

Waiting for asylum in Austria: Well-being of refugee children in a phase of liminality and precarity. Towards a child-centered approach

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What to expect?

1. Aim & Research Question
2. Contextualization
3. Theoretical Foundation
4. Empirical Foundation
5. Preliminary Results (due to Covid-19-Pandemic)
6. Conclusion
7. Literature

1. Aim & Research Question

- Research interest: Conditions of waiting for asylum in Austria in a basic service accommodation with a focus on children in transition
- We define our interviewees' waiting for asylum as a phase of liminality and argue that both the children and their families experience precarity
- Research question: What are the conditions of waiting for asylum that characterize the liminal phase and are experienced by young people in a basic service accommodation?

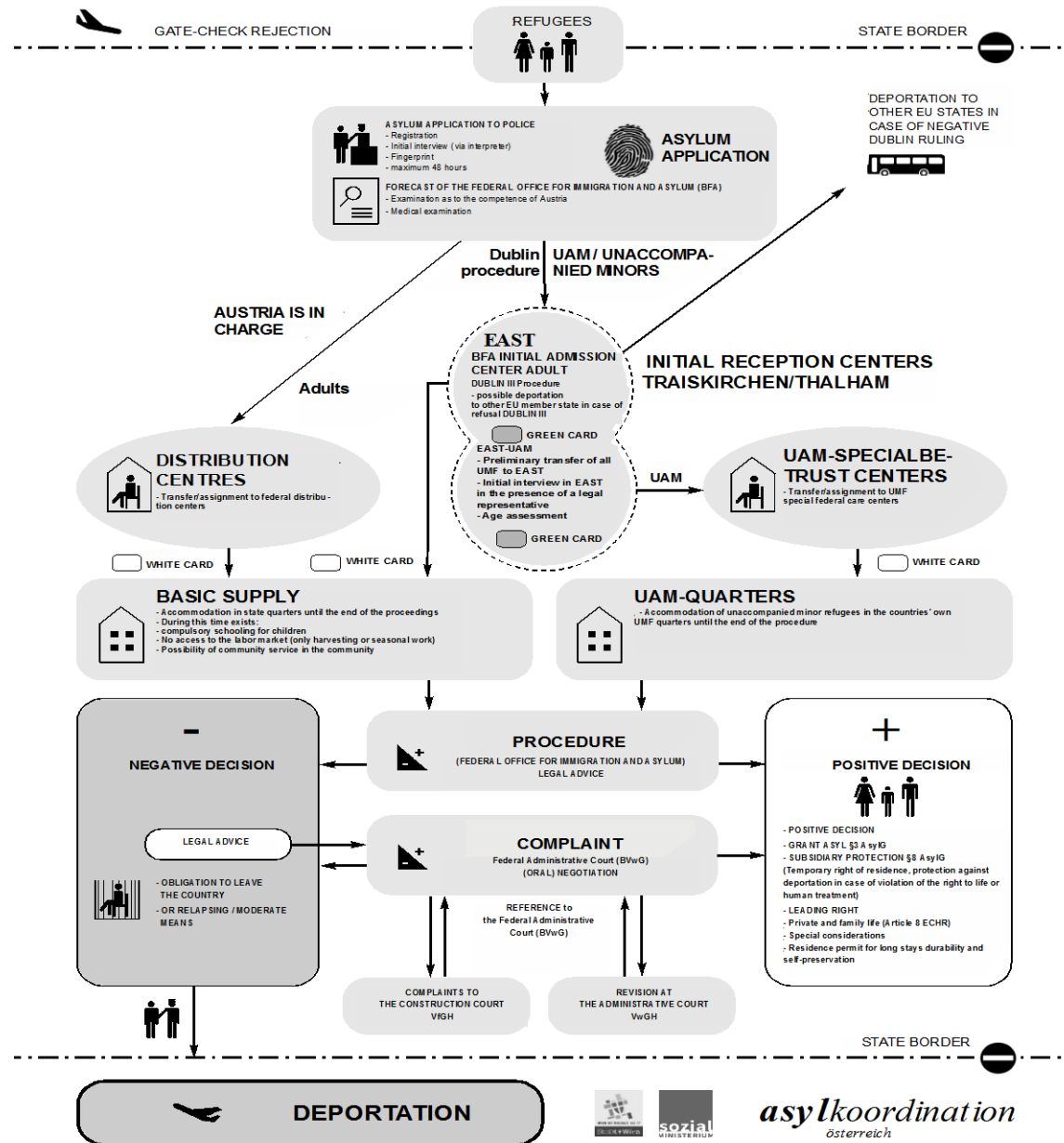
2. Contextualization

- The quality and duration of asylum procedures vary considerably in Europe
- Austria: 15 month for asylum procedure (Network for Children's Rights 2019)
- New Austrian government program provides for a "reduction of the duration of procedures to an average of six months"

→ It can be assumed that waiting for a (positive) decision is associated with unrest and uncertainty.

This uncertainty grows the longer the wait.

asyl process since 2015



2. Contextualization

- Accommodation for asylum seekers is regulated by the “basic service law” (Grundversorgungsgesetz 2005)
- Each state has its own basic service law → The „Vienna basic service act“ (Wiener Grundversorgungsgesetz) was passed in 2004
- People receive e.g. health insurance, counseling, transport costs to authorities are covered and for children travel costs to school are paid and school materials are provided
- People receive 21 Euros per day + 40 Euro pocket money per month
(Grundversorgungsinfo Wien 2020)

3. Theoretical Foundation

Liminality

- Turner bases his liminality analysis on the three stages of separation, liminality and incorporation of Van Gennep's rites de passage (Van Gennep 1981)
- According to Turner (1969) a liminal phase is often shrouded in secrecy, uncertainty and ambiguity
- Waiting can be accompanied by feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and vulnerability → Sutton et al. (2011) stress that the process of waiting can be analyzed as a liminal phase

3. Theoretical Foundation

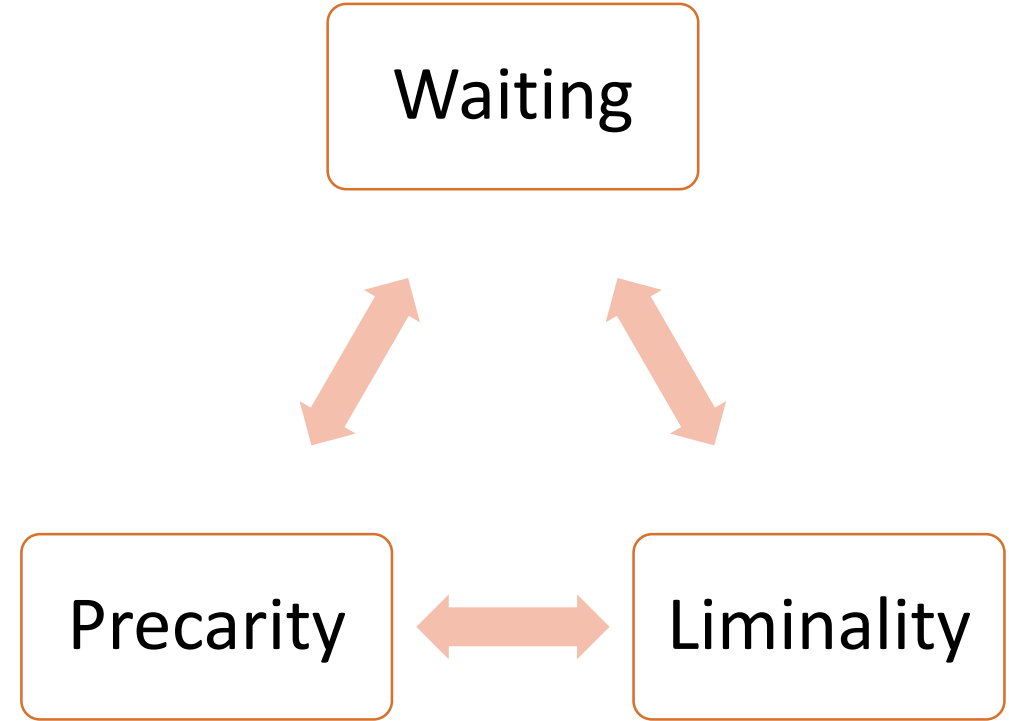
Precarity

- Bourdieu (1963) distinguishes in the 1960s between the casual workers, who he called as “the precarity”, and permanent workers
- Waite (2009) emphasizes that society as a whole becomes more precarious and is potentially destabilized
- Precarity describes a "politically conditioned state in which certain population groups suffer from failing social and economic support networks and are exposed to injuries, violence and death in different ways“ (Butler 2009)
- The potential of the concept of precarity versus risk and vulnerability lies in what can be gained politically by adopting the concept
- Precarization has not only a repressive form, but also ambivalently productive moments (practice of self-government) (Lorey 2012)

3. Theoretical Foundation

(Reciprocal) Connection between Waiting, Liminality and Precarity

- The long wait what asylum seekers have to endure can be described as a liminal phase in which they experience impatience, insecurity and helplessness.
- They have a precarious life because they are in a liminal phase all the time, or precarity is produced by it
- They must wait because their lives are precarious. According to the motto: "Only the poor/most precarious have to wait", "their time is no money"



4. Empirical Foundation

- Child-centered approach
- August & September 2020: 13 qualitative, open interviews with guiding questions & art based approaches
- Interview partners: Between 6 and 14 years; Living in a basic service accomodation in Vienna, Austria
- Interviews were transcribed & analyzed
- Research stop due to Covid-19 in October 2020

→ Preliminary results

Preliminary Results I

Fields:

1. „School Environment“
2. „Conditions of stay“
3. „Family“
4. „Wishes and future plans“

- **Fields describe conditions of waiting in a liminal phase**
- **Contextualization with concepts of precarity and liminality**

Preliminary Results II

„School Environment“

- Describes positive and negative experiences in everyday school life (high diversity, lack of language skills...)
- Creates social security, but also gives rise to fears
- Lack of long term perspective: Precarious existence as pupils

Preliminary Results III

„Conditions of stay“

- Describes material and immaterial conditions under which they live (positive in comparison, strong social connections, good healthcare system, also lack of space...)
- Experiences of discrimination & racism in a liminal phase
- Shows dimensions of uncertainty, precarity and liminality

Preliminary Results IV

„Family“

- Describes the family context of the interviewees (missing family members, duties, high level of psychological stress)

→ Situation of precarity: Children have to take responsibilities for adults

Preliminary Results V

„Wishes and future plans“

- Describes ideas the respondents have about their own future (concrete ideas, desires)
- "What is your biggest wish?" - "That we get a passport so that we can stay" (K3)

→ Liminal situation and uncertainty of waiting for asylum creates insecurity

6. Conclusion

- Waiting has lasting effect on children and teenagers (i.e. lack of security)
- Being in a stage of uncertainty and dependence of change for years (Precarity)
- At the same time: Participate in social structures
- They are „betwixt and between“ (Turner 1987)

→ This circumstances frame the children's experience: They fear, they are anxious but, against all odds, they dream of a better life

7. Literature

Bourdieu, Pierre (1963): Travail et Travailleurs en Algerie. Paris, France: Mouton & Co.

Butler, Judith (2009): Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? London: Verso.

Grundversorgungsinform Wien, 2020

Grundversorgungsgesetz 2005

Lorey, Isabell (2012): Die Regierung der Prekären. Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant.

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Sutton, Rebecca; Vigneswaran, Darshan; Wels, Harry (2011): Waiting in liminal space: Migrants' queuing for Home Affairs in South Africa. In: Journal Anthropology Southern Africa 34: 30-37.

Turner, Victor (1969): The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure. New York, Aldine de Gruytere.

Turner, Victor (1987): Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. In: Betwixt and between. Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation. Edited by L.C. Mahdi, S. Foster and M. Little. Open Court Publishing Company: 3-23.

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Van Gennep, Arnold (1981) [1909]: Les rites de passage: Etudes systematique des rites. Paris, E. Noury.



Thank you for your attention!