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# Tracing the circulation of emotions in Swiss migration enforcement: organizational dissonances, emotional contradictions and frictions

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# Tracing the circulation of emotions in Swiss migration enforcement: organizational dissonances, emotional contradictions and frictions

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Migration enforcement is an emotional field displaying conflicting positions and tensions between bureaucrats and migrants, and within and between organizations. This article conducts an in-depth analysis of emotions within organizational encounters and the role that emotions play between organizations and in the outcome of cases. It examines how emotions directed towards other agencies shape an organizational work ethos and professional standing. Using ethnographic data collected in Swiss migration offices, social services offices and legal counselling offices, this article discloses how such actors 'feel' each other and therefore indirectly show how they 'feel' the 'state' and its policies regarding the creation of migrant subjects and their integration and belonging. While social workers and legal advisors often understand migration policies as restrictive towards migrant individuals, migration officials find themselves in the role of the state defender. Studying their emotions thus facilitates an analysis of the discrepancies between different agencies in the realm of migration administration and of their emotional dissonance, which characterize the migration regime.

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#### Introduction

Diverse actors take part in migration management, who exhibit a range of emotional reactions to migrants (Borrelli 2019). This invites an exploration of how responses to migrants vary between different organizational contexts and how actors in state institutions and non-governmental organizations emotionally engage with each other. Prior work on emotions within the realm of migration control has highlighted the role of fear and contempt when they guide the behavior of detention staff towards detainees (Hall 2010), has examined the emotions of border control actors (Gill 2016) and

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social workers supporting undocumented migrants (Nordling 2017), and has explored how bureaucrats experience their own role as policy implementers vis-à-vis vulnerable subjects (Bosworth 2018; Eggebø 2013). In this literature, emotions tend to be studied in regard to migrant – bureaucrat encounters, highlighting the need to understand emotions and their 'doings' (Ahmed 2004), because emotionally driven discourses impact policies and their implementation, becoming the rationale behind deterrence strategies set up to act against rejected asylum seekers or irregularized individuals (Hall 2010), but also defining professional practices per se.

I expand on these works by focusing on emotions that arise in encounters within and between three different organizations<sup>1</sup> in Switzerland: migration offices, social services offices and legal counselling offices. All three are concerned with negotiating foreign nationals' right to remain, specifically EU/EFTA citizens and third-country nationals with work and residence permits, who rely on social assistance. Since such dependency can cause the withdrawal (non-renewal or also downgrading) of a (permanent) residency permit (Borrelli et al. 2021), the three organizations are in charge of assessing cases and advocating or questioning the respective stay. These migrants may have arrived via family reunification, work contracts, or in some cases were born or raised in Switzerland but have not been naturalized. Studying the prevailing positioning of these three organizations and their relations and communication with each other through an emotional lens introduces an additional angle regarding how these actors position themselves in their everyday work. An analysis of their relational professional ethos also advances how emotional aspects of statecraft and specific emotional responses shape bordering processes beyond direct migrant – bureaucrat encounters. Indeed, work outside the realm of migration research has highlighted how emotions lend power to institutions, thus becoming 'the substance of politics' (Stoler 2004, 6; see also Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017), able to organize difference (see Hochschild 2012 on labour markets). Emotions 'characterize and permeate the social field' (D'Aoust 2014, 271) and particularly do so, as I argue, in the field of migration control, where they highlight sites of personal and social tension (Misje 2020; Pellander 2019; Graham 2002).

My analysis is positioned at the intersection of migration and welfare policies. I draw on ethnographic data obtained from observation and semistructured interviews. Each organization raises different arguments to legitimize and defend its ethical positioning, which is further bolstered by contrasting its professional ethos with that of other actors in the field. The voiced and experienced emotions relate to ideas about other institutions and clients, which convey tensions directed towards actors'2 work and which shape an inter-organizational work ethos.

I draw on work at the intersection of 'emotional' organizations (Lindebaum, Geddes, and Gabriel 2017) and migration enforcement (Vega



2017) to expose how organizational actors switch between having a general suspicion towards and fear of migrants and attempting to show compassion. This enables a three-fold analysis of 1) the professional standing of the three researched organizations, 2) the relational creation of meaning in their everyday work and 3) the positioning towards foreign nationals happening beyond encounters between migrants and caseworkers (and other (non)institutional staff). Indeed, emotional positioning of these organizations extends past the actual migrant encounter and is affected by different goals that support either restrictive behavior or a focus on clients' well-being.

## **Emotional organizations within migration control**

Organizational studies increasingly consider the role of affect, emotions and feelings when the aim is to understand the work processes undertaken in private enterprises, state institutions and public services (Collin, Garot, and De Groot 2018; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Graham 2002).3 They emphasize that emotions are not simply the irrational part of otherwise rational economies or states (Härtel, Zerbe, and Ashkanasy 2005), nor are they exceptional (Friedland 2018). Instead, emotions are intrinsic to the everyday life of organizations and public administration (Svašek and Skrbiš 2007; Albrow 1992). They often also allow for unconscious cognitive schemas that pertain to race, gender or class (Ray 2019) and that affect individual attitudes and state policy or legitimate an unequal distribution of resources.4

I follow this line of argumentation and show that emotions are not an irrational part of organizations but are (re)produced in the reflections of staff on their professional ethos through their differentiation of other agencies and their positioning towards clients. I use the term 'emotion' to include not only how people feel, often on a rather subjective and individual level, though this is influenced by many factors, but also what is displayed (Fineman 2003). This interpretation is used to show how certain emotions are engrained in organizations, making emotions a complex mental construction that is shaped by and in relation to others.

The relational aspect of emotional manifestation becomes especially relevant in the field of migration studies, where many actors are involved in making decisions about foreign nationals' right to residency. To date, research on emotion in the context of migration control has often focussed on migrants, who experience socio-legal exclusion, potentially causing durable psychological or physiological effects such as depression or cardiovascular diseases (Bhatia 2021; Crocker 2015; Svašek 2010). Another line of research has investigated the emotions that migration officials experience in response to migrants (Bosworth 2018; Eggebø 2013), establishing that the asylum and deportation system in particular is ridden with suspicion and mistrust (Bhatia 2020), causing discriminating effects that are directed towards migrants (Borrelli 2020). Fear of 'others', namely migrants, sometimes depicted as welfare abusers or boqus asylum seekers (Ahmed 2004), becomes institutionalized if it is supported by political discourses. This culture of disbelief is often characterized by colonial and racist configurations that are inherent in administration and are revealed in decision-making which constructs 'harmful acts as socially normal and appropriate' (Bhatia 2020, 5). Switzerland, for example, has cultivated a fear of 'over-foreignization' (Michel 2015; Cretton 2018) within migration policies and society at large. It is a fear that has manifested in the production of spatio-affective borders (e.g. through restrictive migration policies) that construct subjects marked by racial difference as threats (Michel 2015) and can help us understand how white identity has become part of Swiss nation-building (Cretton 2018). At the same time, '[t]he act of selecting worthy over non-worthy asylum seekers is, [...] in essence, an act of power and violence' (Wettergren 2010, 414), causing migration enforcement work to be demoralizing for the actors involved, whose work is publicly scrutinized. 'Guilt, shame and anxiety are logical responses to such power abuse' (Wettergren 2010, 414; Bosworth 2018; Hall 2010). Migration enforcement agents thus claim their moral standing in the face of dubious working practices by using a compassionate discourse and disputing migrants' morality (Vega 2017; Eggebø 2013; Wettergren 2010). Again, emotions are a productive means to indicate the moral and ethical frames in which bureaucrats work (Bosworth 2018), also informed by a moral position towards certain groups (Lindebaum, Geddes, and Gabriel 2017).

These earlier studies discuss bureaucrats' emotional framings of migrant individuals but do not focus much on how such framings are also (co-) constructed through the varying emotional differentiations of different organizations that support a particular internal professional ethos. I therefore expand these works (beyond the realm of asylum) and argue that we can find (ethical) positionings not only in emotional expressions made during encounters with migrants or within agencies but also in confrontations with other actors (and thus with organizations). The analysis of displayed emotions builds a relational understanding of migration enforcement and contributes to works on emotional statecraft. I explore how emotions are experienced, made manifest and circulated within migration administration and engage with how organizational inter- and intra-relations are emotionally built, shaping the everyday outcomes of organizational practices. Here, emotions 'go beyond the direct interests of the self' and are 'linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent' (Haidt 2003, 853), uncovering the intricate nature of individual and organizational positioning (Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman 1998). Emotions, therefore, may both provoke and partake in the construction of moral positionings (Lindebaum, Geddes, and Gabriel 2017). In the case of migration,



there is a compassionate repression that characterizes bureaucratic practices (Fassin 2005), a balance between defending the state from migrants that intend to abuse it and protecting those deserving of support (Borrelli 2020). Indeed, ethics are based on moral impulses, not codified rules, and thus emotions play a role, even though bureaucracy significantly reduces bureaucrats' feelings of guilt and their emotional burden (Eggebø 2013). Wettergren (2010) highlights how the internal emotional regimes of organizations (using the Swedish Migration Board as example) come with a need to also orchestrate others' performance to sustain the fantasy of procedural correctness that sustains employees. We therefore need to study emotions as contextual and inter-subjective experiences that involve interpersonal interactions and negotiations (Hall 2010). The analysis that follows will reflect and depict reciprocal emotional engagement and the reflections of three organizations beyond migrant – bureaucrat encounters that crucially shape client images and a specific professional ethos that is created through differentiations formed by organizations that work within the same realm of migration administration

## **Context and methods**

As federal state with 26 cantons (administrative subdivisions of the Swiss Confederation with some political autonomy) Swiss immigration policies are a national responsibility, while implemented and more specifically defined on the cantonal level. Each canton has a migration office<sup>5</sup> making decisions about residence permits and depending on municipal residents' registration offices for information ((de)registering and monitoring the movement of citizens and foreign nationals in and out of the Canton). They can grant or extend both permanent and temporary residence permits, and also withdraw or refuse to extend them if the foreign national has incurred criminal penalties, is the subject of an open debt prosecution or a loss certificate. Also dependency on welfare (more specifically social assistance) or if a person they have to care for is dependent on welfare (FNIA, Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration 2019, art. 62e) can cause the loss of a permit, on the grounds that individuals 'burden' the state and do not integrate, for example by not participating in the labour market. Here the threshold for a withdrawal of a regular residence permit is higher than for temporary ones, requiring the 'permanent' dependency 'to a large extent' (FNIA 2019, art. 63c). Such dependency includes receiving social assistance once eligibility for unemployment benefits has ended and individuals have been unable to find new employment. Over the past years discourses on reducing welfare expenditures have particularly targeted non-citizens (Achermann et al. 2021), beginning with the introduction of the FNIA (2019) that allows to downgrade (art. 63, para. 2) permanent to temporary residence permits, causing

a reduction in rights, including the right to family reunification for thirdcountry nationals, and reintroducing the possibility of withdrawing permanent residence permits that had been held for 15 years or more on the ground that an individual is dependent on social assistance.

Social services, which are organized at municipality level, have an obligation to report welfare dependence to migration offices (as do other institutions that record criminal offences or debts of foreign nationals). Information about foreign nationals' applications for benefits is shared via hard-copy letters, email or online systems (Andreetta and Marie Borrelli 2022).

I use ethnographic data collected between 2019 and 2020 in Switzerland to study the intersection of social policies and migration law, taking an interest in the everyday decisions and work routines of the relevant offices, including their emotional labour (Hochschild 2012), changes in policies and laws, and communication and relations with other actors and organizations. This in-depth fieldwork was conducted in one canton and included six weeks of observation in one migration office, one week in a social services office, five case-file discussions in one other social services office and two interviews at two other social services offices, one including a 'client'. Additionally, 43 semistructured interviews with migration office officials, social services staff and legal counsellors were conducted across Switzerland for comparison. Legal counselling offices can be private law firms and NGOs offering legal support. All interviewees gave their informed consent and confidentiality agreements were signed where I had access to client data. Interviews were conducted and translated by me. All of the interlocutors that I engaged with directly were informed about my role, but I have anonymized all information to protect their opinions and activities and, most importantly, the information about vulnerable clients.

## **Emotional positioning within organizations**

Emotions can be mobilized against or for others, based on individual experiences, professional goals and structures, and may manifest in interactions (Svašek and Skrbiš 2007) and reflections. The different mandates of social services, legal counselling and migration offices cause tensions, negative emotions and the drawing of boundaries. Frustration can build up if it is felt that known organizational goals are being undermined by new policies (Nordling and Persdotter 2021), for example if social workers are treated as an extended arm of migration control or when actors feel they are doing work that other organizations should be doing (see Misje 2020). Similarly, their vocational background is associated with different occupational ethics. Social services nearly always employ trained social workers, whose educational background prepares them to work with marginalized groups (fieldnotes 2019). Lawyers or legally trained staff employed in counselling offices also

take a specific interest in supporting marginalized clients (e.g. welfare recipients or foreign nationals), work that often does not bring much financial gain (interviews 2019–2020). Migration offices often employ staff with administrative vocational training as caseworkers, but also lawyers at the managerial level. Their administrative training does not particularly focus on the handling of social interactions but rather on the administrative systems, accounting and documenting that result in decisions concerning the residential status of foreign nationals. Both training background and organizational aims play a crucial role in the establishment of specific emotions that actors voice. In the following sections, the emotional standing of the three organizations will be elaborated, and the ways in which each organization differentiates its work from that of the others

## Professional self-image and emotional standing

Legal advice and social services offices have a clear focus on the client. Legal counsellors' objectives are evaluating and appealing decisions to secure the livelihood and eventually the legal stay of a person. Clients often cannot pay for these services and money is only won if the case is successful. Legal counsellors note that they fully support the clients they take on, which is evident in the way they argue and in their reflections on migration offices' decisions. They express irritation and annoyance at the attempts of migration offices to undermine their idea of the correct interpretation of laws. This positioning allows lawyers to feel positive about their role in the process while simultaneously being discomforted and aware of their limited resources, which pushes them to select the most promising cases and thus reproduce state logics concerning deservingness. This can cause a moral dilemma as legal advisors often have relatively expansive ideas about belonging and therefore give more weight to the length of stay or family bonds than to minor delinquencies or the amounts of debt incurred or social assistance received, something that is particularly highlighted by migration officials.

Social workers too are keen to evidence their interest in supporting clients in need, explaining how at times they make use of discretionary decisionmaking, even bending rules when they deem it helpful for the client. Such actions include not sanctioning clients for missed appointments and juggling figures to advance bigger payments to clients that these can then pay off in instalments. Their work is imbued with emotions since social workers deal with the personal histories of their clients and engage with them over a potentially long time. Due to their involvement in all matters concerning their clients' private life (insurance, employment, health care, housing), they are also in the loop regarding migration offices' communication. Their clients' frustration, anxiety and anger become to some extent their own because they often side with their clients, condemning the demeaning way in which

migration offices address their clients but also directing their irritation towards other organizations that to them seem to take uninformed decisions about their clients. Social workers underline that they 'see' the client and understand their challenges. While social workers recognize that they also have a general control function and are prepared to sanction clients perceived as lacking motivation or cooperation, they also understand their role as ensuring a 'last safety net' (fieldnotes 2020).

In contrast, migration officials rarely meet clients. Caseworkers highlight that they 'objectively' assess each case and check whether measures to terminate the stay of foreign nationals are applicable and suitable. They underline that they have to weigh national, thus public, interests against the private interests of each individual. Negative decisions are based on paperwork, documents and 'facts', reinforcing a professional self-confidence and fantasies about procedural correctness (see Wettergren 2010). Those affected are given the opportunity to respond to standardized questions. Swiss migration policies target migrant individuals relying on welfare, and caseworkers are tasked with assessing who has 'overburdened the public hand' (FNIA 2019) and thus lost the right to remain. Since the information received by other institutions, e.g. social services, involves negative facts (social assistance dependency), migration offices only 'see' cases in which measures could be taken against foreign nationals. Their assessment is based on the amount of support received, personal circumstances (length of stay, reason for dependency) and additional information (debts, criminal proceedings). Negative emotions, such as disdain or irritation, are expressed towards those unable to reintegrate into the labour market despite being deemed to be able to work by other agencies, or towards those who, besides relying on welfare, also have debts or criminal records.

This lack of direct contact with people differentiates legal advisors and social services from migration offices. 'We have direct contact; a closeness to clients', remarks one social worker (interview extract 2020). She mentions a case in which a young woman without any vocational training was able to find a part-time position in the care sector. The woman had been classified as highly unlikely to find work, and social workers were very relieved and pleased about her achievement. In contrast, the migration office challenged why she was not working full time, irritating the social worker, who criticized the migration office for having unrealistic expectations. Two different professional goals clash here: social workers often support their clients through a step-by-step (re)integration into the labour market process or by maintaining individuals' health and well-being by creating a daily structure for those who face more profound issues, such as addiction. This includes placing people in more secure secondary labour market programmes. These are not, however, evaluated as establishing financial independence by migration offices but as still burdening the state and therefore not fulfiling the expected



'integration'. In contrast to social workers and legal counsellors, migration officials' emotions become translated into moralizing reflections that legitimate their role as a barrier against potential system abusers.

Given that these different organizations process cases which are to some extent exceptional, the divergence between professional goals and ideas concerning 'good client behavior' are not entirely surprising. However, these tensions, the professional ethos and positive emotions regarding selfworth also become crucial in everyday interactions between the organizations, ensuring a proper inter-institutional collaboration.

## **Emotional standing of different organizations towards other** organizations vis-à-vis their own role

Interviewer: What are the effects of the new FNIA?

Interviewee: Well, it has just gotten stricter. The pace of inquiries has become quicker, the letters... the tone is harsher. They [migration offices] are really writing to everyone. With the FNIA everyone who receives social assistance and has a B [temporary residence] permit can be questioned and recently also those with a C [permanent residence] permit. Every year. And at times there are people, where one - well I have a woman, a married couple, and she has had a C permit for years, has grown up here and is blind, really. And each year she receives a letter, really, asking: 'Did you attend a work programme?' - 'No, I am blind'. 'Are you looking for a job?' – 'No, I am blind.' 'Have you been working? Why haven't you increased your work hours?' I always say, at least ten times, 'She is blind!'

Interviewer: And every year they ask the same?

Interviewee: Yes!...Yes. And then one gets - do they actually look at what we wrote last year? And also, the eye specialist is angry. She said: 'Hey, I am not writing another report. There is no measurable visual acuity since 2007'. And she thinks: 'What is that [report] supposed to achieve?' Well yes, it is simply tedious, yes. (interview extract, legal counsellor 2019)

The legal counsellor expresses her frustration with how migration officials conduct their work. While it is not impossible that a blind person can find employment, she criticizes the migration offices' repeated inquiries, their pressuring of clients and the fact that they did not get the information right or simply did not study this case. This makes her work and that of other actors tedious, repetitive and absurd. At the same time, she complains about the poor distribution of information by migration offices; they do not take the time to explain procedures, leaving her with very confused and misinformed clients. She also explains that the need for medical specialists to repeatedly verify physical impairments demonstrates the suspicion that migration offices maintain towards foreign nationals. Such emotional tension leads to

a reduction in exchange and communication, which is done mostly via email, where frustration is expressed less than in phone calls. Interlocutors from both social services and legal counselling offices were often surprised and frustrated by the rude and often pressuring language used in migration offices' communication with clients. Both underline the increase in the pace and repetitiveness of inquiries and the details requested. One legal counsellor connects this to the introduction of the FNIA in 2019. Social workers and legal counsellors remark on the language of disbelief that openly expressed mistrust towards their clients and relatedly their own organization, sometimes even in writing, but was also directly observable immigration offices' internal discussions.

The weekly meeting includes the migration official heading the legal section and three unit heads who are tasked with the evaluation of legal decisions written by their case workers, including withdrawals of permits due to social assistance. She remarks on the cooperation between them and the social services: 'The notification of social assistance works well. We have good communication with social services'. Yet, later the group agrees to her saying: 'Sometimes we would like to have more information on certain people but not all social service employees will share it'. She takes for granted that there is a certain mistrust between migration office caseworkers and those working in social services. Nevertheless, she attests 'there is still an understanding of each other's' work. The superiors of both offices appreciate that they have to get on with the job and convey this to their employees'. However, she admits that some of her caseworkers are not too fond of the social services. 'They are seen as the do-gooders and we are the bad, who only do evil'. Another colleague laughs and repeats: 'Do-gooders, yes'. 'Indeed, and we say, the more information they give us and the more we have, the better the decisions we make'. She, along with several other of her colleagues, frames information as subtly positive for decision-making, implying more information results in a more stable and well-founded case assessment. At the same time, this need for information discloses a certain attitude of suspicion towards the social services: Migration offices compare information and prior reports, because 'it has also happened in the past that reports were contradictory and that again causes mistrust'. (fieldnotes, cantonal migration office 2020)

There seems to be persistent mistrust between the migration office and social services despite their collaboration, although this collaboration is, in practice, rather forced: social services are doubtful about how their information will be used, and migration offices do not necessarily trust social services' reports, thinking that the 'do-gooders' are covering up for their clients. Indeed, some social workers admit that they try to provide favourable reports or standardize them to supply more general information about their clients, partly because they do not want to become the extended arm of migration control and partly because they feel that migration offices target their clients unjustly. Social workers are anxious about the consequences and weight of their reports, which remains rather obscure to them. This discomfort is

brought up on a regular basis. Such voiced insecurities also show how migration offices have the upper hand in this institutional relation. At the same time, migration officials feel misunderstood in their professional role, which they see as based in law and therefore legitimate. Some migration officials felt irritated when social workers highlighted cases of 'less liked' clients with the expectation that they will be removed, adding to their feeling that they are seen as 'the evil ones' rather than as professional and just (interviews 2020).

The mutual mistrust is thus based on specific perceptions of the other organization and reveals insecurities about an organization's own role at the same time. Each party perceives their own work as more legitimate and correct; positioning the 'other' as unprofessional elevates their own status. Social services guestion the rightfulness of inquiries and underline the relentlessness of migration officials, thereby elevating their own morally sound position. Migration officials highlight their efforts to make impartial but informed decisions that are circumscribed by false or limited information shared by social services. Recognizing their emotions towards each other thus uncovers a morally charged field of work in which different actors contest each other's legitimacy through their emotional reflections in a struggle to find their own (professional) standing.

Despite this mutual suspicion, good communication is crucial. A quick call or a regular exchange of some kind can ease the built-up tension and reduce misunderstandings – at least for a while. Social services and legal advice offices appreciate being heard and being helped to understand why certain decisions were taken so that they can advocate a potentially more positive outcome for their clients. Direct communication, however, is not common:

Legal counsellor: Well I just stopped, because it is tedious, you are never put through. And on the phone, the person never has a clue about the case and simply says anything, even hands out wrong information. You can really never count on their information. The people [clients] call us or come by and say: 'They told me' whatever and then we say 'Well, that is not possible'. It is really tedious and well, that is why I only write letters, because then you reach the correct caseworker, and they get the letter, and we receive a correct answer. (interview extract, legal counsellor 2019)

Most communication is done formally, via written letters, and at times there can be rather hostile emotions between legal advisors and migration offices that arise from questioning each other's professionalism. This is especially true for lawyers who have won a number of cases, thereby successfully establishing an adversarial positioning. Sometimes migration officials might even take personal offence and voice emotional frustration about lawyers

In contrast, geographical closeness might facilitate regular exchanges between social services and migration offices. Vicinity thus becomes an

who they consider have nullified their argumentation and thus their work.



emotional proxy, partly making up for the lack of contact that migration offices have with foreign nationals. Since bureaucratic procedures are known to be partially or even entirely incomprehensible for the 'client' (Authors 2019) and other professionals, ongoing and detailed communication may reduce heated encounters or tense relations and support a mutual understanding of the other and their tasks. It may thus also affect the outcome for clients. An inability to directly discuss an issue or reach an organization, on the other hand, fuels unease and frustration.

## Foreign nationals as proxies for inter-organizational emotional standing

Social services and legal counsellors present their clients as trustworthy subjects, with only a minority being 'unmotivated' and pressure from the migration office usually fuels clients' motivation to find work quickly. Most clients however, face multiple 'challenges' that are not their 'fault', including addiction, a low level of education or none at all, unemployment, or psychological or physical illnesses, which reduce the chances of finding employment. While social workers acknowledge their control function, they depict their clients as needy, in an unfortunate position that creates a feeling of social stigmatization, and as further marginalized due to dependence on welfare benefits, having a low income or none at all. Social workers have witnessed clients withdrawing their request for support because they fear the loss of their residence permit. One social worker becomes agitated when describing a couple who were trying to save money and preserve their legal status by living with friends, even though this meant their daily life became very unstable:

A family, who already has two times nothing and then still leaves social assistance ... this is building a two-class society!

(fieldnotes, social services 2020)

Clients are thus depicted as victims of restrictive migration policies, as not accepting support that they are entitled to or as refusing further assistance following warnings by the migration office. Some clients, according to social workers, even try to pay off their official debts (often unpaid taxes, or health insurance costs) as a sort of symbolical act to appease migration offices. Social services were sceptical about this, given the monthly support is already difficult to live off.

This is something that the migration office likes, but one needs to be careful that the clients do not suddenly want to pay back too much and then cannot pay their bills and again end up indebting themselves.

(fieldnotes, social services 2020)



In contrast, migration officials interpret the client's situation as the result of low motivation. Migration officials mistrust social workers' views and the truthfulness of their reports and also their accounts of clients:

What we definitely do is to allow the foreign national a fair hearing, where we try to gather information. There they also have the possibility to explain why they actually came to receive social assistance, where the issues lie and if there is really a forecast [chances to find a job] and then we will assess if this is trustworthy or if this information matches the report by the social services, saying 'yes, they will get back on their own feet again. It is only a temporary problem'. (interview extract, head of a migration office 2019)

Here, the 'migrant' becomes a problematic character. Migration officials highlight that if there is a reasonable explanation for foreign nationals' dependence on social assistance, they have nothing to fear as long as support is brief and a 'prognosis' in the form of a detailed 'check-up' is positive. Migration offices feel that they are charged with the thorough application of law and conduct this in a more objective way than social services do. Caseworkers therefore depict themselves as the officials 'who got it right' and who are able to see beyond 'charming clients', instead seeing 'certain killer criteria' that should end a stay by 'collecting many stones of a 'mosaic' (interview 2019). This goes along with a certain pride in their job, but also with the idea of a certain level of emotional and thus professional detachment that is assumed to be needed to 'defend' the state using terms such as 'proportionality', 'evaluation' and 'prognosis'. Another migration official criticizes the lax laws, saying, 'woohoo, everyone can come and misuse our social security system', adding that 'here we need to close the door bolt, because everyone who comes and works and behaves normally will never have an issue, will never feel us' (interview 2020).

Besides offering an account of how migrants are viewed and felt by organizations, the data also shows how, through this depiction, other organizations are understood and how some emotions are shared, though differently expressed. Social workers feel that 'good migrants' are targeted unjustly by migration offices whose restrictive interpretation of migration policies entails a two-class system in which migrants are left destitute. Migration offices believe that injustice arises from the welfare abuse of 'undeserving' migrants who are defended by legal counsellors and social services to an often irritating and naïve extent. All three organizations have a sense of righteousness towards their own work, morally judge migrants and each other, which also allows them to dilute unpleasant emotions and continue their work.

Emotions are steered against the background of ideological positioning that shapes inter-organizational relations. They function as a way of differentiating and invoking a moral positioning that legitimizes the respective work culture. These work ethics that have been created influence emotional life at work and are reproduced in employees' daily exchanges and reflections.

Although the three organizations have different legal and policy guidelines and professional backgrounds, all three stir up particular, at times shared, sets of emotions. Compassion, mistrust, frustration and irritation happen at the intersections with each other through daily communication (or the lack of it), professional meetings and ideological positioning. Each organization's internally shared understanding of its work becomes a powerful image that circulates within and between each of them.

### Conclusion

Migration administration remains a field infused with emotions that are felt by migrants, bureaucrats and other actors and expressed during encounters or when reflecting on such meetings. I have suggested a further layer by exploring emotions that come up during bureaucrats' positioning towards other organizations, highlighting how the multidimensionality of such relational emotions become relevant for their own professional standing and become of 'political importance [for] exploring the affective weight of [...] politics of inequality' (Bonilla-Silva 2019, 11). Displayed frustrations, anxiety and compassion become part of a structure of loyalties, supporting an ethical understanding of who deserves trust, support and, eventually, benefits and rights and who does not. This is displayed on a broader level, towards welfare non-citizen welfare receivers and the involved organizations. Yet, emotions, such as frustration, also underline the professional legitimacy that all three organizations claim. They provoke actions and ideas about what is morally correct and support the creation of work ethics, explored here through three different but entangled organizations that mutually influence each other, stirring up emotional reflections and reactions that reproduce their own moral values. Actors draw on encounters with other organizations, comparing their work and professional ethos while also disclosing their relation to foreign nationals through their emotional reactions towards how casemaking happens in social services, migration offices and legal counselling.

The data used in this article relates to prior works that engage with emotional statecraft, underlining how inter- and intra-organizational emotions contribute to a highly complex state in which tensions and different goals commonly exist. It supports a broader conceptualizing of emotions on an organizational level, expanding prior works that highlighted the productivity of emotions e.g. in racialization processes (see Bonilla-Silva 2019), also offering insights into engagements with emotions of different professional fields. While legal counsellors and social workers often point out the need to support individual clients as part of their state-related mandate, migration officials attempt to protect the state's

interest from non-citizens who have overstepped their welcome through continuous dependency. All these goals are inherent in a state that is not monolithic. Emotions therefore have the potential to become enacted, for example when actors are supporting particular moral stances. Given that the dominant discourse addresses the issue of poor migrants, future works could contribute to a more differentiated understanding of how unemployed (non)-citizens are viewed in comparison with each other and could also consider the extent to which emotions are influenced by class, race or gender.

#### Notes

- 1. The migration offices and social service offices were bureaucratic institutions, whereas the legal counselling offices were activist, private or semiinstitutionalized bodies. I will use the word 'organizations' to refer to all of these bodies.
- 2. I refer to actors, since social workers, migration office staff and legal counsellors are all immersed in administrative policy-making. Where relevant I name specific positions.
- 3. I do not aim to differentiate between affect, emotions and feelings in this work. Instead I follow D'Aoust's (2014) understanding of emotions as subjective and personal yet shaped and informed by history and social contexts; they happen in narrativisable action - reaction circuits, thus occurring in relation to other subjects or objects (see also Fineman 2003).
- 4. Bonilla-Silva (2019) calls for effective affective policies that challenge racial order and offer strategies to retool racial emotive order and selves.
- 5. Except the canton of Bern, which has three city-based migration offices that have roughly the same responsibility as cantonal migration offices.

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