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**Citation:** Schuster, L. and Majidi, N. (2015). Deportation Stigma and Re-migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(4), pp. 635-652. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2014.957174

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# Deportation Stigma and Re-migration

Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi

*Many, if not most, of those who are forcibly expelled from the country to which they have migrated will not settle in the country to which they have been returned but will leave again. A recent article examined some of the reasons why this should be so. It was argued that in addition to the factors that had caused the original migration, such as fear of persecution, continuing conflict, insecurity, poverty and lack of opportunity, deportation creates at least three additional reasons that make re-migration the most likely outcome. These were debt, family commitments and the shame of failure and or 'contamination' leading to stigmatisation. In this article, we explore the stigma of failure and of contamination attached to those deported, and the ways in which they respond to and manage this stigmatisation, including by re-migrating. We use Goffman's concept of stigma and the refinement offered by to further nuance understanding of the impact of deportation.*

*Keywords: Deportation; Migration; Stigma; Contamination; Afghanistan*

## Introduction

Among deportation scholars it has become almost axiomatic that many, if not most, of those who are forcibly expelled from the country to which they have migrated will not settle in the country to which they have been returned but will leave again (Schuster and Majidi 2013; Alpes 2012; Arowolo 2000; Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Dumon 1986; Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008; Saito and Hunte 2007; Zilberg 2007). In a recent article (Schuster and Majidi 2013), we examined some of the reasons why this should be so. Based on our explorations of post-deportation outcomes for Afghans, we argued that, in addition to the factors that had caused the original migration, such as fear of persecution, continuing conflict, insecurity, poverty and lack of opportunity, deportation creates at least three additional reasons that make re-migration the most likely outcome.<sup>1</sup> These were debt, family commitments and the shame of failure and or 'contamination' leading to stigmatisation. The notion of stigma recurs in a number of studies on deportation (Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Galvin, 2014). In some cases, in

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particular those deported from the US, those who are forcibly returned are tainted with the stigma of criminality (Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008; Drotbohm 2014), but in the case of those deported from Europe, it seems the stigma is more likely to be that of failure.

However, in the literature the stigma of deportation has been described rather than analysed. In this article, we explore the stigma of failure and of contamination attached to those deported, and the ways in which they respond to and manage this stigmatisation, including by re-migrating, and the conditions under which it does or does not arise. We use Goffman's concept of stigma (1963) and the refinement offered by Link and Phelan (2001) to further nuance understanding of the impact of deportation. We argue that families and communities will stigmatise those who challenge their images of migration destinations as lands of opportunity, preferring to believe only those who are lazy, stupid or unlucky (Alpes 2012) will be deported. We further suggest that this stigmatisation acts as an additional pressure to re-migrate. However, while we argue for the existence of a link between stigma and re-migration, we are careful to place stigma within the wider structural framework of physical, economic and social (in)security, and in contextualising stigmatisation, note that it is not inevitable.

### **Stigma and Migration**

Goffman's theory of social stigma defines stigma as an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting' and causes the individual to be classified as different from others, from the norm, undesirable and therefore to be rejected, reducing his/her identity 'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963, 3). Stigma as a conceptual tool has been used since Goffman's study by researchers to examine the exclusion of a wide range of social groups labelled as other and treated as tainted by those who are 'normal', perhaps most extensively in relation to mental illness (Corrigan, Markowitz, and Watson 2004; Dinos et al. 2004; Rüsçh, Angermeyer, and Corrigan 2005), HIV/AIDS (Castro and Farmer 2005; Parker and Aggleton 2003; Alonzo and Reynolds 1995) and disability (Kleinman et al. 1995; Schneider 1988; Fine and Asch 1988). Scholars have also looked at the stigmatisation of migrants, usually in receiving countries and usually those stigmatised not just because of their immigration status, but also because they are engaged in sex work (Lévy and Lieber 2008; Scambler 2007; Pheterson 1993) or HIV positive (Koku 2010). Goffman's work clearly resonates in many areas of research and Link and Phelan (2001) provide an impressive overview of the different contexts in which the concept has been used. Much of this literature has focused on the way these stigmatised groups manage their relationships with the society in which they reside or their rejection by that society (Field 1994; Kusow 2001, 2004).

Work on stigma has largely been in the field of psychology and so perhaps inevitably there is a strong emphasis in studies of stigma on the individual. However, sociological approaches have been recommended and used to understand how

structural processes link stigma and discrimination (Corrigan, Markowitz, and Watson 2004). Link and Phelan also stress the importance of moving beyond a focus 'on the perceptions of individuals and the consequences of such perceptions for micro-level interactions' (2001, 366). The micro-level interactions documented here occur within structural contexts of inequality and poverty that construct migration as a solution to individual problems. Goffman highlights the contingent and dynamic nature of stigma, arguing that while it functions in face-to-face interactions, it 'cannot itself be fully understood without reference to the history, the political development and the current policies of the group' (1963, 127). Context is vital in the assigning of stigma-normal categories (Kusow 2001, 180; Goffman 1963, 127) and so we have taken a comparative approach here to illustrate how what is 'normal' and what is 'stigmatised' (and by whom) varies according to geographical, historical and political contexts.

More recently, as the literature on deportation has expanded significantly, authors have examined the stigmatisation of those who are deported (Drotbohm 2011a, 2014; Galvin, 2014; Peutz 2006, 2010; Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Zilberg 2004). Brotherton and Barrios suggest that 'the experience of stigma is probably the most difficult social and psychological issue confronting deportees' (2009, 43). It may be tempting to see deportation as the end of the stigmatising process, the point at which the person tainted by irregular migration status is expelled from 'normal' society. Our interviewees indicated that, in certain circumstances, deportation continues the process of stigmatisation and leads to the deported person being discounted and treated as tainted by failure (Drotbohm 2014), as no longer normal. As we will show, this is particularly the case where deportation challenges a shared understanding (and shared expectations when migration is a collective decision) in the communities to which people are returned, one that people are anxious to hold onto. In the Brotherton and Barrios study just mentioned, Dominican Javier articulates a perspective that could be Afghan: 'They don't believe it can happen to a person. They think I must be stupid because I went there, spent 25 years of my life there and didn't come home rich' (2009, 50) and Drotbohm notes that deportation challenges affirmation of the families' 'transnational relatedness, cross-border solidarity and familial success' (2012, 133).

Link and Phelan identify discrete elements of the stigmatisation process: 'labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold' (2001, 367). The first occurs when a label is attached to a human difference, the second when negative characteristics are attached to that label and the third when a distance is introduced between 'us' and 'them'. However, stigma is only effective when those labelled suffer discrimination and a loss of status. Link and Phelan (2001) conclude that stigmatisation is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows exclusion and discrimination. In the case of certain categories of migrants, labels such as 'illegal' are applied, and characteristics such as criminality associated with them (Khosravi 2009; Palidda 1999; Den Boer 1998; Drotbohm 2014). Because of the

consequences of discovery, including detention and deportation, undocumented migrants (i.e. deportable migrants) are forced to separate themselves from ‘normal’ citizens or to take great care to hide their status (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter 2009; Alpes 2012; Drotbohm 2014), and may end up being physically separated in detention centres. As such, undocumented migrants are subject to ‘the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination’ (Link and Phelan 2001, 367), which in some cases leads to their physical expulsion from a state. However, we take up the story when those deported arrive in a place that they cannot, or no longer feel that they can, call home.

## **Methods and Data**

The data used in this article was gathered separately by Schuster and Majidi through discrete projects over a period of five years. Although Majidi has conducted both qualitative and quantitative studies, for this paper we used only the qualitative data as this is where the issues and perceptions of shame, failure and stigma arose. Majidi has been conducting field-based research in Afghanistan since 2007 (e.g. for UNHCR, ILO, DfID, IOM, Norwegian Refugee Council) and for her doctoral thesis. Of the 100 returnees interviewed by Majidi in three provinces of Afghanistan (Kabul, Nangarhar and Balkh), 50 had been deported from the UK and assisted through the UK return and reintegration fund (Majidi 2009). Those selected in 2009 were then re-interviewed in 2011 to obtain a longitudinal perspective of their post-deportation experience.

Additionally, we drew on Majidi’s previous work for UNHCR and ILO in 2008 with Afghans deported from Iran (2008), in particular the qualitative fieldwork consisting of 50 individual profiles, 20 case studies and 6 focus groups with 103 Afghans deported from Iran. Those people interviewed at the Iranian-Afghan border had been in Iran for periods between 2 weeks and 20 years before being deported. Majidi also mapped out and interviewed the different stakeholders involved on the Afghan side of the deportation and return process—from the people deported, to their families and friends, to the taxi drivers taking them from the border to Herat city, smugglers, hotel owners, national authorities, NGO workers and United Nations agency representatives.

Schuster spent six months in Afghanistan in 2012–13: three in Kabul and three conducting an ethnographic study in Northern Afghanistan studying the impact of deportation on those deported and their families. During the six months in Afghanistan, she stayed with a total of 11 families and visited at least twice with 5 more. All but two of the families with whom Schuster stayed were Hazara, largely because the contacts in Paris who facilitated the family stays were Hazara. Every family she stayed with had close members living and working abroad. Many had lived in Iran (for between 3–14 years) and some had been deported from there.

During the three months in Kabul, Schuster conducted 10 interviews with men who had been deported from Iran, Norway, Germany or the UK, or with their

brothers and four interviews and one informal focus group with women in Herat who had been deported from Iran with the assistance of an informal interpreter. All but four of the interviews and one focus group were with men and all of those interviewed who had been deported from Europe or Australia were male. The male bias reflects the reality that the overwhelming majority of deportations are of men. The women who had experienced deportation and who spoke about their experiences had all been deported with their families from Iran.

### *Analysis*

For this paper, we sifted our data separately looking for interviews or conversation where shame or rejection were mentioned explicitly or implicitly by the respondents. The initial coding of the data consisted of a detailed reading of each interview. As particularly themes emerged, we discussed and considered these discretely, before looking for relationships between them. In discussing the analysis of stigma, two caveats need to be flagged. First, the separating out of stigma in this article is artificial as in both data-sets it was intimately linked to issues of debt, lost opportunities and affective ties (Schuster and Majidi 2013), as well as collective decisions and structural factors leading to migration. It is important to stress it was never offered as a primary reason for leaving, but rather something which compounded other difficulties, such as insecurity and destitution. It is isolated here to flag its importance and facilitate the analysis of the role of stigma, but a rounded understanding of the pressures to re-migrate post-deportation or of the impact of deportation would need to treat all of the above and most importantly the question of physical and economic security. Deportation is a complex process that varies depending on a whole gamut of factors, of which stigma is only one and often not the most important one.

We were also aware that, in the formal interviews in particular, there was a very clear power imbalance. This was never completely resolved but we tried to redress this by responding as fully as possible to all questions that were asked and by offering clear explanations of the research and its purpose. O'Connell-Davidson (1998) has noted the problems of giving voice and we ourselves share a certain scepticism about whether that is possible in academic research because there is no single voice to be represented: ethnicity, class, education and especially gender all mediate the experiences of the people we interviewed. As noted by Jacobsen and Skilbrei (2010, 194) 'the accounts of the same person may also be ambivalent and unsettled, containing "several voices" that speak differently in different contexts'. We have tried to reflect this variety in our analysis and choice of quotations.

### **Afghan Migration and the Stigma of Deportation**

For stigma to function there must be a shared understanding of the normal. Afghanistan, located on the Silk Routes of Central Asia, has for centuries witnessed and participated in migratory movements along its highways. However, the last 35 years in particular have seen massive population displacements thanks to the

Soviet invasion (1979–1989), followed by civil war and the rise of the Taliban. With every regime change, some Afghans would return, while others would leave, some more than once and most usually to the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan. The norm has been to use migration as a coping strategy (Harpviken 2009; Monsutti 2005 and more generally, see Cassarino 2004). It is estimated that 76 per cent of Afghanistan's population has experienced displacement (ICRC 2009) and Afghanistan is amongst the countries with the largest proportion of its citizens living outside its borders. Around six million Afghans still reside in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan and there are significant communities in Australia, Europe and North American, even though since 2002, some 5.7 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan (UNHCR 2013). While Iran and Pakistan host large populations of registered Afghan refugees, there are also hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers vulnerable to arrest and immediate deportation, often followed as soon as practically possible by re-migration (Majidi 2008; Schuster and Majidi 2013). As such, migration is a norm for many Afghans, who share experiences of migration for survival, security, marriage, labour and education and often for a combination of all of these reasons<sup>2</sup> (Monsutti 2005; Stark and Bloom 1985; Massey et al. 2005). Migration is often seen as a necessary and normal, though painful, experience for both the migrant and those left behind (Aranda 2006).

There is extensive literature documenting migrant expectations that their sojourn will be limited and that they will return after a fixed, usually underestimated period (see van den Berg and Weynandt 2012) with capital to invest in businesses or material assets such as houses or cars or the future of their children (Stark 1991)—expectations shared by those they leave behind. There is often the expectation that successful migrants will help other family members migrate through marriage or sponsorship (Cassarino 2004; Drotbohm 2012). Increasingly, the reality is less clear, as expectations and norms of migration are challenged by the restrictions increasingly imposed on migrants by states. Those taking a more structural approach to return migration emphasise the context in which migration occurs and its role in shaping expectations of what migration can do for the individual, their family and the sending and receiving society (e.g. Cerase 1974).

One category of migrant absent from this analysis is, however, the migrant who is deported. Deportation challenges established norms in sending states 'and therefore returnees experience stigma, discrimination and shame due to discrepancies between what is socially expected and what is the actual reality' (Gomes 2012, 2). Those who have been deported from Australia or Europe discredit the dominant shared understanding of migrants as successful adventurers and of those destinations as places where people go to succeed, to improve their own lives and the lives of their families (Gavin this issue). One way to preserve the idea of e.g. Australia or Germany as an ideal destination is to blame the person deported, to label them as criminal, lazy or unlucky. A focus group with young men deported from the UK in Kabul highlighted a common experience: that of having fingers pointed at them, and being labelled 'the deportee' in the respective vernacular [see also Drotbohm (2011b) on



those deported to Haiti]. They are then stereotyped as failures, or in an ironic continuation of the pre-deportation stigmatisation, as criminals. Peutz notes in relation to deported Somalilanders that ‘the shame associated with their deportation was manifested in speculation regarding the reasons for it’ (2006, 224). Often there is little awareness that those who enter without papers are liable to deportation,<sup>3</sup> so there is an assumption that the person deported must have been engaged in criminal activities. Young men in Paris after re-migrating post-deportation spoke bitterly of their families’ lack of comprehension of what they had suffered en route to and in Europe (Schuster and Majidi 2013). As noted by Peutz (2006) and Khosravi (2009) often (though not always) the assumption is that they must have been doing drugs or stealing, and the injustice of these suspicions is keenly felt.

In particular for those interviewees deported from Europe, their original decision to migrate so far was determined by the need for collective investment because of the much higher expense involved in travelling outside the region. Often families, friends or acquaintances will have lent money in the expectation that it would be repaid and that they would share in the benefits expected. Hussein’s whole family had migrated in stages to Iran, from where they financed the further migration of a brother to Australia and from where Hussein had been deported back to Afghanistan:

My father borrowed 4,000\$ to send my brother abroad. He promised he would send back at least 200\$ every month to my father. He is old and cannot work and there is no work for me here. But he sent back only 500\$ in the two years he has been away so we have to sell our house to repay the debt. (Hussein 25)<sup>4</sup>

When he returned he was completely lost—no job, he lived in his brother’s house whose situation was already not good, he felt like he was worsening their situation, that he brought his entire family down, instead of making their lives better, as he was supposed to do. He is now back in London. (Interview in 2011 with uncle of a man deported in 2009)

The prolonged absence of a loved one and of a contributor to the family income would have been negotiated with the family. Their deportation, like their migration therefore becomes everyone’s business. In Hussein’s case, the creditor had publicly abused his father for not repaying the debt, and elders from both families had met together to negotiate the solution—in this case the sale of the family home. While the stigma is centred upon the person deported it often touches the entire family (Drotbohm 2014).

Goffman (1963) argues that those stigmatised must constantly confront the image that others reflect back at them and deal with their rejection by others. In Afghanistan, there is very little privacy, and it is common for family and neighbours to visit when someone returns and ply them with questions. When one returns without money or gifts, it is hard to hide a deportation. After a time, comparisons are made with the migrant members of other families who regularly send back money or equipment, giving rise to the question ‘if he could take care of his family, why can’t you?’ An Afghan in Paris explained to nods of approval ‘those words are sharper than blades,



and the wounds do not heal' (Nemat 40). Carling and Hernandez-Carratero in the context of Senegalese migrants echo these feelings 'Returnees are not only frustrated and angry but also speak of a sense of shame in relation to having failed and coming home empty-handed' (2008, 4; see also Alpes 2012). This stereotype of the successful migrant leads to rejection and separation from communities and families.

My income is low here and we are under a lot of pressure. The only worry is that people think that the 'son of ...' has returned and has money; I have none. My family would have preferred that I had stayed there so that I could send money back. I was, back in the day, a refugee in Pakistan. I am used to moving around. With this type of pressure and having disappointed people around me, I will probably migrate again, especially given how the situation is deteriorating here day by day. (Mohammad Gol, 34)

Tainted by their failure, they suffer an important loss of status. This in turn affects their employment or marriage prospects. Employment is most often found through networks and connections (*wasita*), so a man's reputation is therefore closely linked to his ability to secure a job. Questions will be asked of different family members and friends about the individual's behaviour abroad and the reasons for his return if it is not voluntary and temporary. Similarly, the stigma of failure can make finding a bride difficult. One of the first acts of many young men when they receive papers is to return to Afghanistan to look for a bride, and his capacity to bring his wife abroad with him is an important point in his favour. Having said that, for some of those who have been deported, marriage is seen as a way to bring him back into the fold, of anchoring him, although this necessitates finding a bride price, which will be difficult if family capital was spent on the journey. If this has repercussions for the marriages of other siblings—this will increase resentment within the family.

The dominant discourse generates stereotypes and rejection of those who challenge those stereotypes, leading to a process of exclusion, but also of internalised stigma (Koku 2010; Campbell and Deacon 2006). Our research highlights the impact of internalising negative stereotypes. Fear of rejection by families and communities may lead those deported to avoid rejection by excluding themselves from the labour market and ultimately by excluding themselves from their home society by re-migrating. The cycle of stigma that is generated is in part self-imposed, since the person deported has failed to live up to his own expectations of himself. One coping strategy is to reject Afghan society as tainted, especially by corruption, as discredited and as different from 'normal societies', a common trend among those deported from Europe.

### *Coping Strategies*

Goffman talks of the stigmatised creating a separate system of honour as a way of managing their stigma (1963, and see Kusow 2004). This is difficult for those deported from Europe, North America or Australia—they are too few and too scattered. However, they can and do attempt to reverse the stigma. Becker and Blumer have argued that stigmatisation may be reversed when 'individuals who are labelled in

a certain fashion talk among themselves about how they are characterised and collectively engage in a process to offset the label' (cited in Kusow 2004, 194). Those deported from the UK, for example, spoke of the rampant corruption in their country, within the government and within the labour market, to the point that it does not seem worthwhile to them to seek a stable employment.

I was very unhappy as soon as I came back. People live like animals here and according to rules that I disagree with; I didn't even want to work here. What is the point if you have to pay to get a job? (Mirwais 25)

They are critical of other returnees, who lived in the US and Europe during the years of war, and who returned voluntarily after 2001 with the passport of their country of exile. These are criticised as some of the worse types of leaders: those who have returned to benefit financially and take the money out of the country, to finance their other Western lives.

How can they build a tall building when I can't even have a mud home? It is not even worth working here. I can buy a job for myself in government if I wanted, but what would be the point? Just the other day someone called me and said that if I paid, I could have a civil servant position. But that does not interest me. If you enter the system, you become as corrupt as them. (Jamshid, 32)

In a form of stigma reversal (Kusow 2004), their experience of life 'over there' is turned into a source of superiority over those who accept how life is 'over here'. There is a disdain for the country of origin, for the society, for way of life and traditions. Rather than directing their frustration, resentment and sense of injustice at the country that deported them, they focus it on the situation in Afghanistan and are sustained by their dreams of returning to, for example, the UK. Ahmad Tamim complained of the overall lack of 'social and cultural environment in this country'.

There is no infrastructure. People live in tents even in Kabul, they have no culture, no good social understanding of how to behave with each other, and the fact that the army and the police do not behave well with ordinary citizens is a big problem. (Ahmad Tamim 38)

Those deported are forced to reconstruct a spoiled identity (Goffman 1963). Snow and Anderson (1987), writing on the homeless, describe a number of the strategies employed to manage stigmatisation, including hiding identities from the public in order to avoid shame and the process of 'fictive storytelling' or 'narrative embellishment' of the past, present and future to disguise actual identities. In the case of those who have been deported, they may try to hide their deportation in a number of ways. Alpes describes the case of Manuella deported from Switzerland to Cameroon, who went to stay with a relative in Nigeria until she could re-migrate to Europe (2012). Those deported to Kabul followed similar strategies. In Kabul, the friend of a young man deported from the UK explained:

When Wali was deported, he could not go home. He was ashamed to face his family. He asked us [his friends] for help, so we put together some money for him to go to Pakistan. His family think he is still in England. (Humayun, 31)

In other cases, the individual may return home but change the narrative of deportation—claiming instead to be visiting, while intending to leave again as soon as the money can be raised. It is difficult to manage this deception without the collusion of the immediate family since returning without money and/or gifts to be displayed to other family members is very hard to explain. If the person deported has the resources they can create another life in the country of origin and leave behind their deportation experience. One such example is the owner of KFC (*Kabul Fried Chicken*) who was deported from Britain and was able to combine his experience of working in a chicken restaurant there with funding from his family to create a successful business in Kabul and avoid the stigma of deportation.

#### *A Complication: The Stigma of ‘Contamination’*

The stigma of deportation is complicated by the stigma of contamination, which can have fatal consequences. In Afghanistan, we found similar responses to those found by Peutz six years earlier: ‘those who are returned to Somaliland are potential spoilers of the true culture at home’ (2006, 227). The teenagers and young adults who left for Europe at a young age and returned with visible and invisible signs of their cultural change (clothing, behaviour, accent etc.) are sometimes seen by family and or the community as ‘contaminated’. In the case of one young man interviewed in 2009 and again in 2011, from Paghman district in Kabul province, his return led to clashes due to the changes he had undergone:

They all bother me because I went to the UK. They say I lost my culture, became a kafir ... all sorts of insults. Another deportee—Habib—returned and was killed in our village last year. I left because I no longer felt safe. But now I have no employment, no stable income, no skills, no future and no family by my side. (Najib, 22)

In this case the stigma has to do with the time spent abroad, rather than the simple fact of having been returned against one’s will. Deportation exposes and compounds the stigma of contamination, particularly for those without economic or social power. As seen from Najib’s comments, this can lead to murder. The stigma of contamination could be mitigated if the person was seen to come back bringing benefits to his family, or if he could present himself as a successful migrant as with the KFC businessman above rather than a failure—although this too has dangers, since we encountered stories of people presumed to have come back with money being kidnapped (Schuster and Majidi 2013).

Peutz (2006) refers to parents who ‘deport’ their children to Somalia as a way of correcting or containing contamination. Musa (40) in Kabul was concerned about his younger brother Mohamad (30) and appealed to Schuster, who had known Mohamad for about four years, to get him deported back to Afghanistan. Mohamad had spent

eight years in Europe, the last four in France. Musa was in despair—his younger brother wasn't studying, didn't seem to be working, had no home, no wife and no children and he had heard that Mohamad was drinking, taking drugs and dating women. Musa himself had recently been deported from Iran, and wanted to see his younger brother before he left again. For Musa, there was no stigma attached to deportation—it could help him save his brother from going to the bad. As we talked, he wept and stroked the photograph of his brother Schuster had brought for him. And yet, if Mohamad was to come back, and against his will, it was hard to see how he would again fit in to life in Afghanistan.

This section highlighted some of the ways in which stigma is a response to the cultural, social and economic shock of deportation. This experience leads many to re-migrate. The longitudinal research completed by Majidi in 2009 and 2011, which found that many had left, generated interviews with their relatives where trauma and stigma were often mentioned, including the unwillingness to adapt to a society that deportees now reject. This sense that the person deported and re-migrating was rejecting society was related to us mainly by family members and friends left behind, who were not prompted for their views on the migrant's decision. Nonetheless, the sense of compassion in these interviews was striking. For example, one young man mentioned sadly that his friend had to leave because he did not feel he belonged anymore. However, in other cases, deportation does not lead to any particular stigma, although it results in re-migration due to the fact that it is a longstanding coping strategy, the 'norm' in Afghanistan. Those deported from Iran, as will be seen in the final section of this paper, are not stereotyped, excluded or rejected. On the contrary, their often violent experiences of irregular migration, difficult working conditions and forced returns, evoke compassion from other Afghans who have witnessed those same conditions (Drotbohm also found compassion for those deported from return migrants to Cape Verde, who understood how precarious life in the US had become (2012, 137)).

### **The Normalisation of Deportation**

As noted by Gavin (this issue) most studies of deportation concentrate on deportations from the Global North to the Global South, although there are significant numbers of people deported within the Global South. In some countries, deportation, while still only involving a minority of the population, is such a significant phenomenon that it has become a norm of that society. Similarly to the study of Zimbabwean migrant workers in Botswana, Afghans migrating to Iran are confronted with a 'constant threat' of deportation, an event that is 'simultaneously disruptive and mundane, stressful and traumatic yet also ... routine and ordinary' (Gavin this issue, p.??) In this scenario, deportation from Iran is lived as a *reverse migration*, when 'achievements of transnational mobility and support capacities are negated', (Drotbohm, 2014). Large numbers of Afghans are regularly forcibly removed from Iran and Pakistan, and increasing numbers from other destinations. In 2011 the

government of Iran recorded 211,023 deportations, down from over 400,000 deportations in 2007, but nonetheless a significant number. One of the more surprising findings arising from Schuster's ethnographic work and confirmed by Majidi's field interviews (Majidi 2008), was the lack of stigma attached to deportations from Iran or Pakistan. For those deported from outside the region there is considerable stigma attached to their forced return, and their deportation is experienced as a catastrophe, but for irregular Afghan workers in Iran, deportation has become an occupational hazard. We suggest that this is due to the level of investment these different types of migration require.

It costs on average \$400 for an irregular entry to Iran, whereas the trip to Europe will cost as much as \$10,000. In addition, upon arrival in Iran, irregular Afghan migrants usually find better-paid employment within a week of their arrival (Majidi 2008) and are able to send money back home within a month. The investment is quickly paid off. We argue that there is no stigma attached to deportation from Iran because of the lower investments, and because of the shared understanding and acceptance of deportation as a reality. It became clear from all the interviews with those families deported from Iran, and from conversations with families and family members in Northern Afghanistan that the potential for stigmatisation was overridden by collective resentment and anger towards Iran because of negative experiences of life in that country and not just of deportation. When during a focus group in Herat one woman said 'we would be happy if America destroyed Iran', the other seven women in the group murmured agreement, while another added:

Yes, America should attack and destroy all Iranians ... I was arrested in the bazaar with my husband. I told them my children [5 & 7 years old] were at home, but they didn't care. They took us to the camp and then to the border ... I didn't see my children for two months until my sister brought them to me. (Zeinab 35)

This anger comes from shared experiences of abuse, discrimination and injustice and a feeling of powerlessness vis-à-vis the dominant society. Baba had lived in Iran and been deported to Afghanistan in 2008. He used this as an opportunity to return home to check on his house, before going back without papers to Iran because the rest of the family and work were there—not because he wanted to:

Here, we say Aqa (sir) or Khanum (madam) or biadar (brother) or khwahar (sister) if we are talking to someone we don't know—but there, they just shout 'Afghan, hey Afghan'. There is no respect. We cannot even buy a sim card—nothing. They can arrest you for nothing. Iranians can beat you and you cannot do anything. If someone beats you—the police will arrest the Afghan'. (Baba 68)

I was walking in the street and two men called to me 'Afghan, come here'. They made me stand and they robbed my money and my phone and then told me 'get out of our country, Afghan. Why are you here? We don't want you'. And other Iranians just looked and said nothing. (Hussein 25—who was stabbed in the stomach during another attack)

Many of the young men had 'war stories' from their time in Iran, including arbitrary arrest, beatings, detention and robbery. While young men are frequent targets of street crime in many countries, the perception of the young men spoken to was that they were targeted because they were Afghan and because they were Afghan their attackers could act with impunity. All of those interviewed, including Hussein, had experienced the detention centres where those arrested are kept until transported to the borders. Family members in Afghanistan knew of the process, since in many cases, they would have received a phone call from the border to send money so the person or family deported could get back to their province. The Sang Sefid detention centre in Iran is known throughout Afghanistan:

I spent 8 days at Sang Sefid detention centre with about 1300 people living and sleeping in the same place. I did not receive any food or water, except for times when I was able to pay for it. We were not even allowed to go to the bathroom or to wash ourselves. I had money stolen from me by the Iranian authorities and I suffered verbal abuse, in the form of insults and other dirty comments. (Reza, 25)

My third arrest and deportation was very difficult. At the detention centre, we received one piece of bread per day, with some rice that no one could possibly eat. We had access to water, but there were no clean bathrooms that we could use. The covers were so dirty we could not use them at night. (Morteza, 40)

Like deportation from Europe, deportation from Iran could be traumatic due to the conditions and manner of deportation, but unlike being deported from Europe or Australia, it was rarely stigmatising and did not lead to rejection or exclusion. An indication of the extreme pressures to migrate and the economic necessity to work, is that in spite of the harsh conditions in Iran and the stigmatisation that they do suffer there—so many Afghans return:

I have been deported three times already. I know a lot of people who get deported and leave immediately the next day to go back. We have no other choice but to try again. (Morteza 40)

I will most certainly go back to Iran. The same economic problems still exist in Afghanistan; I hear it from other deportees who have returned to Ghazni. Unemployment and inflation are everywhere in Afghanistan. So we will all go back for work to Iran. (Hamid, 36)

What is evident here is that while for most people the action—deportation—leads to the same outcome—re-migration; the route is complex. Re-migration does not inevitably follow deportation, though it is the most probable outcome and the reasons for it include fear, poverty, debt, loss and stigmatisation. Even where, as in the case of deportation from Iran, there is no stigmatisation and a lower level of investment, re-migration is still the most likely outcome if the structural problems such as conflict, oppression and poverty in the country of origin are not addressed. There is no one is a necessary factor, but all are sufficient.

## Conclusion

Over a prolonged period of engagement with people directly affected by deportation, the authors were struck first that so many of those who had been deported advanced feelings of shame as reasons for re-migration. However, on closer analysis we found that what we came to understand as a process of stigmatisation seemed to attach more to those who had been deported from further afield, and less to those who were deported from neighbouring states. In this article we have explained this in terms of the level of investment in the project not only by the family of the migrant who has been deported, but also familiarity with conditions in the state from which one is being deported. In other words, stigmatisation may be seen as a way of punishing those who have failed to repay the family's investment and as a way of holding on to the dream of a better life in a distant destination, a dream challenged by deportation. Since a smaller investment is required for migration to Iran or Pakistan, and since there are fewer illusions about life in Iran and Pakistan as compared to life in Australia or Europe, so there is less tendency to punish and greater understanding and sympathy for those deported.

What was particularly striking though was that, regardless of whether one was stigmatised or not, the most common response to deportation was re-migration. Deportation represents at best a temporary set-back, at worst a catastrophe, for the overwhelming majority of those deported and stigmatisation is most likely to occur in the latter case, thus compounding the difficulties experienced by the person deported, and increasing the pressure to re-migrate. There are no easy lessons to be drawn from this analysis, though it confirms findings from other studies examining deportation to and from other states (Alpes 2012; Brotherton and Barrios 2009; Drotbohm 2011a, 2011b; Peutz 2006) that deportation does not deter migration or re-migration, and that its consequences encourage those deported to leave again.

These findings, and those of the other papers in this issue, highlight the importance of developing studies that reflect the complexity of migration: that connect the different stages of the journey; that explore the different actors and structures involved in each stage; and, in particular when it comes to understanding structural factors, takes a comparative approach. This comparative approach allowed us to illustrate how what is 'normal' and what is 'stigmatised' (and by whom) varies according to geographical, historical and political contexts. While a narrow focus is increasingly encouraged in order to generate greater depth, our paper underlines the importance of breadth—of following the migrants and understanding the contexts in which they are embedded. It is only by doing so that assumptions about the efficacy or otherwise of policies can be challenged.

## Acknowledgements

Schuster and Majidi are indebted to the editors and to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments, and to Alice Bloch, Milena Chimienti and John Solomos for comments on an early draught.



Schuster is profoundly grateful to all the families who hosted her but especially Hasidullah, his wife, son and grandson who were unfailingly patient and kind with the strange cuckoo in their nest and to the Leverhulme Trust for funding her time in Afghanistan.

Majidi is indebted to the Social Science Research Council's Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship (DPDF) which funded the second part of the longitudinal study of deportation (2009–2011).

## Notes

- [1] Where possible—re-migration from Cape Verde, for example, is physically impossible because of the island's position (thanks to Heike Drotbohm, one of the editors, for this point).
- [2] As others have noted (Van Hear 2009), it is increasingly difficult to disentangle motivations for migration. Many of those we interviewed and spoke with had left Afghanistan because of the different waves of conflict, though the degree of direct menace to individuals varied. Nonetheless, all assumed that they would be able to contribute to the welfare of their families and many that they would be able to bring their family out. In this paper, we do not therefore disaggregate our interviewees/contacts on the basis of immigration status prior to deportation.
- [3] There are many agencies in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, offering tickets and visas to Australia and Europe for a range of prices and Schuster became used to people asking if she thought that e.g. '\$18,000 for a ticket and visa' was a fair price. When she explained that a return ticket from Kabul to Paris and a visa together should cost about \$1000 and that any agent that added a fee of \$17,000 would be offering services that would not be legal, she was greeted with astonishment and scepticism and asked how they could operate so openly if it was illegal, since many had friends or relations had successfully used these agents—unaware that they might be deported if discovered.
- [4] All names have been changed and the number refers to the speaker's age.

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