of foreign nationals receiving social assistance to illustrate the coupling of welfare benefits with governing migration and mobility (Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018). Here, paperwork emerges as material expressions of bureaucracy and performs different functions such as disciplining and ordering the welfare-receiving foreign population (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Navaro-Yashin, 2007) while simultaneously providing legitimacy for their actions in front of other state entities (Gupta, 2012). Therefore, menaces of warnings are a source of authority (Derrida, 1996) and a key instrument in the legitimisation of revocation orders within the political economy of bureaucracies they are embedded in (Alpes 2017).

⁴² In Switzerland, it is obligatory to dispose of a health insurance. For people with low incomes, the cantons guarantee a reduction of the monthly payment as a welfare instrument.

The notion “menace of a warning” serves to shed light on the, at times, “absurd” (Vohnsen 2017) functions of the paperwork of bureaucratic menacing. I show how the incremental process of menacing leads to the establishment of the individual indebtedness for receiving social assistance and eventually to the enactment of a warning. I illustrate the double function of menaces of warnings in producing discipline and legitimacy for exclusion, and introduce more thoroughly the technique of individualisation of the reasons for receiving social assistance. In my data, individualisation is expressed through the construction of people’s “unteachability” as expressed through their “unsuccessful” (self-)disciplining, thereby legitimising their exclusion. The article will show that menaces of warnings uncover the crucial role of welfare instruments in governing foreign nationals. Since restricting access has proved, in most cases, unfeasible because of human rights conventions and the federal constitution, I show that the instrumentalisation to provide proof of “undeservingness” and of “dangerous others” is becoming more visible in migration policies and bureaucratic practices (Nagy, 2019; Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg, 2019).

Paperwork, discipline and legitimacy

The enactment of revocation orders is conditioned by the categorisation of “foreign nationals” as such and by the connected “deportability” (De Genova, 2002; Sayad, 1999). It is therefore intimately linked to the government of migration and mobility (Fassin, 2011b). Indeed, the government of migration and mobility is connected to the aim of reproducing the sedentary vision of the world and the image of society as a homogenous whole with specific moral and normative conceptions, such as independency from welfare benefits (Khosravi 2009; Schinkel 2018; Walters 2004). Bureaucracy, as a main dimension of statecraft (Jessop, 2007), takes up an important role: it entails a particular way in which “authority and morality” are fused to conduct the live of individuals (Rose 2010: 148). Current transformations and (re)productions of migration governance with connected processes of social ordering (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) have provoked a rethinking of bureaucratic paperwork as a means of population control (Tuckett, 2018; see also introduction, this issue). Control and discipline in this context are not understood as “spectacular acts of violence” but as a more diffuse and subtle form of (bureaucratic) violence that is conditioned by structural inequalities (Graeber, 2012).

Paperwork, then, can be conceptualised as a “technology of government” which is geared at shaping the conduct of individuals in order to produce certain desired effects while adverting undesired ones. Nikolas Rose (2010: 52) defines these technologies as “an assemblage of forms

of practical knowledge, with modes of perception, practices of calculation, vocabularies, types of authority, forms of judgement, architectural forms, human capacities, non-human objects and devices, inscription techniques and so forth, traversed and transected by aspirations to achieve certain outcomes in terms of the conduct of the governed”. In this sense, paperwork is one technology of government which allows to shed light on the complex and heterogeneous ways in which this diversity of relations, objects and actors bear material consequences for the people involved without expressing one singular “will” or “intention”. Through confrontation with bureaucratic forms and documents, borders as abstract lines are becoming a distinct material reality for people (Green 2012: 587; Navaro-Yashin 2007: 80). In line with this, the bureaucratic practices, and violence, of menacing warnings become a means of governance (and signalling sovereign power); paperwork enables the authorities to constantly remind foreign nationals about their conditionality and deportability in the territory of Switzerland and their duty to be financial independent and “integrated” (Ataç and Rosenberger 2018; Korteweg 2017).

At the same time, paperwork must remain accountable within the assemblage of technologies of government at large, namely the bureaucratic system which involves the rule of law and proportionality (Rose 2010: 276). In this context, Matthew Hull (2003: 290) has argued that the rationalising regime of written documentation allows “the collective agent” of bureaucracies and legitimatises their actions. This allows a self-representation where decisions are based on objective knowledge of a utilitarian and homogenous bureaucracy (Hoag 2011). Therefore, bureaucratic paperwork serves to make the state legible and to legitimise its existence and actions (Hull 2003, 2012a) by providing accountability (Pigg et al. 2018).

I further contribute to this literature by demonstrating how this move is facilitated through paperwork as a technology of government by establishing a correlation between the individual reception of social assistance and the cause for such a “dependency”, leading to the construction of individual responsibility (Mazouz, 2015: 243–244). Menaces of warnings are decisive instruments in this regard, because they provide the migration office with “legitimate” arguments (cf. Borrelli and Lindberg, this issue) for the person’s “unwillingness to integrate” into the labour market and for a negative prognostic evaluation of the probability of future “independence” from social assistance in the proportionality assessment. As my data will show, individualisation is produced through asymmetrical power relations that inhabit bureaucratic practices and paperwork concerned with foreign nationals (Dubois, 2019; Rose, 2010). These unequal power relations are as much a consequence of the organisational requirements of a

bureaucratic state as they are a consequence of the functioning of law in a constitutional state based on the alleged rationality, objectivity and distance from “its subjects” (Das 2004; Rosset and Achermann 2019). Hence, paperwork serves to establish this rationality and objectivity for the expulsion and deportation by constituting a proof of the “unteachability” of the accused person and constructing the “anti-citizen” (Khosravi 2009).

Contextualising menaces of warnings in the Swiss case

In Switzerland, the salience of social assistance in the law governing foreign nationals’ presence on the territory is connected to shifts in the legal grounds which manifest themselves since the early 1960s. These shifts are characterised by the aim of governing the foreign nationals’ presence in the territory of Switzerland and is closely related to an increasing juridification and mobilisation of “integration” (Piñeiro 2015). These gradual changes and political anxieties have recently culminated in a revision of the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA) into the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (FNIA).⁴³ These transformations have entailed changes in how “integration” and social assistance are mobilised to define foreign nationals’ right of abode (Espahangizi 2019). The FNA, which was implemented in 2008, provides the legal grounds for revoking stay permits when a third-country national is receiving social assistance. In the case of the residency permit, a mere receipt of social assistance is sufficient to revoke the permit (art. 62, para. 1, lit. e FNA). For the permanent residency permit on the contrary, the receipt must be “permanent” and “substantial” (art. 63, para. 1, lit. c FNA).⁴⁴

In this context, the discretionary wording for revocation orders and for warnings implies that cantonal migration offices, as the authority providing and revoking stay permits, are not obliged to enact such an order. If they, however, decide to enact an order, cantonal migration offices must act within the principle of proportionality as defined in article 96, paragraph 1. In the proportionality assessment, the authority must proof the accountability of the measure by evidencing that the amount and duration of the receipt of social assistance legitimate an expulsion. More importantly, the past attitudes and “dependencies” must be evaluated in order to forge a prognostic view (*Zukunftsprognose*). In addition, the “dependency” on social

⁴³ Because of the period of research, all the case files I studied were collected before the FNIA existed, so in order to be coherent with their legal situation, I will always refer to the FNA.

⁴⁴ The Federal Supreme Court has specified the notion of “substantial” in the jurisprudence ambiguously between CHF 50’,000 (FCJ 2C_672/2008) and CHF 80’,000 (FCJ 2C_958/2011), while stating for “permanent”, “two to three years as a rule” (FCJ 2C_268/2011). Although, cantonal practices vary in the application of these benchmarks (Heim and Pfirter 2017), they provide a frame for the interpretation of authorities to enact a revocation order (cf. Ecoplan 2018).

assistance must be self-inflicted (*selbstverschuldet*) (Caroni et al. 2018: 245). Before enacting a revocation order, the cantonal migration office can order a formal warning “if a measure is competent [*begründet*], but the circumstances are not appropriate” (art. 96, para. 2). Menaces of warnings, in turn, “inform” that a warning of the revocation of the stay permit will be submitted if the receipt of social assistance does not cease. Menaces of warnings might be explicitly labelled as such in the letterhead, as indicated in the introductory scene, but there are also other forms of labelling according to the intensity and “stage” of the menacing as I will show in the analysis of case files later.

Menaces of warnings are not legally defined but remain internal bureaucratic practices. This is relevant since menaces of warnings do not have to respect any form of benchmarks for the length and the amount of the dependency on social assistance. Nor do they have to consider personal circumstances such as the “prognostic view” or the “self-inflicted dependency”. On the contrary, I show that this paperwork serves to establish “proportionality”. Because of their informal character within the case-making of revocation orders, menaces of warnings take up important functions within it and illustrate important aspects of how the exclusion of persons due to the receipt of social assistance works and is legitimised. This has important repercussions, since most menaces of warnings do not end in a formal legal action and remain bureaucratic practices highly charged with “contingency, uncertainty [and] coercion” (Mathur, 2016: 5). As indicated, this paperwork is the materialisation of the bureaucratic practice of menacing the foreign population in receipt of welfare benefits. It illustrates the aim of disciplining and “normalising” the affected person in a way that is beyond the possibilities available to authorities regarding recipients of welfare benefits with Swiss citizenship (cf. Ellermann 2019; Korteweg 2017).

Case files as ethnographic data

It is a usual Tuesday morning at the SOAFL and I am searching through a pile of files. The case file I am looking at was delivered to us by a legal counsellor and contains the legal and bits of the personal history of a person confronted with an official order under the FNA and against whom a complaint was crafted. The person has never been in direct contact with the observatory but found their way into our office in the form of this case file. I am trying to figure out a way to bring order into the diversity of documents. Although the file is considerable, it leaves out parts of the story and only represents what has been deemed important by different administrative bodies, legal counsellors and lawyers.

The SOAFL is concerned with collecting files of legal cases through networks of lawyers and legal counsellors. From September 2017 to September 2018, I was in charge of documenting

these case files to investigate the implementation of the FNA and the Asylum Act and to make the consequences of restrictive migration and asylum policies for individuals publicly visible. The work included the study of a diversity of case files, exchanges with legal counsellors and the sporadic contact with people affected by these laws.

My ethnographic data includes the study of case files and what may be described as “working experience” to shed light on the complex processes of revoking stay permits due to the receipt of welfare benefits. Case files represent the paper trails between cantonal migration offices and the affected persons. As illustrated in the excerpt, the content of case files can change considerably from one case to another and represent what was deemed important by the different actors involved in the crafting of such case files (Barrera, 2018; Pörtner, 2018: 225). Hence, while the content of case files is primarily dictated by the respective cantonal authority, the case files themselves appear in the archive of the SOAFL because of the network with lawyers and legal counsellors. They are produced and patterned in a highly contested field in which the SOAFL takes part.

The topic under study transports different meanings for different people who find themselves confronted with the revocation of a stay permit or with a menace of such. Exploring it implies pointing to contradictory processes, to relations, or assemblages, and to complexities, allowing for the data to question underlying “premises, practices, and repercussions” (Samimian-Darash and Stalcup 2017: 79). This illustrates the sociolegal functions of this materialisation of bureaucratic practices in reproducing state differentiations, exclusion and the coupling of welfare benefits with migration control.

Producing discipline and legitimacy through paperwork

A main case study, described as “case file 1” serves as the basis to elaborate on the manifestation of paperwork in the case-making of revocation orders, before moving to the jurisprudence of the Federal Supreme Court and five remaining case files to further illustrate the function of this paperwork in legitimising exclusion. Case file 1 was selected from six cases being discussed in this article. The six were selected from thirty-one case files dealing with social assistance and revocation orders in the archive of the SOAFL. These preselected six case files offer depth in terms of the scope of documents they contain and the diversity of the individuals and their canton of residence.

Communications, investigations, threats: The production of discipline

In case file 1, the person⁴⁵ arrived in Switzerland in 2003 in the context of a family reunification with her husband after obtaining a visa for marriage. Because of this marriage, she obtained a residency permit B, which was replaced with the more “secure” permanent residency permit C in 2009, one year before they divorced. In 2013, she received a “communication of the receipt of social assistance”. This letter consists only of the official header of the cantonal migration office, a reference to the law governing revocation orders, and the following ending: “The requirements for the revocation of your permanent residency permit are currently not fulfilled. However, we would like to point out to you that we will consider revoking your permit if you are continuing to be unable to support yourself on your own [*aus eigenen Kräften*] and without social assistance”.⁴⁶

“Communicative menacing” consists of a letter where the person concerned is reminded about the fact that the receipt of social assistance is a reason for the revocation of stay permits. This “communication” happens despite the reach of any threshold of length or amount of dependency as defined by the case law of the Federal Supreme Court. This is also referred to in the quote, where it is said that the “requirements” are currently not fulfilled, meaning that the receipt of social assistance is not yet long and intensive enough. Additionally, we will observe later, this includes the proportionality in terms of prognostic evaluation of the future dependency and the self-inflicted nature of the receipt. Nevertheless, a menace of a warning is distributed indicating that they will revoke her permit if she continues to be unable to support herself without welfare benefits. The administrative procedures remain relatively “banal” (Walters 2010: 221), as indicated by the subjunctive mood and lack of any clear sign of the actual consequences and steps taken.⁴⁷

Despite the “banality” of this bureaucratic action, it bears material consequences for the person concerned, including a possible expulsion (cf. Pigg et al. 2018: 168–169). Importantly, this letter serves as an indication of her entrance into a new “category of bureaucratic practice” (cf.

⁴⁵ I have anonymised all dates, persons and places. Nevertheless, I kept the female gender because of the importance for the constellation of the case itself. This should also serve as a hint at the gender dimension played out in revocation orders.

⁴⁶ All translated excerpts from case files are my own unless otherwise indicated. Wherever the translation may be ambiguous, I will add the German expression in brackets.

⁴⁷ This “banality” is also supported by the reason for its communication, which is the knowledge about the person’s receipt of social assistance. As illustrated in the present case, the person has been receiving social assistance for four years without having been menaced. Only with the belated communication from the social services does the migration office take notice and communicate this, combined with a menace, to the person.

Zetter, 2007: 182), which is prone to exclusion due to the receipt of social assistance. Hence, the paperwork links her social assistance with her stay permit. She still has the right to receive social assistance, yet she is informed that this may have legal consequences. In this relationship, paperwork orders everyday lives and institutionalised norms and policies (Gupta 2012). It is communicated to the person that she must conform to established norms of independence from social assistance. The migration office aims at producing certain desired effects, while advertent undesired ones (Rose 2010) by tracking and “counteracting” deviant behaviour (Nagy 2019). At the same time, the migration office begins to produce paperwork that will be used as part of her case file to legitimise a revocation order. It is through the menaces of warnings and the upcoming exchange of documents that the person is menaced and confronted with the reification of the administrators’ perception of “undeservingness”.

In 2014, the migration office enters a new level of menacing which I labelled “investigative menacing”. In this context, the migration office sends a request to the social services to obtain information about the current amount of social assistance received, including questions about the prognostic development of the “dependency”. Simultaneously, the migration office sends a questionnaire to her, entitled “Request on the Receipt of Social Assistance”. Although the outline is the same as in the last menace, this document contains a list of nineteen standardised questions about her husband (whom she has divorced) and children (which she does not have), seven about her lack of sufficient employment (such as why she has no or insufficient employment, why she has no increase in workload), five about her education and others about debts. Additionally, this second menace of a warning starts: “As dependency on social assistance may be relevant for your further stay, we ask you to answer the following questions or submit relevant documents”.

While this communication represents a very open and “banal” form of bureaucratic menacing, the migration office widens its interest in the person by asking questions and demanding explanations for her “dependency”, controlling and monitoring hurdles for the measure of expulsion (cf. Nagy 2019: 70–74). Another letter is delivered within thirty days of her submitting the answers. This is again entitled “Request on the Receipt of Social Assistance”. While the last document represents an abstraction of generalised questions that the migration office already had the necessary information to answer, in this letter, the details of her lack of employment are emphasised and her search efforts are monitored. The very open consequences are concretised and possibilities to evade the measure become more elusive, or at least more stressful and futile for the affected person. These enquiries and monitoring letters illustrate that

the power relations within these formalised negotiations are “far from being equal” (Eule et al. 2018: 3). Menaces of warnings are, consequently, an important “technology of governance”, as the literature has noted (see Rose 2010: 52), by simplifying everyday governance and interaction between recipients of social assistance without Swiss citizenship and cantonal migration offices. By establishing both a (material) link and a distance between the recipients of social assistance and public authorities, the state action is facilitated.

Again, within thirty days of her answering the letter, the migration office sends another set of questions. It indicates the need to elaborate on certain answers or provide additional paperwork to prove them. The investigations of the cantonal migration office slowly approach their aim of exploring hurdles in the possibility of expelling the person. Importantly, at this stage, the subjunctive mood is still predominant in its formulation and no possibility of complaint is opened up. The issue of time becomes a key factor in the paper trail between the affected person and the migration office. While she did not communicate with the migration office for two years after the first menace, at this stage, paperwork is due every few months. This coincides with the content of the letter, which is becoming more affirmative of the possible consequence of expulsion. Hence, this acceleration of the paper trail is driven by the migration office’s aim to “intensify” her efforts to find work. Together with the efforts of monitoring her situation, these menaces are constantly reminding the person about her conditionality and deportability (De Genova 2002; Sayad 1999).

The last level of menacing – “threatening menacing” – is reached in 2015, four months after she submitted her latest answers. It is entitled “Opportunity to Comment” and is more extensive in its writing and references to law:

On the basis of the aforementioned receipt of social assistance, the reason for revocation pursuant to art. 63, para. 1, lit. c FNA is fulfilled. However, the expulsion is not proportional for the time being. We therefore intend to warn you and offer you the prospect of revoking your permanent residency permit in the event that you are still dependent on social assistance or should give rise to other legal actions.

The document invites her to restate her efforts to become “independent” of social assistance to legitimise her further stay in Switzerland. Again, she must hand in more documents that she already handed in beforehand. It is the first time the “intend to warn” (note: “consider” is not used anymore) is explicitly and distinctively pronounced. Before, the emphasis was on the possibility of revocation if social assistance does not cease. Now proportionality comes in the limelight. The migration office considers reduction and independency of social assistance

unlikely. Despite the fact that the amount of social assistance increased over time, this is mainly because of earlier investigative menaces that have not led to her “independency”. This is the reason for menaces becoming increasingly threatening in their documented form. What is lacking, however, is the proportionality of the measure.

Through these menacing practices condensed into paperwork, we observe a continuous concretisation and acceleration of the administrative efforts to monitor and investigate the situation. We observe an asymmetrical space of negotiation where contrasting opinions and visions about the “reason for dependency” are exchanged and in contradiction, but always within the framework determined by the migration office. While the fact of receiving social assistance is not contested, what is contested is the individual responsibility for being dependent. Menaces of warnings emerge here and must be viewed as formalised bureaucratic implementations of the principal of proportionality. They are a main instrument within this setting of uneven power relations to determine the “responsibility” for receiving social assistance (see Dubois 2019).

In 2016, ten months after her last menace, the cantonal migration office enacts the formal “order of a warning of the revocation of the stay permit”. The order is written according to a legal format and extensive references are made to the precedent paperwork. In this exhaustive document, her whole legal history in Switzerland – including her past and present employment, her acquaintances and past social assistance benefits, as well as the jurisprudence in this realm – are stated, all in the third person. Menaces of warnings maintain a central place within the production of the paper trail.

Despite this circumstance and the fact that she was already menaced in 2013 of her social welfare status in a letter, she is still working only a few hours a week. In view of the financial situation, which was communicated to her, she could and should have made appropriate search efforts at an early stage.

[. . .] It must be assumed that she has not exhausted her employability [Erwerbsfähigkeit] according to her possibilities and thus made too little use of the clearly available control capabilities [Steuerungsmöglichkeiten] with regard to dependency on social assistance. It is to be expected from her that she works 100 per cent, which is possible for her, as can be derived from the case file.

Menaces of warnings are portrayed as functioning within the case-making process as an “incentive” to become “independent”. Here, the disciplinary function of menaces of warnings becomes explicitly visible. The individuals are pushed to be self-disciplined through the legal

and structural violence of the “imperative” of independency from social assistance (cf. Graeber 2012). In the warning, menaces of warnings are indicative of the “possibilities” provided to enhance her efforts to find new work. The “inefficiency” of menaces of warnings in terms of creating the result of independence from social assistance is projected on the individual: the paperwork allowed the migration office to make the individual responsible for her situation by monitoring her “inability” to end the receipt of social assistance. They claimed that she alone could change the situation by finding new work and exhaust her “employability”. This specific practice in bureaucratic settings allows the mobilisation of menaces of warnings by making revocation orders and her exclusion legitimate in and for the legal system.

Case law and proportionality: Producing legitimacy through discipline

Within the confines of proportionality, the public interest of preventing the future burden for the “general public” (Caroni et al. 2018: 245) must be weighed against an evaluation of the “prognostic future dependency on social assistance” (FCJ 2C_949/2017). This is done against the backdrop of examining the self-inflicted nature of the “dependency” (Caroni et al. 2018: 245). As I will elaborate with examples of recent Federal Supreme Court rulings, menaces of warnings are an important technology in providing the two aspects of evaluating the future dependency and determining the reason for being dependent on social assistance:

However, due to the long-term self-inflicted dependency on social assistance and the level of benefits received, there is an important public interest in avoiding an additional burden on public welfare in the future, especially as it is not to be expected that she will cover her living costs in the future. She was also initially menaced in terms of proportionality. (FCJ 2C_953/2018)

He was repeatedly reminded that he had to withdraw from social assistance, or otherwise his residence permit would no longer be renewed. All menaces and warnings from the authorities were unsuccessful; the complainant did not know how to take advantage of the opportunities offered to him in order to gain a permanent foothold in the local working environment [*hiesigen Arbeitswelt*]. (FCJ 2F_21/2017)

As illustrated by these Federal Supreme Court rulings, menaces are explicitly linked to the proportionality and legitimacy of the expulsion of a person as a consequence of the revocation order. Legitimacy is hereby understood as a way to make abstract and intrusive measures comprehensible and acceptable for other actors within the wider arrangements that govern revocation orders, especially by providing proportionality. The “unsuccessful” (self-)disciplining is thereby used as a reason for expulsion. Through simplifications and as a

technology of government, this paperwork hides hierarchisations embedded in the processes of producing “the case” (Hahonou and Martin, 2019: 130), which contributes to an alleged objectivity and neutrality (Alpes, 2017; Das, 2004). A transformative construction of a disciplinary measure, such as menaces of warnings (and warnings), as incentives is observed. Consequently, the lives of the affected persons are depicted as a failure in learning from their dependencies and from “communications offered” by the migration office.

Hence, this case law illustrates the double function of menaces of warnings within the case-making and social-ordering function of cantonal migration offices. While the paperwork serves to discipline and “normalise” the affected persons by incentivising them to become independent from social assistance, the paperwork itself becomes a key instrument in legitimising an exclusion because of its own “dysfunction” of leading to such an independency. The disciplinary nature of this technology of government fulfil a central function in the aim to order the foreign population who are receiving welfare benefits, while also performing legitimacy for their expulsion. The next section will address this tension and double function by complementing the analysis with five further case files.

Governing welfare, constructing “unteachability”

The focus on paperwork transmits the message that foreign nationals’ entitlement to social assistance is, contrary to the law, illegitimate. Instead, it is figured, in accordance with a discourse on abuse, that the person concerned wants privileges in the form of social assistance by the Swiss state but is “not willing to contribute to the national community” (case file 2). Similarly, Stefan Kutzner (2009: 12) says in his analysis of the evolution of the Swiss welfare system that there is no absolute right to receive social assistance. Rather, there is a duty of accountability (Pigg et al. 2018), and people must prove they are actively trying to improve their situation. As evidenced in another revocation order, in case file 3, an absence of the “will to work” is constructed:

Despite menaces [Hinweisen] of the migration office, [the person] was not impressed and still fails to learn the necessary lessons by continuing to receive social assistance. [. . .] In this context, the statement that [the person] had built up something in Switzerland is also incomprehensible, especially as [the person] has not managed to integrate themselves economically and professionally here either.

Menaces of warnings must be perceived as disciplinary instruments that are projected within the case-making as incentives to conform to a legal norm (however abstract this might be in

the law), which is concretised through paperwork and becoming a sociolegal reality for the affected persons. Ordering everyday lives and striving for institutionalised norms and policies is a main function of bureaucracies in maintaining the social order (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Gupta 2012). Hence, the disciplinary character of menaces of warnings within the case-making of bureaucracies is the function of incentives, which are decisive for the proportionality assessment in legitimising a revocation order. The “individual indebtedness” constitutes their “undeservingness”, and this in turn poses a threat to the “public interest” (case file 4).

Menaces of warnings contribute within an asymmetrical space of negotiation, where the unequal power relations are expressed in the production of paperwork, to construct personal responsibility for the “dependency” by portraying it as an incentive offered by the migration office to “get their lives together” (case file 6). When a person, despite these “incentives”, does not take action to avoid “dependency”, it is perceived as further proof of their inability and unwillingness to “integrate” (case file 3). This renders their future stay illegitimate. Hence, migration offices, through paperwork, materialise perceptions of what it means to be (in)dependent of social assistance, thereby reproducing normative views about “society”, “integration” and “deservingness” (cf. Schinkel 2018).

As illustrated in the introductory extract and as expressed in written replies, the affected persons do not perceive themselves as solely responsible for being “dependent” on welfare benefits. The individualisation of the ascribed liability on the part of the affected persons is (re)produced through the application of law as written text and translated by state bureaucracies (Makaremi, 2015). As previously argued, this is mainly because of the disciplinary nature of menacing warnings, which aim to order the relationship between people and public welfare benefits. This is structured along boundaries and borders of difference and is made operable through the paperwork of menacing warnings (cf. Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg 2019; Walters 2004).

Similar to Shahram Khosravi’s (2009: 40) analysis of undocumented and unidentified migrants, an anti-citizen is produced who is perceived as “a danger to the well-being of the social body” and serves as a way to constitute what is perceived as citizenship, and as “deserving”. In this regard, revocation orders and the coupling of welfare benefits with migration control makes it necessary to put the findings into the context of how society is governed. The very permanency of the “dependency” on welfare benefits is positioned at the individual level and confirmed by the alleged “unteachability” (case file 5) of the person.

Through the construction of this “unteachability” the person becomes Khosravi’s “anti-citizen”, portrayed as “irrational, irresponsible, immoral, a strain on the welfare system [. . .], constituting a risk to the well-being, value and norms of society” (49). Here, the case-making of revocation orders focuses on the individual as a moral subject (Makaremi 2015: 19).

The migration offices’ argumentation illustrates that despite all “good resolutions of the migration office to incentivise” (case file 3) the people who are receiving social assistance to “come to grips with [their] life” (case file 1), the concerned person “has failed” (case file 4). This instantly reveals menaces of warnings (which are increasingly distributed) as disciplinary and violent instruments (Graeber 2012; Rose 2010). Through the paperwork of bureaucracies, people are portrayed as a “threat” and endangering the public interest. Whatever the reason might be for receiving social assistance, the “unsuccessful” (self-)disciplining is portrayed as a moral deficit and a clear denunciation of “deservingness” of being “supported” by the Swiss state. This is then used to legitimise revocation orders and their exclusion.

Conclusion

Menaces of warnings as the materialisation of bureaucratic practices have been insightful in elaborating the simultaneous performance of legitimacy for exclusion in terms of proportionality and disciplining the affected person. Therefore, menaces of warnings function “as telling manifestations of bureaucratic power, but equally powerful tools with which it can be investigated” (Hahonou and Martin 2019: 131). The presented case files, as ethnographic data, investigated the complex intentions and consequences of rules and bureaucratic practices (Hoag 2011: 84–85) and grasped the (dis)continuities of “practicing bureaucracy” (Hahonou and Martin 2019: 130) as a fundamental form of ordering human lives (Bouagga 2015). In doing so, I demonstrated that social assistance is instrumentalised to furnish the “anti-citizen” (Khosravi 2009) and thereby couples welfare benefits with migration control.

I have shown that the disciplinary character of menacing warnings is a precondition for producing legitimate arguments for the revocation order (cf. Borrelli and Lindberg, this issue). This is done through the construction of “unteachability” which is the individualisation of the indebtedness of receiving social assistance and for not having drawn the necessary conclusion from the “incentives” provided by the cantonal migration office. Hence, people’s need to produce legitimacy for their situations enables bureaucracies to produce legitimacy for their actions through uneven power relations expressed in the form of paperwork (Dubois 2019). Paperwork is a key technology for bureaucracies to produce the disciplining character of

menaces of warnings while at the same time using them as objective knowledge for the assessment of proportionality. This form of paperwork must be disciplining to perform its function of legitimising the final order, linking it back to the assemblage of technologies of government (Rose 2010).

Additionally, there are numerous occasions where menaces of warnings are pronounced despite any real evidence of “dependency” or even receipt of social assistance as defined by jurisprudence or law. The person may only be receiving premium reductions (cf. introductory scene), widow’s pension or another form of welfare benefits. This points to the more general construction of the receipt of welfare measures as a “problem” or a “threat” to what is perceived as the “nation-state”, and relates to the reification of the “nation-state” as a “community of solidarity”, indicating who belongs and who shall be supported and protected (Walters 2004: 241–242). Foreign nationals are viewed as “still on their way” into society (cf. Schinkel 2018), still migrating and mobile despite their stay permit (Ellermann 2019).

Through the study of paperwork, the functioning of the coupling of welfare benefits and migration control becomes more tangible and we observe how the production of “the anti-citizen” is not refrained to the area of “undocumented” or “illegalised” migrants (Khosravi 2009), but diffusing throughout society, affecting people with regular stay permits. More generally, these findings contribute to a critical understanding of how rationalities of migration control are dispersed and co-constructed in bureaucratic settings confronted with the implementation of law and statecraft (Rose 2010). Building on Khosravi’s (2009: 52) point that deportation signifies that the body of the anti-citizen is removed and the “purity of society preserved”, this article demonstrates that not only the effective removal is a “worship of nationhood and citizenship” but also the continuous conditionality, and bureaucratic violence (Graeber 2012) which is produced through subtle forms of menacing as sociolegal banishment of poverty at large.

Chapter 7:

The relationality of producing difference: Justifying and diffusing the administration of “poor others”

State power manifests not only through paperwork but is also embodied by administrators who diffuse such power through their everyday bureaucratic work. Therefore, I turn now to how the relationships between individuals and groups within bureaucracies can shape the way in which policies and rules are implemented. How do the actors and different offices work together, and what does this reveal regarding my initial astonishment at how banishing poverty can be perceived as just? This article marks the inception of the fine-grained ethnographic analysis of my thesis by situating the ordinariness of administrative life in welfare and migration control bureaucracies. Introducing the ethnographic fieldwork of my research complexifies the results from the *paperwork* and *caselaw article* and deessentializes bureaucracies as machines of domination. Instead, my research on the social reality of administering the national order of poverty reveals that bureaucracies consist of humans—with all the fallibilities and contradictions this implies.

The *relational article* serves to nuance the manhunt's manifestation and further specify the ways in which a hostile environment is constructed, providing an ethnographic perspective on state power and its ordinary violence in upholding deportability. In parallel with the previous chapter, I first introduce the theoretical perspective on state power necessary to position the article epistemologically. While the *paperwork article* was concerned with the *materialization* of state power, the *relational article* relates to the *embodiment* of state power by those working in bureaucracy, by the administrations and offices bureaucracy consists of, and by the relations built between them.

The *relational article*: exploring and theorizing the administration of “poor others”

We first began considering the *relational article* when Lisa and I had just started immersing ourselves in the field and our ethnographic journeys. After a time of intensive work, and more time leaving the writing aside, it was only in the summer of 2022 that we handed the article in. This, I would argue from my unexperienced perspective, is a rather long period for writing and rewriting an article, but it has an explanation. First, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated

intensive fieldwork periods be followed by longer periods without the prospect of conducting semi-participant observation. Second, COVID-19 and other vicissitudes in life meant that the time and energy we could dedicate to work was not always foreseeable. Third, these aspects made the writing process irregular and, as time passed, expectancies and insights changed. We were initially interested in using a boundary and bordering lens on bureaucracy by focusing on how we observe boundary-making between different offices. However, we became increasingly interested in the moral elements we encountered and the justifications offered by our research participants that were markedly visible in the exchanges, communications, and gatherings of different actors from varying offices. The timeframe of working on the article was so attenuated that new works were published or encountered, such as the book edited by Julia Eckert: *the bureaucratic production of difference: ethics and ethos in migration administrations* (Eckert, 2020a). This brings me to the fourth point: we needed to rewrite our article and argument several times, as new theoretical insights were generated and, more importantly, the complexity of our field overwhelmed us.

The perspective on the people who represent the state by implementing policies and laws allows addressing the diffusion of state action or the “statification (*étatisation*) or statifications, [...]” (Foucault, 2008: 77) of society. Camilla Alberti (2020: 99) summarizes this as “the state is thus what its agents and agencies do under the multiple influences of the policies they implement.” Brown’s (2006) endeavor to situate and unveil the masculinist power in the state reveals key aspects of state power’s bureaucratization: the blurring between state and society. She argues that the state operates its power “increasingly through disavowal of potency, repudiation of responsibility, and diffusion of sites and operations of control” (Brown, 2006: 202). This is a striking statement that bears considerable potential for my analysis because the state does not only produce “clients” or employ staff but “produces state subjects, as bureaucratized, dependent, disciplined, and gendered” (Brown, 2006: 203). As a regime of knowledge that creates, differentiates, and hierarchizes identities, a study of state power is necessarily also a study that concerns knowledge (Bourdieu, 1994; Jasanoff, 2004).

Widening the previous chapter's perspective and leaving more space for contradictions, I argue in line with Tess Lea (2021: 61) that bureaucracy is a “promiscuous concept” promulgating all kinds of fantasies: from justice to terror, freedom to fascism, and soullessness to dignity. Ultimately, Lea concludes, we might consider bureaucracy as “lively inhabitations with modalities that exceed bureaucracy’s own normative claims” (Lea, 2021: 70). This brings me to the content of this third article. In the *relational article*, we aimed to focus on the ethical

considerations of bureaucracies and on the internal striving for a certain form of bureaucracy. In order to investigate the different ethics at play, we coined the term ‘relational decision-making.’ Hence, decisions to legitimately exclude poor non-national are crafted relationally and are based on the construction of a certain image of a person. This person’s behavior is unwanted and the reception of social assistance “self-inflicted.” This self-infliction guarantees an “individualization of expulsion” (Walters, 2002: 277) by punishing the behavior of a person who is deportable due to being legally categorized as a non-citizen (Achermann, 2008: 63–65). This further develops the argument of the *paperwork article* by illustrating how the bureaucratic legitimization of exclusion refers to the common good or commonweal (Wissink, 2021).

We demonstrate in the article that which is addressed more prominently in the Part Four: In bringing policies and laws to bear on the world, street-level bureaucrats can experience uncertainties, dilemmas, or contradictions. These uncertainties, and the unexpected aspects and consequences thereof, are at the core of literature concerning street-level bureaucracy, implementation processes, and opening the black box of decision-making processes (Alberti, 2021; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019; Lavanchy, 2013a).

‘For just decisions we need you!’: Relational decision-making and the bureaucratic exclusion of “poor others’

Achermann, Christin, Lisa Marie Borrelli and Luca Pfirter (submitted, “minor revision”):
“For just decisions we need you!’: Relational decision-making and the bureaucratic exclusion of “poor others”, *PoLAR*.

Introduction

We [Cantonal Migration Office, CMO] have a technical intersection. We see that the foreign national is also a client of the social services; [...] but we do not see why. [...] Then, when the case examination happens, our caseworker will contact the social service. [...] This exchange supports the decision-making on cases [on permit withdrawal or non-prolongation]. [...] And this is the core of the entire story, that we need all the perspectives and that we study all of them and that only once this happened, we come to a decision. In my experience, this leads to better outcomes than if they only control single-mindedly. (interview Rudolf, CMO 2020)

The FNIA [Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration] and the [cantonal] social assistance law have different objectives. The FNIA is mainly there for control, the law on social assistance for support. This results in tensions. We cannot resolve this conflict. [...] For example, self-infliction is not an issue for us. The claim [to social assistance] is independent of fault. However, this becomes now an issue with regard to the inquiries of the migration office. The reporting [of social assistance receivers without Swiss citizenship] is just a mass business, also for the CMO, and not everything can always be taken into account. [...] There are no mandatory measures anymore for people over 55 years, but for foreigners, it might, depending on the case, be better to do something, so the focus of the counseling will be different, and the client will be informed accordingly. (interview Gregor and Saskia, social service 2021)

While explaining their work, Rudolf, a CMO⁴⁸ official in Switzerland who oversees the implementation of migration legislation, and therefore decides on the stay of non-citizens, reveals an interesting point: To achieve what is considered to be a “better outcome,” cooperation with and information from other offices is needed. Here, “better outcomes” concern decisions regarding people without Swiss citizenship who receive social assistance and therefore may have their residence permit withdrawn and face deportation.⁴⁹ In the second quotation, Saskia and Gregor, who work in a social service, underline that this search for better outcomes occurs under tension, affecting not only non-citizens targeted by bureaucratic decisions but also the bureaucracies in charge of governing access to and exclusion from certain goods or rights (Morris, 2002).

Scholarship on bureaucratic decision-making often focuses on specific actors and their internal processes (e.g., Hull, 2003; Miaz, 2017). Ethnographic approaches that unpack bureaucratic decision-making reveal, however, that decisions are co-produced by a vast web of actors from different fields (Forbess and James, 2017; Miaz and Achermann, 2021; Wissink, 2021) and with specific ethical and procedural goals (Eckert, 2020b; Ticktin, 2011). Against this background, we explore how decisions about the future stay of non-citizens receiving social assistance come about in a relational interplay of different offices and actors in Switzerland, and how different values and goals (ethics) and the respective procedures (ethos) co-produce

⁴⁸ Migration offices are organized by cantons according to the federalist structure of Switzerland. These are the member states of the Swiss Confederation.

⁴⁹ The consequences of social assistance reception for the right to stay vary depending on the type of permit a person holds and include warnings, replacement by a less secure permit, or a revocation or withdrawal leading to deportation (see Pfirter, 2019; Spescha et al., 2019).

the crafting of legitimate decisions. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in CMOs and social services, we analyze bureaucratic decisions that exclude people categorized by the nation-state as “non-citizens” and as “poor.” We show how relational decision-making constructs the latter’s presence as unwanted and portrays decisions as guided by ideas of “the common good,” legitimated by what is presented as an informed, “good and just” bureaucratic decision.

Since Swiss law does not specify the amount of social assistance benefits that result in permit withdrawal, CMOs rely on information and evaluations received from other actors, foremost social services, to legitimize decisions (both legally and morally). For a revocation order to be legitimate, jurisprudence requests that reception of social assistance must be “self-inflicted”—meaning that applicants can be held responsible for their dependency—and based on a prognosis of whether a person would be able to become independent of public support (Borrelli, Kurt, et al., 2021). Bureaucratic decisions are thus neither a direct function of legal texts nor solely dependent on an individual bureaucrat’s discretion (Thelen et al., 2014). Rather, as we argue, information transmission and decisions go back and forth; they are not linear nor made in a vacuum and circulate simultaneously within a network of actors. These actors, in- or outside of state administration, participate in numerous decisions preceding the outcome and in shaping the legitimacy of the final decision. As a result, this relationality allows the veiling of structural inequalities (e.g., racist and classist exclusions, Gupta, 2012; Reinke and Bevilacqua, 2022) and the portrayal of decisions as the result of collective action (Hull, 2003), thus creating the image of a coherent and neutral bureaucratic state (Sharma and Gupta, 2006b). “Just and good decisions,” in this narrative, result from the inclusion of different perspectives of many people in different offices.

The following section introduces the Swiss context of coupling social assistance and migration control both legally and bureaucratically. We continue with an outline of our theoretical framework on relational decision-making (Miaz and Achermann, 2021) and the analytical lens of ethics and ethos (Eckert, 2020b). A description of our methods and data follows before delving into the analysis.

The Legal and Organizational Context

We analyze relational decision-making in the specific context of welfare and migration legislation in Switzerland. Specifically, we study “social assistance,” a subsidiary protection system that exists alongside social insurance (e.g. unemployment, disability) and assists when these have terminated or no other sources of support exist. All legal residents are entitled to

claim social assistance. Contrary to the national system of social insurance, social assistance is a cantonal and municipal competence (Bonvin et al., 2020).

When applying, the person registers with their local social service, which usually exists in each municipality. Caseworkers, often trained social workers, collect the relevant documents and calculate the amount of the needs-based benefits the person will receive (Tabin, 2021). As per a recently tightened reporting obligation (Art. 97, Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, FNIA),⁵⁰ social services must inform the CMO about non-citizens' reception of social assistance. Once informed, the CMO evaluates whether to revoke their residence permit because a non-citizen or someone they take care of (e.g., a spouse) depends on social assistance (Art. 62 and 63 FNIA). If the final decision is affirmative, the person (and maybe their family) must leave Switzerland (Spescha et al., 2019). For those with a permanent residence permit, dependency needs to be extensive and over a prolonged period (Art. 63 para. 1 lit. c FNIA) to cause such a permit revocation.⁵¹

These decisions are discretionary and, therefore, need to respect the constitutional principle of proportionality. Termination of stay is only justified if there is a concrete danger of (long-term) social assistance reception (see Borrelli, Kurt, et al., 2021). Specific circumstances, such as the family situation or childcare duties, need to be considered. Proportionality assessments require migration bureaucrats to weigh the private interest of the non-citizen against the public interest. One important element to consider is whether the dependency on social assistance is “self-inflicted” (Pfirter, 2019). Consequently, the CMO requests further information from social services, the non-citizen, and possibly other institutions (e.g., disability insurance, schools, child and adult protection services) to “form” their case. Social services therefore play a crucial role in governing not only welfare benefits and the specificities under which they are distributed but also in the decision-making of CMOs. However, they do not directly decide the consequences for non-citizens' permits. Moreover, in theory, their professional ethics reject any differentiation based on nationality, and are instead based on the principle of ensuring support to all people in need (Maeder and Nadai, 2004; Tabin, 2021).

⁵⁰ Fedlex: The publication platform for federal law, “Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration.” <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20020232/index.html>

⁵¹ With the introduction of the FNIA in 2019, permanent residency holders residing in Switzerland for more than fifteen years and depending on social assistance are no longer protected from permit revocation (Kurt 2017). Instead, permanent residency permits may be downgraded to residency permits if integration criteria (such as economic independence) are not met (Art. 63 para. 2 FNIA).

Conceptualizing Relational Bureaucratic Decision-making

We approach bureaucratic decision-making relationally, inspired by scholarship interested in how a web of actors, practices, rules and technologies affect migration control practices and how decisions about human lives come about (Horvath et al., 2017; Pott et al., 2018). Our field of inquiry can be conceptualized as “messy” and characterized by contradictions not only between state power and individuals (Forbess and James, 2017) but also between different sections and fields of public administration. “Many hands” are responsible and shape how laws and policies turn into practice (Bouagga, 2015; Thelen et al., 2014). Our analysis contributes to an understanding of how collective bureaucratic authority, shaped by individualization and collectivization (Hull, 2003), transforms specific legal grounds into social reality through the co-production of decisions and their legitimization.

While implementing policies and laws, street-level bureaucrats retain significant discretion and make decisions directly affecting their “clients” lives (Lipsky, 2010). This happens, however, within an organizational context that is guided by internal hierarchies and organizational rationalities, values, resources and constraints, as well as by other agencies that are involved in decision-making (Lang et al., 2021). Bureaucrats interpret a certain case and transmit information that “frames reality for the ultimate decision-makers” (Hawkins, 2003: 192). Consequently, decision-making power is not located at one specific site nor is the state a homogenous ensemble of institutions (Evans and Hupe, 2020; Trouillot, 2015). Discretion is relational, meaning it is a power “not solely exercised by those who decide but [it] is also dependent on other [...] actors who directly or indirectly influence the decisions” (Miaz and Achermann, 2021: 24). Unpacking administrative decision-making must therefore consider the sequence of interrelated decisions (including the assessments of other organizations) that various actors take within a specific context (Hawkins, 2003).

We build on Eckert’s (2020b) elaboration of Weber’s conception of “ethics” and “ethos” to analyze how bureaucrats interpret and legitimize their work. Eckert’s work offers insights into the modalities of the relational decision-making processes and the analysis of “administrative categorization procedures” (Eckert, 2020b: 19). Bureaucratic ethics, including values and norms, are “associated with the substantive goals of a bureaucratic apparatus [,] geared towards ideas of a good society, a good life, welfare or justice” (Eckert, 2020b: 13). An office has certain ethics that “[structure] the proper application of rules in bureaucratic practice” (Eckert, 2020b: 9). To achieve its overarching goals, a specific ethos comes in, consisting of an

“assemblage of values that underpin procedures, such as, for example, rule orientation, consistency, efficiency, efficacy, equality before the law and depersonalisation” (Eckert, 2020b: 12). The ethos refers to the values concerning how the job should be done, including—as we argue—expectations of cooperation with other offices or of what needs to be done to achieve a “good and just decision.”

We use these concepts to analyze the dynamic, relational, and processual character of decision-making produced by different offices that need to exchange information and refer to one another. We assume that both ethics and ethos structure the way information is transmitted, how it is interpreted, and how bureaucrats use it to legitimate disciplinary procedures and exclusionary decisions. These processes are based on specific ideas of what is good for the community, for which the state feels responsible. How offices and caseworkers interpret this substantive goal of the state, and the procedures that underly and legitimize its actions, therefore strongly affects what officials do and how they decide. As we show, both migration officers and social services (who might not be aware of their participation in migration control) participate in a field of action in which their ethics and ethos become affected by their relational involvement. This is specifically insightful in the field of migration control and welfare governance, where different and potentially conflicting societal goals have to be aligned (Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018) and where nationality becomes inscribed into welfare bureaucracy. Investigating the relational dimension of how ethics and ethos are manifested, negotiated, and altered, allows the unpacking of the decision-making process itself, how exclusionary migration control practices are legitimated, and the exploration of “the delineation and definition of the moral community that a bureaucratic apparatus is concerned with” (Eckert, 2020b: 8).

Methods and Data

This article is based on ethnographic research conducted in Switzerland between 2019 and 2021. The multi-sited fieldwork includes a total of seven months of semi-participant observation in CMOs and municipal social services in three cantons, over 70 problem-centered interviews with a variety of actors across Switzerland, as well as casefile and caselaw analysis. To understand relational bureaucratic practices and the dialectics of formal organization, practices, regulations, and norms (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2021; Hoag, 2011), we observed everyday work in these offices; engaged with casefiles of non-citizens and citizens receiving social assistance; participated in meetings (within and between offices), training and

“client interviews”; followed caseworkers’ formal and informal practices; discussed specific cases; and studied internal and external communications and exchanges. We signed data protection and confidentiality agreements with all agencies to maintain the anonymity of places, offices, and individuals.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we constantly renegotiated the scope, timing, and range of our fieldwork. Nevertheless, the majority of interviews and fieldwork were conducted in person. The timing of the research was particularly interesting because the relevant legal framework entered into force in early 2019, which meant that the offices involved needed to discuss and negotiate new routines.

As ethnographic researchers, we were confronted with the fact that by asking questions we necessarily, even if unintentionally, became involved in our field of inquiry. Remarks and questions can reveal the mechanisms and practices of the studied bureaucratic structures and trace the process of legitimizing decisions, but they can also lead to interference and affect the course of bureaucratic action. Nevertheless, in the case of structural inequalities in and through administrative procedures, “the ethnographic method is most capable of revealing mechanisms that contribute to the maintenance of racial inequalities in a social system that silences and denies them” (Lavanchy, 2018: 158, own translation).

Relational Decision-Making

How do decisions about the right to stay of non-citizens receiving social assistance come about through interactions between various actors? And how do civil servants legitimate their decision to withdraw a person’s right to stay? The following section interrogates how migration control and welfare government have become increasingly intertwined, a process that affects who is considered a legitimate member of the community—manifested in the right to stay and, consequently, to receive social assistance. To analyze the relational character of this decision-making, we first show how the reporting obligation establishes relations between bureaucratic fields, before outlining how this relationality works and how it affects ethics and ethos. The last section delves into how relationality contributes to producing legitimate decisions on the exclusion of “poor others.”

Reporting Obligation: Identifying “Poor Others” and Establishing Relations

Since, by law, social assistance claims by non-citizens need to be reported to the CMO, social services usually initiate decision-making processes that may lead to permit withdrawals.

Hence, through this reporting obligation, CMOs learn about the existence of non-citizens who receive social assistance and, in the process, obtain detailed information about them.

The reporting obligation makes it possible to establish a residence history. If a person passes through authorities, which are obliged to report him or her to the migration authorities, these reports accumulate with us. So, you can see [...] very easily [in a specific case]: “but this person is not aiming at integration”. It is an accumulation of grounds, where one ground alone is not sufficient for a [permit] revocation, but in total, it is sufficient. (Interview Rudolf, CMO 2019)

As stated by Rudolf and many other CMO research participants, the decision to investigate a case is based on information received from social services. Using this information, CMO officials decide whether it is justified to invest time to more closely evaluate and monitor a specific person. It is the CMOs’ task to exclude those non-citizens who cause large state welfare expenditures, considered unwanted both legally and politically. In contrast, the ethics of social services have a different goal:

We are there to secure their livelihood [*Existenzsicherung*]. They [CMOs] are not social, for them the negative things are interesting. [...] I communicate what I think is interesting to them. What’s interesting to me is: I need to know when a deportation happens, so I can stop the payments. [...] Our goal is to get the clients out of social welfare as quickly as possible [...] Getting them into the labor market. (Fieldnote with Hannah, social service 2020).

The reporting obligation furthermore establishes procedural and communicative connections between CMOs and social services (as well as other institutions). From a legal and procedural point of view, this relationship is hierarchical, with the social services providing information and the CMO competent to decide about non-citizens’ right to stay. This hierarchy is often reinforced by CMO statements: “It is not the responsibility of the municipality’s social authorities to interpret the legal relevance or not of this reception. But it is the responsibility of the migration office” (interview with Rudolf, CMO 2020). Rudolf draws a boundary around the “jurisdictional monopoly” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 178) concerning migration law, on which he claims to have the expertise and authority and which presents a differentiated set of goals as also highlighted by Hannah above.

In practical terms, however, CMOs depend on other actors to evaluate whether to envisage a possible measure and to craft “good and just decisions” (interview, CMO 2020). The adjective “good” refers to a common goal that implies external legitimization, toward the legal system (Pfirter, 2019). This goal translates into a procedural rule that requires careful investigation of

cases, without including personal antipathy or empathy—what Eckert (2020b) refers to as a rule-oriented ethos. The aim is to respect the constitutional principle of proportionality and the “will of the legislator”, which results in the decision-maker trying to be a neutral and lawful bureaucrat, the Weberian ideal type of impersonal and rational public servant (Weber, 1956b). The adjective “just” represents a common goal that concerns an internal legitimization by invoking the ethos of non-arbitrariness: “With the greatest care we clarify what speaks for a further stay and we look for solutions, otherwise [if no solution is found] the measure [decision] follows” (fieldnote, CMO 2020). Here, CMO officials explicitly distance themselves from the image of “the bureaucratic automaton” (Hoag, 2011: 82). Instead, they perceive their task as “a human one,” as another caseworker in another CMO explained: “We are not robots, and every case is different. That means also that the procedure to get valuable information must be different ” (fieldnote with Lukas, CMO 2021). This search for solutions and “valuable information,” Lukas explains, involves the accumulation of paperwork and a “laborious task of making the case. Of showing that we have indeed evaluated the individual situation” (fieldnote with Lukas, CMO 2021). In a circular connection, non-arbitrariness and rule orientation are mutually reinforcing and used to rationalize bureaucratic categories and legitimate individual decisions. Ensuring the “individuality of those they deport” (Wissink 2021, 256) and the “legitimacy [of] their actions in front of other state entities” (Pfirter, 2019: 30) necessitate various streams of information arriving at CMOs.

The handling of exchanged and amassed information unveils diverging and overlapping organizational goals, values, and everyday work routines. A CMO’s need to obtain information is connected to changes in the perception of migration control. At a cantonal meeting between representatives of the CMO and the municipal social services, migration officials explained that control has shifted from the territorial borders to the interior of the nation-state to control and restrict non-citizens’ access to welfare support. Here, “municipalities are the most important gateway of migration. [...] Why are we conducting this workshop [on reporting]? [...] Because we want to decide and control who uses our infrastructure!” (fieldnote with Jürg, CMO 2020). Jürg continued: “For just decisions we need you!”, coupling legitimate decisions based on information received from other services with what seems good and fair to them. The recalibration of connections between the CMOs and social services is therefore intrinsically linked to an expansion of migration control, but also to the moral imperative of bureaucracies being “just” (see Affolter et al., 2019).

Modalities of Relationality: Tensions and Convergence

By meeting their reporting obligation, social services and other actors shape the decision-making process by interpreting and selecting information, implementing specific procedures, and adapting the obligation to their own organizational goals. This participation may alter the final decisions and affects the very structure of interactions as well as the office's own ethics and ethos. As observed by a legal counselor (interview 2020), whose work is to challenge CMO decisions and who thereby also participates in the creation of legitimate decisions, "social workers really give the information reluctantly. Some add a letter explaining the person's situation, why he or she is on social assistance. Basically, they are already trying to defend the person." In the way they frame the information provided to the migration office, civil servants in social services try to accommodate the duty to report while maintaining their ethics to provide support to those in need, according to their own set of laws and rules (fieldnote, social service 2021; see also Andreetta, 2019; Tabin, 2021). Yet, Bernadette explained how their profession involves different ethics and "a balancing act between protecting the rights of clients and protecting the interests of taxpayers" (fieldnote with Bernadette, social service 2019). Municipalities' aim to "save" costs explains why some willingly and actively report non-citizen social assistance recipients to the CMO: "If you deport people, you can save a lot of taxes. [...] They [the recipients] do nothing, do not respect their duty to mitigate damage [*Schadensminderungspflicht*], and no one holds them accountable" (fieldnote with Steffen, social service 2020). The tension between accountability toward public finances, "their clients," and "the mandate of professional ethics" (fieldnote, social service 2020) are a typical outcome of social services' "double" or "triple mandate" (Staub-Bernasconi, 2007).

Within these conflicting ethics, the relational aspect of decision-making allows for an exchange of information greater than that requested by law. Given the ethics of accountability toward "the taxpayer" (who is equated with "the citizen"), Roman, a head of unit in a highly professionalized social service of a major Swiss city, illustrates how the reporting obligation may serve to reinforce certain aspects of their work that are more intimately linked with control than with their counseling mandate: "We have already communicated cases to the CMO. Difficult cases. Cases that should not be here" (fieldnote with Roman, social service 2021). This office sometimes takes the initiative to identify poor non-citizens whose behavior is considered noncompliant and whose presence is deemed costly. During the fieldwork, the rationale behind this position became clearer, as the below extract from our fieldnotes shows.

Erika, who used to work as a social worker in a children’s home before joining Roman’s unit in the social service, explains: “Now I am on the other side. So, I can understand the whole thing. Suddenly I have to take care of the finances as well. Now I am part of the donor organization.” When asked why she reported a family to the CMO, she looks astonished: “We just did not know what to do anymore. The family [...] did not give a damn about the sanctions we have enacted. The woman did not participate in the language classes. The man did not participate in the labor integration scheme. They did not look for a cheaper flat. They did not declare income.” She waves documents, the different enactments of sanctions (mainly financial) and the threats regarding a suspension of social assistance. “We discussed the case at a meeting, not for the first time. And somebody said, ‘Why not report him to the migration office?’” She looks at me and says “Yes, why not?” So, they informed the responsible CMO “because they must know ... And we did not know what to do in this case. Nothing worked.” (Fieldnote with Erika, social service 2021)

This discussion with Erika illustrates two points: First, the communicational channel to the CMO, established through the reporting obligation, provides an additional disciplining mechanism for social services, giving them a new option to threaten “difficult” clients. In a later discussion, Erika specified that this “pressure from the CMO is [...] an external pressure, that can be great. It makes relationship work [*Beziehungsarbeit*] possible” (fieldnote, social service 2021) since it is a disciplinary mechanism not directly enacted by the social service. Therefore, this pressure does not risk hampering the relationship of trust between caseworkers and their clients. Social services might use the CMO’s symbolic power to achieve their own goal, implicitly accepting the possible consequences to the person’s right to stay. Despite their universal ethics of care, some social services therefore actively engage in the differentiation between citizens and non-citizens defined by migration law. Hence, the reporting obligation introduces the categorical national difference inherent to CMOs’ work into the social service’s daily routines, affecting their organizational ethics.

Second, the example reveals social services’ ideas about bureaucratic competences and related interests. The social worker points to the fact that CMOs are responsible for a specific segment of social assistance beneficiaries, those without Swiss citizenship. Social services assume that CMOs have a different ethics (of expulsing people who depend on public money) and make hypotheses about what kind of information CMOs should receive. Hence, the reporting obligation affects the offices’ internal and external relations and results in the ethics of different offices becoming aligned and reinforced, especially when common ethics, such as the reduction

of public expenditures, are concerned. Such convictions might even lead to closer and formalized collaborations between migration enforcement and social services.

Social services' communication with CMOs reveals relational modalities characterized by tension, convergence, and expectation: They try to either defend their "clients" vis-à-vis CMOs or to discipline them by reporting them. Simultaneously, as outlined by Halliday et al. (2009), they make assumptions about the information that CMOs are looking for, hence choosing the information they provide to either support already existing images of deservingness or contest them (e.g., through standardized and minimal communication; fieldnote, social services 2020). Thus, legal requirements guide practices and create hierarchies, but (formally) less powerful actors can strengthen their own organizational goals by making use of the legal instruments of other administrative fields that suit their own ethics and ethos.

Manufacturing Mosaics: Legitimizing the Exclusion of "Poor Others" through Relationality

It's a very difficult decision. We never agree within the [cantonal migration] office or within the canton [...], we never agree on the area [of social assistance]. "No! It's really not the woman's fault, is it? She has been on such a good path." Of course, we always watch how someone behaves and then we make a prognosis and if this prognosis is really bad, then—as I said—we are in the realm of a killer criterion [*Killerkriterium*] and then we have to look at who it is. There we are with this mosaic piece—a mosaic with these single stones [...]. (Interview Frederik, CMO 2019)

The mosaic pieces that Frederik, the head of a CMO, refers to are the many perspectives and bits of information that come together in the relational decision-making process. The metaphor represents the ideal of a processual decision in which each part fits into a coherent whole. Not matching reality, the metaphor is an intriguing image of the legitimizing work that relationality performs. Once the objective legal criteria for the withdrawal of a permit are confirmed (such as the amount and duration of social assistance), migration officials' assessments focus on the proportionality of the decision. This is based, among others, on the information received from social services and evaluated along two crucial questions: Is the dependency on social assistance self-inflicted? And what is the prognosis of the future (in)dependency on social assistance? The following extract from our fieldnotes illustrates how a social worker prepares information to provide to the CMO.

Marina, a social worker, opens a new social assistance case, where she has to fill out a questionnaire sent by the CMO, which arrived a few months after she had reported the person's

receipt of social assistance. She fills in the Word template used to respond to the standardized set of questions, switching between it and the “client administration software.” The main information is quickly completed: The name and other detailed information about the client, as well as the amount of social assistance that is automatically retrieved. After this standardized section is filled out, she comments “now I can give more comments” and types into the form: “Ms. [...] is actively looking for a job, supported by case management. She is very reliable and motivated.” Marina looks at Author P and states “and now I should probably say that until recently her son was in the same support unit.” She begins to type, adding “due to his age of majority, he is now a separate support unit,” and explains “otherwise they [CMO] might suppose that he is not supported anymore.” She hesitates, realizing that she is about to inform the CMO about the son’s social assistance dependency. After referring to work routines and time pressure, she explains “with the son, he’s also in the naturalization process ... I take this sentence out again.” She laughs and looks at Author P before continuing, “the attitude is that we fill out the paperwork as benevolently as possible for the clients. Otherwise, it’s better not to say anything. That’s what I learned when I started here. In the case of our requested opinion about the future development of the dependency, we never give a prognosis or clearly state that this is not possible.” (Fieldnotes, social service 2021)

The standardized way that Marina fills out forms illustrates well-known bureaucratic constraints, such as lack of time and administrative routines (see Lipsky 2010), but also a refusal to help CMOs to make judgments based on social services’ assessments. While being forced to share information, this strategy allows social service officials to distance themselves from CMOs’ future decisions to withdraw a permit. What is communicated by social services depends on their ethics, whether care or control and discipline is prioritized. But the way information is communicated matters too, for example, following more or less standardized ways of sharing their assessment of individuals’ behavior and their prognosis on them becoming independent of social assistance. This renegotiation of ethics and ethos, due to an obligation to report and exchange information, in turn affects the final decision-making by CMOs.

As mentioned by Marina, some social assistance caseworkers report positively on principle, or they select, channel, and weigh information transmitted to the CMO based on their bureaucratic ethics and assumptions about the CMO’s interests. Caseworkers might omit information deemed irrelevant to the CMO, specifically when it comes to sanctions or conditions imposed by social services. At other times, they stress that the receipt of social assistance is not self-

inflicted and that the users are actively trying to end the support. Through CMOs' information requests, the question of self-infliction (whether the client can be blamed for their long-term unemployment and welfare dependency) becomes part of social services' agenda, as underlined by Saskia and Gregor in the introductory quote to this article, which may come into conflict with their ethics of supporting individuals in need. Whether wanted or not, social service caseworkers participate in the construction of an individual's situation which influences the decision-making process of CMOs.

Once social services reports arrive at the CMO, migration officials also interpret them based on how they perceive social services. If social services hold back information to discourage a negative decision by the CMO or to avoid responsibility, the CMOs interpret the lack of information as an indicator that non-citizens are at fault for their dependency or as ignorance of the caseworker. Thereby the CMO assumes that the social services work unprofessionally or are overburdened. Being unprofessional to CMOs signifies being "too close to the concerned person, [a] lack objectivity and [being] too nice" (fieldnote with Hans, CMO 2021). Hans suggests that small municipalities' practices, which in the context of our research appeared to be more willing to take part in the expulsion of "unwanted poor others," are judged more positively by CMOs. Processing the information received, CMOs polish, replace, enlarge, or ignore certain pieces of information to manufacture their mosaic. This mosaic is not neutral but constructed according to CMOs' promises toward society:

Flavio, a CMO caseworker, describes to Luca Pfirter how he proceeds to craft an expulsion order. He explains that he evaluates the individual and the public interest. For him the "damage" caused, and whether this damage was self-inflicted by the person, is of specific importance. He states: "The damage is the burden on the public finances. The foreigners must reduce this within their possibilities of control [*Steuerungsmöglichkeiten*]" before it comes to an expulsion order, meaning they should actively try to change their situation. "In the case of an expulsion, it's about [assessing] self-infliction. It's no longer about motivating you to exhaust your possibilities of control. It's about avoiding the further burden to the public purse." He continues, "It's about legitimizing the expulsion and showing through a prognosis that [due to the person's bureaucratic biography] even if the person finds a job, it [independence from public money] would not last." To do so, he shows Author P the list of documents and especially the many reports by the social services. "We need the proof. The social services give us this proof." (Fieldnote with Flavio, CMO 2021)

When talking about the “possibilities of control,” Flavio hints at the fact that some CMO caseworkers try to “help” non-citizens and thereby also avoid their expulsion. Lukas, another caseworker in the same CMO, recalls how they told a young woman that the threat of an expulsion order “was an opportunity for her because she was young. [...] And then, suddenly [...] I had rather encouraged her to do a professional training, [...] and then she sent us a working contract” (fieldnote with Lukas, CMO 2021). In this case, the CMO caseworker adopts a position of support, similar to that of social services. Thus, the relational decision-making process might also affect CMO officials’ stance toward “poor others” and their daily routines and procedures.

In the discussion above, Flavio stresses the crucial importance of the information received from social services, which serves as proof that the CMO’s decision on permit withdrawal is legitimate and just. The procedural technique to achieve this legitimation is the evaluation of self-infliction derived from the proportionality assessment, which includes balancing the interests of non-citizen social assistance beneficiaries and those of the public. Based on this, CMO officials decide whether the person deserves the taxpayers’ money and their right to stay, if dependency is not deemed their fault. Hence, public officials legitimate exclusion by relationally constructing the self-inflicted nature of the reception of social assistance that guarantees the “individualization of expulsion” (Walters, 2002: 277). Evaluating the situation based on the principle of non-arbitrariness, the officials might conclude that there is no “potential for change [*Änderungspotenzial*]” (fieldnote, CMO 2020) and that according to their bureaucratic rule orientation, they must take action since “When the legislator says we should force people with a shot across the bows, we have to ... We apply it” (fieldnote, CMO 2021). This individualization of expulsion through case-making and rule orientation for the sake of the greater public good reveals an apolitical conception of poverty, implying that social assistance receivers have caused their situation through lack of effort, and consequently endanger the public good. Collecting a vast amount of data, especially from social services, therefore allows a decision to be made according to which individuals are themselves responsible for their expulsion. No one but the person concerned is to blame because the process of the mosaic construction consists of a quasi-collective crafting of decisions. Since bureaucratic organization, containing both individualization and collectivization, “is a social form designed for collective action” (Hull, 2003: 288), the gathered data and paperwork perform a neutral and coherent state, a fair and just bureaucracy producing legitimate decisions (see Gupta, 2012).

The Exclusion of “Poor Others”—Relational Decision-making and its Implications

This article analyzed how decisions about the future stay of non-citizens receiving social assistance come about in a relational interplay of different actors, and how different values and goals (ethics) and the respective procedures (ethos) participate in crafting legitimate decisions (Dubois, 2015; Eckert, 2020b). We showed the different ethics at play in both migration and social assistance administrations. Put simply, the value of universal support to all people in need orients social services’ work, while CMOs aim to protect the national territory, population, and goods from possible threats coming from non-citizens. Crafting “good and just” decisions in each case is central to CMOs. Yet, the image of the “taxpayer” and “public finances” to whom public officials feel accountable is common to both administrative fields. Some of these ethics are in tension with each other, while others change because of cooperation between offices.

The relational lens of the article highlights that even seemingly disconnected actors play a role in crafting and legitimating decisions on migration control, through the way they interpret, select, and transmit information. CMOs frame relational decisions as potentially better, and their positions and actions become legitimized through their collection of information. In terms of the ethics pursued, we see that both offices mutually influence each other. Questions about whether social assistance reception is “self-inflicted” spill over into social services, while CMOs include knowledge about welfare law and counselling activities into their daily routines. The relational character of migration control implementation therefore has broader implications that affect not only the outcome of a specific decision on stay permits, but that shape bureaucratic ethics and ethos more generally: They create new networks and legitimization for excluding “unwanted” non-citizens and simultaneously influence the everyday practices of CMOs and social services. The relationality of decision-making constructs the final decision as being made in the name of “the common good” (see, Bourdieu, 1987; Forbess and James, 2017; Hull, 2012). A relational approach therefore helps to explain “the conditions and modalities of legitimation” and political power (Dubois, 2015: 209). At the same time, such relationally produced decisions both reproduce and invisibilize the structural inequality and violence faced by non-citizens receiving social assistance in a system that aims to exclude them through the entanglement of migration control and welfare governance (see, Gupta, 2012). The relationality of decision-making processes projects the decision as the legitimate product of a neutral, objective, and coherent state (Gupta 2012; Trouillot, 2015).

As this state is a nation-state, our analysis highlights how relational decisions create “shifting delineations between legitimate members and those defined as illegitimate” (Eckert, 2020b: 11). This national stratification has effects beyond migration control and enters, via relational decision-making, the field of welfare governance. As a consequence, those who are deemed not to belong and who are not able to sustain themselves lose their permits and are excluded from the nationally bound community. This is part of producing “poverty” as an apolitical and individual phenomenon unrelated to structural inequalities, by individualizing expulsions and legitimizing them morally and relationally (see Dubois, 2016; Khosravi, 2009).

Based on these findings, we invite future research to pay closer attention to the inter- and intra-organizational processes of information transfer and decision-making to grasp how contemporary forms of migration government and legitimation of exclusion are co-produced. Furthermore, the diffusion of certain modes of government based on specific rationalities, images of society, and its ideological projects should be scrutinized. Research needs to look at how governmental logics bear consequences on the formations of bureaucracies themselves instead of concentrating on a specific segment of society, such as non-citizens (see Dahinden, 2016). Finally, we suggest broadening the scope of the relational perspective to include other actors such as disability insurance and their medical experts, schools, courts, and—most importantly—the social assistance-receiving non-citizens themselves. The latter also strongly affect the decision-making process, through choices of information given or withheld, through the implication of lawyers, or through rejecting the receipt of social assistance to avoid losing their permit.

PART FOUR

Producing indifference in the national order of poverty: Governing doubts in the administration of “poor others”

A small Herrenvolk sees itself in danger: labor has been called, and people are
coming
(Frisch, 1965: 7, own translation)

To this day deportation remains an instrument to be used against those who can be
defined as political enemies of the state. It will target foreign trade unionists and
dissidents during times of crisis, and especially during wars. However, we can
observe that by the end of the nineteenth century its targets expand to embrace not
just political, but also social enemies in the form of various categories of socially
“undesirable” persons. The enemies of the state henceforth include various
categories of person who are deemed to pose a threat to its population, which is
increasingly understood in racial and biopolitical terms, or to its economy or system
of welfare provision.
(Walters, 2002: 278)

Discerning the socially masculine dimensions of the state requires coming to terms
with the theoretical problematic of the state itself, specifically the paradox that what
we call the state is at once an incoherent, multifaceted ensemble of power relations
and a vehicle of massive domination.
(Brown, 2006: 191)

Converting individuals into abstractions may be the essence of seeing like a state
(cf. Scott 1998), but being pregnant, disabled, sexually predated, amorous, adroit
with legal drugs, and the right kind of bonhomie all gesture to intersectional
encodings that exceed normative accounts of bureaucracy.
(Lea, 2021: 64)

Chapter 8

Hunting “poor others,” encountering doubts, finding humans

I am back in the strangely renovated old mansion in the heart of the old town of a Swiss city, greeting the same timid young women at the glass-covered counter of the cantonal migration office. I exit the waiting room in front of the counter, leaving the children’s books and a brochure rack filled with voluntary return prospects and integration pamphlets behind me. Passing the never-activated metal detector and greeting the women with a nod, I indicate that am announced and expected in Gerhards’s office. As always, she asks me if I know the way. As always, I nod, timid as well.

I pass several bottles of disinfectant as I climb the clinically clean staircase to the third floor while glancing into the mostly open offices of the other case workers.

Gerhard greets me with his usual friendly and bright smile below his chubby glasses and greasy, back-combed black hair. My eyes wander through his office. The room is sizable and a small table, which I sit at, is located right at the entrance, distant from the larger office table to which two big screens are allocated and where Gerhard takes his place again. His office is messy. Piles of case files, loose papers, and post-its are scattered over the table while he hangs serenely in his futuristic office chair. I discover a flat wooden carving of hippos (“I found it at one of these markets”) and one of those kitschy, if not embarrassing, mugs with a print of himself. Right next to the two screens, to its right, a photo is pinned to a stack of post-its: the former head of office. He was a tough character [harter Hund], as indicated by the head of the social services some weeks later in fieldwork. The former head left his position some years ago, leaving behind an air of admiration in the office. For some, he was a recurrent symbol of progress and change who modernized the office and its infrastructure. For others, he was the one who prohibited them from smoking even during breaks. The face of his former superior is highly visible on Gerhard’s table. However, the symbol of a political party on what I suspect is a miniature voting leaflet is covered by a small notice in a local newspaper congratulating Gerhard on his graduation from a business administration formation.

We resume our discussion from where we left it the day before, chatting about cases he has handled or is still handling concerning consequences for people who do not dispose of Swiss citizenship (for whatever reason it might be) and receive social assistance benefits. I direct our conversation to a case we briefly discussed yesterday morning and whose casefile I had studied in the afternoon. The casefile reconstructs the biography of a person unable to sustain themselves who receives social assistance because the unemployment benefits expired, which happens after two years—or earlier if contributions to the insurance scheme are insufficient. The subject of our conversation is a person, a father of two children, who has lived in Switzerland for decades. His long and probably at times troublesome, at times peaceful, life is abstracted in front of us on Gerhard’s screen in the form of endless paperwork walled within a casefile emblazoned with only two large letters and the famous Zemis-number. It is the case of O.

...

I look at O's casefile. Reconstructing a life from such paper trails is an impossible task, but it gives insights into the workings of statecraft, what information is stored under what pretext, and for what reason such information is taken from the depths of bureaucratic archives to be used again. The revised legislation, which entered into force in January 2019, has lifted the prohibition on revoking stay permits due to the reception of social assistance—even after 15 years of residence and regardless of whether the person has permanent residency. Further, the legislation enables downgrading residency permits from permanent to temporary status. The present case is one of the first I encounter directly through the casefile and narration of the responsible caseworker that deals with the questions of revoking or downgrading a residency permit after a lengthy residence in Switzerland.

This case deals with people I will never meet, never get to know. Such people are the object of state power and are both literally and figuratively hidden from my research and, or so I assume, from Gerhard: their histories, qualities, and trajectories; their hopes, defeats, and successes; their pasts, futures, and presents; their ordinary aspirations, personal intimacies, family imaginings, and social relations; their wellbeing, crises, and harmonies; their knowledge and experiences. All this is translated into paperwork ordered neatly according to bureaucratic categorizations of necessary documents, stored digitally on electronic case file processing software, and safeguarded regularly on data-storage infrastructure. The case file is a strange artifact that seems to me at times to have a social life of its own. It is composed of paperwork completed by the migration office itself but also by other actors: state bureaus, the person concerned, friends, and relatives. It contains letters, explanations, accusations, and menaces. It is an abstraction concerning the social world of the person, trying to make it fit into bureaucratic procedures and legal frameworks. The aim of case files is to craft decisions that are legitimate in the eyes of jurisprudence: a form of argumentation and a cultural translation permeated with power inequalities. The lifeworld [Lebenswelt] of the person has to vanish in order for the dream of a “just decision” to come true. (edited fieldnote, 2020)

I turn now to “my feeling” of the bureaucratic work involved in deciding on the legal consequences for social assistance recipients lacking Swiss citizenship (Valli et al., 2002). I employ the term “feeling” because I add to the paperwork article by offering insights into the interrupted and fragmented journeys of case-making and conducting ethnography. This paves the ground for subsequently unpacking the everydayness of such decision-making processes and how my fieldwork speaks to a recursive anthropology (see Part One). Paperwork repeatedly struck me as being void of several core phenomena I encountered during fieldwork: contradictions, messiness, and uncertainties concerning transforming humans into initials on the covers of case files. The humanity of administrative institutions can be grasped, by paraphrasing Tess Lea (2021: 64), in the obvious sense that bureaucracies are “peopled” by human beings with a diverse range of feelings, convictions, ideals, problems, and ambitions. How can I grasp this humanity while acknowledging that a key aspect of statecraft is rendering power impersonal, disembodied, objective, and rational through bureaucratization (Arendt,

1973; Hibou, 2013)? Moreover, it must be recognized that bureaucratic procedures build on the national order of poverty and prey on the deportability, othering, and dehumanization of people.

In the following, I descend into the ordinary, the everyday, of bureaucratic life (Das, 2007) and reveal how bureaucracies might find humans when hunting for “poor others” as much as I might find humans when researching bureaucracy; when confronted with administrations; and when interacting with civil servants, migration officials, and social workers. As Max Frisch (1965) enunciated 80 years ago in the context of guest worker programs in Switzerland, finding humans complicates matters—confronted with humans and not abstractions, imaginaries, or numbers might lead one to question one’s own actions. Further complexities also arise when faced with wishes and not pure labor power, with interrupted life trajectories and not eternal standardizations, with contradiction and not coherence.

Preventing doubts: Administering humans, producing initials

Back in Gerhard’s office and still confronted with the initial “O.” on the cover of the casefile between us, he hesitates and exhales, saying “We expelled O. because no appeal and nothing was done.” Only now do I make the link to the case review meeting I attended yesterday where the head of office and the few caseworkers in the team were dealing with this case. The discussions revolved around a notice from O’s former landlord, who informed them that light could still be observed in O’s flat, which should have been empty by now. Gerhard explained that he had now called the relevant housing administration to ask if the rent was still being paid. This was not the case because the rent had always been paid directly by the social services. In that instant, I thought that the flat was probably one of those rentals in the top tier of social services’ rent and in a miserable condition—easy profit for property owners. Gerhard had emphasized at the meeting yesterday that the landlord was afraid to enter the apartment since O. could still be inside the flat. Hence, the discussion was mostly surrounding what to do with this, the conclusion being that this was not their business, and the landlord should call the police [...]

Returning to the present and the case, I ask Gerhard if it is routine that, as in this case, a person does not have a valid permit for over one year [while the case for a revocation order is being constructed and a decision is pending]. He says that people often live without valid residency permits, “but we take care that it is not this way for too long. If we have to clarify everything [collect the necessary documents and the reports from other organizations], it takes a long time. This is often the case [that people have to wait for a valid permit because of the gathering of data by the migration office].” With EU/EFTA citizens, however, he goes on, the permit is often of a declaratory nature, since “they are allowed to stay here [as tourists and visitors,

there are no travel bans and visas required, contrary to many third-country nationals] [...]. If O. had work, then the story would be different.” Asked how he thinks the lack of a valid stay permit would affect O.’s job search (which the migration office continually urged him to do), he says, “If he [O.] wanted to, we would do a letter explaining the situation regarding the examination of his right to stay until the procedure is finished. So, there would be no questions.” Again, I ask how an employer would react to a letter stating that a residence status is being checked: “I make sure that I actually... that we have a valid permit for the person during the period of the procedure [of whether they revoke the permit or not].” But, as in this and many other cases, in reality people have long periods without a valid permit due to the assessment of whether a revocation order would be applicable. He continues to explain, “With a C permit, the problem is that it can only be extended for 5 years. I ask him if they could not extend the permit and just revoke it if they find sufficient reason, as it is the same procedure as for non-renewals of C: “Yeah, I could have just extended it [this was in 2019] in that case.” I wonder why, and he goes on with a kind of frustrated look on his face: “I don’t remember why we didn’t do it.” He seems to get my point and adds that actually they could just extend, “noting that an extension was made but that we would continue to review the case.” He brings up a similar case and says they extended the permit there pending the assessment of revocation grounds.

We get into the theme of self-infliction, and I ask him questions regarding drugs and psychological problems. Regarding psychological problems (and, as in the present case, depression), he says somewhat evasively, “We rely on DI [Disability Insurance] procedures. Our clients often try to shift everything onto illness. I just have to say that DI pensions were refused for both of them. If they can’t prove it...” And further: “We still give you the chance to prove it. Then it’s your own fault if you don’t bring us the documents. He had the time to provide proof. But he didn’t.” I ask him how O. then could have proven that his reception of social assistance is not self-inflicted, and it starts all over again: “A new DI application, that the AI is not just declining the demand. Measures that are taken, e.g., vocational integration training, expert reports are made.” In addition, he states “One can expect EU/EFTA citizens to leave with an illness because they can have it treated abroad.” He comes to his final conclusion, “If he does not make an effort to treat and overcome his depression, which is claimed very quickly with us, then we cannot do anything... He can continue to see his children, this should not worsen his depression, and medical treatments regarding depression are also possible abroad. Certainly, he still has social contacts there.” (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2020)

This fieldnote illustrates how decision-making is not a “clean” process or case and illuminates how decision-making is always specific to every case, moment, and place. The fieldnote also reveals the context in which decisions are taken, what side effects are produced, and how one might account for the absurdities encountered when translating human lives into paperwork (Vohnsen, 2017). This does not imply that bureaucracy is something inherently absurd but rather that a bureaucracy can, in simple terms, be thought of as a process to make population(s) and processes (be they economic, political, or other) countable, accountable, and governable

(Pigg et al., 2018). While a peopled bureaucracy might portray itself as void of such absurdities, the humans that constitute it are, after all, neither objective, nor neutral, nor rational, but contradictory.

What might astonish when reading the fieldnote above is its contrast with the depictions in the *paperwork article* concerning the repetitive emphasis on rules, be they laws or internal regulations. The evaluations of private lives in legal and bureaucratic end-products, such as decisions or legal texts, provide a further contrast with the above fieldnote, as does how uncertainties are relationally “managed” in the depiction of the *relational article*. How is it that uncertainties or even explicit opposition to punishing poverty disappear in the decision-making process? How do uncertainties fade when considering final decisions; how does bureaucracy manage to prevent doubts in its own practices? By examining doubts empirically, I aim to demonstrate how doubts are governed, and hence systemically prevented from appearing, in the procedures surrounding the (moral) administration of “poor others.”

During case discussions such as the above, I was repeatedly struck by the unexpected answers provided by the person before me and by their own difficulties in apprehending that which would be the “correct procedure.” It is important to state that this is not only so for bureaucracies directly tasked with controlling migration. Instead, dilemmas, uncertainties, and tactics to address these absurdities of everyday bureaucratic work are also present in social services. In the following, I present a fieldnote with the person who was responsible for O’s case in the social service.

After I have explained my topic to Hannah, she immediately refers to a case of a revocation of the C permit (...). To my astonishment, it is the case of O. I feel excitement while she continues, “...it was an inconspicuous case. He was with us for about four years, which is nothing unusual. He worked in the [work integration program], received integration allowances, and never caused any problems. A very pleasant case, which does not require much time. There are also very different ones.” Concerning the coming about of the deportation of O., she explains that she received a notice regarding the expulsion and accordingly closed the case. This means that she immediately stopped all payments and marked the case as closed in the case-processing software. Astonished by the absence of any clue that a deportation of her “client” is being executed, I ask her if she knows why there was a revocation instead of a downgrading. She looks at me questioningly and as similarly perplexed as Gerhard, the caseworker at the migration office. She too seems puzzled that such a question is being asked, saying “It’s just the way it is.” After a short and rather awkward pause she continues, “We actually don’t have much to do with it. The social assistance confirmations [which are requested by the migration office] are done by the admin. Depending on the case, we never even find out that there was a request from the migration office... or that a revocation is being checked, that someone has to

leave Switzerland.” But, she adds, “It happens that the migration office asks for pertinent information [sachdienliche Hinweise],” which is then forwarded and answered by herself. When I asked her how it was in the present case, she says, “It was an inconspicuous case. In an inconspicuous case, we communicate simply ‘receives social assistance.’ Period.”

She seems a bit uncomfortable and avoids eye contact while I ask if there are cases in which she would actually provide more specific information. She takes a swing and says, “Yes, if the person just doesn’t follow the rules, if they don’t go to the program regularly, or otherwise cause problems. Yes, then I write that.” I poke around a bit more, even though it’s a bit unpleasant, and ask what kind of information the CMO wants. She replies, “Yes...just, if it does not go as it should. If I write that the person simply receives social assistance, it is clear that everything is fine. They want to know if a person is having problems. Otherwise, it is clear that people do what is expected of them.” Now, she turns to the case of M. (one other initial displayed on a case file) because, so she suggests, this is a problematic case and here as well a procedure with the CMO took place, “so that you see the difference.” M. has been on social assistance since 2013 and M. is “a very difficult client. She appeals against everything. M. has two children for whom she lost custody, but at the same time she works in a kindergarten. How is that possible?!... Anyway, we certainly had a request from the migration office once.” She switches to the case-processing software on her PC and searches for the person, scrolling up and down, which all seems very confusing to me, until she finds the document with the “pertinent information” within M.’s case history. She looks at the document and says, “This is all non-judgmental. We have written that the KESB [children and adult protection authority] has opened a case against her because of the children and that she has not started a job.” She breaks off, looks at me and declares, not very self-confidently it seems, “These are the interesting indications [for the migration office]. There are sometimes negative things, and, with difficult clients, we would rather put these negative things into the report.” She looks at the current state of the case and explains that M.’s residence permit had been extended: “I don’t find this bad or something, but I just don’t understand why they prolonged the permit here and not in the other case.”

Regarding my question of why she feels that, in the case of O., the revocation order was less just than it would have been in the case of M., she responds, and it sounds like a final conclusion, “This is already rather a case for an expulsion. A troublemaker with all the official agencies and then she also sets them against each other. It is a typical case of doing nothing.” Asking for the consequences for M. if there had been an expulsion, she growls, “They [the children] don’t want to go home to her anymore. It would be easier if the mother had to get out and the children could go into foster care.”

I am puzzled at how she draws such an intimate conclusion about the desires of the children and their family life, a brief silence occurs before she elaborates, “There are very difficult fates and also many emotions involved. Communication can also be very difficult. That is part of our job.” In order to change a subject becoming increasingly uncomfortable, I ask her how she perceives her job, for example, in comparison to the CMO. Her short answer: “We are there to secure livelihood [Lebensunterhalt]. They [the CMO] are not social; for them, the negative things are interesting.” Despite my intent, we immediately get back to the pertinent

information: “I communicate what I think is interesting for them. For me, interesting is... I need to know when a deportation happens, so I can stop the payments.” Now she gets a little harder, her expression seems to tighten a bit: “The rest is not relevant for me in order to calculate the claim [the right to receive social assistance and the amount the person will receive]. It is the responsibility of the clients.” When I ask her what else is relevant besides being able to calculate the claim, she says, “Our goal is to get the clients out of welfare as quickly as possible. With SIL [Situationsbedingte Leistungen, situational benefits], childcare and so on. Getting them into the primary labor market.” I can’t help but ask if deportation doesn’t also get people “out of welfare.” Her facial expression softens again, which seems to be evident from the distance between the piercing in the middle of the lower lip and the chin: “Yes, that’s true, the costs will be reduced. But it is not easy. It is also very emotional. It’s not nice.” (edited fieldnote, social service, 2020)

The two fieldnotes regarding the administrators concerned with the case of O. allow me to portray several core aspects of the uncertainties, dilemmas, and paradoxes of street-level bureaucracies and organizations. The above fieldnotes also bring me closer to bridging the apparent paradox I encountered when faced with administrators whose practices and stories were contrasted with the fact that they partake in the (re)production of social inequalities and hierarchizations. In line with Arendt’s (1973) elaborations on the origins of totalitarianism and the banality of evil, Barak Kalir writes

we must recognize that people in general and bureaucrats in particular are not evil, but racist state projects are evil and those who serve them can and should be charged for their thoughtlessness and carelessness. (2019a: 14)

From where does this thoughtlessness and carelessness derive? How are doubts prevented from manifesting, and should bureaucrats be charged with this suppression of misgivings? In my research, doubts—defined as the practice of reflecting on one’s practices within larger structures of inequality—principally emerge in the settings of ethnography and semi-participant observation. Doubts might manifest in the moments of fieldwork when research participants are confronted with my questions and a gaze that is interested in detail and the coming-into-being of specific decisions. When they are asked about their uncertainties and dilemmas. These doubts are part of the field and can be active (in the sense of questions posed) or inactive (in the sense of being veiled by routine procedures and daily necessities due to workload). I argue that these doubts not being more present and not bringing the system to collapse necessitates ways to mitigate them. This accords with the literature on street-level bureaucracy regarding when the people applying the law and providing the state’s “services” are confronted with dilemmas and uncertainties (Alberti, 2021). However, my interest lies in

how doubts are governed to the extent that they are not expressed more frequently and do not enter more into decision-making processes or final decisions.

I propose that doubts that are necessarily elements of bringing rules, norms, and laws to bear on the world are governed within bureaucratic settings. Bureaucratic reality is messier and more uncertain than its rules, norms, and laws suggest, and it is more contradictory than commonly claimed in scientific analyses. This realization is what links my analysis, theory, and methodology. I argue that three primary techniques of government emerge from the two fieldnotes above and that these techniques are discernible in the three technologies of government that were the focus of my three articles: law and jurisprudence, paperwork, and relational decision-making. This claim requires theoretically situating doubts within my research and analysis. The subsequent chapter therefore provides a conceptual frame to include doubts and render them empirically productive by also introducing my understanding of governmental techniques.

Chapter 9

A recursive anthropology of the state: Conceptualizing doubts in the national order of poverty

How might “the state” be understood anthropologically? How is state power exercised in relation to preventing doubts in procedures concerning the deportability of non-citizens within the national order of poverty? This chapter is concerned with addressing doubts in order to come to more conceptual proximity with bureaucracy and state power within my research and an ontology of contradictions (see Part One, Chapter 2). In all three articles that constitute my article-based thesis, I have elaborated upon the prerogative power of “state bureaucracy” and the pervasive ways in which political operations are put into practice and made productive to differentiate the world. To return to the national order of poverty (see Part Two), I am confronted with Malkki’s (1992: 30) emphasis on the moral and spiritual need of “rooting” people, of separating the world into nation-states. “The state,” however fragmented, fluid, and pluri-centered one might perceive it to be, remains closely attached to “the nation” and is based on its moral legitimization.

Begoña Aretxaga (2003) intriguingly proposed that “the nation-state” is a construction that seeks to combine the cultural and emotional unity of “the nation” with the bureaucratic and legal power of “the state.” However, as varying postcolonial thinkers have illustrated, neither the state nor the nation has any ontological truth in and of itself and can assert no intrinsic reality (see Asad, 1973; Mbembe, 2001; Spivak, 1999). To consider the construction of the state and the nation together, Aretxaga suggests a need to understand the ways in which they interact, shape each other, and co-exist. She argues that the nation provides the state with a sense of legitimacy and authority, while the state provides the nation with a sense of security and protection (for a collection of her essays, see Aretxaga, 2005). This relationship is not always harmonious, and there are often tensions between the ideal of a nation and the community’s administration, between the ideal of a global national order and its materialization, and between the legal frames and the bureaucracies implementing them. Aretxaga’s work is particularly relevant to my anthropology of the state⁵² because she highlights the importance of culture and emotion in the formation and maintenance of the

⁵² Aretxaga’s approach to the nation-state can be seen as part of an anthropology of the state, which is a subfield of anthropology that focuses on the study of state power, state formation, and the relationship between the state and society. Anthropologists of the state are interested in how state power is exercised, how state institutions are formed and maintained, and how people negotiate their relationship with the state (Das and Poole, 2004; see Sharma and Gupta, 2006a).

nation-state. In her work, she illustrates how state power concerns not only the exercise of physical force or the implementation of laws and regulations but also the production and dissemination of cultural narratives and symbols that create a sense of national identity, justice, and service to the commonweal. Aretxaga's thinking allows additional proximity to the core concepts of deportability and b/ordering as empirical aspects of larger conceptualizations of "the state," "the nation," "bureaucracy," and their contemporary power. Hence, when I refer to the state, I refer to state power: the power to order compliance with the national order, bureaucratically administer human beings, and morally legitimize their potential deportation. Applied to bureaucracy, the conflation of nation and state allows the governing of doubts, provides a moral reason for why one should not question the deportability of people due to their poverty and nationality, and elucidates why the national order of poverty is just and worth defending. In the subsequent section, I elaborate on how one might situate the morality of state power and bureaucratic practices.

Doubts and bureaucratic ethics in the national order of poverty

Preventing doubts implies concluding that, although one might be uncertain of one's actions, they are for the "greater good" and serve "truth." As mentioned in the introduction, the Cambridge dictionary (2022) defines doubts as "(a feeling of) not being certain about something, especially about how good or true it is." Doubts are an individual feeling ("not being certain") at the same time as part of larger sociopolitical structures ("how good or true it is"). This is necessarily reflexive, as uncertainties are positioned, when doubting, in the context of larger questions of "the good" and "the truth." Julia Eckert (2020a) and Andrea Muehlebach (2012) place this "good" and "truth" in the context of bureaucratic practices. They call this "ethics." Andrea Muehlebach (2012: 18–19) defined ethics as the "education of the passions into conformity with pursuit of what theoretical reasoning identifies as the telos and practical reasoning as the right action to do in each particular time and place." As outlined in the *relational article*, Eckert (2020a: 8) proposed, on the basis of Weber's classical distinction between ethics and ethos, an empirical conception of ethics (see also Fassin, 2012a; Massé, 2016) with the aim of "investigating the value rationality of bureaucratic practice and its normative orientations." Enhancing the argument of the *relational article*, Eckert further proposed linking ethics clearly with bureaucratic work and daily routines:

bureaucratic ethics defines how a specific idea of the commonweal is served. It delineates moral communities composed of those abiding in the common good from others who are excluded. In order to understand how certain political projects of specific governmentalities are put in place, we must heed the ethos and ethics at play at specific historical points in the administrative apparatus. (Eckert, 2020b: 9)

The daily routines that aim to fulfill a specific ethics are represented by the ethos in the citation above. In order to make bureaucratic actions effective and legitimate, moral judgments are necessary to orient them. This morality shapes bureaucratic ethics, procedures, and ideas regarding the “right” citizenry (Eckert, 2020a). Ethical conceptions and applications of laws and policies imply that bureaucratic “solutions” are not straightforward. In finding solutions and making decisions there might instead be, as Lipsky (2010) argued, uncertainties, dilemmas, and contradictions. As in the fieldnotes of the preceding chapter, I often found uncertainties regarding administrators’ own work. In talking about these uncertainties, and when looking at the final decisions taken, what I encountered was the absence of doubts concerning the appropriate application of rules and laws when addressing human beings who are “poor” and therefore relationally part of power inequalities.

This inherent morality in bureaucratic work is in contrast to Weber’s depiction of the bureaucratic automaton and nuances how it comes to be that the effects of bureaucratic work are nevertheless violent and “machine-like.” This is important for my understanding, as I am interested in bureaucracies—not in what Weber termed the “private sphere” of enterprise but in what he labeled the “public sphere” (Weber, 1999). This differentiation implies that the bureaucracies in the latter sphere have a “commanding authority” (*Befehlsgewalt*) (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2021: 2; see also Hibou, 2013) that implies stateness through representing the state and executing its power. Deciding over the lives of others and executing state power in the national order is no effortless task and is riddled with contradictions, dilemmas, and uncertainties (Alberti, 2021; Clerc, 2022; Lipsky, 2010) that necessitate convincing administrators their decisions are just (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999; Eckert, 2020b). The question of how doubts are governed bridge the three articles. The efficaciousness of administering “poor others” is conducted through ethics that are enshrined in the morality of state power. The task of ethnography is to pay attention to this morality and to uncover not only the hidden logics but the humanity of our interlocutors.

In this context of descending from the structural into the ordinary aspects of the bureaucratic administration of “poor others,” Nina Holm Vohnsen (2017: 20) underscored the “absurdity

and meaninglessness of bureaucracy.” This strongly recalls a critical epistemology and methodology: meanings are not given but constructed. In her ethnography on Danish labor market politics, Vohnsen (2017) analyzed the repetitive remarks of her research participants concerning the “purposelessness,” “meaninglessness,” or “ridiculousness” of (some of) their work. She (2017: 22–23) therefore uses the term “experientially absurd” to classify these practices of sense-making and to distance herself from absurdity as an objective condition of social reality. Linking Vohnsen’s (2017) work on absurdity with the elaborations above concerning an anthropology of the state and the national order of poverty allows examining the ethical and moral considerations (partially imposed by the legal frame and caselaw) I have encountered. In contrast to Vohnsen’s research, I center on deportability and decision-making processes concerning revocation b/orders linked to the nation-state system. This context reinforces the aspect of doubts as decision-making builds additionally on the inequalities of the national order of poverty. Doubts are conditioned by the ethics, or ambient morality (Csordas, 2014), that is part of the offices that engage in governing poverty and migration.

I treat “doubts” as an analytical notion that allows me to investigate the ethics at play in the organization of poverty and migration control and such organization’s imbrication with state power (Eckert, 2020a). In the context of an analytical notion, “doubt” is an active state of mind that is directed towards a questioned object and requires resolution. Doubts are a questioning of privileged positioning within the social relations embedding people. They are part of a reflective and political cognitive process that presupposes people act in a world that is not congruent with the mental and social models applied to it. A world which is not equal for all. Doubting implies agency and the presence of an alternative and differs from uncertainty or skepticism. Instead, doubt is related to belief and action and has a specific human quality. As shown in Chapter 2 (see Part Two), doubts, in the context of my research, are the consequences of cognitive dissonance and the perceptions of contradictory beliefs and actions as elements of larger structures of inequality. As an analytical notion and in line with an ontology of contradiction, it highlights fragility and instability. However, empirically doubts are often invisible, making it difficult to analyze them. To make doubts visible, it is important to look at the process and the non-articulated through ethnography and everyday experiences of doubting (Pelkmans, 2013). I account by introducing the technique of governing doubts.

Conceptualizing Techniques of governing doubts

Rose and Miller (2010: 190) revealed how governmental programs, particular those geared at “the social,”⁵³ might not work in accordance with prior conceptualizations of the reality they are geared at. Instead, they demonstrated that such programs produce unexpected problems. These unintended consequences or problems in the implementation of laws and policies need to be bridged by the people tasked with applying rules and norms (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019). In order to execute law and policies, street-level bureaucrats require techniques to perceive what they are doing as just and in the service of “the good.” They must govern their doubts and conduct themselves in such a way as to make the government of the social efficient and effective. Such techniques allow organizing social relations according to the representations and meanings inscribed in political programs and the ethics of the national order of poverty.

This is neatly represented in Lascoumes’ (2004: 7) understanding of technique as “a technical device with a generic vocation, carrying a concrete conception of the political/society relationship and supported by a conception of regulation.” According to Lascoumes (2004: 7), instruments classically take the form of more or less sanctioned directives (such as laws, regulations), financial reports (such as tax levies, direct and indirect economic aid) and the knowledge or comparison of populations (statistical observations). Additionally, and expanding on the understanding of Rose and Miller (2010), I consider governmental techniques to be the application of these instruments. They are the techniques employed to render instruments such as laws, economic aid, and statistical observations efficacious, to “make them bear on the world” (Valdez et al., 2017: 550). If doubts are one such (potential but substantial) “problem” in the application of rules, then there is a need to individually and organizationally address these doubts using governmental techniques “through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambition” (Rose and Miller, 2010: 175).

⁵³ In addition to shaping social life, the “government of the social” is also closely tied to the role of the state in governing and regulating society. According to Rose (1998), Dean (2010), and Cooper (2017), the state plays a central role in shaping the social through various forms of policy-making, institutional practices, and legal frameworks. These scholars argue that the state is not just an external force that governs society but rather a key player in shaping the norms, values, and beliefs that underpin social life. The concept of “government of the social” also underscores the ways in which power and knowledge intersect in the regulation of social life. This includes the production and dissemination of knowledge, as well as the use of techniques such as surveillance, discipline, and control to shape individual behavior and collective attitudes.

Techniques of governing doubts unite the empirical and the conceptual aspects of my thesis. Importantly, and as the English term I use suggests, techniques have a technological aspect in that they might allow calculating, comparing, structuring, hierarchizing, and defining. I refer here to the formalities in bureaucracy that allow for formal tactics (Hibou 2015). However, techniques are not only technological. They have also a more social, human touch in the way that they are used to render something governmental. In Tess Lea's (2021) words, techniques allow one to desire bureaucracy by rendering "the social" not only governable (and technical) but also by rendering the technical social and human. The latter by creating intimate links between morality and technology (see Haraway, 1999)—a link that is expressed in bureaucratic ethics.

This has highly practical consequences that link the discussion back to my epistemological discussion on writing doubts (see Part One). I can investigate techniques of governing doubts, contextualizing them in the technology of paperwork, in the legality of stateness through caselaw, and by investigating relational decision-making in the administration of "poor others." Understanding each article as investigating one technology that can be aligned with one technique of governing doubts brings the articles together and allow for a more thorough analysis of the bureaucratic interlinkages of migration control and governing poverty. Moreover, I can nuance the understanding of state power, and examine how it is constantly reformulated through techniques that organize bureaucratic ethics and ethos. This is the morality of state power. This brings the absurd and moral character of state power and bureaucracy to the forefront. I take this as the opportunity to not only knit together the articles by filling gaps found between, and within, them but also to include the highly ordinary and banal nature of bureaucratic life.

Chapter 10

Following orders: Techniques of governing doubts in the moral administration of “poor others”

This chapter is organized in accordance with the three articles that make up my article-based thesis. In each article, I scrutinize the specific technique of governing doubts that is unveiled through the focus of the article, the focuses being: caselaw, paperwork, and relationality. Hence, for the *caselaw article* in which I am concerned with caselaw as a technology of governing non-Swiss citizens receiving social assistance, I foreground rule orientation as a technique of governing doubts. For the *paperwork article* in which I address the technology of paperwork, I detail documentation as a further technique to govern doubts. For the *relational article* in which I am concerned with the relationality of decision-making as a technology, I discern de-responsibilization as another such technique. In order to investigate these governmental techniques, I analyze additional fieldnotes and interviews and point to continuities and ruptures in both the articles and with what was previously discussed. This allows me to illustrate the larger implications within the national order of poverty and for bureaucracy when techniques of governing doubts are applied. Each section should be read as a deepening of and addition to the articles, a discussion and reflection on their content, and on the work I and my co-authors have put into them.

Each article presents a progressive densification of the manifestations and implications of governing doubts that leads to a final analytical chapter. This final chapter represents a transition to my conclusion by returning to the morality of bureaucracy and public services as well as the intimacies and alienations between migration and welfare bureaucracy. This returns my confusion regarding why more doubts are not evident to a theoretical level while grounding doubts in the ordinariness of bureaucracies.

The legal order: Rule orientation as a technique of governing doubts

Originally, I did not plan this article to be part of my thesis. Different events prevented me from writing an article on my fieldwork in social services. Rereading the article within a more coherent version of my thesis and after having decided to use it, I feel fortunate that the article remained. On the one hand, I was not convinced by the article when it was published. I had the feeling of trying to fit in “data” in order to make the argument we decided on. However, the

article is now an apposite part of my thesis because it contains original arguments while allowing me to explore how articles present for me a technique to govern doubts. Furthermore, I am content to use this article because its focus on caselaw fits into the narrative I have constructed for this thesis. The article also relates effectively to the others because the subject of ethics is present, although largely implicit (see Eckert, 2020b). Both aspects aid my elaboration of the interlinkages between the morality of state power and the governing of doubts. First, I address the organizational state and the instantiation of caselaw in the daily routines of those partaking in decision-making processes regarding non-Swiss citizens receiving social assistance.

The importance of caselaw in daily routines

In accordance with Pierre Bourdieu, we argue in the article that “judgment[s] represent [...] the quintessential form of authorized, public and official speech which is spoken in the name of and to everyone” (Bourdieu, 1987: 838). Hence, the article directly tackles the question of where the legitimizing power of the state and its persistence come from (see Rosset, 2019). If courts and their judgments represent the “ordered progression toward the truth” (Bourdieu, 1987: 830) and the (re)production of what state power constructs as normalcy and deviancy (Bourdieu, 1987: 847), then the practice of doubting resembles an antithesis to this understanding of social reality.

The practice of doubting is the visibilization of contradictions that are absent from rulings, that are veiled in the ordering of human lives, or, in Loïc Waquant’s (2009: 295, italic in original) words, that are veiled in “the penalization of poverty [that] has proved to be a prolific vector for the construction of social reality and for the reengineering of the state geared toward the *ordering of social insecurity* in the age of deregulated capitalism.” Is the practice of doubting then an act of resistance? Casemakers and CMOs alike rely on jurisprudence, cite it extensively, discuss it, or even worship judgments as perfection in the form of “truth” and “neutrality.” Law, in this sense, is an englobing power and structuring force to maintain grip on what humans believe is just (Sarat, 2016). Law’s effect on the world is effectuated by people embodying the state engendering the material effects of law, of the organizational state. In order to illustrate this, I mobilize further fieldnotes that address the question of how law comes to bear on the world and how people are tasked, for and through themselves, with applying the law effectively. In short, I demonstrate how law, and specifically caselaw, allows for rule orientation to emerge as a technique of governing doubts:

I am sitting with Marco, whom we met during the access negotiations (see Part One, Chapter 3), in his office. A spacious office, flooded with light, next to spacious meeting rooms and separated from the open-office area of the caseworkers. I'm on the floor of the CMO's cadre. The end of the day is approaching, my head bouncing with each hour more, my hands sweaty, and I alternate between being cold and being hot. Marco is overtly interested in my research, very different to the other times I have met him in person or talked with him on the phone. I decide to be daring and ask him about a subject which seems rather sensitive despite my urge to leave as soon as possible, as I have heard many critics in this office regarding its implementation. Hence, we approach the subject of downgrading. He immediately says that, during the consultation phase of the law-making process, when all "important" actors are consulted about their opinion on the subject's matter, "We opposed its inclusion in the law, also because it was not clear how to reconcile it with other measures." Regarding the other measures, he is talking about the three-step model of menacing a warning, giving an official warning, and then dispatching a final order. He looks at me and continues, "But we are an authority, and we implement it..." For the first time, I seem to read some kind of regret on his face, a human feature not covered up by satiric remarks or making the discussion ludicrous. He states, "I was at a meeting last week and the NGOs said, 'So don't implement it.' But we have to. If the lawmakers say we want to force people with a shot across the bow [mit einem Schuss vor den Bug], then we have to.... We apply it..." I try to focus and ask him about discretionary nature of the article, what this means then if they have to apply it anyway. He seems a bit confused but only for a moment, "We have to apply it... and moreover, we now have to submit it to the SEM as well... The public has us in focus. We can't just do no measures." I am perplexed once again at how, in the discussions with individuals, shades are added to earlier expressions, and I remember how Marco told me many months ago that the public has no influence on the practices of the CMO. His glance at me seems a bit resentful while saying, "Some find us too strict, others too lax, that's how it is. But it is important to apply the law." (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

Returning to the discussion of the paperwork article, one finds here an element that binds the articles conceptually. In the discussion with Marco, I observe a rejection of downgrading in his exclamation that downgrading undermines the law's coherence and interferes with his office's own procedures. Marco expresses his opposition but still enacts downgrading orders. While uncertainties may remain concerning whether this is just, these are not doubts because Marco refers here to legal coherence and to neither the structural inequalities within which law is inscribed nor the inequalities law (re)produces. The doubts are governed. Doubts are actively prevented from emerging in Marco's narrative. The "object" of his frustration or concern is the law's coherence endangered by downgrading orders, not the (moral) rightfulness of such actions.

Striving for law's coherence, orientations toward the rules

As detailed in the *paperwork article*, relying on the law's coherence is of key importance when street-level bureaucrats execute translation work and use documentation as a technique of governing doubts. Adhering to rules in the forms of law, caselaw, and internal procedures allows portraying orders as coherent and provides an objective reason for why a revocation or downgrading order is enacted. This resonates with the "rule following" automaton and bureaucrat that Weber depicted and which has been repeatedly criticized (Gupta, 2013; Hahonou and Martin, 2019; Hoag, 2011; Lea, 2021). However, it is evident that the force of orders and judgments builds exactly on the reproduction of bureaucracy as objective, effective, and efficient by following clear rules. The rule following automaton is (re)constructed (with the implication of coherence) in order to shift aside any thought of arbitrariness and thereby conceal important aspects of not only the racialized and gendered effects of bureaucracy but also of the law (Lavanchy, 2018).

This is an instant in which one can begin grasping the first technique of governing doubts. Hence, it is rule orientation that is necessary, that is in the service of the commonweal—as expressed by Marco's statements regarding CMOs having to implement downgrading orders despite being opposed to them in principle. In line with the fieldnote above, it is not the absence of doubts (at an individual level) that is evident but rather how these doubts are governed through the bureaucratic workings of the institution, be they caselaw or paperwork. The tensions are created by the uncertainties within and between rules and ethics. Employees of bureaucracies can resolve this tension through standardizing the language of the bureaucratic office. The daily routines (i.e., the ethos) allow such employees to attain institutional goals or maintain the ethics of rule orientation for the sake of upholding the law's coherence.

It is here that I empirically knit together my elaborations on governing doubts with the discussions on ethics and ethos proposed by Julia Eckert and colleagues in migration-control bureaucracies (Eckert, 2020b). In this book, David Loher (2020) unites, in studying return migration bureaucracies, ethos and ethics in the expression of rule orientation.

Bureaucrats believe that reliance on the principle of rule orientation in everyday bureaucratic practice adds to the public good in substantial ways. This blurs the boundaries between bureaucratic ethos and ethics. Defense of procedural rules and principles via strict adherence can be considered an intrinsic aim of bureaucracy, and, it follows, also as an element of bureaucratic ethics. (Loher, 2020: 122)

Loher's analysis accords highly with my research. Law as the concomitant invocation of rules—law, caselaw, and internal guidelines—becomes a “thing” with intrinsic value and a procedural key. Law becomes a reference figure of its own right to justify an end (Ferguson, 1985). This becomes visible in Marco's discourse regarding the fact that they simply have to apply the law, though they might criticize it. Bureaucrats often make a distinction between their role as a public official (whose task it is to apply the law) and their personal opinion (their feelings, etc.). However, in practice, these two aspects are synchronic rather than separable (see Part Three for the “commanding authority” of bureaucracies and its implications). Public officials need to govern doubts that might appear if they are to address this cognitive dissonance and execute laws and policies. Rule orientation provides one such technique to govern doubts because it allows officials to justify their daily routines and the decisions they make (i.e., ethos) by portraying them as necessary for the “greater good” (i.e., ethics). This is what Marco does by referring to how they must apply the law not only because they are tasked to do so but also because it is the “right thing to do.” The law becomes a value in and of itself, and rule orientation is a technique that gives a moral value to the law that needs to be respected. This allows governing doubts that arise regarding the duality of treating people without Swiss nationality differently from those with it.

Hence, rule orientation is an ethics of CMOs that justifies the measures they take in implementing migration law. Additionally, rule orientation serves to veil uncertainties and prevent doubts, thereby forestalling many questions officials might have regarding their own practices. This has concrete implications for the procedural aspects of governing social assistance recipients without Swiss citizenship, as I illustrate with the following fieldnote that continues the preceding one.

My last day of fieldwork. Marco is not here today. So, I meet his deputy. Another lawyer. Christian is a charming and very interested person. Nuancing bits and pieces of what I ask him. Toward the end of the conversation, we talk again about his role as media representative, and I ask him whether there have been more inquiries from the press about their handling of social assistance and legal consequences since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. He says yes, especially with the queues in front of the food distribution points, which have been the subject of much discussion. I jump somewhat uncoordinatedly back to the topic of social assistance recipients and the subject discussed before about the deportation of criminal offenders. Hans has told me earlier at lunch that my suspicion is not totally wrong. I asked him back then whether the decrease in workload due to deportation of “criminal” offenders—a popular initiative made it the responsibility of criminal courts to decide on the deportation—has freed resources for examining social assistance as a reason for revocation orders. Hence,

I ask Christian if he sees parallels too. He thinks in his contemplative way and states, “Social assistance is indeed the most prevalent case of integration deficits. But I wouldn’t compare the two because delinquency is illegal. Receiving social assistance isn’t.” I stumble upon this utterance of “illegality.” He immediately explains, “The measures concerning social assistance reception are not punishments. They are purely administrative.” Somehow perplexed and also excited by this very interesting turn of conversation, I forget my throbbing head and sweaty hands. I ask him why he does not see this as a punishment: “We make an administrative act; we do not punish. The reception of social assistance is not illegal. Hence, it is not a punishment because nothing illegal was done.” I can’t resist the question and ask if they wouldn’t make the receipt illegal by this administrative act. Repeatedly, I have the feeling that my state of mind, and probably also the fact that it is the last day of fieldwork, makes me more daring, more confrontational. He looks at me, puzzled, and says, “No, it is not about illegalization.” He stops. It seems everything is said. After an awkward silence, I clear my throat and say that, from my perspective, which is not a legal perspective, the people concerned are being punished for not withdrawing from social assistance. He replies very legally: “No, you have to be financially independent. That is the requirement. And this is no longer fulfilled. So, therefore, it is not a punishment.” I try to reword his statement and ask him if basically, it doesn’t seem to be about receiving social welfare per se, but about being financially self-sufficient. He looks at me, nods, and adds, “And proportionality sets clear limits.” This all seems very formalistic and legalistic to me, and, with this, the bouncing in the head is back with renewed force. I decide to leave it be. He nods in a friendly way, and underlines that I should just get back to him if there are any questions. I hand over my key and leave the office to step into the blazing heat of the summer. (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

This conversation with Christian tangibly visibilizes an important aspect I have repeatedly encountered during fieldwork: migration officials enacting and reproducing b/orders interpret banishing poverty not as a punishment but as an administrative act. As elaborated in the caselaw article, law bears a strong symbolic and categorizing power. Revocation and downgrading orders are part of administrative law, and it is therefore unsurprising that the procedures accompanying such orders are perceived as administrative. This has important implications because rule orientation allows those enacting or participating in revocation and downgrading measures to abstract and reinforce them as purely administrative. Such measures are not political or disciplinary. They are not human. They are bureaucratic. They are neutral, objective, and fair.

Naturalizing hostile orders – Reinforcing deportability

Christian and many other research participants do not perceive themselves as punishing impoverished individuals. Through this naturalization of hostile policies, they reduce “deportability” to a procedural routine of evaluating the administrative right to remain in Switzerland. Rule orientation becomes an ethos, a procedural goal of attaining the ethics of the

rule of law. Switzerland is the host country, and people who do not possess Swiss citizenship are still “guests” rather than unconditionally part of Switzerland. As any guest, they must follow certain expectancies. Guests are not just admitted indeterminately. Their presence is conditional on fulfilling certain criteria, meaning, above all, not receiving social assistance or, in Christian’s words, being financially independent. Who wants a guest who not only takes from the table but also starts to search one’s purse for money, in the worst case even spending it outside the room to which they were admitted as a guest? In this metaphor, it is only reasonable to inform the guest that this is not how hospitality works (the menace of a warning) and insist that the guest behave differently, that there are certain expectations (warning). If the guest does not manage to live up to these expectations, they need to leave. Switzerland has no place for guests like this. There are more guests every day, guests who want to be here as well, guests who are deserving. Does this guest want to delegitimize the presence of their fellow guests as well? This is the framing “integration” disseminates. This is the work rule orientation facilitates.

Shahram Khosravi has labeled this hostile hospitality:

The politics of conditional hospitality is also a nation-building process. In this manner, welcoming the “deserving” “genuine” refugees and expelling “undeserving” “bogus” ones is a sovereign act to reconfirm borders. The politics of hospitality is a politics of capacity and of the power of the host over the guest. (2010: 126)

In socio-legal terms, Christin Achermann calls this social closure for the case of deporting “criminal offenders” in Switzerland:

the social and territorial exclusion of foreigners is relatively easy to legitimize because they always occupy a partially excluded position in legal terms: They do not belong, are therefore on the one hand perceived as potentially threatening and on the other hand are territorially excludable. (2008: 326, own translation)

By deciphering the evaluation of love in administrative procedures, Anne Lavanchy denominates the reproduction of whiteness and the boundaries of the nation in bureaucracy:

[T]he silencing of racialization [*taire la race*] is not a reflection of a factual absence but an active process, a strategy for obscuring the presence of Afro-descendant or non-white people in public space. [...] Mutism, as a process of silencing, therefore does not erase the everyday productions of race in the course of interactions, practices, and discourses. (2018: 162, own translation)

Domopolitics is the label placed on these political configurations by William Walters:

If modern political economy echoes the project of government in the image of the household, domopolitics refers to the government of the state (but, crucially, other political spaces as well) as a home. (2004: 241)

The perspectives of these four authors allow me to disentangle several conundrums I had and still have when composing my written text from the circularity between fieldwork and theory. The reproductions and legalities of stateness evident in all four citations become efficacious by upholding law and caselaw as a procedural key for enacting just decisions in terms of ethos and as a goal in itself, (re)producing the rule of law as serving the commonweal.

Walters (2002: 274) describes this eloquently in relation to non-citizens and deportation by citing Arendt (1973: 294), who writes: “The new refugees were persecuted not because of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were—born into the wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class or drafted by the wrong kind of government.” Achermann (2008: 64) develops this argument by maintaining that the persons concerned, in her case due to a lack of Swiss citizenship and a criminal offense, are *deportable* because of what “they are,” but they are *deported* because of their “individual behavior” [...] or individual situation [...]” In my case, and as implied in the articles, the deportability of people and manhunts in the form of a generalized menacing are intrinsically linked to the evaluation of self-infliction, meaning what a person did or did not do to both become and cease being “dependent” on social assistance. Self-infliction and its connection to the discourse of integration (see Part Two, Chapter 5) in this sense allows a bridging, that leaves gaps, of ethos and ethics. Caselaw allows the jumping of these gaps, justifying them not only legally but also morally. The casemakers have tried everything, given a chance to the person, but now they cannot do otherwise, the administrative rights have expired because of how the person has (not) acted. Their individual right has expired, and the community has no place for them anymore. The guest must be cast from the room in which hospitality was so selflessly offered—space which, reusing Frisch’s (1965: 7) words, is in danger because the people have become all too human.

Rule orientation as a technique of governing doubts

Rule orientation (re)produces the imaginary that procedures concern not humans but papers. Papers in the sense of residency permits. As stated by Christian, state officials are simply dealing with documents that have certain administrative rights attached to them. If they expire,

so do the rights. Given the national order of poverty's legality, the only available course for Christian and other administrators is to revoke the rights attached to the paper.

After a rather hasty tour through the routines of the social service's administrative section, which still remain somewhat mysterious to me, I decide to go to Reto's office because of a past short conversation with him and the head of office. Further, numerous social workers had referred to his work in the office. This made me curious about his role and stance regarding communicating the reception of social assistance to the CMO and the consequences of these new bureaucratic links. Not only does he seem like a controversial character within the office itself but also has a strange personality I have difficulty grasping. I knock on the door. As he did the last time, he makes an audible grunt which I take as a sign to open the door. He sits deep in his office chair, grins at me, and points to a chair at the small table next to the door. His unshaven face, loose pants, and the negligent way in which his checkered shirt is stuffed in do not correspond to the image of a controller: the image I have constructed of him for myself. Without words, he welcomes me and looks at me with an interest—that could also be a readying for debate, which he seems to like—in his eyes.

I start the conversation by asking him about the exchange with the CMO which led to countless letters to their "clients" indicating that social assistance is a reason for revocation or downgrading, even after 15 years of residency and with a permanent residency permit. These letters were issued by the CMO on the basis of a list of names provided by the social services. Apparently, as I learned from previous conversations with caseworkers, it was Reto who initiated this exchange. He seems to be glad about my interest and apparent appreciation of his work leading to concrete outcomes. He leans even further back in his chair and mutters that everything started with a meeting in July with Greta and Hans-Rudolf, two characters I know too well from my fieldwork in the CMO (see Part One, Chapter 1).

"It was me who initiated this meeting," he says proudly and goes on explaining that he realized that there is a lack of exchange with them, and the meeting should "get the ball rolling." I keep quiet, waiting for further information and not wanting to break his desire to share. He goes on that the meeting was very pleasant and, on the basis of it, he crafted a list of all the people who had become part of the legal, and now practical, category of deportable citizens. This list was transferred to the CMO. With a kind of admiration in his voice, he tells me, "It is astonishing but already now the first letters [to the people concerned] are issued by the migration office. This is really fast." It seems he makes reference to the slow pace of work at the social services, which he continuously criticizes. For him, this is a confirmation of his hypothesis: "This shows the legal foundation is there." He takes notice of my questioning glance, the outcome of my puzzlement that he derives rightful actions from the practices of the CMO. It seems that my questioning glance leads him to get carried away in a flood of words: "We have a lot of foreigners who receive social assistance. My goal is to learn what we can do about this in practice. The flow of information was not good until now. There are many recipients of social assistance who should not be here."

He seems to be motivated by my silence: "There are several cases where someone with a B permit was expelled solely because they received social assistance. We should check this more

generally, also whether people really leave Switzerland. If you deport people, you can save a lot of taxes... They don't do anything, there's no duty to mitigate damage [Schadensminderungspflicht], and no one holds them accountable. For example, a case I have right now. She's 40 years old and she's already drawn several 10,000 francs, and it's going to be a lot more. This is a Croatian woman." He continues and says that the caselaw states that you can revoke someone's stay permit just because they are on social service, even if it is not high. I feel anger rising in me and cannot stop myself from telling him that this is simply wrong, the first time something like this has happened to me during field research. He says that there is no caselaw yet as the law was only introduced in 2019. I reply coldly that there is, however, caselaw on social assistance and connected consequences under migration law and that these must nevertheless be complied with and that one cannot now just arbitrarily try to force the CMO to make all kinds of revocations simply because this exerts pressure on individuals. He seems somewhat dismayed, and I calm down a little. There is an awkward silence before we resume our talk.

[...]

Having collected myself, I ask him in a more conciliatory manner about the obligation to report. In principle, he says, nothing has changed, "We still report [to the CMO] at the beginning and end of the reception of social assistance. Now we have also created this list." He pauses for a moment, "But it would make sense if we had automatic notifications at a certain threshold value." I try to change the subject a little, not wanting him to come up with another idea of how he could manage this. I ask him a little awkwardly whether he thinks the obligation to report makes sense. "Yes, it makes a lot of sense, because it is taxpayers' money, and we can and must provide legal assistance. They [the CMO] need this info from us for law enforcement." He takes a deep breath and continues, "Also, it's a warning shot to the recipients. They are getting their asses kicked." I venture to ask whether it is not a mix-up of tasks or whether he sees it merely as legal assistance. I try to hit at the fact that the social services are taking over migration-control tasks and the migration office is undertaking the job of the social services. "No, it's not a mix-up of tasks. They are clearly separated. These are just side effects." He pauses briefly and then says thoughtfully, "Yes, it is mixed, but on the basis of the legal frame." Moreover, "the circumstances are often so complex that we also have to communicate when something doesn't work. You can no longer simply report it on your own." In addition, he explains, "There is something very similar on the part of the CMO; we make criminal charges based on reports from the CMO. In this way, the CMO helps to enforce criminal law. For example, if someone refuses to integrate." (edited fieldnote, social service, 2020)

Reto is not representative of the offices where I conducted my research. Rather, Reto represents a role I try to grasp and put on paper that allows me to follow my narrative at the same time as doing justice to the heterogeneity of the people encountered in the field. My conversation with Reto, with the methodical problems encountered in talking to him, allows me to pinpoint how

rule orientation as a technique of governing doubts is not exclusive to CMOs but part of or, in paraphrasing Loher (2020), intrinsic to bureaucracy (see also Vohnsen, 2017).

As visible in the fieldnote above, law is not only something abstractly written in books but an apparatus that is both mobilized and interpreted in reference to other actors and institutions. Reto allowed me to introduce an important aspect of social services and introduce one of “their” perspectives. Additionally, however, he makes extensive reference to the CMO and how applying the law alongside other organizations effectuates “better” or more “efficient” outcomes. This is congruent with the *paperwork article*, which addresses the importance of how law is interpreted and applied, demonstrates how people and cases are documented, and reveals the presence of techniques to govern doubts in material practices and technologies.

The procedural order: Documentation as a technique of governing doubts

The second article focuses on paperwork as a technology of government and therefore as a materialization of state power that has important consequences for those governed by paperwork. The materiality of the state—in this case bureaucratic orders and procedures in the form of paperwork—(re)produce hierarchies. Through paperwork’s materialization of state power, caseworkers who embody the state execute and stabilize both state power and the legal order. In the article, I unpack how paperwork legitimizes the deportability of “poor others” through the entanglements of governing poverty and migration control. This makes paperwork an integral part of the national order of poverty.

I want to reverse the gaze again and deepen the analysis of the last section. Perhaps paperwork might not be conceptualized as a technology of government in Rose’s (1998, 2010) sense. Instead, further insights might be gleaned by concentrating on what the technology of paperwork does to the bureaucracy and the people who utilize such paperwork. In the article, I have explored paperwork’s capacity to legitimize both bureaucratic routines and procedures more generally but have not portrayed how people in these bureaucracies actually interact with paperwork. Writing this section considerably later and with fieldwork conducted in CMOs, I see the necessity to change the applied concepts in order to introduce aspects that remained unexplored until this point. Therefore, I change the terminology used originally in my article, referring no longer to technology but technique. According to my elaborations regarding a recursive anthropology of the state, techniques are related to formal as well as informal tactics.

Techniques are embedded in organizational and structural dispositions, such as the legal order, and allow for formal tactics that are visible in the technology of paperwork. However, techniques also imply informal tactics of how to address formalities when individual or organizational uncertainties are present (see Alberti 2020; Hibou 2015). Not necessarily consciously applied but embedded in inequalities, techniques are crucial to managing the cognitive dissonances that arise when rules, procedures, and laws are applied to the world.

Importance of paperwork in daily routines

A principal aspect of paperwork is the translation of human lives and decision-making processes into an orderly bureaucratic form (Pigg et al., 2018). The importance of paperwork to daily routine was, when I wrote this article, unclear, as I had not yet conducted fieldwork. In CMOs, contrary to social services (which remain absent from this article), procedures are exclusively based on paperwork. All correspondence (despite vanishingly few exceptions) is based on documents. Moreover, written exchanges are more common than oral ones between caseworkers as well as with superiors except for meetings in which specific cases and caselaw examples are discussed (See Part One, Chapter 3). During fieldwork, people repeatedly insisted that increasingly complex digital infrastructures are implemented to ease case-making by providing intuitive interfaces between different sections of the same office or even between different offices of the same canton.

The core goal of both internal and external written documentation seems to be to provide a “capability to prove” (*Beweisfähigkeit*). This was repeatedly explained to me when I asked why this huge amount of documentation was produced and why such considerable investments had been made in organizing it. This goal seems rather obvious regarding the external correspondence, particularly the correspondence with recipients. As in the case of O. (see this part, Chapter 8), the paper trail provides casemakers with evidence of what a person said many years ago or of them not responding (perhaps repeatedly) to the request to submit information (see also Borrelli and Lindberg, 2019; Bosworth, 2016). In order to nuance an understanding of paperwork and its production, I provide a fieldnote from a CMO addressing what a caseworker likes about his job. The discussion quickly turned toward paperwork and the skill of arranging and producing it:

I'm sitting at a desk with Hans, who just started to talk about his fascination for law. But he emphasizes that, “Law is not the only aspect that makes me like my job. I like that you're always dealing with people. Business law would not be my world. And I very much like the work

environment here. You see, I'm a back-office type of guy, and that's the case here. I work at my computer. Plus, you're relatively free to work how you want." He glances at me and adds, "But there are, of course, certain guidelines in place we have to follow." As Hans has worked in the CMO for over 20 years now, his huge experience is insightful to me, as he always contrasts the current state of the office with how it was when he started to work here: "What I did 20 years ago and what I do today is completely different. Now, there would only be interviews in the case of marriages of convenience." He makes a reference to our discussion before: "Counseling is the task of the social services. Of course, there are sometimes people who call us, but then we just try to explain our perspective." He sighs, sitting comfortably in an office chair that he might not have changed in 20 years, and states, "Working with documents is more objective... I wouldn't say more difficult." After I ask him if it is possible to get a picture of people's situation at all when not meeting them, he is silent for a moment and then adds, "I don't think the decision would be different." This brings us to the topic of the complexity of his daily routines, and he underlines that "it is a rather difficult task, and you need to know how to write, how to investigate cases, find information, and orient yourself in the different legal texts. It takes at least a year to train someone new. That's why we're mainly interested in people with a long-term perspective." (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

Importantly, due to the legal system as well as the general importance of written evidence (Bosworth, 2016; Pigg et al., 2018), paperwork is seen as "more" objective than in-person interactions. As a "back-office type of guy," Hans draws attention not only to these objectivized aspects of paperwork but also to the way in which they provide evidence. His job is to produce paperwork on the basis of paperwork. It is a notable skill in the daily routines of the CMO employees I encountered during my semi-participant observation. I was particularly interested in the skill of translating human lives, legal texts, and the diversity of details received from a wide variety of actors into a single document, be it a final order, a menace of a warning, or a warning.

Paperwork and, more specifically, the translation of a multiplicity of materials and sources into paperwork is therefore a technique of governing doubts. The act of translation is enmeshed with power relations and inequalities. This translation of paperwork into other, more official forms of paperwork, is what I term documentation, and the official documentation files that emerge as the outcome of this translation process "uphold bureaucratic control as the means by which information is held, meted out or shared" (Pigg et al., 2018: 169)

From file notes to documentation: The unmaking of uncertainties

To illustrate this act of translation within the creation of paperwork, I provide several of my own documents and translations related to encountering the field (fieldnotes). Hence, I also engage in a process of translation. I address a specific aspect of translation, which concerns

translating file notes (*Aktennotizen*) into an official order (*Verfügung*). File notes are those the caseworker constructs while “making the case.” In these file notes, all sources are listed, the historiography of the concerned person’s stay in Switzerland is outlined, and further steps projected. Hence, file notes are a work-in-progress document that allows the caseworker to keep track of their case-making and how they deduce a conclusion. It is a document that does not need to be “finished,” “accurate,” or presented before other entities; it is internal⁵⁴ and not given to any other organization. In addition, file notes are also the paperwork, at least in the CMOs I visited, that are transferred to a supervising person, who then checks the file notes and provides commentaries. The superior then agrees with the decision, orders further investigation in a certain direction, or rejects the proposed procedure outright. In the latter two cases the caseworker must rework the file notes and provide more evidence, change the decision, or add other steps. In the first case, when the file notes are accepted by the superior, the caseworker begins the central task of their translation work: arranging the file notes into a formal and official order. They engage in documentation. This translation is what I focus on. Although this is based on the procedures of CMOs, I have observed highly similar forms of translation in the social services.

Josephine is a woman of 55 years who has been living in a large city in Switzerland for several years, having been married to a Swiss person and disposing of a residency permit. She came here from what is called a “third country.” This racialized model of Swiss immigration policies defines all people with a nationality other than EU or EFTA as “culturally” different and without legal possibilities if they do not possess money, specialized education, or close family connections. I meet her on a rainy afternoon in a coffee shop close to a train station. She greets me with a warm and welcoming smile, which at the same time seems somehow unsure. As our encounter proceeds, it becomes clear that she is afraid that I would somehow talk to the CMO, make her position worse. The reason for her uneasiness: for more than five years, she did not have her new residency permit automatically renewed. Instead, it had to be prolonged every year and she had to wait because, “They check if I am still worth enough to get one.” Another reason for her uneasiness might be that I got her contact through a labor integration program where she works occasionally despite her health issues. I introduced myself as a researcher and explained my fieldwork in social services and CMOs. Despite my repetitive reassurances that I do not communicate with the CMO or the social service about her nor provide any details of her history in my research, I have the feeling that she remains skeptical. I feel somehow out

⁵⁴ “Internal” here implies that it is marked as such in the case-making software. When the CMO has to provide the casefile to the concerned person, to a lawyer, or to the court (a legal obligation if they are demanded to do so), these documents are automatically excluded from the automatic generation of the digital case-file ready to be sent to the demander. It represents one of the very few documents treated like this, and I found the same logic in the social services. This is instructive regarding the comprehensiveness but also uniformity of certain aspects of institutionalized bureaucratic procedures.

of place, imposing myself on her. A feeling I never (or very rarely) had in the administrations and a feeling substantiating while writing these lines. Not because she is (or was) not welcoming. But because I do not feel legitimized in “producing knowledge” from this encounter. I somehow feel as if I am part of the system that oppresses her. Trying to give voice to her and not to victimize her, I feel her perspective allows me to nuance the bureaucratic work she engages with during our encounter.

Being dependent on social assistance (income from the labor integration program does not reduce social assistance “dependency”) for another year, Josephine explains, makes her unsure how it will end. Now it is spring, again the time of year for insecurity, followed by six to nine months with a valid permit—depending on how fast they give her the prolongation. She digs around in her bag and reveals a file filled with documents. She takes out the top three and I immediately recognize the paperwork informing her that her case is under revision. Another document displays two pages of questions, “Every year, they ask me the same question,” she exhales. Once again, and even more so in Josephine’s presence, I am struck by the menacing tone of the documents, the bureaucratic jargon, the many references to the law, and the deadlines in bold. (edited interview note, 2021)

...

A few months later, I’m sitting in my provisional office in the CMO. It is my last day of fieldwork. I have gotten access to the software, to all documents, to every casefile on their server. Astonished by the change of mind about not only granting but giving me such complete access, I cannot resist and type in the Zemis-number for Josephine. My head thrums from worrying about whether they might check my search history. With a feverish head from my first COVID-19 vaccination the day before, great timing, I shrug and reject my fear. I calm myself—it is only for research proposes and anonymized anyway. I find her immediately; Josephine’s casefile is impressive. It feels different from the many other times I have looked at a person’s casefile. Knowing the person a little, having met her and talked to her. Knowing that there is actually a person behind the case file. Her not being only an initial and a Zemis-number for me. Seeing the sheer number of documents, I decide that at least I won’t go into detail, not go into the intimacy of her bureaucratic biography. I just want to check what the CMO is doing at the moment. The most intimate details, or at least the documented ones, are in front of me.

I see the file note document. Opening it, I feel awkward. I read the first lines and perceive compassion in the lines I read. I am confused and, without thinking, I enter the Zemis-number of another person I have encountered. The same. I am perplexed by the difference in wording between the letters to the affected persons and the file notes. The memos in the file notes are written in a much more pleasant and understanding tone. Especially in Josephine’s case, the memos are much less sharp than the letters. I wonder how the translation of these notes into official letters works. I am puzzled by the scope of this translation, the elimination of the human into a bureaucratic form peppered with paragraphs and standard formulations that, according to a conversation with the caseworker earlier, are probably more objective and clearer, even more neutral. I am perplexed that this didn’t occur to me earlier. Why do I only realize this now when I have met the person in real life? Have I become so much of a bureaucrat that

casefiles have become something natural for me, something without surprises? (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

...

Lukas has joined me in my office, and we are discussing cases. I use the opportunity to ask him about the file notes in a specific case where he just wrote the final decision, a revocation order of a permanent residency permit. A very convenient opportunity to discuss the subject of file notes that only now emerged. Lukas explains that, for this decision, he worked out the whole case in the file notes. Basically, he says, the file notes are fundamental to all decisions, everything is pre-noted and structured there and then commented on by superiors: "File notes are the scaffolding for the order; argumentation and caselaw is the mortar [Mörtel], so to say." Again, Lukas strikes me as fascinated by the construction of decisions. In an earlier conversation he declared that, for him, the Federal Supreme Court judgments represent "the way to go," and that with, "the clear writing and objectivity. This is true neutrality." This astonished me given I perceived judgments by the federal judges as filled with circular reasoning and incomprehensible expositions of facts that missed out important aspects about the sociality of the person concerned. These are his greatest heroes.

I try to focus again on what Lukas is telling me, my head bounces, my muscles ache, I only want to go to bed. When I manage to return my attention to him, Lukas talks about the order and why he decided to order a revocation. He says, "It's about showing that incision in his life is self-inflicted by his inaction." I grasp that he is not talking about why he makes the order but what the order should show, what its aim is in the bureaucratic and legal setting: "There is a duty to justify [Begründungspflicht], the deeper the incision, the more justification it needs. You're being removed from your home [here, surprisingly, he uses this word "home" for Switzerland] where you've lived for 16 years." This is quite blatant, and, for him, it is also a matter "for the appeal, that the person sees the points and might be able to appeal against it." (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

This was the last day of my fieldwork in summer 2021. It is only another year later, while sitting at my laptop and trying to come to terms with the task of writing my thesis, that I grasp what I noted on that day. I go through my fieldnotes scattered before me, switch to the casefiles on my computer, and have the intuition that I have something here to pinpoint my own uncertainties concerning the way I portray paperwork and bureaucratic procedures. I also have a means to determine and elaborate on the difference between what people say and what is written in official documents. The circumstances and coincidences led me to an insight that was out of sight. I hope my intuition is not wrong—it has proven valuable many times before. Perhaps intuition is also just a way of taking a decision, of moving on, particularly in the writing process. Intuitions, methodologically speaking, are then also standpoints (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004).

The fieldnotes above illustrate the translation work undertaken through bureaucratic procedures that are part of the immense production of paperwork in bureaucracies. Lukas provides an example and, returning to my fieldnotes, I discovered many other such instances. There are uncertainties about what measure to take and which step of a procedure would be most applicable. These uncertainties are portrayed to varying degrees in file notes in which arguments are exemplified and uncertainties indicated, though not necessarily in the same way as in the discussions I had, as these file notes are destined for a superior and intended to “build a case.” However, there are moments of compassion, moments when people working in bureaucracy are not sure what to do next. Questions emerge regarding whether the measure makes sense, whether a warning is really necessary, questions of how the person concerned will react. I read in these file notes the anxiety of making the wrong decision. These are not fundamental or existential uncertainties, however. The very *raison d’être* of revocation b/orders is not placed into question. To expunge doubts, there needs to be a technique to prevent doubts from emerging—a technique to make doubts disappear from the final order.

Hence, as soon as a decision is taken to enact a certain measure, then the task is to translate this into an official document, into an order. The aim of such a decision is to be coherent and objective in accordance with an array of specificities that are marked in the internal guidelines: prime examples of orders with quotation blocks already summarizing the clarity of the law, quotation blocks in which certain details must be filled in (both reducing the workload of the caseworkers and enhancing standardization of the orders). Moreover, an array of lawyers are employed and exchanges between CMOs established to construct and exchange “templates of orders” (*Musterverfügungen*) and revise the latest caselaw with the support of the SEM.

As Lukas said, all the above processes are undertaken to prove the “righteousness” of the decision, “to add argumentation and caselaw” as “the mortar” of an official order. Now documentation needs to be completed following the credo: once we have decided on the measure, it needs to be followed through. However, this is conducted carefully and in a language that leaves not even a trace of the uncertainty the person in charge might feel. All elements that might signal uncertainty vanish from the document in the process of translation, in the process of documentation. This is the link to rule orientation as a technique of governing doubts. The duty to justify is conducted through extensive reference to caselaw and by producing what Lukas sanctified in reference to SFC judgments: “true neutrality.” In the coherence of bureaucratic procedures, there is also the coherence of the law, the coherence of

bureaucracy, the coherence of the state, the naturalization of the national order of poverty, and the justice of it all.

Documentation as a technique of governing doubts

This complex translational process is what I deem a technique of governing doubts. Governing doubts implies organizational and individual techniques that suppress doubts and prevent any practices from being questioned in a final decision that must be unquestionable. There were no doubts regarding the rightfulness of the decision—nor any concerning the process that led to that decision. Documentation is therefore the technique of governing doubts one finds when considering paperwork as part of the materialization of state power and ensures that uncertainties do not lead to doubts, to questioning the rightfulness of an order, or to mistrusting a “just decision.”

This focus on documentation nuances the understanding of governing doubts for the following discussion of the remaining technique of governing doubts. As Camilla Alberti pointed out for the case of asylum reception: “Ironically, uncertainty is one of the few certainties that public authorities can rely on [...]” (Alberti, 2021: 3570). In this sense, uncertainties are omnipresent when considering the discretionary task of street-level bureaucracies (see also Evans and Hupe, 2020). Uncertainties, as previously argued, are an organizational and structural condition that emerges when applying law and rules to the world. Moreover, these uncertainties, as Alberti (2021) illustrates, are remodeled when passed on to the individuals in charge of applying such rules. Uncertainty is a condition but also an integral aspect of government (Alberti 2021). In a manner different to that of uncertainty, doubts imply a moral character represented in the bureaucratic ethics discussed above. I have empirically illustrated how the doubts that are a prerequisite of the system are governed within the system and therefore inhibited. This is the difference with uncertainties, which remain individual and are structured organizationally. Doubts do not remain—they are governed.

In the case of paperwork, doubts are governed through the technique of documentation. Doubts are also governed through organizational aspects of law, through rule orientation. I now proceed to the relationality explored in the third article and therefore to the morality and justice of the national order of poverty. Relationality of decision-making bears important implications for how the bureaucratic order is guaranteed and how migration control and governing poverty intersect and are embodied by street-level bureaucrats. I therefore investigate another technique of governing doubts: the technique of de-responsibilization.

The bureaucratic order: De-responsibilization as a technique of governing doubts

The final article of my thesis has been resubmitted after a minor revision to the journal *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. In this article, we investigated the ethics inherent to a bureaucratic office that function as promises (given to society and attributed to the state) and the overarching goals and values such offices must promote. We therefore coined the term “relational decision-making.” This represents the continuation of the discussion regarding procedures that are deemed state-like, as inhabiting stateness, to attain the goals inherent in specific ethics (Eckert, 2020b; Loher, 2020). The article also provides insights into how different offices adapt procedures that might consequentially alter or challenge the ethics of their offices; for example, social services that are increasingly confronted with the stratification of their “clientele” according to nationality and legal citizenship status. How do social services contend with this, and how is it that doubts regarding the explicit participation of social services in a deportation regime fail to manifest?

In order to address the implications for the ethics of bureaucratic offices, and specifically the social services, I again alter the gaze somewhat. I engage with how the governing of doubts is linked to the underlying ethics and ethos of rule orientation that facilitate the translation and materialization of state power in the form of neat and “neutral” decisions. Furthermore, I elaborate how the relationality between the different actors and offices also represents a technique of governing doubts. In doing so, I focus on the construction of self-infliction in the relationality of decision-making processes and how this becomes embodied by street-level bureaucrats in their ethics and ethos.

Relational decision-making as a technology of governing “poor others”

Decisions to legitimately exclude poor non-citizens are crafted relationally. These decisions are based on the construction of a certain image of a person whose behavior is undesirable. The reception of social assistance is therefore “self-inflicted.” This self-infliction guarantees an “individualization of expulsion” (Walters, 2002: 277) and renders exclusion legitimate and necessary for the common good (Wissink, 2021). Indeed, to legitimize decisions (both legally and morally), CMOs rely on information and evaluations received from other actors, social services foremost among them. These assessments are not merely factual but contain judgments and interpretations whose content and meaning might change in the process of decision-

making. To further ground this procedure and the understanding I can gain from it by a perspective on governing doubts, I draw parallels to the game “telephone”—also referred to as “Chinese whispers” or “whisper down the lane” (see Borrelli, 2018b).⁵⁵ In the game, each person whispers the sentence they heard from their preceding neighbor to the following one within the circle the players are a part of. At the end of the circle, the sentence has usually altered in form and content—generally unintentionally. This metaphor illustrates that information transmission is never merely an act of mirroring what was received. The transmission, in both the sending and reception, is related to situated judgments of complex information regarding individuals who receive social assistance (Borrelli, 2018b; Ticktin, 2011). Each civil servant has discretion and interprets and selects the information to transmit and can also actively alter it and choose what knowledge is passed on. The receiver again interprets, modifies, or ignores various elements of this information (Mathews, 2008). These processes are also based on the (comparatively strategic) anticipation of what bureaucrats think the other offices will do with the information they receive (see Hawkins, 2003). Finally, this game metaphor involves multiple actors in bureaucratic decision-making beyond the ultimate decision-maker (Miaz and Achermann, 2021).

The game metaphor, however, needs complexification: In the telephone game, intentionality is not implied in the same way as when crafting decisions regarding the future residential status of non-citizens. The role of judgments and their interpretations in terms of values, morals, and ethics are of importance for decision-making when deciding on the revocation or downgrading of stay permits due to the reception of social assistance. These judgments and interpretations change the information transmitted and the way it is received. In contrast to the telephone game, in relational decision-making processes, information is transmitted and interpreted intentionally in the “wrong” way (although this might also happen unintentionally). Additionally, information transmission on non-citizens receiving social assistance is neither linear nor one-way. Rather, as argued in the article, information goes back and forth and circulates simultaneously between a variety of actors, resembling a network rather than a circle of information. Nevertheless, relationality remains an important characteristic: what one person transmits or omits might have an impact later—though not necessarily the one the sender intended.

⁵⁵ Many thanks to Andrea Gibilisco, who brought my attention to the capacity of this game metaphor to illustrate and break down my understanding of relational decision-making.

This indicates another important aspect that must be added and that does not appear in the article: how the telephone metaphor reveals a technique to govern doubts that is located within this relational decision-making process. When receiving or relating information, the sender or receiver might interpret it according to certain ethics that allow framing the information in specific ways that allow them to “unmake” uncertainties and pass on responsibility. The passing on of responsibility is a core aspect in decision-making processes concerning revocation b/orders, as the sender might diffuse responsibility by deferring to the receiver. The receiver, in turn, might then diffuse responsibility by pointing to the information received. This diffusion of responsibility is what I refer to as de-responsibilization.

From relational decision-making to de-responsibilization

A further question arises regarding how doubts enter, or are prevented from entering, into the concrete decision-making process of revocation and downgrading orders. Again, it is important to emphasize that the relationality of decision-making is hardly rare and probably prevails in most bureaucracies, as information must first be gathered in order for it to be stored, evaluated, or neglected. Street-level bureaucrats, by interacting with recipients in person or in paperwork, are already necessarily engaged relationally with their “clients” (Borrelli, 2018a; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Lipsky, 2010), though in highly unequal terms.

The first instance illustrating the implications of relational decision-making between migration and welfare bureaucracies stems from a social service in a major Swiss city. As a large, and professionalized office, this social service is structured into different units fulfilling different tasks. One day, as implied in the *relational article*⁵⁶, the head of the most “commercially trained” (*kaufmännisch*) unit of the social service told me: “We have already communicated cases [of non-citizens receiving social assistance] to the CMO. Difficult cases. Cases that should not be here.” In that case, he was referring not to the compulsory communication due to the reporting obligation of art. 97 FNIA but to an initiative the social service took on their own cognizance. I was astonished at this difference to what I had observed in other sections of the same social service, wherein it had been repeatedly underlined that it was part of the social service’s organizational ethics to not communicate with the CMO without an obligation. The

⁵⁶ In the *relational article*, we include a fieldnote with one of the two caseworkers I consequently met. Here, I focus in more length on the second caseworker in order to add further detail to the analysis.

head of unit, having been implicated in the discussion of whether to report, forwarded me to caseworkers who were responsible for one such case.

I sit in front of a sympathetic young woman, who I call here Kerstin. She, the case worker, works three out of five days here and is also studying at university. She has been working here for three years and was previously employed in the administrative area of another city as part of her apprenticeship as a commercial employee. Kerstin escorts me into the “focus room,” which had been constructed for efficient, “user friendly,” and cost-effective working procedures and named in line with neoliberalism’s mantra of the “agile provision of services.” I start the conversation by asking how the case of the couple—both of whom are around 60 years old and have lived in Switzerland for more than 30 years—came to be part of the “clientele” of their unit. I have learned that cases transferred to their unit must be well founded and the counseling work must be covered elsewhere. She tries to explain it but can no longer remember exactly how it was justified that the couple ended up in their unit, “since a lot of time has passed.” She opens the case management software to retrace the history through the enormous number of documents displayed in the concerned couple’s digitalized casefile.

...

I am left without a satisfactory answer as to why the case ended up with them and suspect that the answer lies in a mixture of coincidence, misjudgment, and statistical probabilities that indicate a very low chance of getting out of social assistance (over 50 years old; disability assurance procedure active; etc.). I therefore change the subject and enquire about the cases and the people concerned: why the social service has communicated, with what expectations, how the communication was actualized in their daily routines. I start by asking her more about the meeting where they decided to inform the CMO about the reception of social assistance and the “uncooperative manners of the clients.” She explains that she and “my boss,” as she calls him, were sitting together after the conversation with the couple, “We discussed the whole subject with them being migrants and wondered whether there was already something going on at the side of the migration office. We had to say, he just doesn't get it, he doesn't understand what it's all about. It is always the same. The woman is not integrated at all. That is still often the case in these cultures. The issue of the discussion was always restitution [of unjustified received social assistance; Rückerstattung]. Never the woman.” The idea was, so she explained, “to write a letter to the CMO based on the questions they normally send us in a standardized way when they are inquiring about social assistance recipients. Clarify if there is something going on in this case... and, if they are not currently [making a case], to inform them about it... So they know.”

Kerstin looks at me and then says, somewhat distressed, maybe because of my long silence, “We didn't know how to go on.... He just doesn't understand the principle. We really took our time. We must have met with him three times; we kept explaining, ‘You have to report this’ [she refers to undeclared incomes that have led to the aforementioned restitutions].” She waits a moment, collects herself, and then continues more briskly, “The background [of the communication to the CMO] is that something has to come from the other side [CMO] as well. It's not up to us to decide about him [as a non-Swiss-citizen], but the integration is nowhere.”

I look at her questioningly and she says, “The woman has been in Switzerland for more than 20 years, speaks no German. In a similar case, when the CMO came into play, suddenly something gained momentum. This other woman suddenly found a job.” She slowly admits what she has hesitated to pronounce up to now, “Yes, the pressure is useful. You have to try that too. It is above all also about the potential of the woman.” She leans back, “We have no leverage anymore.” I start to ask more questions and, after some evasions from her side, I ask her, perhaps a little too directly, if communicating “difficult cases” to the CMO is like a new tool of theirs to “bring people back on track.” Kerstin replies after a short pause, “I wouldn’t call it a new tool. But ‘Hey! There’s someone who’s receiving welfare. Who is not cooperative and has received welfare illegally [he hasn’t declared income, which is very recurrent] is that registered with you [the migration office]?’”

She now slowly changes her tone of voice and explains to me that they thought—“based on experience from other cases”—that reporting the case to the CMO would make sense, would be in line with the logic of the law. Now, the question slowly arises of how she perceives this additional pressure being possible with some and not with others because of citizenship status and nationality. Kerstin answers very quickly: “Yes, it is difficult. But it is the first time I wanted to make such a report. Hopefully it won’t happen again... And also if they have to leave Switzerland, I would find that already crazy for the two. But phew... this is a very subjective question. But at some point, you reach a point where you have to say... Yes, you have to look at the argument with integration. And you have to say: ‘That can’t be it.’” (edited fieldnote, social service, 2021)

If, as Camilla Alberti (2020: 99) argues, the state is (also) “what its agents and agencies do under the multiple influences of the policies they implement,” then the above passage reveals how state power alters its form and effect in relation to the person targeted by bureaucracy. This is the case for Kerstin as much as for the couple she reported to the CMO, but in highly divergent ways. Kerstin, as embodying the state, (co-)produces “state subjects, as bureaucratized, dependent, disciplined, and gendered” (Brown, 2006: 203). Importantly, however, her “clients” are not passive but act and react. They might change their behavior, present it in other ways, critique Kerstin’s approach, or act in other manners. Moreover, Kerstin, as with many other persons I encountered in fieldwork, is not only a passive vector of state power but, as a street-level bureaucrat, also forms and transforms it.

Uncertain what to do in “difficult cases,” Kerstin has legal and procedural instruments at hand that might be exhausted at some point. Further, in certain “difficult cases,” she has additional instruments; for example, launching the telephone game by reporting cases to the CMO. Alternatively, Kerstin can use the fact or mere possibility of the CMO requesting information as leverage applicable to some of her “clients.” In my discussion with her, I perceived uncertainties concerning what would have been the correct procedures and what the

consequences might be for the persons concerned. However, here, as in many other discussions I had with social workers, although she perceives problems as part of her work, these uncertainties do not induce doubts. Such uncertainties do not lead her to reflect on the practices she employs in terms of situating them as being structured by wider inequalities. Why not? In line with the telephone metaphor, one can argue that this lack of reflection derives from Kerstin's conception of herself as being merely a transmitter of information, considering herself neither an interpreter nor a framer of this information. She simply passes on that which the "CMO ought to know." What happens next, how her message is received, is another story—and not one within her scope and responsibility.

De-responsibilization as a technique of governing doubts in neoliberal bureaucracy

One can more extensively grasp why so few doubts are evident in decision-making processes by locating relationality within embodied and bureaucratized state power. Brown (2006: 202) argues that the state operates its power "increasingly through disavowal of potency, repudiation of responsibility, and diffusion of sites and operations of control". This accords with Béatrice Hibou's (2015) proposal of understanding neoliberal bureaucratization as a place in which to express politics, the exercise of power and domination, struggles and conflicts, and power relations between actors with different, even incompatible, positions. This understanding implies asking:

how and according to which logics the relations of power in a given political order are reconfigured; in other words, what the processes of ever-increasing formalization and universalization of nonetheless specific abstractions tell us about the transformations of politics, the mutations of the modes of intervention of the State and of the State imaginary. (Hibou, 2013: 9, own translation)

Kerstin's elaboration on the case presented above seems solidly linked to this aspect. She refers, time and again, to the CMO. Responsibility is diffused. She is not the person who takes the decision. She only passes on information. It is not Kerstin who punishes the person. There is just a law that sets reporting obligations and that proposes the potential to report—also voluntarily. Control is not located at one specific site but diffused within different offices of bureaucracy. She does her part, the CMO does its part, her "boss" does another part, and politics might float somewhere above. Nobody can be held responsible for this other than the individual who receives social assistance through their own self-inflicted fault. She adopts the law's logic, puts it in her paperwork, and sends it off to the CMO. It is their job to deal with this; the issue

is now cleared from her table. Hopefully, her acts will cause her “clients” to motivate themselves to become “decent and ethical” citizens, to become “active citizens” (Lessenich, 2015; Muehlebach, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2019). This is de-responsibilization: a technique of governing doubts that functions through the relationality of decision-making processes.

However, employees of social services do not only engage in producing diligent “clients” who conform to perceptions of ethical citizenship in the service of the commonweal. Neoliberal bureaucracy is neither uncontested nor homogenous. Social services, as well as CMOs have different mandates and engage in different forms of counseling, controlling, and evaluating the people who pass through their offices. It is pertinent to address how this multiplicity and its conflicting ethics are linked to the procedures of other offices and what this entanglement and its contestations suggest regarding the techniques of governing doubts. How are the three orders—legal, procedural, and bureaucratic—connected? This is the focus of the last chapter, which delves into the morality of state power through the notion of self-infliction.

Chapter 11

The moral order and the bureaucratic production of in/difference

The FNIA and the [cantonal] social assistance law have different objectives. The FNIA is mainly there for control, the law on social assistance for support. This results in tensions [Zielkonflikt]. We cannot resolve this conflict. [...] For example, self-infliction is not an issue for us. The claim to social assistance is independent of fault. [...] However, self-infliction becomes now an issue with regard to the inquiries of the CMO. [...] There are no mandatory measures anymore for people over 55, but for foreigners it is better, depending on the case, to do something, so the focus of the consultation will be different, and the client will be informed accordingly. (adapted interview notes, social services, 2021)

The adapted interview notes serve to delve deeper into the subject of governing doubts and its articulation within the morality of state power. This interview note is *adapted* because the two persons I interviewed asked me to send them the citations I use for my publications. I have done so, and the extract above is the product of their comments and requests for alteration. The changes did not alter the content but attenuated certain expressions by nuancing them with words such as “mostly,” and “in many cases.” I accepted these changes because I make them transparent here. This is revelatory because I had a subsequent telephone exchange in November 2022 with one of the two interviewed persons, I call the person Gregor.

I call Gregor from my office. I explain to him that I have the audio-file of the interview and that the “original” quote corresponds to what has been said. But, as Gregor illustratively outlines, what people say is not necessarily what they want to see transmitted. I, as the receiver, to maintain the jargon of the telephone game, interpret the information and take it out of context. He explains that, although completely anonymized, “I don’t want the subject to become more political than it already is. We do not want to transport any prejudices about the mentality of other authorities.” But at the same time, he does not want that “it seems now as if we backpedal from something we said. This [the new version of the quotation] reflects in my eyes better what we wanted to say.”

Having introduced the telephone metaphor above into my thesis a day before this conversation, I think, “Fair enough; this is a valid point.” I will use it to contextualize and to dig deeper because the conversation with Gregor did not stop there. Instead, we both had a necessity to explain ourselves, to be heard, it seems. Gregor as much as me, wanted to justify our decisions. Me, for having used a citation that depicted the CMO as “evil,” which was heavily linked to my doubts regarding how I could nuance my findings better. Him, for making me understand why my choice of citation is politicizing.

After some back and forth, I agree to adapt the citation and he reaffirms, “There is no political left or right office or law. All have political attitudes, but no authority is subordinate to left or

right politics. Even in our [social] service, there are very different fractions of politically engaged persons. A basic attitude what I see, both in the CMO and the social service, is to reflect on a differentiated picture. And that doesn't come across in the quote." This statement is even more interesting, as Gregor worked for a CMO before coming to the social services. Trying to change his perspective on what might be understood as "political," I ask him whether this implies that administrations and law are neutral. There is a short pause before he continues, "There are political beliefs, and these are diverse and depend on the respective person. But, they all want to make just decisions. This is what unites them. The CMO and the social services." Seemingly motivated by my question, he takes a pause; I feel like I'm hearing his head working. Finally, he goes on and says, "Okay, the decision might be political. But not the intentions. We want to perform good work; I did not meet any ideologists. Neither here nor in the CMO. There is a clear mindset [Geisteshaltung] of control." (fieldnote, 2022)

Gregor emphasizes that the bureaucratic offices involved "all want to make just decisions. This is what unites them." In this fieldnote we grasp that there seems to be moral considerations that allow the different offices to partake in banishing poverty. The exploration of the morality of implementing the national order of poverty can be read as asking how state power is morally stabilized, where its force comes from, and why it has not long ago disappeared. Hence, I ascend from the ordinary by interrogating the moral order⁵⁷ and return to the questions I posed at the beginning of this thesis: how is it the deportation of poor individuals is not only viewed as legitimate but also as just? Why are there no doubts? The answer is twofold and lies in concomitantly producing, first, *difference* in the sense of hierarchizing humans along racialized and classist lines (as detailed in the articles). Second, *indifference* is produced in the sense of naturalizing this manufactured difference in the national order of poverty through the governing of doubts (as explained in the preceding chapter). To situate this bureaucratic production of in/difference, I return to the notion of "self-infliction" in this last chapter.

Constructing self-infliction to stabilize the national order of poverty

Lukas and I sit next to each other—a bit too close for my preferences. We discuss a case whose casefile I have examined beforehand. The case of a person being born here, lived here for 30 years. Faced with an expulsion. I ask myself if I am starting to make judgments about when it is alright to exclude people due to their poverty and when not. 30 years here, grown up here: unjustified. Only recently arrived: justified. How easily we get used to certain aspects of

⁵⁷ With moral order and in line with bureaucratic ethics (Eckert, 2020b), I refer to Fassin's (2012b, 2015) understanding of morality as norms and values deeply embedded in social relations and power structures that guide human behavior and shape judgments of right and wrong.

banishing poverty; how quickly also I tend to normalize and alter my frames of justice, my ethics.

I ask Lukas about the role it plays in their procedure that the person concerned lived here their entire life: “As an executive authority, we are executors, we do not deal with political issues. This is clearly separated in Switzerland... You are from the Dominican Republic, that means the FNIA applies.... But of course, we do a case-by-case examination [Einzelfallgerechtigkeit]... We are already aware that he never had contact with the Dominican Republic. But it's about political discourses. We don't do that. We see if it is suitable [under international humanitarian law].” I am once again astonished by the pragmatism. And, as many times before, by the nuances added to this pragmatism: “It may be that jurisprudence states who attended school here will not be expelled. But that has to be done by the jurisdiction—not by us. We are not allowed to do that. We do not participate in the design of policies. We are executors. We execute the laws.”

I need a break, tell him so. I smoke two cigarettes in front of the glass building. The heat of the summer and the cigarettes do not help my head and I think about a conversation with Flavio. Flavio told me the day before that social services help “to get a picture of the case and to determine whether the reception is self-inflicted and what are the chances to get out of it. They are closer to the people. They have more information.” But what kind of information does the CMO want? It sometimes seems to me they are not necessarily interested in the social work viewpoint.

Back with Lukas, I ask him the question that popped up in my head before concerning his estimation of the information received by social service. He answers lengthily: “Social services are only an accompanying office. The person is responsible for integration. We encourage them to better cooperate with the social services. With the objective of the right direction: integration... Social assistance should never be chronic. If social assistance is permanent, the disability insurance must take over. There is no reason for permanent social assistance reception. [...] We simply show our expectations and the control possibilities. And then we incentivize the person; we menace and warn until they do it the right way.” (edited fieldnote, CMO, 2021)

During fieldwork, I realized that the decision-making procedures regarding revocation b/orders often do not concern the actual cases of expulsion or the aim of expelling more people. Instead, they relate to making expulsions, and particularly the case-making behind the decisions, more effective and efficient. As visible in the encounter with Lukas, focusing on the effectiveness and efficiency of procedures permits governing doubts through the intersection of the techniques outlined above. Returning to the game metaphor, Lukas, on the one hand, underlines the importance of the information and, on the other hand, interprets the information received. In order to evaluate self-infliction, to evaluate whether “menacing and warning” has had the desired effect, Lukas engages in the question of what he thinks the other administrations are doing. He underlines the importance of this information in order to demonstrate the self-

infliction necessary to translate the case of receiving social assistance into “objective” language, to materialize state power and the rule of law. In order to do so, he interprets the information by underlining that social services are “closer to the people”. The relationality of the decision-making process that makes Flavio and the other casemakers of the CMO dependent on the information by social services also fulfills here an important aspect of governing doubts. In the task of translating file notes into bureaucratic paperwork, the communications and evaluations provided by social services serve to justify the decisions taken. They also serve to de-responsibilize CMOs and prevent any questioning of their own practices.

Lukas enunciated the CMO’s role as executers of the law, and the rule of law is both an ethics and an ethos. In order to translate the human life of a person into bureaucratic paperwork, he engages with documentation and incentivizes the person to “become integrated” through informing, menacing, and warning them. He emphasizes that he makes an measure in line with bureaucratic standards and references to the law. It is the responsibility of the courts to decide on the importance of a person’s school career (and entire life) in Switzerland—not his. Finally, he bases his judgement of the situation on the communications of social services. However, the fact that the person does not become independent from social assistance is not (necessarily) the fault of the social service. It is, instead, the fault of the person. The social services are only an “accompanying office.” The CMO is not responsible for the revocation order either. Only the person is left to blame. They are “unteachable” and their troubles self-inflicted despite being assisted, counseled, helped, and incentivized (see also Kalir, 2019b). Here, one can decipher the three techniques of governing doubts in co-constructing self-infliction

This importance of self-infliction also influences the routines of social services as illustrated in the following fieldnote regarding an interview with a social worker:

After an initial uneasiness due to Michaela’s statement that we can use the informal “Du,” since we would do the same if having met partying, I progressively relax and we talk about her counseling activities toward the recipients of social assistance. She perceives counseling as the most important part of her work, even if she states that she has fewer and fewer resources to dedicate to this aspect of her daily work. When talking to people who might be affected by the consequences of receiving social assistance, she underlines that, “I apply the integration criteria on the case. Which one of these criteria needs to be improved?” She waves with her hand at the flyer between us. The flyer stems from the CMO and is intended for social workers to hand out to recipients without Swiss citizenship. As we discussed before, her social service uses it for the initial interview [Erstgespräch] with the persons concerned to “be transparent about the possible consequence of receiving social assistance.”

She brings up the case of a 50-year-old person who has health and psychological problems, in whose case she received questions from the CMO. She pulls out the questions from the folder she has prepared for our talk. She continues that the person, “had many stigmatizing experiences. It was like they couldn't get out of social assistance. And then came the letter from the CMO and they came and asked, ‘What can I do?’ So, I asked him what path he wanted to take and showed him what offers were available and what would fit. The main importance was that they do not fail again in participating in a program we offer... Language was also a point in this case, and I agreed with them on a German course for A2. That's not only good for showing to the CMO but also good for the job.” In addition, she tells me that she cared with them that they pay their bills on time and that they initiate a repayment of his debts, “because debts are very bad in the eyes of the CMO.” She stops for a moment, sighs and says, “With Swiss people, we have more resources for other questions. We can focus on other things in the personal counseling.”

After a detour regarding their yearly resource-intensive reassessment of diligence, we come back to the subject of self-infliction. “Self-infliction,” Michaela continues, “is not an issue for us, neither in decisions about whether the person can access social assistance, nor when they are reclaiming social assistance, nor in anything else. It used to be more of an issue when the whole thing was still called poor relief [Fürsorge].” I think about the CMO and how there it is mostly called poor relief and not social assistance, asking myself what implications that might hold for legitimizing a link between deportation and self-infliction. “So far, it hasn't become an issue again either, except for Question 1 of the questionnaires from the CMO.” How would they deal with it? “As factually as possible and as benevolently as possible... In a troublesome case, we write a lot more, we write the whole thing. Certainly, don't just write ‘It's a lazy bastard.’ The CMO wants to have people out. That's why you have to think very carefully about what you write. But there are certainly strong differences between the social services. The social services in [another city] is very bad. You hear that again and again from the clients.” She exhales and, in connection with our discussion regarding the lack of resources for counseling, she underlines, “I spend more time on the weaker ones. That is my understanding of social work.” (edited fieldnote, social service, 2021)

This fieldnote with Michaela illustrates how the procedures stimulated through migration law and driven by CMOs is disseminated to the social services. The interlinkages between different offices and the information exchanged and accumulated narrow the distances between offices, rendering them more intimate. The difference stemming from the national order of poverty diffuses to uphold the laborious task of producing indifference. Michaela illustrates how the different offices and actors implicated in the task of constructing and administering “poor others” must be accountable to political programs targeting non-nationals and the neoliberal organization of poverty. The consequent interior b/ordering is expressed in the ideological and practical targeting of the boundaries of society. Society becomes the object of political interventions and policing (Khosravi, 2009; Lavanchy, 2015), and this reciprocal conditioning

of difference and indifference in the moral administration of “poor others” reveals the banality of evil.

Muehlebach (2012: 18) talks in this context of the production of a “soulful citizenry.” By using the term “moral neoliberal,” she investigates the connection between a liberal market economy and conceptualizations of the common good in moral and ethical terms. She thereby links the term ethical citizenship to the intimate space of a “welfare society” that creates a link between citizens and the state through street-level bureaucrats (Muehlebach, 2012: 43). In line with Shahram Khosravi (2010: 115), I thus observe a dialectic process in which the construction of the right citizenry is enmeshed in the production of the “anti-citizen.” This anti-citizen is:

An individual who exists outside the ordinary regulatory system, one who violates established norms and who may constitute a risk to the safety and quality of life of “normal” citizens. [...] Someone who constitutes a risk to the wellbeing, virtue, values and norms of society. (Khosravi, 2010: 116)

In the context of “anti-citizenry,” the means of proving (non)belonging is ethical citizenship (Muehlebach, 2012: 18). This can be aligned to Walters’ (2004: 256) elaboration on domopolitics that “mobilizes images of home, a natural order of states and people, of us and them, in such a way as to suppress and deny [...] subjectivities.” Ethical citizenship, a process of proving worthy enough to belong, is part of both a continuous process of nation-state building and of the national order of poverty. It is self-infliction that connects the structural and the individual, the community and the entrepreneurial self. Indeed, it is self-infliction that helps situate the banality of evil within the national order of poverty and that expresses the morality of state power. Self-infliction connects difference with indifference. Self-infliction is where borders are negotiated, where the boundaries of the “moral community” are constantly (re)defined (Anderson, 2021) by focusing on the individual as an “(un)ethical” citizen (Muehlebach, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2019).

However, this diffusion of bureaucratic tasks, the (re)production of difference and of an ethical citizenry through interior b/ordering, is not uncontested or unquestioned. As visible in the fieldnote above with Michaela, social workers are not passive when confronted with the colonialization of space and resources but react to and interpret what the other office might want. Civil servants adapt their procedures, change the way they allocate resources, and make choices regarding priorities. They might challenge indifference.

The morality of self-infliction

I sit with Brigitte at her desk and stare at the dark violet of her desktop picture, my eyes follow the emblem of the feminist strike of the June 14th. She shrugs to underline her skepticism regarding the architecture of her working place, before narrowing her focus by declaring that “the latter, the clients, have completely disappeared from view and much more attention should be paid to them.” She exemplifies this by the power of attorney, the main subject of our previous discussion (see Part Two, Chapter 5): “The power of attorney has been bothering us social workers for a long time, but that doesn’t meet with much interest in the administration. Take, for example, the last training we had a few weeks ago [where I was present as well]. All the focus was on the dispositions and their form. Not on procedures themselves. We talk always about process-oriented, but in practice I do not see anything of this.” For her, this is a central problem; there needs to be much more questioning of the procedure and the inclusion of those affected, “that would be in the interest of the clients. But it is convenient to exclude those who should be the focus of interest. And at the end, it is a question of money.” And, for her, the power of attorney is unnecessary anyway, as if there were criminal proceedings (e.g., because of the unlawful reception of social assistance), she can obtain all the necessary information anyway. Regarding the voluntary nature of the signature, she observes two basic reactions of the clients: “They need help and therefore they sign everything anyway. And the others just don’t realize what it implies... I mean we even get the visa bills. We see everything of their life!” (edited fieldnote, social service, 2021)

While I have previously included this fieldnote with Brigitte in Part Two (see Chapter 5), it is worth reiterating a part of it here, as Brigitte allows me to locate the practice of doubting within the organization of poverty. Doubting can be considered a questioning of her own practices as embedded within wider unequal relationships and within the organizational setting of the social service as an institution of social control. Brigitte explicitly engages with the societal orders that form part of her job. She points to structures of inequalities that prevail in her daily work and in the organization of poverty. She reflects on her privilege by stating that “I would never sign something like that.” She acknowledges the inequalities that form part of her daily work, inequalities of which she is part, and she expresses and names these inequalities. These are doubts, and one can see here the practice of doubting.

The people I have encountered are not “passive bureaucrats” (Graeber, 2015) or the Weberian ideal type of the impersonal and rational public servant (Weber, 1999) narrow-mindedly applying the laws. Instead, they individually, collectively, or organizationally create techniques to deal with the everyday messiness, absurdity, and restrictiveness of their work. Such techniques allow them to understand contradictions, according to Berliner et al (2016: 3), as “opposed forces [that] may operate on an individual level.” Techniques allow people working in administrations to come to terms with contradictions and contradictory beliefs. This renders

their work seemingly less “absurd,” enabling their doubts to be governed efficiently and effectively. However, the bureaucratization of social services allows governing doubts to prevent them from becoming effectuated within the procedures, the ethos, and the ethics of offices. This becomes more visible in the following interview note and is linked to the question of how social workers and social services deal with the coupling of migration control and the governance of poverty. In other words: How do they cope with effectively becoming border guard proxies?

I am sitting at a table facing three social workers. We come to talk about the different interpretations between social services and the CMO regarding the duty to cooperate [Mitwirkungspflicht] and the duty to control damage [Schadensminderungspflicht]. Nicole explains that, in the past, she was usually not able to evaluate the duty to cooperate at all because, with 140 cases to follow, she simply had hardly any time for discussions with and counseling of “clients.” This is now different since the restructuring of workloads: now each social worker has a little more than half of the “cases” they had before. But, as I find out later, with the reduction of cases per person, administrative tasks have increased, especially concerning the yearly evaluation of indigence. Here, still, Nicole adds, proactive clients are of course more likely to be perceived as fulfilling their duty to cooperate. We also discuss the ambivalent position of the reports to the migration office and the information they give to the clients (or potential clients) in advance. Andrea explains, “Although this exerts pressure, we do not want this, but it is about a transparent case management in which we point out the possible consequences that the reception of social assistance might entail.” All three underline now, in a heated debate, that it is very disturbing that this pressure from the procedures of the CMO often leads to the discontinuation of programs of work integration—even to inpatient psychological treatment. In addition, the CMO always asks for prognoses, which Nicole underlines, “We, as social workers, do not make. As a matter of principle. Because so much uncertainty is associated with a prognosis. How should we evaluate this? We do not know the development of the labor market. We are not clairvoyants [Hellseher].” Andrea explains how she deals with this: “I only write a positive prognosis for people who ‘cooperate well.’ If this is not the case, I state that a prognosis is not possible for people.”

...

After some detours, they engage with the ways in which their daily work is changing due to the reporting obligation and the possible consequences for people without Swiss citizenship. Andrea exhales, “In the case of people who could lose their residence permit, we focus no longer necessarily on ‘sustainable economic integration’ but rather on entering the primary labor market as quickly as possible.” This, Andrea goes on, inevitably leads to more precarious working conditions, and often these people end up back on social assistance. Nicole takes up the topic and adds, “We have also had people who have dropped out of an apprenticeship in order to take on a part-time job with better pay or who have not taken part in programs because they would incur additional costs on their social assistance account.” Noemi, who had remained mostly silent until now, only nodding from time to time, clears her throat and adds

with a low voice, “We also observe that many people are afraid of consequences and therefore enter into employment contracts that would probably not have been accepted under the previous situation, and we would have advised them to keep searching for a job.” (edited interview notes, social service, 2020)

I have repeatedly encountered such reflexive moments in which social workers express their awareness of the implications of diffusing migration control tasks, of the shifting and flexible ways in which interior b/ordering works. They express unease concerning the tasks they are meant to fulfill. Importantly, this unease is also geared at the institution and modalities of the regulation of social assistance as a site of neoliberal bureaucratization. However, the consequences of these reflexive moments do not lead to doubts that would question the very moral and neoliberal bureaucratization that facilitates this diffusion of tasks. The social workers above, as with many others I encountered, are aware of the inequalities that are part of their daily actions but do not see themselves as partaking in (re)producing them. Instead, they change their practices and aim at reinserting people menaced by revocation orders as quickly as possible into the labor market. They may even find other ways of paying parts of social assistance without having to declare these payments as actual social assistance, which would necessitate reporting them to the CMO. This is contestation within the manifestations and processes of state power, within bureaucracy.

Here, I can point empirically to the fact that neoliberal bureaucratization, and bureaucracy more generally, is not an evil that can be pinpointed but a process in which the social workers as much as caseworkers in CMOs are implicated. This is the everyday of the state. Bureaucracy and the state are not the “coldest of all cold monsters” (Nietzsche, 2012: 34). Bureaucracies consist of humans with uncertainties who face dilemmas (Lipsky, 2010). Moreover, by investigating the moral order, I can decipher how these individual practices of doubting are bureaucratically suppressed by techniques to govern doubts.

Governing doubts, (re)producing the moral order

The people I met in social services and CMOs are concerned with being accountable to the legal, procedural, and political frames within which they are embedded. They need to be answerable to the orders provided by these frames and reach decisions in accordance with them. Hence, they apply techniques that govern the doubts that would place this accountability in peril. Documentation, rule orientation, and de-responsibilization are techniques that are applied

in order to be accountable within the materiality of state power, within the legality of stateness, and as a representative of the state. This depicts the moral order. Gregor refers to the morality of state power—or this is how I interpret him—when he says “the decision might be political. But not the intentions. We want to perform good work, I did not meet any ideologists. Neither here nor in the CMO there is a clear mindset [Geisteshaltung] of control” (fieldnote, 2022).

The governing of doubts as expressed through the transversality of the morality of state power therefore serves to dehumanize an altogether exceptionally human invention: bureaucracy. This perspective also allows me, as mentioned in the methodological section, to refrain from diabolizing my research participants and instead reveal their humanity. They are also ordered, also part of a normalization of the neoliberal self who must daily prove their ability to undertake what they are tasked to. Bureaucracy can, after all, uphold the illusion of rationality by making doubts disappear through the techniques encountered when turning the lens of b/ordering toward those charged with executing racist and neoliberal laws and policies. Hence, techniques are structural as much as they are individual. By addressing doubts and their government in bureaucracies, my analysis can be characterized as a political intervention humanizing bureaucracies and state power and visibilizing contradictions and contestations.

The morality of state power facilitates administrators in not having to act according to uncertainties and (possible) doubts. Instead, this morality allows officials to govern such doubts. There is no need to admit doubts, no necessity to provide reasons for the contradictions and cognitive dissonances that are part of the unexpectedness and messiness of the world. People working in administrations have a considerable workload they have to fulfill and are dependent on a salary. Techniques of governing doubts allow them to “do their job,” a job that, it is often claimed, “somebody else would if they didn’t.” Hence, the morality of state power enables governing doubts and suppressing contradictions while prioritizing efficiency and effectiveness. The morality of state power provides ethics that are necessary to cope with the orders of bureaucratic offices’ field of action, address the diffusion of tasks, and portray the offices’ work as in the service of justice and the commonweal. This morality translates the world into an abstract representation rooted in (neo)liberalism and a national order of poverty. It is a production of knowledge in which knowledge is in the service of a positivism that grasps the world as a set of correlations that can be explained, measured, and changed according to historically and linearly grown parameters. People employed in CMOs and social services must perform these translations of a chaotic reality while remaining accountable to the frames within

which their practices take place. They must act within the morality of state power, upholding its illusion.

Apart from the symbolic and physical violence perpetuated by the national order of things, I also delineated an epistemic violence.⁵⁸ The epistemic violence stemming from this morality of state power is evidenced by the fact that the banishment of poverty and the construction of “poor others” is not viewed as political. Instead, the racist, classist, and sexist characteristics of state power are normalized and naturalized by portraying individual decisions as just. It is self-infliction that connects the structural and the individual, the community and the entrepreneurial self. Indeed, it is self-infliction that helps to situate the banality of evil within the national order of poverty and that expresses the morality of state power. Self-infliction connects difference with indifference. Self-infliction is where borders are negotiated, where the boundaries of the “moral community” are constantly (re)defined (Anderson, 2021) by focusing on the individual as an “(un)ethical” citizen (Muehlebach, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2019).

This moralization allows state power to be de-politicized and fosters the pretense that the morality of state power is ontological: natural and indicative of reality itself. The morality of state power renders poverty an individual, and the nation-state system a technical issue. This allows the techniques of governing doubts to be applied, erases the humanity of bureaucracy, and (re)produces difference, inequalities, and hierarchization. No one is left to blame other than the individuals who the state contends are morally responsible for being poor. Deportability is the only logical and reasonable consequence for not being Swiss and affected by poverty. No humanity of bureaucracy remains—only administrative procedures, administrative rights, and administrative decisions. If the government of poverty and controlling migration is morally admissible, ontologically moral, and perceived as such, all blame can be leveled only at the individual. The offices and the people working there have ordered themselves according to the national order of poverty, assumed the dissemination of tasks, and adapted their routines and procedures. For the people who perform the state, all that remains is the unquestionably justified moral obligation to punish the unteachable “poor other.” In the name of the state. In the name of the nation. In the name of order.

⁵⁸ Epistemic violence, intimately linked to the colonality of knowledge (see footnote 5), is a term that describes the harm caused by the imposition of one's own worldview or knowledge onto others, often resulting in the erasure or exclusion of the other's knowledge, beliefs, or experiences. It is a form of violence that occurs in situations where one person or group holds power over another, and uses that power to define what counts as legitimate knowledge or ways of knowing (see Mignolo, 2011; Mohanty, 1993).

CONCLUSION

J'aime les gens qui doutent, les gens qui trop écoutent leur cœur se balancer
J'aime les gens qui disent et qui se contredisent et sans se dénoncer
J'aime les gens qui tremblent, que parfois ils ne semblent capables de juger
J'aime les gens qui passent moitié dans leurs godasses et moitié à côté

J'aime leur petite chanson
Même s'ils passent pour des cons

J'aime ceux qui paniquent, ceux qui sont pas logiques, enfin, pas "comme il faut"
(Anne Sylvestre, 1977)⁵⁹

⁵⁹ extract from the song 'les gens qui doutent':

I like people who doubt, people who listen too much to their heart swinging,
I like people who speak and contradict themselves and without denouncing themselves,
I like people who tremble, that sometimes they only seem able to judge,
I like people who are half in their shoes and half beside them,
I like their little song,
Even if they look like fools, I like those who panic, those who are not logical, well, not "as they should be."
(Own translation)

Throughout this thesis, I was concerned to shed not only light but also doubt on my own research procedures and writing as well as on the procedures of bureaucracies implicated in enforcing and co-constructing revocation b/orders. By mobilizing the concepts of bureaucratic ethics and the relationality of decision-making processes (Eckert, 2020b; Muehlebach, 2012), I depicted the morality that is necessarily part of b/ordering “poor others.” Social services are concerned with people affected by “poverty” and charged with “correcting” them by implementing specific formal and informal tactics. CMOs, on the other hand, are tasked with evaluating whether a person without Swiss nationality who is receiving social assistance is entitled to remain in Switzerland and apply specific tactics to assess this. The objects of these interventions are political subjects that are reconceptualized as (anti-)citizens: they have rights to social protection and counseling in return for duties of social obligation and social responsibility. Due to the entanglements of migration control and governing poverty, state officials must adapt to new circumstances and, in administering state policies and laws in an effective and efficient manner, manage substantial moral and ethical questions.

My thesis reveals that this is not a smooth process. Indeed, decision-making is not straightforward but riddled with uncertainties, conflicts, and unintended consequences as effects of encountering the everyday realities of implementing the national order of poverty (Alberti, 2021; Das and Poole, 2004; Muehlebach, 2012; Vohnsen, 2017). Hence, my research was not confronted with a coherent and linear state or bureaucracy but with fragmented state power in constant evolution in which contradictions form integral elements. The people working in bureaucracies might perceive uncertainties and encounter dilemmas when applying the laws to the people they target. The question posed was how it is possible to construct as just the potential deportation of people affected by poverty without Swiss nationality. I have therefore demonstrated that different governmental techniques are present in order to prevent doubts from emerging and manifesting. Doubts are the expression of reflecting on one’s own practices and participations within sociopolitical structures and whether such practices and participations can be considered “good” and “just”. The techniques to govern such doubts are therefore formal and informal, individual and structural.

Each article has investigated a distinctive method of how the entanglement of migration control and governing poverty manifest and how these are linked to state power. Each article is also concerned with a different perspective on state power and a different technology applied to administer “poor others.” I have exhibited how *caselaw* can be analyzed as a technology of government that provides legitimacy for a state’s prerogative power. Rule orientation as a

technique to govern doubts allows civil servants to morally legitimize their actions and provides guidelines for decision-making. *Paperwork* represents both a materialization of state power and a technology for producing the anti-citizen. Through the technique of documentation, civil servants can address individual uncertainties that might arise within the decision-making process and align their own actions with organizational and bureaucratic ethics. Finally, I have argued that the *relationality* of decision-making is a technology of government that allows responsibility to be diffused, creating an impersonal and collective authority. By applying the technique of *de-responsibilization*, only the individual targeted by the decision-making process remains to be held responsible.

By adding further detail to the articles and proposing a recursive anthropology of the state imbedded in an ontology of contradictions and my “search for the other” (see Part One), I have revealed that techniques of governing doubts allow bureaucrats to individually manage uncertainties and erase them from official decisions and orders. Combining techniques of documentation, rule orientation, and de-responsibilization renders the entanglement of governing poverty and controlling migration efficacious. The diffusion of tasks within and between different bureaucratic offices results in the ordering of bureaucratic procedure in relation to civil servants’ own practices of b/ordering “poor others.” This is the condition for and consequence of (re)producing the national order of poverty. As I have illustrated, the practice of doubting implies a reflective moment on one’s uncertainties concerning what is “true” or “good.” Preventing doubts implies a conclusion that, although one might be uncertain of one’s actions, they are for the greater good and serve truth. This is visible in all three techniques of governing doubts. Therefore, I have argued that a transversal morality can be observed here. The morality of state power is transversal because it frames state action and stateness as being just and good (Eckert, 2020b; Muehlebach, 2012; Vohnsen, 2017) when the procedures are efficient, effective, and formalized (Hibou, 2015) and when they provide accountability to the legal and political sphere (Alberti, 2021; Ashenden, 1996; Dean, 2010; Pigg et al., 2018). The illusion of a coherent, fair, neutral, and impersonal “state” and bureaucracy is created and upheld. In this moral order, only the individual can possibly be responsible for being affected by poverty. The authority of this morality allows the techniques of governing doubts to become efficacious and is transversal to all the three technologies explored in this thesis’ articles.

Preying on poverty – Hunting for justice

In the introduction, I used the notion of the “illegality industry” to situate the different offices and actors involved in the emergence of revocation b/orders. I now return to this notion in order to conclude my findings and reflect on the limitations. Ruben Andersson (2016: 1059) used the notion of the “illegality industry” to investigate, with a focus on the externalization of borders and migration control, why “a seemingly failed response keeps perpetuating itself despite evidence showing that it does not ‘work’ in the way it is ‘advertised’ to electorates.” My findings stimulate a similar picture regarding interior b/ordering. Andersson’s work accurately articulates my finding of how bureaucracies and the civil servants working within them are b/ordered, ordering themselves in the context of the national order of poverty. Their work concerns not so much effectively and efficiently “deporting” people who receive social assistance but making the bureaucratic procedures more efficient and effective, ordering bureaucracy and people working in administrations. While one effect of this is the disciplining of impoverished non-nationals by relying on a wide array of technologies, actors, knowledge, and techniques, another is the disciplining and production of a docile workforce in bureaucracies. Considerable amounts of time are necessary by caseworkers and social workers to “resolve” the tasks that stem from entangling migration control and governing poverty.

Another important aspect of Andersson’s (2014) writings is that people are neither legal nor illegal (see also De Genova, 2002; Kalir, 2019b). Instead, they are illegalized, made illegal, through the illegality industry. It can therefore be similarly stated for my research that people are made deportable. This industry’s production is described by Andersson as resembling a “hunter and prey” relationship (2014). Andersson also observes a racialization of those targeted while moving towards the European borders (see also Green 2012). In the case of my research, people are made poor, deviant, and racialized, their every ostensible insufficiency deemed self-inflicted through bureaucratic procedures that implement policies and laws.

People become “poor others” by passing through offices according to decision-making procedures geared toward their deportability. This was not sufficiently addressed in my thesis, although I tried to do justice to this process by providing glimpses of it and theoretically attempting to account for what postcolonial, feminist, queer, and Black thinkers and activists have outlined in depth. The consequences of this process for the people targeted was not the focus of my thesis. Instead, I focused on bureaucratic procedures and what such procedures do to the people in charge of partaking in dehumanizing, racist, and classist political programs, as

well as how these procedures affect bureaucratic offices. However, I did not provide a nuanced analysis of what the national order of poverty and the administration as “poor others” implies for the lives of those not part of the bureaucratic apparatus but its target—its “prey,” to remain with Ruben Andersson’s term.

Focusing more on the people directly targeted by revocation b/orders, however, would be a worthwhile and politically engaging matter. Such further research would be instructive in terms of the colonial practices through which state power facilitates constructing “poor others” and portrays them as “lazy” and “unteachable”. This focus would also be useful to understanding how people outside bureaucracy react to and counteract these de-humanizing procedures. Can utopias be found in this dystopian setting? How to go beyond the suffering subject and provide glimpses of hope? These hopes and utopias *do* exist, and they will always exist. Analyzing doubts regarding bureaucratic procedures, their functions and ethics, as well as on my own writing, analysis, theory-building, and research, can be read as conspiring with all the people suffering under the normalization and reinforcement of state power. Questioning the authority with which the “truth” and morality of state power, just as those of academia, are upheld represents for me a destabilization of the “evil” of indifference in all its mundanity.

Acknowledging contradictions – Undermining indifference

A step in this direction of destabilizing the morality of producing in/difference is to reveal that not only do the “direct” prey of state power suffer from authority but also the bureaucrats themselves—although of course in highly divergent manners. Preying on poverty for the sake of “justice” is not without effect on the hunters. Undermining my own authority as an ethnographer—reserving the judgment of whether I have achieved doing so to the reader—should be read as part of the same struggle. This struggle is for a world without authority—a utopia of course, but one that displays the effects of authority. In the words of Emma Goldmann

Yet the State is nothing but a name. It is an abstraction. Like other similar conceptions—nation, race, humanity—it has no organic reality. To call the State an organism shows a diseased tendency to make a fetish of words. (1940: 8)

Unveiling the procedures surrounding revocation b/orders and its dehumanizing effects through the manifestations of state power constitutes an empirical and political claim rather

than a normative one. The morality of state power and the techniques to govern doubts fetishize the state and its authority.

In Shahram Khosravi's (2010) words, counteracting this would entail an unconditional hospitality, one in which the dialectic between "us" and "them" is abolished, where there is no conditionality. Conditionality is, as I have demonstrated, the principal aspect in the functioning of governing poverty as much as of migration control. Conditionality is the pre-condition for self-infliction. Hospitality, however, is only real when there is no conditionality: "Unconditional hospitality entails recognizing the other's right to have rights – the basic right of human rights" (Khosravi, 2010: 129). These rights should not be understood in a legal sense but in the ontological sense of radical difference emphasized by Donna Haraway (1999: 300): "Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination." "Rights" in the legal sense refer to the legal entitlements that individuals and groups have in relation to the state or other authorities. However, Haraway's ontological perspective on rights concerns the fundamental differences that are shaped by historical systems of domination and oppression. In other words, these differences are not simply personal preferences or individual choices but are deeply embedded in the social structures and power relations that shape the lives of individuals and groups in profound ways. Therefore, considering rights from an ontological perspective concerns not simply legal entitlements but the recognition and affirmation of these fundamental differences and the dismantling of the systems of domination and oppression that have historically shaped them. Recognizing and valuing these differences allows working toward a more just and equitable society in which all individuals and groups can live with dignity and respect.

In this sense, the most questionable element of the nation-state is that it asserts an order (the national order of poverty) that cannot exist. Order is a wholly inadequate term—I have repeatedly underlined the messiness of social reality and of bureaucratic procedures. Order and the authority that projects it as truth, or morally just, is as much a phantasy as the nation-state—but a highly persuasive one. An ontology of contradictions, as I propose here, is a vision of the world that is contradictory rather than linear or flat. Contradictions and tensions are fundamental to social reality. People are therefore necessarily contradictory, and doubts are crucial to recognizing these contradictions. Adapting Andersson's (2014) words, to act otherwise is to prey on poverty for the greater good of hunting justice.

The radicality of doubting

The civil servants this thesis focuses on seem all too human from the perspective of doubts and the elaboration of how, in academia, personal life, and bureaucracy, humans constantly regulate doubts embedded in an ontology of contradiction. With what Tess Lea (2021) has labeled “desiring bureaucracy,” one might glimpse how governing doubts is present as a human condition. Perhaps bureaucracy has only managed to take the governing of doubts to the extremes. Governing doubts is a core ingredient of bureaucratic life. Indeed, a self-regulating, aspiring self-entrepreneur might desire what bureaucracy has managed to do.

By applying doubts to my analysis, I instantiated that the caring left and controlling right hands of the state are considerably more intimate than often presumed (Bourdieu, 2004). The intimacies between CMOs and social services in desiring bureaucracy through the techniques of governing doubts shed further light on the bureaucratic production of difference (Eckert, 2020a). The morality encountered in the administration of “poor others” exhibits how new and intimate links between different bureaucratic offices are reproduced and how this is visible through the b/ordering of their own ethos and ethics. This intimate link and the morality of state power allow the state officials to decide on human life within a framework they perceive not only as objective and efficient but righteous. This framing often stands in stark contrast to the individual aspirations of those implicated in governing the social. Nevertheless, they contribute to its stabilization and the reproduction of state practices that hierarchize, differentiate, and discriminate against people due to the very categorizations of the nation-state system.

In this thesis, I disclosed how the successful governing of doubts is an intrinsic element of legitimizing bureaucracies’ effects on reproducing inequality while offering points of entry for contestation, appropriation, and resistance. I argued that doubting can be circumscribed “when social actors become conscious of their inconsistencies, whether it happens alone or in the midst of social interactions, ‘self-awareness’ takes place” (Berliner et al., 2016: 5). This process of doubting, which Berliner calls “reflexivity-in-action,” allows for the creation of self-knowledge and feelings concerning the self. Berliner links contradictions explicitly to questions of moral belief. This linkage suggests, for me, that techniques to govern doubts are a masterful structural and governmental arrangement to create coherency from contradictions.

I have attempted to nuance this by writing doubts, by making them visible at least in my fieldnotes and methodology. Desiring bureaucracy is therefore not reserved to bureaucratic

offices alone but is visible also in my research, writing process, and in neoliberal academia more generally. Therefore, one might advance a plea for radical doubting that considers not only material and discursive privileges but also the privilege of de-responsibilizing actions and being in a world built on the debris of coloniality. This debris leaves more traces than is often acknowledged, including within academia. Doubting might be a re-politicization of state power and its morality as well as a de-fetishization of the authority perpetuated in the *pensée d'état*.

Conclusively, while one might find humanity in individual choices and acts, the effects on the everyday lives of those bureaucracy bears down upon is anything other than human. Instead, the governing of doubt is the punishment of poverty, the societal legitimization of which has tangible yet diffuse effects that mark countless lives. This is how I sought to make sense of what feminists and Black theorists and activists have long called for by criticizing the racist (Mbembe, 2017; Mills, 2017; Moreton-Robinson, 2015), sexist (Brown, 2006; Das, 2007), and classist (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Muehlebach, 2012) authority at the heart of (neo)liberal statehood.

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