

# Bureaucratic Routes to Migration

## Migrants' Lived Experience of Paperwork, Clerks and Other Immigration Intermediaries

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**Abstract:** For a number of migrant actors, bureaucratic processes related to immigration constitute the greater part of the route toward their aspired destination and significantly shape their experience of migration and forced immobility. This special issue takes a look at the meaningful ways in which migrant actors interact with immigration bureaucracies and at how administrative procedures, with their highly emotional potential, shape in turn the subjectivity, decisions and actions of migrant actors. All the articles here analyse immigration bureaucracy as a dynamic process mediated by a network of people and by material objects (for example, documents, forms). Whether work, marriage or refuge is the reason for migration, the period of waiting in administrative limbo — which can last years — is crucial to our understanding of the bureaucratic encounter as a social force. This issue, dedicated to migrants' lived experience of paperwork, clerks and other immigration intermediaries, explores two aspects of migrant actors' encounters with immigration bureaucracies that go beyond the specificities of each individual's personal background and trajectory: the production of affects and bureaucratic agency; the former often being the driving force behind the latter.

**Keywords:** immigration; bureaucracy; emotions; paperwork; agency

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## Introduction

In February 2019, the Quebec government Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) announced it was discarding 18,000 immigration files — representing about 50,000 individuals — that were still pending examination. A few months later, in June 2019, the government adopted Bill 9, fulfilling its electoral promise to cut down the yearly number of selected immigrants from 50,000 to 40,000 in order to “better integrate them.” There has been a tremendous amount of discontent since the first announcement. In Morocco, some 20 would-be immigrants affected by this measure organized a protest in front of the Canadian embassy. Canadian newspapers published the stories of individuals whose hopes and dreams were crushed when they received the generic email from the government of Quebec telling them, without further details, that their immigration application file had been deleted. What we have to understand from the uproar is that even though some files had been pending for years, the violence and injustice of the measure shattered all the emotional work that had been invested in building an immigration file and dealing with immigration bureaucracies. Prospective immigrants to Quebec invest a good deal of money in the application process but, perhaps most importantly, the whole bureaucratic process generates intense and often life-changing sets of emotions and affects. For example, when filling out paperwork, one has to answer questions concerning education, work experience and international trips. For family migrants, the level of intimate details requested in the application file is even greater. Applicants are compelled to do a thorough self-evaluation of their life and accomplishments and start envisioning their future life in the host country, projecting into their file emotions associated with preoccupations in terms of well-being, safety, professional dreams and family projects. This process shapes applicants’ subjectivity as they project themselves into the future. Moreover, these administrative procedures underscore the contrast between a life “before” immigration and an expected life “after” immigration. The imagination and emotions involved in building an immigration claim are nurtured while the file is being processed by the periodic updates sent to applicants. Dealing with immigration bureaucracies thus encompasses a lot of emotional work that is never compensated in the case of a major bureaucratic shutdown such as the one that happened in Quebec. Newspaper headlines in Quebec emphasize the emotional aspect of immigration processes, with titles such as “Despair sets in for prospective immigrants in Quebec” (Hanes 2019), “Grogne contre la décision de rejeter 18 000 dossiers” (LaCroix 2019), “Des candidats à l’immigration vivent dans l’incertitude” (TVA nouvelles 2019).

In addition to the emotionality inherent to immigration administrative processes, this case exemplifies the inconsistency, indeterminacy, incoherence and inherent structural violence of bureaucratic procedures, which further add to the emotional burden experienced by applicants. Thus, 50,000 immigration candidates to Quebec are seeing their dreams vanish before their eyes, not because they were denied entry for any deliberate reason, but because bureaucratic “murk”<sup>1</sup> (Taussig 1984), “fostering an aura of facticity” (Pigg, Erikson and Inglis 2018, 171), legitimized an act of extreme administrative violence while blaming the allegedly dysfunctional workings of its own system. Instead of considering the files *as* the embodiment of people’s lives, hopes and dreams, the immigration bureaucracy treated them as mere material administrative entities that could be replaced, diverted, returned, or forgotten. In so doing, it partially succeeded in dehumanizing administrative documents and processes (Weber 1968), creating enough distance with the human beings involved in the process to make it easy to discard migrants *as* disembodied files. Waiting for the outcome of this deletion measure, issued before their files were even examined, has become another administrative trial and provoked additional stress for applicants. Immigration bureaucracies are vectors of emotionally laden (im) mobilities and (im)possibilities.

Thanks to new and pervasive technologies of control and surveillance and to online application and follow-up procedures, bureaucracy permeates and impacts, today more than ever before, individual lives, personal experiences, choices and trajectories in every aspect of human life (Graeber 2015; Hull 2012). For a number of migrant actors, bureaucratic processes linked to immigration — with their more or less complicated visa/residence permit application formalities (Andrucki 2010; Cangiano and Walsh 2014; Helleiner 2017; Mau et al. 2015) — constitute the greater part of the route toward their desired destination and shape their experience of migration (or forced immobility) in significant ways. As the case of Quebec illustrates, bureaucratic routes to immigration are risky because they are filled with expectations, hopes and dreams of a better future, with prospective migrants projecting and re-creating their sense of selves and their family lives in a new environment. Moreover, the process itself is emotionally charged because it entails frustrations with administrative hurdles, uncertainties about the outcome of the application, as well as waiting and feelings of stagnation while the file is under review. Finding and filling out the necessary paperwork in which one has to expose and justify a claim to move (Collins 2008; Dhuphelia-Mesthrie 2014b; Jacob 2007), providing proof of

admissibility (Dhuphelia-Mestrie 2014a; Geoffrion 2018; Tomchin 2013), dealing with delays in file processing (Bélanger and Candiz 2019; Cabot 2012; Tuckett 2015; Turnbull 2016), interacting with, getting interviewed and screened by immigration clerks (Borrelli 2018; Borrelli and Andreetta 2019; Eggebø 2013; Friedman 2010; Maskens 2015; Satzewich 2014) — these are all part and parcel of regular migratory trajectories. These administrative procedures, too, constitute social interactions.

Prospective immigrants have to strategically negotiate fast-changing immigration laws and policies; they need to be resilient and creative as well. Bureaucratic routes to migration are also punctuated with small victories: when a police report is handed in; when an official email indicating that one's file is under review is received; when a temporary residence permit is issued. These encounters with the immigration administration apparatus, whether they are positive, negative or ambivalent, often generate a wide range of emotions in migrant actors and their loved ones (Geoffrion 2017; Griffiths 2014; Jacob 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Tuckett 2015; Van der Velde and van Naerssen 2018). At the same time, the degree of friction — or the type of experience — encountered along bureaucratic routes is contingent on the national, religious, classed, gendered and racialized identity of the migrant (Anderson 2010; Andrucki 2010; Cretton 2018; Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013; Hayes 2015, 2015a; Tesfahuney 1998). Some individuals are effectively better equipped to deal with bureaucratic procedures and formalities, either because they have the financial means to pay for the assistance of professionals who are literate in the administrative intricacies of a specific system (Sandoz 2020), or because they have access to human or material resources that help them navigate sometimes contradictory immigration requirements. No matter how much capital they possess, all prospective migrants using formal routes have to engage with the immigration bureaucracy of their desired host country at one point of their journey. Putting one's signature at the bottom of a form (Cody 2009) or checking file processing delays online are but two ways in which individual migrants and their families engage with the procedures. However, these seemingly simple and banal gestures may hold considerable meaning and value for the people involved.

The articles presented here take a look at the meaningful ways in which migrant actors interact with immigration bureaucracies and at how administrative procedures, with their highly emotional potential, shape in turn the subjectivity, decisions and actions of migrant actors (Beatty 2014; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Svašek 2008, 2010). Using ethnographic

methodologies, the authors examine the intersubjective experience of the encounter with immigration administration systems and their human and non-human delegates (human agents, paper or electronic forms, websites) from the perspective of the migrant actors themselves. The articles analyse immigration bureaucracy as a dynamic process mediated by a network of men and women (immigration agents, immigration brokers, legal consultants, human resource managers and other experts) and by material objects (files, forms, material “proof” of the legitimacy of the claim) that incessantly reshape individual fates and subjectivities. They highlight the tensions that arise from bureaucratic encounters when the immigration status of candidates is still precarious, whether they already live in the host country or not.

Through a series of five fine-grained ethnographies, this special issue focuses on two aspects of migrant actors’ encounters with immigration bureaucracies that go beyond the specificities of each individual’s personal background and trajectory: the production of affects<sup>2</sup> in immigration administrative processes and bureaucratic agency; the former often being the driving force behind the latter.

Instead of focusing on an ideal type of migration or migrant (for example, “forced migration”, “economic migrants”), we examine the general administrative dynamics associated with immigration. Migration is understood as a performative process that entails first-hand or mediated interactions between individuals and bureaucracies, which produce affect, emotions and subjectivities, regardless of the type of migration or migrant. Set in different case-specific contexts, the contributions detail what it means for migrant actors trying to cross international borders to contend with the complex, often arbitrary and unequal nature of the bureaucratic interventions that stall or facilitate their international movement.

## **The Emotional Potential of Immigration Documents**

In a recent issue of *Anthropologica* dedicated to documents, anthropologists Stacy Leigh Pigg, Susan L. Erikson and Kathleen Inglis examined documents as “a mundane feature of everyday life”: “In situations of verification and validation, documents centre human attention. Power imbalances flash into view: acts of judgment and assessment imply relations, values, structures” (2018, 167-168). In the field of immigration, documents hold specific and sometimes divergent meanings and produce affect in their holders. They have the potential to create stress, confusion, frenzy or even solidarities in migrants who try to

respond to administrative requirements to the best of their capacities. The aesthetics of documents and forms (Hull 2012), with their official letterhead and other stylistic conventions, encourage migrants to handle them with care (Navaro-Yashin 2007) and to revise their written answers thoroughly to avoid committing legal infractions (Geoffrion 2017).

Anthropologists are increasingly interested in the social life of documents in the way these affect the lives of individuals. Documents have been analysed in relation to power, control and the maintenance of structures of power (Weber 1968). Immigration documents contribute to the reproduction of social norms by slotting people into categories — “refugee,” “skilled worker,” “dependent family member,” “Non-EU nationals” — to which are attributed different political and moral values in social and national hierarchies. They are treated administratively according to that ranking. By ticking certain boxes, would-be migrants attest that they fit the social categories that make sense in the host country, resulting in a process of negotiation and transformation of their identity. This “domestication” (Hage 1996; Hunter 2016) of foreign identities by means of immigration forms can be interpreted as an instrument of nation-building from a social control perspective. However, the power that documents hold is not unidirectional and leaves room for individual agency: “documentation as a site for manoeuvring by those it is meant to control” (Pigg, Erikson and Inglis 2018, 175). As such, immigration documents should rather be interpreted as sites where social interactions happen and where power relations unfold and are contested. When used and handled, they become sites of confrontation, reproduction, negotiation and performance, in which social relations are formed and rearticulated and meaning is created.

In addition, the literature on documents reveals that paperwork, online forms and other types of official documents, which constitute the bulk of immigration procedures, produce a wide range of emotions and affective states (Hull 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2007). For example, Cabot (2012) documented how the “pink card” (an identity document issued to asylum seekers in Greece) acquires different “lives” depending on how its holders engage with it. The sometimes divergent functions of this temporary identity card produce mixed feelings in asylum seekers: because it is a proof of legal status, it constitutes a safe haven away from the insecurities of being “illegal,” but at the same time, its ties to surveillance and classification technologies make it an object of intense fear and anxiety.

As “gatekeepers” (Pigg, Erikson and Inglis 2018, 169), documents hold particular power in the context of immigration, where one can remain “stuck” in place if a document is missing or expired, or if an application file, due to its presentation or content, does not convince immigration agents of the value of the migrant’s contribution to the desired destination country. In her work on Turkish-Cypriot nationals, Navaro-Yashin (2007) shows that by their mere appearance, official letters, even when they are of relatively inconsequential content, can provoke panic in certain migrant individuals. Conversely, even when devoid of legal force, documents can be reassuring for their holders. For example, in 2009, in Lugano, the Swiss Red Cross produced plastic membership cards for its undocumented migrant “protégés” (Charrière and Lachavanne 2009). Such documents did not have any official value, nor did they legalize the stay of irregular migrants in Switzerland, but they did acknowledge the existence of their holders.

Moreover, the care people put into handling certain types of documents such as passports and visas reflects the power encoded in them, which can induce states of fear, shame or admiration in their owners. Engaging with immigration documents can prove extremely emotional in itself, apart from the symbolic value attributed to the prospect of moving and improving one’s life. Throughout the immigration process, migrants actively engage with the forms they have to fill out, creating a dialogue with them, guessing at their meaning, negotiating requirements, outsmarting questions in a way that creates and recreates the self. They actively interact with immigration documents, whether in print or online. Hence, encounters and active engagement with immigration documents not only have the potential of generating emotions, but by their emotional potentiality, they also alter subjectivities and offer a space in which migrants assert their agency in the face of often very restrictive immigration measures and policies. However, documents are part of wider bureaucratic processes and cannot be separated from interviews with immigration agents, file processing times, court hearings, etc. These different but interconnected administrative steps constitute a whole in the experience of migrants and contribute to creating a specific bureaucratic temporality (Auyero 2011; Cabot 2012; Griffiths 2014; Kobelinsky 2010).

## Waiting: Stuck in Bureaucratic Temporalities

Bureaucratic time, as both distinct from and enmeshed in everyday time, produces a special kind of temporality. Immigration as a bureaucratic process has often been analysed through the lens of its induced “waiting” (Elliot 2015). This waiting, or the state of limbo that accompanies waiting for one’s (migratory) fate to be processed, assessed and filed by immigration bureaucrats, has a qualitatively different nature than waiting in everyday temporalities — for instance, waiting for the bus or waiting for a prescription to be filled at the pharmacy. It is as if would-be migrants were holding their breaths (Elliot 2015): there is a life or death quality to it. Waiting for a decision on one’s migration status effectively alters a migration candidate’s gaze on their own life, tainting every other daily activity by the yet-unrealized prospect of migration. As Auyero (2011, 2012) has shown in his study of a welfare office in Argentina, waiting holds the power to discipline (poor) subjects. As claimants’ patience is being tested, their subjectivity is altered: they become compliant “patients of the state.” However, waiting is rarely a completely passive state. In her work on Moroccan women waiting to join their husband in Europe, Elliot (2016) has shown that waiting is also often characterized by very intense periods of work dedicated to the migration project. In some other cases, waiting and administrative delays can also give migrants room to manoeuvre (Tuckett 2018). In this issue, we show that waiting and delays produce a wide range of emotions in migrants, while also providing a space where they can devise creative strategies to reduce waiting times (Bélanger and Candiz 2019) or to justify the legitimacy of their immigration claim. For example, Geoffrion discusses how, for binational couples applying for family reunification, waiting becomes proof that their relationship is strong and authentic.

Geoffrion (this issue) also describes how waiting for an answer puts applicants’ life and that of their loved ones on “hold” and produces intense emotions. If the acuity of emotions induced by bureaucratic processes can fade after prolonged periods of waiting, bureaucratic time and “emotionalities” keep returning to the surface every time an applicant receives a governmental message requesting further information, a missing document or processing fees, or simply updating the applicant on the status of his or her file.

Bureaucratic time also materializes when immigration candidates are required to pay visits to governmental agencies such as police stations, embassies or town halls. Odasso’s detailed exploration of the process of regularization of migrant spouses’ residence papers in Belgium and Italy clearly demonstrates



how, through regular physical incursions into their everyday life and their intimacy, immigration bureaucracies disrupt the banal flow of social life for binational couples who live “with the border.” In such cases, bureaucratic time organizes daily life and spatiality, forcing would-be migrants to adjust their lifestyle, including their work schedules, to the administrative visit requirements involving immigration authorities (also see Sandoz, this issue).

Bureaucratic time can also be productive as migrant actors actively “work” on their immigration file, a process that is very time consuming (Geoffrion, Nourpanah, Odasso, Sandoz). This administrative work, even as it pushes “real” life into the background, foregrounds the agency of applicants. It creates a space for developing strategies to overcome administrative barriers. Bureaucratic time is also a time spent reflecting on one’s life and goals, re-crafting the past in order to better fit into a projected future in the country of settlement. Immigration-related solidarity networks are produced, extended and sustained during this period (Odasso, Geoffrion). Expertise is developed and refined. It is a temporality that allows for contestations of social norms.

### **The Lived Experience of Immigration Bureaucracies: Filling a Gap, Building Knowledge**

The lived experience of immigration bureaucracies, from the perspective of migrants themselves, but also from that of third parties involved in the migration process, has been the subject of recent long-term fieldwork in anthropology. Cabot (2012, 2014, 2016) looked at immigration bureaucracy in Greece. Tuckett (2015, 2018) and Giordano (2008, 2019) both examined immigration bureaucracies in contemporary Italy, the first through the lens of political and legal anthropology and the second through the perspective of ethno-psychiatry.

Also based on long-term fieldwork, the ethnographies in this issue describe with nuance, acuity and depth the complex articulations between, on the one hand, immigration administrative structures and processes and, on the other hand, migrant actors’ affective states and agency. They ask: How do migrant actors respond to administrative processes and formalities and to the affective states they activate? What coping or resistance strategies do they create to better navigate the bureaucratic situation? How do they mobilize resources and develop support networks? This focus on the intersection of migrants’ emotions and agency informs the (administrative) negotiations, strategies and confrontations that occur throughout the migratory trajectory (Collyer 2007; Huijsmans 2012; Triandafyllidou 2017).

Following Martiniello and Rea's (2011) suggestion, all the articles in this issue articulate the lived, embodied, micro-level experience of migrants with dynamics specific to meso-level administrative apparatuses. In doing so, they allow us to draw connections between individuals' emotions, feelings and agency and broader processes of national exclusion and inclusion. The focus on lived experience reveals that, despite the discriminatory, and often arbitrary, nature of national administrative frameworks, migrants show navigation capabilities (Sen 2009) and are able to make strategic choices that have the potential to alter or reframe the terms underpinning power dynamics within immigration bureaucracies. The tactics used include moving, getting an education and a job, starting a family, getting involved in local organizations and participating in local social life. Of course, such capabilities depend on different "regimes of mobility" (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013) and do not apply equally to all.

The articles in this issue investigate decision-making processes in migrant actors' encounters with complex logistics and look at how emotions that emerge from the immigration process contribute to shaping their life choices and trajectories. If the agency of migrant actors, and especially that of female migrants, has been the subject of a growing number of studies over the past twenty years (Bloch 2011; Constable 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parreñas 2002), this issue's detailed attention to the different parties involved in bureaucratic encounters, namely migrants, but also their spouses, employers, immigration clerks and accreditation agencies, makes an original contribution to the study of migrations. Contributors clearly show that all these actors make strategic choices but also encounter constraints. Administrative steps such as filling out forms or preparing for an interview form an analytical lens through which to examine how the agency of migration candidates and other key actors is activated, resources mobilized, networks created, meanings transformed and subjectivities performed. For example, Odasso's paper shows how support networks destined for binational couples keep abreast of administrative loopholes and use them to facilitate admission into the desired country.

Emotions are also central to the bureaucratic experience and to migrants' dealings with its requirements. The agency of migrants cannot be separated from the emotions generated by the bureaucratic process itself: emotions act as the "driving force" (Svašek 2008, 219) behind most of the administrative work done by migrants and their loved ones. Many migration scholars have emphasized the need to look at migration processes in relation to emotions (Baldassar 2008; Frohlick 2013; Mai and King 2009; Skrbiš 2008; Walsh 2009). D'Aoust

(2015) talks of how emotions, especially love, set people into motion; a notion present in the very etymology of the term “e-motion”. Mai and King (2009) argue that emotions are not only produced by migration, but also contribute to shaping one’s migration trajectory. Moreover, bureaucratic routes to migration are paved with often-intense sets of emotions which, in turn, fuel migrants’ actions and shape both their bureaucratic encounters and their migration trajectories. Thus, the aim of this collection is to sharpen our understanding of the joint workings of emotions and agency in immigration bureaucratic encounters and processes. Within this overall theoretical objective, the articles provide examples from three types of immigration: marriage migration, work migration and forced migration. In so doing, they show how bureaucratic procedures disturb and affect individuals, regardless of the type of migration or the categories of migrants.

### **Marriage Migration**

Spouses who are citizens of different countries and who wish to live in the same country often need to regularize the foreign spouse’s status by applying for family reunification, and more specifically for spousal reunification. Over the past ten years, spousal reunification, or “marriage migration” (Charsley, Storer-Church et al. 2012), has received increased attention from migration scholars (Charsley 2013; D’Aoust 2013, 2017; Geoffrion 2017; Lavanchy 2013; Maskens 2013, 2015; Odasso 2016; Salcedo 2015; Wray 2006, 2011). The *politique du soupçon* (Salcedo 2013), or the generalized suspicion that falls on couples in which one of the partners comes from a country of the Global South, is reflected in reunification procedures and requirements, mainly through the emphasis on the “authenticity” (or lack thereof) of the marriage. This “moral economy of suspicion” (D’Aoust 2017) also informs the couples’ lived experience of the bureaucratic process (Eggebo 2013; Satzewich 2014; Wray, Agoston and Hutton 2014). Both partners, the citizen and the migrant, feel this hostile climate acutely.

Indeed, administrative procedures and immigration and registry clerks act in concert to intimidate binational couples with formal and informal tools, thereby withholding the (family) rights of the Western nationals involved in such unions (Geoffrion 2018). In the long run, the social pressure to perform true love for the scrutiny of others ends up increasing power inequalities between spouses (Fresnoza-Flot 2017; Hervouet and Schiff 2017; Salcedo 2013). Like the waters of a polluted river, bureaucratic suspicion overflows into the private life of the spouses, who have to cope with society’s skewed gaze. Yet, bureaucratic

immigration processes have seldom been approached from the perspective of the lived experience of couples who face government suspicion over the legitimacy of their relationship. This special issue addresses this question through the case of binational lovers who wish to be reunited in Canada (Geoffrion) and that of couples who live together in Italy or in Belgium but need to regularize their union and/or the status of the migrant partner (Odasso). The very emotional nature of this type of migration is especially relevant to the purpose of this thematic issue. As the cumbersome, time consuming and indeterminate nature of the spousal reunification/marriage validation process often entails the physical separation of partners and generates additional stress on their relationship.

Karine Geoffrion's paper highlights the emotional plight of Canadian women subjected to administrative violence during the process of spousal reunification in Canada. Extended delays in file processing, state intrusion into their intimate life by way of paperwork and immigration interviews all generate a range of intense emotions, from despair to gratitude. Geoffrion coins the term "bureaucratic emotionalities" to highlight the emotional potential of immigration administrative procedures for women invested in their husbands' immigration application file. "Bureaucratic emotionalities," as a conceptual tool, can also be apprehended through a reflection on specific regimes of emotions inherent to bureaucratic procedures. For example, the emotions generated by the reunification process can incite Canadian women to develop various defensive strategies in order to act against the gendered and racialized systemic violence intrinsic to the immigration process. Moreover, the use of the plural form "emotionalities" points to the manifold potentials of emotions generated by bureaucratic processes at the micro level of the individual: some sets of emotions are intense, reactive and potentially productive, others are quieter and more reflexive. Within a moral frame that tends to victimize Canadian women married to men from the Global South and to demonize their non-Canadian spouses, Geoffrion examines three embodied modes of involvement with the Canadian process of spousal reunification — Waiting, Working and Fighting — in which love becomes central in shaping subjectivities and creating meaningful narratives within state-imposed categories.

Laura Odasso's study conducted in Italy and Belgium between 2009 and 2017 uses the concept of the "border-network" (Rea 2018) to further explore the various barriers (Andersen, Klatt and Sandberg 2012) that native and migrant partners in binational couples encounter in their "shared migration career." The article's focus on the experience of bureaucratic procedures in two

European countries contributes to better understanding the face-to-face interactions between binational couples and street-level bureaucrats, the materiality of the administrative process and the various intrusions into the couples' intimacy. Here, resistance arises from the bureaucratic encounter, mainly through the support applicants obtain via the building of networks and the recourse to legal and practical guidance provided by community-based organizations and intermediaries at the margin of immigration bureaucracies. Odasso makes evident the articulation between, on the one hand, bureaucratic encounters and, on the other hand, migrant actors' emotions and individual agency and the re-formation of (national) subjectivities and forms of belonging. On the routes to national residence, human agents (that is, clerks, policemen) and non-human agents (that is, laws, documents) involved in bureaucratic formalities impact partners' agency, and the scope of possibilities broadens as migrants develop resources and skills that allow them to either take administrative shortcuts or use alternative, less monitored or demanding bureaucratic routes. Experiencing the border-network entails experiencing bureaucratic work from below — completing forms, advancing evidence, anticipating delays, knowing how to behave in front of an official, guessing which tone to use — that is, potential spousal migrants learn the language of immigration bureaucracy as they proceed along the migratory trajectory.

### **Work Visa Application**

Emotions that emerge from the burdensome administrative processes associated with work visa applications and the recognition of immigrants' credentials are at the fore of Shiva Nourpanah's study. The paper draws attention to the case of qualified foreign nurses, mostly from India and the Philippines, who migrated to Canada by way of a temporary worker's visa. The different policy regimes regulating conditions of work and movement in Canada produce a wide range of emotional states because they "operate in disjointed, unpredictable and time-consuming ways, creating "riskiness" and uncertainty for the nurses." For qualified foreign nurses, the immigration process is characterized by, on the one hand, emotional insecurity stemming from the immigration bureaucracy's complex procedures and formalities and fast-changing requirements and policies and, on the other hand, the acknowledgement and appreciation of their competencies by co-workers (Yeates 2008). Nourpanah analyses the various sets of emotions that permeate foreign nurses' encounters with Canadian bureaucracies and policies through the lens of migration temporalities in which candidates run a "double-race." She also shows that the distressing emotions arising

from bureaucratic encounters cannot be separated from the everyday relationships the nurses forge, develop and enjoy at work with colleagues and patients. This case exemplifies a system where bureaucratic experiences and everyday social encounters are at odds with each other.

In her article, Laure Sandoz focuses on the work of immigration intermediaries in facilitating the visa application process of qualified workers in Switzerland. In this country, highly skilled non-European migrants see their immigration facilitated by lawyers and other middlemen commissioned by Swiss companies that seek to hire them because of the added value they might extract from them. Here, migrants' experience of the immigration bureaucracy is indirect and mediated. The article's focus on the interactions between state representatives, third parties and prospective immigrants constitutes the originality of the analysis. The author's multi-actor approach emphasizes the experience and agency of the various actors involved in the immigration process of qualified workers: state immigration agents, human resources managers and the workers themselves. The paper reveals how different vested interests and embodied (power) relations crosscut and intersect in complex sets of interactions. It also shows how would-be migrants devise strategies and deploy resources to overcome immigration barriers. This article's insight into the international migration business contributes to better defining the making of an elite, composed, in this case, of individuals who are able to avoid most of the inconveniences associated with immigration policies and bureaucratic practices. At the same time the article depicts with nuance the bureaucratic imbroglios that even well-to-do prospective migrants encounter. Sandoz highlights that the migration experience varies widely depending on the type of support provided by the prospective employer. The article offers a broader view on the perceptions, logics and tactics of various actors involved in the immigration process, as well as a better understanding of the power and economic relations at the heart of the immigration bureaucratic industry.

### **Emotions under the Threat of Deportation**

Little has been said about how emotions materialize in the immediate interactions between migrants and bureaucrats. Lisa Borrelli's article fills this gap: it explores how emotions are expressed, negotiated, manipulated and contested within the context of the encounter between street-level bureaucrats and migrants facing deportation. Borrelli makes a special contribution to this issue by shedding light on the bureaucratic ordeals of rejected refugees in Europe

(Sweden and Switzerland). Inspired by Campbell (2010), she examines the emotional life of governmental power through the lens of encounters with street-level bureaucrats. By showing that emotions are felt by bureaucrats as much as by migrants, her study challenges the image of a rational, neutral and emotionless public administration. The article thus sheds light on the internal making of struggles (Bevir and Rhodes 2010) and feelings with all their contradictions. Borrelli also shows how despair, anxiety, fear, irritation, but also hope can be interpreted and conveyed through material means such as medical forms, audio recordings and police or border guard administrative reports. Rooted in powerful narratives, her analysis demonstrates that emotions are not only manifestations of power imbalances, but can also be invoked or used strategically. It documents how the emotional labour of migration enforcement is translated into bureaucratically enacted practices, while paying special attention to how bodies, voices, objects, papers and space interact.

According to Borrelli and the other authors of this special issue, institutions think (Douglas 1986), feel (Herzfeld 1992) and judge (Feldman 2013, 2016), thereby entering into a dialectical relationship with law and policy (Fassin 2015) and with the moral framework of migration control practices. While recognizing the power and constraints enshrined in the diffused set of agencies managing migration, all authors featured here highlight the situated agency of actors involved, which can either reproduce or subvert power relations.

## **Conclusion**

By focusing on the emotional intensity that informs migrant actors' experience of immigration bureaucracies, this collection of articles sheds light on the multi-layered articulations between the administrative apparatus, its functioning and the lived, embodied experience of those who deal with it. Following Tuckett (2015), we argue that bureaucracies function in a manner that is a far cry from the dehumanizing ideal type described by Weber: "Instead, bureaucracies and bureaucratic encounters are affective" (2015, 113-114). They generate and are generated by emotion, personal interest, moralities, social networks, objects and documents (De Sardan 1999; Gupta 1995; Heyman 1995; Nuijten 2003). Furthermore, bureaucracies, and the paperwork that accompanies this form of governance, are often characterized by confusion and fuzziness (Cabot 2012; Kelly 2006; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Triandafyllidou 2003; Tuckett 2015), which contributes to creating space for affect-based interactions and the actualization of "racialized knowledges" (Pratt and Thompson 2008) in decision-making processes.

In this special issue, we argue that bureaucratic procedures are, indeed, social actors that need to be taken seriously because of their potential for social change. By focusing on the emotions and agency generated by and through immigration bureaucratic processes, we aim to show that encounters and interactions with immigration bureaucracies are sites where individual and collective subjectivities are reproduced, rearticulated, negotiated and contested. While immigration-related bureaucratic procedures serve to control who gets in and shape potential newcomers into existing moral categories for the benefit of the nation and national identity, they also create an arena where applicants, their families and third parties involved in migration processes self-reflect and develop navigation strategies. The articles in this issue show the interstitial spaces in which social actors bypass bureaucratic difficulties by seeking help from organizations, networks, online support groups and professional migration agents, by mobilizing their personal assets and their capacity for endurance and by changing ways of thinking.

In addition, the articles featured in this issue argue that bureaucratic processes are performative, in the sense that they enact one's story and dreams, often as a response to perceived immigration requirements and expectations (Pigg, Erikson and Inglis 2018). An ethnomethodological lens may be useful here, as it shows that bureaucratic processes involve many actors, whose perspectives, values and embodied experiences of immigration intersect and sometimes clash. In such a perspective, immigration bureaucratic processes act as a stage where would-be immigrants perform what they believe is an "authentic" version of their immigration claim, and where immigration officers assess the same files bearing in mind their potential for "fakeness." Envisioning immigration bureaucratic processes as a site for the performance and interactions of many actors, human and non-human alike, a productive site that generates emotionalities and subjectivities, proves fruitful if we wish to go beyond a rather static and dehumanized vision of bureaucracies. Such an approach opens a door for a potentially more human(istic) way of managing immigration and immigrants.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Epistemic murk” is “a political practice that cripples resistance by dislodging straightforward perceptions of truth and rumour” (Pigg, Erikson and Inglis 2018, 171).
- <sup>2</sup> We understand “affects”: “dans leur pluralité, en tant que puissances qui, d’une part, sont diversifiées dans leur agissement à des moments et en des lieux précis, et qui, d’autre part, sont façonnées par les êtres qu’ils mettent en mouvement et par des modalités d’imagination, d’expression et d’interprétation de ces derniers” (Plancke and Simoni 2018, 6). [“in their plurality, as forces that, on the one hand, are varied in their actions at specific moments and locations and that, on the other hand, are shaped by individuals that they set in motion and by processes of imagination, expression and interpretation of the latter” (translated by Karen Caruana)].

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