Article

Between Papers and Peril: Pakistani Asylum Narratives in Italy's New Migration Moment

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines how Pakistani men seeking protection in Italy make sense of leaving home, enduring irregular journeys, and rebuilding their lives under "paperwork time." Drawing on ten in-depth, note-based interviews conducted across different stages of the asylum process, we apply reflexive thematic analysis to explore how migration decisions, danger, and belonging are narrated under high-stakes credibility pressures. The participants' accounts rarely fit a simple refugee/economic binary: they describe layered motives shaped by family obligation, status aspirations, economic pressure, and, for some, chronic insecurity. Journeys are recalled as organized deprivation structured by debt and coercion, including hunger, unsafe water, injury, and threats by intermediaries. Arrival does not end hardship; it often transforms it into prolonged waiting, language dependence, precarious work, and loneliness. A central finding is that asylum operates as a narrative regime: applicants learn what is likely to be treated as "credible," which can encourage strategic emphasis, self-censorship, and occasional scripting, especially after rejection or onward movement within Europe. We argue that documentation delays and credibility demand shape everyday life as powerfully as border controls*

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INTRODUCTION

Italy stands at the intersection of two realities that can scarcely be reconciled during policy discussions: the demand to have protection along the Mediterranean and Balkan pathways and the tightening European edifice that intends to process claims at a rate that is quicker on the border, which tends to employ accelerated procedures most of the time (EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy, 2025). The new screening regulation that has been adopted and the Pact on Migration and Asylum that was adopted in 2024 by the EU are intended to send people straight into the "right" process, fast-track decisions and returns (Conte & Yavcan, 2024; Triculescu et al., 2025; Apatzidou, 2025). Moreover, deaths and disappearances on Mediterranean routes are structural features of irregular migration and not anomalous occurrences (Pons, Crang, and Travlou, 2016; Bachelet, 2025). Against this background, Italy continues to receive large volumes of asylum applications: one of the major monitoring sources indicates that more than 150,000 applications were received in 2024, with first-instance decisions granting some form of protection to approximately one-third of those applications when special protection is added (Ambrosini, 2025). At the EU level, the tendency of asylum demand is also historically high, although it fluctuates annually, and issues such as safe countries, accelerated processing, and credibility assessment have become the focus of debate (Gill et al., 2025; Gundacker et al., 2025; Feyissa & Sherpa, 2025).

Why Focus on Pakistani Men Seeking Protection in Italy?

Pakistan has established itself as a source country on various routes within Europe and certain nationalities (Yang et al., 2024; Hussain et al., 2025). Through the Central Mediterranean route, for example, by the start of 2025, Pakistan is among the most common nationalities arriving in Italy according to data collected by the UNHCR summed by the Mixed Migration Centre (Chaudhry & Amis, 2025; UNHCR, 2025). However, Pakistani migration is too frequently discussed as a group that has been simplified into either the category of economic migration or the other category of asylum abuse (Bhimji, 2018; Crawley and Skleparis,

2017; Kaufmann and Bernhard, 2023). This is important because asylum systems do not simply assess a degree of risk but also evaluate narratives for their specifics, coherence, date, and correspondence to familiar models of such narratives (Aliverti & Tawfic, 2025; Boitcova, 2025). Many studies have demonstrated that credibility evaluation may penalize inconsistency, even when it is anticipated, in the face of trauma, fear, cultural narrative traditions, or cross-institutional interview repetition (Herlihy and Turner, 2015). This, in effect, presents a dilemma: applicants will either be pressured to reduce complex motives to a single, easily understandable reason or remain silent, as doing so seems unsafe (Balkin, 1987).

From "Arrival" to "Documentation Time"

The journey is the most obvious threat to many migrants and asylum seekers (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2025). However, a parallel, but equally significant, penalty manifests upon arrival: delays due to bureaucratic processing, limited capacity to receive, language barriers, and precarious labor (Malloch and Stanley, 2005; Koikkalainen et al., 2020). The literature on reception and asylum politics in Italy underscores the role of the institutional logic of emergencies and fragmented provisions in creating long-term uncertainty, restricted mobility, and asymmetric access to integrated resources (Dotsey, 2020). Recent findings also indicate that the close associations of employment, proficiency in language and social capital are strongly correlated with the socioeconomic outcomes of refugees in Italy (Panichella et al., 2021). In other words, not only motivation but also infrastructure reports, language networks, and housing are constant (Ager and Strang, 2008).

What This Study Does Differently

This paper examines Pakistani men seeking protection in Italy through a lens that is directly relevant to both academic and policy audiences:

I.   **It Treats Motives as Mixed Rather Than Binary.** The participants described departures shaped by family duties, aspirations, economic pressure, and, in some cases, chronic insecurity. The analytic point is not to rank these motives as "real" or "fake" but rather to show how people translate messy lived reasons into asylum-legible accounts.

II. **It links Journey violence to settlement fragility.** Accounts of hunger, injury, extortion, and near-death are not only retrospective trauma; they also shape post-arrival capacity to learn language, trust institutions, and plan.

III. **It centers the asylum as a narrative regime.** Instead of assuming that interviews are transparent windows into facts, the study examines how credibility pressures shape what is said, what is withheld, and how

"reasons" are framed, especially where applicants have experienced rejection or secondary movement across European states.

This approach is not an excuse for relativism. It is a practical recognition that policy decisions depend heavily on narratives produced under conditions of fear, uncertainty, and unequal power, which can distort in multiple ways: exaggeration, simplification, omission, or total silence (Roe, 1994).

This study treats language learning as a form of integration education: adult learning that enables access to work, services, and institutional participation. Accordingly, references to "educational access" focus on adult language and vocational pathways shaped by paperwork time and legal uncertainty rather than formal schooling or children's educational trajectories.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do Pakistani men seeking protection in Italy narrate their departure, journey, and settlement under conditions of legal uncertainty?
2. How do credibility pressures and documentation delays shape the content and form of asylum narratives?
3. How do language barriers, work precarity, and transnational family obligations interact to shape settlement trajectories and plans?

This study does not claim to represent all Pakistani asylum seekers in Italy. Instead, it offers an empirically grounded, policy-relevant account of how people experience the system from within where "papers" are not just an outcome but also the condition that makes work, belonging, and even speech feel possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Moving Target: Europe, Italy, and the Current Asylum Moment

The asylum regime in Italy operates within a European policy shift that treats asylum not as a deliberate, slow process but as a sorting issue that is predetermined (Shah, 2020). The Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU has become law, and some of its key provisions are to take effect as early as June 2026, such as changes in asylum procedures and border screening (Apatzidou, 2025). This is important because reforms that expedite the decision-making process place greater emphasis on applicants' initial impressions (first interviews, initial credibility assessments, early documentation gaps), which are most likely to reach applicants at their most vulnerable point (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). Italy also provides a convenient test ground for such a conflict between administrative expediency and humanitarian imperative (Panebianco, 2019). As of 2024, Italy had registered 151,120 first-time asylum applications (158,605 applications in total), with the first instance protection rate of 35.9 when the national forms with

special protection are included (AIDA, 2025). There are two points in the analysis that are supported by these numbers. First, papers are not a single product but a complex of legal options that cannot be readily understood by nonexpert applicants (AIDA, 2025). Second, they contribute to understanding why Italy is recounted within migrant networks as a location where one can finally obtain documents, even though this assumption is informed by rumors, biased experiences, and policy window-dressing (Eurostat, 2025). Moreover, the structural threat that compels such policy urgency is also intractable. Reports of fatal shipwrecks and unremitting deaths on the Central Mediterranean route are reported many times in news coverage and UN-related summaries. The risk does not disappear when arrivals vary; it changes. The UNHCR dashboards on Italy sea arrivals indicate that nationality profiles vary over time and that Pakistan is represented among nationalities expected to arrive in large numbers in 2025 snapshots of data (UNHCR, 2025). The Pakistani movement to Italy is not, therefore, simply exceptional or merely an economic footnote but rather an element of a modern path blend, as legal entry is constrained, implementation is inconsistent, and asylum decision-making is time-constrained (Ryo et al., 2025). The implication of this study is simple: the faster a system is, the higher the price of being mistaken for mixed motives and narrative constraints.

Why People Move: Migration Culture, Networks, and Blocked Capabilities

An effective overview of modern migration should go beyond push-pull. Push-pull is descriptively attractive because of its advantages: poverty and insecurity push; European wages and safety pull. However, it can hardly account for what the interviews in this study predict: socially patterned and morally framed, structurally constrained migration decisions. One of the first concepts that allows us to situate Pakistani mobility is the culture of migration (often referred to as such). This means that the environments in which departures are normalized and socially valued, foreign mobility is a status symbol, and goals are framed by neighborhood discourses and visible images of home comers (prestige, housing, symbolic status). Instead of being solely an individual ambition, aspiration is a socially constructed phenomenon caused by comparison, expectation and reputational pressure. This prism is superimposed on the recurring mentioning of the participants to cousins in the foreign country, glorified Europe backers, and the symbolic status of being the one who made it, which justifies the reason that migration can seem to be a dignity route even when the risks are common knowledge. The second, and associated, conceptual framework is network theory and cumulative causation. When migration occurs, family and community connections reduce costs and risks by exchanging information, arranging travel logistics, and initially providing housing and job connections, thereby rendering destinations perceivable and recurrently deciding upon over time (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 1993). Throughout this paper, the use of the term's cousins, brothers and support with the Pakistani community can be seen as an example of how networks work to provide settlement infrastructure once they land. However, the

same networks may also provide narrow horizons drawing new entrants into segmented labor markets and restricting contact with the institutions of the host country when the language is weak and generating the duality of networks as lifelines and constraints (Massey et al., 1993). The third framework that has a direct relationship with irregular migration is the aspirations–capabilities approach, which is related to de Haas and associated with the aspiration/ability thinking of Carling. According to this view, movement relies on the desires (aspirations) and errands of a person who are viable and achievable in perceived opportunity systems (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2021). Where legal means of mobility are shut off, either by visa control, expense, document restrictions, or restricted routes linked to education, desires will be strong and legal capacity low. It is then structurally predictable that migration is irregular in nature and not merely a moral failure or a matter of unawareness (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2021). This can be used to understand a common theme in the interviews: participants tend to deter irregular migration and encourage legal migration, yet they nonetheless characterize irregular migration as a situation in which ability is lacking, and migration is still viewed as the only possible investment option within the household. This argument is supported by NELM, which demonstrates that decisions are often entrenched in household risk management and commitments (e.g., the future of children, housing, and marriage expenses), rather than in individual preferences alone (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999). These systems also explain step-migration and secondary movement. Pakistan's shift to the Gulf (or elsewhere) and the subsequent shift to Europe are not arbitrary; they are responses to changes in opportunity closures, frustrating outcomes, and new aspirations. Similarly, forward mobility within EU states, since rejection can be interpreted as restricted sailing across an irregular administrative geography, rather than mere opportunism. Networks and capabilities theories are not justifications to exploit or harm, but they simply aid in thinking about the reasons the movement continues despite the general awareness of risks.

Asylum as Governance of Time and Story: Credibility, Memory, and "Paperwork Life"

Asylum systems of today are not just filters of law but also machines of credibility. There is frequently a lack of documentary evidence by applicants, and decision makers must largely use narrative indicators, i.e., detail, coherence, plausibility, and consistency. In addition, the UNHCR's Proof reveals how credibility assessment functions in EU asylum and the importance of structured and fair procedures in cases of limited evidence (UNHCR, 2013; EASO, 2018). In this work, literature advances a decisive analytic gesture: that asylum reasons are not merely preexisting facts but are also institutionally constituted discourses constructed in fear, uncertainty, and unequal power. This is related to evidence of trauma, memory and inconsistency. A repeated-interview study conducted by Herlihy, Scragg, and Turner revealed that inconsistencies in autobiographical

memories are typical among refugees and warned against automatically interpreting such inconsistencies as fabrication (Herlihy, Scragg, and Turner, 2002; EUAA, 2024). The policy's implications are uneasy yet feasible: faster processes and screening can shift more of us toward a relational performance, and those who are too tired, homeless, traumatized, or culturally accustomed to the overarching narrative of bureaucratic interviewing will be disadvantaged (Paskey, 2016; ECRE, 2017). This is a parallel qualitative literature, a narrative dilemma: applicants can focus on, simplify, omit, or remain silent to practice disbelief or to run the risk that disclosure of the same might be counterproductive to their position. The current interviews represent both sides of this dilemma: explicit scripting in one case and a fearful refusal to speak in another, which makes the dataset highly suitable for relating macroarguments of credibility to microfacts of what can be said (Abbas et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2014). Finally, there is also temporal governance in asylum governance. Although the journey ends, individuals enter what participants refer to as the eriodwaiting-for-papers papers, in which legal ambiguity and language access shape employment opportunities, housing security, and community membership. The protection environment in Italy supports the explanation for why the organizing horizon becomes papers: there are numerous outcomes, yet applicants feel that it is the only gate through which they gain independence (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024). The condition is akin to liminality and precarity, in which extended periods of uncertainty constrain planning and foster dependence. The transnational commitments are not obviously superseded in this time regime, which makes Europe a paradise and Europe lonely; thus, the paradox is made socially useful: it is justified by the need to sacrifice and adjust to separation (Griffiths, 2014; Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski, 2021).

Research Gaps

Although Pakistani migration has attracted much scholarly effort, little is known about Pakistani men who come to Italy via irregular routes and ultimately seek protection under the asylum and reception system of Italy. Available studies tend to focus on more established diaspora groups or more established migrants and thus present a weaker evidence base on newly arrived asylum seekers surviving through paperwork time, unstable accommodations, language barriers, and precarious labor. In addition, qualitative explanations related to the entire course, including premigration psychological forces, experiences along the path, and initial settlement, are not abundant, especially concerning how irregular pathways influence psychosocial burdens (fear, stress, trauma) and how family commitments across nations maintain decision-making at the postarrival stage. Finally, although there is increased discussion of credibility assessment in asylum systems, there is less research on how credibility pressure can be practiced and negotiated in daily life via strategic simplification, self-censorship or silence, particularly among individuals who have been rejected or moved onward within Europe. This paper fills these gaps by conducting ten note-based interviews by

following how peril and papers underproduce Pakistani asylum narratives during the contemporary movement of migration that is taking place in Italy.

METHOD

Research Design and Analytic Approach

This research project employs a qualitative, interpretivist design to examine the experiences of Pakistani men seeking refuge in Italy, focusing on narratives of departure, irregular movement, and premature settlement during periods of legal ambiguity. The data were collected through semi-structured Urdu/Punjabi interviews conducted between January 2025 and December 2025. The participants were subjected to one in-depth interview; in three instances, a short follow-up interview was conducted to obtain the dates or order of events straightforwardly when the participants wanted the researcher to verify or where the notes of the researcher revealed uncertainty.

The primary interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, and the follow-ups lasted approximately 10-20 minutes. The interviews were conducted during walks in public streets, a format the interviewees had chosen because it seemed less invasive than a private setting and less intimidating, given the absence of the anxiety that accompanies being questioned. The participants refused to be audio recorded because they believed that audio recording would adversely affect their future legal lives. The researcher thus made structured field notes during the walks (with sequence markers, key phrases, and key events) and developed them into more detailed notes soon after. Quotations are applied sparingly because of the nature of the data to be used (note that short phrases taken verbatim is presented as direct quotations, and long sections are represented as close paraphrases and are stated as such.

Participants, Sampling, and Field Access

The sample is a group of ten Pakistani men living in Italy in various phases of the asylum and settlement process, including newly arrived individuals, who still feel an acute sense of insecurity to the more stable individuals, who are more established in terms of documentation and employment. The respondents differed in their migration paths and histories of prior and subsequent movement. The selection process was based on purposive and network recruitment via contacts and snowballs. The researchers contacted more than 400 possible participants; most of them refused the interview in fear of revealing the information and in fear that they were being spied on. Before the interviews, rapport-building with time and several assurances regarding confidentiality were needed. This limitation of recruitment is analytically pertinent: the unwillingness to talk was also an aspect of the broader picture of vulnerability and the fear of credibility that affects the asylum process.

Data Collection Procedures

It was explored using a semi-structured guide: premigration pressures and decision-making; the experience of the route and contact with intermediaries; arrival and reception; perceptions of asylum procedures and credibility; language learning; work history; housing conditions; dependence on networks; transnational obligations; and the future. Urdu- and Punjabi-language interviews were conducted in public places selected by participants to reduce perceived risk. To enhance precision in an unrecorded environment, the researcher resorted to a consistent note-taking methodology during the interview (including chronology, turning points, and salient phrases) and to elaborating the notes into more detailed scripts shortly after each interaction. In cases where follow-ups were performed, they were used only to verify sequences, dates, or transitions between major life events, rather than to create new life histories.

Translation and Data Preparation

Field notes were also originally written in Urdu and then translated to English for analysis. The translation was performed in stages: (1) a first-pass translation was performed to maintain the idioms and emotional color; (2) the original Urdu notes were checked to assure meaning and chronology; and (3) simplification was performed to enhance clarity without losing faithfulness. Information was removed or generalized, and pseudonyms were used throughout.

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps of the analysis procedure included familiarization, preliminary coding across cases, formulation of candidate themes, assessment of the themes against the dataset, definition and labeling of themes, and composition with descriptive excerpts. Coding was conducted via two analytic commitments**:**

1. **"Papers" as lived governance:** attention to how documentation delays, waiting, rejection, and jurisdiction switching structure everyday life, work access, housing stability, and willingness to speak.

2. **"Peril" as an embodied and moral narrative:** attention to how deprivation, injury, extortion, and near-death experiences are narrated and morally interpreted through endurance, sacrifice, and responsibility.

Negative-case comparison was used to retain contradictions as analytic resources rather than forcing consensus across accounts.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To improve credibility in interviewing the legally vulnerable with notes, several measures have been employed. First, during the walk, the sequence markers and key phrases were taken to enhance the retrieval of details, and the expansion of notes into more detailed accounts was carried out as soon as the interview was over to minimize the recollection error. Second, an audit trail recorded note expansion, translation decisions on important terms and theme building during stages of analysis. Third, there was some cross-case grounding: themes could be retained only when supported by several accounts or when a deviant case helped clarify an important boundary case. It applied reflexive memoing in all cases to trace how access, disclosure, and interpretation could be shaped by researchers' positionality, such as prior professional experience, which participants may have associated with state authority. In line with the credibility scholarship, no minor inconsistencies were treated as signs of deception; rather, the narratives were interpreted as stories produced under the influence of fear, within time constraints and in the context of institutional interests.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were made aware of the purpose of the research, voluntary participation and their right to withdraw. Given the legal risks posed by precarious immigration status, strong confidentiality safeguards were implemented: pseudonyms were used, identifying information was removed, and selective disclosure of route/location data was employed where indicated. The use of data was risk-minimizing and not used to collect redundant sensitive data.

Limitations

There are various limitations of this study. First, the sample is limited to men; women's experiences can vary significantly. Second, the dataset is informed by survivorship and availability bias, as the participants were available in Italy and not those who were killed on the way home or were repatriated or eluded contact. Third, the interviews were not audio-taped, which restricted verbatim quotes and emphasized the note reconstruction more. Finally, the high-stakes asylum situation can influence the narratives recounted with the perceived credibility requirements. Such constraints are analytical rather than technical: they are expressions of the circumstances under which asylum discourses are generated in the contemporary Italian migration context.

RESULTS

This section presents the patterns from ten interviews with Pakistani men seeking protection in Italy. Since the interviews were written down (not recorded), short expressions taken in the process of conversation are given in the form of verbatim

quotes, and longer passages are paraphrased. The results are organized into four themes that represent the paper's main argument: life is shaped at the same time by peril during movement and by papers after arrival.

Theme 1: Leaving is Rarely "One Reason" Duty, Aspiration, and Fear Combine

Migration was also narrated across cases with mixed motives as opposed to one cause. What could seem like an economic choice was often introduced in ethical frames of duty, and descriptions of insecurity commonly accompanied the prospects of dignity and mobility. Some of the participants referred to migration as a family measure to ensure the future of a child, organize marriage or create a stable home. Jawad was a retired military man who was repeatedly coming back to the thought that whatever he did was on behalf of his children but also explained how the savings decayed once in the country and how family aspirations were impossible to reach. Wasif introduced migration as not a choice so much as a family division, where one of the three brothers had to emigrate, and subsequently considered the price mainly in wasted time, with the stress that money is not everything. Meanwhile, two explicit motivators were aspiration and status.

The respondents discussed a social context in which returning Europeans are prestigious and in which success stories abroad are shared as evidence that mobility can change lives. Anees stated that those who came to Italy were glorified, and status symbols (Raja G, Lodhi G) demonstrated symbolic power in the village. For Aslam, the stories of cousins' success abroad made migration seem a normal means of achieving dignity and progress. However, there were also motives for protection. Imran, who is a refugee living in a war-torn border community, preempted insecurity and fear, a situation where peace had now become a dream. A recurring tone of conflict ran through the set: Europe was portrayed as both an opportunity and a loss. Aslam termed Europe the paradise of Pakistanis and continued to urge people to migrate although he recognized the threats of undertaking illegal paths. However, other people focused on regret and disillusionment: Wasif talked about the price of long separation with relatives, and Rashid talked about underemployment and instability. Instead of advancing this contradiction as an inconsistency, the descriptions imply that migrants assess mobility in light of competing with ethical principles, namely, sacrificing the greatness of their family and regretting wasted time and relationships.

Theme 2: Peril is Organized Journeys Built from Scarcity, Debt, and Coercion

The journey was not reported as a one-time event by the participants but, instead, as a long-term experience with regulated deprivation. Hunger, dirty water, wound and death fears have always been mentioned in accounts. According to one of the participants, the main part of it was that we did not know when we would die in the process. Anees talked about days spent hiking up and down the

mountains with little to no food, taking on their dirty water, and seeing others give up, and Jawad talked about physical deterioration, such as blisters and inventing basic hygiene by washing clothes in the open air. These narratives were both memories of ordeal and moral witnesses that one had to endure something more than the normal suffering to survive. The focus of the route experience was financial extraction. Mobility was consistently associated with premature payments, requests, and borrowing from family members in emergencies. Anees said that they borrowed money when they were required to pay more money by the agents. This dynamic made the journey a fiscal trap: having made large sums of money, it became difficult to feel like a failure to turn around and leave the family in debt and stigma. Intermediary coercion became apparent. Hadi cited his agents, who asked him to pay them more money and leave: "Send money... or we will leave you there. The latter kind of accounts portray smuggling not as a service but as a power dynamic in which vulnerability is commodified. Other participants explained the middlemen as ethically predatory, such as allegations that shipping can be intentionally sunk. Although these statements cannot be tested on their own during this research, analytically, they convey a high level of distrust and an understanding that the life of migrants is as expendable as possible. In all instances, the participants cautioned other people on the dunki/donkey route, which they said was a route that ripples an individual inside.

Theme 3: Papers are not Paperwork Time, Fear and Credibility Pressure

Upon arrival, participants tend to report a change to administrative time after the physical danger. Access to work, housing, and even freedom of speech was formed around the concept of "papers" as the boundary between independence and dependence. Imran stressed the point that there are no quick settlement and connected suffering in real life with the long waiting time associated with obtaining documents. Sultan indicated that he was truly getting bare necessities in a camp within months, yet he could not know when his situation would normalize. Some also involved forward or subsequent movement across Europe, usually following rejection elsewhere or disappointment. Rashid reported the rejection of asylum applications in Belgium and Germany and then resisted them in Italy, where he was supported by the family. Hadi said that he rejected in France and then relocated to Italy because he believed that the papers would grow faster. Wasif recounted a deportation cycle: Germany, incarceration and back to Italy. These trends imply that mobility is guided not only by the demand for labor but also by perceived discrepancies in administrative opportunities and the practical necessity of providing support systems. The reported reasons for the asylum of the participants were grouped into familiar classes and categories, one of which was generalized insecurity and terrorism, sectarian tensions (including hostility toward Ahmadis, which has been locally branded as Mirzai), family feuds and targeted threats, retaliation after court marriage, militant control in border regions, retaliation after court testimony, borderland violence, and, in some cases, extreme poverty as a form of survival pressure. The critical goal is not to judge truth claims

but to demonstrate how high-stakes systems generate incentives to produce legible stories. Anees categorically claimed that he had narrated a tale of religious antagonism and threat to justify his application. This implies awareness that certain stories seem more believable or familiar in the asylum process than others. Simultaneously, narration was defined by the fear of speaking. Tahseen is a newcomer, and he was reluctant to even take an interview because he was not aware of the impression my words might have on my future. The expression, which, as he says, he has purchased with money, of the death--I have paid with money, I have bought my death and the anxiety of the future of his children over which he has no control, are the poignant essence of paperwork time, not that one is waiting, but that even speech may be hazardous.

Theme 4: Settlement is Constrained Language Dependence, Precarious Work, and Transnational Ache

Even in cases where the participants obtained jobs, stabilization was still flimsy. Language continued to emerge as a constraint; without Italian, participants had to rely on others to navigate the work and bureaucracy, and opportunities became confined to fragile niches. Rashid associated limited Italian with chronic underemployment, in which he described working a few days per month and being unable to support his family. Imran simplified the issue of daily dependence: everything depends on other people. The instability was manifested in work trajectories. They characterized low-paid informal or seasonal work (leaflet delivery, agriculture/packing, restaurant and hotel work, and painting in France), which typically involved movement between sectors with document and language enhancement. A few of them referred to incremental mobility by learning a language and niche-based prospects, such as food-related writing/media employment. These examples demonstrate that when documentation and language are compatible, they are easier to integrate but that compatibility is characterized as slow and uneven. The stories were filled with loneliness and separation with the family. Anees discussed years without parents and stated that they wanted to return after their residences were secured. Sultan spoke of relative stability in Italy and experienced a sense of perpetual incompleteness, such as that of the family, the country and the self. Tahseen defined alienation as bordering on paralysis. In all cases, transnational obligations shaped how participants assessed success. Remittances, marriage, and assisting relatives in migrating and reunifying plans were still in the limelight. Aslam said, she funded the marriages of sisters and was in favor of brothers' mobility. Jawad said that she had long-term aims of children and houses. Fazal stated that she did not want to marry soon and wanted to come to Italy to join her family. Such commitments contributed to the fact that some members remained committed to Europe even when they were in pain: success was not only based on individual well-being but also on what could be brought home to the family. Taken together, the interviews demonstrate that the work between Papers and Peril is not a metaphor but a structure lived in. The narration of Peril was that of organized deprivation and coercion along

unregulated lines, whereas that of papers was that of time, uncertainty, and pressure of credibility once there. The interrelationship of documentation, language access, precarious labor and transnational obligation then influences settlement outcomes.

DISCUSSION

This paper has explored the ways in which Pakistani men in Italy recount narratives of migration when they pattern their lives by two forces simultaneously: danger on the path and papers in the destination. The narratives in ten interviews did not fit in convenient categories (refugee vs. economic migrant; "real" vs. "fake" claim; integration as simple effort). Instead, decisions on migration are made under household pressure and aspiration, paths are fashioned by scarcity, and forced migration and post arrival life are dealt with by a patterned combination of waiting, language dependence and credibility pressure that results in the safe saying of anything.

Mixed Motives as a Mechanism, not Confusion

A typical policy reflex is to interpret mixed motives as indicative of weak claims "if you want to work, too, you are not a protection case. The interviews indicate the opposite: ambivalent motives are usually the anticipated outcome of decision-making in constrained households. The participants put migration in the context of children, their future, housing, marriages, remittances, and the moral need to provide. Simultaneously, the dynamics of aspiration and status were also clear: the status of Europe returnees, the symbolic authority of the one who made it and the stigma of remaining at the same time. This is one way to understand why some of them accept lethal danger and still support migration; the meaning of suffering is uplifted with family and dignity. There was one instance that anticipated insecurity and fear, which makes us remember that economic stability mostly cannot be separated from protection, and vulnerable people are also more vulnerable when their economic stability is at stake. When systems require one clean cause, applicants are driven to reduce complexity into a single dominating line.

Peril as Structured Experience: Scarcity, Debt, Coercion

In both stories, danger was not described as accidentally unfortunate but as systematic deprivation, hunger, unsafe water, injury, and the danger of being abandoned without sending more money. This recharacterizes smuggling as a neutral form of transport service and an extractive relationship whereby weakness is commoditized. It also explains the repetition of near-death expressions: they serve as a moral testament in which survival entails going through more than is normal. The meaning is also influenced by survival. In addition, certain tell of suffering as a worthwhile thing to do, and others tell of it as loss (money is not

everything, years away from family). The analytical significance of the contradiction is that success was measured not only materially but also relationally and in the past.

Papers as a Regime of Time and Voice

What the study demonstrates concerning papers is its greatest contribution. The participants refer to the term as a whole word, whereas it represents a more general state: waiting, dependence, and restrictions in the field of speaking ability. Waiting operates as a form of governance. There is no infrastructure to support integration, as people rely on others to provide them with housing, work, and guidance through institutions, since without documentation and language, individuals can no longer navigate the world on their own but on the infrastructure (stable housing, translation, language routes). Meanwhile, asylum is manifested as a plot regime. The mentioned types of asylum justifications were recognizable (e.g., insecurity, sectarian conflict, feuds, threats, militant control, witness retaliation, border violence, abject poverty), which suggested that the respondents were aware of what was institutionally legible. One interviewee talked about molding an account into a persecution story, and the other was afraid to speak at all, as words would destroy his future. These are not the two opposing forms of morality but the two differing means of the same situation: the system in which speech and silence have consequences. This does not involve seeing narratives as either true or false; it involves acknowledging how high-stakes procedures influence the storytelling process.

Constrained Settlement: Language, Work Precarity, and Transnational Obligation

The settlement in such accounts was seldom a linear upward process. Language was constantly outlined as the chief custodian, influencing entry into employment, social services and free movement. The small size of Italy confined people to dependence and narrowed informal employment opportunities; some attained incremental stability through learning the language and changing jobs, but tracks were not even. Separation was also the heart of settlement emotionally. The factors influencing participants' assessments of migration outcomes included loneliness and transnational commitment, expressed through remittances, marriage, reunification plans, and the desire to return with honor. For this reason, one can say that Europe is safe, painful, dignified and alienating.

Implications for Language Learning and Adult Education Pathways

Although this study is not dedicated to formal schooling and student mobility, the interviews consistently demonstrate that adult language learning is the primary pathway for integration education that asylum seekers who have

recently arrived use. The respondents positioned Italian proficiency as the key that unlocks the door to employment, services, and independence; without language, all are dependent, and access to institutions continues to be provided through informal networks. Some of them said they were learning Italian slowly by slowly exposing themselves to it every day and with nonformal training as they worked as precarious employees, but it went very slowly particularly when they were living under unsteady roofs and when they were in a state of constant change with regard to which side of the border they were in. Access to learning is also influenced by paperwork time: documentation delay can inhibit enrollment in structured language classes and vocational training, and certification paths and uncertainty can reduce the perceived payoff of long-term learning investment. In this context, documentation is not only a legal product but also a facilitator of education and skill development.

Policy implications

There are three implications for practice. First, early stability, namely, safe accommodation and faithful interpretation, is also a form of credibility protection since disorientation and homelessness may impair coherent narration and institutional communication. Second, the language-first model (early, intensive, accessible teaching of Italian) tends to decrease dependency, enhance employability, and increase access to training opportunities. Third, the evaluation of the credibility of accelerated situations should be sensitive to trauma, fear and cross-cultural narration and careful not to over penalize small discrepancies that may arise in stress and the repetition of interviews.

Limitations

This research is limited by the fact that the sample was male, there was survivorship and availability bias, and note-based interviewing in a high-stakes situation where stories could result under the pressure of fear and credibility. The work does not purport to be representative and cannot itself establish the veracity of the events recounted; rather, it is an analysis of the experience of migration and the ways it is said to be constrained.

CONCLUSION

This paper followed the narratives of migration by Pakistani men who request protection in Italy, as they described their migration path as a place of danger on the move and paperwork following their arrival. In ten interviews, interviewees explained how it was a mixed motive, household duty, financial need, status anxiety, and, in a few instances, chronic insecurity that explained why the refugee/economic dichotomy would not necessarily explain the paths taken by individuals. Travel is described as structured deprivation determined by debt and coercion and arrival redid hardship in terms of waiting, dependence, and

uncertainty. One of the key contributions is to demonstrate that asylum seeking is also a narrative space. The participants narrated the demands to render institutionally legible narratives and, in certain instances, demands to simplify withholding or strategically craft stories under the pressure of credibility anxiety. Such dynamics cannot be reduced to a moral dichotomy of truth versus fraud; they reflect the reality of speaking with stakes at the ceiling, scant information, and power imbalances. The results are directed at practical priorities: early stable accommodation and interpretation, fast language access as an education pathway of integration, and credibility evaluation with a balance of the trauma-fear-trauma-cross-cultural-narration course, particularly in situations where early experiences have a disproportionate influence. Although small-scale and relying on notes collected through interviews with a specific group of men, the study presents a significant finding in the context of policy and academic research: in the current period of migration in Italy, individuals do not merely cross the border they inhabit time, documents, and narratives.

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