CHAPTER 13

LIMINALITY AND *COMMUNITAS*

The Making of Refugees in Switzerland

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> There is a certain homology between the 'weakness' and 'passivity' of liminality in diachronic transitions between states and statuses, and the 'structural' or synchronic inferiority of certain personae, groups, and social categories in political, legal, and economic systems.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

At the peak of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 more than one million people arrived in Europe to claim asylum. Since the European Union signed the EU–Turkey deal in 2016, the numbers of refugees arriving in Greece decreased to less than 100,000 in 2017, and by 2018 there were less than 100,000 arriving in all of Europe. More generally, there are 22.3 million people of non-EU citizenship among the 512.4 million living in Europe (4.4%) (Eurostat 2019). The increase in the movement of people sparked by the war in Syria was significant not so much in concrete numbers, but rather in the debates it opened and the nationalist passions it fuelled. The increased support of populist leaders across Europe via the reinvigoration of nationalist discourses and the defence of national territory requires attention. European countries revised and tightened their immigration laws and asylum processes, and since 2015 border controls have emerged (in some places temporarily) within certain Schengen areas[1] and along the Balkans route. Systems of management and categorization of people on the move are a European attempt to maintain the structures of control (social and political) in times of intense movement and instability. The populist response to immigration is, even if deplorable, a reaction of a communal structure to the destabilizing poten-

tials of migration. That is, the surge of nationalism is a form of *communitas* – an expression of egalitarianism – within European populations and against what they conceive as a foreign threat. Through *communitas*, Europeans reinforce their hierarchical position in relation to foreigners, so that hierarchy and *communitas* become intermingled in an attempt at redefining the social whole; one a dimension of the other.

In this chapter I will consider processes of making refugees in Switzerland. Even while Switzerland is a relatively benign place in terms of the treatment given to asylum seekers, it nonetheless reveals the dynamics between hierarchy and *communitas* through the process of determining 'proper' refugees from negatively conceived economic migrants. This liminal process – one of radical reconfiguration of personhood – is concerned with maintenance of Swiss social and political structures, as well as with the incorporation of foreign others into the national social body. I have conducted research at a refugee reception centre in Zurich and with refugee management programmes and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Geneva since 2016. Official government efforts pertaining to refugees draw heavily on humanitarian NGOs and corporate bodies in the process of funding and management of refugee-related programmes. I consider asylum seekers' exposure to multiple management processes that foster liminality at a time when anti-foreigner issues become political banners in increasingly extreme right-wing populism, which harnesses these anxieties to create a shared sense of community. I interrogate how the Turners' categories of liminality and *communitas* explore the formation and transformation of social structures through the categorization and incorporation of the other.

Crisis and Liminality

Refugees enter knowingly into a perilous liminal state when they leave their homes and seek asylum in other countries, but the process – perilous and wrapped in contradictions – does not always lead to their reintegration into a host society as full citizens; they encounter resistance within European societies attempting to maintain structure in times of intense crisis.

At a time of great uncertainty (the increased precarity of labour conditions, the threats posed by Brexit, and the rise of fascist leaders in Europe and the United States) social structures within Europe are stressed as social cohesion is increasingly fragmented by movements of capital, ruptures caused by economic and military conflict, and deterritorialized power structures articulated through large transnational corporations. In 2015 this crisis became personified in refugees, who were being made responsible for for-

eign threats to jobs, community, tradition, religion and political unity (Žižek 2016). Conceived as a destabilizing force trying to break into the structures of European social and political life, refugees/migrants (often used interchangeably) are exposed to different liminal processes: territorially (in offshore refugee camps, detention centres); normatively (in a state of legal limbo during interminable processes); and socially (in an appeal to human rights, for not receiving civil rights). The system of management of refugees, from transnational, national and local legislation, to the practical application of refugee-related programmes, keeps people (perhaps inadvertently) in a state of prolonged liminality – temporal, spatial, legal and social.

The system of management of refugees retains 'asylum seekers' in an indefinite period of uncertainty – 'betwixt and between' (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992) – which does not serve the purpose of passage from one status to another (ultimately to be incorporated into the social structures through citizenship) that van Gennep (1909) termed the 'liminal phase'. Instead, as Turner (1969: 107) argued, the liminal phase has in modern societies become institutionalized.

With the increasing specialization of society and culture, and with progressive complexity in the social division of labour, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities 'betwixt and between' defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state. Transition has here become a permanent condition.

The process of asylum is a promise, not always fulfilled, of a better way of life. People endure hardship, and submit themselves to dangerous and degrading situations throughout a liminal period whereby they must prove they are not economic migrants but 'true' refugees, in the hope and expectation that they will improve their living conditions, reach a safer environment and have a more prosperous future. This liminal period acts as filter, a process of socialization into European political and civic norms; it transforms asylum seekers into refugees, as much as it protects and insulates the communal structure of Europe. Asylum seekers are confined to liminal states that extend in space and time, and cannot easily be restored through social rituals, such as acquiring refugee status or citizenship.

Refugees become a contested group – and the refugee crisis is the social situation through which tensions between structure and *communitas* are played out. Marx, referring specifically to the crisis of capital, understands crisis as a moment in which the antagonism of all elements in the bourgeois process of production explodes (Marx [1859] 1999), and as the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy (Marx [1863] 1951). Therefore, Marx conceived of crisis as a moment of intensification in which the contradictions erupt, engendering historical processes. This view influenced Max Gluckman's understanding of process

and change within human customs (Gluckman 1940). Gluckman started from the premise that change was the condition of social existence, and crisis was integral to all processes, as they allowed the contradictions of the system to emerge and they represented moments of social life in the very process of formation (Kapferer 2006). Victor Turner elaborated this in his analysis on ritual, where he showed how ritual liminal spaces revealed enduring forms that constitute processes, and also allowed for them to become modified as potentialities (Turner 1957), thus not only repeating practices but also creating them. These dynamics can exist outside ritual practice. Social relations are dynamic structures; a crisis – a moment in which the contradictions rupture through the fabric of normalcy of the system – also generates new processes that are themselves encoded with their own contradictions.

The refugee crisis represents one such moment: an eruption of the contradictions of the Western egalitarian ideal, commonly referred to in the media as 'the European way of life'. Such crisis is most acutely felt in the structures that traditionally sustained the nation-state (territorial sovereignty, citizenship processes, nationalist constructions) as the universality of humanity is contrasted to (and too often becomes incompatible with) the specificity of the citizen. It must be noted, however, that the coming of refugees into Europe that increased in numbers between 2014 and 2016 is not the cause of the perceived crisis, but rather a symptom of it – or more specifically, of the social situation within which the complexity of the moment of crisis crystalized.

The refugee 'crisis' represents thus a social situation, in Gluckman's terms. He argued that social situations are events that reveal the interrelationships within a society through which to understand the social structure, relationships and institutions of that society (Gluckman 1940). It constitutes the social and political complexity in which the different events themselves develop, and it embodies the particular structural processes manifest in them (Kapferer 2006). Debates about refugees have become the battleground between conservative nationalists and humanitarian universalists discussing the very role and currency of the nation-state and the validity of human rights. While, through refugee anxieties, right-wing groups rally support for anti-immigration policies, other groups draw on the humanitarian component of the refugee crisis to organize themselves around the notion of solidarity outside the space of the state (NGOs, corporate bodies, private foundations) and that draw on universalist values to create a sense of shared humanity in order to redefine the social group beyond the structures of the state. Therefore, the tensions between *communitas* and liminality, and structure and egalitarianism, can be understood through Turner's categories (still current and useful in conceptualizing these dynamics), but these need to be rearranged to analyse how refugee movements (as egalitarian movements

that aim to break through structures) simultaneously reinforce structures and transform them.

The Prolonged Liminal State of Refugees in Switzerland

In this section I will consider three situations that coalesce the complexities of refugees' journeys with the role of humanitarian and governmental sectors in the administration and bordering of people. I approach the issue of refugees as a conceptual opening for larger processes of social change that involve the transformation of the structures of the nation-state and the emergence of a different configuration of the state (see Kapferer and Gold 2017, 2018). Elements of this argument will emerge in the following sections as I discuss the multiple structural, legal and social barriers imposed on refugees.

The Spatio-temporal Liminality in Refugees' Journeys

> Liminal entities . . . may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them . . . Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new situation in life.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

This description can easily be applied to people undergoing the asylum procedure in Switzerland, and across Europe. It is important to highlight that Switzerland has a relatively benign process of asylum, with well-established facilities, allowing people to move with relative freedom within the country, as they can leave the short-term reception centres during the weekends and have only a night curfew.

Nonetheless, people undergoing asylum are still exposed to a process of reduction and categorization. They possess nothing; they are discussed within the community that houses the centre as 'criminals' and 'villains'. Regardless of the fact that many are from the middle classes and are professionally trained, their degrees are not recognized and they are seen as a homologous mass. They are expected to be submissive and thankful for what they receive (shelter, language courses, logistical support), and they must obey instructions or forfeit their chances of getting asylum. They are 'being

reduced or ground down to a uniform condition' (Turner 1969: 95), during which people are sorted, sifted and deported.

The centre is organized by a private non-profit organization and funded by the Swiss federal government. It had the role of trialling a pilot project intended to expedite the asylum procedure. The results of the pilot project were subjected to a national vote in 2016, where 66.8 per cent of voters decided in favour of reducing the asylum procedure from 400 days to 140 days. While the intention of the initiative seems to be the reduction of the liminal period of asylum, the motivation behind voters' support has been to reduce the time unwanted migrants remain in Switzerland. When I began fieldwork in February 2016 the short-term reception centre had room for 300 people and it was filled to the limit, mostly with young men (18–30 years old) from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and North Africa. People can stay a maximum of three months while their asylum status is determined. If their application moves forward in the process they must be relocated to a cantonal centre.

In the instances where asylum requests are not accepted, people are moved to special centres for rejected claims, until they can organize their departure. Few go back to where they first registered in Europe (Italy or Greece). The Swiss government offers to pay for deportation costs to their home country as well as a one-off stipend to encourage them to voluntarily return there. The careful organization of spaces of exception (centre for processing different 'types' of asylum seekers) within the national territory and along the migration track is an attempt at categorizing, through a moral hierarchy of deservedness (Fassin 2005), those who are more likely to be granted protection: women and children, unaccompanied minors, young families.

Life at the centre revolves around the immigration requirements. However, most of the day is spent waiting: hanging around the centre, talking to family back in their hometowns (or elsewhere in the migratory trajectory) and wondering around the city. People can leave the centre, but must return before the 10 PM curfew. People in the process of application for asylum in Switzerland are not allowed to be employed other than by the centre. However, residents are offered the possibility of a few hours of symbolically paid work outside the centre, in jobs that do not displace Swiss employees. Such jobs include clearing the forests of invasive species (a task that would be done with young Swiss doing the 'social service', an alternative to the military service) or working on community farms, where others work voluntarily.

The non-government institution that manages the short-term reception centre has another female-only training activity at a locally run restaurant offering hospitality skills, language and cultural training. Women are told to address others in formal language (e.g. German makes a distinction between formal and informal 'you'), and to address the clients politely and always use eye contact. By working outside the reception centre they can earn 30 CHF

a week (a symbolic wage considering it would barely cover the costs of food for one adult for one day), and while they can claim to accrue some work experience and workplace relations in what might be their new home, they cannot get letters of recommendation from this employer. Asylum seekers at the reception centre cannot earn more than 400 CHF a month by law, as that would mean the organization in charge of the centre would have to pay taxes on them, as if it were employing non-European workers.[2] A customer asked an Eritrean woman where she came from and she replied from Italy, and only after being probed further she repeated the reverse chronology of her travels: Tunisia, Libya, Sudan and Eritrea, a seven-year journey. This woman's limbo was far from over. She was in a reception centre, where she could only remain for three months, and if she passed the first stage of the process she would be relocated to a cantonal centre, which would house her until a positive or negative resolution. Even in the unlikely eventuality of a positive decision, the uncertainty of her situation would endure, with difficulties finding housing, work and a social support network, especially in cases where temporary asylum is bestowed. This level of spatio-temporal liminality was prevalent in many asylum seekers' accounts.

The implications of these typical refugee stories are multiple: the conflict between the asylum procedure as focused on neatly documented and substantiated claims and the ambiguity and intractability of asylum seekers' journeys across Africa and the Mediterranean; the contradictions and ironies of the management procedures throughout the entire process of asylum request that theoretically aim to protect 'true' refugees from 'false' economic migrants; and the extended periods of liminality experienced by people, becoming a norm rather than an exceptional moment at times of crisis.

Significantly, the numbers of refugees arriving at the centre decreased as the EU–Turkey deal was enforced. By 2017 the centre was no longer at full capacity and in 2018 it has been reduced to almost a third of its original size, as part of the council land on which it stands was ceded to build an ice hockey stadium, much to the delight of the local community. Women, children and families were moved away to a larger centre in another commune, keeping this centre for men and young adults. By 2018, most residents had arrived directly from camps in Turkey. This reveals a shift in the border-making process, as Europe has used the EU–Turkey deal to enforce offshore-type policies such as those implemented by Australia in Papua New Guinea. By removing the first instance of asylum seekers from the national territory, Europe ensures a tighter process of selection and a guarantee that those who are rejected will not remain illegally, reducing deportation costs.

Being a refugee ought not to be a permanent state. However, the contingencies of the asylum system leave people in an indefinite state of limbo, and in some locations 'asylum seeker' becomes an inherent state of being.

The Dublin Treaty inadvertently forces people to remain in the limbo of the 'asylum seeker' state for longer, as those who do not want to settle in Italy or Greece do not apply for asylum and continue their journey northwards.

During this ambiguous status they are exposed to accusations of being economic migrants or terrorists as they seek to settle in the wealthier northern European countries. Along the refugee routes, European powers have set up processing centres, interim camps and humanitarian hotspots that initiate people on the move into the expectations and contingencies of refugee life, while simultaneously acting as a space of control and discipline by documenting people's moves (Pinelli 2015), implementing systems of medical services that also act as surveillance tools as the clinic is brought to the field through humanitarian NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde. The International Organization for Migration recently launched an app that is intended for people on the move so that they can upload their documents and self-document their health issues in order not to lose their official identity along the way. The irony of this is that people often intentionally 'lose' their identity, particularly in cases of young adults barely over 16 years old, who aim to claim asylum as unaccompanied minors (under 16 years of age, who should get automatic asylum).

The average processing time for asylum requests in Germany in 2014 was 11.1 months (AIDA 2016), and in France it was 16 months in 2016. In Switzerland the processing time for asylum applications is theoretically only ten working days, however in practice the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM 2017) reported an average processing time of 243.5 days in 2016 (AIDA 2016: 4). In Sweden, waiting time for the first interviews after lodging the asylum claim is on average six months, and in Austria up to a year (ibid.). By August 2016 there were 1,036,762 pending asylum applications in the twenty-eight member states of the EU (EASO 2016).

The spatio-temporal liminality that defines refugees in their journeys across Africa, the Middle East and into Europe is accompanied by the legal and categorical ambiguity that aims to sort people out into moral hierarchies, and that determine those who deserve to be supported and integrated and those who are beyond assistance and can only become economic (often illegal) migrants.

Legal and Categorical Liminality in the Asylum Process

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

The structural violence of the asylum procedure, with its ambiguous, incumbent and bureaucratically dehumanizing effects, results in the perpetuation of temporal and legal uncertainty and the arbitrary enabling of people's exclusion. The violence of regional and national legal procedures that ought to protect but have the opposite effects, are echoed in local behaviours against the settlement of refugees, and in the increase of anti-immigration political positions. In an effort to produce accountability and transparency, by standardizing procedures, the bureaucratic machinery (increasingly modelled on corporate management) transforms people into codes, and enables a more distanced and calculated exclusion. Refugees are not the only ones being bureaucratically excluded. In the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008, the 14 million US homeowners who lost their homes were victims of the corporate bureaucracies that denied 70 per cent of homeowners financial support (Stout 2019). Governmentality is increasingly corporatized, serving the interests of capital, and threatening local communities.

The process of application for refugee status in Switzerland starts at a federal level at one of the six reception centres, at the airports, or on international soil at refugee centres in Turkey. Once the application progresses further, applicants are transferred to asylum-processing centres under cantonal jurisdiction, which will receive state funds for processing the applications but will have to bear the costs of deporting people in denied cases, or of integrating accepted refugees or people granted a temporary residence status. Furthermore, cantons are obliged to accept a percentage of refugees, and are fined large sums if they refuse. The process of asylum is not only controlled by the government; at every stage of the procedure, NGOs and corporate groups cooperate and compete for the jurisdiction over the integration and rejection of refugees.

In Switzerland the main organization concerned with the initial process for dealing with asylum requests is the State Secretariat of Migration (SEM), the former Federal Office for Migration (see the 2016 AIDA report by Nufer et al. for a detailed explanation of the application process). With an expenditure of 1.27 billion Swiss francs in 2015, 735 million was distributed to the cantons to cover the 1,500 francs per asylum applicant. However, the rest of the expenditure goes to pay the one thousand officials of SEM (Herzog 2016).

A first short preliminary interview addresses issues on the identity, the origin and the living conditions of the asylum seeker, collecting information about the journey to Switzerland and the reasons for seeking asylum. The interview provides a first classification, the initial ordering and determination of potential asylum seekers from migrants. It is the gatekeeper within the national territory. The first interview is crucial because it establishes the main grounds to allow an application to carry on to the second stage. If not

enough evidence is provided in the first interview, an applicant can be denied asylum and be sent back to another state. This is often a problem with women who have been subjected to rape and abuse, who – particularly if they have a male interviewee – will not disclose this information due to fear of shaming, permanently hindering their application process, as has been documented by the NGO Action from Switzerland.[3]

When the application progresses further, the applicant receives a second interview, when he/she can describe in more detail the reasons for flight and present evidence. This interview could be delegated to the cantonal authorities, but SEM conducts many second interviews as well. Furthermore, a member of an authorized charitable organization (coordinated by the Swiss Refugee Council) is present at the interview in order to act as an independent observer and clarify facts or raise objections (Nufer et al. 2016). These NGO observers have often reported problems with simultaneous translations and the lack of partiality of interpreters, who sometimes identify with the official regime from which asylum seekers are fleeing, regardless of their need to abide by SEM's code of conduct. Other issues that emerged with interpreters were differences in dialects, which made the translation too general and imprecise (ibid.: 21–22).

The Federal Administrative Court can revoke SEM's decision on the grounds of a violation of a federal law, or on an incorrect or incomplete determination of the legally relevant circumstances, but it cannot contest SEM's discretionary power to determine whether an application that is legal is also appropriate. Legal representation should be provided by the state, but in some instances this falls on the cantonal authorities, and in other cases, donor-funded NGOs fill this obligation.

If the asylum application is approved, the applicant receives a temporary residence permit, which after ten years can be turned into a permanent one, pending consideration of particular cases in their canton of residence. Only once a person receives a refugee visa can they begin to apply for work and housing, moving out of the long-term processing centres and into their new local community. Each canton has particular regulations around refugee integration programmes. This is often described by refugees as one of the most difficult stages, as it represents unexpected hardships. Most refugees expect the violence of the journey across the Mediterranean, but few are prepared for the institutional and structural violence they encounter, first throughout the asylum procedure, and then through the arduous process of finding a house and a job. This last process alone can take at least two years and as long as seven, as they must learn a new language and often revalidate their degrees or learn new skills. According to Swiss law, recognized refugees, asylum seekers and provisionally admitted persons who have been in the country for less than seven years can claim public social assistance. The

cantonal authorities are responsible for providing this support but they receive reimbursement from the federal government (Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation, Asylum Act, Art. 74).

Temporary refugee status, which contemplates a return home when the crisis in their home country is over, generates an even more ambiguous situation. People who are denied their refugee status but appeal are thus allowed to remain in Switzerland when their return is inadmissible, unreasonable or impossible. They receive temporary protection until their appeal is resolved. After five years, if their appeal has still not been resolved, they could obtain a long-term residency status, given certain conditions. Many people whose refugee request is denied will not leave Switzerland but instead disappear from the official grid. These people are in the worst situation of ambiguity because they are inherently unable to integrate and so are condemned to work in the black market. This group of people then shift their categorization, from asylum seeker to undocumented migrant. They lose their right to be treated at a hospital (except in the cantons of Vaud and Geneva, which provide health care to undocumented migrants) and they are exposed to the stresses of being an illegal alien within the national territory (they cannot leave as they will most likely be intercepted at the border upon their return): they cannot get a bank account, they cannot officially rent an apartment, and so on.

The legal construct ('refugee') is a fragile and shifting one, when month after month places that define the appropriate origin of refugees are changed according to whether or not a city is in the hands of armed rebels. The closures of borders and the arbitrary determinations of 'safe' places grants certain people the status of 'refugees' while others remain 'economic migrants', establishing radically diametrical access to the presumably universal right to claim asylum (Dérens and Rico 2016). At the border between Greece and Macedonia the police periodically opened the gates to let fifty refugees at a time into the Macedonian side. Until November 2015 only Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians were allowed through; nationals of other countries were treated as economic migrants. But in January 2016 Afghans were no longer accepted, and in March of that year Syrians from Damascus were no longer considered refugees and their access was denied (ibid.: 4).

This is mirrored in the attitudes of refugees already in short-term processing camps in Zürich, where from March 2016 people's hopes of being granted asylum dwindled, as most North Africans were denied asylum. In March 2016 six Afghan youths disappeared from a short-term processing centre, and violence increased. After a knife attack and following the vandalism of cars in the vicinity of the centre, a private security company was hired at the request of the neighbours. These tensions, on a larger scale, are also reflected in the fivefold increase of attacks on refugee centres in Germany,

and the increase of neo-Nazi declarations against liberal values and solidarity towards refugees in Germany (Osborn 2016).

Anti-EU political groups in Switzerland have harnessed the refugee crisis in order to reinforce their position within the Swiss political system, gaining more seats in Parliament in the last six years, and turning what were once considered extreme right positions into more mainstream-supported initiatives (Bernhard 2017). However, other groups have also been reinvigorated by the ongoing plight of refugees. Humanitarian organizations supporting refugees in their continuous liminality are increasingly gaining ground within political scenarios because refugees are relegated to the non-governmental and humanitarian sphere. In the next section I will consider how, in supporting refugees during their liminal journeys, different groups have increased their cogency and notoriety, reinforcing their structures and orders.

Social Liminality and the Reproduction of Structure

> The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

The recent rise of right-wing parties in Europe on the basis of anti-immigrant policies draws attention to the increasing role of essentializing and exclusionary rhetoric in the imagination of European national ideologies (Halikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou 2013). The harnessing of anti-immigration passions has been particularly effective in Switzerland, ever reticent of being absorbed into Europe. Among the recent popular initiatives, those against foreigners have awakened heated debates, fuelled by the refugee crisis in an attempt to shift public opinion against the European Union and in favour of a stricter control of immigration policy. Most campaigns have drawn on essentialized national symbolism and aimed to reinforce what are seen as key Swiss values (democracy, self-determination, Christianity, work diligence, federalism).

Some popular initiatives, such as the facilitated naturalization, and the minaret and burka bans, reveal the increasing prominence of anti-immigration policies in right-wing party agendas,[4] which harness images of ethnicized foreigners to create a sense of a community under threat. The banning of

burkas was voted for in Ticcino (the Italian canton of Switzerland) in 2016, and in St Gallen in 2018. It is not only an attack against a religious minority, it is a structural adjustment designed to exclude certain groups from public life. Women who choose to wear burkas are banned from public spaces. They are denied access to state financial assistance if they fail to identify their faces. They can be denied a residence permit if they refuse to unveil for a photo, and they will most likely be voted against by the community in cases of citizenship for failing to integrate into Swiss cultural life. But the reaction against refugees must be contextualized within this larger anti-foreigner phobia, particularly as refugees are often associated with Islam. This is a key issue across Europe, as anti-Islamic discrimination is fuelled by terrorism fears and it radicalizes anti-immigration reactions.

While cantons and communes (a local and administrative subdivision of cantons) are supposed to take a quota of refugees, they do not do so willingly. The village of Oberwil-Lieli on the outskirts of Zurich was threatened with a 300,000 CHF fine for not agreeing to integrate the ten refugees ascribed to it by the federal state in 2016. A village referendum rejected the federal mandate as 52 per cent of the 2,200 inhabitants voted against the refugees. After months of intense deliberation, the village mayor, Andreas Glarner, from the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP), decided to accommodate a family of five refugees to recognize the will of the 48 per cent of villagers who had voted in favour of resettling refugees in their community. However, when the council requested an apartment for the family within the community, there were no responses. Furthermore, the mayor of Oberwil-Lieli declared on CNN that 'it makes much more sense to help people there [in refugee camps off-shore] instead of supporting our nonsense refugee policy here in Switzerland' (Caderas and Said-Moorhouse 2016). The town of Oberwil-Leili donated 370,000 CHF to the Swiss Red Cross. After this incident, the mayor won a seat in Parliament.

This is not a unique situation. In the commune of Rekingen, canton Aargau, the local government advised residents not to rent properties to refugees with temporary permits because it would imply that the local government would need to pay social benefits to support them and it could lead to 'the municipality's financial ruin' (Aargauer Zeitung 2016). There are some organizations that assist refugees in obtaining an apartment, by acting as guarantors for the rent, but even they struggle to obtain housing. The Red Cross is often involved in providing housing and health support to people who would otherwise become destitute.[5] The humanitarian world has 'taken the arbitrary and radical decision to help the people society has decided to sacrifice' (Bradol 2004). Bradol further argues, as a humanitarian, that humanitarianism is an attack against the established order of the system that produces extreme privation.

The role of the non-governmental sphere in the administration of refugees sheds light on the reconfiguration of tasks that once belonged to the state, such as the provision of health, protection and education.[6] Following the general consensus that work is the most valuable asset for a refugee in order to integrate with the host society (a not unproblematic discourse connected to the protestant ethic, and serving the purpose of capital), large NGOs as well as small grass-roots initiatives focus around the provision of training and employment mentoring (which does not always result in concrete employment). Most programmes are privately run, even while some receive government funding, and focus on providing people with a trade (carpentry, construction, cleaning, etc.), using these courses to impart German and cultural lessons. A private language and business school in Bern (Förderschmiede) is one example, collaborating with Caritas and the Red Cross (supported by the cantonal government), and the local authorities of the nearby city of Thun. This is only one example of the large number of such collaborations – partly state-funded, largely corporate-funded – and in charge of developing integration programmes mandated by the government.

Among the humanitarian and non-governmental spheres, the liminality of refugees similarly unites people in a sense of community, ironically, however, harnessing diametrically opposed values as those articulated by the extreme right. Through the universalist language of human rights, humanitarian organizations find in the refugee crisis a passionate reason to unite in the fight to defend 'humanity' against wars, environmental disasters and increasing political intolerance. International organizations, NGOs and the corporate responsibility branches of corporations join to solve the world's problems in an attempt at redressing the inefficiencies of governments, thus changing the forms of governmentality that humanitarian organizations were based on, as emerging at a time when the nation-state was consolidated. Their increasing connections with corporations (openly and proudly advertised) signals a new era in the conceptualization and administration of social welfare, which indicates the transformation of state structures previously seen to contain the nation, and responsible for the care of its citizens.

The type of sociality articulated by these humanitarian and developmental organizations is instead informed by the belief in a shared humanity that has been marginalized by the state (Feldman and Ticktin 2010). Therefore, the ambiguity that refugees encounter within the nation-state (as a social and political body in crisis) enables the proliferation of other types of structures that claim refugees within their domain, and base their claims of legitimacy through their very precariousness. Large humanitarian organizations, departments of corporate social responsibility (large tax deduction processes), and small non-governmental foundations of various denominations rely on the victims they support to subsist (Polman 2010). The notion of

the deserving victim is applied to refugees in the reports and posters of humanitarian organizations (Malkki 2015) and sustains their corporate funding partners' exoneration. The process – akin to confession – attenuates the negative effects of corporations in low-income countries by their donation to humanitarian causes.

MSF's practice of 'witnessing' as a way of denouncing the violations against human rights, without taking on explicit advocacy roles of the type assumed by Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, creates a moment of communion where all humanitarian workers listen to each other's accounts of what they see in the field, or invite a refugee to speak about their journey into Europe, uniting in a sense of shared purpose. A room full of people, mostly former MSF volunteers, sits in quiet and sombre contemplation of the tragedy of Fadi's story, as the young Christian Syrian tells of his Mediterranean crossing. Meanwhile, he remains in a refugee camp, unable to find accommodation or validate his literature degree, and so awaits a decision from the cantonal authorities about his refugee permit. The *communitas* his situation and account forged in the audience of well-intended humanitarians, and the sense of shared purpose and sameness, did not alter Fadi's liminal condition in relation to the Swiss state, but it reinforced the humanitarians' belief in the idea of a larger sense of humanity, beyond the exclusionary politics of the rising populist right. Refugees have become central in all manner of humanitarian struggles: the delivery of health to people on the move, the protection of the right to claim asylum, the struggle against slavery and people smuggling, violence against women, and the protection of children. These struggles are played out both at a global level, where the very nature of humanity is at stake, and in the everyday antagonisms of local communities against foreigners. However, at all levels, this pertains to the definition of the nature of the social, coping with changing social and political structures and accommodating new forms of social relations. In this process, liminality becomes an ongoing condition for those excluded, and displaces its educational and transformative potential to those already within the dominant social structures.

The Disaggregation of Liminality and *Communitas*

> From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

The ambiguity of liminal personae, argued Turner (1969: 95), emerged from their capacity to slip through the networks of classification that locate states and positions within a cultural space. As dangerous beings, they must be subdued and made passive, be subjected to arbitrary punishment and forced to obey unquestionably. The contrast between the undifferentiated social bonds forged within the liminal moment – *communitas* – and the structured hierarchical system into which they are classified politically, legally and economically once they overcome liminal stages, represents a dialectical understanding of social processes that require both forms of social organization (homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality). It is through the liminal subversion of structure that social hierarchy and values are reinforced (and can be redefined). Turner argued that both opposites constitute one another and are mutually indispensable, so that 'each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*' (Turner 1969: 97).

What is significant about refugees' extended liminal status today is that in the current atomized, highly individualistic society the states of *communitas* and structure – still crucial in processes of social transformation – are now disaggregated. That is, not all individuals go through periods of liminality in the process of the reproduction of social relations, but rather, social structures are reproduced by those within them who reinforce social norms and hierarchies, and are set in opposition to those who are liminal and excluded, against which the structures are defined. The marginalized and the precarious (workers, the poor, ethnic minorities) are reduced to the isolated competitive individual, conspiring against the formation of a potentially powerful *communitas*, from whence social change could be enacted. That is, society is increasingly confined to life within the structures, and what was once a transitional moment has now become an institutionalized state, a permanent liminal condition.

Turner warned against the dysfunctional consequences of an imbalance between *communitas* and structure: 'Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against 'the law'. Exaggeration of *communitas*, in certain religious or political movements of the levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, over-bureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification' (Turner 1969: 129).

Indeed, over-bureaucratization is a symptom of modern societies, particularly prevalent in the Global North, where the state is increasingly subjected to bureaucratic processes and expert knowledge, which constitute pillars of what Foucault (2008) understands as biopower (the supervisory and regulatory mechanisms that manage and order life). Biopower is manifested in the asylum procedure through the influence of legal, medical and

bureaucratic processes. Some of these include medical tests on refugee minors to determine their age,[7] collection of biometric data, and phone applications that encourage asylum seekers to upload their identity documents.[8] The bureaucratic processes that determine asylum seekers' requests take place privately, and are rarely transparent, as the highly technical legal language and the confidential nature of legal proceedings makes the decisions only accessible to experts. The secrecy and seclusion of the perpetuation of liminality for asylum seekers reduces the dialectical potential of the process, turning it into a mechanism of exclusion rather than one of social transformation.

Badiou's argument that refugees and migrants, who constitute an internationalized 'nomadic proletariat' coming from the most devastated zones, can become a virtual avant-garde 'for the gigantic mass of people whose existence, in the world today, is not counted' (Badiou 2015: 62) could be countered by the fact that the mass of 'nomadic proletariat' does not constitute a *communitas*, and thus does not have transformational potential. There are increasing structural measures in place to constrain the movement and curtail the rights of those on the margins, extending the liminal stage across space and time through bureaucratic, legal and political measures that signal what Turner saw as the dangers of an exaggeration of structure, and Agamben (2005) conceptualizes as the state of exception.

The state of exception enables the suspension of the quotidian protection of the law in the interest of preserving sovereignty (that is, the exercise of control by a given structure – in this case, the nation-state) (Agamben 1998: 11). It is a paradoxical situation by which the law is legally suspended, a point Agamben develops from Carl Schmitt (1996), whose notion of sovereignty referred to the capacity of the state to realize right (*Recht*) and monopolize politics. The increasingly normal situation by which states distinguish civil from human rights in order to separate national from foreign populations, makes the condition of bare life (that which lies outside the state order) more common. Additionally, the securitization of migration, which turns migrants and refugees into threats to national security, means that those who fall outside the protection of the state are seen as threats, and justifiably excluded. In current manifestations of the state of exception, human rights become mechanisms of state power and enable the creation of certain groups of people to fall outside state protection. Therefore 'illegal' migrants and asylum seekers have no rights within the state apparatus, and can only appeal to a vague construction of humanity (De Genova 2002). Thus, falling outside the realm of the political life of the state, refugees (and other marginal beings) have no protection and become nothing but bare life (Agamben 1998, 2005), reduced to only having human rights (Arendt 1968). It is in this respect perhaps that refugees as a global category can have the effects

of a *communitas* of equals, of which their commonality is their being human, and being outside the social order. However, they are once again differentiated in their humanity by different classificatory processes that grant them more or less chance at the asylum request: women and children, unaccompanied minors (a particularly contentious category for adolescents who are at the edge of adulthood), disabled people, families. These categories shape the experiences of people, and qualify them as better/more desirable refugees, or bound to be rejected. Key in the sorting of refugees within the liminal process of asylum are not only state organizations but also NGOs and, increasingly, corporate bodies.

This shifting political configuration in the structures that determine the movement and management of people is another element perpetuating the liminality of refugees, as emerging corporate state formations are not founded on a society of the nation-state, but rather on more fluid constructions of sociality determined by class. The corporate order as a social system competes against the nation-state, and marks an inside and outside determined by access to work and the reproduction of life for profit (Kapferer and Gold 2018). The refugee crisis is thus a product of the success of capitalism by which states barely serve as containers and regulators of people (Stolke 1995), but citizenship (people's relationship to a territorially based nation-state) is now subject to economic valuations and rules (Grace, Nawyn and Okawako 2017), giving way to more economic forms of citizenship. Refugees in their liminality become buffers for a whole range of hierarchical categorizations: European worker/non-European economic migrants; EU/non-EU citizens; Christian/Muslim, and so on. The irony is that such distinctions are in practice irrelevant, as Costas Douzinas (2007: 107) argues: 'In the new world order the excluded have no access to rights. . . . Economic migrants, refugees, prisoners in the war of terror, torture victims, inhabitants of African camps, these "one-use humans" attest to total and irreversible exclusion', a permanent liminal existence for the reproduction of life within the structures.

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NOTES

1. Some of these include the Brenner Pass between Austria and Italy; Moschendorf, Heiligenbrunn and Heiligenkreuz between Austria and Hungary, and a militarized unit in Ticcino between Italy and Switzerland. Brussels ordered European countries to remove border crossings and return to the normal Schengen free-movement conditions within six months (by the end of 2017).
2. As a measure of protecting European workers, Swiss law dissuades employers from bringing in 'third country' workers by taxing them higher per non-Swiss or non-European worker.
3. Retrieved 15 April 2019 from https://actionfromswitzerland.ch/protection/the-situation-of-female-refugees-in-switzerland/.
4. The facilitated naturalization succeeded in giving Swiss-born migrant children the right to a speedier process of naturalization if they grow up in Switzerland and go through a certain period of public schooling. The initiative was opposed by the SVP, which argued that it would create excessive foreignization and foster an abuse of Swiss citizenship rights.
5. In Switzerland it is the birth canton of a person, their Heimat (their 'mother country'), that is responsible for supporting a person if they become destitute.
6. This has particular implications in Switzerland, where health and education are cantonal matters and there is no strong centralized state that could take a welfare role. There is in fact a historic antagonism against the creation of a centralized state, and this tension is played out in immigration debates as well.
7. People under sixteen years of age receive automatic refugee status, but those over must be processed as adults.
8. The irony of this application is that refugees often purposefully neglect to bring their papers in order not to have documentation that might incriminate them in the asylum process (age limits, police checks, etc.). Furthermore, while some plan their migration and have time to prepare, many leave suddenly, or have been displaced from their hometowns for months or years before they leave their country.

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