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Zurich**<sup>UZH</sup>

# Experiencing and Negotiating Everyday Liminality - A Case Study of Young Provisionally Admitted Foreigners in Switzerland

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

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## Abstract

Several researchers have observed a progressive securitization of migration in Europe as well as an intra-European disharmony regarding the admission of refugees. While nation-states increasingly perceive individuals in need of protection as a threat to their societies, a meticulous examination of every asylum application has seemingly become necessary to efficiently filter out ‘true’ from ‘false’ asylum applicants. Hereby, numerous studies have recognized that the detention and isolation in asylum centers significantly affect their lives while being left uncertain about the decision of their case assessments. Categorized as asylum seekers, they experience strongly restricted legal rights and find themselves in a legal in-between or liminal condition after arriving in a potential host state. While some researchers have recognized that asylum applicants develop strategies to actively cope or resist their legal exclusion by building up forms of agency, fewer studies have examined personal narratives about their experiences beyond the asylum procedure. Hence, this master’s thesis attempts to examine the experiences of liminality of former asylum applicants along their life trajectories since their arrival in Switzerland. Thus, it explores liminality through the lens of legal geography to understand how and where provisionally accepted foreigners experience respectively negotiate the law as well as legal exclusion in their everyday lives. Based on the in-depth analysis of six provisionally admitted foreigners’ narratives, this thesis argues that the incorporation of the border and thus the imposed restriction of rights persistently appear in their daily routines even beyond the asylum procedure. However, it also asserts that these legal geographies are not just produced by a linear reaction between space and law but rather in a lived matrix where individuals constantly co-constitute them by developing strategies to negotiate their liminality.

## Keywords

*Borders, Liminality, Legal Geography, Asylum, Migration Governance, Migration Management, Agency, Situated Knowledge, Provisionally Admitted Foreigners, Switzerland*

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## Abbreviations

AFSJ	<i>Area of Freedom, Security and Justice</i>
AOZ	<i>Asyl-Organisation Zürich ('Asylum Organization Zurich')</i>
APPA	<i>Asyl- und Wegweisungspraxis ('Asylum and Expulsion Practice')</i>
CEAS	<i>Common European Asylum System</i>
CEC	<i>Commission of European Communities</i>
EASO	<i>European Asylum Support Office</i>
EFTA	<i>European Free Trade Association</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
EURODAC	<i>European Dactyloscopy</i>
FNIA	<i>Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration</i>
ORS	<i>Organization for Refugee Services</i>
SEM	<i>State Secretariat for Migration</i>
SIS	<i>Schengen Information System</i>
SKOS	<i>Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations</i>
TCN	<i>Third Country National</i>
VIS	<i>Visa Information System</i>
VVWAL	<i>Verordnung über den Vollzug der Weg- und Ausweisung sowie der Landesverweisung von ausländischen Personen ('Ordinance on the Execution of the Expulsion and Deportation as well as the Exile of Foreigners')</i>

# 1 Introduction

Contemporary European governments face a fundamental dilemma regarding the governance and management of refugees. On the one hand, from a humanitarian point of view, they hold the legal obligation to protect refugees from persecution (UNHCR, 2010). Accordingly, it is a European interest, as a community of shared values (European Union, 2021), to acknowledge the legal framework regarding the Human Rights and the Geneva Convention of Refugees (European Union, 2016). On the other hand, the prolonged fear of strangers reinforces itself through the increasing mistrust towards refugees arriving in Europe, whereby security and control have become increasing concerns (Huysmans, 2000), especially during exceptionally high migratory events (Athanasopoulos, 2017; Walter-Franke, 2018).

Since the introduction of the Schengen Area and the associated abolishment of internal European borders in order to enable the free movement of persons, governments have also expected the emergence of a security deficit that necessitates a common approach to reinforce the external European borders (Vradis *et al.*, 2019; Basilien-Gainche, 2015; Moreno-Lax, 2014). Accordingly, the *Common European Asylum System* (CEAS) increasingly focuses on the efficient assessment of individuals before they enter the Schengen Area in order to minimize their perceived risk to European societies (Walters, 2006; Amooore, 2013). However, Gill & Good (2019) argue that European governments still endeavor to determine on their own who may access and inhabit their national territory. These conflicting views result in a European politics of deterrence (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan, 2017; Hatton, 2020; Pörtner, 2017) where national governments indeed recognize the importance of asylum but at the same time try to elude admitting refugees (Gibney, 2014). Hence, even though the Dublin Regulation technically bears the question of responsibility regarding the admission of refugees (Schilliger, 2016), European governments introduce restrictive asylum policies in their asylum systems to prevent pull-factors that could, in turn, lead to more asylum applications (Hatton, 2020; Bernhard and Kaufmann, 2018). Pörtner (2017) also observes a similar trend in the context of asylum case assessments in Switzerland, which is a Schengen member state (European Commission, 2020a).

Asylum seekers who arrive in a potential host state are usually detained in reception facilities since they do not meet the entry conditions to legally reside in the Schengen Area (Arbogast, 2016). After applying for asylum, selected state officials scrutinize the credibility and plausibility of their narratives and ultimately decide on their eligibility for asylum during the asylum procedure (Shuman and Bohmer, 2012; Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012; Kagan, 2015). For arriving individuals in need of protection, this means that they find themselves in a situation where, on the one hand, they have lost or never had the legal protection of their country of origin or last residence. On the other hand, the securitization of migration discourse justifies

their detention (Mountz, 2011), which severely limits their legal rights (Maillet *et al.*, 2018). This results in a legal in-between condition, which translates into the notion of liminality (e.g. Van Genep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Thomassen, 2009; Andrews and Roberts, 2015).

While researchers have already addressed the impact of living in reception facilities while waiting for the asylum decision on asylum seekers' lives (e.g. O'Reilly, 2018; Jonzon *et al.*, 2015), there are also some studies that argue that (rejected) asylum seekers build up forms of agency to actively cope or resist the legal exclusion they experience (e.g. Ghorashi *et al.*, 2018; Ostendrap, 2016). Other studies have focused on the time span after the asylum procedure and stress that liminality continues to affect former asylum applicants' lives even beyond the asylum procedure (Wimark, 2019; Gold, 2019). However, I could barely find studies that specifically address the concept of liminality by means of personal narratives of individuals with refugee experience along their life trajectories.

Hence, this master's thesis primarily explores the experiences of six rejected asylum applicants that have received provisional admission to understand how they have experienced liminality during as well as after their asylum procedure in Switzerland. I, hereby, intend to understand liminality through the lens of legal geography to contribute to the exploration of "the co-constitutive relationship between people, space, and law" (Bennett and Layard, 2015, p. 406) in order to find out how and where their legal in-betweenness translates itself into their daily routines. I thus attempt to bring together the spatial and temporal aspects of migrant liminality in the Swiss asylum regime. Besides, I follow Ghorashi *et al.* (2018) and Ostendrap (2016) to explore how provisionally admitted foreigners actively negotiate liminality according to their own understanding to build up agency. By doing so, I address the following research question:

**How do young Provisionally Admitted Foreigners experience and negotiate Liminality along their Life Trajectories in Switzerland?**

I argue that my participants experience liminality directly after making their asylum claim in Switzerland. Their categorization as asylum seekers imposes a particular set of rights that is highly restricted compared to Swiss or EU citizens. They are spatially and temporally detained and experience strong surveillance as well as limited freedom that often lead to conflicts while being geographically and socially isolated. Because they were not able to convince their caseworkers during the asylum hearing they end up as rejected asylum seekers that can only stay in Switzerland on a provisional basis due to its non-refoulement policy. However, as provisionally admitted foreigners, they received an enhanced set of rights in comparison to the legal status of the asylum seeker. Nevertheless, this set of rights still highly restricts them. Therefore, they continue to live in a legally in-between condition which they continue to



experience in their daily lives wherever they are as their body defines their border between inclusion and exclusion. However, I assent to that they actively perceive their legal exclusion, which is why they actively start to form a sense of togetherness, pursue meaningful activities, and resist it by additionally creating spaces of inclusion to negotiate their liminality.

Because Switzerland is a Schengen member state, I also stress to situate the developments regarding the Swiss asylum regime in a European context. Therefore, I emphasize always keeping the following question in mind:

*How is the contemporary Swiss Asylum Regime developing as a part of the European Framework?*

## 1.1 Outline

This master's thesis is structured as follows. After defining some key terms, I first introduce the pillars of the CEAS and discuss them in the context of an increasing securitization of migration. I then illustrate how to re-imagine today's borders using the example of the Hotspot Approach that emerged as a tool for European migration management in 2015 following exceptionally high migratory movements to Europe (Walter-Franke, 2018). This helps to better understand the contemporary perception of migrants, strategies, and trends of the European asylum system. Afterward, I focus on how these developments, in turn, affect the national asylum procedures of individual European nation-states. I then address the research gap through the theoretical underpinnings of legal geography and the introduction of the notions of liminality, agency, and situated knowledge. They serve to illuminate the resulting effects of the currently observed trends regarding national asylum systems on the individuals in need of protection and lead to my research questions. Thereafter I explain the present research design as well as the considerations that influenced my methodological approach. Moreover, I also discuss the limitations of it. I then specifically refer to Switzerland's embedding in the CEAS on the one hand and offer an overview of the Swiss asylum regime on the other. Afterward, I present the results from my fieldwork in chronological order by following the life trajectories of my participants. In a subsequent discussion, I then link the results of my fieldwork back to the introduced literature to answer and reflect on my research questions. Finally, I summarize my findings as well as their scientific contribution and present an insight into future research ideas.

## 2 Scientific Embedding – The Issue

This chapter provides the contextual framework for this master's thesis and outlines the principles, trends, and challenges of contemporary European asylum policies. After introducing some fundamental terminologies, I review the structure of the CEAS through the literature of critical migration studies. Thereby, I explore its developments in times of an increased securitization of migration and exceptionally high migratory movements, using the Hotspot Approach as an illustrative example to re-imagine present-day borders. I then move on to explain the role of the individual Schengen member states and the architecture of their asylum reception infrastructures in the second part of the chapter.

### 2.1 Migration and the Definition of the Refugee

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State” (IOM, 2019, p. 137). Yet the concept of migration is often further specified in academic and political debates and divided into (voluntary) labor migration and forced migration. Although such a binary division is scabrous because it inevitably raises questions about where the threshold between voluntary and forced migration lies and how such a threshold could be defined (Schilliger, 2016), I should clarify that the present work focuses on people that had to forcefully leave their countries of origin and arrived in Switzerland to seek protection as refugees.

Historically, the notion of the refugee as such emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the century of refugees. This primarily results from the modern division of the world into nation-states and not, as one might think, from exceptionally increased dislocations of individuals (Adelman, 1999). Because nation-states have accomplished supremacy as the only legitimate political institutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Delaney, 2005) and due to the common establishment of passports as identity verification after the First World War, refugees became a category that could be, for the first time, distinguished from other migrants (Hatton, 2020). Refugees are therefore produced by modernity (Adelman, 1999).

Politically, contemporary nation-states usually define refugees as individuals who are subject to the criteria of the Geneva Convention on Refugees (IOM, 2019). It was drafted in 1951 to address the mass migration movements that resulted from the First and Second World War (Joly, 1996). Accordingly, anyone who has to flee their country of origin because of a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3) has the right to protection outside his

or her former country of residence (IOM, 2019). The implementation of the Geneva Convention and its refugee definition also allows to determine refugees individually based on alleged persecution (Joly, 1996). It is acknowledged as the groundwork of international refugee law (Nicholson and Kumin, 2017) and has been complemented by the 1967 New York Protocol to widen the geographical and temporal range of applicability of the Convention, allowing to also embed non-Europeans seeking international protection into the refugee definition (Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012). However, none of the aforementioned documents actually define what the word *protection* practically implies (Steven, 2013). Hence, as per Goodwin-Gill, protection has become “something of a term of art, obscuring the scope of an activity that ought to be fundamentally clear” (Goodwin-Gill, 1989, p. 6). This, in turn, means that nation-states are having certain room for interpretation regarding their protective duties as *protection* is not concisely defined (Steven, 2013).

Next to international treaties such as the Geneva Convention on Refugees or the 1967 New York Protocol, the establishment of national bodies responsible for the administration of those individuals who can be politically defined as refugees have institutionalized asylum (Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012). According to the IOM (2019), asylum is the granting of protection by a state on its territory to those individuals who have fled their country of origin or last residence. Individuals that are seeking international protection by applying for asylum in a potential host country are thus called *asylum seekers*. But due to its negative connotation, I use the notion of the asylum seeker with caution. Asylum also entails the permission for individuals to reside in a host state and is built on a principle of non-refoulement and humane treatment. Non-refoulement means that people seeking international protection cannot be returned to a country where they face imminent danger (IOM, 2019).

The next section explains how Europe, as a supranational construct consisting of numerous territorially organized nation-states (Gehring, 1998), addresses the issues of migration and asylum by focusing on the development of the CEAS.

## **2.2 Freedom for what Price? – The Common European Asylum System**

Since a detailed description of the formation of the European Union (EU) and the CEAS would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, I only introduce the fundamental pillars to explain how migration is governed and managed in Europe nowadays. This subchapter includes an overview of the Schengen Agreement in a time of increasingly securitized migration in Europe and how the Dublin Regulation sets the responsibility for people seeking protection. The emergence of the Hotspot Approach then illustrates how to re-imagine contemporary borders, especially when confronted with exceptional migratory movements.

### 2.2.1 Schengen in the Light of a Securitization Discourse

26 European countries, including Switzerland, are members of the Schengen Area (European Commission, 2020a). It features the abolition of internal borders, a common visa policy, and repressive protection of the external European border (Schilliger, 2016). The European Commission (2020b) writes that the free movement of persons allows EU citizens to travel within the Schengen Area, reside, and find work in any EU country without any particular formalities, and generally without being controlled at the internal borders. The abolition of internal borders thus addresses the pressure for an increasingly globalized world and facilitates the free circulation of goods and (certain) people (Vradis *et al.*, 2019). But at the same time, there is a securitization discourse that is pulling in the opposite direction as it is a major function of borders to protect its society from potential threats from the outside (Huysmans, 2000; Newman, 2003; Vradis *et al.*, 2019). Huysmans (2000) recognizes a progressive securitization of migration in Europe since the 1980s. Accordingly, migration supposedly endangers the “public order, cultural identity, and domestic and labour market stability” of European countries (Huysmans, 2000, p. 752).

Basilien-Gainche (2015) emphasizes that the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Schengen Convention of 1990 have specified common visa regulations and enhanced police and judicial cooperation. This aims to maintain security despite the abolition of internal borders within the Schengen Area. Hereby, Basilien-Gainche (2015) understands the objective of establishing an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) laid out in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 as the ambitious endeavor to complete the desired free movement of persons. The establishment of Frontex for the efficient implementation of the aspired border management in 2004 (Laitinen, 2008) or the Schengen Borders Code introduced in 2006, which regulates common entry conditions for the Schengen area, are significant examples of intensified police and judicial cooperation (Basilien-Gainche, 2015). The Treaty of Lisbon of 2009 has then constituted the new foundation for the current European border control regime by merging the policies of Justice and Home Affairs into the AFSJ, again strengthening the internal Schengen cooperation by introducing additional measures in the areas of border control, asylum, and immigration (Basilien-Gainche, 2015). This development underlines what has never been questioned while establishing the Schengen Area. First, that the abolishment of internal borders leads to a lack of migration control, and second, that a European security deficit emerges as a result (Moreno-Lax, 2014). This, in turn, shows that security has become sort of a requirement for both, the establishment as well as the expansion of the free movement within the Schengen Area (Basilien-Gainche, 2015).

### 2.2.2 Question of Responsibility

The official website of the EU mentions that its member states share similar values. Among these values are the protection of human rights, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law that are all representing the values of European life (European Union, 2021). However, Huysmans (2000) observes that the securitization of migration significantly influences the asylum policies of EU member states. This results in a situation where the importance of asylum is recognized by Schengen member states, but often condemned by the public and eluded by governments (Gibney, 2014). This dilemma also raises the question of responsibility regarding the admission of refugees, who in light of the securitization of migration discourse are considered a potential threat to public security. In this context, the Dublin Regulation plays a decisive role. It assigns the responsibility for processing a particular asylum application to a participating state (State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), 2019a). The fundamental principle is that the state which first lets a refugee enter is responsible for processing the corresponding asylum application. Accordingly, it also allows returning asylum seekers to the first Schengen member state through which they entered Europe (Schilliger, 2016). Once the question of responsibility is determined, the responsible member state continues the asylum procedure based on its own national law (SEM, 2019a). In this regard, it is of crucial importance that “asylum must not be a lottery” (European Commission, 2014, p. 3). The European Commission (2014), therefore, calls on the shared responsibility of its member states to conduct a fair, efficient, and consistent examination of asylum cases within their national law. This standardization should have the effect that it does not matter in which member state asylum is applied for since uniform asylum procedures should ultimately lead to the same decision-making (European Commission, 2014).

### 2.2.3 Crisis of Control & Emergence of the Hotspot Approach

However, the CEAS nearly imploded during the Summer of 2015, when more than one million refugees in need of protection attempted to reach Europe (Walter-Franke, 2018). This demonstrated the weaknesses of the CEAS when faced with exceptional migration events. Because of their geographical location on the external borders of the Schengen Area, especially countries such as Greece and Italy are more exposed to migratory movements than other countries. Hence, they are common countries of first entry and responsible for processing a lot of asylum applications according to the Dublin Regulation (Kasperek, 2016). Perceived and often referred to as a *refugee crisis*, border security has ascended to the top of the EU's as well as the Schengen states' strategic agendas (Dempsey, 2020). However, the term *refugee crisis* is twofold deceptive. First, it rather refers to a crisis of control of the European border regime, and second, it indicates a temporal period, whereby stability is suggested to settle in again, which is not for certain (Hess and Kasperek, 2017). As reported by Valenta (2014), increased migration has usually been followed by the emergence of new instruments and restrictive

asylum policies to reduce the number of arriving migrants. Accordingly, this happened, for example, in the aftermath of the exceptionally high mass migration from the Balkans at the turn of the last millennium. Also, these restrictive policies often remain in place even when the level of migration decreases again (Schuster, 2004).

In her book *The Politics of Possibilities: Risk and Security Beyond Probability*, Amoore (2013) describes how in today's era of increasingly securitized migration, notably after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the understanding of *security* increasingly focuses on the key terms of prevention, pre-emption, and risk management. She describes that it is no longer the probability of a threatening event to happen but rather its mere possibility that already requires a form of countermeasures. She thus recognizes a shift from what she calls a *politics of probability* to a *politics of possibility*. In 2015, at the same time as migration to Europe significantly increased, terror attacks also convulsed Europe, notably France, Belgium, and Germany. This raised the concern that terrorists, disguised as refugees, could reach European countries, thus questioning the concept of security (Athanasopoulos, 2017). To withstand the perceived migration pressure, the *Hotspot Approach* emerged as a measure to manage the suddenly increasing number of refugees (Walter-Franke, 2018). The *Hotspot* is a “multifaceted management tool that has become the main border instrument for the management of migrant mobility” (Vradis *et al.*, 2019, p. 48). Designed as a chokepoint, it creates an infrastructure for the efficient identification, registration, and detention of arriving refugees in different facilities at the outermost geographical borders of the Schengen Area (Tazzioli and Garelli, 2018; Pollozek and Passoth, 2019). In practice the approach entails that representatives of EU agencies, such as Frontex and EASO officers, assist the local Italian and Greek authorities to identify arriving asylum seekers, assist in asylum applications, and coordinate return operations in an efficient way (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli, 2018).

In this context, the term *efficiency* refers to the assessment of risk which is expected to emanate from refugees trying to reach Europe (Amoore, 2013). Pollozek & Passoth (2019) as well as Vradis *et al.* (2019) write that the Hotspot serves to channel and control refugees as well as to record certain information and biometric data, e.g. fingerprints, that are stored in different databases (e.g. SIS, VIS, EURODAC). Increased cooperation also means that Schengen member states share collected data among each other while local authorities have access to this data infrastructure everywhere and at all times (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019). This illustrates how the emphasis of migration governance is shifting away from the territorial borders of states to the individuals on the move (Muller, 2010). Through these new technologies, individuals can be turned into identifiable subjects whereas the original border is dislocated far into Schengen territory, consequently internalizing the border (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019; Vradis *et al.*, 2019). Thus, according to Amoore's (2013) terminology, the Hotspot is a *signature point* that, with the help of new digital technologies, can link certain information such as biometric data

and travel routes of any person in transit to their mobile body. Once in the Schengen territory, local state authorities can now access this digitally stored information during border controls at any time (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019). And because these authorities are becoming increasingly mobile themselves (Mountz, 2011), the checking of persons is no longer bound to geographically fixed border points and could potentially happen anywhere (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019).

The next section conceptualizes the Hotspot Approach through the lens of critical migration literature and uses it as an example of how to re-imagine borders in times of increasingly securitized migration.

#### **2.2.4 Re-Imagining Contemporary Borders**

It should first be noted that the Hotspot Approach is not the sole but rather one of several adaptations that have been put in place to answer the exceptional migratory events from 2015 onwards (Pollozek and Passoth, 2019). But the Hotspot illustrates very well its contribution to the internalization of borders since the digitally collected data also remain crucial inside the Schengen Area. It moreover demonstrates the selected approach of the CEAS regarding the management of migrant mobility. Other important measures that promote, for example, the externalization of the European external border, such as the Safe Third Country Agreement between the EU and Turkey of 2016, are important parts of the European migration management as well (Schilliger, 2016; Pollozek and Passoth, 2019) but are not considered in further detail in the scope of this master's thesis.

Walters' (2006) notions of the *reflexive government* and the analogy of the border as a computer *firewall* are useful conceptions for a better understanding of European borders and their developments. Contrary to the assumption that a European supranational policing-state is emerging, Walters (2006) argues that a reflexive government does not intend to manage issues like migration itself. It rather intends to govern already established governmental systems. Accordingly, it connects different national migration systems into an ensemble, while also weaving in private companies and authorities (Walters, 2006). At this point, it should not go unmentioned that the border security market is also a profitable business for several private companies that are developing sought-after technologies or taking on security assignments (Arbogast, 2016). Next to an enhanced interconnectedness, a reflexive government also has to constantly address and renegotiate the gaps between the interlinked systems of the Schengen member states since they could be exploited in the future (Walters, 2006), assuming that the "common security system is only as strong as its weakest point" (CEC, 2002, p. 26).

The Hotspot illustrates Walters' (2006) understanding of a reflexive government as Pollozek & Passoth (2019) observe how transnational agencies such as EASO or Frontex are supporting national authorities in their common aspirations to keep up the control and security aspirations that are challenged in times of increased migration arrivals. Increased connectivity also encompasses transnational databases that share the digital signatures of individuals recorded at the Hotspot with the authorities of participating member states having access always and everywhere. Walters' (2006) second notion of the firewall explains why the border experiences of arriving refugees can significantly vary depending on their risk assessments. A computer firewall is not only designed to impede incoming data traffic. Rather, it is designed as a chokepoint that recognizes potentially dangerous data for the computer and filters it out before it eventually causes harm. However, data that is not classified as being dangerous can pass through the firewall very straightforward (Walters, 2006). As a result, the Hotspot underlines Paasi's (1998) understanding that borders are not simply the fixed lines between nation-states as it is visually suggested on our world maps. Newman (2003) stresses that we have to understand borders as institutions to recognize that they have their own rule compositions. These internal rules govern, for example, the proportion of in- and exclusion, and the border's permeability (Newman, 2003). Therefore, they can be compared to a firewall or a sieve with a filter function (Midgal and Schlichte, 2005).

According to Basilien-Gainche (2015), this also means that it is much easier to enter the Schengen Area for those individuals who meet the common entry requirements than for those who do not. By doing so, the categorization into citizens of Schengen member states and Third Country Nationals (TCNs) plays a decisive role. The categorization consummated at the Hotspots leads to a minimal examination for the former, whereas the latter are meticulously assessed regarding their risk (Basilien-Gainche, 2015). This also implies a disparity between safe European citizens and potentially risky individuals entering Europe from abroad (Basilien-Gainche, 2015; Hansen and Papademetriou, 2014). Thereby, all individuals that enter the Schengen territory without a valid visa violate the common Schengen entry regulations. As a consequence, they are illegalized and become irregular migrants (Schilliger, 2016).

### **2.2.5 Assessing Abusers and Victims**

So far, this thesis has pointed out that Schengen member states are part of a CEAS and are thus bound to cooperate in a complex ensemble regarding the governance and management of migration by having common goals, principles, obligations, and guidelines. At a time of increased securitization, however, new instruments such as the Hotspot Approach have also shown how seemingly indispensable migration control is to maintain the free movement within the Schengen Area. Hence, the categorization of migrants and new technologies to extract and share biometric data play an important role in withstanding the perceived pressure resulting



from exceptional migratory events. In this section, I look at how national governments themselves address migration and asylum.

Despite the establishment of Schengen, the interest of nation-states to determine on their own who may access and inhabit their national territory has not disappeared (Gill and Good, 2019). The rising perception of refugees as a societal threat and the lack of harmonization regarding their distribution in the Schengen Area have thus led to a form of competition among member states. This has, in turn, resulted in the mutual deterrence of asylum seekers through exclusionary practices and restrictive policies (e.g. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan, 2017; Hatton, 2020; Dempsey, 2020). Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018) refine the notion of *restrictive policies* by differentiating tightening and streamlining policies. Tightening policies consequently have two core functions. First, they impede access for people in need of protection to apply for asylum. Hatton (2020), for example, identifies how increased border surveillance, visa policies, and carrier barriers deter refugees from crossing borders. According to Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018), less permeability of borders for refugees also results in fewer people arriving in a potential host state where they would be entitled to make an asylum claim. However, due to the obligation of Schengen member states to grant protection to political refugees according to the Geneva Refugee Convention, Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018) emphasize that such tightening policies are certainly both legally and morally controversial. Hence, increasingly difficult access to asylum affects all individuals, including those who eventually would be recognized as eligible refugees.

Second, tightening policies also intend to curtail the attractiveness of a country as an asylum host state through a more restrictive interpretation of the refugee definition, more difficult living conditions, and less social support (Bernhard and Kaufmann, 2018). Schengen states increasingly assume that national asylum procedures that offer a good chance of permanent asylum as well as long-term living and work opportunities attract more refugees and thus lead to more asylum applications for the individual nation-states (Hatton, 2020). Therefore, they try to avoid any pull factors to prevent more asylum applications (Hatton, 2020; Pörtner, 2017; Papademetriou *et al.*, 2017). These examples also demonstrate how governments believe that the introduction of more restrictive measures in one country will divert asylum seekers to other countries (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan, 2017; Hatton, 2020). Barthel & Neumayer (2015) have researched this deflection effect and have identified that a country with restrictive asylum policies deflects a proportion of migrants to geographically nearby countries, creating a spatial dependency among potential host states. Particularly within Europe, Ortega & Peri (2013) assume that neighboring countries are suitable alternatives.

In comparison, streamlining policies address the efficiency of national asylum procedures. According to Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018), they aim to increase the efficiency of the refugee

determination process. By 2005, all EU countries have introduced accelerated asylum procedures (Oakley, 2007). Building on Oakley (2007), Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018) distinguish streamlining policies into inclusionary and exclusionary. Through a more efficient asylum procedure, the asylum seekers in question can, for example, obtain refugee status more quickly. However, the exclusionary characteristic of an accelerated asylum procedure is focusing on a fast rejection because of supposedly ‘unfounded’ grounds for asylum due to a restrictive interpretation regarding the eligibility for protection combined with a reduced appeal period (Bernhard & Kaufmann, 2018) and, as per Valenta (2014), imminent deportation. Regarding the grounds for asylum, Walter-Franke (2018) recognizes how the tension between control and protection often results in a polarizing and stereotypical representation of refugees. As a result, refugees are often framed as either victims or abusers of the asylum system (Walter-Franke, 2018), whereas Shuman & Bohmer (2012) emphasize that efficiently filtering out fraudulent asylum seekers has become the prior goal of asylum procedures. Hence, in line with Amoores (2013), efficiency can again be understood as risk assessment, with risk referring to those asylum seekers who allegedly abuse the national asylum system and seemingly have no ‘true’ grounds for asylum.

Shuman & Bohmer (2012) understand fraudulent as those grounds for asylum, which, based on the country's legal interpretations, are classified as ‘unfounded’ to qualify for asylum, such as economic motives. However, DiMarco (2015) stresses that not alone ‘fraudulent’ asylum applicants are increasingly ineligible for asylum. Thereby, more and more individuals are not granted asylum in Europe but a different, supplementary form of protection instead. Accordingly, *subsidiary protection* refers to those asylum applicants whose flight motives do not meet the political refugee definition of the Geneva Refugee Convention, but who cannot be returned to their country of origin due to the non-refoulement principle. It applies, for example, to war refugees that are not politically or individually persecuted (DiMarco, 2015).

But Shuman & Bohmer (2012) stress that the assessment of asylum eligibility poses a major problem which they illustrate by reference to the asylum hearing, where the responsible caseworkers in European countries (Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012) increasingly examine the credibility of the asylum seekers’ narratives in question through “the lens of suspicion” (Shuman and Bohmer, 2012, p. 200). Accordingly, caseworkers meticulously examine whether or not the asylum seekers’ narratives about their past are true and whether they qualify for protection or asylum according to the legal frameworks or not (Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012). However, Kagan (2015) stresses that it is hardly possible to determine with certainty what the truth is. Oftentimes, officials only know in retrospect what the political situation in a country and its danger for certain individuals were. And due to a widespread lack of credibility markers, asylum applicants are usually left with only their narrative, which determines their political status and future life trajectory (Kagan, 2015).

By comparing the asylum applicant with a defendant in a courtroom, Fassin & Kobelinsky (2012) highlight the resulting issue of the seemingly dominant influence of suspicion in today's decision-making practices. While the presumption of innocence applies to defendants in court, caseworkers increasingly consider asylum seekers as suspects during the asylum hearing. Thereby, the caseworkers' expectations and prior knowledge significantly influence how credible the asylum seekers' narratives turn out to be. Caseworkers consequently determine both what is considered normal and provide knowledge about how plausible a particular narrative is (Shuman and Bohmer, 2012). Shuman & Bohmer (2012) understand *plausibility* as the extension of what is considered normal. However, asylum seekers and caseworkers do not necessarily understand 'what is normal' in the same way. But since the responsible caseworkers assess the credibility of asylum applicants, they can disallow the experiences of the latter and render their narratives untellable in case they conflict with their available information (Shuman and Bohmer, 2012).

### 3 State of Research & Research Gap

The last chapter critically examined current developments in the field of migration governance and management on a European as well as on a national level. It moreover pointed out that the rising discourse about the securitization of migration combined with exceptionally high migratory movements have resulted in a crisis of the European border regime and an intra-European politics of deterrence. In analogy to Walters' (2006) concept of the firewall, Schengen member states increasingly concentrate on assessing asylum applicants as efficiently as possible. In this context, the asylum applicants' credibility and the plausibility of their narratives play a decisive role in determining what political status they receive at the end of the asylum procedure. To understand how states actively use jurisdiction to pursue exclusionary objectives, I now introduce the relationship between people, place, and law to approach the identified research gap as well as the research question.

#### 3.1 Producing Legal Exclusion

The elaborations of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his books *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and *State of Exception* (2005) offer an important starting point on how to think about the relations between law, sovereign power, and violence (Agamben, 1998; Coleman, 2007). For Agamben (1998; 2005) sovereign power results from the characteristic that individuals in modern societies consist of a political and a biologically natural body (*bare life*) and can be deprived of the former in a state of exception, usually proclaimed in crisis situations such as civil wars or insurgencies. The sovereign is thus the one who can decide about the state of exception that suspends the normal juridical order, for example through a new law. Therefore, the state's rule of law is only made possible by a practice of sovereignty which is prior or above the law (Connolly, 2004). Deprived of its political existence, an individual becomes what Agamben (1998) introduces as *Homo Sacer*, a figure who, although its bare life is sacred, can be sacrificed because it is excluded and not legally protected.

Accordingly, Agamben's (1998) vision of the camp embodies the state of exception. The camp is a place where the state abandons individuals who are deprived of their political body, and where the state of exception shifts from being temporary to permanent. Hence, the camp represents a place that is included in the juridical order but at the same time is "outside the normal juridical order" (Agamben, 1998, pp. 169-170). As an extreme example, Agamben (1998) refers to the concentration camps built by the Nazi regime during the Second World War while also drawing a parallel to more recent examples such as waiting zones at airports where refugees intending to apply for asylum are detained and where the normal order is

suspended. In fact, the detention of asylum seekers has become the favored method of asylum management in Europe since the 1990s (Arbogast, 2016). Therefore, they often unintentionally (Mountz, 2011) end up in pre-existing structures such as warehouses, military installations, or even prisons, which got converted into reception facilities (Arbogast, 2016).

However, Gregory (2006) argues that Agamben (1998; 2005) crucially neglects the spatialities of law. Massey (1999) recognizes spatiality and space as a sphere where multiple trajectories coexist, interact, and continuously affect each other. She hence understands spatiality in a way that space is always a “product of interrelations” (Massey, 1999, p. 2). These social, cultural, and quasi-material interrelations constantly produce space, which is why space is never complete but always becoming (Merriman *et al.*, 2012; Massey, 1999). Besides, Massey (2001) also recognizes the importance of time and emphasizes its consideration in the concept of *space-time*. But how can we appropriately approach the spatialities, or spatio-temporalities of law? To address this question, I introduce a subset of geography called *legal geography*, which focuses on the exploration of “the co-constitutive relationship of people, place, and law” (Bennett and Layard, 2015, p. 406). Braverman *et al.* (2014) account for this co-constitutive relationship by noting that virtually every aspect of law takes place somewhere in space and that both social spaces as well as geographical places are imprinted with legal meaning. Delaney (2010), therefore, argues that space and law do not independently exist in two different dimensions but are always merged. Hereby, Delaney (2015) understands the law less as a thing and more as a dynamic, fluctuating, and complex process.

In contrast to Agamben (1998; 2005), Basaran (2008) hence recognizes that legal exclusion is less produced through the sovereign’s introduction of a state of exception, but by ordinary legal means. She points out that law combined with a politics of borders and spaces actively creates spaces of legal exclusion. Accordingly, legal exclusion entails a variety of restrictions such as limited access to due process or court, detention in isolation, as well as disputed return policies. Thereby, these restrictions apply to certain places and certain categories of individuals (Basaran, 2008). Basaran (2011) thus differentiates between *legal spaces* and *legal identities* that entail inscribing law into spaces as well as inscribing law into different populations whereby these practices allow state authorities to establish or manipulate jurisdiction. Modern jurisdiction, according to Maillet *et al.* (2018), ideally means that states exercise their effective and legal power over all the objects inside their territories. But since the focus of the application of jurisdiction is increasingly shifting towards the migrants’ bodies nowadays, jurisdiction can be separated from territory (Maillet *et al.*, 2018) as the migrant becomes the border (Basilien-Gainche, 2015).

According to Maillet *et al.* (2018), this is in line with Elden’s (2009; 2013) understanding of *imperial power* which implies that individuals seeking protection can be legally in- or excluded

through a production of legal practices that are detached from territory. These practices have, as per Maillet *et al.* (2018), the power to subject individuals to new alternative legal regimes with significantly altered rights, which in turn influence the individuals' experiences of, for example, mobility or freedom. It allows excluding certain categories of people from the ordinary law, which means that individuals, although sharing the same geographical space, may have different rights as a result of their categorization or legal status (Maillet *et al.*, 2018). In this regard, Basaran (2008) also understands these spaces as *border zones*. Levy (1997) and Cunningham & Heyman (2004) argue that every space principally depicts two sets of movements, which they describe as 'go' and 'no-go', 'enclosure' and 'mobility' respectively. However, Braverman (2011) emphasizes that the border implies a third set of movements that lies in-between the 'go' and the 'no-go' which she calls the *liminal movement*.

In the context of arriving people seeking asylum, this practically means that it has become necessary to first assess their risk and credibility to ensure the security of the host society (Shuman and Bohmer, 2012; Fassin and Kobelinsky, 2012). Hereby, the illegalization and criminalization of refugees justify their detention as they do not meet the conditions for legally entering the Schengen Area (Schilliger, 2016; Arbogast, 2016). Categorized as asylum seekers they then become eligible for a specific set of legal rights. However, compared to citizens of the potential host state, their set of rights is restricted and significantly different (Maillet *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, they simultaneously live in-between legal in- and exclusion and can be understood as liminal beings themselves.

### 3.2 Living In-Between the 'Go' and the 'No-Go'

The concept of liminality dates back to the writings of Arnold van Gennep in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He traditionally used it for social anthropological discussions on rites in small societies (Andrews and Roberts, 2015). Originally derived from the Latin word *limen*, which translates into *threshold* (Andrews and Roberts, 2015), van Gennep (1960) relates his concept to symbolic processes and ritual conventions through which he examines crucial moments of social transition. Accordingly, the transitions of people from one social category to another form the core of his conception. Thereby, Van Gennep (1960) subdivides each transition into the following three stages: separation, transition, and reincorporation. The separation or pre-liminal stage refers to the separation of the individual from a certain social role. The transition or liminal stage describes the period of time in which the individual is between the old and the new role, whereas the incorporation or post-liminal stage describes the subsequent assumption of the new role (Van Gennep, 1960; Andrews and Roberts, 2015; Kertzer, 2019).

Since the English translation of his book in 1960, the concept of liminality has increasingly found its way into other research fields and gained increasing acceptance (Kertzer, 2019; Andrews and Roberts, 2015). While van Gennep faded into the background, the ethnographer Victor Turner significantly coined the concept of liminality in the 1960s and 1970s. Turner has also recognized an application for the concept of liminality in modern societies beyond the rites in small societies (Thomassen, 2009). Turner understands liminal entities as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Thomassen (2009) emphasizes that these entities are either individual subjects, social groups, or even entire societies. He also stresses that Turner has moreover attributed a spatial and temporal dimension to liminality. Temporally, he associates liminality with short-term moments up to longer periods. Spatially, the large scope of applications of liminality refers to specific places, areas, zones, or up to entire regions (Thomassen, 2009). Due to its wide range of applications, Horvath *et al.* (2015) also understand liminality as a tool for analyzing various research questions at the interface between anthropology and political studies.

Liminality has also found increasing resonance in numerous studies on the lives of asylum seekers. These range from how the border zone experiences influence their health status to their own perception of living their lives legally in-between. Jonzon *et al.* (2015), for example, identify that awaiting asylum decisions cause strong uncertainties and worries about the asylum applicants' futures, which in turn heavily distress their lives. O'Reilly (2018) addresses the narratives of asylum seekers, exploring both their experiences of spatial and temporal liminality, while living in asylum centers in Ireland. Her informants speak of an uncertain future and constant surveillance in geographic and social isolation, where they feel like prisoners. Besides, O'Reilly (2018) stresses that the liminal condition also affects and shapes their personalities. Hence, she identifies a third form of liminality, which she calls *ontological liminality*. Furthermore, Wimark (2019) and Gold (2019) understand that liminality can also persist beyond the asylum procedure. But while there are already detailed insights on the migration governance and management regarding the asylum infrastructure in Switzerland (e.g. Affolter, 2021; Bertrand, 2019; Bernhard and Kaufmann, 2018; Pörtner, 2017), I only found very few recent Swiss studies that directly address the narratives of people with refugee experience (e.g. Kiselev *et al.*, 2020; Ostendrap, 2016). Ostendrap (2016), for example, has identified the absence of rights, social and geographic isolation, stigmatization, fear of being deported, living conditions, as well as mental and physical health problems as the key issues of rejected asylum seekers in Switzerland during her fieldwork in 2015.

But unlike Augé (1995), Ghorashi *et al.* (2018) understand places such as waiting areas or asylum centers no longer as *non-places* in which liminal beings are passive objects that cannot build up meaningful social lives. There are also other approaches to migration that understand

asylum seekers and refugees not as passive objects but as active subjects. Hence, they increasingly focus on the migrants' personal border experiences rather than on the sole functioning of the related control apparatus. The *Autonomy of Migration Approach* (e.g. Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2015; Hess, 2017; Scheel, 2013; Papadopolous and Tsianos, 2013), for example, understands both migration and mobility as social movements, whereby it places border struggles, that require a continuous negotiation, in the foreground (Hess, 2017; Papadopolous and Tsianos, 2013). I also advocate this understanding in my master's thesis, as it prevents portraying refugees as passive objects or victims – an important requirement to approach people seeking protection with empathy instead of pity (Smets *et al.*, 2019).

According to Ghorashi *et al.* (2018), Giddens (1979) and Ortner (2006) understand that control systems never operate consummately since the individuals to control have both understanding and agency, which is why they constantly find means to resist or elude the system. Gorashi *et al.* (2018) emphasize that Harding's (1993) *strong reflexivity*, emerging from "intersubjective negotiations of contrasting positionalities" (Ghorashi *et al.*, 2018, p. 377) could enable agency. In line with Zanoni & Jansens (2007) and Gorashi & Ponzoni (2014), I understand agency as the ability of refugees to be reflexive about their life, which subsequently allows them to act upon it and eventually change their current situation. Jonzon *et al.* (2015), for example, document asylum seekers' strategies to comply with the asylum procedure to ultimately receive a positive asylum decision. Parkinson & Behrouzan (2015) further explore the lives of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and how their personal experiences with the bureaucratic strategies of their host state form a common framework of how they perceive and understand their liminal condition. Accordingly, negative experiences as well as widespread rumors significantly influence their subjective perception and understanding of their personalities. In this regard, it is also important to consider the concept of *situated knowledge*. Situated knowledge dates back to Donna Haraway (1988), who emphasized that knowledge is always local and individual, whereby linking these different perspectives together is important to understand how knowledge forms. Rose (1997) argues that the type of emerging knowledge always depends on the corresponding makers of said knowledge. Accordingly, the object of knowledge is not to be understood as a projection surface or resource but always as different agents or actors (Haraway, 1988).

Regarding the Swiss case studies I found, only Ostendrap (2016) considered the resources and strategies of rejected asylum seekers to analyze their agency. She identified temporary and long-term strategies such as building up a meaningful social life, pursuing hobbies, staying in Switzerland illegally, or even return. However, she already conducted her fieldwork six years ago and did not build her research on the concepts of liminality, legal geography, or situated knowledge.



### 3.3 Research Questions

This master's thesis continues to address the still under-researched liminality of people in need of protection in Switzerland. Hereby, I first intend to explore firsthand narratives through the lens of legal geography to understand how, where, and when former asylum applicants have experienced their in-between condition and legal exclusion on their life trajectories. I hence follow Delaney's (2010) interest to understand where law happens in space. Second, I also consider O'Reilly's (2018) notion of ontological liminality in relation to the formation of knowledge to understand how individuals with refugee experience actively negotiate their liminal condition to build up agency. I have decided to specifically focus on people who have already experienced the asylum procedure and who, as a result, were not entitled to asylum. However, since they arrived in Switzerland from countries to which, in line with the non-refoulement policy, they cannot be returned due to politically unstable situations, they have only received temporary admission and have received the status called *provisionally admitted foreigners* in Switzerland (SEM, 2021). Consequently, they are not recognized refugees and therefore have a different set of (fewer) rights compared to accepted refugees, even though most remain in Switzerland long-term (Benelli *et al.*, 2014). These differences are explained in more detail when I introduce the *Swiss Residence Permit System*. There are also very few studies on the experiences of people in Switzerland who did not receive asylum, such as provisionally admitted foreigners (e.g. Benelli *et al.*, 2014; map-F, 2020). However, these studies do not specifically build on the research state of legal geography, liminality, agency, and situated knowledge. By following my participants' life trajectories, I consider the findings of Wimark (2019) and Gold (2019) who both stress that the liminal condition can endure beyond the asylum procedure. I address the identified research gap under the following research question:

**How do young Provisionally Admitted Foreigners experience and negotiate Liminality along their Life Trajectories in Switzerland?**

Because Switzerland, as a Schengen member state, is also embedded in the CEAS, we have to always keep the following sub-question in mind since the political position of Switzerland regarding its asylum regime is situated in a European framework:

*How is the contemporary Swiss Asylum Regime developing as a part of the European Framework?*

## 4 Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodological approach that I have selected to examine the experiences and narratives of provisionally admitted foreigners in Switzerland. I collected the present data during five months of ethnographic research in my hometown in Switzerland between October 2020 and February 2021. According to Hume & Mulcock (2004), the ethnographic approach attempts to explore a particular social or cultural setting through various techniques where the main objective as an outsider researcher is to get closer to the insider point of view regarding that particular setting. Hume & Mulcock (2004) identify participant observation, a technique in which the researcher observes the setting of interest while also participating in it as much as possible, as particularly promising in this regard. Further interactions between the hosts and the observer occur through other practices such as conversations and interviews (e.g. Emerson *et al.*, 2010; Sherman Heyl, 2010). Thus, the ethnographic approach requires building up relationships with insider individuals while the researcher is simultaneously navigating between the inside and the outside. Keeping a certain distance from the insider point of view is important to reflect the insights gained with outsider's eyes to balance intimacy and distance. This requires a continuous negotiation of trust and fear between the participants and the researcher and necessitates interpersonal skills to build up meaningful relationships (Hume and Mulcock, 2004).

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to get to know six provisionally admitted foreigners. Besides, I have also intensively networked with politically recognized refugees and one individual who currently lives illegally without any permission in Switzerland. Moreover, I collected insights through a representative of an organization for the promotion of social and professional integration as well as a representative of a non-governmental organization. This chapter describes how I accessed the field, describes what data I collected, and how I then analyzed it. Furthermore, I discuss ethical considerations and my own positionality as a researcher.

### 4.1 Accessing the Field

When I started my research in May 2020, the ongoing development of the Corona pandemic in Switzerland made it particularly challenging to get to know people with refugee experiences. I first contacted non-governmental organizations, aid networks, and schools hoping that they could help me to connect with people that are interested in my research. Therefore, I briefly summarized my intentions and inquired about the need for further assistance like a potential internship. Unfortunately, I mainly received rejections or no answers at all. The given reasons

were either the uncertain pandemic situation or simply that there has been no need at the moment. Instead, they recommended other organizations that might be able to help me further.

At the same time, I made inquiries in my social network, hoping to find someone who could provide me with the contact details of a person having a forced migration background. Unfortunately, only a few were close enough to individuals who would qualify to participate in my research. But since they offered me to ask them if they would be interested in getting to know me, I did not want to leave any possibility untried. However, they all had some reservations about talking to me about their experiences with the Swiss asylum system. At that time, I did not fully realize that the difficulty of accessing the research field was already underlining an important part of the issue that I later identified.

The first breakthrough in accessing the field happened at the end of August 2020, when a friend called my attention to *Students Across Borders*. This student organization voluntarily helps individuals with refugee experiences on a voluntary basis by teaching German and other subjects, which is why I immediately signed up as a tutor. The same friend also introduced me to a person she has met within the tutoring program. While having lunch together, I told him that I was interested in the experiences of people, who had had to forcefully leave their country of origin regarding their asylum procedure and life after the procedure. He showed great interest in my research topic and offered me his help to connect me with other people. A few weeks later he sent me the contact details of other individuals who were also interested in my research and had agreed to meet me. I then contacted them and started meeting them one by one. This sampling strategy is known as snowball sampling and is particularly useful for becoming acquainted with individuals from social groups that are difficult to access (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017).

I then attended a walking tour organized by Students Across Borders, during which I met another person who was also interested in sharing his experiences with me. Moreover, I joined online meetings arranged by an organization that promotes the exchange of experiences of different population groups. Through these meetings, I also tried to build up additional entry sites to get to know more individuals with refugee backgrounds. Hence my sample grew organically, and I soon managed to establish contact with six individuals, five men and one woman originating from the Near and Middle East who arrived in Switzerland between late 2015 and mid-2019 and were not granted asylum. They now all officially live as provisionally admitted foreigners in Switzerland. Regarding the sample size, Omidian (2000) emphasizes the importance of engaging with a few reliable informants, with whom a necessary basis of trust and openness can be established, rather than engaging with many unreliable ones. Since I attempted to build on the methodological principle of saturation, which is widely accepted in qualitative research although it also entails certain challenges (Saunders *et al.*, 2018), the

sample size was not predefined. I discuss the limitations of my sample as well as the sampling strategy later in this chapter.

## 4.2 Data Collection

To learn more about the experiences of people with forced migration backgrounds with the Swiss asylum infrastructure, I used different ethnographic research practices in my research design. They consist of techniques that are aimed at finding out more about the beliefs, values as well as practices of the participants (Hume and Mulcock, 2004). In the following sections, I describe the techniques I used, namely participant observation, ethnographic and formal in-depth interviews, as well as triangulation.

### 4.2.1 Participant Observation

According to Hume & Mulcock (2004), the social self of the researcher is the primary tool during participant observation. Through participant observation, the researcher himself increasingly becomes a participant, while gaining more and different insights into the researched topic (Flick, 2009). I thus contacted my participants and we organized the first meetings. I first met my participants individually in public places like cafes or parks since the pandemic situation still allowed physical meetings at the end of summer 2020. After that, we regularly spent time at places where the participants usually like to go in their daily life and where they also started to introduce me more and more to their different social networks. I mainly accompanied them during their free time, during which we played soccer or spent the day in the city or nearby recreational areas. During this time, we built up good relationships of trust, whereby they gave me increasingly deeper insights into their everyday lives and their ways of thinking. Through these insights, I began to understand the Swiss asylum system from a different perspective and gained more information about how the participants experience liminality, and where it occurs.

Ethnographic research also entails writing down the insights gained through participating in the field. As per Emerson *et al.* (2010), field notes document observations and reflections made in the field and are taken directly in or close to the field, with close referring to the temporal proximity between the events in the field and the moment of writing them down. Since the researcher has to actively decide what to record and what to leave out, field notes are always selective and never complete (Atkinson, 1992) and they are always descriptive and also entail interpretation and sense-making (Emerson *et al.*, 2010). After each meeting, I thus took field notes that summarized what we discussed, how I perceived the atmosphere, what other specifics influenced the meetings, and how to put my observations into context with my research topic and literature. Writing down what I experienced also helped me a lot to reflect and process the

narratives of my participants. Through this reflection, I was able to regain a certain distance from my informants, which was significantly more difficult during the meetings.

I am also aware that certain activities and routines of the participants' everyday lives changed due to the spread of Covid-19 and the subsequent government restrictions that impacted social life in general. Of course, this not only affected my participants but also myself. When governmental decisions aggravated physical meetings to contain the rapidly spreading virus by the end of the year, playing soccer with my participants, for example, was no longer an option. Besides, the cold winter temperatures hampered other outdoor meetings. However, I stayed in contact with my participants by regularly texting via cell phone.

#### **4.2.2 Ethnographic and Formal Interviews with Provisionally Admitted Foreigners**

During our meetings, we further interacted through conversations, which come naturally by spending more time together. We addressed various topics during our conversations and they occasionally told me about their personal backgrounds and experiences in Switzerland. From time to time, I also integrated some questions into these conversations. Allen (2017) describes such informal interviews that emerge from participant observation as ethnographic interviews. However, Sherman Heyl (2010) draws attention that terminologies can vary significantly in qualitative research. Accordingly, ethnographic interviews require that the researcher has established a respectful and ongoing relationship with his or her interviewees to allow for a genuine exchange of views. I did not record our conversations, as setting up the recorder and asking for permission to record would have interrupted the natural flow of the meeting. Instead, I wrote down interesting statements in my notebook after the meetings so that I could address them again during the formal in-depth interviews, if needed.

For the formal interviews, I prepared an interview guide with 20, primarily open-ended main questions. I allocated them into five different blocks that referred to the participants' arrivals in Switzerland, their life during the asylum procedure, their asylum hearing, the asylum decision, their political status as well as their perception of their life trajectories. It was very important for me not to be completely bound to the order of the different blocks to provide enough room for my interviewees to decide for themselves in which direction the interviews should go. While this required some flexibility on my part, it greatly helped me to identify the core themes in an iterative process between data collection and analysis.

Identifying a location for conducting the formal interviews was more challenging than I initially anticipated. In the beginning, I conducted them in public places, mainly universities and other schools. In doing so, I chose a place that would provide enough privacy for the interviewees to share their very personal experiences with me. Besides privacy, the interview places also had to be quiet so that I could record the interview. We also had to maintain the minimum distance

of two meters recommended by the Federal Office of Public Health to prevent the spreading of the Coronavirus. Because of these factors, I conducted most of the interviews on weekends or in the late evening, when universities and schools were considerably less busy. When the government closed all public buildings, face-to-face interviews became unfeasible. However, since I had already established contact with my participants, we agreed on interviews via videoconference. On the one hand, this brought the disadvantage that we could not meet in person. On the other hand, we could talk in a very quiet environment, which ensured good audio quality. All the interviews were highly in-depth, and each took around one hour to one and a half hours.

Four interviews were held in German, whereas one interview was held in English and another one in Dari with the help of an interpreter. Each of my participants chose the language in which the interview was to be conducted according to their own skills and preferences. The German and the English language skills of my participants varied, depending on different factors such as the time they had already been in Switzerland and which language courses they could, or could not attend during this time. Nevertheless, all participants had good communication skills to understand the different questions and to share their experiences in detail. However, I am aware that interviews in a foreign language or with an interpreter also imply certain limitations which I also address later in this chapter.

### **4.2.3 Data Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to the application of additional methods and data sources, leading to improved comprehensibility of data in qualitative researches (Patton, 1999). Flick (2009) describes triangulation as an approach that examines a research topic from at least two viewpoints. To enhance the quality of my data, I have attached great importance to taking into account the perspectives of other actors, whose life trajectories frequently intersect with those of my participants in their daily lives. These include recognized refugees who have been granted asylum, individuals living without a permit in Switzerland, actors from non-governmental organizations, and a representative of organizations responsible for integration. Their narratives and experiences in combination with the statements of my participants can be additionally linked with Swiss-specific literature of critical migration researchers.

Through increasingly networking with people having a refugee background, I was also able to establish connections with officially recognized refugees. I usually got acquainted with them while playing soccer with one of my participants. I moreover continued my tutoring at Students Across Borders, meeting with an officially recognized refugee online once a week during several months. Through these weekly conversations, I gained further insights into the life of a recognized refugee and also became more familiar with the legal differences between them and

provisionally admitted foreigners. During my participant observation, I also got to know a person who did neither receive asylum nor a temporary residence permit. As a result, he is currently living illegally in Switzerland. Meeting him was complicated because he had to be continuously aware of local police activities and, therefore, many possible meeting places were out of consideration. Nevertheless, I was able to meet him regularly and could also conduct a formal interview.

(Assumed) Name	Age in years	Gender	Arrival in Switzerland	Residence Permit
Adib	30	Male	Mid-2019	F-Permit
Alisson	27	Male	Late 2019	F-Permit
Enas	22	Male	Mid-2016	F-Permit
Hamid	30	Male	Late 2015	F-Permit
Hasib	24	Male	Mid-2016	None
Murat	32	Male	Early 2020	B-Permit
Taher	30	Male	Early 2016	F-Permit
Yassra	28	Female	Late 2015	F-Permit

Table 1: Overview of my Participants with Refugee Experience

Additionally, I also conducted an expert interview with a worker from the *Asyl-Organisation Zürich* (AOZ), an organization that focuses on social and professional integration in the Canton of Zurich (Stadt Zürich, 2021). Through a fellow student, I was further able to ask questions to a worker of the non-governmental organization *Amnesty International* about Switzerland's involvement within the European framework regarding its asylum system<sup>1</sup>. Triangulation thus helped to complement the introduced literature with additional data. In this regard, I also introduce additional literature regarding the Swiss asylum system to situate and embed experienced liminality in a geographically narrower context.

#### 4.2.4 Positionality

It is essential to know your own role as a researcher during ethnographic research (Rose, 1997) because this role or position, in turn, influences the production of knowledge (McDowell, 1992). As I have already introduced in the last chapter, it is fundamental to be aware that knowledge is always situated. This is indispensable not only for my participants but also for me as the researcher of the present work. According to Madge (1993), knowledge can be situated

<sup>1</sup> My fellow student Vanessa Seger was also working on her master's thesis at that time focusing more on the role of non-governmental organizations related to the Swiss asylum system. We co-operated regarding our interviews and prepared our interview questionnaires together to cover both research topics.

by considering the positionalities of the makers of knowledge. As a result, different factors such as race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or social and economic status compose these positionalities and, in turn, influence the production of knowledge. The researcher's positionality thus affects the data collected during ethnographic research, which again affects the findings and ultimately the production of knowledge. Therefore, it is important as a researcher to openly communicate and consider his or her own position to counter overgeneralization and universalization of the conclusions made during fieldwork (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi, 1995) and to allow a debate regarding the researcher's position (Gilbert, 1994).

The positionality of my identity regarding the twofold role of simultaneously being an insider and an outsider is complex as well as debatable and hence requires a more detailed elaboration. Unlike fieldwork in which researchers leave their familiar surroundings behind, I focused on an issue that I was able to examine in my hometown. This means that I was usually moving through a familiar geographical environment. My participants, living in Switzerland between around one and a half and five years, had very diverse geographical familiarities. Thus, I had to make sure that my geographical experience as a native did not shape the participant observation in a way that I decide where we meet or what we do based on my geographical knowledge. In addition, I am also more habituated to the Swiss culture as well as language. While preparing my research, I also studied the developments of the Swiss asylum system, becoming increasingly familiar with the legislation, and the asylum reception as well as integration infrastructure in Switzerland.

However, I moved through this geographically and socially predominantly familiar landscape within a social constellation that was very unfamiliar to me at first, being in a somewhat liminal situation myself. I am certainly aware that some conditions underpin my position as an outsider. The experienced unfamiliarity is partially resulting from a different situated knowledge compared to my participants, primarily due to my nationality, social status, and culture. I also do not have a forced migration background myself and therefore cannot compare what it means to forcefully leave a home to my own experiences. Besides, as a Swiss citizen, I am in a very privileged situation regarding the legal rights I am entitled to. In this position, I explore the narratives of people whose legal rights have been severely restricted since they arrived in Switzerland. I have also learned that my positionality can raise mistrust, for example, when some individuals might have had reservations about meeting me. This complicated getting closer to an insider's point of view and thus needs to be critically viewed.



Hume & Mulcock (2004) write that ethnographic fieldwork “at home” can lead to disorientation and sort of a cultural shock where the researcher is both amazed and confronted by the encountered differences while moving between strange and familiar structures. To get closer to and understand the viewpoint of my participants, I heavily relied on my interpersonal skills. Through a common interest in sports or artistic activities like soccer or painting, we easily found connections that were helpful in building up relationships. Even though I openly communicated that I was interested in their experiences from a scientific standpoint for my work to be completely transparent, the focus was significantly heavier on our shared activities. By holding myself back from constantly asking questions and instead going with the flow, I tried to not put any of my participants under pressure. Although this required much more time, it was the only way to develop genuine relationships. Through this relationship formation, the participants also provided more insights into their everyday life, which allowed me to increasingly recognize their experiences with liminality from an insider's point of view. Their perspectives and views, made within the same geographical environment I thought to be familiar with, often remained hidden to me up to a certain point. I also discovered new places in the city and met a variety of new people. This sometimes took on a dimension where I started to feel like an outsider in my hometown, which in turn was fruitful in understanding their perspectives.

#### **4.2.5 Ethical Considerations**

Especially when working with people that are affected by unprivileged conditions, it is important to incorporate ethical considerations into the research design (Halilovic, 2013). Hence the Ethics Committee's guideline questionnaire by the Human Geography division of the university helped me to be aware and include preliminary ethical considerations into my research design.

It was primarily important that I did not harm any of the voluntary participants in any way through my research. Since some of my participants explicitly feared persecution by certain groups of their home country or by the Swiss police, I intentionally gave all participants an assumed name to conceal their identities. Besides, I also chose to use an analogous notebook for my field notes to digitize as little information as possible. Furthermore, I did not publish any geographical information that could allow clear inferences about the identities of my informants.

For the recording of interviews, I always asked my informants for permission. I am aware that recording very personal and emotional experiences can be uncomfortable for the participants and could have negative consequences if they fall into the wrong hands at worst. In this regard, my participants had to trust me enough, and I assured them that I would not publish the audio data at any time.

I must also respect the principle of not harm after completing this research. Before I went into the field, I was aware that my relationships with the various participants are long-term. Unlike fieldwork geographically distant from my home, I share the same geographical space with my participants, even after my fieldwork. However, I do not see this as a burden but as an enrichment.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of collected data during ethnographic research requires both a systematic as well as a flexible approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Therefore, according to Charmaz & Mitchell (2010), I adopted and adapted grounded theory strategies in my data analysis process. Accordingly, these strategies are built on a “symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective and are complemented by constructivist methods that assume the existence of multiple realities, the mutual creation of knowledge by researchers and research participants” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2010, p. 160). This allows for an interpretative understanding of the subject matter since it can be explored how action and meaning are constructed (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2010).

Data analysis and data collection followed an iterative process, meaning that I already initiated the analysis during the collection of data. I thus transcribed and smoothed the audio files of my interviews according to the guide of Dresing & Pehl (2015). Smoothing refers to the omission of filler words or broken text fragments that affect readability (Dresing and Pehl, 2015). However, I transcribed the grammar and sentence order accurately to ensure that the transcripts reflect the interviews in as much detail as possible. For the analysis, I then thematically coded the transcripts of my interviews. For this purpose, I used *Taguette*, an open-source software program that enables data coding by labeling text excerpts. I sorted them and made queries, which was extremely helpful for organizing my data. Besides, I also included my field notes in this process and also marked them thematically, albeit only analogously.

Since I already initiated the data analysis during the data collection process, I established an early overview of which themes emerged from the conversations with the participants. This, in turn, helped to design my data collection process to be as productive as possible. By thematically collecting and structuring my participants’ statements during the interviews as well as in the field notes, I found several interrelations throughout the process related to the exploration of their liminal experiences. In a final step, I revisited my data and marked particularly illustrative excerpts to subsequently cite them.

## 4.4 Limitations

I am aware that there are some limitations regarding the research design that I need to discuss. On the one hand, there is a risk in snowball sampling that due to the access via one individual to the sample, mainly people from that individual's social environment participate, who might be in similar life situations and have similar knowledge (Bagheri and Saadati, 2015).

Moreover, I could only select participants who already speak German or English for us to be able to communicate at all. I am aware that this already presupposes a specific linguistic knowledge for my participants, which is by no means self-evident. Therefore, the statements and experiences of my participants cannot be generalized and have to be considered in an appropriate context. Since we did not communicate in our native languages, I tried to prevent misunderstandings and always inquired if I did not fully understand a statement.

Besides the access to my participants, the sample itself is also significantly limited. On the one hand, I mainly spoke with young adult men who came to Switzerland from similar regions of the world with similar reasons for fleeing. Thus, due to the organic formation of my sample, I only reached one woman. This is especially important, as gender could be of great importance regarding their subjective experiences with the Swiss asylum system. It also applies not only to gender but also to all other factors that influence positionality. Also, the sample size is generally relatively small, which is why conclusions are not representative, and hence we ultimately need to consider them in relation to my specific sample. By doing so, the question arises to what extent, or if at all, saturation is even possible when analyzing different narratives regarding situated knowledge.

The temporal dynamics of the Swiss asylum system and policy as well as the personal changes of my participants' life trajectories are further limitations. Due to many legal adaptations, it is enormously difficult to identify how these changes affect my participants regarding their liminality. Especially the adaptations of the asylum procedure can significantly influence the perceptions and experiences of individuals living in Switzerland. Along with the legal asylum framework, the Corona pandemic is also dynamic in time. Therefore, its effects are still uncertain, especially in the future. Hence, we must also understand this master's thesis as a snapshot in time.

## 5 Characteristics of the Swiss Asylum System

I divided the following chapter into two main parts with increasing levels of detail. The first part addresses the embedding of Switzerland in the CEAS as well as the contemporary trends of its national asylum reception infrastructure. Hereby, the emphasis is less on the history of the Swiss-European cooperation in terms of asylum matters but rather on the consequences for those individuals who apply for asylum here. The second part then introduces the residence permit system of Switzerland and its significant characteristics. This involves looking at the current developments of the integration infrastructure that are of great importance to the contextual understanding of my participants' subsequent narratives.

### 5.1 Embedding of Switzerland in the CEAS

Switzerland has been an official Schengen member since December 2008 (SEM, 2016) and has implemented the Dublin Regulation ever since (SEM, 2019a). The consulted Swiss representative from the Human Rights and Asylum Department of the non-governmental organization *Amnesty International* stated that because of this membership, Switzerland is more embedded in a European framework regarding migration and asylum matters than in comparison to other policy areas. Hence, we can compare Switzerland's asylum management with other European member states. Even though there are significant differences among EU countries, he situated Switzerland's willingness to admit asylum seekers around the European average. He also said that the main consequences of Switzerland's embedding in the CEAS are the Dublin cases, referring to those asylum applications whose responsibility does not lie with Switzerland because the individuals in question have already been registered in another Schengen state. Amnesty International thus criticizes that Switzerland could technically admit persons on humanitarian grounds even though their asylum applications are not under Swiss jurisdiction. However, Switzerland is highly ungenerous in this regard and rejects them. Switzerland has transferred about four and a half times more people to other countries than it has received since joining the Dublin association agreement (SEM, 2019a).

Besides, the representative pointed out that Amnesty International recognizes a relatively large margin of maneuver for Schengen member states regarding those developments that are more independent of the Dublin system, such as the national asylum procedures. Although there are specific European guidelines on how member states should accommodate asylum seekers as well as how they should conduct asylum procedures, Switzerland, as a non-EU country, is not directly involved in their elaboration. From Amnesty International's point of view, however, he said that these guidelines are important to ensure both humane accommodation for asylum seekers as well as fair asylum procedures that are at stake for the individuals in need of

protection. Improved guidelines would moreover counteract the intra-European competition resulting from the disharmony regarding the distribution of asylum seekers and the subsequent introduction of restrictive asylum policies.

Like other European countries, Switzerland has also introduced various tightening and streamlining policies to prevent possible pull factors for people seeking asylum (Bernhard and Kaufmann, 2018). Hence, changes in the binding legislation of the *Asylgesetz* ('Asylum Act'), responsible for determining the granting of asylum, the legal status of refugees, and temporary admission (Fedlex, 2021), are not uncommon. Since its initial introduction in 1981, the Asylum Act has been more altered than any other Swiss law within such a short period, showing how temporally dynamic the developments in the field of asylum are (Piguet, 2009). According to Miaz (2017), it is remarkable that several of these modifications were prompted by the political referendum in Switzerland. The securitization of migration in Switzerland is historically linked to the discourse of *Überfremdung* ('over-foreignization'), a prominent discourse that has emerged in the 1970s. It portrays asylum seekers as a national threat and has found its way into several political parties over time. In this regard, they use the discourse of *Überfremdung* to legitimize frequent changes in the Swiss asylum law (Miaz, 2017; Affolter, 2021). Pörtner (2017) and Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018), among others, have already addressed recent examples that underline the trend of introducing restrictive policies in Switzerland, which is why I refrain from a detailed analysis. I thus only point out the latest modifications that are crucial for understanding the subsequent narratives of my participants.

The latest revision of the Asylum Act, introduced in March 2019, provides for a more efficient and accelerated asylum procedure. On the one hand, a more efficient and accelerated asylum procedure enables a quicker rejection of Dublin cases as well as 'false' asylum seekers, who allegedly intend to exploit the Swiss asylum system. On the other hand, the adjustments to the asylum reception infrastructure should further reduce governmental costs (Affolter, 2021). This revision is important for the reason that all of my participants arrived in Switzerland between late 2015 and early 2020, which means that some experienced the old asylum procedure while others experienced the accelerated asylum procedure.

Practically, this latest revision consists of the division of Switzerland into six asylum regions whereas all arriving asylum seekers are distributed to a corresponding region and a decentralized federal center (SEM, 2019b; Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, no date). They then remain in these facilities until the caseworkers of the SEM make the asylum decision, after which they are redistributed to the different cantons and municipalities, in case they obtain refugee status or provisional admission. Also, these new federal centers no longer serve only for their accommodation, but also provide space for the registration process, medical checks as well as rooms for the asylum hearing and hence synergize all the involved actors under one roof

(SEM, 2019b). All asylum seekers undergo a first medical check after the digital registration of their personal and biometric data. Since March 2019, each asylum seeker also receives a free legal representative that accompanies them during the whole asylum procedure (SEM, 2019c).

The processing strategy of the asylum applications refers to the situation in the asylum seekers' countries of origin, the credibility of their asylum application, and the behavior of the asylum seeker (SEM, 2019d). In line with Pörtner (2017), the SEM (2019d) writes that applications from countries with a low protection quota such as EU and EFTA countries as well as so-called *safe countries* are prioritized. In triage, the SEM examines all applications from non-European countries to determine their responsibility according to the Dublin Regulation and whether it is possible to transfer the applicant to another Schengen member state (SEM, 2019b). In case Switzerland is indeed responsible, the applicants are then assessed for their asylum eligibility in an accelerated procedure which takes up to 100 days. Hereby, the asylum hearing remains a core element of the asylum procedure (SEM, 2019e). According to Affolter (2021), the meticulous assessment of the asylum applications and the importance of asylum credibility regarding the asylum decision remained largely unchanged in the accelerated asylum procedure.

To make an asylum decision, Affolter (2021) describes in detail how caseworkers use written guidelines and recommendations, called *Asyl- und Wegweisungspraxis* or APPA's in short, to get familiar with the asylum applicants' country of origin. They also include examples of how to proceed with asylum applicants from different countries. Regarding the interview technique, Affolter (2021) recognizes that interviewers first ask the asylum applicants about their family, education, and the situation in their country of origin. They then move on to the grounds for asylum which the applicants in question have to credibly prove. In the end, they then confront the interviewees with alleged contradictions in their narratives. Due to the lack of credibility, Affolter (2021) identifies the trend that most of today's asylum applications are negative. This illustrates how the responsible caseworkers conduct the risk assessment of asylum seekers in times of securitized migration through Shuman & Bohmer's (2012) lens of suspicion. Accordingly, most applications are indeed not rejected because the applicants do not meet the requirements for refugee status, but because the caseworkers do not perceive their narratives as credible enough (Affolter, 2021).

If they can sufficiently assess an asylum applicant's narrative after the asylum hearing, the SEM (2019e) writes that they issue a first-instance decision within eight working days. They then communicate their decision to the applicant's legal representative, who has to comment on it within 24 hours. Rejected asylum seekers can then file an appeal within seven days after getting the asylum decision. If the application cannot be conclusively assessed after the asylum hearing, asylum seekers enter an extended procedure. The SEM assigns them to a specific canton

responsible for all further examinations. The extended procedure takes up to one year whereas the asylum applicant has 30 days to appeal in case of rejection (SEM, 2019e). In contrast to the former asylum procedure, the accelerated asylum procedure has significantly reduced the waiting time until an asylum decision is made. While some of my participants had to wait up to three years in the old procedure, all my informants that underwent the accelerated asylum procedure received their asylum decision in under one year.

The asylum decision has, in turn, decisive consequences for subsequent integration of the applicant assessed. I discuss the link between the asylum assessment and integration in the following subchapter.

## 5.2 Legal Exclusion of Provisionally Admitted Foreigners

Apart from the Asylum Act, the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA) is of particular importance to my participants. It regulates the entry and exit, residence and family reunification of foreigners in Switzerland, including the fostering of their integration (Fedlex, 2020). In this regard, Bertrand (2019) recognizes a strong dependency between the asylum reception infrastructure and the integration infrastructure in Switzerland. She observes that the asylum assessment labels the asylum applicants into different statuses. Each status is linked to a different form of residence permit. This permit system already comes into effect during the asylum procedure, when asylum applicants receive the *N-permit*, which in general does not allow them to engage in gainful employment (SEM, 2017). At the end of the asylum procedure, they are then divided into four different categories. Caseworkers also erase last doubts regarding the asylum credibility by categorizing all asylum applications into these clearly distinct statuses. They encompass recognized refugees with a right to asylum, refugees with temporary admission, non-refugees with temporary admission, and non-refugees without temporary admission (Affolter, 2021).

Bertrand (2019) emphasizes that this categorization leads to an additional hierarchy of people seeking protection in Switzerland. Because this political status of a person seeking protection decides about the eligible rights and thus their legal status, it highly depends on where the individual is placed in this hierarchy (Bertrand, 2019). While recognized refugees receive a *B-permit*, provisionally admitted refugees as well as provisionally admitted foreigners receive an *F-permit* (SEM, 2020a). Temporary admission was first introduced in 1986 for those individuals who, despite lacking refugee status, could not be returned to their home country due to international legislation, humanitarian or technical reasons (Sille, 2016). But the F-permit is again subdivided and granted, on the one hand, to individuals who meet the refugee definition but are not granted asylum due to reasons for asylum exclusion under the Asylum Act and, on

the other hand, to individuals who are neither recognized as refugees nor eligible for asylum (SEM, 2020a). The attached legal rights also differ from one subcategory to another, with the former having rights similar to those of recognized refugees whereas the latter have significantly fewer (Fedlex, 2020; SEM, 2020a). As a result of the caseworkers' case assessments, my participants have neither qualified for refugee status nor for asylum. But they have received an F-permit as provisionally admitted foreigners.

There are several differences between the F-permit for provisionally admitted foreigners and the B-permit for recognized refugees. According to the *Migrationsamt des Kantons Zürich* ('Migration Office of the Canton of Zurich') (2020), the F-permit is a temporally restricted substitute measure to protect individuals that are not eligible for asylum. In case of being assessed as a provisionally admitted foreigner, the F-permit needs to be renewed every year whereby the responsible officials inspect every time if subsequent deportation is reasonable or not. Since the SEM can revoke the temporary admission at any time, according to the *Verordnung über den Vollzug der Weg- und Ausweisung sowie der Landesverweisung von ausländischen Personen (VWAL)* ('Ordinance on the Execution of the Expulsion and Deportation as well as the Exile of Foreigners'), the right of residence is not equivalent to the validity period of the F-permit. Therefore, provisionally admitted foreigners are not allowed to cross international borders. In contrast to the B-permit, they are also not entitled to family reunification for at least the first three years (Migrationsamt des Kantons Zürich, 2020).

Following the guidelines of the *Swiss Conference for Social Welfare* (SKOS), map-F (2020) writes that recognized refugees also receive more money due to their entitlement to *Sozialhilfe* ('social welfare') than provisionally admitted foreigners, who only receive *Asylfürsorge* ('asylum care'). According to map-F (2020), this results from the exclusion of provisionally admitted foreigners from social welfare since 2018. While recognized refugees are generally eligible for more financial support than provisionally admitted foreigners, the available funds per capita also differ among the same categories of people in need of protection (map-F, 2020). This was not only addressed by map-F (2020) but also during my interview with a representative of the AOZ. In the canton of Zurich, several municipalities outsource the task of taking care of the asylum seekers and provisionally admitted foreigners to the ORS Service AG (ORS) and the AOZ (map-F, 2020). During our interview, the AOZ representative mentioned that the available funds per capita are geographically not uniformly distributed, which is a huge problem because it means that provisionally admitted foreigners receive different financial support depending on either the municipality of the asylum center they end up and on the organization responsible for their care. Map-F (2020) identifies the same problem and thus speaks of a *Gemeinde-Lotterie* ('lottery of municipality') in that regard.



Benelli *et al.* (2014) also criticize that provisionally admitted foreigners have lower chances to enter the labor market, which puts them in a situation that offers hardly any chances for stable security of livelihood. Hence, while Switzerland rarely recognizes diplomas and education from countries where most provisionally admitted foreigners come from, many employers are also deterred by the notion of provisional admission that intends insecurity (Benelli *et al.*, 2014). However, regarding employment, the SEM (2020b) states that the regulations for provisionally admitted foreigners have been facilitated since the beginning of 2019. Since then, the previously required authorization procedure is no longer necessary and provisionally admitted foreigners just have to submit a notification form if they find work. Also, they are allowed to participate in integration programs (SEM, 2020b). Moreover, the integration agenda of the canton of Zurich tripled the integration lump-sum per capita from CHF 6'000. – to CHF 18'000. – with the goal of facilitating successful integration (Kanton Zürich, 2021). Bertrand (2019) therefore recognizes the paradox that the government promotes a faster integration while it restricts access to the more stable B-permit at the same time.

The Migration Office of the Canton of Zurich (2020) writes that since the F-permit is a substitute measure, the conversion to a B-permit is not automatic. Although provisionally admitted foreigners can generally always apply for the B-permit, there are several conditions for its approval. These require an uninterrupted stay in Switzerland for five years and an appropriate degree of integration. An adequate degree of integration includes sufficient knowledge of written and spoken German, at least two years of employment, and financial independence for one year, as well as an unreasonable return to the home country. Besides, applicants must not be delinquent (Migrationsamt des Kantons Zürich, 2020).

## 6 Exploring Liminality along different Life Trajectories

The following part draws on my participants' narratives regarding their liminal experiences along their life trajectories in Switzerland. First, I present their narratives of how they experienced arriving in Switzerland as well as how and where they lived during the asylum procedure. I then move on to their perception of their case assessment and life after the asylum procedure. I first look at the different processes and experiences that have contributed to a high perception of exclusion along their life trajectories. In a second step, I then show how they actively perceive their status themselves. The third part then presents the strategies of my participants to build up a meaningful life and how they counteract their exclusion.

I am aware that all of my informants were already moving along their individual life trajectories before arriving in Switzerland, whereby all had to forcefully leave their last country of residence at a certain moment in life. The most common motive for fleeing, mentioned in conversations and formal interviews, was belonging to a discriminated ethnic minority in combination with a politically unstable situation in their country of residence making a desirable future impossible. One individual also feared persecution by members of a fundamentalist militant formation because he cooperated with foreign military forces in his country of origin. For this master's thesis, their arrivals in Switzerland form the starting point to explore their experiences within the Swiss border zone.

### 6.1 Arrival in the Unknown

My participants experienced arriving in Switzerland very differently, as their decision to apply for asylum here differed between intentional and rather coincidental or forced. In this context, Enas told me, that the selection of a particular country as an asylum destination varies greatly and depends on various circumstances and factors:

“You don't decide so much about the country where you go, and you just think what a good option for me would be, just a country where I can feel comfortable and I think, at least, that's very different for all refugees.”<sup>2</sup> (Enas)

Whether one can 'feel comfortable' in a country or not is difficult to assess in advance. Those of my participants who intentionally chose Switzerland as their asylum destination explained that they hoped for help from acquaintances or tried to reunify with family members who had already applied for asylum here. Others knew Switzerland and its pictorial scenery from television or knew organizations located here that advocate for the rights of refugees, which is

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<sup>2</sup> Except for Adib, with whom I conducted the interview in English, I translated all other quotes as accurately as possible.

why they considered as well as expected it to be a suitable destination for seeking asylum. Those who did not intend to make an asylum claim here coincidentally got into a check of state mobilities during their transit, for example, and since they did not meet the Schengen entry conditions subsequently had to be registered. Due to their registration in Switzerland, as the first (official) Schengen country of entry, their original plans were thwarted, and they had to remain here according to the Dublin Regulation. Hamid, who traveled in a group of several individuals, mentioned that they had first intended to apply for asylum in Germany. However, as they were told by other asylum seekers that the German asylum application procedure is taking a very long time, they decided to move on to Switzerland instead. His narrative shows that while various factors, considerations, and expectations enter into the evaluation of a possible asylum destination, original plans may still change intentionally or unintentionally, which again affects their life trajectories.

Despite different thoughts and expectations about the considered asylum destination, all of my informants associate their arrival with a great deal of uncertainty and a fundamental lack of knowledge. During the interviews, many expressed that, especially at the beginning, they were completely left in doubt regarding their future after arriving in Switzerland. When I asked Enas about how he remembers his arrival he said for example:

“We came here as refugees, like little babies who are just big. We didn’t know the language, the asylum laws, not even the Swiss laws. We didn’t really know the people. [...] My expectations were just entirely different than reality.” (Enas)

His statement not only shows that he was utterly unfamiliar with the Swiss asylum laws and the asylum procedure but also with the German language, and, as the comparison with an infant indicates, the way of Swiss life in general.

How ubiquitous this unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge is present from the very beginning was also emphasized by Hamid as he described how he and his friends arrived at Zurich main station at the end of 2015. Since they neither knew where nor how to apply for asylum, they started to ask random pedestrians at the train station for advice. But these people could not help either, as they also did not know how to apply for asylum. After a while, Hamid and his friends coincidentally spotted a man they thought was either of the same nationality or at least of a foreign background. Luckily, he indeed knew of an asylum center in another city, approximately one hour away from Zurich by train, and told them that they maybe could apply for asylum there. Based on this information, they then traveled on to the aforesaid city and could indeed file their asylum application there. Besides a fundamental lack of knowledge, Hamid’s arrival also shows that he neither arrived directly in front of an asylum center nor did he end up in a control by state mobilities after entering Swiss territory. Therefore, he and his friends were left on their own to first find a place that allowed them to make an asylum claim.

But even those of my participants who indeed ran into police control were not directly taken to an asylum center. Adib, who arrived by train in July 2019, reported that following a check by the police, he received an address of an asylum center as well as a ticket to travel there by himself for registration. In the process of registration, he mentioned how some officials collected his documents, and how they took biometric data such as fingerprints. Adib also narrated that they then transferred him to another facility where officials compared his fingerprints to the EURODAC database in order to check whether he was already registered in another Schengen state. But since the database did not find a corresponding match, he could stay here in Switzerland as it was the case for all of my participants. The next subchapter illustrates how my participants lived during the asylum procedure after their arrival.

## 6.2 Legal Space of the Asylum Center

All of my participants described the asylum procedure as a very difficult time. Difficult in a way that they felt socially as well as geographically isolated from their local surroundings, experienced limited privacy, and restricted freedom. Additionally, the persistent uncertainty regarding the outcome of their asylum application emerged as another key topic during the interviews.

Taher, who arrived in Switzerland in January 2016, has already lived in several asylum accommodations and explained why life in these asylum accommodations is challenging. As he described his relocation from one gender-segregated camp to another, he said:

“But in *City B* we were much more [men], about 500. And most of them were very aggressive. They are newly coming from many different countries, from war zones. They didn't understand each other and most of them didn't know other cultures from other countries at all. There was always fighting. There were always problems. You couldn't sleep well at night. There was no night rest. There was no day's rest. There was no respect between people and you didn't have a school or a course (...). Then I had wondered and thought, yes, this is like a prison, actually, this is already a prison.”  
(Taher)

There are three points I would like to address from his statement. First, as Taher indicates, he could not choose the social environment of the asylum center he ended up in. Thus, he found himself in a compulsory community. It consisted of several individuals belonging to different ethnicities having different cultures with many of them being psychologically shaped by their experiences before or during their flight. They were then randomly distributed among the rooms of the asylum facility. While Taher had to share his room with 14 other people in the previous example, Hamid told me that he once had 26 roommates for half a year while he was living in a bunker without any windows and light in his room. The resulting lack of privacy often ended

in conflicts because many roommates followed different daily routines. While some tried to sleep at night, others stayed awake during the night and did not respect the night's rest, which is why the potential for conflict was very high in any of these facilities.

Second, Taher describes that many accommodations did not provide schooling or language classes. When I asked him how he originally spent his days there and what activities the facility management organized, he said that the offerings of activities greatly varied between the different centers he lived in. While he could attend a language course or engage in a few organized activities in some of them, they mostly did not provide any activities. Therefore, all he could do was to talk to other co-residents, read, learn German by himself, or take over internal duties such as cleaning the facility. He further mentioned tremendous fatigue that took hold of him during the first weeks after arrival that made him very inert. Enas spoke of similar tiredness and immediately provided his explanation for it. He said that he was initially incredibly happy and thought to finally be in freedom and peace after arriving in Switzerland. But, after a while, he noticed how he slowly started to lose energy. He referred to a culture shock and that after around six months he was not motivated to do anything anymore. He stopped talking to anyone for a while and was just sleeping all day because everything felt "dark", as he said, just like in his country of origin during wartime. He was far away from his family in a shared room in which he did not feel comfortable without having anything to do.

This leads me to the third point of Taher's statement that I would like to address, which is the comparison of the asylum center with a prison. It impressively illustrates the experience of spatial liminality during the asylum procedure. Yassra's narrative also fits into this comparison as she recounted how she experienced a lack of freedom. She described that her first asylum center was not a public place that she could leave and return to freely. As a result, she had to follow strict rules. She was, for example, only allowed to leave her accommodation for a walk for around one or two hours a day. This rule geographically restricted her radius of movement as she was forced to stay inside the asylum center for most of the time. It also happened that the movements of my participants were closely monitored by the staff of the asylum center, especially at the beginning. In this regard, Taher told me that he always had to report to responsible officials to obtain their consent as soon as he intended to leave the facility. Most of the time he and his co-residents were even accompanied by the camp officials outside the center which portrays how they felt controlled and surveilled. They could also only leave their facility between 9 AM and 5 PM, whereas visitors were not allowed inside the center. However, according to his experience, the effective rules vary more or less from location to location.

Enas, for example, just mentioned a few internal rules in his first asylum center such as adhering to the night rest from 10 PM onward. He described that, while living in a small remote village, he and his fellow residents even felt somehow abandoned by the asylum care since there was

not even a single ORS official working in their center. As the entrance of their accommodation was broken, it was not uncommon that they unintentionally encountered unwanted visitors such as drug dealers who were trying to take advantage of their situation and incited them to sell drugs. As a result of these living conditions, he often felt extremely unsafe in his room. But just because there were only a few internal rules to follow does not mean that they did not experience any form of control. Once or twice per month, they underwent unannounced police checks. He described how these checks varied from relatively simple identity checks to meticulous housing searches and usually took place early in the morning. In fact, according to my informants, such police and security controls were not uncommon and also happened in the new asylum facilities in the context of the revised asylum procedure. Alisson, who has been living in Switzerland for around one year and thus lived in one of the new federal asylum centers also spoke of unannounced inspections by the police or camp security personnel. Accordingly, they even used dogs to search their rooms and lockers, for which the security officers had all the keys. He added with a laugh that they even checked their refrigerator.

Adib also used the term of a prisoner when he shared how he was treated in the asylum center. While he believes that strict rules and controls might be the result of previous bad experiences with other asylum seekers, he also emphasized that they were rather annoying and seemed childish to him being a “normal adult”. Accordingly, he did not understand, for example, why he was not allowed to use the internet. When he asked for the reason why he could not video call his wife and mother, the employees told him that all the rules are in place for his own safety whereas to him they seemed to be rather a chicanery. My interviewees’ experiences with the asylum facility officials were generally mixed. While some were friendly, others treated them in a highly discriminatory manner. One problem that arose during a few interviews was that some of the employees also belong to different nationalities. Those employees had various functions and were responsible for different tasks in the center. They sold, for example, clothes or were hairdressers. In this regard, Adib and Taher both mentioned that they often took sides with their countrymen.

“When an Arab works there, he always looks after Arabs. If an Iranian works there, he always likes Iranians. And those who come from Somalia, they are somehow concerned about the people from Somalia living there.” (Taher)

Adib explained that these relationships with employees, in turn, led to privileges and less strict control for some of the asylum seekers. He narrated how he once asked a security guard why certain people were allowed to smoke outside during the night and he was not. The guard simply replied that “it is something else” and that he should go to sleep. Because these people were employees, Adib felt helpless after complaining to the asylum center management, but nothing happened. Co-residents then made him aware that if he continues to attract attention by complaining, it could have a negative impact on his asylum decision. As a result, he left it at

only one complaint and tried to bear with the situation by just accepting the experienced inequality. While talking to Alisson, he additionally emphasized that ethnic conflicts and inequality also arose among the asylum applicants. He also said that he avoided contact with his countrymen since he belongs to an ethnic minority and because he made very bad experiences with some of them, even though they were not officials and in the same position as him.

Besides the experiences of hindered living conditions within the asylum center, its geographical surroundings played a major role regarding the geographical and social isolation my participants experienced. Adib, for example, stated the following about the environment of his former asylum facility:

“I never went somewhere because I had no person out there and the money which has been given to you at that time, it’s so little that you cannot travel anywhere. You are given 21 Francs per week (...). So, you cannot travel anywhere. I just didn’t travel. But there were many guys who had some relatives here and they would go and spend nights [during the weekends].” (Adib)

Adib’s statement implies that he would have been allowed to leave the facility, travel, and even stay out overnight, at least during the weekends. But since he arrived in Switzerland alone, he did not know anybody around and thus simply did not have a place to go. Besides, he also did not have the necessary financial means to be able to travel at all. Therefore, he somehow still felt forced to stay inside the asylum center even when there were no explicit interdictions. But Adib added that they had the possibility to work in the kitchen, the laundry, or the adjacent forest to at least earn a bit of money during the asylum procedure.

Since my participants were mostly inside or in the adjacencies of their asylum center, their social connections to the outside world and especially to the Swiss residents were generally extremely weak. While a few were lucky enough and had contacts with friendly people showing support, most of them did not connect with locals, as they could not communicate with them at the time, did not know how to approach them, or even felt unwelcomed:

“Because for the first time you are thinking this, your inner feelings that: Oh, I’m kind of alien to these people. And so, you don’t try to have a conversation with them. And they also, they are not concerned about you.” (Adib)

“Even some neighbors that could say good morning or greet you just looked at us mad or harsh, because we just didn’t look like them or, I don’t know what they thought, because we were just different than them. It totally changed that we didn’t have the feeling of being human, but the feeling of being an asylum seeker.” (Enas)

Of particular interest is how Adib's and Enas' experiences with the local community had an additional impact on how they started to perceive themselves as different compared to the Swiss natives. This shows that, besides the strong experiences of spatial liminality, they already experienced ontological liminality during the asylum procedure, whereby its full extent will be discussed when I talk about my participants' reflexivity.

This subchapter predominantly demonstrated the challenges faced while living in the asylum center during the asylum procedure. In a compulsory social environment with a high potential of conflict, my participants experienced tough living conditions and a lack of activities in combination with a high level of control and limited freedom. Forced to spend most of their time within the asylum center, they remained unfamiliar with their geographical surroundings and short of financial means that further increased their experience of spatial as well as ontological liminality.

### **6.3 The Big Interview – Road to Exclusion**

While Affolter (2021) looked at the practice of asylum adjudication from the perspective of caseworkers in the SEM, I also asked my informants about how they remember their encounters with their SEM caseworkers during the asylum procedure. Allison recounted how his case assessment started with a brief initial interview, in which the majority of the questions were about the path of his flight. During this initial interview, Taher also had to answer questions about his family and was then asked very roughly about his grounds for asylum. All of my participants recounted how they were then invited for a second asylum hearing, also known as “the big interview”, as Adib explained to me during our interview. After the revision of the asylum procedure in 2019, the time period between the initial and the second asylum hearing also significantly decreased. While Yassra, for example, had to wait over seven months until she got invited for the second interview in 2016, Allison's whole asylum procedure took around half that time in 2019.

The second asylum hearing is much more extensive than the initial interview. My participants told me that they were interviewed for between three and thirteen hours in detail about their previous life, about why and how they came to Switzerland. During our interview, Yassra emphasized the tension and stress ahead of the second asylum hearing. She felt like before a major exam, was extremely nervous and could not sleep the night before because she knew that her future in Switzerland was at stake. Since examinees can usually prepare for an exam, I wondered to what extent my participants were able to prepare for their second asylum hearing. Hamid remembered that some officials informed him after the initial interview that the pivotal question in the second asylum hearing will be why he came to Switzerland. Because this is very broad and ambiguous, he was left in uncertainty about what other questions to expect and



because he did not have any support or advisor he also started to ask around for more details. However, Taher explained that additional information such as advice from other asylum seekers can be dangerously counter-productive. He experienced that his fellow residents started to give him unsolicited advice. They inculcated him that by no means he should make mention of any acquaintances or family members in Europe or Switzerland, as it will negatively impact his asylum decision and asserted that the responsible caseworkers will call someone in his home country to assure that he is who he claims to be. In retrospect, Taher realized that much of this information was incorrect, but at the time the advice frightened him even more, which is why he went to the asylum hearings in great fear.

Allison emphasized the extensiveness of his second asylum hearing by telling me that he had to go into the smallest detail imaginable. Accordingly, he was asked, for example, how many trees there were in the garden of his old house and he needed to describe its geographical surroundings to the meter. He was so stressed and concentrated that he completely forgot his sense of time. In the end, the interviewers questioned him for just under thirteen hours. Because they still doubted his story, they then invited him back for another interview a week later, which took another nine hours and resulted in a transcript of 46 pages.

Taher recapped the extent of the asylum hearing by saying that he had to recount his personal story “from the first day he remembered in his life”. After each of his statements, they additionally asked him for the exact date of when the described event happened, which he often did not remember anymore. He was also surprised that they always asked him for tangible evidence to prove his narrative. Based on what he has been through in his life, he expected that he would quickly get protected in Europe, especially Switzerland. As a member of a discriminated minority, he lived in constant danger when he had to leave the area in which his ethnic group was tolerated, to work, buy food, or medicine. He also told me how he then had to disguise himself each time to avoid getting killed by radical militants. Taher also emphasized that he was discriminated against by his professor and was, for example, not allowed to attend certain schools because of his ethnicity. Of course, neither the militants nor his professor gave him any written document confirming his persecution or discrimination. Besides, since he never expected to have to prove his life story at any given point in time, he did not have any video or voice recordings. Like Taher, most of my participants struggled with presenting their stories as credible to their caseworkers, as they were lacking the necessary credibility markers to convince them.

Adib, who fled to Switzerland out of fear of persecution from a terrorist organization due to his collaboration with a foreign military, was even accused of lying during the second asylum hearing. On a joint hike, he recounted that he did not intentionally lie at all. During his flight, he had to fight for his life many times, which psychologically confused his mind so much that

he simply forgot how many cousins he has. While he said two during the initial interview, he later remembered that he has three. The caseworkers then interpreted this inconsistency as a lie. Besides, Allison even said that his interviewer sometimes deliberately made false statements and tried to confuse him. Moreover, my participants had to correct their interpreters present at their asylum hearings, who, according to Enas and Taher, sometimes translated incorrectly. But to recognize such translation mistakes, however, at least some knowledge of German was required, which of course depended heavily on the time already spent in Switzerland and on the linguistic knowledge of the individuals themselves. Next to these difficult circumstances, Taher also identified that the manner of questioning and the interviewer's knowledge amplified the already tense atmosphere during the interviews:

“Because (...) you're also not being asked in a good way. But like, as if you came here as a criminal. And they argue on issues that are clear for you. For you, they are your life, they are a part of you. But for him it means nothing. And that's annoying. That annoys you and if you say the same thing several times, then he gets annoyed. Then he says: “Yeah, why don't you say something different. You always say the same thing. I want to hear something different”. And then, yeah, you just think, this is not an interview. This is just to screw people.” (Taher)

Not only Taher, but most of my participants criticized their former caseworkers' knowledge. Accordingly, people who had “no idea” about their country of origin because they had “never been there” ultimately decided about their status and thus about their future life trajectories. Hence, they estimated the country knowledge of the caseworkers as insufficient, overly generalized, and sometimes even incorrect, as Hamid emphasized:

“(...) there are provinces in *country A* that are considered safe places from Switzerland's point of view. But they are not safe.” (Hamid)

Adib also brought up what Hamid meant. He recounted how his interviewer asserted that the province where he grew up and worked as a military translator is considered to be safe. When he heard this comment, he could not help laughing. He then desperately tried to explain that even Hollywood war movies about his country are usually set in the exact same province where he lived and worked. However, the interrogator insisted on his own country knowledge and merely admonished Adib that he should not laugh in this room.

Unlike most of my participants' bad experiences with the second asylum hearing, Yassra's interview went unexpectedly well. After traveling to Berne for her second asylum hearing with great concerns, she was interviewed for only three hours and did not mention any further problems or complications. Her narrative also illustrates how differently an asylum hearing can proceed or be perceived. However, it should be mentioned that Yassra was the only one who spoke of a reasonably quick interview and a relatively pleasant atmosphere.

Those participants who were still in the old asylum procedure all recounted how they had to wait extremely long for their asylum decision after their second asylum hearing. Enas, Hamid, and Taher stressed that waiting for the decision parallel to their isolated life in the asylum center for several years was very hard for them. Taher said about the time of waiting that those who have not had psychological problems yet were getting them because they were left in complete uncertainty about their future. The experience of temporal liminality thus had a great impact on his health condition because the uncertainty about what will happen to him started to dominate his thoughts as the following statement shows:

“After some time, this thought [of what is going to happen to my life] becomes so repetitive, that one is depressed. If you somehow suffer from mental problems, then you can’t sleep. Then you can’t eat. Then you don’t like to meet with your friends or you don’t like to go outside. You always stay at home.” (Taher)

Since those participants who experienced the old asylum procedure also knew about the current changes of the asylum procedure, I additionally asked them about their opinions regarding the current trends in the Swiss asylum infrastructure. Enas told me that he is conflicted. On the one hand, he welcomes faster asylum decisions because, if positive, they allow for faster access to language courses, which then facilitates a successful integration. While he could only attend a language school after three years of living in complete uncertainty, he now knows refugees and provisionally admitted foreigners who could start their language courses just one year after their arrival. On the other hand, since the whole procedure is now fully handled in a single decentralized asylum center, he is concerned that today’s asylum applicants are even more isolated from their geographical surroundings because they are bound to a single location. In his opinion, they thus cannot establish a social network or have the chance to understand how life even works outside the asylum facility. He added that living in different asylum centers had helped him, as he appreciated a change in his social environment every now and then which made him more open-minded. A second point he emphasized is that because most asylum seekers are not granted asylum today, they can also lose everything within a very short period of time. By everything, Enas not only means the chance of a safe life in Switzerland. He also explained that many individuals sell all their belongings or even incur debts to be able to leave their country of origin. He then added that in the case of rejection and imminent deportation, they may even be disowned by their family, as they are seen as a disgrace or failure.

All of my participants still remember the moment when they learned of their negative asylum decision very well. Remarkably, all of my interviewees were already aware of the various residence permits at this point. They had all been informed by friends or acquaintances about the set of rights and the implied restrictions of the F-permit. Therefore, most of them became extremely disheartened, sad, and depressed when they heard that their asylum claim got rejected. Some of them tried to appeal against their decision and inquired with volunteer

lawyers. Unfortunately, the lawyers were unable to help them because they had no evidence that could have turned the decision around. Moreover, Adib and Allison also questioned the legal representatives they received in the context of the new asylum procedure. When I asked Alisson about the function of his legal representative, he said that these lawyers have a rather negative than a positive impact on the asylum applicants. He added that he even knows individuals whose lawyers used statements from private conversations against them during the asylum hearing. In his opinion, they thus function more as additional interrogators than supporters for the asylum applicants.

When Adib asked his lawyer why he received a negative asylum decision he told him that his story is just a “normal” one. Normal because even though radical militants attacked him twice, they did not seriously injure or kill him. Adib then replied how he could even talk to him if he were dead and whether this means that he first has to be killed for them to believe his narrative. Because he made a point of telling his story as matter-of-factly as possible, he also asked if they would have preferred to hear an exaggerated story, a story like from a Quentin Tarantino action movie. He said that if that is the case, he could have easily made up a fictitious story, as long as he would have been recognized as a refugee and hence got a B-permit. Accordingly, he even knows some individuals that indeed received a B-permit after narrating a completely fabricated story. He further believes that these individuals got some help and were somehow prepared before the asylum hearing.

Adib concluded from his experiences that the asylum case assessment is a pure lottery that illustrates that the caseworkers do not have enough knowledge to make such important decisions. Taher had a similar narrative and said that whenever he talks about the case assessment with his friends, it seems to be ridiculous. After Adib communicated his incomprehension regarding the case assessment to his lawyer, the lawyer told him that he believes his story. Thereupon Adib wondered why he still had no chance to appeal and stressed his uselessness during the asylum procedure. In desperation, he then asked a friend, a co-resident, for advice about what he should do next. His friend warned him that the decision-makers might also take away his F-permit if he continues to complain, which is why he refrained from acting against the decision, which he regrets today.

While this subsection examined how my participants experienced their assignment in the additional hierarchy of refugees, the next subsection focuses on how they experience their lives since being categorized as provisionally admitted foreigners.

## 6.4 The Everyday Incorporation of the Border

What often arose while talking to my informants about their current life situation is their perception of living in two completely different worlds. These worlds consist on the one hand of being in and directly around the asylum center and, on the other hand, the world outside their facility. I address their liminal experiences made while navigating through both of these worlds in this subchapter.

Many of my participants stressed that since the exclusion of provisionally admitted foreigners from social welfare, they receive significantly less money compared to recognized refugees and are no longer entitled to get their own apartment if they depend on financial aid. As a result, they are often forced to continue living in an asylum center even after the asylum procedure. For this reason, it is unsurprising that five of my six participants with F-permit are currently still living in asylum centers. In a direct comparison, Murat, who arrived in Switzerland in early 2020, was able to credibly prove his persecution on the basis of his political convictions. He could show an official governmental document in which he was dismissed from his job because of his political opinion and was dubbed a terrorist. Recognized as a political refugee, he received his B-permit. This allowed him to move into his own apartment via social welfare just around one year after his arrival. Due to his status as a recognized refugee, he also has the right to family reunification, and his family could officially join him in Switzerland around two months after he moved into his apartment. Several of my provisionally admitted participants recounted similar stories about some of their refugee friends having a B-permit. While their friends could move into their apartments financed by social welfare, they themselves had to stay in the asylum center without having the immediate right to family reunification.

There, the problems of social and geographical isolation already experienced during the asylum procedure remain largely unchanged. This also emerged when I asked some of my informants about how they currently feel affected by the Corona pandemic. Taher and Enas told me that they are certainly less troubled than the Swiss since they already have a smaller social network and are more isolated in their asylum centers in the first place. Enas added that he believes that the two-month lockdown, announced in March 2020, had put many Swiss citizens on the same level as people with refugee backgrounds. He said that these two months had already been unbearable for many Swiss and that we should now imagine that there are thousands of individuals for whom it has been commonplace to be unable to go out or work, not only for a couple of months, but for years.

The well-being of my participants greatly varied based on the experienced living conditions within their facilities as well as the support by the responsible facility management. Yassra explained that, because she fled together with her little sister and arrived shortly after her

parents, they received a family apartment within their asylum facility, whereas men, who arrived alone, have been accommodated in shared rooms. While she emphasized her satisfaction with her current living situation, other participants reported poor living conditions, an ongoing lack of freedom in their facilities, and serious issues with the facility management.

Taher referred to a form of helplessness when problems arise in the asylum center. He described how he and his fellow residents have been insulted by their manager who once even told him that he is not willing to talk to the other residents because, in his eyes, they are not humans, but pigs. Besides being discriminated against, Taher further mentioned that the same manager does not have time for any of their concerns and does not care about the maintenance of their asylum center. This is particularly annoying when important things break. For example, when the washing machine once broke down, his manager said that he would not organize a new one. He then argued that since it was not him who broke it, they would have to pay for the damage. Taher stressed that in such cases, days or even months elapse before their manager addresses their problems. Enas described a similar form of temporal dependency regarding his social advisor. He said that sometimes several weeks pass by before he responds to his e-mails, which bothers him a lot because it means that he loses valuable time.

Because of the ongoing problems in their facility, Taher and his co-residents once started to collect signatures and tried to submit a letter of complaint about their manager to the local municipality. When the manager heard about this undertaking, he started to threaten them and said that every signature on the letter would have noticeable negative consequences for the corresponding person. Because of his intimidation, there were residents who then withdrew their signatures out of fear. Others were not intimidated, and a conversation with the municipality directorate eventually took place. However, it did not lead to any improvements because, according to the directorate, the facility management was responsible to manage their concerns and not the municipality. Hamid similarly reported how it was already difficult for him and his co-residents to complain. He said that he once lived in an asylum center managed by the ORS and that every time they had a concern the ORS directed them to the municipality. But when they approached the municipality, its representatives said that ORS was responsible. This back and forth caused valuable time to pass and their problems remained mostly unaddressed.

Besides the asylum care, the geographical location and surroundings of the asylum center also play an important role for my participants' well-being. Adib reported that he sometimes wakes up in the middle of the night just to find a random person standing outside his door looking for drugs. He said that shady people that are not even living in his asylum center make him feel very uncomfortable because, as he put it himself, he might just as well live in a run-down neighborhood in his home country. As a counterexample, Yassra mentioned that she feels very

lucky with the location of her accommodation and that the beautiful environment invites to gladly spend time there.

Next to the world that my participants experience in and geographically directly around their asylum facilities, they must also manage the world outside. As I interviewed Adib, he emphasized that as soon as he leaves his asylum facility, he finds himself in the center of wealth and modern economy. He underlined the contrasting perception of both worlds, as follows:

“So, I’m sitting in one of the top five universities of the world. Or Europe’s best university in sciences and giving you this interview. But I know that after eight o’clock at night I will be in a place where you barely could find an educated person. You barely can find like a clean washroom to do a poop.” (Adib)

But this ‘outside world’ also holds difficulties for my participants. On the one hand, it is geographically severely restricted, since the F-permit does not allow them to leave the country. This bothers Allison, as he would like or at least be allowed to visit other countries in his free time. On the other hand, living here meant a start from scratch for my participants since Switzerland did not recognize their educations and certificates. This is not only a specific problem for provisionally admitted foreigners but also for recognized refugees. To pursue new labor, they all stressed the importance of education, and especially the knowledge of German. On a walk with Taher and Adib, I asked Adib, knowing that he recently started to take German classes, about his language school. He answered that although he really likes the classes, the problem of social isolation remains outside the asylum center as well, since there are obviously no Swiss students in his class. He and many others thus stay unfamiliar with the Swiss and often do not know how to approach them. Yassra, for example, told me that especially young Swiss seem to be extremely busy. She then said that they probably just prefer to be among themselves or are not open to meet new people. However, she immediately added that her impression could well be wrong and that she just does not know any better.

I also asked my participants directly in which situations they become aware of their status outside their asylum centers. Taher, for example, explained that he intended to study medicine but was then not allowed to do so because of his F-permit, despite having passed the university entrance exam. In addition, he emphasized that semester fees are significantly higher for him than for Swiss citizens or recognized refugees. Regarding education, Adib and Taher also added that recognized refugees are eligible to visit better language schools and courses than provisionally admitted foreigners. Besides education, most of my informants also mentioned significant differences in terms of stable employment.

Although the government has addressed the hurdles to work as provisionally admitted foreigners, my participants reported that it was or still is very difficult for them to find work. Almost all of them mentioned that they have less chance of finding work with an F-permit than with a B-permit. Accordingly, employers often do not want to employ them because of the risk that they could lose their provisional admission at any time. Only two out of the six participants with the F-permit worked at the time I conducted my fieldwork. However, Alisson and Adib have only been here for about a year and a half and are still attending intensive German courses before applying for an apprenticeship later. Enas only found employment after five years, and after he had been rejected countless times. Yassra was luckier and could already do an internship in several places and is currently working in a bar. But Hamid emphasized that even if they find work, certain disadvantages still remain because of their status. After finally finding a job in the gastronomy sector, the Corona pandemic in Switzerland worsened in early 2020, which led to restaurants and shops closing down. Hamid then lost his job and is currently unemployed. It is worth noting that he mentioned that employees with an F-permit were the first to be laid off whereas individuals with a B-permit were less affected.

Besides education and the difficulties in entering the labor market, some of my participants also reported about everyday situations in which their F-permit imposed restrictions on them. Taher recounted how he once tried to buy a new laptop by installment payment. The salesman assured him that this would not be a problem. However, as he showed him the F-permit, the salesman said that unfortunately, because of the F-permit, he had to pay everything at once. Adib and Enas portrayed another daily situation. Both of them mentioned that they were not allowed to buy a SIM card for their cell phones because they were only provisionally admitted and did not have a B-permit. Adib then said that he subsequently had to pay a large sum of money in advance as a guarantee. However, he immediately added that the phone providers were not to blame. After all, it is his permit that legally obliges them to do so. These examples illustrate how my participants actively perceive everyday restrictions due to their status as provisionally admitted foreigners.

In the next subchapter, I address how this awareness and the reflection of their life situation affects their personalities. This is important to address to understand how they are negotiating their legal exclusion along their life trajectories by being reflexive and able to counteract their situations.



## 6.5 Understanding the Purpose of Liminality

The previous examples and situations illustrate that my participants regularly feel the negative impact of their status. They usually feel driven towards exclusion because of their social and geographical isolation while living in asylum centers and because of their disadvantaged position in the social hierarchy.

Interestingly, Taher stressed that the feeling of being legally as well as socially excluded is already anchored in many refugees even before they leave their home countries. After all, a disadvantaged position in the social hierarchy already played a decisive role in his decision to flee. Many of my participants reported how they suffered from exclusion even before their flight to Europe. Taher added that he now has the exact same feeling of not being equal to everyone else here, with the difference that it hurts more in Switzerland because many human rights organizations could support him.

Depending on the experiences they made on their life trajectories, some of my informants developed the feeling of not being protected early on during the asylum procedure. Enas, for example, sees the reason for the regular police checks as well as the poor living conditions in the asylum center in the securitization of migration as the following interview excerpt shows:

“So, as a refugee, you are not protected, because you are seen as a criminal, as a suspect, as an undesirable person. Thus, we were not protected by security, but we were always controlled by the police.” (Enas)

Especially the second asylum hearing confirmed that initial perception because of the way the interviewers examined the narratives. In this context, Enas said that the second asylum hearing has completely changed his life in a negative way only because some caseworkers have decided not to trust him and his story. Taher also pointed out that the case assessment and the categorization of asylum applicants into different statuses are unfair from his point of view. In retrospect, my participants identified their asylum decision as highly unfair and fundamentally responsible for the subsequent restrictions they have experienced ever since.

These daily reminders and restrictions foster their perception of being at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Taher said that those reminders are sometimes very hidden. Even though he was allowed to study, his status has implied restrictions regarding the choice of subjects as well as a higher fee per semester. Such experiences have merged into the perception of a ‘suggested freedom’ meaning that nothing seems to be forbidden but everything is followed by a huge ‘but’, conditions, or restrictions for my participants.

Hence, Adib concluded that:

“This piece of paper will deny you any success. Or it will keep you shorter in a run than all other people. They will always be ahead of you.” (Adib)

Especially when my participants compared their own situation with the lives of recognized refugees, the feeling of frustration and incomprehension became apparent. Legally, for example, it is not forbidden to move into an apartment with an F-permit. But unlike recognized refugees, provisionally admitted foreigners must be financially independent to do so. They are also allowed to work with an F-permit, but the permission alone does not change their situation since they could still get rejected and deported, which could happen at any time. Legally, they are even allowed to apply for a B-permit at any time. However, Enas then emphasized all the reams of conditions to become eligible for changing his status. Therefore, in his opinion, it is unrealistic to obtain a B-permit, even after five years.

Due to the active perception of being disadvantaged, my participants have also perceived their asylum care as somehow dishonest and not genuinely serving their best interest. Hamid believes, for example, that the care he experienced while living in the asylum center was only intended to prevent him and his former co-residents from attracting too much negative attention outside of their facility. But he mentioned that the responsible officials did not necessarily care what happened inside the asylum center. Enas also found very clear words on this aspect and said that he experiences what he calls “double face”, meaning that in Switzerland it seems like human rights are upheld and honored and that people in need of protection receive great support, when in reality, the system in place complicates his life. He added that if a country is admitting asylum seekers and provisionally admitted foreigners for humanitarian reasons, then it should genuinely stand up for them and offer support. Otherwise, it would be more honest to explicitly state that Switzerland does not want to protect any refugees at all. He added that all the negative experiences of living here since his arrival showed him that he is not only unwanted but also not allowed to feel comfortable here.

Taher addressed the same perception. He said, for example, that although his current asylum facility is not a repatriation center, it certainly feels like one. Because of the ongoing problems with his facility manager and the conversation held with the directorate of his municipality, he also believes that the municipality is satisfied with the facility management and does not see any need of changing the status quo. He thinks that by repeatedly complicating life for provisionally admitted foreigners, the municipality aims to push them to the decision of leaving Switzerland on their own accord.

Adib reported how the lack of support and the restricted set of rights have affected his personality since the asylum decision. He emphasized several times that even though he tries

to make his own decisions, there are numerous aspects of his life over which he has no control. He added that he is actively aware of this inability, which is why he started to get stressed about his future. Thus, he can feel how he is slowly being pushed into a corner. He mentioned that he deliberately uses the passive form to describe this feeling because there is no single entity or person who actively pushes him into this metaphorical corner. Still, he noticed how he increasingly meets significantly fewer people due to persistently being stressed. However, he emphasized that other residents have even fewer social contacts because, unlike him, they do not have very good English or German skills and are thus fully unable to even meet people outside their facility.

Enas further described that after he could not even buy a SIM card for his mobile phone to call his parents, he started to fundamentally question his value as a human and whether he was a human being at all. Because it was also hard for him to build up a social network, and to identify with or belong to a social group, he even read a book about the subject of identity to address his confusion. This helped him a lot to understand his environment and life situation from a different perspective and to get in touch with different people from different cultures. The extent to which a different perspective can change the narrative of experiences also emerged during my conversations with Allison and Yassra. They both emphasized that they still believe in having much better chances for a meaningful life in Switzerland than before, even with an F-permit. Especially when my participants compared themselves with those individuals who are currently living in Switzerland without any permit, they were glad to have a permit which allows them to live here legally at all.

Talking to Hasib, who currently lives here without a permit and thus illegally navigates through both worlds, strongly underlined what Allison and Yassra meant. The legal exclusion he experiences on a daily level is much more dramatic for him than it is for any of the other participants. Hasib told me that as soon as he leaves his repatriation center, he is constantly looking out for the police since he is technically not allowed to leave his facility. In case he gets caught, he then faces high monetary fines and he had to go to jail several times because he was not able to pay them. Additionally, he is not allowed to work or attend any German-language schools and receives even less financial aid than my other participants.

Allison, a good friend of Hasib, then told me how much their living situations differ and how hard life would be for him without any permit. It is also striking how Allison manages to draw motivation from his case assessment. He explained to me that because he has more difficult living conditions with an F-permit compared to a B-permit, it spurs him on to change his situation and achieve something in life. And because at least he lives legally in Switzerland, he believes that he might be able to manage his life. Therefore, I now draw on these motivations and strategies that my participants developed to counteract their daily exclusion.

## 6.6 Negotiating and Counteracting Exclusion

During my fieldwork, I recognized several strategies that help my participants to counteract what Adib described as the passive exclusionary force of the asylum system. My participants usually told me how they first had to become familiar with life in Switzerland to overcome the fundamental lack of knowledge about their rights and possibilities. Because they did not experience any genuine support of the asylum care, they began to build up strong cohesion among themselves, made friends in the asylum center, and tried to organize themselves from early on.

Taher commented that although the lack of privacy in the asylum accommodations has repeatedly led to quarrels, most people have now become accustomed to each other, and have developed friendships within the asylum center. As an example, he shared that despite different origins, some people have even started to learn each other's mother tongues rather than German so that they can at least communicate with each other. In his opinion, this is partly due to social and geographical isolation, as they have no contact with German-speaking people. Fittingly, Adib told me that learning a language is useless if he has no one to talk to. Taher also said that some people in his asylum accommodation are not motivated to learn German because they are uncertain about whether they can stay in Switzerland or not. According to Enas, friendships also helped him not to be alone with his problems as he started to share them with his friends. He described that this cohesion is comparable to that of a family and that the co-residents were the only people who were there for him. Besides that, these friendships have also helped him to develop agency.

Enas explained that because he and his former co-residents quickly realized that they were not getting honest support, they developed a strong sense of self-responsibility and established a genuine form of togetherness. Accordingly, they began to share all their knowledge among themselves, as they understood that they were all in the same boat and had the same goal in mind. He said that they felt the urge to do something because after all, they were not "cows or pigs that only eat and sleep". He described how they started to communicate with each other in broken English without any knowledge of German and how they organized themselves in the asylum center.

Outside the center, they then began to search for schools together where they could learn German for free, and eventually found organizations of volunteers who offered genuine help. These volunteers continuously helped them to extend their knowledge about the asylum system and life in Switzerland more and more. Yassra described how she has already met some retired Swiss people in a church house during her asylum procedure. They voluntarily gave her and her co-residents German lessons for free, which she described as extremely important and

helpful. Unlike official language school programs, these volunteers also do not differentiate between people based on their ethnicity or residence permit. Hamid shared that some local residents even helped him and his former co-residents to get better accommodation as they started to protest against the harsh living conditions in the bunker converted to an asylum center. As a result, he could stay with a Swiss family for some time. Taher also highlighted the importance of having good relationships with the Swiss. On the one hand, his contact to them allows him to distract himself from his depressing thoughts and routines, and on the other hand, it helps him getting familiar with the Swiss culture.

But my participants stressed that they not only acquire knowledge through intersubjective relationships with the Swiss outside the asylum center. Accordingly, they in turn disseminate it in the asylum center again. Enas, for example, mentioned that after a while he tried to be a role model for those who newly arrived in his facility by introducing them to the characteristics of living in Switzerland and the asylum procedure. In addition to important information, he also intended to offer them places where they could “feel like human beings”, as he said. He was therefore actively involved in setting up new services for asylum seekers and provisionally admitted foreigners. Very similarly, Taher also described how he took over the responsibility to support his co-residents. Thereby, he could pass on his knowledge to his co-residents in various ways. He mentioned that he helps by translating letters, by filling out certain forms, and accompanying them to doctor’s appointments. But his co-residents also ask him for advice when they are, for example, considering an apprenticeship. They rather ask him than their social advisors because they say that he can probably give better advice. He said that although he is generally happy to help and give advice, he then also loses important time that he needs, for example, to study for his exams.

Hamid and Allison both described how helpful more experienced co-residents are in the asylum center. They both told me how they could expand their knowledge thanks to more experienced co-residents. Hamid thus became acquainted with helpful organizations and schools that he could visit free of charge. Allison further spoke of a meeting place located close to his former asylum center, which was managed by people with similar migration background, and which he could visit in his free time on weekends. There, he could eat breakfast and network with other individuals. In addition, free counseling sessions were offered to all the asylum seekers. Especially an elderly woman who also immigrated to Switzerland decades ago helped him a lot. She informed him about what he had to pay attention to during his asylum procedure and gave him valuable tips, such as that he should take notes during his asylum hearing so that he would always know what he had already said and what not.

My informants also stressed the importance of hobbies and activities. Enas told how he developed the need to try as many new things as possible. Since he was not yet able to attend a

German course during his asylum procedure, he described how he started to participate in free seminars, learned German individually, and moreover educated himself with videos in the field of computer science. This allowed him to keep himself busy while being unemployed. He added that he already plans his next day the evening before so that no negative energy can arise. Yassra shared that she had met a volunteer swimming teacher who gave her swimming lessons and because she could not learn how to swim in her home country, she enjoyed finding a new hobby here. She then told me how they also taught her co-residents how to swim. Furthermore, she said that her family frequently invites guests, often people of the same descent and those she had already met during her flight. Because they are very lucky with their asylum center and the surrounding area, they meet almost weekly at their place and enjoy spending time together.

Only a few of my informants occasionally perceived the official asylum care as satisfying enough. Nevertheless, I would like to mention that Yassra, for example, reported very good experiences with her social advisor. Allison and Adib also appreciate that they can go to a language school. They thus hope for a better chance of getting an apprenticeship and a job later. Taher explained that he chose to study rather than work. He said that the main reason why he decided to study is that he still does not know whether he can stay here in Switzerland in the future. Hence, he rather focuses on an internationally acknowledged education, which would not lose its value in case he would be deported to another country. He considered it more valuable than working in a profession he might not enjoy. However, work is important as it is a huge leap towards financial independence. Financial independence, in turn, drastically increases the chances of moving out of the asylum center. Therefore, all my informants wish to find meaningful work soon. Enas emphasized the importance of work not only because of financial reasons. He proudly told me that he recently received positive feedback from his employer during an interim interview. He also added that he felt accepted as a human being for the first time in Switzerland and that this experience released additional motivation in him.

In addition to such strategies and activities that counteract their exclusion, my interviewees occasionally talked about other strategies of resistance. These include that certain refugees, as Adib told me, tell a fictitious story so that they do not receive an F-permit in the first place. Enas also mentioned how they wrote several articles about their municipality during the asylum procedure. They then submitted those articles to newspapers and radio stations to draw attention to grievances. Lastly, he also sees his participation in this master's thesis as a form of resistance and a chance to make the issue more public. He compared the situation to a kettle and told me that the water first slowly heats up before it then quickly starts to boil. Similarly, he hopes that society recognizes their problems sooner or later and then starts to act to finally protect them properly.

## 7 Discussion

To approach my research questions, this chapter discusses the narratives of my participants in the context of the introduced literature.

First of all, Switzerland's embedding in the CEAS is characterized by its Schengen membership and the implementation of the Dublin Regulation. Therefore, its asylum policy is comparable to other Schengen states, whereas the securitization of migration discourse has historically emerged several decades ago. While borders are becoming more reflexive and selective, as Walters (2006) describes, the increasing cooperation of Schengen states enables them to shift the focal point of migration from the territorial borders to the individuals on the move. In this regard, new technologies such as digital databases are useful. Recorded data also allows to determine the responsibility of processing a corresponding asylum application. My informants were all unregistered by choice or by chance until they eventually arrived in Switzerland which allowed them to make their asylum claims here.

They were forced to leave their countries of origin because unstable political situations such as war combined with their belonging to discriminated minorities have led to a lack of legal protection. As Taher said, they already experienced a highly restricted set of rights and had fewer opportunities than others before they had even left their countries of origin. All of my informants then decided to seek international protection in the hope of a better life and left their countries of origin at a certain point in their life trajectory.

By arriving and applying for asylum in Switzerland they have, in line with Braverman (2011), started to move liminally, in-between the 'go' and the 'no-go', as they first needed to be assessed for their eligibility of protection. They then ended up in various reception structures such as asylum centers or former military bunkers. As Schilliger (2016) and Arbogast (2016) describe, their detention is justified because they did not meet the Schengen entry criteria and were thus considered illegal. Seen as potential threats or exploiters of the Swiss asylum system, caseworkers then meticulously examined their applications. This also fits well into Walters' (2006) comparison of contemporary borders to a firewall, which underlines the filter function of modern borders and how they should efficiently differentiate between dangerous and safe individuals. Because exceptionally high migration movements and the increasing securitization of migration discourse have led to a crisis of European border regimes, Switzerland has, similarly to other Schengen states, also introduced more restrictive policies over the last decades. We can trace them back to the European disharmony regarding the admission of refugees that, according to Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan (2017), Hatton (2020), or Pörtner (2017), has increasingly led to a politics of deterrence.

In line with Shuman & Bohmer (2012), the narratives of my participants illustrate how their caseworkers critically examined all of their asylum applications through the lens of suspicion. This fits into Amore's (2013) observed shift from a politics of probability to a politics of possibility and stresses its importance not only in the context of Europe but also regarding individual nation-states. Hereby, the risk assessment happened during the asylum case evaluations of my participants. Based on a political interpretation of the refugee definition, the results of my fieldwork highly indicate how crucial the narratives of my participants and their credibility were during their asylum procedures. As recognized by Kagan (2015), they highlighted that their credibility was usually solely based on the caseworkers' subjective appraisal because they lacked any form of credibility markers. During the asylum hearing, they thus felt, surprisingly similar to the findings of Fassin & Kobelinsky (2012), like they were treated as suspects or criminals that have to prove their innocence to get a positive decision, which they could not. Hence, they strongly criticized the way of how the SEM caseworkers assessed their asylum case. Next to the caseworkers' knowledge about their country of origin, they also frequently questioned the manner in which they were interviewed by them, the individual questions, and mentioned problems with their interpreters.

Accordingly, this often led to disagreements between the interviewers and my participants. Taher's narrative that his interviewer questioned some of his statements, which were completely self-evident to himself, impressively illustrate this. Also, Adib's disbelief when his interviewer called his home province a safe place is emblematic of such discrepancies during the asylum hearing. Similar to Shuman & Bohmer (2012), these examples demonstrate how the caseworkers, based on their own knowledge, then rendered certain narratives of my participants untellable, implausible, and thus not credible. As a result, my participants actively recognize that they subsequently received a negative asylum decision because of their unfair case assessments.

In accordance with Basaran (2011) and Maillet *et al.* (2018), their categorization as asylum seekers assigned my participants a certain set of rights during the asylum procedure, which brought numerous restrictions compared to those of Swiss or EU citizens. Forced to live in asylum centers, several rules significantly restricted their freedom and privacy. Within these facilities, they experienced strong spatial liminality while some of them, in line with O'Reilly (2018), compared themselves to prisoners. They were constantly under surveillance and often received little to no support when problems arose while living in their centers during the asylum procedure. Little financial means and loose connections to local citizens reinforced their feeling of being geographically and socially isolated. My informants usually remained unfamiliar with and felt alien to the Swiss way of life. Additionally, they addressed conflicts between individuals from different cultures, difficult living conditions, regular police checks, and experiences of discrimination from other asylum applicants as well as from officials. Hence, I



could identify similar challenges as Ostendrap (2016) recognized in the narratives of her participants without any permit.

Similar to the findings of Jonzon *et al.* (2015) and Kiselev *et al.* (2020), living in asylum centers and being left uncertain about their future also triggered or reinforced psychological health issues. Especially those participants who had to wait many years for their asylum decision reported how this temporal liminality has started to significantly affect their personalities. Enas, Taher, and Adib identified the problems of establishing an adequate social environment and the lack of control regarding their decision-making as the key drivers of ontological liminality. Their narratives moreover show how O'Reilly's (2018) three types of liminality are in constant interaction and thus should always be considered co-constitutively. Taher, for example, illustrated how his thoughts of what will happen in the future started to prevail over his daily routine. He thus geographically and socially isolated himself even more. Because the new accelerated asylum procedure drastically reduces the time until asylum applicants receive their asylum decision, some of my participants stressed that the temporal liminality has decreased since the introduction of the new procedure. However, the downside to the accelerated procedure is that their spatial liminality seems to noticeably increase because they are both detained and assessed at the same geographical location.

In line with Bertrand (2019), the SEM caseworkers classified my participants into an additional refugee hierarchy at the end of the case assessment. In accordance with Bernhard & Kaufmann (2018), they have received the F-permit because, on the one hand, their grounds for asylum did not meet the definition of the political refugee and, on the other hand, because their repatriation would have been set against the non-refoulement policy. Following my participant's narratives, I agree with Bertrand (2019) that Switzerland seemingly aggravates the access to asylum and to the more stable B-permit. Their categorization into provisionally admitted foreigners also indicates a re-shift of their legal status as they have again received a new set of (restricted) rights linked to their new status as provisionally admitted foreigners.

Since my interviewees have received provisional admission, they are legally excluded from social welfare. Therefore, their legal status continues to impede their living conditions that result in severe difficulties regarding a successful integration. As they are usually not financially independent, they are, for example, forced to stay in an asylum center. They also do not have the right to family reunification for at least three years. Thus, I highly agree with Wimark (2019) and Gold (2019) that their liminal condition endures after the asylum decision. Hence, the problems already faced during the asylum procedure often remain, especially with regard to their asylum care. Because of the F-permit, they are also reassessed every year and could potentially be sent back at any time in case the SEM considers the political situation in

their home country as stable enough for a return. As a result, their future remains highly uncertain, which demonstrates their ongoing experience of temporal liminality.

I also argue that my participants' narratives of living in two different worlds align with the writings of Braverman *et al.* (2014) in the context of legal geography. On the one hand, their stories show that certain places like the asylum center are significantly inscribed with legal importance. On the other hand, their narratives also indicate how persistently the border is incorporated into their everyday lives, which has become evident whenever they described their experiences of their "outside world". Like Delaney (2010), I thus argue that law and space should not be considered independently, but only in a co-constitutive manner. Their status as provisionally admitted foreigners has put them in a situation where they often share the same geographical space as, for example, the Swiss outside their asylum facilities. However, they are significantly more restricted due to their F-permit. This clearly points out that they experience the aspects of law not only in places like the asylum center but wherever they currently are. I thus also agree with Maillet *et al.* (2018), Basaran (2008), and Elden (2009; 2013) that my participants' legal exclusion is actively produced through the legal technique of categorizing people into different legal statuses with the help of a jurisdiction that is detached from territory.

My participants actively identified their case assessments as highly unfair, and hence responsible for their ineligibility to asylum and for their legal rights. This awareness significantly strengthened their perception of ontological liminality. In line with Parkinson & Behrouzan (2015), my participants described how experiences of legal exclusion due to their legal status highly affect their opinions and feelings about the Swiss asylum system. As a result, they have often lost trust in the Swiss integration structure and have perceived their asylum care as increasingly dishonest or hypocritical. Negative experiences that reinforce such perceptions are those daily restrictions and conditions that always remind them that they are "different" whereby they have developed the feeling of being undesired in Switzerland. Therefore, many of my participants emphasized that the Swiss asylum system intends to deliberately complicate and negatively influence their daily routines.

But because the integration infrastructure is not uniform and varies greatly between the municipalities the level of support by the asylum care geographically keenly differs even among provisionally admitted foreigners. By doing so, the lottery of municipality, described by map-F (2020), significantly influences my participants' experiences which is a rather surprising result. While only a few of them evaluated their asylum centers and their asylum care as sufficient, most of the others faced serious challenges.

Regarding the negotiation of their experienced liminality, I, first of all, agree with Ghorashi *et al.* (2018) since my results indicate that my participants have established forms of agency as well. In this regard, I highly consent to the autonomy of migration approach in terms that my participants are active subjects rather than passive objects, that are only at the mercy of a control system. Unlike Augé (1995), I strongly disagree that places such as asylum centers are non-places that do not allow meaningful social relationships. In this context, I argue that situated knowledge plays a crucial role and not only affects the experiences of liminality but also its negotiation, as well as the need to actively counteract forms of legal exclusion. Depending on their previous lives, their nationality, or gender, my participants already grew up under exclusionary conditions before they fled. They had different expectations about Europe or Switzerland based on what they knew or thought to know. Due to their arrival in a completely unknown country, in which even the most fundamental processes were unfamiliar, getting familiar with the environment highly matters. This also applies to the understanding of their own legal status in order to develop strategies to negotiate their liminality.

I suggest that the intersubjective relations to other individuals from the refugee community as well as to local people are crucial. My participants could reflect their own positionality exactly through the multiplicity of different positionalities in their social environment. This, in turn, affected their reflexivity and hence their agency. Accordingly, my participants started to better understand the Swiss asylum system, their legal rights, and life in general here in Switzerland. This enabled them to counteract the experienced legal exclusion by developing forms of belonging to a certain community. Due to their social and geographical isolation, forms of cohesion and the mutual exchange of knowledge showed them a variety of ways to support each other within the refugee community. Thus, they again found further support outside the asylum center through which they discovered new possibilities that contribute to their social inclusion. This entails, above all, contact with local individuals and organizations that voluntarily offered their help regarding integration. The narratives of Enas and Allison also show how they actively started to create or visit spaces of inclusion where they could socialize, and “feel like humans” because they were accepted how they are.

However, I also argue that the observed formation of knowledge is not without problems. The statements of my informants illustrate that shared knowledge can be untrue, misleading, and therefore dangerous for making decisions along their life trajectories. Adib, for example, decided not to challenge his asylum decision because a co-resident told him that he could lose his F-permit if he appeals against it. Such myths and rumors also led Taher to go to asylum hearings with great fear because his co-residents told him things that turned out to be untrue in retrospect. Moreover, these rumors can also be counterproductive. If asylum applicants, for example, tell made-up stories during the asylum hearing, they could, in turn, cause the control

apparatus to be further reinforced. Hence, the truth content of the aggregated knowledge is of crucial importance to counteract exclusion.

Lastly, I would like to address the whole concept of liminality. Through the lens of legal geography, I could not categorize my participants' liminality into the classic three-way division of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases proposed by van Gennep (1960) or Turner (1969). These three stages do not do justice to the complexity of their experiences along their life trajectories. Nevertheless, I agree with Horvath *et al.* (2015) that liminality is a powerful tool at the intersection of anthropological and political studies and that it offers a valuable insight into the perspectives of people with refugee backgrounds and how they influence the co-constitutive relationship between law, place, and people.

## 8 Further Research

While I have already pointed out some limitations of my methodological approach, I nevertheless associate them with promising research ideas to follow up in the future. Hereby, I identify three key areas.

First, it is crucial to generate more data to analyze the individual situations of asylum applicants and provisionally admitted foreigners also through quantitative data as well. This requires not only conducting multiple studies but also various focal points. On the one hand, it is important to survey not only young adults but also older or younger people with a refugee background. Especially because situated knowledge complicates any form of generalization, it is important to also interview people who neither speak German nor English. Talking about situated knowledge, it is crucial to interview more women about their experiences of liminality. Is it just a coincidence that the narrative of the only female participant was clearly the most positive? Or could it be because she has more freedom in Switzerland in comparison to the men from similar origins and thus a different kind of situated knowledge? Or did her family help her to overcome all the negativity? Hence, I stress to draw more attention to the multiplicity of different positionalities.

Second, it is promising to monitor the impact of the new accelerated asylum procedure on asylum applicants. Because only Adib, Alisson, and Murat went through the new asylum procedure, it could be fruitful to interview other people that experienced the accelerated asylum procedure, especially regarding its long-term impact. Their experiences with liminality could then be better compared with the experiences of people who arrived in Switzerland before the 2019 revision, which would allow for a more detailed assessment of current policy trends.

And finally, I identify the impact of the Corona pandemic on the lives of people with refugee experience as the third area for future research. However, this depends to a large extent on how the issue will develop and eventually affect us in the future, which is currently still uncertain and full of open questions.

## 9 Conclusive Thoughts

This master's thesis explored the liminality of young provisionally admitted foreigners since their arrival in Switzerland. It brings together the spatial as well as the temporal aspect of migrant liminality while reconstructing their former life trajectories according to their narratives.

I first explored at how the emergence of the discourse on securitization of migration shapes and influences the current landscape of European asylum policy. The Hotspot Approach then offered a scene to illustrate the re-imagination of contemporary borders that are becoming more reflexive and selective. I showed how the assessment of allegedly risky and safe categorization of individuals is becoming more important and how the border thus increasingly gets incorporated into the migrants' bodies. As a result, individuals have completely different border experiences as the modern border selectively promotes and impedes their mobility at the same time.

Moving on to the asylum management of nation-states, I then offered an overview of how they currently govern and manage refugees during exceptionally increased migration events. Hereby, I introduced different forms of restrictive policies. I identified a research gap in the under-researched field of legal geography that considers the co-constitutive relationship between people, place, and law. Based on the notion of liminality I then explored how people have experienced their life trajectories since they arrived in Switzerland. Through the lens of legal geography, I looked at how they navigated through the Swiss border zones as liminal beings to better understand where and how law happens in space, and how it impacts my participants. Hereby, my contribution to the theoretical framework of legal geographies has two facets.

On the one hand, the experiences of my participants show how persistently the border is incorporated into their everyday lives during as well as after the asylum procedure. They actively perceive and understand this incorporation through the constant reminders of living in a disadvantaged social position. After the asylum procedure, they remain in a liminal condition whereas they identify the assessment of their asylum applications as unfair and the main reason for their current life situations. Hence, they understand the asylum regime as a system that actively works against them by constantly fostering their legal exclusion which prevents their successful integration by intentionally keeping them in a legal in-betweenness. On the other hand, their understanding and formation of knowledge also mobilize forms of agency by which they start to actively counteract or resist their daily exclusion. As a result, they start to build up meaningful social lives and find new ways to navigate their lives as active subjects.

I thus assent to the argument of legal geographers that law is not just simply poured into preexisting geographical spaces, but that it is constitutive of spatio-temporalities, such as spatial relationships or experiences, which, in turn, also co-constitute the condition of the legal. Second, I add to their argument that these legal geographies are not just produced by a linear reaction between the law and space, but within a lived matrix of people's experiences in a legal time-space.

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## 11 Personal Declaration

I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work. All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

