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Published online: 25 Sep 2023.

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"Techniques to be respected as a human being!": moving beyond the binary of strategies and tactics

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ABSTRACT
Migrants' actions of embedding in new ethnonational contexts have been interpreted as de Certeau's "tactics of the weak" forging new lives according to their own visions of integration in the territory of the powerful. While the concept of tactics offers a useful tool for understanding migrants as agentic, applications of tactics and strategies as a binary of contrary forms of power simplify our conceptions of how the marginalized navigate everyday life. We argue that understanding actions as tactical and/or strategic should be based in de Certeau's original distinction between *lieu propre* and *espace*, and not subjectivity. Based on our analysis of modes of action by Eritrean refugees in Switzerland, we show that they use both tactical and strategic forms of power, sometimes simultaneously and deploy power by proxy. We argue that it is more productive to see strategies and tactics as forming a continuum of modes of action.

Studies increasingly show migrants as active agents overcoming obstacles and exclusions not only in mobility, but also in longer term settlement (e.g. Conley and Shefner 2020; Lanari 2023; Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche 2020; Şimşek 2018; Torok and Ball 2021). Such efforts have been interpreted as de Certeau's tactics of "making do" by "the weak" (e.g. Hall et al. 2022; Kahveci, Karacan, and Kosnick 2020; Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant 2020). While the analyses provide important insights into how the marginalized cope, they say little about how specifically these tactics are deployed and the mechanisms that make them possible. Further, the assumption that migrants are always "the weak" obscures how some mobilize various forms of power (Harrison, Moyo, and Yang 2012; Secor 2004). This has

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resulted in an impoverished understanding of power relations in migrant (dis)integrative processes that exclude visible migrants thus reproducing colonial forms of knowledge. In the European context, the silencing of "race" as category relevant to the analysis of "integration" of migrants, particularly from Africa, has come under sustained critique from scholars working within the frameworks of Black Europe, Black

Mediterranean, and Black diaspora in Europe (e.g. Hawthorne 2023; Rastas and Nikunen 2019; Small 2018). These scholars call for examination of the dynamics in settlement, exclusions and resistances by migrants from Africa to Europe.

Strategies and tactics are De Certeau's (1984) most celebrated concepts but have also been criticized as "too clear cut" (Ahearne 1995, 163) and "confusing" (Buchanan 2000, 87). De Certeau saw marginalization as a pervasive social condition that forces the disempowered to find ways to manage and use places, products, systems, etc., produced by those more powerful. His schema offers a useful tool to address forms of resistance against exclusions, but its treatment as a binary between power and disempowerment has limited insights. However, he himself showed that the power of those producing the dominant order is differentiated and those with relatively less power resort to tactics thus indicating fluidity between and multiple deployments of tactics and strategies (Ahearne 1995). Andres et al. (2020) demonstrated such tactical deployments of strategic power by urban planners. This and other studies urge thinking of the relation between tactics and strategies (e.g. Buchanan 2000; Secor 2004).

We argue that conceptualizing tactics and strategies as a continuum offers a useful heuristic for understanding how migrants deploy power and develop "techniques" to overcome or sidestep barriers, negotiate strategies of state integration, and counter racist exclusions, calculating what will work and how. Further, we detach power from subjectivity as a factor determining one's relations and practices in everyday life. Instead, we concentrate on De Certeau's (1984) distinction between *lieu propre* and *espace* as instructive to a more nuanced understanding of tactical and strategic deployments of power and their entanglements. We identify and analyze several types of tactics demonstrating how power is negotiated through them. We also show modes of strategic actions that rely on or generate authority. Further, we demonstrate how certain actions are both tactical and strategic deployments of power. Finally, we identify a novel mode of action, strategy by proxy. We thus provide empirical demonstration and theoretical elaboration of the hypothesized tactics-strategies continuum (Ahearne 1995; Buchanan 2000). We also contribute to reconceptualizing migrant integration by centering power dynamics in analyses of relations between national "insiders" and racialized migrant "outsiders" (e.g. Dahinden 2022; Klarenbeek 2019). Attending to struggles with exclusions by visibilizing power relations (Dahinden and

Korteweg 2023) moves us towards decolonizing knowledge of integration in Europe (Amelina 2022). The analysis is based on 65 in-depth interviews with Eritreans who came to Switzerland as forced migrants where many experience structural exclusions. These experiences as well as actions taken to get around barriers or counteract exclusions emerged in interviews conducted by the first author, an Eritrean refugee scholar. Her insider status opened up difficult topics as the participants were surprised that "one of us" was able to study for a doctorate and presumed that she understood some of their struggles. The interviews generated negotiated knowledge from the ground of the scholar's and participants' lived realities. In what follows, we first situate our contribution in the growing research on migrants' active settlement, before presenting a detailed analysis.

Power and agency in settlement contexts

Scholarship on migrant integration has been sharply criticized, in part, for its inattention to power dynamics and reproducing stigmatizing and marginalizing discourses that portray migrants as passive, deficient or solely as "integrating agents," who (are supposed to) diminish their cultural differences and advance their human capital to align with the mainstream society (Klarenbeek 2019, 9; also Favell 2022; Rytter 2018; Schinkel 2018). Although those who cross the poverty threshold become invisible to scholars and policies alike, visible migrants remain stigmatized, while race was rendered irrelevant to integration in Europe (Favell 2022; Schinkel 2018). This makes it difficult to address racist marginalization and perpetuates what Hawthorne, following Crenshaw (2020), calls the "unmattering of Black life" in Europe, (2023, p. 490). In recent challenges, Schinkel (2018) and Favell (2022) see integration policies and practices as racial population management rooted in colonial control of the movement of minorities from former colonies and central to maintaining Europe's self-definition as white. This limited the number of black people in Europe where they are concentrated in a few states, highly visible in urban centers, and overrepresented in low paid, part time and insecure jobs, often in the care economy (Small 2018). In many European states–including in Switzerland, the context of this study-proclamations of a lack of direct involvement in colonialism served to silence race as a relevant social category in social life and scholarly analysis thus leaving racism unaddressed.

However, the mechanisms of such occlusions are being revealed (e.g. Lentin 2008).

Scholars argue that while nativism, manifesting itself in concerns about *Überfremdung* ("over-foreignization") and in *Eidgenosse* ("confederate"), is a key mechanism of exclusion of migrants in Switzerland (Dahinden 2022), the presumed Swiss national is white, its meaning shaped by Swiss complicity in colonialism and its denial (Michel 2015; Purtschert 2015, 2019). Such

recognitions prompted examination of the colonial presumptions in knowledge production as scholars working the Black Mediterranean, Black European studies and others call for attention to the marginalized and yet central relation between (post)colonial Africa, Europe and migration (Hawthorne 2019). Attention to "Black subjectivity, resistance, and livingness" in European contexts is crucial to the decolonial project of challenging Europe's silence about race and its white self-definition (Hawthorne 2023, 485).

The colonialist view of forced migrants as passive recipients of assistance has been challenged by studies that show them as agentic and resilient within dominant structures of integration become entrepreneurial (Balyejjusa 2019; Herwig 2017; Huu, 2021; Liu et al. 2018; Şimşek 2018; Torok and Ball 2021). However, these analyses offer a limited picture of power relations between the embedding migrants, state institutions and the local people. Power is addressed more explicitly by studies that conceptualize migrants' actions as tactics of "the weak" within De Certeau's (1984) framework. They demonstrate its tactical deployment through a variety of actions (Fischer 2020; Hall et al. 2022; Kahveci, Karacan, and Kosnick 2020; Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant 2020). Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche (2020) and Borrelli et al. (2022) combine de Certeau's tactics and strategies with Foucault's microphysics of power to understand agency "as the ability to navigate not only overarching and centralized institutional power (the state, the border regime, etc.,) but also, and mostly, the daily, meticulous and dispersed procedures of disciplining social bodies and discursively ascribing subjectivities" (1144). They argue that "in a new society where one's new presence remains felt and understood as precarious" (Borrelli et al. 2022, 1146), migrants' tactics are "calculated small scale actions" (1145) performed based on their understanding of their reality and their goals.

The duo of strategies and tactics offers a heuristic for a nuanced understanding of how migrants tactically maneuver through and around dominant power structures to achieve their goals. De Certeau sought to deconstruct the perception of those disempowered as passive and demonstrate their ability to convert forces of the dominant order to their advantage. However, the application of tactics and strategies as opposite forms of power and the assumptions that "strategy belongs exclusively to the host society, and migrants are relegated to the realm of tactics" limits our understanding of relations between "outsiders" and "insiders" (Harrison, Moyo, and Yang 2012, 901) and nuances of migrants' "uses" of products, resources, discourses, etc., of the dominant society. Certain groups of migrants, particularly those who are economically strong and politically well-connected, have access to strategic forms of power. Even the marginalized can mobilize power strategically such as when Kurds in Turkey "disrupt the hegemonic strategy of

citizenship" and "through spatial appropriation" strategically claim Kurdish neighborhood or café as their places (Secor 2004, 360).

Andres et al. (2020) argue that de Certeau's distinction between *lieu propre* and *espace* is central to a more complex understanding of how power is wielded tactically and/or strategically. The term *lieu propre,* a proper place, refers to a demarcated territory of authority to strategically enact, rule and execute thereby maintaining stability and predictability in the social system (Andres et al. 2020; Buchanan 2000). *Lieu propre* is a space of strategy, which de Certeau defines as

> the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment". A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research). (1984, p. xix)

In contrast, *espace* doesn't have a terrain of its own but is fluid and contextually changing, composed of mobile elements that join forces within the constraints of time and space to execute actions (De Certeau 1984, 117). It is "a practiced place" where "the weak" tactically "turn to their own ends forces alien to them" not to upend the system but simply "make do" (De Certeau 1984, p. xx). Their power is in the ability to effectively manipulate and maneuver around constraining forces.

> I call a "tactic," on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. [...] Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities". (De Certeau 1984, p. xx)

While clear at the outset, on closer look the distinction between strategies and tactics becomes fuzzy. However, Ahearne (1995) and Buchanan (2000) argue that they are formulated elusively and suggestively as "an initial schema" (De Certeau 1984, 35) to create a broader framework, rather than conclusively to investigate "modes of operation or schemata of action" (ibid, p. xii). Ahearne (1995) asserts that the conceptualization allows identifying "a number of heterogeneous movements across different distributions of power," not opposing forms of power (p.163). De Certeau himself proposed that those with strategic power may at times resort to "tricks" and "deception" when faced with those with greater strategic powers (1984, 37). Andres et al. (2020) explicate tactical actions by those working within *lieu propre* of strategies, and argue that it is important to look closely at the circumstances in which a particular action is executed to understand tactics

and strategies (also Buchanan 2000; Secor 2004). We thus closely examined practices by people who arrived as forced migrants from Eritrea.

Eritreans who came to Switzerland as forced migrants

Eritreans began to arrive in Switzerland, a country with a "miniscule" black presence and indirect links to colonization (Small 2018, 3; see also e.g. Michel 2015, Purschert 2015) in 1980s and 1990s fleeing political repression, indefinite military service and border conflict with Ethiopia (Kibreab 2009). The initially restricted numbers increased after the revision of the asylum act in 2009 reaching a peak in 2015 and 2016 (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2022b). Eritreans make up the largest non European refugee group of approximately 40,969 among the 8 million population in Switzerland (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2022b). They are the largest group of refugees who depend on social welfare living below the poverty line due to high unemployment and insufficient income (Swiss Federal Statistical Office 2022a). Poor education, language barriers, difficulty accessing training and a lack of recognition of diplomas are primary obstacles hindering mobility upward. However, those with good education and showing social "integration" still face structural exclusions limiting their upward mobility (Eyer and Schweizer 2010).

Methods

The analysis draws from 65 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Eritreans who came to Switzerland as forced migrants conducted by the first author. Participants from diverse backgrounds and migration cohorts were recruited across Switzerland to understand the breadth of experiences with settlement. They were between 28 and 60 years old, 30 were female, 35 were male, and lived in Switzerland between 7 and 40 years, with most settled for 14–25 years. 18 held Swiss citizenship. 25 held permanent residency C permits granted after holding a B permit for 5 or 10 years and demonstrating "successful integration". 19 held B permits granted to asylum seekers recognized as refugees and allowing a permanent stay but subject to renewal every 1-2 years. 3 held a provisional F residency permit for 11, 13 and 15 years. The F permit prevents deportation as long as the situation in their home country is unchanged and while it allows work, potential employers tend to be reluctant to hire F permit holders. Participants were identified through personal and social networks of the first author and subsequently through snowballing. The interviews, held in Tigrinya, the lingua franca of Eritrea, lasted 2-3 hours, were recorded and transcribed. The interviews focused on their experiences in Switzerland, although many began by recounting their refuge seeking journeys.

Statement of Ethics. The research project was approved by the Università della Svizzera italiana Ethics Committee in February 2020. The participants were informed of their rights. All but one declined to sign the consent form opting instead to give verbal consent for fear of a paper trail that could be used against them by the Eritrean or Swiss government. All quotes in this paper are anonymized and potentially identifying details duly omitted.

The first author came to Switzerland from Eritrea as a student in 2010 and obtained refugee status in 2014. While she shared her status with the participants, many repeatedly asked how she managed to become a doctoral student while they were struggling to secure survival. Her tacit knowledge of a refugee experience allowed her to understand their fears, suspicions and hesitation to share experiences. She reassured participants that political topics were off limits. Taking part in community activities, sharing her status and predicaments, and answering their questions helped her assuage their trepidations and create rapport thereby turning the interviews into guided conversations. While this did not completely balance the power relations between her and the participants, it facilitated frank exploration of experiences with exclusion and various efforts to overcome them. The second author is an academic white repeat migrant who designed and directed the project. Early, she saw the importance of collaborating with a scholar from the community when in a pilot study interlocutors seemed anxious to stress that "everything was fine" but shared only sparse details about their lives.

The focus on tactics and strategies emerged during a broader inductive data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Reading through the transcripts, we noted various practices the participants undertook to overcome barriers and solve problems. We turned to De Certeau's (1984) tactics and strategies to elucidate the nature of these practices and analyzed the data by progressively comparing our insights with other research (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Findings

The participants used both tactics and strategies, sometimes simultaneously. Some of their actions had elements of both. We also identified tactical mobilization of strategies by proxy. Below we demonstrate that migrants have access to strategic power and that their practices move on a continuum between tactics and strategies.

Discursive and practical tactics

The participants recounted many stories of bureaucratic obstacles, structural exclusions and episodic racism that impeded their upward mobility. They

responded to various expressions of racism with indirect and humorous resignifications, sarcasm, ironic flips and "linguistics altercations" (De Certeau 1984, 40) that we classified as discursive tactics. Such responses contested or subverted domination allowing the participants to salvage some dignity, even if momentarily. They also went around barriers or requirements by finding "cracks", loopholes or weak links in the system, fudged, and otherwise "made do" to access resources. They worked within the established order by momentarily subverting rules, exclusions or offensive attacks. We classified these "schemata of actions" as tactically practical maneuvers (De Certeau 1984, p. xvi). These practical and discursive tactics are "*on the watch for the opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'*" (De Certeau 1984, p. xx). Such actions allowed survival and small steps towards finding jobs, training, housing or subverting exclusions through creative usurping of power in a system that marginalized them.

Having heard many offensive statements, some participants developed tactics of defensively reversing them. Here we analyze one type of reversal, an ironic flip, that substituted categories in the original statement to apply it to the offenders. A participant who lived in Switzerland for 14 years recounted:

> *I am the only black who works there. It is a job that is reserved only for white people. You know that there are specific jobs only for whites and certain jobs only for blacks. The people who work there are Italians, Portuguese and Swiss. It is unthinkable for a black man to work there. […] Now, I am fully aware that I will be called black, and I made myself ready for that. Before, I used to confront and fight and quit working when white people disparagingly called me black. Now when at work, they call me "hey, you black," I call them back saying, "hey, you white." However, they say that as a form of a joke because they know they can be penalized. Pretending it is a joke, they tell me: "we are not racist. We are working with a black man". Then I respond, pretending to joke, "I am not a racist. I am working only with whites (with laughter)". So it appears as a joke. They know they cannot say something like this in a serious tone.*

He used humor and ironically flipped the black and white categories to tactically contest statements that, in his perception, asserted superiority of whites and his inferiority as a black person. We interpret an *ironic flip* as a form of reversal discourse, a term first coined by

Foucault (1990) to show various forms of discursive resistance to power relations (Lilja 2022). The substitution of "white" for "black" visibilized racism in the original statement that only "makes sense" from the position of whiteness (Dahinden and Korteweg 2023). It further turned the original offender into the butt of the joke. The participant resisted discursive subjugation that relegated him to an inferior social position and claimed equal status through humor knowing that if the original statement was defended as "a joke", the colleagues could not object on those same terms. His response is

a form of trickery relying on it being fast on the spot for its fleeting effective-ness. While it chips away at the raised boundaries, it does not prevent rep-etitions that raise the boundaries again thus requiring a sustained effort.

When performing practical maneuvers, the participants "subvert(ed) bar-riers or exclusions not by rejecting or altering them" but by looking for oppor-tunities, circumventing barriers and transforming setbacks into opportunities (De Certeau 1984, p. xiv). They performed tricks such as fudging information about residence permits to gain access to employment, registered businesses under different names and/or in different cantons to avoid bureaucratic administrative laws, accepted jobs paying "under the table" or procured sick leave certificates to avoid toxic work environments. When a participant's recommendation for a friend's citizenship application was rejected because she was a naturalized citizen, she maneuvered to help her friend:

> They didn't accept my name. They told the woman that my nationality was not by birth, but by naturalization. […] Then I had to find a solution to help the woman not to miss the opportunity of obtaining citizenship. I had to find another Swiss woman, who never knew the applicant. So, the name of that woman had to be submitted on the application and the applicant eventually obtained citizenship. In reality, I know the other Eritrean woman more than the Swiss person, but they don't trust you, as if you could never have an objective opinion on any issue.

Her realization that her naturalized citizenship was not seen as equal to that of "native" Swiss by the state apparatus that defines recommendation from a naturalized citizen as evidence of a lack of integration and thus a ground for rejecting a citizenship application. Degraded as a citizen, she nevertheless found a way to help her friend by recruiting a citizen "by blood" to provide a recommendation letter. The recommender's familiarity with the applicant was never verified and this "crack" made poaching the recommendation possible (De Certeau 1984, p. 37-39). Contra strategic power from the *lieu propre* of the state apparatus that relegated her to *espace*, she tactically exer-cised her power to procure a recommendation.

While many participants were supported by their social workers, others spoke in desperation about those who were unhelpful or even prevented them from pursuing opportunities. A participant recounted:

> www, these people [the assistants] are very cruel [with frustration and anger]. These people do not want us to be independent. They want us to live under social assistance. First of all, I was not allowed to continue with the French lessons. Then they told me that I had acquired enough knowledge, so all I had to do was to practice communication. Imagine, I only did A1 [entry level] [with astonishment and anger]. I was sent to a refugee camp. At first, she told me to work there only for three weeks, but I worked for three months. When she asked me how my French was, I told her I learned Arabic [with anger]. Everybody spoke Arabic, but nobody spoke French, and it did not help me improve my language. The funny thing was that all the people working there had N permits

[asylum application under review]. I was the only one with a B permit. The other funny thing was that I worked full time and did not get any salary. I was considered under social assistance. They are used to free labor. They don't want to hire people with a proper salary [angrily]. So they always try to fill the gap by bringing people like me. And my colleagues were making fun of me, asking why I was working with them while having a B permit. When I told her, she just refused. Then I left the job [with sadness and anger]. She threatened me, saying that there was nothing I could do without her. After that, I could not work or learn French. Finally, I learned French for a year paying for it myself from the money we got for food. Then I learned to drive. After getting my driving license, I studied and took the Uber test. I passed and started working as an Uber driver. They were not happy about it. Then after a year, they started sending many bills just to discourage me. Usually, you expect them to encourage someone trying to be independent. However, all they try to do is to discourage us. Now we have overcome all these challenges and become independent. We are doing very well now.

The participant already had a residence work permit but was unable to find a job. Expressing his negative emotions through a paralinguistic "*www*" and the word "*cruel*," he speculated that social assistants exploited refugees' dependence to assert their dominance instead of facilitating their independence from social welfare. He saw coercion to work in the camp where he could not advance his French, a threat to halt his social assistance payments, and denial of access to free language courses as mistreatment and abuse of power due to his vulnerability.

He took a risky step of quitting his assigned but non-remunerated job and persisted by paying for language courses from his food allowance. We suspect that from *lieu propre* he was likely seen as difficult, irrational or belligerent. But from his *espace* of the weak, he refused to be docile and further hurt his long term prospects, and instead engaged in actions according to his own operational logic (De Certeau 1984). While he had no means to directly contest the social worker's assignment and get a different one, he went around it, for a while even increasing his vulnerability. He subverted the restrictions by using the food allowance towards obtaining what he wanted, an outcome the social care system had no choice but to accept.

Strategies

Some participants were able to exercise power from *lieu propre* that sometimes they created themselves. In cases when racist colleagues or customers questioned their social position, potential or belonging, they wielded their institutional powers to contest racialization and exclusion. They invoked institutional laws or used their institutional authority. A participant who worked as a master bike mechanic recounted how he retaliated against a racist client:

My colleagues call me "Jimi" and so the client did not expect a black man. To avoid me, she went to my colleagues. She was sent back to me. My colleagues are

supportive of me. And according to the rule, they cannot receive a client unless it goes through me. I didn't show her emotions, but I didn't want to do favors that I usually do for my clients. In our business, we do favors for people who don't have money. I charged her a lot. I know how to deal with these types of people without being aggressive or showing them emotions.

The participant had strategic discretionary power due to the workplace policy and the support of his colleagues. When a client tried to avoid dealing with him, the black bike mechanic, he used his discretionary power derived from *lieu propre* that granted him authority to penalize the customer. This strategic "dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Yuval-Davis 2006; p. 204) against him evoked strong emotions that he had to manage to not reveal them. His strategy of offense as the best defense originated from *lieu propre* whose rules as well as colleagues' support forced the customer to deal with the black bike mechanic across the boundary she tried to reinforce. While this could be seen as only a momentary boundary lowering, the institutional support offers possibilities of chipping at boundaries, if not structural change.

Participants recounted stories of finding out which restaurants or bars did not welcome them and avoiding such places. However, some "forced" inclusion, such as a participant who wanted to socialize with a group of friends in a nearby restaurant where the owner tried to make them feel unwelcome:

In the beginning he was showing us arrogance. We forced our way and we were chatting. Then he would tell us to not talk loudly. He used to complain. But we wanted to show him that we are equal to any other Swiss people in this place and we confronted him. He used to tell us that the place was reserved, when it was not. We told him we had the right to sit and that we live like any other people by paying taxes. Nobody is dependent on social welfare. We are all living while paying our taxes like any other Swiss person. Our constant confrontation attracted the attention of other people as well. So he started to be concerned about that. He finally gave up because he was afraid to have a problem. Because some people started also to notice.

When the owner tried to exclude them from the restaurant, the group persistently confronted his lies about reservations and his complaints about noise. While the owner operated in *lieu propre*, the group was able to assert their right to its use from the *lieu propre* of citizenship and paying taxes "like other Swiss people". Their claim of paying taxes challenged discourses of refugees' dependence on social assistance and a burden to taxpayers that are persistent in Switzerland. This was not a tactical act of "making do" but rather a strategic persistent spatial staking out of a claim to a semipublic place that attracted other customers' attention and eventually broke through the boundary. While their assertion of paying taxes could be viewed as reproducing a discourse of "good vs. bad" refugees that devalues Eritreans unable to find jobs, such a reading limits understanding power

dynamics and reduces agency to emancipation (Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche 2020). Rather, their assertions are means of moving from *espace* of black refugees disempowered by perceptions of dependency on welfare to *lieu propre* where citizenship rights can be exercised through persistence and the restaurant owner's authority can be challenged. These participants strategically, not tactically, exercised their agency with pragmatism fitting the specific situation to appropriate space for themselves within dominant power structures (Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche 2020; see also Secor 2004).

Between tactics and strategies

Some participants, particularly those with long residency and who arrived as children, were empowered by their citizenship, educational credentials from Eritrea or Switzerland, and advanced professional employment. They still faced acts of exclusion and mobilized different forms of power in response. A naturalized citizen who resided in Switzerland for over 26 years and worked in a government office where she experienced racist exclusion, explained with anger ringing in her voice: "*Because I am black and a lady! They don't have any reason! My name is Arayabrhan not Depan!* [a typical French-Swiss surname]". Their ability to exercise power as citizens was curtailed by the lack of symbolic recognition owing to raced nativism (Dahinden 2022, 8). When they encountered racialization and systemic exclusions, they engaged in actions that were partially strategically derived from *lieu propre* and tactically from *espace* demonstrating that actions can have elements of strategies and tactics. Below we show that strategies and tactics are not necessarily opposite forms of power but form a continuum allowing for a more complex understanding of actions (Ahearne 1995; Buchanan 2000).

A participant who worked as a school teacher at the time of the interview recounted her daughter's experience of racism and the techniques she employed to contest prejudice and negotiate acceptance.

> … *my daughter was excellent in her class. […] one teacher doubted how she could get better grades than Swiss students. Another teacher came from a different canton and said my daughter got good grades because she cheated. She always punished her.* […] *I intentionally used my professional email to ask for an appointment.[…] It was a way of telling her where I work. During the meeting, I skillfully & deliberately started the conversation in a friendly tone, discussing everyday life, my background before I came to Switzerland, what I do for a living, the challenges I have been through. I perfectly speak five languages. I did not go and quarrel. As much as possible, I managed the situation peacefully. I spoke about myself to make her see the type of people my daughter is surrounded by. The teacher, in return, started sharing negative experiences she encountered in her professional life when moving from one canton to another. I told her that even though my daughter is black, she came from a family with a strong background. Without*

confrontation, I made her understand that we are not just refugees and the kind of family my daughter is surrounded by. The following day she spoke with my daughter with a friendly attitude. […] There is racism at school.

Faced with explicit discrimination from a teacher, the participant made a calculation of what power was available to her. She concluded the teacher's actions were racist and that this would affect how she would be received. Calculating that a direct challenge to charges of cheating would not have worked, she strategically derived power from her professional status which she indirectly communicated through her professional email address. Having put herself on the same professional level as the teacher, she then tactically engaged her in a cordial and friendly conversation to present herself and her family as not "just refugees". The meeting was no longer between a teacher and a black refugee in a disempowered position (De Certeau [1984](#)) but between two teachers who shared experiences. Her action had both strategic and tactical elements that cannot be separated out but instead combine to place the action somewhere between a tactical and strategic enactment of power cobbled up from different sources.

Another participant, a naturalized citizen with considerable strategic power by virtue of his professional position, consciously developed "techniques" to not just cope with but to change the power dynamics that marginalized him at his workplace. He used his advanced position in *lieu propre* to tactically pose a technical question about something he had expert knowledge to expose the chief's ignorance.

I am the only black in the office […] Sometimes some people when they see you at a meeting they get shocked but they control their emotion, although you can see it from their body language. You can feel that they are wondering though. […] You can call it racism. There are also other instances, which are not explicit or verbally communicated. In anything related to my job, I always strive to know more than what they know. Some supervisors may not even know a lot about the job. Others can be high officials assigned from above and they may think that they are invincible. There was one man, the chief of the department, who later became assigned to a higher position. But he was not a nice person. […] I cannot say anything concrete, but he has an attitude, difficult to explain. You can challenge such kind of people by asking technical aspects about which they are less knowledgeable. For example, in a meeting setting you can expose them by raising technical questions for which they don't know the answer. That way you can devastate them. Then they start respecting you … So, instead of telling people "you are a racist," you can communicate your message in a way that is more meaningful. If you do it that way, you can win […] I am trying to tell you about some techniques to make sure that you are respected in your work place. If you do that, they don't even remember you are a black person. They start to respect you as a human being, because at that stage they start to care more about their own self.

As the only black professional at his workplace, the participant was adept at reading indirect expressions of racism. When he sensed racist disregard from

his boss, he tossed out a surprise technical question that others could not answer thereby revealing his higher expertise. He saw his knowledge as his protective resource and understood that enhancing it was a technique to protect himself against marginalization. While by virtue of his position as an expert in the institution he held strategic power, he was nevertheless subject to pervasive racialization. He strategically calculated and exercised the power of his expertise from *lieu propre* by tactically posing a question aimed to indirectly "devastate" his boss and earn his respect without explicitly challenging him. The indirectness of exclusionary attitudes made it impossible to directly challenge them, but the participant maneuvered strategically and tactically to win respect as "a human being".

Strategies by proxy

Many participants found it very difficult to secure employment or job training, rent apartments or even buy mobile subscription. One explained:

> I have with me more than 500 apartment application forms. I kept them all. I wanted to use them to explain how difficult Switzerland is for refugees. You apply and keep applying and get no response.

Facing such daunting rejections and not finding sufficient institutional assistance, they felt powerless as outsiders to enter into the space of the insiders. They understood that the insiders, or local people, whether social workers, neighbors or friends, had access to such spaces and could help them. A statement such as: "Mrs. X is clever, all of her friends are locals" was common among the community members longing for such contacts. Certainly, most of the time, most local people are themselves de Certeau's *weak* tactically moving through spaces designed or controlled by those with strategic powers. However, to those who arrived as refugees and faced structural exclusions, they appeared to be powerful actors with access to rights, resources and networks. Some participants bet that befriending locals could open up opportunities and attempted to meet local people to create networks. Much research shows the importance of networks and the help of locals as fundamental to settlement (Ager and Strang 2008; Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019).

The participants reported many examples of insider friends helping them secure employment, accommodations and influence, or convince administrative entities or other insiders to make favorable decisions. However, where and how to meet locals was a challenge as the participants saw the space of the locals closed off by social boundaries with few bridges. With despair, they asked the interviewer: "*where can you find natives*?" A participant explained that she tried to make local friends by "*trial and error*" approaching people in public spaces such as neighborhoods, churches, work places or

even public transport and, e.g. making open comments about the weather to a person sitting next to her on a train, hoping that someone would respond and a conversation ensue. Such tactics sometimes paid off creating looser social relations or friendships and allowing the participants to "poach" the local acquaintances' or friends' strategic powers.

Many participants explained that when local people see their motivation to adapt, learn the language, and find employment quickly, they are willing to help. This self-presentation contra popular stereotypes of welfare dependency becomes a tactical deployment of power. Local peoples' privileged insider position, identity and knowledge were viewed as instrumental assets that give them power to influence and change decisions of state or nonstate actors. This does not mean that all contacts and friendships were only instrumental or somehow not genuine. But those friendships served an important role in overcoming exclusions. They are also seen as such by the Swiss state apparatus which requires friendships with locals as evidence of integration. We demonstrate how friendships and acquaintances made it possible for the participants who could not act strategically to use strategies by proxy. We argue that tactics and strategies should not be understood only as forms of power performed by a single individual and that their use "by proxy" is a deployment of power.

Churches provide opportunities for meeting people due to their communal character. Some reported that local worshipers stared at them in church and did not approach. Other participants did not go to non-orthodox churches. However, some saw churches as opportunities. A participant explained that to make friends, she attended a non-orthodox church, knowing that her transgression was perceived as outrageous in her circle.

> After absorbing this country and understanding the challenges, the first thing I did was I tried my best to meet local people and create a network. […] You know my religion is orthodox but unlike many Eritreans, I don't restrict myself from going to other churches. I go to the Catholic church on Sundays when they have mass to meet new people. I approach them and introduce myself. Who cares about denominations. I have my belief and it doesn't matter where I go and pray. That is the problem with Eritreans. They don't grab opportunities to establish networks in their surroundings. I am a very open person. I am not a conservative person. I tell them all my background and my history without any reservation. I try my best to earn their trust. I have now a lot of friends, who call and help me with everything, like finding an apartment.

Frustrated by barriers, she made a choice that she believed to be crucial to overcome them and achieve her goals, such as finding a job and accommodations. Keeping her "beliefs to herself," she attended a different church to meet local people with access to resources she lacked. Once she entered an enclave of locals, she started building friendships by providing information about her background. Attending a church of different denomination where

she was more likely to meet locals and approaching them was tactical based on her observations of daily life and her conclusion that others from Eritrea were limiting themselves and not pursuing opportunities actively enough. Her actions allowed her to make friends and use their connections, knowledge, local accent and insider status to gain access to the labor market, housing and other resources. This is illustrated by another participant who explained how her insider friend helped her secure a rental apartment:

> When I called a woman to rent an apartment, she asked me if I was a refugee. When I said yes, she said they rent apartments only to Swiss people. I said ok and told my Swiss female friends. When I told them, their "blood boiled". […] They said that it was unacceptable and described the behavior of the woman as undisciplined. When I got my permit, my Swiss friend from church helped me look for an apartment in a local newspaper. Most of the time, they don't rent apartments like this to Africans. They give you negative responses and all kinds of excuses, such as you are unemployed, under social welfare, or something like that. Before we contacted the advertising agency, my friend personally met with the landlord. She told him about me, saying all the nice things about my daughter and me. He asked her to meet with me. I visited the apartment, and I was able to rent it.

When she experienced discrimination in the housing market because of her status and skin color, she reached out to her Swiss friends. The strong bond she established with them helped her overcome discrimination that angered them. Rejecting her application because she was not Swiss was not only judged as wrong by her friends but evoked anger and incited commitment to help her rent an apartment. Her friend's going around the rental agency was tactical and approaching the landlord directly was strategic based on her insider knowledge and national identity. It is from this position that the friend's "blood boiled" and she judged the landlady's behavior as "unacceptable" and "undisciplined". It also gave her access to the *lieu propre* of the landlord who had power to determine access. The participant engaged her friend's powers thereby using what was not initially hers but became hers.

Repeated rejections of participants' job applications by employers due to their unwillingness to hire people with F refugee provisional permit or a lack of awareness that the law allows it, was sometimes an insurmountable problem. Some participants mobilized tactics and strategies by proxy concurrently to circumvent the exclusion. A participant, who struggled to find a job with an F permit, fudged information about his residence status to an interested employer.

> The woman asked me about my permit, and I lied about it. I told her that my permit was B. Because I had experienced a lot of problems because of my permit. Employers refuse to offer jobs to refugees with an F permit. […] They don't know the permit. So because I was aware of this, I said I had a B permit. After a one-day probation period, the woman agreed to take me. Then when I

told my assistant, he proposed to go with me. Then the owner of the restaurant told him about her intention to hire me [...]Then when we were about to sign the contract, she asked me for my permit. When she saw my permit, the owner was shocked: "Is your permit F?" I kept quiet. Then my assistant said: "so what is your problem, yes, his permit was F". He explained to her that I am a refugee who is supported by [organization]. He also told her about the possibility of changing the F permit to a B permit. Then he asked her if she wanted to hire me, and she said yes. So I got hired.

The participant was well aware that his chance of securing a job with the F permit was slim. When a potential employer showed interest in hiring him, he knew his permit would be a reason for the employer to withdraw the offer. However, he saw the employer's carelessness in verifying his residence permit up front as a "crack" that he could leverage. Cracks are viewed as opportunities by those disempowered, they thus "vigilantly make use of them by poaching and creating surprises in them" (De Certeau 1984, 37). His initial lie about his permit was a trick to get further into the process when he could recruit the strategic power of his social worker to support him. After having lost other job opportunities, he resorted to trickery. Tricks are used by the weak when they realize they are their "only possibility, as a 'last resort'" (De Certeau 1984, 37). He then involved his social assistant who had strategic power by virtue of his position to convince the employer about the rights of the F permit holders. While the strategic power was not his, he recruited the authority of his social worker.

He thus mobilized both tactics and strategies by proxy as complementary forms of authority.

Conclusions

This study expands de Certeau's framework of strategies and tactics to understand how those who arrived as forced migrants mobilize and deploy different forms of power in longer term settlement. While studies recognized that migrants deploy power tactically to successfully overcome obstacles and exclusions, their analyses limited migrants' practices to tactics by virtue of migrant outsider status and marginalization. Instead, we take de Certeau's two forms of power as an initial distinction to understand its varied deployments by migrants in the practice of everyday life. We showed how participants tactically exploited cracks, poached and played tricks through practical and discursive maneuvers from *espace* of the marginalized, in distinction from deployments of strategic power by participants who derived it from their institutional positions or group organization. To be sure, this does not mean that those participants are all powerful and thus do not experience marginalization but rather that they were able to counteract it to a greater or lesser extent on the basis of their institutional positions.

This points towards possibilities of structural changes, however modest, in distinction to the fleeting effects of tactics. We also demonstrate that the participants found ways of mobilizing strategic power by proxy as they recruited insider friends with more knowledge and access to the dominant social structures to act on their behalf.

A key to recognizing actions as tactical, strategic or mixed lies in the distinction between the places from which power is exercised: *lieu propre* or *espace*, and not based on agents' subjectivity that runs counter to de Certeau's own formulations. If we detach power from subjectivity, we can see that the participants were not fixed in a marginalized position. Some were able to snatch some power in *espace*. Others had formal access to *lieu propre* by virtue of their employment or claimed it through skillful appeals to laws or group organization, however their positions in *lieu propre* were differentiated affording degrees of, rather than absolute, authority. In daily practices, some moved among multiple spaces where power calculations changed. Further, we demonstrate that some actions have elements of tactics and strategies and argue for conceiving them as a continuum rather than opposite forms of power. While those who arrived as forced migrants experience marginalization in various forms, it is important to not see them all as "the weak" "outsiders" who can only "make do" in the territory of the powerful. Understanding how those structurally disempowered "make do" and those with authority counteract exclusions requires attention to the sources of power and the manner in which it is deployed. The practices we highlighted here do not change the system or demolish the boundaries excluding them. Even if they allow only survival or salvaging some dignity, they are significant precisely as coping mechanisms, and should be viewed as agentic. We thereby extend Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche (2020) important contribution on migrant agency by pointing to various sources and forms of power mobilized by migrants facing systemic racism. Although there was no space to explore it here, many participants avoided or even refused to describe their exclusions as racists. While this is problematic, their tactical "making do" and strategic counteractions carry them through experiences of everyday racism whether they acknowledge them as such or not.

Our study contributes to rethinking the much embattled concept of "migrant integration" as power laden (Klarenbeek 2019) and differentiated through race based exclusions (Dahinden 2022; Favell 2022). As we show, we should neither assume that forced black migrants do not have access to power sources, nor romanticize their power to overcome exclusions while settling down in a different ethnonational context. Our study demonstrates that the process of embedding is a power struggle where different understandings of situational particularities, conflictual visions of success, individual reasoning by migrants, bureaucrats and social workers, practical

expediencies as well as government integration regime align, collide and become entangled in tense configurations that are shaped by racial, religious and other exclusionary logics to various effects. This is particularly pronounced in the case of forced migrants, most of whom are visible minorities in Europe, who must depend on and are constrained by state institutions. Attention to the multidimensionality of practices will go a long way towards understanding the actual conditions of racist and other marginalizations, migrant agency (Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche 2020) and "livingness" of migrants from Africa in Europe (Hawthorne 2023, p. 2).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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