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Living bureaucratisation: young Palestinian men encountering a Swedish introductory programme for refugees

> My dream is to study at the university. But when you go to [the caseworkers], they do not listen to your ambitions and dreams. They make you believe that you can tell them what you want. In the end they will write in their plans what *they* want. You want to study? Okay, you are going to study. They write 'Amir wants to continue his education. Amir wants to study Swedish. Amir is going to take the social integration course. And this basically means that according to this [action] plan, you should show us that you have attended [language] school.' (Amir)

This chapter discusses the experiences of young Palestinian men in an introductory programme for refugees in Sweden. The programme was designed to support people who had been accepted for asylum in learning Swedish and introducing them to the labour market (Larsson, 2015; Enneberg, 2017). Despite the good intentions of policy-makers, my interlocutors, like Amir who is quoted above, often feel that it is a waste of time to follow the programme. The programme is not adjusted to their individual aspirations, and they have few possibilities of deciding what to do with their own lives while being enrolled in it. In this chapter, I argue that their frustrations can be understood primarily as reactions to a bureaucratisation of daily life and to the institutional requirements that limit their sense of agency. Bureaucratisation in this case leads to resistance but also to hopelessness and readjustments of personal ambitions.

Many migrants from war-torn and poor countries are well prepared for multiple losses in life and for enduring hardships (Jackson, 2008). Among Palestinians, there is even a frequently used term, *sumud*, for patience or endurance, which means to keep going despite all (Peteet, 2005, pp. 148ff.). However, migrants are seldom prepared for the bureaucratisation of everyday life that is set in motion in Northern European welfare states when dealing with different institutions and authorities as asylum-seekers or refugees (see also chapter 10).[1] The Swedish street-level bureaucrats are, in general, described as friendly and caring by my interlocutors; still, their practices are, as we will learn, experienced as constraining and excluding.

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In addition, I claim that the bureaucratic labelling of my interlocutors as 'refugees' (Zetter, 1991), whose reason for migrating was fleeing persecution and violent conflict, conceals their aspirations to attain or continue higher education. This co-existence (or sometimes blending) of different motivations for mobility, and its connection to imagining a better life in faraway places after migration, is well-known within anthropology (Salazar, 2011), even though this particular mixing of political reasons for fleeing, on the one hand, and aspirations for social mobility through education, on the other, has received little attention. Appadurai (1996) emphasises that the practice of imagining (for example distant places, upward social mobility, safety) is a driving force behind increased migration globally. Imagination seems vital when deciding to migrate: either one does so in a context of war and violence or unemployment and poverty, or both. Appadurai (2013, pp. 286ff.) sees the capacities to imagine and to aspire as grounded within local systems of value, meaning, interaction, and opposition, even though recognisably universal. The frustrations my interlocutors experienced while being in the introductory programme highlight that wishes to find 'safety' often mingle with imagination of what a good life constitutes for many Palestinian refugees. The need to flee does not automatically diminish other needs or wishes in life. For migration agencies, introductory programmes and other parts of national bureaucracies, such co-existence seems difficult or even impossible to handle. As a result, my ethnographic material shows that from the perspective of some refugees, introductory programmes that do not take educational ambitions into account may seem meaningless, and refugees may, either deliberately or not, ignore bureaucratic requirements in an attempt to break out of conditions that are experienced as immobilising.

After a section on methodology and a theoretical framework, I briefly discuss Palestinian migration to Sweden, Palestinian desires for education, and Swedish introductory programmes for refugees in general. Then, I discuss my material in two ethnographic sections. First, I examine the procedures within the introductory programme, and the feeling of being stuck that my interlocutors experience. Second, I outline the tactics they use to juggle institutional requirements while maintaining their aspirations for higher education. The final section includes a summary of my findings and more general conclusions about my interlocutors' future in Sweden. My analysis points out that a focus on institutional requirements within introductory programmes for refugees may create hopelessness and frustration among participants to an extent that they give up on their aspirations for higher education and instead focus on getting employed in a low-status job or, possibly, migrating onwards. Ironically, the introductory programme, which aims at the socio-economic integration of refugees, makes some of them give up on ever becoming part of Swedish society.

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Methodology

This chapter builds on ethnographic material collected since 2011 among Swedish-Palestinians. The bulk of fieldwork was carried out in relation to an introductory programme for refugees in a city in southern Sweden during 2014–2015. The Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES, *Arbetsförmedlingen*) coordinates the introductory programme; my fieldwork included participant observation, qualitative interviews and informal conversations with staff at a local branch of the authority, and with refugees enrolled at the programme. I also attended information meetings for new refugees and held meetings about preliminary findings with personnel to get additional perspectives from a wider range of staff.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the accounts of four young Palestinian men with whom I established more long-term relationships. They were between twenty-five and thirty-three years of age and had waited for asylum for six to nine months before starting the introductory programme. I did not intend to focus on males but since Palestinian migration is dominated by young men this is how my snowballing turned out. The four men come from different parts of the Middle East: one grew up in Gaza, two are from the West Bank and one is from Syria. They have different socioeconomic backgrounds and have grown up in Palestinian refugee camps run by United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA).[2]

Being a Swede and thus a native in the receiving society was initially a disadvantage, since some refugees, out of courtesy, hesitated to be critical of the introductory programme in front of me. When I got to know them better such politeness disappeared. In this chapter, all names are pseudonyms and some personal details have been changed so to ensure the anonymity of individuals interviewed and the confidentiality of the local office of the SPES where I conducted fieldwork.

Bureaucratisation in welfare states

Weber's work (2013 [1922]) is the point of departure for most contemporary research about bureaucracy. He saw the convenience of a well-managed bureaucracy, which can promote trust and smooth interactions between citizens and representatives of the state, even though he also feared the expansion of bureaucracy, which he saw as an inevitable and self-reproducing aspect of capitalist production. Weber famously termed the entrapments of modern societies building on bureaucratic over-rationalisation rather than tradition and higher values as 'an iron cage' (Bauman, 1989; Cochrane, 2018). When people meet and interact with bureaucracy, they thus risk being turned into cases and divested of their individuality.

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For Eisenstadt (1959, p. 312), bureaucratisation implies that bureaucratic activities and power expand to many different areas of social life and that bureaucratic service goals tend to become less important in relation to the interests of bureaucracy itself and/or the society's elite. In this chapter, bureaucratisation is primarily about the extension of bureaucracy and less about the underlying power interests, even though the displacement or dwindling significance of service goals can be taken as signs of power and control. This also implies that the tentacles of bureaucratisation have reached areas of social life that many hoped would be free from bureaucratic regulations.

Scandinavian welfare programmes have intervened in people's private lives to a larger extent than in many other places (Olwig, 2011, p. 180). There are, however, differences between categories of citizens and residents and their relation to the state (Lister, 2007; Lundberg and Strange, 2017). Healthy and employed citizens are left at peace, while those who are directly economically dependent on the state, such as citizens on sick leave or newly arrived refugees on state allocation (that is, with asylum and residency but not yet taxpayers or citizens) tend to face more interventions. The latter's everyday lives are bureaucratised and controlled to a larger extent than those who can provide for themselves. There are strong ideals of reciprocity in the social contract between welfare systems and citizens within Scandinavia; a 'good' citizen does not remain dependent on the welfare state, but rather works and pays taxes so as to continue to receive benefits and reciprocates all the benefits that the citizen has received since birth (Olwig, 2011). In a comparable way, the introductory programme under scrutiny expects the inscribed refugees to reciprocate benefits (such as allocations and free courses) by following institutional procedures, for instance, by attending language classes as agreed, and thus showing that they are becoming 'good', responsible and self-supporting citizens.

Refugee labels

The people who are allowed to follow the programme discussed in this chapter have been accepted for asylum and are thus legally defined refugees. Since a ground-breaking article with examples from the Greek-Cypriot refugee situation by Zetter (1991), many scholars have argued that the bureaucratic labelling of refugees is a complex and dynamic process occurring inter-relationally between people who have fled and the international and national institutions that attempt to assist them (e.g. Peteet, 2005; Ludwig, 2013; Janmyr and Mourad, 2018). Implicit values guide refugee assistance, and the labelling of target groups is not neutral (Zetter, 1991, p. 45). Through labelling, a process of stereotyping occurs. Refugees become conflated with certain characteristics and needs depending on the context

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they are in, and on the degree and nature of control and opportunities provided by institutions within host countries and aid organisations (Zetter, 1991, p. 41).

As Zetter (2007) notes, the international refugee regime has changed significantly since the early 1990s. Today, it is often governments in the Global North, rather than NGOs and humanitarian organisations in the South, that form and transform the refugee label. In the case of Sweden, it is primarily the Migration Agency that forms the refugee label by interpreting the Aliens Act, accepting some individuals and groups as refugees or in need of protection and granting them asylum, and refusing others. However, it is in everyday practices of many different authorities, among those the SPES, that refugees are labelled and stereotypes are acted upon.

Refugees tend to experience 'speechlessness' (Malkki, 1996), since the production of authoritative narratives about refugees is frequently done by refugee relief and policy-making rather than by refugees themselves. In the case discussed here, the problem seems to be an unwillingness or inability within bureaucratic practices to make use of the capacities and wants of refugees, even when policy documents clearly state that interventions should be focused on individual needs and resources (Regeringens proposition, 2009).

Refugees do not always remain docile to their helpers or to bureaucratic procedures, however. Zetter (1991, p. 49) notes that the primary concern of refugees within, for instance, rehabilitation is often to reconstruct pre-existing identities. Such wishes seem key to understanding my interlocutors' frustrations with the introductory programme. By looking at what the label implies and refugees' experiences of institutional practices, we can understand that irritations among the refugees grow because the programme did not address their main aspiration. My Palestinian interlocutors have problems finding meaning in the introductory programme since it does not help them to pursue their dream of upward social mobility through reassuming or starting their higher education. In my research material, it is apparent that refugees with political reasons to move also have ambitions for higher education. However, the refugee label – often coloured by victimhood, passivity and emergency (Malkki, 1996; Janmyr and Mourad, 2018) – does not connote long-term migratory aspirations and future hopes other than safety.

Palestinian migration to Sweden and desire for education

Palestinian migration to Sweden started in the 1960s and rocketed in the 1980s during the Lebanese civil war (Lindholm with Hammer, 2003; Christou, 2017). But, as many Palestinians live without citizenship in unstable countries in the Middle East, their migration continues and at times intensifies, recently due to the Syrian war. It is unclear how many individuals of

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Palestinian origin reside in Sweden, since they have often been registered as 'stateless' or 'of unknown citizenship', but estimates suggest that there are at least 70,000 individuals (Gren, 2015). Palestinians are, however, a minor part of the refugee migration to Sweden, which amounts to half a million refugees 1980–2014 (excluding family members) (Migrationsverket, n.d.).

Although most Palestinians in Sweden arrive due to violent conflicts, some come for educational purposes (Lindholm with Hammer, 2003). In the Palestinian territories, it is common to migrate for higher education to the neighbouring Arab countries (Rosenfeld, 2004, p. 123f.) and many are educated in Eastern European countries, such as Belarus and Ukraine, thanks to comparably low university fees. During the Cold War era, there were also various scholarships that Palestinians could apply for via various Leftist political parties with links to Eastern Europe (Rosenfeld, 2004, p. 125).

There is a wish for education among Palestinians that is related to the war and the following losses in 1948 when the state of Israel was established and the hope for Palestinian independence was put on hold. About 750,000 Palestinians fled during the same war (Pappe, 2004, p. 139), and the majority of those who ended up in camps had limited schooling (Peteet, 2005). During the 1950s, the UN built schools in Palestinian refugee camps in neighbouring countries, making schooling available to everyone. Palestinian refugees used education as a way to recover from displacement and loss of resources, for instance by employment in the Gulf economies during the 1960s and 1970s (Peteet, 2005, p. 64). Importantly, higher education has often been a family project rather than an individual trajectory to upward social mobility (Rosenfeld, 2004). Nowadays in Gaza and the West Bank, increasing numbers of people study at local colleges or universities (Gren, 2017).

Higher education has also been considered crucial for the Palestinian national project. Since Israel is overwhelmingly powerful militarily and economically, a way for Palestinians to fight back is supposedly by becoming educated. In the long run, this strategy reflects their desire to change the rules of the game and gain international support for their cause (Akesson, 2014, pp. 197ff.).[3] My interlocutors were, of course, affected by the importance most Palestinians put on higher education. If they do not succeed in continuing their higher education in Sweden, their feelings of failure are compounded given the need to explain to their families and friends why they have failed to get educated in a country where you get student aid and do not pay any university fees. Failure is further accentuated because many of their peers in the occupied territories are finishing up their education.

Swedish introductory programmes for refugees

Swedish official discourse has underlined the necessity for refugees to become self-supporting (Borevi, 2014), although there is recognition of the need to

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assist those refugees who are unable to provide for themselves (Byström, 2015).[4] The requirements of the Swedish labour market have influenced both rhetoric about refugees and the different introductory programmes that have been in place since the 1980s (Graham, 2003; Eastmond, 2011). Employment is not only an economic issue but is seen as both producing and proving integration (Valenta and Bunar, 2010; Larsson, 2015).

Employment rates among refugees used to be high until the 1980s (Schierup et al., 2006, p. 207). However, since an economic crisis in the early 1990s, ethnic divisions in the Swedish labour market have become striking; immigrants, either work migrants or refugees, have typically entered the labour market through low-income, low-status jobs and many have remained in such jobs (Larsson, 2015 p. 36). In particular, those who are foreign-born and/or assumed to be 'culturally different' have problems getting access to employment (Lundborg, 2013, p. 219). Although actual employment rates among groups of immigrants vary between nationalities and legal statuses, as well as change over time (Belevander and Pendakur, 2012), the perception in society is that large groups of foreign-born depend on social welfare or unemployment compensation. Public debates reflect concerns that it takes too many years for immigrants, and especially for refugees, to become employed (Larsson, 2015, p. 44). Today, this is increasingly seen as a societal problem and/or a waste of human resources.[5]

Due to the widespread concern about unemployment among refugees, the responsibility of refugee introduction was moved from municipalities to the SPES in 2010 (Regeringens proposition, 2009/10:60). The SPES is a governmental agency with many local offices, and one purpose of the reform was to make the accommodation of refugees equal and fair, independent of local and regional policies. In the new regime, the SPES functions as a coordinator, collaborating with many other institutions, such as municipalities, social services, the Migration Agency and language schools. The introductory programme is called *Etableringen* in Swedish (literally the Establishment, referring to gaining a foothold in the labour market) and goes on for about two years (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2013; Larsson, 2015; OECD, 2016; Ennerberg, 2017).

There are strong norms about the necessity of speaking Swedish to be formally employed in Sweden, even for rather simple jobs (Eastmond, 2011). Thus, the programme places much emphasis on language training. It is not an exaggeration to say that language proficiency has become a sign of national integration. The programme also includes courses on Swedish society, culture and the political system; Swedish language for specific professions; validations of previous work experience and foreign degrees; internship opportunities; and government-subsidised employment. Through 'active participation' in the programme, a refugee is entitled to a modest sum of money to cover living expenses, distributed by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. This allocation is about SEK 1,504 per week (about EUR 150).[6] Participation in the programme is voluntary, but in practice only

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those refugees who are economically independent can afford to not follow the programme, since attendance is bound up with the distribution of allocations.

The main goal of the introductory programme is not that refugees should become educated, but that they should become employed or at least employable. Eastmond (2011, p. 283) concludes that, since 1998, *Arbetslinjen*, a policy prioritising employment of all citizens and residents, reflects increasing worries about people remaining jobless and consequently eternal welfare recipients (see also Larsson, 2015; Ennerberg, 2017). For the Swedish state, education of refugees thus seems important when it leads to quick employment. Basically, refugees without advanced degrees are only included in the Swedish labour market if they accept blue-collar jobs. They are seldom seen as equals who have their own hopes and dreams of a good life.[7]

'Integration' is an unclear concept that is used in multiple ways in daily life and for diverse political and scientific purposes (Diedrich and Hellgren, 2018; Rytter, 2018). Although the introductory programme is mostly focused on economic integration, a number of cultural and social agreements are part of the practices and settings of the programme. Similar to Norwegian integration measures, 'a compulsory re-socialisation' based on cultural conventions about how to properly behave in society are promoted and expected to be followed (Engebrigtsen, 2007 p. 733). Hence, it seems that a collective self-perception of Swedes as punctual, active, hard-working and willing to follow agreed-upon plans also influences how the introductory programme is carried out in practice.

Stuck within the introductory programme

In a dull office building close to the city centre, a big room is filling up with people. The people who enter are gathering around three different persons – the interpreters between Swedish and Arabic or Dari or Somali. A middle-aged, blond woman from the SPES introduces herself as Fredrika Lundgren and distributes brochures, congratulating everyone for having been granted asylum. Then some general information follows about the SPES and its introductory programme. It is underlined that the programme is individualised and that each refugee should talk to their caseworker so as to adjust the programme according to one's health, previous experiences and wishes. Fredrika explains about the compulsory and individual action plan, a document where caseworker and refugee collaboratively schedule a programme for the refugee's participation. Specific courses, language training, internships and other events should be chosen 'according to your thoughts about the future', Fredrika adds. Moreover, she explains that the action plan should be similar to a 'normal job', which is why eight hours per day should be scheduled Monday to Friday. The aim is that the refugees should 'become

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part of society' in Fredrika's words. On her power-point, Fredrika shows the local addresses of two authorities that the refugees need to visit as soon as possible as to get their allocations: the Swedish Tax Agency and the Social Insurance Agency. She explains that the Tax Agency manages the civil registration and that everyone needs to have a local postal address to register. By registering, everyone will get a personal identity number. Several people nod, seemingly aware of the importance of having a personal identity number in Sweden. Fredrika continues to explain that with a personal identity number, each one will also be able to apply for a Swedish ID card. Furthermore, to be able to receive their allocations without further ado, Fredrika recommends a certain procedure:

> First, you visit the Tax Agency to get your personal identity number and then your ID card. Second, you visit a bank of your choice. You bring your ID card and you open a bank account. The third step is to visit the Social Insurance Agency – bringing your ID card with your personal identity number and the number of your bank account. Then you will start to receive allocations.

As she touches the computer's keyboard to show the next slide on her power-point, Fredrika tries to joke: 'If you haven't noticed that yet, we like papers in Sweden, especially at authorities.' Nobody laughs while she goes on to explain the four valid reasons for being absent during the programme.

An action plan for each individual refugee is a significant document within the introductory programme. The action plan should be filled with assignments such as language training and internships, during 40 hours per week, which equals the working hours at an ordinary full-time job in the Swedish labour market (see also Larsson, 2015, p. 49). The idea is that in this way the refugees will learn about working life in Sweden. In contrast to most employees, people who follow the introductory programme do not have the right to vacation during the two years of the programme. In practice, there are often gaps in the implementation of the action plans, however, which means that people may, for instance, have to wait for a course to start, and some of the activities are not as 'demanding' in reality as on paper.

The second significant document is what staff and refugees call the school card, that is, the attendance form, which not only proves attendance at language school but at all assignments scheduled in action plans. Once a month, refugee clients stand in line, waiting to hand in their cards to the staff who send them onwards in the system so the refugees receive money from the Social Insurance Agency. This is a monthly procedure, which is debated among the employees. In fact, all unemployed people registered with the SPES need to fill in attendance forms but, unlike the refugees, others can fill in their activities online and thus avoid the tedious queuing. Some of the employees feel that the queuing is disgraceful and makes the refugees unnecessarily uncomfortable. Others argue that this is something

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'normal that one has to do at any job.' Attendance proved by the school card is the basic institutional requirement for cash distribution.

Except from the hassle when starting the programme, my interlocutors' daily routines quickly fill with Swedish lessons, meetings with mentors, queues to hand in attendance forms, occasional meetings with their caseworkers, evaluations of previous educational degrees, the writing of CVs, and the search for internships and jobs. But they also often find themselves waiting: waiting for the exam papers to be returned from the authorities, waiting for a rewritten action plan, waiting for a new course on the Swedish political system to start or a caseworker to agree on a specific internship. Waiting is an exercise of power, especially when delaying but not totally destroying hope, argues Bourdieu (2000). For my interlocutors, experiences of waiting add to the dampening effect on the excitement of coming to a new country and fulfilling their dreams (see e.g. Khosravi, 2014; see also chapter 11).

To my interlocutors, the programme and its bureaucracy, as well as individual bureaucrats, hinder rather than support their future aspirations. One case in point is Yousef's story. After a series of arrests, which included beatings by the Israeli security forces, Yousef managed to get out of the West Bank and travel to Sweden. After eight months of waiting, he was granted political asylum. He has some work experience at a Palestinian municipality and a bachelors' degree in social work from a local university. His caseworker promised to send in his exam papers to the Swedish Council for Higher Education, which is in charge of evaluating foreign degrees and exams but, unfortunately, she forgot. When he discovered this after months of waiting, he was furious and sent his papers himself, but all this meant that the evaluation was delayed by several months. His degree was eventually recognised in Sweden. Meanwhile, Yousef studied Swedish and finished his language exam quickly and was thus given a financial 'award' from the authorities. The only problem is that now there is not much for him to do within the introductory programme. His caseworker advised him to take the *same* Swedish course he had just finished one more time. Frustrated, Yousef tells me: 'The [Swedish] system makes you sleep and eat and smoke. For two months, I have been waiting for a new course, I have nothing to do.' He wants to study academic English to be able to follow an international MA programme at a Swedish university, but instead he ends up doing an internship at an Arab friend's falafel kiosk 'to practise Swedish', as it was framed by his caseworker.

Part of my interlocutors' frustration is that the introductory programme is not flexible enough to meet their needs. As discussed earlier, neither bureaucracy nor refugee labelling leaves room for individualisation (due to educational background, work experience, health issues and so on), but, on the contrary, emphasises standardisation. However, at the local office where I conducted interviews and participant observation, as well as in the policy

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documents of the programme, individualisation is repeatedly underlined as a necessity for successful matching between refugee and labour market (see also Ennerberg, 2017, p. 192f.). Bureaucratic practices and limited resources limit individualisation. In the end, standardisation and procedure become the rule.

Rarely can individualisation occur, and only after long negotiations, often including a number of medical certificates. For instance, Rashid, a Palestinian from Syria, has finally succeeded in getting his action plan adjusted to his own needs. Since his arrival in Sweden, he has been suffering from depression and other psychological issues. The little energy he has is mostly spent on his work in a Syrian activist network, for instance by going to conferences on the Syrian war in other Swedish cities. Attending such conferences sometimes leads to his absence from language school, which his first caseworker did not accept or, as Rashid phrases it: 'she did not understand that those events are also important to me, otherwise I'd get more depressed.' He tried to gain his caseworker's trust by showing her documentation of his participation but, despite this, she threatened to lower his allocation due to his absence. In his own words, his encounter with this first caseworker was a total collision with Swedish bureaucracy. He felt that she cared about his mental health but at the same time she neither understood what he was going through nor shared his priorities. Her caring for his health stayed within the confines of medicalised understandings that did not necessarily extend to seeing the need for Rashid to pursue activities that are meaningful to him but may contradict the action plan. Rashid explains this lack of understanding in ethnic terms: this caseworker is an ethnic Swede without any migrant background, while the two successive ones both come from families with their own stories of flight. In his third caseworker, Rashid meets an employee who acknowledges his problems:

> It was my third caseworker who [finally] tackled my case as an individual and who saw potential in me. … She found a particular law to help me. Since then, I do three days of work because of my depression and I'm allowed to follow SFI [Swedish for immigrants] in a flexible way. I was crushed when I came to her. She pushed me to get medical certificates from my doctor and from a psychologist.

Even though he feels that bureaucracy in Syria is worse than in Sweden, since it has often been used as 'a political tool to humiliate some people' as he says, there are rules that can be ignored. In Sweden, on the other hand, everything is supposedly about laws, especially when his caseworker wants him to do something in particular. Yet, to Rashid, the law is used in an arbitrary way in Sweden. The law, as he phrases it, seems to be focused on the refugees living up to the institutional requirements of the programme: being active 40 hours a week, keeping to the action plan by following the schedule or having pre-approved reasons not to. The system has problems

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dealing with refugees who are not well, who are traumatised or who just intend to do something different than what has been entered in the action plan. In this context, being able to integrate seems to mean following the programme and its institutional requirements, not necessarily being or becoming employable or part of society more generally speaking.

This does not mean that the caseworkers I interviewed within the introductory programme are unaware of the heterogeneity among their refugee clients. On the contrary, they underline the differences they note among refugees, for instance, depending on national background, education, age and gender. They are acutely aware that, for instance, lack of housing, worries about family members abroad and experiences of torture or other kinds of extensive violence often influence their clients' ability to follow the programme. It seems clear that neither politicians nor bureaucrats have intended to standardise the programme. However, there are a limited number of courses and activities that can be part of an action plan. Those bureaucrats also have limited time with each of their clients in addition to budget restrictions.

As Yousef notes, the caseworkers have mixed educational and professional backgrounds. Few have a degree in social work as Yousef does himself and he concludes: 'There should be social workers at the SPES who could help us. My mentor doesn't know anything about society. It is just that her Swedish is good. Knowing the language is like having a PhD in this country.' To Yousef, the support that is given within the programme is not of the right kind. Nobody is able to advise him on university studies, for instance.

Juggling institutional requirements and aspirations for the future

My interlocutors navigate the Swedish politics of integration while trying to keep up hope and pursuit of a good future on their own terms. While the young Palestinians I interviewed were granted asylum on political grounds, their migration is associated with aspirations they have for their own lives that go beyond escaping political persecution and war. For many of them, migration and integration involve pursuing the life trajectories that they were on before fleeing. In other words, they attempt to conform to the demands of the introductory programme while simultaneously aspiring for and imagining a better life.

As mentioned, higher education is one of the common forms of aspirations for my interlocutors. For instance, Rashid, who belongs to a highly educated Palestinian family in Syria, sought to restart his university studies as soon as possible:

> I have a job that the SPES pays for.[8] But I plan to go back to university. … I didn't graduate from university in Syria. It was because of the 'normalisation'

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> of the abuses. There was a detention centre at the university, so I boycotted the exams. … I want to study for a BA at a Swedish University. But our grades [those of the Syrian and Swedish grading systems] are not comparable so it's hard to get accepted. I have also been outside academia for a while and I'm psychologically affected [by the war and by fleeing].

Syria, where Rashid grew up, used to be the host country in the Middle East that gave most rights to Palestinian refugees prior to the on-going war, including the right to attend higher education for free (Gabiam, 2016). Thus, many of the Palestinians who flee the war in Syria already have higher education or had expected to get a university degree without obstacles.

My interlocutors' aspirations for higher education tend to clash with the caseworkers' prioritisation of the programme's institutional requirements and the rules for the allocation. Amir explains to me that he has two goals with his migration: first, getting away from Gaza and the threats of both Hamas and Israel, and second, starting a university education. For the Swedish Migration Agency, he emphasised the first to obtain asylum, and for the SPES, he underlines the second. However, when he prioritised his aspirations to be accepted at a university through taking a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), he failed to fulfil the requirements of the introductory programme.

> I told [my caseworker] that I don't have English B [that is an English course required for university studies in Sweden] so I have to do an exam instead. And I can't pay for this. It costs like 3,500 Swedish crowns. But [the SPES] rejected. … I needed to study English but at the same time I had to go to SFI. I said that I didn't want to go to SFI, I want to do the English test. I had even borrowed money for this exam and I registered for it. I studied and studied. I didn't go to SFI and they rejected my application for money because I hadn't been at SFI. 'But I told you in my action plan that I want to continue my education so I need to do this exam.' So I went [for the exam] anyway. I was so stressed. I couldn't sleep very well and then I did the exam and I failed.

The requirement of the course English B to apply to university studies in Sweden can be fulfilled by taking an evening class or a TOEFL. In Amir's case, it is clear that taking a TOEFL was not the course of action that is expected from him during the introductory programme; he was not following the expected procedure. Quite the contrary, according to the logic of the programme, he should continue to study Swedish and only later, after finishing the programme, would he be advised to take an English course or perhaps a TOEFL. In my interviews with the caseworkers, dreams of higher education are often taken rather lightly as long as the refugee in question is not already highly educated within a shortage occupation, such as medicine. If discussed at all, higher education is referred to the time after the introductory programme. Besides, there are no funds that are earmarked for expenses such as the TOEFL in the budget of the SPES. According to

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Amir, he has been financially punished by the system for not having followed the action plan as he was engaging in a trajectory that he hopes will bring him closer to his aspiration for higher education. Additionally, the Swedish my interlocutors learn during the introductory programme is not enough for following an academic programme in Swedish; hence, the desperate attempts to improve their English. In relation to this, another of my interlocutors, Hassan from the West Bank, notes that Swedish language instruction seems less efficient than in other countries. For instance, he knows Palestinian students in Ukraine who only spend a year on language training; thereafter, they are able to continue their university studies in Ukrainian.

Within the SPES, enrolling in the introductory programme means being ‘ready to follow the programme as agreed’, neither suffering too much nor being too agentive, too independent or too ambitious. Some individual initiatives, such as actively looking for internships or job opportunities, are praised, but only within limits. According to my interlocutors, some enterprises, such as Amir’s skipping Swedish classes for some weeks to study for an English language exam, are definitely not acceptable and even punished by holding back cash distributions. Other acts, like Yousef finishing his Swedish exam too quickly, become difficult to handle bureaucratically, even though on paper he does what he is supposed to. Neither should people be too traumatised – they should basically be governable according to the action plan. Such bureaucratic demands have a dampening effect on my informants’ ambitions and plans.

Being aware of their limited options and living with experiences suppressing their dreams, the young Palestinians re-formulate their ideas about the future after the introductory programme. Hassan, who was mentioned above, has given up on a university course in academic English that he started. He is unemployed and dreams of going back to the Gulf state where he partly grew up due to his father’s work. Such dreams are at least attempts to indirectly ward off the risk of remaining uneducated and unemployed in Sweden. Amir has already tried leaving. He still hopes to start a university education or at least get a job according to his work experiences from international NGOs in Gaza, but it seems impossible in Sweden. He has visited the UK, Denmark, Spain and Germany trying to find a ‘suitable’ job. Sometimes he was successful, but then the authorities in those countries stopped him, since he is not a Swedish citizen and thus needs work permits to work in another EU country. Now he is back in Sweden and delivers newspapers in the early morning hours. Amir has adjusted his immediate plans so they are more in line with Swedish society’s expectations of him to hold a low-paid, low-status job.

My two other informants experience different levels of success. Rashid is one of four who is back to university studies after the two years at the introductory programme. His achievement is probably related to the fact that his parents had advanced university degrees from Syria, which is not

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the case with the parents of the other three. Yousef wants to study for an MA in social work in English, but is, for the time being, pleased to have found a job. He had a temporary post at a home for unaccompanied minors – a job that fits his education in social work – but he now works in a more profitable unskilled job. This job is more desirable than the alternative unemployment, which would also mean continuous interaction with the SPES.

Conclusion

My interlocutors' frustrations and disobedience within the Swedish introductory programme should be read as responses to a bureaucratisation of their daily lives that leaves little room for individual agency. In addition, they are pushed to focus on the immediate institutional requirements rather than their own long-term goals of higher education and upward social mobility. To the refugees, the programme and its content often seem meaningless since their dreams for the future are seldom prioritised. On the contrary, some of their initiatives that focus on higher education are, at times, punished because they are not scheduled in the programme. Events, such as a caseworker forgetting to send in a diploma for validation or the absence of accurate information about university studies in Sweden, are read as an institutional neglect of this group of refugees' main aspiration, namely higher education. The withdrawal of cash distributions when refugees concentrate on things other than learning Swedish is taken as proof of the caseworkers' lack of understanding and even lack of appropriate professional knowledge. Dealing with their disappointments when they have not succeeded in taking up their studies, my interlocutors either renegotiate their aspirations, by becoming employed and thereby securing a financially 'good life', or by dreaming of migrating onwards, in the search for education and jobs. Ironically, the introductory programme, which aims to include refugees in Sweden, makes some give up hope of a satisfactory life there. Instead, they are softly impelled to fill spots in a racialised labour market, rather than educate themselves.

Moreover, the experiences of my interlocutors show that the institutional difficulties in taking the refugees' more long-term educational goals seriously are not only due to budget limits or shortage of staff, but are intertwined with the labelling of refugees. A refugee cannot be highly educated or hold ambitions to be so; it is a contradiction in terms. Within the institutional frames of the Swedish introductory programme, my informants' ambitions to get a higher education and/or re-establish their former identities as professionals collide with their main reason for seeking refuge, which is to reach safety from political violence and persecution. Their experiences show that bureaucratic practices end up being a hindrance, rather than support.

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Notes

1 Although many Palestinians from the occupied territories are used to the hostile and extensive bureaucracy of the Israeli Civil Administration when, for instance, applying for travel permissions, family reunification or work permits, Israel does not intend to turn them into 'good citizens' or decide on their daily whereabouts. The Swedish introductory programme does. Israel, rather, uses its military forces to interfere in people's daily routines through arbitrary decisions to block a road, close off a specific geographical area or refuse to let a Palestinian through a checkpoint despite having a valid permit (Calis, 2017).
2 They thus have previous refugee statuses with UNRWA since they belong to families that fled the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948. UNRWA's ability and mandate to protect Palestinian refugees is, however, very limited. My interlocutors travelled independently to Sweden to seek asylum.
3 A recent study, however, has pointed out that with diminishing beliefs in Palestinian self-determination and in an end to Israeli occupation, many Palestinian youth understand education in a more instrumental manner and as a route to individual economic improvement (Pherali and Turner, 2018).
4 It can, however, also be argued that in practice, refugees have been more or less deliberately kept out of the labour market during various time periods, for instance by high demands on Swedish language proficiency and Swedish, rather than foreign, educational degrees (Schierup et al., 2006, p. 207).
5 http://arbeidslivinorden.org/artikler/insikt-og-analyse/nyheter-2015/article.2015-05-27.1719982153.
6 Arbetsförmedlingens återrapportering 2012. Etablering av vissa nyanlända -samverkan och samordning, Dnr: AF-2011/414101, p. 44. Available at: https://arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.3e623d4f16735f3976e9be/%C3%85terrapport_8b_-_Etablering_av_vissa_nyanl%C3%A4nda_-_Samverkan_och_samordning.pdf (Accessed 15 March 2020).
7 This is also clear from a special law, the so-called *Gymnasielagen*, which gave a second chance to young asylum-seekers, most from war-torn Afghanistan, in July 2018. Those 'failed' asylum-seekers with a deportation decision can stay in Sweden as long as they attend upper secondary school. After finishing school, they will have to leave unless they can find a job. The uncertain security situation in Afghanistan and any wishes for higher education are thus insignificant. (Khosravi, 2014 https://lesvosmosaik.org/stolen-time-shahram-khosravi/).
8 There are government-subsidised forms of employment for job-seekers considered 'difficult to employ' in Sweden. Normally, the employer will pay a smaller amount of the salary and social fees, while the SPES pays up to 80 per cent of the salary (Ennerberg 2017, p. 115).

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