

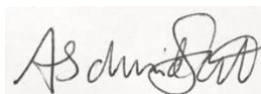
BUREAUCRACY,
VIOLENCE,
RESISTANCE

An account of Home Office reporting in Britain

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Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Schmidt', enclosed within a light grey rectangular box.

For Pedro and Abel

‘Neither the impact or the amelioration of violence will make sense if violence is configured only as a physical act. It is in the more intangible realms of the ‘existential’ - the meaning of existence - that violence takes its definition and its toll. It is here that resolving violence must begin.’

— Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War* (2004a: 69)

Abstract

Scholarship on asylum often overlooks bureaucracy, folding its associated sites and practices into the broader, more overtly violent spaces and systems in which they take place. Yet, this thesis demonstrates that contributions which only focus on overt or more visible forms of violence are not necessarily indicative of asylum seekers' daily experiences. They also inadequately reflect how a modern state governs the lives of those seeking asylum, from the everyday intimate experience of state-enforced destitution, through to the structural dynamics that threaten and enforce the detainment and removal of individuals from Britain; though seemingly disparate experiences, both are part of a broader political agenda for making life unliveable for unwanted migrants. Making connections across these different modes of violence and the logics through which they operate underpins the aims of this thesis.

Based on 16-months of ethnographic fieldwork, including 11-months as a Signing Support volunteer at a Home Office reporting centre, I argue that Home Office reporting provides a critical site for understanding how these various modes of violence come together. By drawing together aspects of Hannah Arendt's poignant analysis of bureaucracy with feminist theorisations of violence, I argue that the threat of physical force plays a constitutive role in creating a politically induced condition of precarity amongst asylum seekers. Yet, as I will explore, these sites can never fully extinguish the possibility of resistance and by appropriating a Rancièrian notion of dissensus, I show how both asylum seekers and Signing Support volunteers who offer support to those reporting, find ways to disrupt the 'going-on-being' of these operations. I argue that these forms of resistance have oftentimes, indeterminate political outcomes, yet are an important form of politics in momentarily challenging these operations.

Acknowledgments

I firstly wish to express my gratitude to all those who took part in this research project. I especially thank all those experiencing the asylum system who shared their time and their stories. For their privacy and safety, I have changed their names.

I thank Bristol Signing Support, and in particular Sophy, Sarah, Gaie and Natasha¹, for their kindness, their openness, and their hospitality. I am also grateful to Emily and Anna at United for Change, Alice at Bristol Refugee Rights, Lisa at Right to Remain and Penny and Rachel at Bristol Hospitality Network, all of whom gave their time to me in different ways, and without whom, this research would not have been possible.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisory team, Professor Nick Gill, Dr. Bice Maiguashca and Dr. Karen Tucker. Together, their critique and support were invaluable throughout this project, and their collective enthusiasm got me through some low points. Nick, thank you for believing in me, for supporting me at every stage, and for keeping me on track; Bice, who provided incisive and challenging questions and critique at its most critical stages; and Karen, whose detailed feedback made this a far better thesis than it would otherwise have been. I am so grateful to each of you for going above and beyond.

My eternal gratitude goes to all my family both in the UK and in Switzerland; especially to my parents for their support, including all the childcare they happily provided during the writing up stage; my sister Chloë and all her family who, as well as making our move to Exeter so much more enjoyable, helped so much with childcare; my sister Emma for being my eternal encourager; Mark and Kylie for their support, especially during our “lockdown” together in France, and by providing delicious meals and wine

¹ Pseudonym

after long days of writing; and Beat and Klara for their consistent interest in this work, and for always looking after me during trips to Zürich. This thesis would not have been completed were it not for you all.

Thanks also go to all those in Exeter University's Geography department who became valued friends along the way. Special thanks go to Patrycja Pinkowska and Emma Marshall, for all our important discussions about asylum research and politics and for generally being inspiring friends and wonderful companions throughout this journey, and who helped to make it less solitary. To Sunnie Wu, Susan Warren, Kuba Jablonowski and Angeliki Balayannis, I am so thankful for their friendship and support and have benefited so much from our conversations over the last five years. I also want to thank Dr. Jen Bagelman, who as well as becoming a dear friend, also became like a mentor to me over the course of this PhD (and beyond). Special thanks go to her and Noam for inviting me to their beautiful home for a writing retreat at a critical time during this project. Our conversations about work and about life have been invaluable to me, and her intellectual integrity has given me something to aspire to.

To old friends Charlie Rumsby, Nicola Abram and Sam Thomas, who, having endured this process before me, offered solidarity (and empathy!) when it was needed. I am also profoundly thankful for all my friends outside of academia who encouraged and supported me in innumerable ways during this process: Sophie, Susie, Michele, Claire, Anders, Kelly, Matthias, Mary, Holly, Miranda (to name but a few), thank you for keeping me grounded. I also want to thank Luke, who first believed in me. Enormous thanks go to Jesse Voth for proofreading this thesis, and for the invaluable insights and clarity he brought. It is immeasurably better for it.

To Pedro, you have demonstrated such love and patience throughout this whole process, without which I would probably have given up a long time ago. Thank you for

being my companion on this journey, and for being proud of me before I achieved. Lastly, Abel, your existence has brought me so much joy.

My PhD was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and I sincerely thank the ESRC for providing me with a scholarship, without which I would not have been able to do this research.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of contents.....	5
Abbreviations.....	9
Preface: A political prelude.....	10
Chapter One: Introduction.....	17
Reimagining violence and resistance.....	21
A research project.....	24
Addressing the lacuna.....	25
Thesis structure.....	32
Contributions to knowledge.....	35
Chapter Two: Bureaucratic violence and dissensual resistance:	
Literature Review and theoretical framework.....	40
Introduction.....	40
Nonthinking, necessity and automation.....	41
Bureaucratic rationality and neutrality.....	46
Theorising violence.....	55
Violent continuums.....	58
Precarity, threat and violence.....	61
Liminality.....	64
A theory of resistance.....	67
Dissensus as resistance.....	69
Speaking and acting beings.....	71
Bearing witness.....	73
Conclusion.....	75

Chapter Three: Methods.....	77
Introduction.....	77
Articulating a feminist methodology.....	78
Positionality and power: a reflection.....	81
Reconciling my role.....	86
Researching reporting and beyond.....	87
Locating the field.....	89
Methods of enquiry.....	90
Stage one: Networking and conducting focus groups.....	92
Manchester and Bristol.....	96
Stage two: Participant observer: reporting at Patchway.....	99
Data collection.....	100
Interviews.....	101
Participant observation and ethnography.....	102
Writing and representation.....	103
A note on terminology.....	103
Ethical responsibilities.....	104
Confidentiality.....	104
Consent.....	105
Chapter Four: Bureaucracy.....	108
Introduction.....	108
Bureaucratic logics of border control systems.....	111
Rules are rules.....	111
Necessity and automation.....	117
A neutral system? Vindictiveness and kindness.....	123
Incompetence and malfunction.....	131

Unexpected benefits.....	136
Conclusion.....	139
Chapter Five: Violence.....	141
Introduction.....	141
Violence: a feminist lens.....	143
Creating precarity.....	145
Violent spatialities: accessing Patchway.....	145
Living without cash.....	149
Proving destitution.....	153
Violent temporalities.....	154
The temporal violence of reporting.....	156
Making life unliveable.....	158
Self-regulation and being made docile.....	161
Threat.....	164
Communicating threat.....	164
Architecture of reporting.....	165
"Welcome to the country!".....	166
Liminal spaces.....	168
Fear beyond the reporting centre.....	176
Oppressive visibility.....	178
Life and death.....	181
Conclusion.....	187
Chapter Six: Resistance.....	189
Introduction.....	189
The phone tree.....	190
Being seen and heard.....	194

Gaining appearance.....	196
Setting into motion.....	200
Witness bearing.....	202
Returning the gaze.....	204
Prompting ethical conscience.....	208
Counter gaze.....	209
Dissenting activist stereotypes.....	210
Conclusion.....	212
Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....	214
Thesis summary.....	218
Future research.....	222
A final remark.....	225
Bibliography.....	227
Appendices.....	246

Abbreviations

BHN - Bristol Hospitality Network

BRR - Bristol Refugee Rights

BSS - Bristol Signing Support

FNO - Foreign National Offender

HO - Home Office

IRC - Immigration Removal Centre

ILR - Indefinite Leave to Remain

MW - Machsom Watch

UKVI - United Kingdom's Visas and Immigration Agency, (formerly UK Border Agency)

P R E F A C E

Setting the scene: A political prelude

‘Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.’

- Article 14, Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1951²

‘The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration.’

- Theresa May, then Home Secretary 2012³

It is perhaps difficult to envisage that before the twentieth century there were no legal restrictions on immigration into the United Kingdom (Yeo 2020: 5). Today, the UK is experiencing a profound and continuing shift in its stance towards immigration, with increasingly stringent measures being introduced towards migrants arriving in the country. While policies concerning immigration and welfare towards migrants have been growing increasingly restrictive in recent years, they thoroughly intensified following the then Home Secretary Theresa May’s press interview with the Daily Telegraph in 2012. May’s now infamous statement announced the Conservative government’s agenda to make Britain a ‘really hostile environment’ for illegal migration. This mandate led to the creation of a secret inter-ministerial group in government, initially named the Hostile Environment Working Group with its aim being to make life ‘intolerable’ for unauthorised migrants to live in the UK (Yeo 2020). In 2013, one of the government’s first campaigns after this announcement was the highly controversial ‘Go home’ vans, driven around ethnically diverse areas of London. Unsurprisingly, the messaging proved not only to be offensive but ineffective, and the campaign was largely ridiculed by both

² <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile/>

the press and the public (Wintour 2013). However, the major cumulative outcome of the group's efforts was the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016, which essentially restricted access to basic life necessities for unauthorised migrants. This included restricting access to housing, employment, healthcare and bank accounts, as well as restricting appeal rights (Yeo 2020: 29). According to an analysis conducted by The Guardian, since 2010 the Home Office have made more than 5,700 changes to immigration rules, with more than 1,300 changes made in 2012 alone (Bozic, Baar and McIntyre 2018). One of the major changes was the introduction of the 'deport now, appeal later' policy in 2016, which resulted in appellant's being removed to their country of origin before they could appeal a Home Office refusal for Leave to Remain; thus people were forced to engage with Britain's legal process after removal, regardless of the state the country of origin might be in (Canning 2017). Restrictions have also been increased with regards to accessing support. In 2015, individual asylum seekers over the age of 18 were entitled to receive £36.62, rising very slightly in 2018 to £37.75 a week, amounting to a little over £5 per day. As Canning points out, this amount is notably less than other British benefit recipients receive; for those entitled to Job Seekers Allowance, individuals receive between £57.35 and £72.40 per week (Canning 2017: 22). Asylum support therefore is around 50% of Job Seekers Allowance, which is itself set just above the poverty line (Mayblin 2016: 816). Also during this period, high-profile immigration enforcement raids began to occur in workplaces and residential areas.⁴ Additionally, the removal of legal aid for cases falling under Article 8 (the right to family life) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was facilitated by the Immigration Act 2014. As those without the legal right to remain in the UK (including asylum seekers) are not permitted to work, this means

⁴ During my fieldwork, I had a number of conversations with people who had encountered raids in their communities and described the terror of seeing friends and loved ones taken from their homes.

that those prohibited from exercising their right to work are also responsible for financing their own access to justice (Canning 2020:263).⁵

As this thesis will illustrate, these policy changes and the legal landscape in which they occurred hint at the extent to which the government's mandate for creating a hostile environment began to seep into people's everyday lives. Indeed, the implementation of the hostile environment went beyond targeting people smugglers and 'clandestine' immigration, into every facet of life for those deemed outside the increasingly narrow framing of what legitimated asylum seeking. In other words, 'illegal' and 'bogus' migrants came to encompass an ever-expanding cohort of people.



Figure 1: A Home Office "Go home" van. Photograph: Rick Findler. Source: The Guardian

Then, in April 2018, a leaked letter to the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd confirmed that the Home Office was continuing to operate a deportation targets policy, something that she previously denied knowledge of. The six-page memo passed to The Guardian revealed the 2017-18 target for achieving 12,800 enforced returns, and boasted of having

⁵Asylum seekers can apply for the right to work if they are waiting 12 months or longer for a decision on their asylum application, and the delay is not deemed to be their fault (Home Office 2018). However, if they are then granted the right to work, they are limited to jobs on the shortage occupation list. This list includes 'specialist highly skilled jobs such as 'classically trained ballerina of international standard', and so in effect, as Mayblin argues, 'presents a total barrier to legal employment for the vast majority of asylum seekers' (Mayblin 2016: 815).

‘exceeded our target of assisted returns’ already (Hopkins and Stewart 2018). This news became particularly controversial when it was revealed that many of the Windrush generation - those who had arrived from the Caribbean to fill the job shortages in the post-war era - were systematically being denied access to healthcare and benefits, as well as being threatened with expulsion from the UK. Due to lack of appropriate documentation, they became an easy target for removal. Following Rudd’s resignation, Sajid Javid took office as Home Secretary and sought to alter the Home Office’s aggressive reputation, shifting the language from a ‘hostile’ to a ‘compliant’ environment. Yet, as Pinkowska (2019) notes, this terminology shift implies that the moment migrants were not cooperating with the immigration rules, it was their non-compliance that forced the Home Office to resort to hostility and enforcement. By the time Priti Patel took office as Home Secretary in July 2019, any attempt to soften the Home Office’s reputation appears to have been in vain. Her recent proposals for creating further and increasingly cruel barriers to those seeking asylum include offshoring asylum processing and the use of nets to stop migrants boats crossing the channel (Malnick 2020), only the latest in a series of hostile mandates targeting asylum-seekers, driven by a Conservative government propelling a succession of increasingly right-wing policies. Patel stated at the recent Conservative party conference that the new asylum system would be ‘firm but fair’, and highlighted preventing ‘endless legal claims’ from refused asylum seekers (Elgot and McDonald 2020). The tangible consequences of these shifts in policy have been to disadvantage, exclude and make life intolerable for those arriving in the UK to apply for asylum.

The UK government’s exclusionary approach towards immigrants has been driven largely by a desire to eliminate ‘pull factors’ (Mayblin 2016), supposedly attracting migrants to one particular destination country over another, and this has heavily influenced the shape and nature of what we see as Britain’s immigration system today. ‘Pull factors’ are deemed to be controlled by politicians, from legislating the elimination

of access to healthcare, to the right to work, to reducing benefits; all these policies play into the notion that immigration can largely be managed through restricting basic rights (Yeo 2020). As Lucy Mayblin argues, this policymaking necessitates ‘complexity reduction in the interest of undertaking practical interventions in the social world’ (2016: 825). Not only has it not worked to deter migration - in part because it has been evidenced that asylum seekers possess very little knowledge of their ultimate destination country before arriving (Mayblin 2016) - but the only significant consequence of these policies is that asylum seekers are so traumatised by the process, they struggle to adapt to a life in the UK, even when they are successful in obtaining leave to remain (Yeo 2020:142). One of my research participants, Hassan, who had suffered severe persecution in his country of origin and who had recently received leave to remain told me, “I’d like to go back to [my country] if I can. All the time, I’d like. I didn’t like to stay here but I had to claim asylum” (Interview, May 2017).

In August 2020 Mercy Baguma, a 34-year-old Ugandan woman, died in Glasgow from malnutrition, found next to her one-year-old malnourished baby. Mercy, whose leave to remain had expired, was trying to claim asylum and had been relying on donations from friends and local charities at the time she died. Her death, while it frequently featured in the media as an example of the UK’s broken asylum system, was in fact symptomatic of the government’s agenda for making life ‘intolerable’ for unauthorised migrants. In other words, Mercy Baguma’s death was not a sign of the UK’s asylum system having broken down; it was constituent of its normal operation. And yet, the Home Office responded by declaring, “This is a tragic situation and our condolences go to Ms Baguma’s family. The Home Office takes the wellbeing of all those in the asylum system extremely seriously, and we will be conducting a full investigation into Ms Baguma’s case”.⁶ This statement reveals a profound incongruity between how the

⁶ See: BBC News (2020).

Home Office wish to be perceived by the public at large and the legislation they enforce on asylum seekers, for they cannot both create the policies they do and take the wellbeing of those in the asylum system seriously.

Let us return briefly to reflect on Theresa May's mandate, the resulting hostile environment in the context of Home Office practice, and Article 14 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of which Britain is a signatory, which states, 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution' (ibid). Taken together, there is clearly a contradiction that exists between international law and immigration policy. In this context, the Home Office's task to enforce immigration law with unhindered impartiality and rationality is inevitably occluded by this interminable tension between law and policy, and one which Home Office functionaries must continually navigate. Yet as long as Britain is bound by law to fulfil its obligations towards refugees under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and at the same time to fulfil its current political mandate under the Conservative government to reduce net migration and to deter new arrivals, this tension will undoubtedly continue. Indeed, this very tension explains the 'ramshackle construction' (Yeo 2020: xvii) that arguably constitutes Britain's immigration system, and the innumerable examples, as I will discuss through this thesis, of malfunction, vindictiveness and incoherence through which it operates. Immigration barrister and campaigner Colin Yeo describes this tension as such:

Applications... to enter or remain in the UK are governed by a cobbled-together conglomeration of incomprehensible and outdated laws, criteria that are set out in constantly shifting so-called 'rules' and apparently randomly privatised services delivered to the lowest bidder... [But] politicians and civil servants are not naive or powerless, nor has this ramshackle construction evolved of its own accord. There are architects and engineers behind it all and the broad way in which the present system operates is the result of deeply ingrained thinking, long-term policies and conscious choices' (2020: xvi-xvii).

Often when describing bureaucratic malfunction, it is only equated to that - the result of unfortunate mistakes, inefficiency or a significant workload, and yet in the context of Britain's immigration system, such a narrative would not explain the deeply established thinking, deliberate choices and often competing logics through which it operates.

Introduction

On my first visit to Patchway Police Station, I take the short ten-minute train journey from Bristol Temple Meads, and as the train arrives into Patchway I am the only passenger to disembark. Elderflower lines the footpath and I am struck by how alone I suddenly am; that is until the footpath ends, and I am forced to cross onto a busy dual carriage-way. The sound of cars driving at 60 miles-per-hour abruptly fills the air and the fact that I am on foot is immediately unsettling. I head along the narrow footpath next to the dual carriage-way, passing a petrol station and a “Costa Drive-Thru”, reinforcing the sense that I should be in a motorised vehicle, and after a brisk 15-minute walk, I arrive at Patchway Police Station. The police station itself is a large concrete slab of a building, its contemporary glass façade giving it a sleek, corporate feel. At first glance, the building stands out amidst its rather depressed surroundings; shabby and seemingly unvisited shop fronts line one side of the busy road. Yet I soon learn that only a stone’s throw from here is a Rolls-Royce manufacturer, its Patchway site responsible for manufacturing military gas turbines for use by the US Navy and the UK’s Ministry of Defence. This is a somewhat strange discovery, given its surroundings denote a kind of dilapidated no man’s land. Yet Patchway in some ways embodies this disparity, an underdeveloped suburb where some of the UK government’s more questionable practices remain largely out of sight and obfuscated.

Inside Patchway Police Station are the archetypal milieu of doors, desks and corridors, all in a palette of varying hues of grey, white and blue. The majority of the staff that pass up and down the corridors — besides the surprisingly infrequent uniformed police officers and, on designated reporting days, Home Office Border Enforcement staff — wear monotone suits and carry briefcases; men wear ties, women wear smart heeled shoes. All of this gives the impression of a relatively characterless operative space typical of any administrative institution.



Figure 2: Patchway Police Station.
Source: Google maps

Up to two days of every week, this particular police station on the outskirts of Bristol designates one of its small, windowless offices as a space used by the Home Office, for the ordained purposes of immigration control. The policy framework set out in the UK Home Office’s Instructions states that ‘a person who is liable to detainment under the power of Immigration Acts may, as an alternative be granted temporary release *on restrictions*’ (emphasis added).⁷ One of these restrictions states that individuals are

⁷ See Home Office (2016).

required to report at regular intervals to an immigration office or police station, as the ‘primary default alternative to detention’.⁸ Individuals are required to report if they are an ‘asylum seeker who makes an in-country application for protection’ or an ‘illegal entrant who is detained or liable to detention as a person subject to removal or deportation’ (Home Office 2019b), which in practice means that most people who have applied for asylum or another immigration status and are awaiting a positive decision are required to regularly report. Approximately 80,000 migrants are subject to reporting requirements at 13-reporting centres across the UK,⁹ with an estimated compliance rate of 95% (APPG 2015).¹⁰

Despite its framing as an administrative procedure, one of several troubling aspects of reporting is the Home Office utilise these sites for targeting potential deportees. In other words, each time an individual attends their reporting appointment they face possible arrest and detainment. Sites like Patchway police station are, from the perspective of the state, ideal locations for Home Office reporting practices, enabling efficient administrative activity to operate with the addition of sophisticated surveillance and security facilities, onsite holding cells and a rear transportation area for immigration removal vans to both be utilised and concealed.

Many of the insights I explore through this thesis materialised during the 11-month period I volunteered at this particular reporting centre with Bristol Signing Support (BSS), between May 2017 and April 2018. While the reporting process itself is, for the most part, an administrative procedure for which individuals are simply required to present themselves at the reporting site usually once every fortnight, during this period I witnessed an average of two detainments every month. The ever-present threat of a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See: Corporate Watch (2018: 55, 116; also Corporate Watch 2020).

¹⁰ 90% of signers travel to one of the 13 reporting centres and the remaining 10% report at a local police station. More than half of all signers report to the three London centres: Becket House at London Bridge; Lunar House in Croydon; and Eaton House in West London. In the busiest, Becket House, staff regularly see 1,200 people a day (Corporate Watch 2018).

possible detainment and subsequent forced removal attempt is intimately felt by individuals, making it an inordinately stressful process, and yet one which individuals are compelled to repeatedly engage in, very often for years on end.

The primary role of Signing Support volunteers within this space is to offer practical and emotional support to individuals in what can be a difficult, frightening and often isolating experience.¹¹ The often-conflated encounters of bureaucracy, violence and resistance I discuss were realised through observing the process of reporting as well as through conversations and in-depth interviews with asylum seekers about reporting, and the networks of activism and support which surround it. Over time I perceived that, whilst the reporting process itself is imbued with many of the expected hallmarks of any governmental bureaucratic practice, what can be defined as the ‘boring, humdrum’ systems that define our existence (Graeber 2012:105), the impact of reporting on the lives of those subjected to it is far from benign. I found that, like ‘toxic environments’ containing harmful chemicals which evade human perception, reporting centres do not clearly reveal their clues and dangers (Davies 2017). Reporting centres operate, on-the-whole, in a mode of administrative mundanity, yet the logics through which reporting operates, the processes implemented to administer it and the structures upon which it depends, are acutely and deliberately violent and enact a plethora of harms on those subjected to its practices. This thesis examines and scrutinises the bureaucratic logics and processes which underpin Home Office reporting practices in order to reach a deeper understanding of contemporary formations of violence and how they operate within Britain's border control and management systems.

Yet the reporting centre also provides a unique space for examining resistance, and in this thesis I explore how both asylum seekers and Signing Support volunteers who regularly attend to offer support to those reporting, respond to the seemingly mundane,

¹¹ See Appendix 1.

administrative operations of these sites. Appropriating a Rancièrian notion of politics as ‘dissensual reconfigurations’ (Ranciè 2010), I argue that both migrants subjected to reporting practices and the volunteers who bear witness engage in a form of resistance, which temporarily interrupts the ‘going-on-being’ (Bayly 2013) of the usual order.

Reimagining Violence and Resistance

‘A number of signers attend the reporting centre with large bags and I often wonder if that’s because they anticipate being detained.’

— Fieldnotes, 3rd October 2017

Often, we assume that violence only constitutes those acts that take place in moments of aberration (Amoore and de Goede 2008), or what philosopher and social theorist Slavoj Žižek refers to as a ‘perturbation’ (2009) to the normal state of things. In his book *Violence: six sideways reflections*, Žižek writes that if there is a unifying thesis that runs through the bric-a-brac of reflections on violence within the book, it is that within these depictions of violence there lies a paradox: ‘at the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict’, what he names ‘subjective violence’ (2009:1). Yet, he argues that once we step back and disentangle ourselves from the lure of only equating violence with that which is directly visible, and performed by a clearly identifiable agent, we are able to observe what he defines as the invisible ‘dark-matter’, the catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems (2009:2). For Žižek, the paradox lies in the fact that another kind of violence exists which sustains our very effort to fight subjective violence. This tendency to be captivated only by the more visible or obvious signs of violence not only allow the less visible kinds of violence to persist, but to do so largely unnoticed. As Žižek suggests, to understand this dynamic, we need to step back

and take a look from a different position. This thesis explores what altering the lens through which we analyse violence might reveal.

Both academic research and the media have sought to shed light on immigration detention centres and on the more overtly violent practices which occur within these spaces, relaying incidents of verbal and physical abuse, hunger strikes, and those occasional tragic deaths which occur either in detention or during a forced removal attempt. In these accounts such incidents either tend to be portrayed as ‘violent events’ (Griffiths 2014) or become tethered to narratives of extreme but momentary distress, thus sustaining the notion that these spaces and their practices, on the whole function within a mode of relative benign administrative mundanity. In other words, they focus on a particular notion of violence which perpetuates assumptions of how these spaces operate, how we conceptualise the harm caused by their use, and what effect such conceptualisations have on our understanding of violence itself and its proximity to us.

The interest that initially prompted this research was directed towards understanding this dynamic between these distinct yet profoundly interrelated forms of violence. I wanted to understand how asylum seekers, who become situated within apparently purely bureaucratic systems and sites, continue to experience immense suffering. By examining the ‘smooth functioning’ of these sites, what might we learn about violence and how it operates in contemporary liberal society? While academic research has rightfully scrutinised the overtly violent practices which do, on occasion, punctuate the lives of those entwined within these systems, the everyday operation of these sites remains relatively unscrutinised.

While refugee and asylum studies have been attentive to these moments of extremity, little attention has been paid to the everyday operations which constitute these systems and which enable such events to occur. My own research demonstrates that reports which only focus on these extreme, interruptive forms of violence are not

necessarily indicative of the kind of suffering which asylum seekers experience in their daily lives. They also inadequately reflect the workings of how a modern sovereign state governs the lives of those seeking asylum. From the everyday intimate experience of state-enforced destitution through to the structural dynamics that threaten and enforce the removal of individuals from Britain; though seemingly incommensurate experiences, both are part of a broader political agenda for making life unliveable for unwanted migrants. Making connections across these different modes of violence and the logics through which they operate underpins the aims of this thesis. To do so, this thesis focuses on a specific feature of Britain's border control and management practice, namely, Home Office reporting.

That said, this account of reporting is not the end of the story, and this research also aims to explore the ways in which asylum-seekers resist. Indeed, a proliferation of interest in resistance in asylum politics brings an important complexity to the discussion of bureaucracy and violence within the context of border control systems and the framing of asylum-seekers as voiceless, apolitical victims to these processes. It has been argued that unauthorised migrants occupy a state of inexistence, in the sense that they are exposed to logics and processes which seek to silence them (Isin and Rygiel 2006). While I argue that reporting places a form of silencing upon individuals, by refusing to grant a voice to the person in front of them, I also show that they find ways in which to unsettle its 'silencing effect' (Feldman 2015:7) and enact their political subjectivity, producing a shift in the 'givens' of a governed order (Millner 2013: 89; Rancière 1999: 70). As such, this thesis is also about the modes of resistance which are forged within these sites.

It is important to note, however, that while the focus of this thesis is concerned with the practice and impact of Home Office reporting, I also draw from other sites and experiences beyond the reporting centre. Recognising that a key component to a feminist understanding of violence is the way in which it functions through a continuum, I reflect

on the correlations between participants' accounts of bureaucracy, violence and resistance in the context of reporting, supplemented with encounters of, for instance immigration detention. By including material from sites beyond reporting I seek to indicate their interconnectedness, and to demonstrate the extent to which the violence of reporting does not operate through abstract, free-floating spaces or encounters (Pratt and Rosner 2012),

A research project

As I have journeyed through this research project, new questions emerged, replacing previous lines of enquiry as I grasped a more in-depth understanding of the issues facing asylum seekers in Britain. In doing in-depth research, it felt important to me to take an exploratory approach, in which my theoretical insights were guided by empirical observations, and as such, the research questions shifted, and became reframed and refocused, influenced by both my experiences in the field and of different literature I was engaging with. Eventually, my research questions consolidated, and I focused my empirical enquiry on Home Office reporting, which I examine through three overarching themes; bureaucracy, violence and resistance. In this thesis, I approach these themes, guided by the following research questions: Firstly, I ask how do asylum-seekers experience bureaucracy and Home Office bureaucrats, focusing in particular on their frequent engagement with the site and practice of reporting? Secondly, I ask in what ways do asylum-seekers experience Home Office reporting as violent? Thirdly, I ask what modes of resistance are both asylum-seekers and Signing Support volunteers able to forge within these sites? In inquiring into these aspects of the asylum experience and engaging with and scrutinising the administrative demarcations of reporting itself, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which bureaucracy functions as a violent technology within border control and management processes, and in particular Home Office reporting.

Addressing the lacuna

Much of the scholarship on asylum in the UK has tended to focus on the more overtly violent sites and practices associated with the process of claiming asylum, including immigration detention and deportation (e.g. Bosworth 2014; Gill, Conlon and Moran 2013; Conlon and Gill 2013; Gill and Moran 2016; Griffiths 2014; Hall 2012; Hasselberg 2014; 2016; Hiemstra and Conlon 2017). Specifically, the institution of immigration detention and its unprecedented expansion in liberal, democratic states has provoked a growing debate amongst academics and activists on the existence of detention as well as the UK's practice of detaining individuals indefinitely.¹² Much of this scholarship has made claims on the punitive nature of these sites as carceral centres (Moran, Gill and Conlon 2016) which preside over life, making the familiar strange (Bosworth 2014), and which render lives more governable.

While this scholarship has played a critical role in making visible the harmful impact of immigration detention and has been partly responsible for its recent declining use (Migration Observatory 2020a), an attentiveness given to these sites has left other significant, and I would argue profoundly harmful, features of the asylum experience, overlooked. Moreover, and significantly to this research, I suggest that a focus on detention somewhat perpetuates assumptions of how these spaces and the associated processes which surround them function. In other words, a focus on the more overtly violent sites and spaces can hinder our ability to perceive the less visible processes of harm which structure the asylum process.

¹² Until 2018, the numbers of people held in immigration detention were increasing each year. However The Home Office (2019) reports that a recent fall in enforced returns between 2018-2019 has coincided with changes across the immigration system, including proposed changes following the Windrush scandal– which saw the unlawful detention and removal of people from Caribbean countries (see Migration Observatory 2020a).

As discussed above, the theme of violence itself within this discourse has tended to focus on violent spaces including detention, or ‘violent events’, including suicide (Nyers 2008), hunger strikes (Conlon 2013; McGregor 2010) and deportation (Hasselberg 2016). The media has often played into this narrative of extremity in rightfully exposing instances of systemic abuse, racism and bullying within the context of immigration detention.¹³ As well, a concern with exposing injustices such as the Windrush scandal - in which people were being wrongfully detained and deported - communicated a message that these events were in themselves aberrations, and not that this was the state acting in a business-as-usual manner.

Yet, this thesis suggests that it is important to consider violence as not only operating in these moments of exception, or on bodies within a carceral space. While these stories are important, only focusing on these narratives can perpetuate an illusion that the non-carceral, the everyday, or the bureaucratic aspects of border management processes are effectively benign. Ethnographic examples are needed to move beyond an analysis which locates the violence as operating only in more overt, visible ways or, as Nordstrom states (2004a:69), ‘configured only as a physical act’, to highlight the bureaucratic and ostensibly benign aspects of the asylum process as part of this violent continuum. This is especially so in the context of Home Office reporting which, to date, lacks any detailed ethnographic research on the subject.

Besides the topics of detention and deportation, asylum scholarship has also brought to light asylum seekers’ access, or lack thereof, to material resources, such as food, housing and legal services (Canning 2017; Conlon and Gill 2013; Waite 2017). Partly in response to the government’s recent dramatic shift in immigration policy and the resultant effects on asylum seekers, the academic discourse has been drawn to the everyday struggles and precarities that asylum seekers encounter, and has thus turned to

¹³ See Channel 4 News (2020).

a more nuanced theoretical framing of violence to describe these experiences. Victoria Canning's work focusing on Britain's political approach to immigration and asylum policy utilises Johan Galtung's (1969) concept of 'structural violence' to describe the intentional hostility of the asylum system and provides a significant contribution to understanding the structures of harm around asylum. Canning's book, *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System* (2017), argues that the asylum process in Britain not only fails to protect people fleeing persecution but, she also evidences how it exacerbates previous harms, and often seeks to prevent individuals from making a successful claim.

Richard Nixon's concept of slow violence has also been appropriated within asylum scholarship for exploring the gradual harm implemented and sustained through various border control tactics and systems. Building on Galtung's concept of structural violence, Nixon observes the differing scales and speeds at which such violences occur, where the 'conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded' and where 'those people lacking resources [become] the principal casualties' (2011: 3-4). The concept of slow violence, writes Rachel Pain, invites us to consider how violence is reflected through systematic and institutionally driven processes, increasingly concealed through the growing tendency for our focus on spectacular violence (Pain 2018:387). Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi theorise the ways in which asylum seekers are ultimately kept from 'physically dying' (2020:111) - therefore allowing the UK to fulfil its obligations under human rights law - whilst being both physically and politically marginalised, as a form of slow violence. The authors draw from Mbembe's notion of 'necropolitics' to distinguish how asylum seekers are 'kept alive but in a state of injury' (2003:21; cited in Mayblin et al. 2020:110), where slow violence operates through the 'mundane' aspects of everyday life, from restrictions around shopping, to transportation and socialising (Mayblin et al. 2020:113). These practices which enforce a state of barely

surviving should, as the authors note, be conceived as ultimately creating a hierarchisation of human life and rights (Mayblin et al. 2020). Employing a postcolonial perspective, Mayblin argues that bordering practices lead to poverty and marginalisation among asylum seekers and can be seen as an attempt to keep out those deemed backward and unmodern (Mayblin 2018; 2020). Kate Coddington (2018) argues that a form of ‘slow violence’ exists through the impact of cashless technologies on refused asylum seekers with a protracted reliance on this method of income. The long-term inaccessibility to cash is a tactic of the state, argues Coddington, gradually eroding their participation in society which exacerbates their vulnerability over time.¹⁴ Here, violence occurs through slow, dispersed and delayed techniques rather than ‘sensational’ violent flare-ups (Coddington 2018:530-531; Nixon 2011:2).

This body of work provides an important contribution in highlighting the nature and effect of Britain’s immigration policies and makes explicit the daily harms caused to asylum seekers at the hands of the state. Yet, I suggest that we need to understand more of the texture of these encounters, and to make connections about how these various violent processes and experiences are held together. I argue that, in analysing the bureaucratic aspects of these encounters, we might perceive the more subtle forms of violence through which they operate and in this way, understand more of the everyday lived experience of claiming asylum in the UK.

There are several reasons why bureaucracy itself requires its own critical investigation in the context of understanding the harm caused by immigration policies. Despite a significant body of critical scholarship devoted to refugee and asylum studies, relatively little attention has been paid to the bureaucratic processes which characterise the asylum experience in Britain. And yet bureaucracy saturates the lives of those

¹⁴ Drawing from Yen Le Espiritu’s term ‘critical juxtaposing’, the ‘bringing together of seemingly different or disconnected events, communities, histories and spaces’ to make visible these connections (2014:21; cited in Coddington 2018: 528), Coddington argues that the punitive feature of these state efforts highlighting their precarity.

applying for asylum in Britain - from the plethora of forms individuals must complete, to the innumerable documents they must locate and verify to support their claim, to the mandatory regular reporting they must perform at a Home Office reporting centre, the everyday experience of making an asylum claim is embedded with these institutionalised and administrative practices. What's more, the institutions which constitute Britain's immigration and asylum policy - from immigration detention centres to Home Office bureaux and reporting centres - operate through, and are contingent upon, a bureaucratic mode of existence. Indeed, detention itself is presented by the Home Office as a mere administrative practice for those who are not presently eligible to remain in the UK. Yet the ways these sites and processes function are inextricably tethered to the foundational logics of sovereign state politics and are, I argue, the contemporary means through which violence is both imposed and concealed. As I explore, these encounters often remain oblique through the dominant conceptions and understandings of violence, and how it is both administered and experienced in the everyday. This thesis argues that by examining Home Office reporting and the logics and processes through which it operates provide valuable insight into how western liberal democracies develop new and intricate avenues for both removing migrants deemed undesirable and legitimising their removal.

Furthermore, while Hannah Arendt's political theory on statelessness and the right to have rights is often drawn upon within asylum scholarship, there is much to be learned about the seemingly mundane sites of bordering and their relation to the asylum experience within her vast body of work; indeed her critical theorisation of bureaucracy has been largely overlooked within this discourse. This thesis brings a new contribution to this conversation by engaging with Arendt's writing on the threat of bureaucracy which, as I will explore in Chapters Two and Four, has continued relevance for examining and scrutinising the institutions and practices of bordering.

As I have argued, there has been a limited ethnographic exploration and scrutiny of the bureaucratic sites and administrative operations which constitute Britain's immigration and asylum system and in particular, the practice of Home Office reporting and the spaces in which it occurs have been largely overlooked within asylum scholarship. Where reporting has been discussed, it is oftentimes within a broader critical discussion of the immigration and asylum system (notwithstanding some recent notable exceptions; e.g. Burridge 2019; Fisher, Burridge and Gill 2019; Hasselberg 2016). Yet reporting remains inherited within many people's experience of claiming asylum and, as this research demonstrates, has a profound impact on their everyday lives.

One relatively recent academic engagement with reporting has been by Ines Hasselberg and her book, *Enduring Uncertainty* (2016). Hasselberg argues that, along with detention and the chronic uncertainty arising from facing deportation, reporting acts as a continuance of the state's surveillance and control over foreign nationals which impacts their lives both directly and indirectly. She discusses reporting as functioning as a 'public display' of a person's condition of unworthiness to reside in the UK, therefore impacting their sense of self. In this sense, Hasselberg regards reporting as an extension of the role of immigration detention in projecting state power. Together, detention and the subsequent requirement for reporting, function as a means to quell popular anxiety over immigration, thus conveying the message that 'the state is still in control over the geographical (and social) borders that citizens want to maintain (Leerkes and Broeders 2010: 843; cited in Hasselberg 2016: 79). She also argues that through reporting - in its being concerned with removability and control - the state exerts immense power over individual's lives, despite the fact that the gaze is not permanently fixed (2016:80).

While there is certainly a symbolic dimension to the role of reporting, in reinstating a message of control which seeks to dehumanise those subjected to this practice, it can hardly be described as a public display designed to manage popular

anxieties over immigration. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, reporting is largely a concealed practice which occurs in unexpected or out of sight locations. To the vast majority of the public, regular reporting remains an unknown procedure within the wider process of claiming asylum, and as Andrew Burrige has noted, reporting receives little attention across popular media (2019).

Moreover, within the limited critical analysis of reporting which exists, its focus centres on its role as an extension of the carceral nature of detention (Fisher et al. 2019; Hasselberg 2016), and therefore reduces its function to another elaborate means of controlling and punishing unwanted migrant populations. While these are important contributions to understandings of the everyday impact of reporting on those seeking asylum, there has been little consideration of the linkages between the various bureaucratic logics which are enacted through the practice of reporting, and their connection to other modes of experience within Britain's immigration agenda, as discussed in the preface. This includes the role of reporting in making individuals more vulnerable to destitution, and in aiding detainment and removal. There has also been very little engagement with these sites as providing opportunities for resistance, or with the role of Signing Support volunteers in providing support to those reporting.

This thesis aims to respond to this lacuna by focusing on the bureaucratic logics of reporting, its specific spatial and temporal features and how it is encountered by those subjected to this practice. By attending to and analysing these features of reporting and their effects, this thesis draws together the parallels between reporting and destitution - inherited within many people's everyday experiences of seeking asylum. My aim is to map how violence operates through reporting in subtle, drawn out and often concealed ways by deliberately steering individuals towards precarity, and by successively making them more vulnerable to detainment and removal. Sites of reporting, I argue, elucidate the ways

in which these ‘apparently incommensurate’ (Pratt and Rosner 2012:1) registers of violence come together.

Thesis structure

This thesis begins by laying the foundations for how I critically explore these topics and the literature which has inspired and shaped my thinking. Then, through my substantive chapters I delve into and expound my analysis, which is presented as a thematic triad: bureaucracy; violence; resistance. Approaching these themes, I was initially guided through conversations I had with research participants, which oftentimes revolved around everyday administrative issues. Whether these were in regard to their asylum claim, their access to asylum support, or the various problems related to reporting, bureaucracy as a theme emerged relatively early on in this research. As I observed the reporting process, I began to draw links between these issues and the conditions of precarity in which individuals subjected to reporting were situated. This led to recognising and identifying these as topics in the analysis and coding of my data (see Chapter Three).

Chapter Two outlines my theoretical framework, providing the ontological foundations and terminology for the succeeding thesis. I draw from Hannah Arendt’s critique of bureaucracy, exploring first her analysis of non-thinking as a mode of behaviour and its tendency for disabling the ethical claim for judgement. I then reflect on bureaucracy’s relation to Arendt’s notion of necessity and automation, which she perceived as being borne out of the cognitive mode of thought and which disregards the individuality inherent to human existence. Crucial to Arendt’s thinking was her observation that bureaucracies become the ideal birthplace for violence, since they recreate the missing links with the people they rule over. I then reflect on and push against other significant contemporary thinkers on the subject of bureaucracy, before outlining a framework for analysing the bureaucratic aspects of border control systems, from which

I will then draw from in my empirical analysis in Chapter Four. Chapter Three is my methods chapter which focuses on my methodological and ethical approach. I provide a reflexive discussion of my own, often complicated positionality as a researcher within what I found to be a field site infused with a myriad of complexities. I then describe the research process itself, first by expounding the trajectory that led me to undertake this research, followed by describing the methods which were used and the ethical issues that emerged.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are my substantive chapters in which I present the thesis' central arguments, grounded in my empirical data. Chapter Four is an exploration into how individuals become subjected to certain bureaucratic logics as they navigate the asylum process, including the practice of regular reporting. Drawing from Hannah Arendt's grasp of bureaucratic processes as birthing an ultimate dependence on what she calls the 'non-thinking' faculty of the mind (Arendt 1978), I argue that non-thinking can be understood as a mode of behaviour which is necessary for current border management practices to carry on as they do. For Arendt, the mind relies upon non-thinking when it invokes duty and blind obedience above all else (Butler 2011). In contrast to thinking, which allows the mind to question the status quo, non-thinking debilitates the silent conversation between me and myself (1978), and as a concept, elucidates the ways in which bureaucracies fail to account for the individual before them. This is followed by considering how Arendt's understanding of the logics of necessity and automation, for which she draws from Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, also bring into focus the ways in which a dependence on these logics seeks simply to impose order upon the world through abstract logic and thereby disregard the complexities of human existence. Following this, in contrast to normative notions of bureaucracy's supposed neutral qualities I examine Home Office behaviour, exposing it as highly value-laden and oftentimes actively vindictive, to demonstrate that bureaucrats wield substantial power over the fates of

migrants (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019). I also reflect on Home Office incompetence and malfunction, which I argue operates through a heightened level of abstraction. This chapter argues that, due to the nature of Home Office decision-making processes and the structures within which they operate, Home Office bureaucrats are, to a large extent, shielded both from the individuals whose lives they preside over, and from the consequences of the decisions they make over their lives.

Turning from a focus on the bureaucratic logics inhered within reporting practices, Chapter Five explores the material processes of violence which are employed within and uphold the very system of reporting. I introduce a feminist framing of violence which allows us to make connections across different forms of violence and insecurity (Pain 2014a; 2014b) and draw from Judith Butler's observation that certain populations are at a heightened risk of exposure to violence without protection, due to what have been designated as 'ungrievable' lives (2004; 2016). I draw together the parallels between reporting's specific spatial and temporal features, and destitution - embedded within many people's everyday experiences of seeking asylum in Britain - to map how violence underpins immigration policy, by deliberately steering asylum-seekers towards precarity. Following this, examining the architectural components of the reporting centre at Patchway and how they operate, including how the centre is laid out as a series of enclosed spaces individuals become orientated through, I aim to demonstrate how violence is also enacted through the continually reinforced threat of detainment. In examining and drawing connections across these different features of reporting, I argue that the threat of physical force is embedded within the very system of reporting and is ultimately how these processes of precarity become implemented and sustained over time.

Chapter Six shifts focus to explore how individuals find opportunities, albeit temporarily, for disrupting these processes. Appropriating Rancière's notion of political

action as opportunities for dissensus, I show the political potential of these sites in enabling a disruption of bureaucracy's atomising and silencing effects. I argue that asylum seekers find ways for a 'dissensual re-configuration' (Rancière 2010:140) of the usual order, by mobilising against the processes of control and exclusion, through being seen and heard. I then focus on the experiences of one asylum seeker named Ammika, a central figure in the Shut Down Yarl's Wood campaign. During her detainment at Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre, Ammika became involved in an occupation, and drawing from her narrative of this experience I explore the possibilities for contesting the anonymising and silencing effects of these sites and spaces. Following this, I draw on the theorisation of dissensus to examine how Signing Support volunteers also take part in dissensual moments by perforating the one-way gaze through their ability to bear witness, as well as through disrupting expectations of activist stereotypes. Chapter Seven is my conclusion where I summarise the central themes and contributions of my research. I consolidate my analysis which argues that the site and practices constituting reporting elucidates the western liberal democracy's ambitions to manage and exclude unwanted migrants through making them progressively more vulnerable to destitution, detainment and removal.

Contributions to knowledge

The scholars that have influenced me are from divergent disciplinary fields, and have enabled interesting and at times surprising convergences, and this thesis is an attempt at cultivating something new from these disparate fields of scholarship. While Home Office reporting is a relatively under-researched field of academic research in Britain, this thesis provides a critical account of reporting that can be employed and developed to extend scholarship on the intersections of bureaucratic process, violence and resistance within the asylum discourse and beyond.

This research aims to contribute to three main fields of study. First, it seeks to speak to the scholarship on critical migration, refugee and asylum studies. Emerging after the Second World War, this interdisciplinary field has grown exponentially since the 1980s and encompasses a plethora of literature examining the causes of and responses to refugees. Yet only more recently has the experience of seeking asylum been considered a critical field of study, and as discussed above, the asylum discourse in Britain has typically focused on the punitive nature and experience of immigration detention as well as the challenges for those seeking asylum in accessing food, shelter and legal advice.

By attending to the practice of reporting, and by scrutinising the bureaucratic logics through which it operates, this thesis contributes to understandings of the lived experience of claiming asylum in Britain. It also attempts to draw out the connections between these sites and their instrumental role in creating a politically induced condition of precarity, and in aiding detainment and deportation.

The second field of study to which this research seeks to contribute is situated within contemporary political theories of violence. Within the social sciences, violence has been a subject of study frequently situated within politics, anthropology, peace studies and international development studies, with a prolific volume of research focusing on the events and implications of global political processes, war and terrorism. Social scientists within these disciplines have often theorised violence within a framework of exceptionality, where violences are ‘separated out’ and positioned as either local/everyday or international/political (Pain and Staeheli 2014). Much of the scholarship on violence within geography has been characterised through a similar presentation, engaging with its global, spectacular forms through the study of political and state violence and terror (for example, Vaughan-Williams 2009; Gregory and Pred 2007). Only relatively recently have geographers engaged with a notion of violence through understanding it as both a geopolitical and intimately imposed and experienced

phenomenon. In this way, these discussions have sought to emphasise the importance of dissolving the normative binaries between global/local, familial/state, personal/political (Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pratt and Rosner 2012; Little 2017), and in doing so, provide a distinct conceptual framework for researching and theorising violence. In particular, feminist geographers have drawn from ideas within feminist scholarship more broadly to theorise violence through terms which aim to expose its character in transcending opposing binaries, often imposing itself as simultaneously global and intimate (Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pratt and Rosner 2012; Massey 1994). These theorisations analyse and emphasise the gendered power relations which shape and influence experiences of and responses to violence, and demonstrate their interconnectedness. Within anthropology, David Graeber has also engaged in exploring violence through a feminist framing. Graeber's work builds on notions of violence as to articulate the often unspectacular, banal and intimately experienced ways in which imminent force plays out through bureaucratic systems within western liberal democracies.

This thesis contributes to theorisations consonant with feminism, drawing on these debates about what counts as violence, as well as feminist work on the role of threat (Graeber 2012; Little 2016; Massey 1994; Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pain 2014a; 2014b; Pratt and Rosner 2012). By presenting an account of the linkages between reporting practices, destitution and the threat of physical force in the form of detainment and removal - and upon which reporting depends - I demonstrate how the western liberal state's ambitions to manage and exclude 'unwanted' migrants are tethered to asylum seekers' routinised, everyday and intimate encounters with bureaucracy. I therefore build on this body of work which focuses on the interconnectedness of these different modes of violence.

Incidentally, this research also led me to the interdisciplinary field of resistance studies. Through recognising the complex and multifarious ways in which violence

operates within these sites, I was prompted to examine the everyday contestations to these processes. Therefore, this research also contributes to understandings of resistance through an attentiveness to moments of disruption that occur within these sites. Within geography specifically, notions of resistance have often aligned with conventional conceptualisations focusing on an overt, organised opposition to power (Hughes 2019; Rose 2002); yet I found that these claims to resistance are often rather optimistic in how they envisage an effective challenge to power operating, in particular in understanding the modes of resistance that are possible within the context of border control processes. This study therefore contributes to an expanding body of work which highlights the disruptive actions or moments, often at the level of the everyday, which are not necessarily transformative or even effective in resisting power, yet which remain purposefully oppositional (Hughes 2019: 5-6; Pottinger 2017). As Cindi Katz argues, it is possible to distinguish different expressions of resistance, between forms of resistance which involve oppositional consciousness and achieve emancipatory change, forms of reworking that alter the organisation but not the polarisation of power relations, and forms of resilience that enable people to survive without changing the circumstances that make such survival so hard (2004; cited in Sparke 2008:424). While I acknowledge the agency of my research participants, I also engage with the limited potentiality of the effectiveness of resistance to these processes. By considering the conditions under which resistance and political agency emerge in the context of reporting practices, I aim to focus attention on the disruptive political agency of asylum seekers, while at the same time acknowledge the often indeterminate outcomes. Given that asylum scholarship has tended to focus on analysing the exclusionary politics of asylum from the perspective of sovereign power, thus leading to a further exclusionary politics (for example Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004; 2005), this research is attentive to the moments in which asylum seekers disrupt the givens of where and when they may speak. By also considering the presence and role of

the Signing Support volunteers, this research also contributes to understandings of the disruptive potential of bearing witness, through engaging with the significance of this act of embodied presence.

Bureaucratic violence and dissensual resistance

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Before I begin the story of this study, this chapter and the following introduce the theoretical and methodological tools used and developed through the research project. Bureaucracy, violence and resistance within the context of border control processes are the central themes of this thesis, and here I lay the foundations for how I will critically explore these topics and establish the links between them. It is therefore divided into three main parts. The first outlines a theoretical framework for engaging with bureaucracy, mainly guided by the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt, whose writing has had a profound influence on this research project, from her seminal work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963a) to her final book *The Life of the Mind* (1978). I examine Arendt's critique of bureaucracy, focusing on her conceptualisations of non-thinking, necessity and automation, which she argues underpin and shape bureaucratic practice. I explore how her understanding of the dangers of bureaucratic practice lie in a reliance upon these logics which lead to the disabling of the ethical claim to human judgement. From there, I draw from several contemporary debates within academic research on bureaucracy and push back against notions of bureaucratic neutrality, to demonstrate the

continued relevance of Arendt's work in revealing the links between bureaucracy and violence, and for elucidating the administrative components of border control practices and their effects. The second part of this chapter outlines the conceptual framework structuring my theorisation of violence. I provide an elemental discussion of some of the key theorisations within the discourse before turning to feminist theorisations of violence, and in particular feminist geographers. Their writing on the interconnectedness of different forms and sites of violence provides a critical lens for revealing the processes and practices through which exclusionary immigration policies operate. Following this, the third section introduces my theoretical framework for my analysis of resistance. This discussion is mainly guided by Rancière's notion of dissensus as a form of resistance which focuses on acts which antagonise or disrupt the going-on-being of a given situation (Bayly 2013). I draw from and extend his analysis as well to consider the role and function of bearing witness as another act of dissensus.

Non-thinking, necessity and automation

In *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954* (2005b), Hannah Arendt devotes a chapter to analysing Franz Kafka's famous novel, *The Trial*. *The Trial* is the story of a man named Josef K., or simply K., caught up in a bureaucratic system so senseless and defeating, it becomes like a nightmare. He is given an ineffective lawyer, so resorts to seeking advice from various functionaries before he is tried according to laws which he never manages to unearth: eventually he is executed. *The Trial* depicts a bleak world constituting an exasperating milieu of opaque processes, non-information and infuriating functionaries, which together gradually thwart K.'s resolve to fight back. The novel, written in the early 1900s (the book was completed in 1915, yet published posthumously in 1925), was widely interpreted as a terrifying forecast of the world to come. For as Arendt notes, to the public of the 1920s, 'bureaucracy did not seem an evil great enough to explain the

horror and terror expressed' in the text (Arendt 2005b: 71). But for Arendt, the story had an uncomfortable yet poignant message for contemporary society; for this novel was not simply prophetic, and instead unveiled the world as it was evolving. She writes:

Kafka's so-called prophecies were but a sober analysis of underlying structures which today have come into the open. These ruinous structures were supported, and the process of ruin itself accelerated, by the belief, almost universal in his time, in a necessary and automatic process to which man must submit (Arendt 2005b:74).

Arendt articulated how K. is caught in a system ultimately supported and compounded by a logic shaped by what she names a 'necessary and automatic process', which had already become almost universal in Kafka's time, yet remained largely concealed. Here, again Arendt highlights how typical bureaucratic operations have the potential for causing immense harm, by their ultimate reliance upon this posturing, which she regarded as only being able to accomplish an objective impersonal goal. She thereby frames a connection between non-thinking, necessity and automation which, together, impose order upon the world through abstract logic. As I will expound further below, to operate in the non-thinking or cognitive mode, is to invoke duty above all else. Relatedly, to function from a mode of necessity and automation is to fail to look at events and situations in a new, critical light (Stivers 2008: 60). Arendt hereby points to the ways in which bureaucracies invariably disregard the subtleties of human existence. Graeber makes a similar argument about bureaucratic procedures, in which he speaks of them 'reducing everything to simple pre-established mechanical or statistical formulae' (2009: 519). In this way, bureaucracies are always to some extent modelled around processes of simplification, which function through a mode in which predictability and the erasure of nuance are essential features.

Fundamentally for its time, Arendt's work unearthed something about bureaucracy which had yet to be articulated: that within bureaucracy there lies an inherent violence, a violence that was responsible for many of the political and ethical failures of the modern world. Rather than simply consigning the Byzantine nightmare in which K. found himself to the realms of fiction, or a terrible distorted parody of the world to come, Arendt grasped how bureaucracy had become the contemporary means through which violence can be both imposed and obscured. This was, in part, because it physically removed bureaucrats from the individuals they acted upon, allowing them to behave in ways which would otherwise be inconceivable (Hoag 2011).

In addition to their distancing effect, Arendt also observed how bureaucratic systems have the tendency to disable the possibility for thinking and judging, a conclusion she derived as a result of attending the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the elemental Nazi officers responsible for the perpetration of the Holocaust. It was Eichmann's job to organise deporting thousands of Jews to Poland, as discussed in her enduringly contentious yet widely misunderstood book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* (1963a). Through her term 'the banality of evil', Arendt sought to capture the sheer ordinariness of a man who was capable of engineering one of the most appalling events of mass genocide in world history. Arendt perceived Eichmann as epitomising the ultimate bureaucrat, 'quite ordinary and commonplace' (ibid); he was after all, certified 'normal' by the six psychiatrists that examined him, and one even found that Eichmann's entire psychological outlook, including his relationship with his wife and children, was 'not only normal but most desirable' (Arendt, 1963b). In his last statement to the court, Eichmann claimed that 'he had "always done his duty", obeyed all orders as his oath demanded' (Arendt 1963a: 92). This unwavering, and even proud allegiance to duty is what Arendt later defined as 'the manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives' (Arendt

1978: 4). According to Arendt, Eichmann's crimes were not the result of an inherent depravity of mind, but an innate thoughtlessness which ultimately obstructed his ability to tell right from wrong. Drawing from Kant's notion of judgement as presented in his book, *The Critique of Judgement*, Arendt determined that our faculty of thought is critical for determining good from evil, indelibly tethered to both will and judgment. Thinking, as Arendt understood it, is the silent conversation between me and myself, which is therefore an ethical act fundamentally postured towards the question, why? This, she states, is vital for distinguishing the difference between right and wrong. Thinking is not dependent on education or intellect, but she perceived it as distinct from cognition, or non-thinking, which in any given situation only asks, how? Therefore, for Arendt, Eichmann lacked the ability to judge, because he was unable to engage with the rudiments of thinking itself (Kateb 1984). As Gregory Feldman expands:

Cognition must see the empirical world as objects, not subjects, because when imposing abstract logics it cannot accommodate alternative standpoints, even though it can appropriate them... [I]t cannot establish a relationship of equality with any subject it encounters because that would grant the particular subject an equal voice... and risk an unpredictable outcome... Thinking, therefore, is required to do this work because it is capable of representing another person's perspective... when she is deciding on an ethical course of action. Thinking enhances imagination because the mind accumulates images of alternative perspectives with which new directions can be conceived (2015: 58).

What concerned Arendt was how bureaucratic management and processes produce a situation whereby cognition takes precedence over thinking. This simultaneously serves economic and administrative factors whilst dismissing any ethical reflection on why certain individuals are organised the way they are (Feldman 2015). In this context, individual agency is contained or delimited to improve the efficiency of a system, therefore prioritising economy and administrative convenience above all else. In

ultimately pronouncing Eichmann not a monster, but as someone who did not think, Arendt captures the inherent problem caused by non-thinking, by demonstrating the potential catastrophic consequences caused by an absence of ethical judgement:

[E]xcept for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal... He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realised what he was doing... He did his duty...; he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the law... [T]hat such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together (Arendt, 1963a).

Whilst her concept of the banality of evil was widely contested, largely throughout the Jewish community who perceived it as ultimately downplaying Eichmann's crimes, Arendt's indictment against Eichmann goes to the heart of thinking and judging (Stivers 2015: 249). She was not suggesting, as many presumed she had concluded, that his crimes were not severe, nor that there is 'an Eichmann in all of us'; rather that Eichmann represents the modern propensity to judge automatically, thoughtlessly, according to existing rules and norms, or what she called 'bannisters' (Arendt 1963a; Stivers 2008: 67). Arendt's writing invites us to consider what effect the absence of discretionary judgment inherent in bureaucratic processes, has on our political institutions and on those they seek to govern. In the modern world, to act in response to only the cognitive or non-thinking mode is 'to impose order upon the world by aligning it with logics which hold together in the abstract' (Feldman 2015: 58). As Feldman explains, effectively the cognitive mode of thinking must see the empirical world as made up of objects not subjects, for it cannot regard those it encounters as having a voice, which would result in an unpredictable outcome (ibid.). In other words, someone operating only in the cognitive mode of thinking ensures that an absolute commitment to logic and rules are adhered to, regardless of the unique situation of the person standing before them. The cognitive

response therefore refuses to grant a voice to that person, for in effect, the person's individuality cannot be comprehended.

In her later book, *On Violence* (1970), Arendt suggests bureaucracy can be defined as the 'most formidable form of... domination... an intricate system of bureaus in which no men... can be held responsible, and which could properly be called rule by Nobody' (1970: 38). When considering existing forms of government, Arendt perceived bureaucracy 'the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done' (ibid.). Crucial to Arendt's thinking was her observation that bureaucracies become the ideal birthplace for violence, since they recreate the missing links with the people they rule over (Arendt 1970). By this, she points to the innate propensity of bureaucracy to remove accountability and therefore responsibility for wrong-doing. She writes: 'the greater the bureaucratisation of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one could argue, to whom one could present grievances, on whom the pressures of power could be exerted' (Arendt 1970:81). As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, Home Office bureaucratic encounters function through an innate level of abstraction which fails to deal with the individual before them.

Bureaucratic rationality and neutrality

Other prominent thinkers on the topic of bureaucracy are situated within the domain of sociology and philosophy, with seminal works by German sociologist Max Weber, and Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman. Weber was interested in how bureaucracy enabled the efficacious execution of rules (Herzfeld 1992). Weber outlined a series of six characteristics of an ideal rational bureaucracy, which included a firmly ordered hierarchy of offices, an exclusion of unnecessary tasks and interests, and the model of the 'career official', whose vocation is to carry out duties according to specific

rules (Gerth and Mills 1946: 196-204, cited in Heyman 1995: 262; Stivers 2015: 242). For Weber, what made the performance of these duties a vocation was both specialised training and the ‘acceptance of a specific obligation of faithful management in return for a secure existence (i.e. salaried tenure)’ (Stivers 2015: 242). In essence, Weber’s account of bureaucracy emphasised its commitment to the rational and the impersonal, which ultimately superseded any commitment to one’s own values; the bureaucrat embodied this practice of ultimate functionality, devoid of any irrational or emotional engagement. As Camilla Stivers develops, Weber’s argument highlighted how the bureaucrat’s loyalty is not to a particular person, such as a king, but to the office itself and the tasks associated with it’ (2015: 242). Weber applauded the potential for bureaucracies to efficiently coordinate such behaviour, and as Graeber points out, Weber was able to describe bureaucracy as the very embodiment of rational efficiency because, in the Germany of his day, bureaucratic institutions generally worked incredibly well (2015b).

Yet, despite these acknowledgements, over the last century scholars have been highly attuned to the threat of bureaucratic power. This was also a concern of Weber’s, wary of what he named the ‘power position of bureaucracy’ in which the control and dissemination of resources that bureaucrats hold affords them a degree of power which could exceed that of the sovereign (Weber 1978: 991; Hoag 2011).¹⁵ Bauman has drawn from Weber’s analysis to develop a conceptualisation of bureaucratic practices as engendering a rationalisation of labour that results in a form of moral emptiness. Bauman’s critique of bureaucracy is outlined most comprehensively in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) in which he regards ‘the culture of instrumental rationality’ characterising modern society as undermining the essence of moral relationships (1989:17). Bauman explains how a belief in a strict adherence to duty as a moral good and the division of labour into smaller and smaller tasks became the foundations for

¹⁵ Weber’s typology is often taken in isolation yet, as Heyman points out, it was part of a much broader discussion on the modernisation of societal power (Heyman 1995: 262).

modernity. In this way, Bauman specifically considers how bureaucratic rationality not just enabled, but vitalised the Holocaust, through an inherent dependence on efficiency, utilitarianism and dispassion, features which he argues have come to define western modernity. Bureaucracy 'extends the distance at which action is able to bring affects', he writes, thus as proximity is eroded, responsibility for others is silenced (du Gay 2000: 36). Bauman reflects on how during the Holocaust, these central tenets of bureaucracy fostered a posturing towards certain lives as expendable, through features which were in and of themselves 'quite ordinary and commonplace' (1989: xiii). He writes:

That modern civilisation is not violent is an illusion' he writes, and 'like so many other things which we have been trained to abhor and detest, violence has been taken out of sight... it has become invisible, that is from the vantage point of narrowly circumscribed and privatised personal experience (Bauman 1989:97).

It was in this way that Bauman could describe the 'astounding moral blindness' (1989: 24) which was possible during the Holocaust for its perpetrators. For Bauman, bureaucratic culture in general enforces a view of society as 'an object of administration', a collection of problems to be solved, as nature to be controlled, mastered and improved and remade' (1989: 18). It is a 'silencing of morality', as the middle-man shields off the outcomes of action from the actor's sight (Bauman 1989: 24-25, 29). In this way, Bauman points to the bureaucratic tendency to avoid lingering on the entire chain of events, and to the mediation of action, 'the phenomenon of one's action being performed for one by someone else, by an intermediate person, who stands between me and my action, making it impossible for me to experience it directly'. By situating bureaucracy's threat in terms of its incompatibility with moral integrity, this view reveals bureaucracy's potential for violence, for the 'further removed the victim from the sight of the official, the less likely the bureaucrat is to object to inflicting harm' (Murray 1991: 83). Conversely, what makes

the self moral is located within the ‘unfounded, non-rational, non-calculable urge to stretch towards others’ (Bauman 1993: 247).

Nick Gill’s book *Nothing Personal?* (2016) provides a significant contribution to understandings of moral distance and indifference in relation to contemporary border control practices in Britain. The book’s title, a direct quote from Bauman and Donskis’s book, which states, ‘Nothing personal, it’s just business: this is the new Satan of liquid modernity’ (2013: 10), captures much of the clichéd sentiment that constitutes bureaucratic systems of governance. In the context of immigration policy, Gill argues that indifference is generated largely through the intensified spatial and moral distancing of asylum-seekers from their immigration decision-makers. Were more proximate encounters between them enabled, Gill suggests, they might hold the potential ‘to move bureaucrats to act not according to adiaphoric principles of government, but to particular moral sentiments prompted by the needs and demands of specific individuals’ (2016: 45).

Returning to Arendt, her concept of non-thinking also illuminates the ways in which bureaucracies shield functionaries from the repercussions of their actions, and therefore she argues, from reality itself. Arendt understood how the system through which bureaucracies function, and significantly the language to which they defer, creates an inherent obliqueness for what duties its functionaries are in fact performing. Carol Cohen powerfully illustrates this process in her description of the rhetoric used by defence intellectuals when discussing nuclear war. She writes of how particular language creates an abstract conceptual system in which ‘hypothetical, calm, rational actors’ defer solely to a ‘perfectly informed mathematical calculus of megatonnage’ entirely ‘removed from reality’ (1987:709). This form of rationalising the unthinkable often relies upon the ‘language’ of numbers, which is a language that cannot be spoken, in the sense that it has no contextual meaning (Stivers 2015:247).

A somewhat disparate voice in the academic scholarship on bureaucracy, Paul du Gay has sought to salvage its reputation, condemning supposedly overly romanticised critiques of bureaucracy and applauding its ostensibly innate capability for rationality and efficient organisation for the public good. In his book, *In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber, Organisation, Ethics* (2000) du Gay argues that bureaucracy offers a type of organisational structure enabling the equal treatment of people according to standardised codes of conduct. Du Gay meticulously confutes Bauman's analysis of bureaucracy being the 'moral impoverishment of modernity' as 'fundamentally misguided' (2000: 36-37). Instead, du Gay seeks to provide an ethical argument for the "pros" of bureaucratic office, arguing that pejorative notions which seek to critique the impersonal face of the bureau are misplaced, due to a misconception of 'institutional rationalism'. In essence, his argument is premised on the notion that the bureaucrat is able to subsume her or his own personal interests towards a greater institutional goal. Instead of creating a moral void, the bureaucrat can be understood as a 'positive moral achievement', subordinating their own ego to the ethos of bureaucratic office (Hunter 1994:157, cited in du Gay 2000:32). Du Gay aims to recover what he calls a 'certain ethical dignity for the mundane routines of bureaucratic administration' (2000:9), embedded in recognising the significance of the bureaucrat's ability to subordinate deeply held convictions and personal interests to the 'diktats of procedural decision-making' (2000:44). Du Gay's argument is rooted in Weber's affirmative acknowledgement that the bureaucrat is devoted to impersonal or functional purposes, and therefore any attempt to judge the conduct of bureaucrats according to a criteria deriving from other departments of ethical life is ultimately futile (Weber 1978; du Gay 2000: 32).¹⁶

Du Gay's depiction of the rational, duty-bound bureaucrat intimates the embodiment of neutral competence, one who continually defers to quantification and a

¹⁶ Du Gay's line of argument also acknowledges that bureaucratic conduct is rational in very specific ways, and can mean vastly different things in different times, spaces and circumstances (2001).

mechanised and objectified mode of response, which takes the place of personal and thereby emotional, judgement. However, there are a number of problems with du Gay's argument; firstly is his insistence on the possibility for bureaucrats to make decisions neutrally, and without personal judgement. As Stivers writes, every bureaucrat exercises judgement continually, 'because on no basis can they do otherwise (2015: 244). There is no law, regulation or protocol 'so unambiguous' argues Stivers, that can be applied in situations where personal judgement is not required (245). Josiah Heyman's (1995) work supports this argument, demonstrating how the bureaucrat's individual attitudes, or what he names their 'thought-work' ultimately informs their decision-making. For Heyman, because US immigration policy relies on a contradictory principle both preventing and facilitating the entry of undocumented migrant workers, it requires individualised thought-work, which is ultimately influenced by a worldview - a set of fundamental assumptions about the nature of being and comprehensible forms of action. Within this framework, Heyman seeks to bring attention to how the officer's worldview effects the ways in which these contradictory processes become enacted, often through 'covert policies' which serve to bring coherence to the US policy monologue.¹⁷

While there is a degree of rational universality implicit to bureaucracies and how they are designed to function, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four they are not devoid of human intervention. Countering du Gay, I argue that bureaucracies do not eliminate the exercising of personal judgement and bureaucrats wield substantial power over those implicated in these systems. There is, as Arendt noted, no rule for following a rule (Arendt 1966/2003, cited in Stivers 2015: 245), and bureaucrats must continually navigate the degree to which they are bound by them in any given situation, as well as the extent of

¹⁷ Arendt's analysis of the bureaucratic dependence on non-thinking seems initially to be at odds with Heyman's notion that bureaucrats must continually exercise personal judgement, despite their regulated circumstances. Yet, non-thinking operates only in the cognitive faculty of the mind, which seeks to maintain the status quo, and which ultimately only asks "how?". Therefore, personal judgement operates concurrent to non-thinking, for both seek to maintain the status quo, through a reliance upon a routinised and stabilised worldview.

human kindness or vindictiveness they choose to display towards those they act upon. Individuals, after all, 'bring their pasts, their intelligence, and their personalities to bear' on such organisational labour (Cohen 1995). In Chapter Four I show that, despite the notion that neutrality is a supposed prerequisite to bureaucratic practice, this is not only unrealistic, it fails to account for the 'complex politicised bureaucratic world' (Nuijten 2003:120) in which they are established. As Stivers writes, 'Civil servants can buy in wholeheartedly to an ethic of neutrality but it is literally impossible for them to practice it, since to do so would amount to what the philosopher Dilthey once called trying to see without an eye' (2015:245). By attending to Home Office encounters with both signers and Signing Support volunteers at the reporting centre, in Chapter Four I also highlight the extent to which officers not only develop their own styles of operation but also hold immense power over the lives and fates of those subjected to these ostensibly neutral systems of bordering.

Secondly, du Gay's argument suggests that the bureaucratic system to which it defers is itself coherent and rational. Yet, as Hoag (2011) describes, there is an inherent irony in how bureaucracies represent order and efficiency, while they are so often experienced in our daily lives as chaotic, incoherent and irrational. Hoag argues that it is bureaucracy's innate tendency for prescribing behaviour of an ideal universal and abstract sort that make them so confounding (2011:82). Graeber calls this the 'comic senselessness of bureaucratic life', which causes people to behave in absurd and even 'stupid' ways (2015: 53). In Chapter Four, I draw from this argument to examine how the Home Office officer's role in the context of reporting practices functions through highly schematised processes which at times, fail at the exact moment they are designed to succeed. I demonstrate how an unyielding adherence to rules ultimately leads to absurdity for it holds the bureaucrat's mind, and the subject in front of them, in the abstract. What makes bureaucracies at times so absurd is also what makes them dangerous which is, as

Arendt perceived, their obedience to the rule itself. On this basis, Arendt could locate the danger of non-thinking, for in not being in touch with our conscience, we will not be able to give account of what we say or do. As Arendt writes ‘nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can be sure that it will be forgotten in the next moment’ (1971:187).

In contrast, Arendt’s conceptualisation of thinking is the search for meaning, a questioning of the status quo itself (Feldman 2015:16). While the non-thinking mode which exists in the sphere of governmental bureaucratic practice is a form of silencing, ‘thinking has political implications because it clears the way for judging, which comes into play in the face of every new situation’ (Stivers 2015:250). Arendt’s ideas have been profoundly influential throughout this research in excavating the links between bureaucracy and violence, and in particular her theorisation on the logics underpinning bureaucratic practice and their potential for wreaking havoc on our political systems of governance. In Chapter Four, I argue that certain subjects of contemporary liberal society, namely asylum seekers, are just as exposed to these logics, which emerge in the bureaucratic mechanisms and material processes of exclusionary border control systems. While Arendt’s argument focuses on non-thinking as the cognitive tendency which exists within bureaucratic institutions, leading to what she regarded as an absence of discretionary judgement, I focus rather on the concept as illuminating the Home Office’s behavioural propensity to defer only to rules as they are, rather than applying it to analyse their ability to make judgements.

I draw from her analysis to describe my own observations of reporting practices, the related encounters with Home Office officials and the violence with which these practices are imbued, however, her analysis is limited due to her emphasis on opposing violence with power. In order to comprehend the infrastructure of these practices more fully, I build on feminist theorisations of violence, which as I will explore further below,

allow for a more nuanced mapping of the multi-sited and interconnected nature of power and violence.

Yet first, incorporating Arendt's political theory with a feminist framing of violence requires some clarification. Arendt was careful to distinguish power from violence, regarding power as generated and maintained through collective, communicative practice, while maintaining that violence requires instruments and therefore becomes an artificial means of achieving the same end (Perelberg 2015; Arendt 1969; 1970). In essence, Arendt argued that power and violence are antithetical, for violence is only required where power is absent; genuine power is essentially nonviolent, argued Arendt, 'since violence is by its very nature, incapable of creating power' (Menge 2019: 4; Arendt 1969; 1970). Yet, I argue that in order to examine the bureaucratic systems of governance constituting bordering processes, one must understand the variant modes through which violence and power coincide. In comparison, Foucault, understood power and violence to be distinct, but regarded violence as playing a constitutive role in generating power, describing contemporary forms of power as the strategic, continual and often intimate shaping of human behaviour, enabling a 'mastery... applied at the level of life itself (Foucault 1978:142). While drawing a distinction, Foucault argued that the rationalities upholding practices of power and domination were often compatible with practices of violence (Oksala 2012). A feminist approach to violence emphasises this integrated and fluid relationship between power and violence and is more consonant with Foucault's understanding. This more fluid and evolving mapping of power, violence and resistance will be explored further below.

Theorising violence

Often understood to function through moments of aberration (Amoore and de Goede 2008) or what Slavoj Žižek refers to as a 'perturbation' (2009) to the normal state of

things, violence is frequently equated with the ‘physical carnage that can tear up the body’ (Nordstrom 2004a: 60). However, this project draws upon a more nuanced definition of violence, beyond the overt, interruptive acts which are normatively associated with the term. Žižek states that while the most obvious signals of ‘subjective violence’ (2008:1) are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest and international conflict, in their urgency, they distract from a far more subtle, yet in his words ‘catastrophic’ mode of violence which cannot be perceived from the same standpoint. Žižek names this as ‘systemic violence’ which includes the subtle forms of coercion that ‘sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence’ (2009: 8).

Within the social sciences, the term ‘structural violence’ (Galtung 1969; Farmer 2004; Scheper-Hughes 2004) has been frequently adopted in an attempt to capture how the indirect, oblique, and seemingly inadvertent political and economic processes of repression and exploitation inflict harm on individuals and communities, often over generations. The concept of structural violence originates most famously from Johan Galtung who described it synonymously with indirect violence, those processes of ‘harming and/or hurting’ (Galtung 1969: 2) which emerge from the social structure itself, rather than from direct human action which comes with overt intentions (ibid.). Significantly, Galtung’s depiction of structural violence is linked with unintentionality, whereby what he calls the ‘sender’ or ‘actor’ existent in instances of direct or intended violence is not necessarily a person, but something which emerges as a process. He argues that whereas personal violence is violence with a subject, structural violence is violence without a subject, it is ‘built into the structure, and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances’ (Galtung 1969: 171, cited in Confortini 2006: 336).

Galtung’s formulation of structural violence has been frequently drawn upon within numerous academic disciplines including sociology, anthropology and peace studies as a means of analysing institutionalised forms of repression on ‘migrant Others’

(Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi 2017). Within asylum literature it has been applied to describe how the structures constituting immigration and asylum policy inflict indirect harm on those seeking asylum. For instance, Davies et al. (2017) explores how the abandonment of refugees in Europe is structurally violent due to the withholding of basic provisions and legal advice by state actors, and traces the connections between this and the physiological violence they suffer. As discussed in Chapter One, Victoria Canning (2017) draws from Galtung's concept to expose the many guises of indirect violence within Britain's asylum system, exploring practices such as dispersal, detention and deportation, as well as the high levels of poverty that people seeking asylum experience. For Canning, as many of these harms are avoidable, the decision taken to inflict them equates to structural violence.

Central to these arguments is the notion that border control systems inflict harm on those subjected to them, in gradual, elaborate and often concealed ways. Richard Nixon develops a similar point in an environmental context through his concept of slow violence, which is attuned not only to the structural foundations of social injustice and unequal life chances, but to the 'out of sight' violences of delayed destruction caused by massing greenhouse gases, toxic build-up and ravaged habitats caused across time and place though 'typically not viewed as violence at all' (2011:2). Building on Galtung's concept of structural violence, Nixon observes the differing scales and speeds at which such violences occur, where the 'conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded' and where 'those people lacking resources [become] the principal casualties' (2011: 3-4). Indeed, the concept of slow violence 'provokes us to expand our imaginations in terms of what constitutes harm' (Davies 2019:2), and to consider how violence is enacted through systematic and institutionally driven processes, increasingly concealed through the growing tendency for focusing on spectacular violence (Pain 2018:387). Within the asylum discourse, the concept's emphasis on the protracted nature

as well as the geographical scale of various systematic processes draws attention to the often obscured ways in which vulnerable migrant communities are harmed gradually and invisibly (Coddington 2018; Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi 2020).

While these depictions clearly attribute to the state, the pervasive and harmful aspects of asylum policy, and draw connections between seemingly distinct, disconnected tactics or events, when we look at these experiences in light of the bureaucratic processes which structure them, it becomes evident that they can only exist through the imminent threat of physical force, upon which they ultimately depend. In other words, violence is the ultimate threat by means of which relations of domination are upheld in this context (Oksala 2012). In understanding the potential for physical force and the fear this induces, which also constitutes a particular kind of violence in itself, we are able to see how these political processes are implemented and sustained over time. I will return to this point in the following section.

Furthermore, while Nixon's representation of slow violence characterises a broader force than Galtung's concept of structural violence (Coddington 2018), and its attentiveness to space and time have made it a particularly popular concept in geography (for example, Davies 2019; DeLeeuw 2016; Pain 2018), these theorisations, which seek to capture how these different forms of harm are constituted have explicitly emphasised the often obscured or 'out of sight' quality. Of this Davies rightly asks, 'out of sight to whom?' (2019:6). In answering this question, Davies seeks to highlight the knowledge claims of the communities themselves who are subjected to these forms of violence, and for whom they are not necessarily out of sight, but rather whose testimonies 'do not count' (13). He argues that slow violence persists because of a 'politics of indifference' (Davies 2019:13) towards those whose lives are treated as though they do not matter, and therefore whose suffering remains largely unnoticed.

I propose a conceptual framework that considers the various dimensions of violence as operating through bureaucratic processes, yet of which their effects are obscured or concealed through a protracted, and seemingly benign mode of existence. That said, their effects are evidently not out of sight to those subjected to them. In emphasising the everyday suffering and long-term implications of these processes on asylum seekers, I seek to draw attention to the less visible kinds of violence and how they persist. Crucial to this framework is the understanding that violence is the ultimate threat by means of which power relations are sustained. In the context of this study, the modes of violence I describe depend upon the imminent threat of physical force in the form of detainment and removal.

Violent continuums

The violence of these pernicious political processes and (in)actions are evidently responsible for much of the everyday suffering of asylum seekers in Britain. And yet, while there are many descriptions of the governing tactics that reinforce structural inequalities (Coddington 2018:530), I suggest that they often distinguish and separate out these different forms of violence, as though they were not part of a single, complex continuum.¹⁸ Indeed, one of the main problems with theorisations of violence in general, is in how they fail to situate the mechanisms through which all these forms of violence become abstracted. As Graeber argues, they thereby tend to conceal the material processes in which violence, and the threat of it, are inherently constituted (Graeber 2012:113; Confortini 2006).

¹⁸A theory consonant with both Nixon and Galtung's definitions of slow and structural violence could claim that the asylum system as a whole inherently possesses a culture that legitimates violence against 'unwanted' migrants. However, as Catia Confortini argues, applied to a military context, a feminist framing of violence goes further to contend that the establishment of a violent culture '*depends* on the building of a hatred and subjugation of the feminine' (2006: 354, emphasis in original), therefore gender relations are implicated in the very creation of violence.

A feminist theorisation of violence may be understood as part of the critical scholarship which enables us to draw these connections across different forms of violence and insecurity (Pain 2014a; 2014b) and, I argue, is a critical lens for unearthing and scrutinising the processes and practices through which exclusionary immigration policies operate. While a feminist contribution to understandings of violence is absent from much of the analyses of violence within asylum scholarship specifically, it has important implications for this area of research, in particular for developing a critique of the bureaucratic procedures and administrative sites through which these processes are employed. Making connections across these different scales and sites is part of the work of feminist scholarship, in an attempt to bring closer to home the manifestations of violence and their impact (Pain 2014a; 2014b).

For decades, feminist scholars and activists have argued for understanding violence across scales and sites as closely interrelated, to highlight violence functioning across a continuum (Pain 2014a; Pain 2014b), challenging dichotomised notions of these categories and ‘upending hierarchies of space and scale’ (Pratt and Rosner 2012:1). As feminists have argued, rather than positioning the two realms as separate, we need to explore how violence traverses the conventional bounds of global and local, to locate these seemingly distinct modes of violence in a single complex (Pain and Staeheli 2014). Doreen Massey’s landmark text, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) in which she unravels the traditional distinctions of local verses global, as well as other accepted categories such as feminine versus masculine and space verses time, offered a compelling framework for reimagining how these binary constructs might be re-conceived. For example, by conceptualising space as being constructed out of interrelations and interactions, ‘at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global’ (Massey 1994: 264), Massey provided a framework for considering how violence can be understood as occurring through a convergence of differing scales. This understanding problematises typically

binary distinctions for, as Massey states, ‘if each is part of the construction of the other then it becomes more difficult to maintain such simple contrasts’ (1994: 9). In this way, an attentiveness to both the intimate and the global highlights tactics of violence within Britain’s border control systems such as state-enforced destitution, as well as enforced removals, as operating through a continuum. As this thesis shows, Home Office reporting is the banal, everyday enactment of violence that gradually makes life unliveable for those seeking asylum, and yet which is sustained by the actual use or threat of detainment and removal. A feminist framework enhances our understanding of how these seemingly distinct modes of violence are held together.

It has been argued that such an integrated analysis results in losing a clear analytical focus on the issue of what violence is. As Oksala states, ‘when everything is violence, then nothing is’ (2012:79). However, a feminist framework urges us instead to consider the different arenas in which violence becomes manifest and to consider the ways in which distinct experiences of violence are very often integrated and connected. As Nordstrom (2004b) has suggested, violence as a mere fact is largely meaningless. It takes on and gathers meaning because of its affective and cultural content where violence is felt as meaningful (Springer 2011:92). I suggest that the violence enacted through contemporary border control policies are both made possible by and rely upon a dynamic in which its form is least visible to the ‘outside world’. I argue that examining different experiences of violence as integrated and connected is critical for understanding its contextual meaning and can unearth how western liberal democracies develop new and intricate tactics for enacting violence over “unwanted” migrant populations.

The next section will examine violence through two distinct yet, as I will argue, inseparable modes, the violence of precarity and the threat of physical force. Underpinning my theoretical framing of violence is that both precarity and the threat of physical force are inherently linked. As my empirical research demonstrates, the specific

features which constitute Britain's border control tactics, including the administrative practice and site of reporting, as well as the imminent threat of physical force upon which they ultimately depend, are integral to both creating and sustaining precarity amongst asylum-seekers. Connecting these supposedly 'incommensurate registers of experience' (Pratt and Rosner 2012:1) exposes how certain kinds of precarious subjects, in all their various forms, are produced. The everyday practices of the state enacted over the lives of asylum seekers are therefore analysed not only through a focus on experiences of reporting, but on other banal and violent features inherent to the process of seeking asylum in the UK.

Precarity, threat and violence

Precarity, as defined by Judith Butler is the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support. This, she distinguishes from precariousness, which is the innate social interdependence of being human (Martin 2015), for all lives are in some sense, 'in the hands of the other', and can be expunged at will or by accident (Butler 2016:14, 25). In her book *Precarious Life* (2004), Butler is very deliberate in naming precarity as experienced by those whose lives have been deemed ungrievable by the West. For Butler, precarity and violence are inextricably linked as state violence is enacted through distinct policies which make certain, ungrievable lives unliveable. In this sense, various forms of harm are not distributed randomly, but as Hillyard and Tombs state, fall systematically upon certain genders, social classes, and racial and ethnic groups (2007).

In her more recent book, *Frames of War* (2016), Butler expands on her definition of precarity to highlight the extent to which states are not just complicit in exposing certain lives to violence, but in actually enforcing it. She writes:

Precarity also characterises that politically induced condition of maximised precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection. In other words, they appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they require protection. To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection from violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another (Butler 2016: 26).

Here, Butler attends to the ways in which state policies make life unliveable on certain populations and provides a philosophical grounding for a critique of state violence (Martin 2015: 244). In Chapter Five, I will highlight the ways in which Britain's asylum policies force "unwanted" migrants into a state of precarity. I argue that, in appealing to the state for protection, they become embroiled in bordering sites and systems including the practice of Home Office reporting, and thus become exposed to further forms of violence. These forms of violence seek to make life unliveable, as life is circumscribed through the threat and fear of violence, in the form of destitution, detainment and removal. In fact, if there is a limitation to Butler's definition of precarity, it is that it does not go far enough in making explicit the extent to which forms of pervasive social inequality are ultimately backed up by the threat of physical force. Drawing from feminist theory, Graeber asserts that we need a more radical definition of violence which encompasses not just those acts which intentionally inflict harm or injury without the person's consent but also the threat of doing so itself (2009; 2012). In the context of understanding how states and institutions operate, he argues that these are not simply violent in the abstract sense in which the structures through which they operate have violent effects. For Graeber, there is a very real, concrete violence existent within state institutions and upon which they ultimately depend, which is constituted through an ever-present threat of physical force. In other words, systems which are contingent upon and are ultimately

effective due to the potential use of physical force, are inherently violent, whether or not physical force is ever actually resorted to. He argues:

We are not used to thinking of nursing homes or banks or even HMOs [Health Maintenance Organisations] as violent institutions - except in the most abstract and metaphorical sense. But the violence I'm referring to here is not epistemic. It's quite concrete. All of these are institutions involved in the allocation of resources within a system that ultimately rests on the threat of force. "Force", in turn, is just a euphemistic way to refer to violence (2012: 112).

Drawing on how philosopher Tony Coady (1986; cited in Graeber 2009) distinguishes three broad traditions defining violence, including 'restrictive', 'wide' and 'legitivist' definitions, Graeber simplifies the typologies as such: restrictive violence intentionally inflicts pain or injury on others without their consent; wide violence is violence which intentionally inflicts pain or injury without consent, *or threatens to do so*, and legitivist violence is harm or damage *that is not authorised by properly constituted authorities* (2009: 448; emphasis added). Clearly, and as Graeber iterates, these definitions have significant political implications, each one being favoured by distinct political affiliations. Significantly, as he also points out, the legitivist notion of violence makes it impossible for the state to behave violently. Graeber locates his own formulation of violence within wide definitions, for:

if you pull a gun on someone and demand all their money, you will normally be considered to have committed a violent crime, even if you do not actually shoot anyone'... [I]f you apply it systematically you would have to conclude that the state itself is essentially an instrument of violence (Graeber 2009: 448-9).

To be clear, in this theorisation, violence not only exists when states facilitate harm through the elaborate, and indirect consequence of their (in)actions, but abides in a

structural system irrevocably dependent on the threat of physical force so deeply institutionalised that we no longer regard it as violence at all. Simon Springer (2011) attends to a similar argument when discussing how we are all too frequently blinded from seeing that which is too obvious, or familiar. For Springer, neoliberalism erases the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs. Violence is thus thought of as irrational and always happening far away, therefore essentialising the notion that it is incompatible with western liberal democracies. These ‘seemingly invisible geographies of violence’ must be brought to light if one is to make sense of the ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective or direct violence (Springer 2011: 92; Žižek 2008: 2).

Building on Butler and Graeber, I argue that border control practices, and more specifically the administrative sites and practices through which they occur, create a politically induced condition of precarity, which is ultimately enforced through the imminent threat of physical force. By recognising precarity and violence in the context of these sites and practices, we can see how these practices make life ‘unliveable’, as they deliberately and successively steer individuals towards state-enforced destitution, detainment and removal. In the context of this study, sites of reporting make visible the ways in which precarity and the threat of detainment and removal come together, to form a single, complex continuum of violence.

Liminality

Whilst the existence of the violence that I describe is encountered in multiple ways, these encounters cannot be defined through purely essentialist terms. In other words, experiences of these forms of violence cannot be distilled into fixed, invariable descriptions. The threat of physical violence is often, to some extent, encountered cumulatively and differentially, according to the circumstances in which it is communicated and deployed. In recognising the state as enabling and enforcing violence

in different ways over certain populations, is also to understand these processes as materialising differentially according to the circumstances in which they are enacted. Put differently, state violence is not encountered in the same way, to the same degree at all times.

The work of Giorgio Agamben has been frequently drawn upon within critical migration and refugee studies to conceptualise the ways in which the refugee figure becomes subject to western border control measures, enforced into a state of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), and into inhabiting a site of ultimate 'abjection' and exclusion (Isin and Rygiel 2006; Millner 2013). Bare life describes what remains when a human life is stripped of its social location and is therefore included in the political order only by way of its exclusion; a life judged unworthy of being lived; 'a life that could be killed with impunity and whose death therefore had no sacrificial value' (Enns 2004). Agamben called this state one of 'inclusive exclusion' (Agamben 1998:17), where the nation-state seeks not merely to exclude undesirable persons, but to penalise and regulate them (Khosravi, 2010: 332).

In seeking to challenge this somewhat essentialist notion of the camp, scholars have also sought to wrestle anew with ways for understanding the legal and political context asylum seekers find themselves, and have drawn from conceptualisations of 'liminality', to theorise the in-between state associated with the condition of seeking asylum (Cabot 2014; Hynes 2011; Khosravi 2009). Much of this scholarship builds on Victor Turner's seminal work on rites of passage, describing 'liminal space' as not only in between states but precarious and 'ambiguous' states (Turner, 1967: 97). As liminal space is one of unavoidable ambiguity, Turner describes how subjects of the rite of passage, are secluded and hidden away, without rank, position or kinship, in a condition of 'sacred poverty' (ibid.: 98-99). Their behaviour is ultimately 'passive or humble' he writes; 'they must obey their instructors implicitly' (ibid.:95). Turner finds that since this

condition is one of indeterminacy, it becomes likened to 'invisibility, to darkness...to the wilderness' he writes (ibid.). This construct of liminal space emphasises the individual's disintegration and the degeneration in which the subject is 'ground down to a uniform condition' (ibid.).

Geographer Dominique Moran's theorisation of visiting rooms in prisons as 'liminal carceral spaces', spaces of in-betweenness and indistinction (2011; 2013), extend understandings of the experience of visiting sites within the prison as neither inside nor outside; 'quasi-institutionalised' spaces, under the carceral surveillance of the penal regime (Moran 2011:15). By entering into the visiting room, individuals occupy new social statuses, only to return to their pre-liminal state once they leave; the liminal is experienced 'not once, as a stage of linear transformation, but repeatedly' (2011: 12).

In Chapter Five, I draw from this language of liminality to examine the architectural components of the reporting space itself. This framing elucidates the complex, cumulative and repeated ways in which the threat of detainment is both communicated and encountered by signers. Whilst Agamben's theorisation offers ways for understanding the grey zones of modern nation-states, these sites are not bounded spaces in which individuals are altogether divorced from political potential. In this way, Agamben's notion of the camp constituting a 'pure, absolute and impassable biopolitical space' (Agamben 1998:123) does not allow for recognising the significance of the differential and contingent modes of threat which individuals encounter within the different spaces. As well, Agamben's vision fails to capture moments of dissensus which, on occasion, occur within these sites, as I explore in Chapter Six.

Therefore, in avoiding an essentialist framing of the reporting site as a purely abject space, in Chapter 5 I explore the ways in which individuals become successively exposed to an increasing threat of physical force, as they are orientated through the various spaces within the centre itself. As Hubbard (2001:51) notes, space 'is not just a

passive backdrop to human behaviour and social action, but is constantly produced and remade within complex relations of culture, power and difference'. In geography, space is recognised as more than the surface where social practices take place, it is produced by social practices (Moran 2013:181; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994). Rather than positing a permanent state of exclusion, this framework of liminality allows for theorising the ways in which threat is conveyed and experienced in increasing degrees through reporting, in which the space itself becomes the medium and outcome of that threat (Moran 2013). As individuals are orientated through the various spaces within the reporting centre - and depending on whether they become subject to detainment procedures - they encounter increasing levels of threat which are both communicated and constructed out of the different spaces and their symbols (Turner 1967: 95).

A theory of resistance

Wherever there is dominance, there is also resistance, argued Foucault (1980). Indeed, in attending to the inherent vulnerability and exclusion that characterises awaiting asylum, Foucault's writing reminds us also of the modes of power existent in their excluded positionality, a concept as I will explore, also familiar to feminist scholarship (Harding 1991). Below, I outline the theoretical framework through which I will examine resistance.

Conventional conceptualisations of resistance within geography have tended to focus on an overt, organised opposition to a particular configuration of power often situated within institutions controlled by the sovereign state (Hughes 2019). In these accounts, power is imagined as fixed and linear, emanating from one circumscribed realm "out there", which, as Bice Maiguashca notes, frames power in terms of its coherent singularity 'to be captured and redistributed' (2013:123). In so doing, these approaches project a notion of resistance as oppositional, dichotomous and entirely external to its

alternate force, foregrounding the structurally organised positions that facilitate transformational change. They also fail to account for the quieter, seemingly unremarkable contestations and resistances which do not cohere to an expectant resistant form (Hughes 2016; 2019). Indeed, Sarah Hughes argues that regarding resistance as constituting certain ‘coordinates’ of intentionality, linearity and opposition against a sovereign power, ultimately renders other modes of politics invisible (2019:2-3; 2016; Amoore 2005). As Sharp et al. (2000) argue in relation to geography, though it can be said of the social sciences more broadly, there must be an ‘ambiguous, entangled view of power’ (27), which negates the separation of power from resistance.

In seeking to wrestle anew with notions of resistance, contemporary scholarship has frequently adopted a feminist framework in order to capture a more complex and nuanced mapping of power, exposing its form as fluid, cross-cutting and evolving (Maiguashca 2013). In the same way that violence cannot be simply understood as operating through abstract and disconnected structures of power, as argued above, feminist notions of resistance also conceive its interconnected and contingent form. Much of this literature draws from Foucault’s theory of power to reveal its multi-directional and relational quality. Power, therefore, holds the potential for continual contestation, for ‘resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (Foucault 1978: 95). A feminist mapping of power seeks to illuminate the manifold forms through which it is both directly and indirectly enacted and contested. This in turn provides, as Maiguashca argues, a more expansive view of the ‘real’ and ‘transformative’ aspects of political agency (2013: 127), thus shifting focus from any centralised source towards the significance of process, relationship and embodied experience (Mountz 2004:325). More specifically, theorisations of resistance are expanded beyond the realm of organised opposition enacted against an external, sovereign force towards the dynamic, messy, creative and at times surreptitious forms of action. Resistance, as Pain points out, is never

in 'straightforward opposition to violence, but exists in messy and dynamic relation' (2014d). In this way, a feminist perspective attends as well to the more modest, everyday acts of resistance otherwise obscured from any politicised labelling.

Therefore, the starting point for the discussion on resistance shifts the gaze away from essentialising notions of power as out there and a dualistic understanding of power verses resistance to acknowledge the multifarious ways in which to alter or disrupt systems of domination. Within this framing, there is also an acknowledgement of the fact that in the absence of the more overt, oppositional forms of resistance, there is still a story to tell. Resistance can be read through and within the everyday and embodied experiences and situated acts which often characterise the migrant struggle for subjectivity and politicalability and therefore at the same time reveal the profoundly pernicious landscape in which they are situated.

Dissensus as resistance

Jacques Rancière's appropriation of dissensus highlights those moments which interrupt the 'going-on-being' of the existing situation or order (Bayly 2013) and provides a powerful concept through which to analyse forms of resistance in the context of asylum studies. Indeed, an increase of interest in the subject of resistance amongst migrant communities adds important complexity to the image of the vulnerable migrant (Sigvardsdotter 2012b), and yet Rancière's notion of politics speaks to the rare moments of resistance possible in their precarious position. For Rancière, genuine political activities involve forms of innovation that 'tear bodies from their assigned places' (Corcoran 2010:1), engaging with the ways in which individuals gather to collectively disrupt the usual, hierarchical order. As Naomi Millner argues, in Rancière's account, self-authorised acts of intervention - for example the demonstrations enacted by the Paris sans-papiers migrants in the early 1990s, as they occupied churches proclaiming

themselves citizens based on their contributions to France – are important to critical scholarship to the extent that they evidence political disagreement; she writes ‘such acts mark the appearance of a collective which is not counted as ‘part’ of the social, and the assertion of a polemically different version of rights’ (Millner 2013: 89), thereby producing a substantively different understanding of rights and who is able to determine them. Rancière’s theorisation of politics, therefore, concerns what people do, and in particular what they do that challenges the social order itself, in how it disrupts the ‘obviousness and naturalness that attaches to [that] order’ (May 2016). This conception of politics constitutes a reconfiguration of what Rancière names the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière 1999: 70) - that is this ‘tearing’ of bodies from their designated spaces, reflecting a ‘polemic disturbance’ (Millner 2013: 89) which materialises in what he calls a dissensus. Such acts are ‘polemical’, argues Millner, due to the dispute over the ‘givens’ of what substantive rights are and who may define them (ibid), thus throwing into question the preordained structures of who can make rights claims and when they can be made. The resistance possible in the position of the asylum seeker is based in the fact that it is not what they receive or demand, but on what they do under the presupposition of one’s own equality (May 2016).

Therefore, Rancière’s concept of dissensus is notable here specifically in how it focuses attention on the repressive and constraining conditions of particular social arrangements on the one hand, and the nature of those acts required in order to disrupt them on the other. Rancière’s notion of politics is rooted in recognising those acts which, however temporarily, antagonise forms of domination and are driven by an inherent assumption of equality between all beings, enabling an alternative response beyond what appears possible (Millner 2013: 91). Rancière’s political subjects emerge as they take part in activities that do not belong to them, ‘altering the configuration of the sensible that rendered them invisible and inaudible’ (Çıdam 2020). Being attentive to the messy, and

even ambiguous disruptive responses to power and violence highlights the ways which individuals find to resist and become (re)politicised in these sites. This framing of resistance opens up a way for analysing the gestures, or temporary moments in which individuals gather collectively to challenge what substantive rights are and who may define them (Millner 2013: 89). In the context of these administrative sites which, as I will explore, seek to reduce individuals to anonymous, silent beings, this lens on resistance highlights those occasions in which individuals collectively defy bureaucracy's rendering of them as invisible and inaudible beings.

Speaking and acting beings

Arendt's writings on public space as a space of appearance are also of significance in exploring how individuals participate in action within highly suppressed environments and offer an alternative dialectic for thinking through notions of being visible within such spaces. Arendt, who was highly influential to Rancière's thinking, understood politics as a confrontation and contestation of worlds and given identities, regarding political action as setting 'something into motion' (Arendt 1958:177), resulting in something 'unexpected, unpredictable and ultimately causally inexplicable' (Arendt 2005a: 111-2; cited in Dikeç 2013:80). Where Rancière emphasises political action as disrupting the usual social order, Arendt's politics underscores the creation of a space of appearance for acting with and before others - not through a material public space, but through a performed and socially defined political community (Sigvardsdotter 2012b:25). Indeed a space of appearance is ephemeral and contingent (Dikeç 2013). Arendt continually emphasises politics' spontaneous, creative potential as well as its capacity for plurality, in inducing actors to join together to open 'a kind of theatre in which freedom can appear' (Arendt 1958:154). For Arendt, one's unique 'who-ness' is only disclosed in public action and speech in the presence of others, recognising that to be fully human is only possible

through public action and speech. She thus theorised a politics built not on already existing identities but shared experiences and practices of citizenship. (Dikeç 2013; Honig 1995). In Dikeç's words:

Political action in the presence of others — in plurality — is the basis of Arendt's political subject revealing their 'who-ness'. It is only in the presence of others, in action and speech, that they at once establish a political relation with the others and affirms their distinctiveness from them. What provides human beings that 'mysterious talent for working miracles' (Arendt 2005a:113) is the capacity for action, which is both ruptural and inaugurative for Arendt, working miracles in opening up spaces that at once relate and separate individuals (2013: 81).

As I show in Chapters Four and Five, part of the pernicious character of border control systems and their administrative structures is their enacting a form of silencing on individuals, whereby they can only be managed and controlled in the abstract. Yet, within these circumstances, there are openings for resistance. Arendt affirms the possibility for equality in spaces of appearance, where the normal status and distinctions that regulate interaction are temporarily suspended (Marquez 2012: 12). Spaces of appearance may be created whenever individuals gather together politically, reflecting a ruptural moment similar to Ranciere's notion of dissensus, in making oneself 'seen and heard' (Arendt 1958:50). This capacity to act is what Arendt regarded as true power, for it does not rely on 'instruments' (i.e. violence) in order to obtain it. In this sense, Arendt's notion of appearance generates power, as individuals speak to and act with one another (Marquez 2012). For Arendt, one's unique 'who-ness' is only disclosed in public action and speech in the presence of others, recognising that to be fully human is only possible through public action and speech. As mentioned above, Arendt was careful to emphasise and celebrate a notion of public space as not material but performative, in its ability to provide an opportunity to speak and act — what she considered to be reality itself (Arendt 1958).

In the same way that Arendt points to bureaucracy's tendency to protect individuals wielding power from engaging with reality by an ultimate dependency on the cognitive mode of thinking, her dialectics of visibility and appearance point to a condition of political participation which engages the individual *with* reality.

While, the creation of a space of appearance may require a certain artificial equality, for it does not eliminate inequalities of wealth and status (Arendt 1970; Marquez 2012: 12), this action brings 'something into being which did not exist before' (Arendt 2006:150). Spaces of appearance then, are not only where political subjectivity is disclosed, but where subjectivity is produced (Dikeç 2013: 86). It is individuals acting together in freedom, and it is in this sense that Arendt regarded political action as enabling new relations and new realities (Dikeç 2013: 86), where mutuality and interaction are empowering in their own right (Birmingham 2006). Arendt, writes Dikeç (2013), is a theorist of beginnings, and her notion of political subjectivity, created through the collective action of individuals, temporarily enables new roles and rules, and eludes the roles and rules that usually oppress them (Marques 2012).

Both Arendt and Rancière therefore, offer a conceptualisation of politics as a mode of activity which emphasises both its collective and disruptive potential. In Chapter Six, in seeking to recognise, highlight and problematise the possibilities of resistance within the confines of bordering strategies, I draw from Rancière's language of dissensus and Arendt's notion of appearance, to engage with the ways in which individuals contest and unsettle bureaucracies rendering of individuals as invisible and inaudible beings, by making themselves seen and heard (Arendt 1958; Ranciere 2010).

Bearing witness

In recognising dissensus as a mode of resistance which disrupts the going-on-being of a given situation, I established a framework for articulating those gestures which serve to

temporarily unsettle or contest the dominant order. This framing also opens up another dynamic for understanding what people do which challenges the usual arrangements, enabled through the phenomenon of bearing witness. In the context of this study, the act of bearing witness was significant to how Signing Support volunteers felt able to legitimise their presence in the reporting centre, despite its limited potentiality in instigating change. In this section I introduce the concept of bearing witness within critical scholarship, and discuss the main concepts of relevance to Chapter Six, where I explore the potency of analysing witness bearing as a way for understanding this act of embodied presence as a defiance to the bureaucratic tendency to avoid proximity.

In his paper, *Message in a Bottle* (2009), Fuyuki Kurasawa identifies witnessing as one of the defining socio-cultural practices of our epoch, a mode of response to political crises and human rights abuses which has become increasingly favoured (2009: 106). Studies have often focused on the political potential of bearing witness as a particular kind of ‘speech act’ (Givoni 2011:147), appropriated within notions of testimony which emphasise its ethical character as an act compelled by duty. In *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), Agamben speaks of a compulsion to tell when confronted with suffering. It is this compulsion, suggests Holocaust survivor, writer and chemist Primo Levi, that is the impetus for survival. His infamous words: ‘I am at peace with myself because I bore witness’ (1997: 219; cited in Agamben 1999: 17), reveal a certain unease about his own survival that is in some way quelled or justified through the very act of witnessing. The academic and US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power once described bearing witness as both an instinct and a responsibility, pointing to the politicised nature of the act, with its potential to impact change (The Final Year 2017).

Elizabeth Currans provides a more modest account of witnessing as requiring ‘bodily presence and affective investment’ (2017:92), thus capturing bearing witness as a simply an intentional act of embodied presence. Through these terms, it could be argued

that the process of bearing witness constitutes one aspect of how we as human beings might articulate a particular kind of response to suffering. Rather than segregating suffering to ‘the realm of the inhuman and the incomprehensible’ (Kurasawa 2009:100), which arguably serves to remove it from public engagement and scrutiny, bearing witness constitutes an embodied refusal to look away. In defiance of the bureaucratic tendency to avoid lingering on the implications of actions or on suffering itself, bearing witness can be understood as a confrontation with suffering. A face-to-face encounter with suffering, argued Levinas, is crucial to ensuring the self is ‘put in question by the alterity of the other’ resulting in a specific form of ‘exposedness’ (Levinas 1981: 75; cited in Gill 2016: 26). This, Levinas emphasised, prohibits my turning away.

Beyond theorisations which point to its ability to impact change, bearing witness can be understood more simply - or even more profoundly - as an enhanced act of bodily presence, in defiance against the onlooker's inclination to turn away from an encounter of suffering. This I suggest, in itself makes it political, recognising it as a disruption to the bureaucratic tendency to avoid lingering on the outcomes of harmful actions (Bauman 1989). As I will discuss in Chapter Four, reporting operates through a mode of abstraction which shields functionaries from the repercussions of their actions. Speaking back to this, as Signing Support volunteers bear witness, they constitute a mode of response which actively chooses to see, and to know. Bearing witness can thus be constituted by its capacity to be confronted with reality itself. As well, by defying the one-way mode of surveillance which operates within the reporting space, witness-bearers use their gazes and their bodies to transform the passivity expected of them (Currans 2017: 93).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the key literature which has inspired this thesis, as well as the central theoretical basis on which it has been shaped. Drawing from

scholarship on bureaucracy, violence, and resistance, I have sought to bring together these relatively disparate fields of enquiry to create an analytical framework through which I will examine Home Office reporting.

By engaging with the work of Hannah Arendt and her critique of bureaucracy and its potential for violence, I have sought to undo notions of bureaucratic systems of governance as benign, rational and neutral. Arendt's conceptualisation of the logics underpinning bureaucratic practice as dependant on non-thinking, necessity and automation reveal the extent to which bureaucracies prescribe behaviour ultimately reliant on rules and abstraction, and which therefore fail to deal with the human before them. While other thinkers, du Gay prominent among them, argue that bureaucracy enables a neutral system of governance, I have sought, in contrast, to provide a theoretical basis for understanding the threat of bureaucratic power. By then considering what counts as violence as well as feminist work on the role of threat, I have sought to highlight the nature of the processes and practices through which exclusionary immigration policies operate, by seeing that bureaucracy is a way of enacting violence, since bureaucracy is a central element of how those processes and practices are constituted. This framework also elucidates the western liberal democracy's ambitions to manage and exclude 'unwanted' migrants in surreptitious and out of sight ways—through the seemingly benign administrative systems and sites which constitute immigration and asylum policy. By providing an analysis of Rancière's notion of dissensus, I have also established a framework for looking at the modes through which disruptions might occur. I argue that recognising dissensus as a temporary mode of resistance, it highlights both the repressive conditions of these seemingly mundane bureaucratic sites on the one hand, and the nature of those acts required in order to disrupt them on the other, rooted in enacting a response beyond what appears possible (Millner 2013: 91).

Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I detail how I undertook my research, outlining the trajectory which led me to engage with the reporting process and the methodological approach taken, in seeking to deepen our understanding of the intersections between bureaucracy and violence within border control systems. I begin by articulating my methodological approach to organising and conducting my research as well as reflecting on and analysing my data, which followed a commitment to points rooted in feminist theory. I then reflect on my role as a researcher in this field, and the issues concerning my positionality which emerged. This is followed by a more practical outlining of the journey I went on in constructing a research site, and the learning process I underwent in navigating this process, which was significant to how my research project unfolded. I then give an overview of the two stages which structured this research, followed by a detailed discussion of the methods of enquiry I engaged with and the ethical considerations which centred my research.

Articulating a feminist methodology

‘Feminist research begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical’
- Beverly Skeggs (1994:77)

Here I outline the methodological approach I adopted in conducting my research, which I articulate through a commitment to feminism as both theory and praxis (Letherby 2003:4). While there is no single feminist epistemology or methodology, feminist research shares some common angles of vision that are connected in principle to feminist struggle (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993:266), and which have guided and shaped my praxis, which I outline below. I both acknowledge and scrutinise my role and my positionality as researcher, with the aim of offering a process of reflexivity to the ensuing discussion (Stanley and Wise 1993).

Feminist research starts with a commitment to produce knowledge that challenges the silences in mainstream research, both in relation to the issues studied and the ways in which the study itself is undertaken (Letherby 2003:4; Hyndman 2004). bell hooks implores feminists to root their scholarship in ‘transformative politics and practice’ (1994: 71), and therefore feminist research must take a clear political stance. Hesse-Biber speaks of feminist perspectives as conveying messages of empowerment that challenge the ‘encircling of knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions’ (2014: 35). To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes (Hesse-Biber 2014); as academics they ask new questions that place marginalised groups at the centre of social inquiry (ibid.).

As I discussed in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, this research is concerned with exposing the mechanisms of violence which operate, often surreptitiously, through the everyday bureaucratic systems which govern the lives of asylum-seekers. Acknowledging that their experiences have often been side-lined, discredited or

excluded, this research aims explicitly to respond to this recognition. It has sought to expose and critique these structures of oppression, while also bringing marginalised voices and their experiences to the foreground.

This approach has inspired not only my methodological approach but the methods I drew from in conducting my research. The everyday of conducting fieldwork can be an emotional venture and qualitative research is, as Aitken describes 'heart work' (Aitken 2010: 47). Far from being devoid of feeling, feelings and emotion provide connections which push us into the world rather than positioning us on its periphery (Thrift 2004). As a practice, feminist research is attentive to the role that emotions play in influencing actions, relationships and spaces (Ahmed 2004; Bondi 2005). In this vein, I adopted a range of qualitative research methods including focus groups, semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation and ethnography and in all of these methods, sought to take account both of my own emotions and feelings, as well as those of whom I was researching.

With regards to conducting interviews, DeVault and Gross (2014) speak of interviews as simply systemising the fundamental human activity of 'talking with others'. My interviews involved gathering reports and stories, learning about participants' perspectives, and giving them voice in academic discourse (DeVault and Gross 2014). By letting my participants speak for themselves using the initial focus group discussions, and by following up with interviews, the participants had influence over the research agenda and what issues and experiences felt significant to them.

In conducting ethnography and acknowledging the tendency of this method to focus on the 'suffering subject' (Pink 2007), a commitment to seeing beyond these totalising descriptions, I have sought to avoid such representations of the suffering migrant, by as well attending to moments or gestures of resistance to the structures of oppression marginalised groups face. In being conscious not to position asylum seekers

simply as lacking in agency, I as a researcher was keen to navigate toward empowering rather than objectifying (Canning 2017). As well feminist research calls for a commitment to reflexivity, which critically analyses the role of the ethnographer, together with considering our own intellectual biographies and contexts and relations (Pink 2007; DeVault and Gross 2014). It also acknowledges the complexity of the research process and considers the detail of doing research and the relationship between this and the knowledge produced (Letherby 2003). As Jennifer Hyndman articulates, the field is messy, and very often cannot be constituted as bounded by time and place, cordoned off from the rest of our lives. Drawing on the work of feminist geographers, Hyndman insists that fieldwork should be considered as 'at once a political, personal and professional undertaking' (2001:262) and an endeavour in which insights gained are always partial, situated and not a quest for a whole and complete truth (2001; Rose 1993). Following the same line of thought, Liisa Malkki writes that it may be precisely in giving up the scientific urge to know everything that we gain access to those very partial vistas that our participants may choose to share (1995, cited in Hyndman 2001:262).

It is in this sense that feminist methodologies are attentive to knowledges which not only recognise our own positionality as researchers and as such our limitations, but as well acknowledge the ways in which power relations and political and economic structures take shape and are experienced differently at different scales and sites. As I explore through this project, feminist research also recognises and seeks to highlight the ways in which different forms of violence are interconnected, while inflicted across differing spaces and sites (Pain 2014a; 2014b). In order to understand the ways in which reporting is experienced as violent, as well as the modes of resistance individuals are able to forge within these sites, I therefore inquire into how violence operates both through and beyond the reporting site and how these other sites and experiences are part and parcel of the violent continuum which constitutes seeking asylum.

The section below is my attempt to outline my own conflicted feelings about my positionality in this research, the messiness of some of my processes and how I felt able to reconcile these various considerations.

Positionality and power: a reflection

To engage in research with asylum seekers is to encounter people on the edge: on the edge of hope, on the edge of despair, on the edge of poverty, the edge of survival, on the edge of recognition and belonging. Indeed the portrayal of lives and experiences are unfailingly, as Canning points out, contentious ventures in the social sciences (Canning 2017) and arguably none more so than for those living in this intensity of precarity, in which the everyday constitutes a complex struggle towards belonging. Belonging, as Askins (2013) invokes is more than simply being materially or legally secure, but about being recognised (see also Strang and Ager 2010). This recognition is underscored by contesting their place on the periphery, and situating their lives and experiences, in all their complexity, at the centre. A quest for recognition and belonging, however, involves many challenges which we as researchers must navigate in order to avoid taking advantage of the frequent willingness of asylum seekers to ‘make their voice heard’. This is especially true given the proliferating interest in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in social science research, and a desire to impress upon an ever-more hostile government, their vulnerability. Though our intentions are often well-meant, this potential as Canning suggests, can lead to a voyeuristic gaze towards the seemingly agent-less (2017:5-6).

Reflecting on Lugones and Spelman's challenge to do ‘theory jointly, in helpful, respectful, illuminating and empowering ways’ (1983: 580), I have been mindful of approaching this study in a way that might elevate the participants and their insights, whilst being open to self-questioning and circumspection (581). I found that engaging

with political activities beyond the academy enabled me to reflect on my own commitment to critically engage with the networks of power that exist within these institutions. As Askins notes (2013), as academics we are to think carefully about the knowledges produced through these academic lenses, particularly since much of what is portrayed about the lives of people of black and minority ethnic people is portrayed through the knowledge and experience of white people (hooks 2015; Canning 2017).

Feminist geographers have paid a great deal of attention to relations of power and questions of positionality in fieldwork (Bondi 2003; Rose 1997), and have argued that the similarities and the differences between researchers and those they research require particular consideration (Bondi 2003; Valentine 2002). As such, I have also sought to take account of my own motivations and, in recognising my privileged position and the responsibility we have as academics to consider the entire process of negotiating social relations within the field. With Askins, regarding my own political perspectives and motivations as ‘embedded formative experiences’ (2013: 527) which informed not only my reasons for wishing to undertake this research, but how I have sought to interpret the (partial) experiences of seeking asylum. Yet, as Lugones and Spelman anticipate, it is not always an easy task to be sensitive and self-questioning outside of your own culture, and at times I certainly failed. I have also experienced feelings of shame at my own privilege, and the sympathy I had for those who have shared with me I could only perceive as inadequate, who continue to face immeasurable hardship. The levels of distress among asylum seekers perpetually suffering an inordinate degree of hardship, was at times difficult to bear. For me it led, often simultaneously, to feelings of both helplessness and anger.

In terms of my positionality as a white British female, together with my status as ‘researcher’, inevitably led to some challenges. There were times that my nationality has seemed awkward, (Bosworth 2014) for instance when participants expressed anger

towards the perceived hypocrisy of Britain's immigration stance. Lila, a woman from a country in central Africa who has lived in the UK for 12 years said to me: "why can't they let us stay here, when they have the freedom to go anywhere? Why shouldn't I live in England just because of the colour of my skin, when there are millions of white people in my country?". (This inference to 'they' was perhaps her way of seeking to deflect from implicating me in her country of origin's colonial history). As someone with dual citizenship, there were also times I was troubled by how, unlike my participants, I was able not only to live unhampered in this country, but was also able to travel and live with ease across national borders. The addition of being a PhD student, with all the privileges that brings, meant that there were times during my fieldwork when I felt apprehensive about what I was doing and who I was benefiting. Not only can the very presence of a researcher make a community visible in ways which may not always be favourable (Tomlinson 2002), I was conscious of how building rapport with participants — arguably a key component to feminist qualitative research — can play into a research model which emphasises minimising social distance for scientific ends (see Oakley 1981; Sjoberg and Nett 1968). This is a dimension of feminist methodologies which Duncombe and Jessop critically question, with regards to how 'doing rapport' can become commodified through a hidden use of power (2012).

Clearly there were aspects of my identity that impacted on my interactions in the field and this was something I was acutely aware of throughout my fieldwork (De Vault and Gross 2014). Yet that is not to say that I did not have meaningful connections with many participants: I found that during the course of my fieldwork, individuals were eager to start conversations with me both about my research and often over time this led us to deeper conversations about our lives, our families, where we had come from, even our politics. Even for those who did not speak English, I found that some reached for other ways of connecting: a young Vietnamese woman no older than 20, hugged me every time

we saw each other at Patchway and said “thank you”, one of the only English words she seemed to know. This had a conflicting effect on me, as on the one hand, I had a desire to ‘connect emotionally’ (Kearns 2001) with people who I felt compassion for, whilst simultaneously aware of the ethical challenges associated with the practice of ‘doing rapport’. While this desire to connect can reflect an eagerness to minimise social distance, yet it can often exist in tension with a need to embed distance for the sake of reflexivity - that is, the recognition that research is a process that contains a variety of power dimensions, which anthropologist Helen Callaway describes as ‘a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness’ (1992: 33, cited in Hesse-Biber 2014: 133).

Regarding interviewing, while listening empathically to another person is an ordinary and everyday process, it is not necessarily easy to do (Bondi 2003). As Bondi describes:

Imaginatively entering into another person’s experiential world at the same time as retaining awareness of the difference between one’s own unconscious experience and that of the other means being an observer of the process at the same time as being a participant. Rather than occupying the two positions simultaneously all of the time, what happens is more akin to an oscillation between observation and participation (Bondi 2003:72).

Here Bondi depicts the tensions that can often exist when conducting interviews, whereby we can feel in one moment fully absorbed in the interviewee's story, yet a moment later, recognise the need to attempt a degree of objectivity as an observer, an experience I identified with during my fieldwork.

At other times, I encountered difficulties in communication, which also related to my positionality as an English-speaking researcher. Whilst all of my participants spoke some English, their level of fluency varied significantly: this not only made it difficult to understand each other during interviewing, but ultimately they were forced to use my

language in order to explain their experiences, which at times felt problematic, particularly in how it re-embedded their own experiences of exclusion (Lugones and Spelman 1983; hooks 2015). While I did consider using a translator, I eventually decided against it as I felt it could likely impinge on the trust I had sought to gain from individuals. I also questioned its appropriateness given the translator's association with the Home Office and the scepticism with which translators were discussed by some of my participants. For example, as Felix, a young man from central Africa shared with me, 'I made my first claim in Croydon, and I had a translator: there was many mistakes in my story... The solicitor write to the Home Office and say you have made a mistake' (Interview, February 2017). Similarly, Hassan who understood English very well, told me in relation to his translator during a Home Office interview: 'I found his [question] is not the question the [Home Office] interviewer in fact wants to know about... I got very angry.' Whilst I recognised the problems of being an English speaker and how it undoubtedly excluded some participants, as well as forced some who did participate to speak a language that was not their own, I found that several asylum seekers I interviewed had exceptionally good levels of English. Those that I interviewed that did not speak fluent English still expressed an eagerness to share their experiences with me, and even despite a limited diction there was still a powerful story to tell.

Another aspect of my positionality which impacted on my interactions in the field related to gender. I found that being a woman had some implicit advantages, specifically in terms of being able to access the migrant activist network with relative ease, many of whom are women and who welcomed me into their homes on numerous occasions. As a woman it was also more straightforward to connect with women seeking asylum, who may not have been comfortable sharing their stories, especially one-to-one, with a male researcher. While the dangers of assuming that gender similarity provides a basis for identification and empathy have been extensively discussed (Bondi 2003), and whilst

I did not assume unity based on gender (Mohanty 1988; Smith 2014), there were dimensions of commonality in this regard which were relevant in easing the researcher-participant relationship (Smith 2014: 22).

Perhaps inevitably, being a woman had other distinct disadvantages, particularly when relating to male participants, which though seldom, emerged largely from misunderstandings or misplaced assumptions on the part of the participant. There were also occasional moments of discomfort and frustration when I also felt my “gender” got in the way. As the manager of one asylum support organisation told me during interviewing, ‘we tend not to recruit young blonde women as volunteers for our project with male asylum seekers, it just doesn’t work’. While I understood her sentiment, being a blonde-haired woman and aged 31 at the time, I could not help but smile at her comment, which seemed to me a gentle (and humorous) reprimand for attempting to put aside my ‘young’ femaleness.

Reconciling my role

There were a number of ways in which I was able to reconcile these various contentions and conflicted feelings about my role as 'researcher' in this context. Personally, rather than adopting an approach that embedded distance, reflecting Kearns' notion of 'abstract justice' it became important for me to connect emotionally and almost always this occurred naturally as I interacted with participants over time. This was especially the case with regards to volunteering with Bristol Signing Support (BSS), and seeing both asylum seekers and volunteers regularly at Patchway enabled varying degrees of familiarity to form with individuals during the course of my fieldwork. This was perhaps also helped in part because I was eager to avoid methods of research that made my presence particularly obvious or awkward (for instance, I avoided surveys and questionnaires and

sought to avoid asking individuals for interviews unless there was already a degree of familiarity between us).

Perhaps more importantly, I found that as I began to articulate my methodology and began reading about feminist approaches to research, many of these conflicted feelings began to ease. As I described above, I discovered ways of conducting my research which for me, reconciled these concerns and who I felt to be benefiting from this research. I also engaged in various pro-migrant protests during my fieldwork, which enabled a different kind of connectedness between myself and informants, where my role as researcher became temporarily subsumed within a desire to act. Reflecting on Paul Cloke's (2002) call for geographers to develop deeper connections between our academic and non-academic lives, and Doreen Massey's recognition that geographers need to be engaged beyond the academy (2000; 2002; see also Valentine 2005), taking part in protest was, for me, one response to these invocations: 'acting politically' (Cloke 2002) through taking part in protest became one form through which I might disrupt the traditional power relations between researcher and researched and avert the 'voyeuristic gaze' which Canning (2017) warns against.

Researching reporting and beyond

The research methods chosen for this project were shaped and determined by a feminist approach, not only in being attentive to the practices constituting the reporting process and their effects, but also in engaging with the interconnectedness of other experiences beyond reporting. In order to better understand the extent to which bureaucracy functions as a violent technology in the context of border control and management practices, I decided to focus on examining Home Office reporting, an under-researched phenomenon yet one which constitutes a significant component of the lived experience of seeking asylum in Britain.

To investigate how those subjected to reporting experience it in their daily lives, as well the modes of resistance they engage with, I inquire into the bureaucratic logics at play within these sites, analysing the behavioural conduct of Home Office staff within the reporting centre, as well as asylum seekers' encounters with officers. I also draw from interviews with asylum seekers, migrant support workers and Signing Support volunteers to understand how these processes are felt and experienced as violent. I also analyse the spatiotemporal features of reporting at one reporting centre in Patchway, but also draw from additional research and accounts of reporting at other sites. Mindful of the need to go beyond simply examining reporting, methodologically, I responded to these questions through a mixed-method approach, undertaking a detailed ethnography of a reporting centre and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with those who are required to partake in this practice, as well as inquiring into other violent aspects of the asylum experience, and of which as I explore, reporting is inherently connected. This means that I also include research material from other experiences and sites, including participants' experiences of immigration detention, living without access to cash, as well as facing removal, thus highlighting how violence operates through a continuum across different sites, extending and compounding the violence of reporting itself.

Locating the field

Before embarking on my fieldwork, I recognised some difficulties concerning my initial research focus on the lived experience of immigration detention. Interested in rendering visible (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) the everyday, often mundane violences of immigration detention practices, and to examine how they intersect with the detention estate's role as ostensibly the most administratively convenient (Bosworth 2014; 2015) way of monitoring those with insecure legal status, I was aware that to grasp the nature of these institutions, I would need to go 'inside' (Bosworth 2014: 53). Yet, as I learned

of the increasing difficulty in accessing the space of immigration detention itself, the question quickly arose of whether I would be able to describe and document the lived experience of immigration detention in any meaningful way, under the awkward surveillance of staff (Bosworth 2014: 74). Whilst in her comprehensive study of immigration removal centres, Mary Bosworth acknowledges that in such restricted sites, the government remains anxious about opening up for ‘academic scrutiny’, it is right to be cautious and to recognise as researchers, the potential to both embarrass staff and to hinder access (Bosworth 2014: 55). Even if I was able to gain access, I became increasingly aware of the ethical issues raised in asking detainees to share information about their lives within a space wrought with such tension and unease. Alongside these concerns, I sensed the ethical integrity of my research could be compromised, if by potentially going ‘undercover’ as a visitor, how I might communicate my research to the individuals detained. I also questioned how I might go about allowing people to talk freely and unencumbered, if they were indeed still ‘inside’. As I navigated these questions around accessibility and ethics, I felt that I would be able to explore experiences of violence and bureaucracy through a different aspect of the asylum process, so I turned to reaching out to organisations working to support asylum seekers and undocumented migrants within the community as opposed to the immigration detention estate.

Given that the city of Exeter in which I live lacks proximity to a substantial refugee and migrant “hub”, I also perceived how my location was limiting in not enabling me to be readily available for events and volunteering opportunities (Schmid-Scott, Marshall, Gill and Bagelman 2020). I had, after all, become concerned with the welfare of asylum seekers in Britain, first through volunteering and then working for a migrant rights organisation in east London. I found a lot of my connections and networks were London-based, and I was therefore compelled to start over in terms of re-establishing links and networks in the southwest. All of this meant that the initial stages of my

fieldwork were spent networking, building relationships and trust, and identifying informants within the asylum-seeking community in Bristol. I will explore my methods of enquiry in more detail below.

Methods of enquiry: an overview

I embarked on my fieldwork during an 18-month period between September 2016 and April 2018. The empirical material for this thesis was obtained through two main stages of research; stage one initially involved networking and identifying participants; I attended a number of events and meetings based in Manchester organised by my supporting organisation, Right to Remain. I also attended events in Bristol organised by Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR), and organised meetings with BRR staff-members, who facilitated in helping me to reach out to the asylum-seeking community in Bristol. At this stage, I then conducted two focus groups and several in-depth pilot interviews; one focus group constituted a group of asylum-seekers in Manchester, and one with a group of asylum-seekers and volunteers and activists in Bristol, both of which I recorded using a dictaphone.

For stage two of my research, I conducted participant observation as a volunteer with Bristol Signing Support, and conducted further in-depth interviews. Once I had decided to focus on the process of reporting, the most substantial aspects of my empirical data were obtained during this stage, which constituted an 11-month period between May 2017 and April 2018. I took part in several of BSS's monthly meetings, and made many pages of fieldnotes and observations. As well as the recorded focus groups, overall I conducted a total of 26 in-depth interviews, 24 of these were recorded using a dictaphone: I conducted ten of these with asylum-seekers and refugees, and 16 with volunteers, asylum support workers and activists working with the various organisations I became

involved with (see Figure 6). Alongside focus groups and in-depth interviews, over the course of my fieldwork I spoke to approximately 50 individuals experiencing Britain's asylum system. I also had conversations with two solicitors working in the area of immigration and asylum, and a trauma expert who has worked and conducted various projects with refugee women in Bristol. These conversations occurred either at the reporting centre or in the community during various events or meetings. I also engaged in many conversations with activists and volunteers, and I made written notes of these interactions and insights afterwards. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full, along with approximately 30 pages of fieldnotes. Unfortunately, my numerous attempts to conduct interviews with Home Office staff, including sending emails and asking in person at the reporting centre, were unsuccessful. Rather, the insights presented here are my own observations of their actions and interactions within the site of the reporting centre, or described by research participants.

That said, while there was a "beginning" and an "end" to my fieldwork, in many ways, the groundwork for this project began many years ago through my volunteering activities with asylum advocacy groups in London, where I witnessed first-hand the pernicious landscape of immigration and asylum policy in the UK. In some ways, this project also extends on through my continued engagement with asylum advocacy groups based in the southwest, as well as through developing future research proposals which involve some participants from this project.

In the following section, I explain in more depth my methodological approach through each of these stages, concluding with the 11-month period I spent as a volunteer with Bristol Signing Support. My aim is to provide an honest and open account of the research process I underwent, and to demonstrate the risks and dilemmas I encountered (Punch 1986).

Stage one: Networking and conducting focus groups

‘The political agency of people here is palpable. Around a hundred refugees, asylum seekers and activists packed into a small conference centre... Discussions quickly move from the hardening of the ‘hostile environment’, the increase in van raids and the increasing number of barriers for accessing legal rights, to the organisation of solidarity workshops and community support strategies which are challenging this form of aggressive politics.’

— Field notes, Right to Remain annual meeting, September 2016.

Once I had decided to focus on engaging in research with asylum seekers within the community, I decided to concentrate on building a network in two major areas of refugee dispersal: Manchester, in England’s northwest region, and Bristol in the southwest, and only an hour from Exeter by train. As a city with a significantly diverse population I discovered Manchester to also have a burgeoning pro-migrant community and activist network. Many of these networks operate in conjunction to one another, and function through a variety of events, meetings and support groups. The partnering organisation for this research is Right to Remain who, as an organisation with an extensive network of migrants’ rights organisations they are regularly supporting, were able to help me in making initial connections with migrant rights and activist groups. I attended a Right to Remain annual meeting in Manchester in September 2016. The event was a gathering of asylum seekers, refugees and activists based in and around the northwest, and was an opportunity for sharing knowledge and information on challenging immigration detention. As well as being keen to connect with local organisations in order to conduct the initial stages of my fieldwork, and given that I had yet to settle on a new research focus, I also attended to gain a sense of other themes and issues that the migrant community were concerned with. Right to Remain were keen to involve me in their various activities so I decided that I would attend and participate in as many of them as I could. At this point, knowing Greater Manchester to be one of England’s major hubs for refugee dispersal and migrant activism, I considered it to be a good place to begin.

Through attending this meeting and subsequent events and workshops organised by Right to Remain in different locations across Greater Manchester, I connected with United for Change: a coalition of organisations and individuals supporting refugees and people seeking asylum within Manchester and Salford. Emily, a young Mancunian



Figure 3: Sewn banners created by members of United for Change, Manchester.
Photo: Amanda Schmid-Scott

working for United for Change, invited me to participate in their regular meetings in Manchester. I had met a couple of the group at various events in Manchester and she said that many were keen to share of their experiences, which they saw as part of their fight for migrant justice. Emily became an important contact and through her I was able to organise subsequent focus groups and interviews with participants.

Liisa Malkki (1995) discusses fieldwork in terms of giving up a determination to unearth all "the facts", and instead to listen to what the informants deem important to share (1995, cited in Hyndman 2001: 262). Importantly for me, entering the field in this manner gave me an opportunity to formulate 'exmanent questions' (Jovchelovitch and

Bauer 2000) - namely questions that I had formed in my mind before I began my fieldwork, which were neither fixed nor clearly focussed. I went on to develop these further once I had spent time in the field, responding to the 'immanent' issues (ibid.) that arose from these interactions. Themes that consistently emerged during this stage included asylum seekers facing issues surrounding reporting practices, as well as challenges in accessing basic necessities like food, and accommodation. As this stage I also considered how my research might incorporate forms and sites of resistance which individuals forge, going beyond their victimhood portrayal (Bagelman 2016).

After several months of travelling back and forth to Manchester from Exeter, attending events, organising and conducting a focus group, and conducting several one-to-one interviews, I eventually decided that I needed to focus on a research site closer to where I lived. I was especially keen to avoid being a 'helicopter' researcher, associated with academics who 'fly in' to conduct research and then disappear: due to its lack of proximity to where I was based, I felt that Manchester as a field site would not enable me to spend time building relationships with research participants and gaining their trust. I decided to focus my field of research on Bristol.

Bristol, located in England's southwest region, has a controversial migration history as one of the major ports facilitating Britain's slave trade during the late 17th up until the early 19th century. Indeed, Bristol became the focus of the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020 when the statue representing the notorious slave trader Edward Colston was thrown into Bristol Harbour by protesters, an act which invited both criticism and praise. Runnymede Trust recently described Bristol as the most divided city in Britain, and ranking ethnic minorities in Bristol as experiencing greater disadvantage in education and employment than in England and Wales as a whole.



Figure 4: The statue of Edward Colston being thrown into Bristol Harbour.

Source: PA Media.

As one of the major dispersal areas in the southwest, Bristol also has a significant asylum-seeking community, and similarly to Manchester, it has a thriving network of migrant support and activism. Given this, as well as its proximity to my home in Exeter, I decided to make Bristol the primary site of my fieldwork, which initially began through connecting with Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR). BRR is one of several charities in Bristol supporting asylum seekers and refugees, which also functions through partnering with other smaller charities throughout the city. Through connecting with BRR, I was able to organise an initial focus group, which I intentionally designed to be open to asylum seekers, refugees, as well as volunteers, as an opportunity to introduce my research and to hear from them, what issues or themes were significant as part of their experiences of seeking asylum. I attended several meetings and attended a weekly drop in at Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN).

Focus group: United for Change, Manchester

In February 2017 I joined a United for Change gathering on an afternoon in an unheated church hall where they were painting signs and banners for an up-and-coming protest - One Day Without Us - which seeks to celebrate the contribution of migrants throughout the UK. As others painted and debated over catchy slogans, I conducted a focus group with a small group of those who had expressed an interest in sharing their experiences of the asylum process. Of the group of six, all were waiting for asylum outcomes, and were subjected to bi-weekly reporting at Dallas Court, the Home Office reporting centre in Salford. Three had experienced detention. During the focus group, I introduced discussional themes but I kept the questions open in order to gain a sense of the major issues they faced and what they considered important to share with me. The focus group was followed by several subsequent visits to United for Change meetings, where I conducted in-depth semi-structured pilot interviews with several members of the group. I also conducted in depth interviews with Emily and Anna, who at the time, coordinated United for Change activities.

Focus group: Bristol

The focus group in Bristol took place at the Malcolm X Centre. The Malcolm X Centre is a consistent hub of activity for migrants during the week, with a drop-in legal advice service, free English language classes, art therapy sessions, and a clothing and homeware 'shop' - donated items displayed in a shop-type fashion yet free to those in need. Through this focus group I was invited to join Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN) during their Monday drop-in service. Facilitating focus group discussions and interviews at this stage of my fieldwork enabled me to gain a sense of the experiences of seeking asylum and how asylum seekers engaged with these discussions which informed the subsequent

direction of my research. Themes that arose from this stage of fieldwork strongly centred around the issues concerning access to financial support, the bureaucratic aspects of the asylum process, and reporting. Through these initial observations, I began to formulate a clearer and narrower field of research — and wishing to ground my research in one specific field site, I became a volunteer with Bristol Signing Support (BSS).



Figure 5: Posters created by members of United for Change.
Photo: Amanda Schmid-Scott

Stage 2: Participant observer: Reporting at Patchway

Once I committed myself to volunteering with BSS, I was subsequently given training and joined the volunteer rota, which involved a two-hour slot every other Tuesday at Patchway police station. I was usually accompanied by fellow BSS volunteer Sophy, a highly intelligent and witty activist in her 70s, and who quickly became a friend.

The general principle of reporting is that those with an insecure immigration status are required to regularly report to the UK Visas and Immigration Agency (a division of

the Home Office). This can include asylum seekers, visa overstayers, migrants found in want of documents, and (former) foreign national offenders (FNOs); in essence, anyone without ‘the legal right to be in the UK’, as explained by the Home Office. In 2018, it was estimated that approximately 80,000 people regularly report or ‘sign’ with the Home Office, which operates out of existing Home Office buildings or, as is the case in Patchway, at local police stations through the UK. In Patchway, there are approximately 300-400 who regularly report, and this can vary for individuals between weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or every six months. Individuals may request for less frequent reporting, if, for instance, they have young children, or they have a health issue which makes travelling regularly to report difficult. Since 2014, Patchway police station is the official reporting centre for Bristol and the surrounding areas, having moved from its previous location in Trinity Road Police Station in the centre of Bristol. Trinity Road, as it is referred to in nearly all my interactions with signers and volunteers, was the much preferred location for reporting, mainly due to its proximity to the city centre. Patchway, as I will explore in Chapter Five of this thesis, is a highly inconvenient location for people to access.

The reporting procedure differs across different reporting centres, for instance some centres require that you hand in your phone when you enter the building, however this wasn't the case at Patchway. The reporting process itself is in many ways a purely administrative procedure; individuals arrive at their allotted time, wait in a queue for up to 20-minutes, enter a small office where a Home Office officer sits behind a desk with a computer screen and clicks a button next to their name to verify their presence, and then, providing there are no further questions, or additional forms to fill out, they may leave. However, as I learnt during my fieldwork, this is a procedure wrought with much tension and ambiguity. This is in large part due to the fact that if there are any issues or discrepancies in the individual’s case, they may be questioned or “interrogated”, searched

(full body searches are common prior to being detained), arrested (“picked up”), and detained (placed in one of the onsite cells). Sometimes, lawyers are contacted and, if they are able to gather evidence in time to show that this has been an erroneous detainment, individuals are later released. When an individual does not have a lawyer, or if the lawyer is not able to challenge the detainment, an individual will wait in the holding cells until Border Enforcement are ready to take them into a van and they are driven to an immigration detention centre where they will face removal.

It is not always clear why individuals are questioned and detained, and as I will explore, at times this appears entirely random. At other times, people can sense that they may ‘have some trouble’ - as it was often articulated by signers, perhaps because they had missed a signing appointment, or they had received a letter from the Home Office, asking them to bring in additional documents. The Home Office very rarely explains in detail why they require additional information or conduct further questioning to individuals. But, as Burrige explains (2019), these often serve as ‘fishing expeditions’ used for gathering additional evidence to prove the ineligibility of someone’s claim and potentially used against them later. As signers attempt to negotiate these tensions and ambiguities in varying ways, the scope for misinterpretation, extreme anxiety and panic is frequently expressed.

During this stage of my fieldwork I was based at this Home Office reporting centre in Patchway as a volunteer. The primary role of volunteers with BSS is to offer practical support to individuals, usually in the form of helping fill out any forms they may be required to complete by the Home Office, directing them to various migrant advice and support services they may require, or to contact their solicitor in the case of a detainment. Our role also encompassed an emotionally supportive element, which usually involved chatting to people as they waited in the queue to report. BSS operates through a rota system whereby volunteers sign-up according to availability via doodle-poll, usually in

regular time slots of two hour shifts. Usually each time slot is allocated by two or occasionally three volunteers.

Data collection: Interviews

I adopted a standard set of questions throughout interviews which was useful in generating a breadth and depth of experiences for understanding the asylum process. I initially focused on key research areas in relation to the circumstances of people's lives whilst seeking asylum, their encounters with the Home Office, their experiences in obtaining financial support, and their experiences of reporting. I also asked questions concerning moments in which they felt able to obstruct or resist what was happening to them. I constructed a list of two to three questions under each of these themes, but was led by participants as to how these questions were discussed. For interviews with asylum support workers, volunteers and activists, I focused on their observations of how the process of asylum was felt and experienced in their encounters with asylum seekers, and their own dealings with the Home Office. I also asked questions concerning their own processes of 'becoming' active (Hercus 2005). Given that I had spent time volunteering alongside several of these participants, I was able to adopt a more reflexive approach, in responding to 'immanent' issues as they arose (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). In all of my interviews, I also gave space for all individuals to share with me anything I had not asked them about already, which often led to meaningful discussions and insights I would otherwise have missed. On occasion participants contacted me following our interview, with a story or experience they had not remembered during the interview.

Using this method, I was not necessarily looking to reconstruct 'facts' as much as understand 'feelings' and 'experiences' and therefore sought to react and respond to participants' descriptions and conceptualisations rather than imposing my own (Redclift 2012). Recognising how, as Oakley (1981) points out, overly structured interviews have

the potential to compound unhelpful power relations, I was particularly mindful of this, especially in light of how many asylum seekers are affected and (negatively) reflect on their initial Home Office interview (see Chapter Four).

Figure 6: In-depth interviews used in study

Participant*	Characteristic	Gender	Organisation affiliation(s)
Lila	Asylum seeker	F	United for Change
Aimee	Asylum seeker	F	BHN
Felix	Asylum seeker	M	United for Change
Elodie	Asylum seeker	F	United for Change
Bernadette	Asylum seeker	F	United for Change
Samuel	Asylum seeker	M	BHN and Borderlands
Anne	Asylum seeker	F	United for Change
Mohammed	Asylum seeker	M	BHN
Hassan	Refugee	M	BHN
Esrām	Refugee	M	BHN
Felicity	Volunteer	F	United for Change
Anna	Asylum Support Worker	F	United for Change
Emily	Asylum Support Worker	F	United for Change
Natasha	Volunteer/Activist	F	BSS
Sophy	Volunteer/Activist	F	BSS
Gaie	Volunteer/Activist	F	BSS and BRR
Sarah	Volunteer/Activist	F	BSS
Grace	Asylum Support Worker	F	-
Rachel	Asylum Support Worker	F	BHN
Penny	Asylum Support Worker	F	BHN
Elinor	Asylum Support Worker and Trainer	F	-
Elenor	Activist	F	Movement for Justice
Richard	Catholic Priest/Activist	M	Borderlands (founder)
Hannah	Former art therapist in UK immigration removal centre	F	-
Katie	Solicitor working with asylum seekers	F	-

* Some names have been assigned pseudonyms

- Indicates where someone wished their place of work to remain anonymous

Participant observation and ethnography

Writing... is itself a way of thinking, and a way of thinking through our research.

Writing... is a significant method in itself.

— Dydia DeLyser, 2010: 341

In much of the methods literature, participant observation is connected to, yet distinct from ethnography (Sigvardsdotter 2012b: 52). While the former describes the research method itself, ‘taking part and continually reflecting on’ what is happening (Walsh 2009:77; cited in Sigvardsdotter 2012b: 52), the latter is the approach through which the researcher aims to describe people’s lives ‘with accuracy and sensitivity’ (Ingold 2008:69; Sigvardsdotter 2012: 52b).

Having a background in anthropology, I was committed to an ethnographic approach in conducting my research, which recognises the importance of interactions and lived experiences. However, this thesis is not an ethnography of people’s lives as such, but an ethnography of a concept (Sigvardsdotter 2012b: 57). That is, it does not seek to document and detail the lives of those I write about, but the imposed bureaucratic processes and their impact encountered through border control practices. Ethnography allowed me to think (DeLyser 2010), and became constitutive for determining how I was understanding and experiencing the actions, events and conversations I both observed and was a part of. Observing and participating in this way also enabled me to develop deeper, more meaningful friendships with people which conducting interviews does not always allow for. In essence, ethnography constituted a practical way through which I could process, whilst not creating an obvious distance. Indeed, I found that requesting interviews was not always appropriate (Bagelman 2016), in terms of how it could potentially create a barrier between myself and the participant.

Once all the data had been collected, I turned to my analysis, and drew together all of my interviews, fieldnotes and focus group transcripts. I used the qualitative data

analysis software NVivo to aid me in coding my data and generated over 70 codes including subsections.

Writing and representation

In terms of the writing process itself, I maintain the first person narrative, which can contribute to challenging traditional styles of academic writing, where ‘one’, ‘the author’ and ‘he’ are meant to represent distance and objectivity (Morley 1996, cited in Letherby 2003:7). ‘I’ is therefore a way of challenging traditional academic authority, as well as constructions of objective truth as somehow obtained through distance, implying that I as the researcher have no involvement or responsibility for what I write (Fleischman 1998, cited in Letherby 2003). Writing as ‘I’ became an intentional act for taking responsibility for what I wrote, whilst simultaneously acknowledging my own presence and my subjective involvement, and the relevance of my presence in the research process (Letherby 2003).

A brief note on terminology

Throughout this thesis I often use the term ‘asylum-seekers’ to collectively define the individuals subjected to reporting practices. While not everyone who visited Patchway to report during this research was an asylum seeker, since any individual subject to immigration control can be required to report, the focus of this study is the lived experience of asylum, and all the research participants involved in this study were either awaiting an outcome on their asylum claim, had gained indefinite leave to remain after applying for asylum, or had had an asylum claim refused and were therefore ‘failed’ asylum claimants. For simplification, I collectively use the term asylum seekers, whilst recognising the variant political and legal statuses this ignores. Additionally, on occasion

within the interview dialogue research participants use the term ‘signers’, ‘signing-in’ or ‘signing-on’ to describe reporting or those subject to reporting requirements.

Finally, the Home Office uses the term Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) to describe the facilities used to detain individuals under immigration powers. But as many people are held in detention for long periods of time with no prospect of removal/deportation, this term can be misleading, and therefore I use the term “detention centre” (see Right to Remain).¹⁹

Ethical responsibilities

Confidentiality

Working with asylum seekers and those without a secure legal status is a complicated and highly sensitive endeavour, and the importance of protecting their identity was central to this research. Names were changed for all asylum-seeking participants as well as those who had secured refugee status, and often countries of origin were replaced with broad geographical areas. Any information which could risk exposing someone has not been included; as this thesis is not supposed to serve as an ethnography of the people themselves, the details of their lives are not in-depth, which made it easier to explore their experiences in a way that didn’t reveal their identity. I also changed the names of several volunteers, activists and asylum support workers where I felt revealing their identity might deem a risk to their work or reputation.

While I felt it ethically necessary to criticise and scrutinise the border control practices enacted by Home Office staff, my critique is, for the most part, structural rather than directed at individual staff members (see Lindberg and Borrelli 2019) and as such I changed the names of Home Office officers to protect their identity also.

¹⁹ <https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/detention/> [Accessed 1.11.2020].

Consent

Given the sensitive nature of working with asylum seekers, compounded by the suspicion of the outsider (Hasselberg 2012), informed consent was also a central ethical consideration to this research. Ensuring that all research participants had clear information about the research project as well as my university affiliations was critical, and was communicated appropriately, either using the consent form (see Appendix 3), or verbally, where paperwork did not seem appropriate, either because of a language barrier or where it felt overly formalised. Recognising that the design and the initial ethics approval stage varies significantly from experience in the field, Crang and Cook suggest that researchers consider ‘two kinds of research ethics’, one with a capital ‘E’, necessary at the initial, planning stage and composed of broad and widely accepted principles, and ethics with a small ‘e’ that evolves through everyday encounters in the field (2007:32). As Shea warns, ethics processes can at times prevent researchers the opportunity to evaluate for themselves what is the most appropriate course of action (2000, cited in Valentine 2005: 485), and especially I found that in protecting research participants and in gaining their trust, it was at times necessary to consider alternative ways of ensuring they were able to make informed decisions about their participation, beyond formalised paperwork. Our own reflexive ability to gauge the suitability of participants and ensure their protection can occasionally be underestimated or entirely occluded through overly structured ethics processes, and the ethical demands for the research to protect research participants, can at times do the opposite by hindering the researcher from evaluating the best course of action in ensuring the participant is fully informed.

As such, I found that as my research process evolved, so did the mode through which I sought consent, whilst prioritising protecting my research participants and ensuring they were informed. For instance, during stage one in this research, where I was still unknown to potential research participants, I first reached out to organisations, clearly

stating my research aims and inviting participants who had an interest in sharing through the focus group discussions. Some follow up one-to-one pilot interviews took place after the focus group discussion and in those instances, my research project and how their contribution was going to be used was reinstated.

However, during stage two of the research, most often contact with participants evolved gradually through meeting at the reporting centre during their regular reporting appointments. In this context, I was introduced as a BSS volunteer, and in interactions with individuals I would explain my research and university affiliations. Over time, this occasionally led to some people initiating an interest in sharing their experiences with me as part of the research, which I then followed up with an interview. For me, it was important to have a degree of familiarity with participants before following up with an interview, and this was mostly possible through developing relationship with individuals at the reporting centre. All research participants involved in the focus group discussions and in one-to-one interviews completed consent forms, which were also verbally explained prior to taking part.

Importantly, as Sigvardsson states, protecting our research participants is not simply a matter of informed consent, but about the risks and vulnerabilities throughout the entire process (2012b:57). While I found that some of my conflicted feelings about my position eased during my role as a volunteer with the Signing Support group, due to the sense that I was challenging, even in a very small way, some of the structures of injustice described by the research participants, there was also an enduring sense of responsibility I felt towards them, in honouring their experiences, and not contributing in any way, to their trauma.

With regards to the reporting centre itself and observing the Home Office within that space, I had permission and was able to observe reporting practices in the capacity of a volunteer with Bristol Signing Support, where the front desk and surrounding area

we occupied is open to the public; I therefore felt that ethical formalities towards police and Home Office staff were not a concern. Staff were aware however of my presence in my capacity as a PhD student as I asked permission on several occasions to conduct an interview with the Home Office staff on duty at the reporting centre, aware that my gender, relatively young age and nationality may be perceived as ‘harmless’ (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019:20). However, all attempts to interview Home Office staff were unsuccessful.

Overall, while the reality of the field site is often messy and complicated and, as with other social science researchers, we are at times unable to conduct ‘normal’ participant observation due to considerable ethical and methodological challenges in conducting fieldwork in these sorts of institutions (Griffiths 2012), I was committed to avoiding any harm caused by my research and ensuring confidentiality and consent.

Bureaucracy

‘It is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary.’

— Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925: 263)

Introduction

‘Everyone’s called Dave’

In this chapter, I explore asylum-seekers’ experiences of bureaucracy and Home Office bureaucrats, focusing in particular on their frequent and mandatory engagement with Home Office reporting. My aim in this chapter is to identify the bureaucratic logics at play within these sites, and to explore their impact on the lives of asylum seekers. The main examples are drawn from reporting, however I also draw from other sites and experiences which participants shared with me, illuminating how bureaucracy functions within border management processes more broadly.

However, before embarking on an exploration of the bureaucratic logics at play within reporting practices, a brief reflection on the context in which I began to think through these ideas and how they relate to this field of study is of pertinence. Every month or so, volunteers from the Bristol Signing Support (BSS) group gather in someone’s home

to meet and discuss any issues that may have arisen at Patchway, as well as to share positive stories as part of the group's commitment to maintaining best practice. On one particular Tuesday evening during my fieldwork when I attended one of these meetings, Sarah, one of the more experienced volunteers was explaining a recent encounter with a Home Office officer. During a particularly busy morning of reporting, Sarah explained how the officer had asked her to assist him in informing who was next in the queue to report. 'The officer was called Dave, everyone there is called Dave!' she quipped. Everyone laughed. Though uttered in jest, Sarah's comment stuck with me; I noticed that often comments made by BSS volunteers about the Home Office staff revolved around typecasting them as officious bureaucrats, lacking in individual personality or character. Besides 'Dave' being an exceptionally common name — not only as was apparent within the Home Office but in Britain generally — I still found myself picturing the Home Office headquarters filled with white, middle-aged men with identical haircuts and grey suits, all named 'Dave'. It occurred to me that this was one component to Hannah Arendt's disdain for bureaucratic systems; their creation of anonymous, featureless bureaucrats (Arendt 1970). For Arendt this anonymising aspect was how bureaucracies could endlessly conceal responsibility, thus making it impossible to 'identify the enemy' (1970: 39).

As one of the largest ministerial departments within the UK government constituting almost 30,000 employees, the Home Office functions through a vast and intricate bureaucratic regime. What Sarah unintentionally captured in her remark is the profoundly homogenising nature of bureaucracies, where bureaucrats' personalities, characterisations and interactions merge. As a result, decisions emerge out of complex, anonymous structures of power, 'effectively hidden behind a mask of forms and micro-procedures' (James and Killick 2012:11). The Home Office model that retains this impenetrable structure of power resonates with Arendt's vision of a body of anonymous

faceless bureaucrats, growing from the ‘desire to avoid having to give an account of government’s actions’ (Stivers 2015: 245). In essence, this anonymising feature of bureaucratic systems of governance has the effect of obscuring the harm enacted on individuals by the doer.

Using Sarah’s comment as a provocation, this chapter enquires into the ways in which reporting operates through and depends upon certain bureaucratic logics. Drawing from Arendt’s comprehensive engagement with bureaucracy, I reflect on her notion of non-thinking and explore its significance in relation to border control processes. While I acknowledge that this thesis cannot make claims on the moral perspectives or thought-work of Home Office staff, being unable to delve into their thoughts about what they were doing or why; rather, by drawing on Arendt’s notion of non-thinking, I consider the impact of a bureaucratic tendency that prevails within border management processes, in which a culture of clichés and stock phrases denotes a generalised disengagement between action and effect. While I do detail Home Office officials’ words and deeds, my aim is to demonstrate a prevalent bureaucratic culture, rather than individual examples of non-thinking, for indeed, as Hillyard and Tombs note (2007), it is impossible to look into a person’s mind and measure intent. Following this and building on Arendt’s conceptualisation of bureaucracy’s ‘ruinous structures’ (2005b:74) as underpinned by a faith in necessity and automation, I then explore how Home Office personnel enact this behavioural tendency. The following section explores how Home Office behaviour and conduct undermines notions of bureaucratic neutrality and impersonalised border management practices. The last section reflects on Home Office incompetence and malfunction, which I argue operates through a heightened level of abstraction, before exploring how these incompetencies can, on occasion, benefit asylum-seekers in surprising ways. While bureaucracy and administrative processes in general have come to saturate all of our lives, defining the very conditions of our existence (Graeber 2012),

this chapter shows how the functionality of the ‘bureaucratic machine’ (Nuijten 2003: 16) is particularly significant for understanding the embodied experience of seeking asylum in Britain.

Bureaucratic logics of border systems:

Rules are rules!

‘His guilt came from his obedience, and obedience is praised as a virtue.’

— Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* (1963a).

The prototype bureaucrat described by Arendt is, in many ways, embodied by the modern-day Home Office official. This first became clear to me several weeks into my fieldwork when Natasha, a young BSS volunteer in her mid-20s relayed a recent encounter. She had recently made several trips to Brook House immigration detention facility to visit her friend Promise, a young man from west Africa who had recently been detained. Promise had already received his removal directions from the Home Office and his parents, who were also living in Britain, were trying to arrange to visit him at the immigration detention facility before he was removed. Yet, as asylum-seekers themselves, his parents did not have the necessary ID to be allowed inside the detention facility when they arrived. Natasha, who was visiting with them, told me that as Promise’s father had a serious heart condition that prevented him from flying, he feared he would never see his son again. Natasha then shared with me this encounter she had with an official at Brook House:

I tried to communicate with the guys at Brook House this is happening, so like the MP wrote to the Home Office to lift the restrictions on the ID [asking] is it possible to book an appointment for them for tomorrow? And they were like “No”. It didn’t happen in the end because they were like “we don’t know about it”... because you

have the Home Office and then you have the G4S guys, and they just don't communicate so they didn't know anything.²⁰ And they were not even trying to sort it out because it's like "no, no". I was being really polite and nice and in the end I was just like "Ahhh!", like explaining what is happening to him; "Look man this is happening, he's not going to see his son again", but it was just "No, sorry we don't know anything, there's been no information from the Home Office", "rules are rules", he just kept saying "rules are rules".

On the one hand, this distressing encounter is reflective of the general malfunction through which the Home Office and their various private contractors often operate, a feature of bureaucratic practice I will discuss further below. Yet it also expresses the ultimate adherence to convention and duty through which border control policies become enforced, enacted and repeated, oftentimes with devastating consequences. In effect, the small, purely administrative matter of not having the correct ID meant that Promise's parents were denied the opportunity to see their son before his removal. Natasha explained with tears in her eyes that Promise was eventually removed back to his country of origin, unable to see his parents for one last time.

This phrase, 'rules are rules' was expressed time and again during my fieldwork, either uttered explicitly by a Home Office official when a particular decision that had been made was being questioned or challenged, or it was implied through their actions and behaviour. Anne, an asylum seeker based in Manchester, explained that she was made instantly homeless when a UK Border Force officer made an unexpected visit to her friend's asylum supported accommodation. When Anne was discovered to be sleeping on her friend's sofa, she was evicted on the spot, on the grounds that individuals living in asylum supported accommodation are not permitted to have guests. Similarly, Mohammad, an asylum-seeker based in Bristol, who was approximately in his late fifties,

²⁰ G4S is one of several private security companies contracted by the Home Office. They operate numerous immigration detention centres across Britain.

told me he was made homeless when his fresh claim for asylum was rejected.²¹ He described how he was evicted from his supported accommodation:

[The officer] says “Leave the house!”. My food, my papers, my clothes, my everything, no no no, I’m not going to leave, where I will go? I don’t know nobody. “No you have to leave!” [he said]... He brings the henchman, the police, the police came and they said “If he says leave, you leave!” Okay, let me carry my bags and put somewhere safe in the kitchen. I will come back and collect it later. It’s raining, I don’t know anybody, you understand me? It’s very, very bad situation. I called one friend of mine, I said “I’m close to suicide here, I said can you come and help me?” I went to his house, I was standing in front of the house for two hours waiting, shaking from the rain (Interview, February 2018).

According to Home Office policy, asylum supported accommodation is only provided to asylum seekers whose claim is in process, and who do not have any other means of supporting themselves. Therefore, with Mohammed’s case, the moment his asylum claim was rejected, he was no longer entitled to supported accommodation and so became unceremoniously evicted. His words express his feelings of utter despair and his abrupt eviction, coupled with his asylum claim being refused, almost results in him taking his own life. I was struck in particular by how frail Mohammad was when I met him and found it especially troubling to picture him without somewhere to sleep. Yet, in dealing with both Anne and Mohammad, both of the Home Office’s unceasing allegiance to ‘rules are rules’ becomes a justification for implementing their eviction, which rendered Mohammed homeless.

These practices of immediate evictions render visible the effects that an adherence to standardised codes of expression and conduct have on the lives of those seeking

²¹ Distinct from an initial asylum claim, the basis for a fresh claim might be the provision of new evidence, or a change in situation, either in the person’s country of origin, or in case law since the initial asylum claim was made. It is made only when a person’s appeal rights have been exhausted.

asylum. Indeed, the phrase ‘rules are rules’ denotes an innate behavioural devotion to the bureaucratic process, for ‘bureaucracy depends on sameness’ (Stivers 2015: 247) and therefore cannot comprehend or deal with complexity. As Arendt aptly writes:

‘Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardised codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognised function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking... Eichmann differed from the rest of us only in that he clearly knew no such claim at all’ (1978: 4).

Arendt’s words articulate this tension between the bureaucratic compulsion for an unyielding adherence to rules and its claim on thinking itself. To rely on these standardised codes of expression in essence, disallows the mind to question the ethics as well as the consequences of such deeds, thus shielding the official from the repercussions of their actions, and therefore from reality itself. In Arendt’s depiction, non-thinking disconnects and even disables the capacity to draw alternative, informed conclusions and instead, an absolute deference to duty and rules as they are is upheld.

While in these instances, a discussion on the extent to which the Home Office officers were non-thinking is precluded, these scenarios, in which the officers perform their duty through a reliance on banal modes of expression and conduct, represent a continual deference to rules as they are. In this way, I argue that they speak of a behavioural tendency which, in doing so, prevents a different outcome.

These experiences of being made instantly homeless by the Home Office were far from exceptional. Anne shared that when she was evicted, she spent several nights sleeping rough at Manchester Piccadilly bus station, and found that ‘so many people sleep in the bus [station] in Piccadilly. Also the churches there are many and in [Manchester] Victoria station, because there’s a heater there’, she shared. As Yeo (2020) points out, due to the fact that rejected asylum-seekers’ subsequent departure from the UK is not then enforced, one of the consequences of these evictions is a significant population of

unauthorised migrants falling into destitution and homelessness. The fact that departures are not (always) enforced by the Home Office reflects the incoherence between the detention system and immigration policy (Yeo 2020).

A study by Baillot, Cowan and Munro found that those working in asylum decision-making roles, including Home Office personnel, often hide behind ‘rhetorical comfort’ and ‘matter-of-fact approaches’ to dealing with asylum-seeker’s accounts (2013: 529). They argue that this revealed not so much a controlled balance between detachment and sympathy, but ‘a reluctance to engage at all’ with narratives relaying violence and trauma (527). One Home Office official in their study who had spent years listening to and evaluating asylum-seekers’ accounts shared: ‘I don’t think I’ve ever heard anything that’s been harrowing, you know, that’s distressed me in any way... I’ve never been personally bothered, I’ve never had a sleepless night about anything’ (Baillot, Cowan and Munro 2013: 525). While Baillot et al. are careful not to suggest that all legal and quasi-legal professionals involved in their study were disengaged from hearing asylum-seekers’ accounts, they describe a general disposition of wilful detachment within the culture of the Home Office which risked jeopardising asylum seeker’s prospects for justice.

This was consistent with the behaviour of Home Office officials I encountered in my own research. The behaviour displayed by Home Office staff at times reflected a wilful detachment from what they were doing, reflecting a disassociation between action and effect. This was especially notable when detainments occurred at the reporting centre. On one occasion, a young man from Afghanistan who had only recently turned 18-years-old, was detained at the reporting centre. My fieldnotes afterwards read:

I can’t help thinking that the officers seem to revel in an individual being detained. The manner in which they walk back from the holding cells seems to change when someone is being held; they have an air of officiousness and seem to revel in the drama. “Not now!” they chimed a little too chirpily at me when I asked two officers which IRC facility ‘L.’ was being taken (Fieldnotes, July 2017).

Baillet et al. argue that, in the context of hearing asylum applicants' narratives detailing trauma and violence, detachment is often cultivated, consciously or otherwise, to assist in acting professionally. As one legal representative they interviewed put it: 'I just treat it all as just a story, I don't think about the reality of it' (Baillet et al. 2013: 531). Even where it begins as a self-protective psychological strategy, the reference to treating the narrative as 'just a story' raises potentially serious concerns. Such an approach may develop into an 'automatically dismissive and sceptical attitude towards claimants, impacting on the way in which their credibility is assessed, and their chances of receiving an open-minded evaluation' (ibid.). In the same way, what I observed of the officers going about the routine task of detaining an individual, reveals a level of detachment from the eventual outcomes of the system they are a part - like cogs in a machine (Yeo 2020) in which the potential consequences are obscured from view. While the officers I encountered at the reporting centre were part of a broader system and were not directly responsible for the decision to detain, their behaviour oftentimes seemed to reveal a distinct distancing in terms of how they perceived the consequences of their role.

'Lower officials' may, as Nuijten points out (2003:120), have little insight into what exactly is going on within the bureaucratic system of which they are a part, and even less influence on decisions in relation to individual detainments themselves. While in the context of detaining individuals at the reporting centre, this is a difficult claim to reconcile, I would argue that the perpetual deference to rules as they are, the use of 'clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardised codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognised function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking' (Arendt 1978), for as Stivers expresses, the indispensable element of thinking 'is the elimination of conventional, standardised norms of conduct' (2015:248). To think is to enable the potential for exercising critical judgement and is based on the capacity to imagine another person's experiences. Due

to the nature of Home Office decision-making processes and the structures within which they operate, functionaries are, to a large extent, shielded both from the individuals whose lives they preside over, and from the consequences of the decisions they make over those lives. For Arendt, the danger caused by bureaucracies was in part caused by this shielding; the innate distancing they create between functionaries and those they act upon, for they behave in ways they would never do otherwise. Therefore, a further danger of bureaucracy lies in how as a system it extends this distance between action and effect (Bauman 1989).

Necessity and Automation

‘These ruinous structures were supported and the process of ruin itself accelerated, by the belief, almost universal in his time, in a necessary and automatic process to which man must submit.’

— Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, 2005b:74

‘The power to detain must be retained in the interest of maintaining effective immigration control’

— Home Office Guidelines 55.1.1

Bureaucracies by nature cannot deal easily with complexity, nuance or variation beyond certain fixed typologies, and Hannah Arendt’s theorisation of non-thinking also relates to how she perceived Franz Kafka’s portrayal of bureaucratic processes described in *The Trial*. Arendt summons the words of Kafka’s prison-chaplain, cited at the beginning of this chapter, to highlight how the logics of necessity and automatic process are part of the very machinery of bureaucracies, to which man can only submit (Arendt 2005b). I suggest here that Home Office conduct also demonstrates a pronounced accession to the logics of necessity and automation within the context of border control practices. This behaviour,

argues Stivers, deprives functionaries of the ability to look at events and situations in a new, critical light (2008: 60). One of the most striking examples of this in the context of reporting is the manner in which individuals are detained at the reporting centre.

On a cold January morning, Sajeed, a middle-aged man from Sri Lanka, was detained at the reporting centre. He had been waiting in the queue outside the office and had just explained to myself and Sarah, the other BSS volunteer present that day, that he was worried. Recently he had been unexpectedly moved from bi-annual reporting to reporting every month, and that morning he told us he had a bad feeling. When it was his turn to enter the office, he spent only a few minutes inside before Border Enforcement guards entered, and then immediately led him out to one of the interview rooms. As Sarah and I went about looking through the BSS file to check whether Sajeed had a solicitor we could contact, the door to the interview room opened abruptly and a visibly fear-stricken Sajeed, flanked by the two Border Enforcement officers, was led through the double doors towards the cells. As they were exiting Sarah asked the officers firmly: 'Can you please tell us if he is being detained so we can contact his solicitor?', to which one officer replied, 'We can't tell you anything.' As we scoured through Sajeed's information in the BSS file, it confirmed that he had a mental health condition and was regularly seeing a mental health counsellor. According to Rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules, a person with a mental health condition should only be detained in 'very exceptional circumstances', designed as a safeguard for victims of torture or those whose health would be at risk from continued detention.

After several minutes, a Home Office Border Enforcement officer, an older woman with white hair, emerged from the locked double doors leading to where the cells are located. Sarah approached her and said: 'The man you've just detained has a mental health counsellor which means he has a mental health condition, which really means he shouldn't be detained'. The Border Enforcement officer looked slightly affronted by this

rather direct though politely delivered challenge and by way of reply, told her: ‘Well, I can tell you in a private conversation, but I won't in front of all these people’, signalling the queue of five or six people waiting to report. She and Sarah disappeared around the corner and minutes later, Sarah reappeared, and shared in a hushed voice that the officer had said they were only going to detain him for one night, and then he would be released, but that this was ‘off record’. We had not heard of this type of practice before, which seemed entirely nonsensical; we wondered if his detainment was being deployed as some kind of warning to others; an attempt to exert control through instilling fear (Pain 2014b). Or perhaps Sarah had been lied to, as the officer could have presumed that we might cause a disruption were he to be detained in the circumstances we had informed them of. Several days later, I phoned the Home Office to follow up what had happened to Sajeed. I was told that he was still in detention, despite his mental health counsellor submitting evidence that he had a mental health condition. His solicitor shared that she was preparing an appeal.

While failing to submit fresh evidence on your asylum claim or failing to attend regular reporting appointments are grounds for detainment, detainments can often appear to occur at random. Penny, an asylum support worker, echoed this view but pointed out that this was because:

‘if [the Home Office] were planning a charter flight, you know the flight is going to Pakistan or Nigeria, they just gather people [from those countries] to fill the charter flights. Recently, a man we know was signing regularly every two weeks, he got detained and we think ‘cos he’s from Pakistan, they were planning a charter flight, you know the whole flight was going to Pakistan’ (Interview, May 2017).

In Sajeed’s case, he had been regularly attending his reporting appointments and, as well having a verified mental health condition, he should have been protected from being detained. Yet, as Penny’s point indicates, the decision-making processes for how

individuals become subject to detainment and removal often appear highly spurious. Substantiating such perceptions that detainments often appear random, immigration barrister Colin Yeo states ‘whether a particular migrant is detained and removed is a matter of luck... [for] any decision to detain is inherently arbitrary’ (2020: xxviii). Yeo explains that, rather than ‘identifying high-risk migrants, planning their removal, putting their documents in place... and then detaining and removing them’, migrants of any given nationality are often ‘rounded up solely because of their nationality for group removals on chartered flights’ with around 2000 people expelled in this manner every year (2020:236). While the Home Office has repeatedly denied the practice of targeting particular nationalities to fill planes, Corporate Watch won a Freedom Of Information legal battle in 2015 which confirmed the existence of an official document released on the order of the Information Commissioner (Corporate Watch 2018). The audit report written by the director of Harmondsworth immigration detention facility in 2014 stated:

Figures rising and falling [in the detention centre] can often be attributed to the amount of charter operations in progress by DEPMU [a Home Office unit] and other pick up operations in effect from the Home Office enforcement teams. In certain circumstances these two departments may work together to *focus on a specific nationality to fill a charter* (Corporate Watch (2018: 116; emphasis added).

Here, the report published by Corporate Watch reveals the extent to which the filling of charter flights is a routinised practice, rooted in prioritising efficiency and economy (Feldman 2015). As Yeo's words also indicate, these seemingly entropic detainments whereby individuals become targeted for removal are not one-off events. Britain has seen an increase in the frequency of enforced removals during the years 2017-2018, after the Home Office's planned target to administer 12,800 enforced returns, as discussed in the

preface. In essence, the apparent randomness of Sajeed's detainment can be understood as the implementation of automated and routine procedures, for despite the specifics of his situation, the infrastructure of the bureaucratic process inflicted on him eliminated his personal circumstances.

Sajeed's detainment highlights as well how integral an allegiance to necessity is to detainment processes. In this specific instance, even where detainment was challenged on mental health grounds, the logic of necessity remains indispensable, for in coherence with Home Office policy, the 'power to detain must be retained in the interests of maintaining effective immigration control' (Home Office Guidelines 55.1.1). This reliance on necessity and automatic process fails to deal with the nuanced reality of people's lives. I suggest that in effect, a submission to necessity and automation has the potential to serve as an avoidance mechanism, which ultimately eliminates the possibility for lingering on the outcomes of harmful actions (Bauman 1989). If necessity and automatic process become normalised and even celebrated in any institution, Arendt warns that those in power are unable to clear the way for discretionary judgement, and on why certain individuals are organised the way they are (Feldman 2015).

A further relevant insight offered by Kafka's *The Trial*, is in the infuriating encounters K. has with various functionaries. Kafka describes a world in which K. is met with perpetual ambiguity, obscurity and nonsense-phrases, which ultimately leads K. to resign to his fate. Referring to K.'s situation, Arendt describes him as caught within a 'bureaucratic machine whose senseless automation has the privilege of ultimate decision' (2005b:71). She says of the force of the machinery in which K. is caught, that it 'lies precisely in this appearance of necessity' (2005b:70).

Several weeks after Sajeed was detained, I met a middle-aged Bangladeshi couple at the reporting centre. They had been reporting for around two years, but as I was volunteering on a different day to usual, I had not met them before. As soon as they

arrived, they greeted everyone in the queue, and as they waited to enter the office, they appeared relaxed and chatty. My fieldnotes read:

While in the office Asma and Rahul were given a letter and a stack of forms they had to fill in and bring to an interview in December at the HO. As soon as they came out of the office their demeanour had completely changed. They both looked incredibly anxious and R. immediately handed me the letter and said “what does this mean?!”. I tried to read the letter quickly; it said simply that they must attend an interview in December at X location, and they must bring certain documents with them, as well as the enclosed form which must be completed. The letter said in bold that if they do not attend the interview, their support may be stopped. The form was around 15 pages, and asked them questions including their address, passport numbers, dependents, as well as whether they were working, etc. Nowhere did it state why they were required to attend an interview or to fill out the form. A. was especially distressed, and kept asking me “why do they want this, they have all this information already?!”. I showed it to [BSS volunteer] Joy, and she said “it is worrying, yes”. A. said “they want our passport numbers because they want to deport us” and “they want to arrange our travel documents” (Fieldnotes, 9th November 2017).

In this particular instance, it seemed that the most distressing aspect of this Asma and Rahul's situation was the ambiguity surrounding the letter. As Rahul thrust the letter into my hands, I sensed that he wanted me, as a native English speaker, to somehow excavate the letter's true meaning. But as I read it a second time, I still struggled to obtain any real understanding of what the letter was implying, which seemed intentionally ambiguous. Was this meeting a routine check, or were they being tricked into a removal? This lack of clear, transparent and explanatory information which, in this situation left the couple incredibly anxious for weeks on end, often characterised the indeterminate nature of Home Office encounters. In this way, uncertainty and indeterminacy is built into the very system (Griffiths 2012; McGranahan 2020). As Lindberg and Borrelli write, 'state bureaucracies have an interest in retaining a certain level of obscurity vis-a-vis the public'

(2019:19). Max Weber, they point out, identified secrecy as the heart of bureaucratic administration as it protects them from criticism and enables them to retain power vis-a-vis politicians and the public at large (ibid.; Weber 1978: 992). Indeed, Arendt spoke of secrecy as both a political and technical requirement; that is it is rooted in the desire to avoid having to give an account of government action (Arendt 1951; Stivers 2015:245). This continual deference to secrecy or obscurity bears resemblance to the culture maintained within the Home Office, particularly in how they choose to communicate with those outside their institution. When Asma and Rahul were faced with an instruction in the form of a letter, its ambiguity obscured the letter's true meaning, thus both protecting the Home Office from scrutiny, and enabling a degree of power through its secret motives. In this way, Asma and Rahul were left with little choice but to attend the meeting as instructed, but inevitably felt disarmed by the nature in which they were told to do so.

A neutral system? Vindictiveness and kindness

‘You will always be treated with respect, fairness and impartiality.’

— The Home Office²²

In Chapter Two, I discussed how one of the central arguments heralding bureaucracy’s positive contribution to society is the notion that it enables and upholds a system inherently objective and neutral in nature. For du Gay, this is both possible and desirable, for he argues that civil servants are trained to conduct themselves in a manner which minimises the influence of their own political views. While inevitably they operate within an inherently political environment, du Gay points out that this ‘does not make nonsense of the notions of objectivity and neutrality’ (2000: 141) to which they are committed. By

²² See, *The Home Office Guide to Living in Asylum Accommodation*, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821324/Pack_A_-_English_-_Web.pdf [Accessed 22.7.2020].

emphasising what bureaucracy can accomplish through its ostensible reliance on impartiality and typology, du Gay envisages a system wholly ‘mechanised and objectified’ where mere judgement, with all its gaps and idiosyncrasies all but disappears (Porter 1995:7 cited in Stivers 2015: 244).

However, one issue with this argument is in how it misrepresents the degree of power that anonymised functionaries hold, a power they possess in part due to their anonymity. It was from this issue that Arendt was able to locate bureaucracies as possibly the most formidable form of domination, for not only do decisions emerge out of complex hierarchies of power, the individuals making those decisions are mostly concealed and therefore protected from any real responsibility for their actions. Relatedly, as Hoag argues, ‘opacity empowers bureaucracies and bureaucrats - they become gatekeepers, with control over the flow of information and resources’ (2011: 82). As such, bureaucrats are the ‘rule by nobody’ of which Arendt was so critical. Here I argue that Home Office bureaucrats embody this description and for this reason, wield immense power over the lives of migrants whom they are tasked with managing (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019). This degree of power is concerning, not only with regards to the levels of vindictiveness (or, more positively, kindness) they may choose to transmit, but also because their decidedly non-neutral intervention can have significant and immensely harmful ramifications for individuals, particularly with regards to their asylum claim. My point here specifically is less about documenting the individual examples of Home Office vindictiveness, and more about the innate tendency for bureaucracies to generate these kinds of interactions, and for the most part, for them to go unnoticed. The role of the bureaucrat as depicted by du Gay, is one in which they simply administrate the law, impartially and with minimal intervention, ‘ready-to-hand for use in the service of whatever political mandate or politician gets hold of it’ (Stivers 2015:244). However, as I have discussed, there exists at least two opposing forces between Britain's current political mandate of hostility

towards asylum claimants and its legal obligations under international law. Furthermore, as Stivers argues, 'bureaucrats don't stop judging, they simply ignore or disguise the fact that they do it' (2015:245). Indeed, Arendt's indictment of bureaucracy was that bureaucracy's supposed demand for abstract regularity and rationality, prevents the ability to stand in someone else's shoes and think from their standpoint (Stivers 2015: 249). This observation, combined with perceiving their innate distancing effect, as well as the assignment of responsibility without accountability, is what led Arendt to describe bureaucracy as possibly the most powerful form of domination (Arendt 1970).

One of the more publicised examples of the Home Office practicing non-neutral behaviour was a story which featured in the BBC News in 2010. A former Home Office employee described how staff kept a toy gorilla which was put on the desk of any officer who approved an asylum application, saying that the gorilla was used as a 'form of public ridicule' (BBC News 2010). This example, which was often mentioned by BSS volunteers in conversation concerning Home Office culture, reveals not only an apparent reluctance to approve any individual's asylum claim, but the degree to which people's lives were trivialised, to the point where decision-making and its potential life-death ramifications became a game.

A particularly disturbing display of Home Office vindictiveness was relayed to me by Richard, a Catholic priest who has been working with destitute asylum seekers in Bristol for many years. He shared with me one of his first encounters with the UK Home Office, when he was assisting Gloria, a young asylum-seeker. He described a visit he made with Gloria to Lunar House, the Home Office in Croydon, to submit a fresh asylum claim:²³

²³ Current policy is that fresh claims can only be submitted at Liverpool, a further contributing difficulty for individuals in terms of accessing their right to claim asylum, particularly for those living in other parts of the country. The way that these rules frequently change not only adds to the inherent confusion within the asylum system itself, but also allows the discourse of Home Office incompetence to obscure possible intentional forms of violence against individuals.

They had one of these ticket systems, like in the deli counter, where you pull the little ticket and you waited for your number to be called... Gloria said “take this ticket, put it in your pocket”. After three hours or so of queuing, they called and we went over, and they asked for her ticket, which she said she’d lost. We were then told that “Oh you’ve applied in the wrong place, you’re in the wrong office you need to do it in Bristol” (Interview, May 2017).

Confused by this information as he was certain there was not an immigration office in Bristol, Richard wanted to contact the solicitor to make sure. He was told that he was not allowed to make phone calls inside the building and that he would lose his place in the queue if he left, meaning he would most likely have to come back in the morning. Being new to the procedures he assumed it must be true what the officer had told them, so they returned to Bristol. He went on:

Six o’clock the next morning [Border Enforcement] officers arrived at [her house] to remove her. In other words, we were lied to because the woman had seen on the computer screen that Gloria was going to be picked up the next day. And so Gloria’s legal right to put in a fresh claim was prevented and we were told a lie, that we were in the wrong place when we were absolutely in the right place.

In the end, the ticket that Gloria was asked to hand over became evidence that she had been to Lunar House to put in a fresh claim; a tiny fragment of paper that Gloria kept hidden, quite literally prevented her from being detained that morning.

In another example, Aimee, an asylum-seeker from Zimbabwe recalled a recent encounter with the Home Office in Cardiff when she went to submit a fresh claim for asylum;

I took my fresh claim [to the Home Office], [but] they never gave me a receipt. I asked them, the Home Office man “Where is my receipt?”. He said “no don’t

worry about it”. The man was so hostile, he was hostile. And so later the Home Office say I never got my fresh claim in... So I called my solicitor and said they asked me for evidence for my fresh claim, I don't have it and they said “Oh they never gave you a receipt?!” I said they never gave me! (Interview, March 2017).

Here, Aimee describes how the Home Office official refuses to give her a receipt, which is invaluable proof that a fresh claim has been submitted and which therefore can prevent a detainment. Rather than experiencing impartiality, both Aimee and Gloria were confronted with a wilful obstruction to their asylum claim. In both of these instances, the power held by the bureaucrat in front of them was immense and their legal right to claim asylum was impeded. While these cases might appear relatively extreme, these are not isolated phenomenon, and there exists multiple and repeated examples of this type of behaviour.

More everyday examples can be seen in the decidedly hostile manner in which certain officers dealt with individuals reporting. For instance, Kerry was a more senior Home Office official who would occasionally visit Patchway for no other reason I could observe, than to admonish signers for various minor issues. During her visits, Kerry would take over administering the reporting process. She would routinely and often aggressively tell those who arrived before their allotted time to wait, even when there was no one else queuing to report, and she would also rebuke and threaten those who arrived after their allotted time with being marked with ‘non-attendance’. Though this threat did not materialise during the time I was present at Patchway, being marked with ‘non-attendance’ can have serious ramifications for an asylum case, and may also result in losing any asylum support an individual might receive.²⁴ My fieldnotes during one of Kerry's visits reads:

²⁴ For example, during appeals at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, the Home Office will often raise instances of non-attendance with regards to reporting appointments in order to present the appellant to the judge as untrustworthy (Pinkowska 2019).

Today “the boss” (as all the volunteers refer to her), was overseeing the reporting process. She came across as somewhat rude and pedantic, telling signers off for arriving too early, or threatening them when arriving late. A new laminated sign, blu-tacked onto the wall reads: “Reporters must come at their allotted time. Late-comers may not be reported”. Mary, who had come early to report because she was feeling unwell, asked Kerry if she could report now and was told, “No!”. Sophy [BSS volunteer], referring to Mary said: “Who could say no to that face?!” (Fieldnotes, June 2017).

Recalling a similar example of Home Office behaviour at Trinity House, the reporting centre prior to Patchway, Sophy shared about one official who regularly conducted the signing process:

I sat in, the days when it was all at Trinity House, I sat down in a chair just opposite the window and I noted each person and she was rude, unpleasant or inconveniencing in a different way to each one, every single one she found a way... to slightly humiliate or thwart (Interview, August 2017).

These forms of practice reflect not only the capricious behaviour often displayed by Home Office staff, but the levels of vindictiveness their role, and its ostensible anonymity, it affords. While the intention of her mode of speech is not clear, addressing individuals in a demeaning or injurious way serves to establish their subordination (Butler 1997).

Similarly, Samuel, an asylum-seeker based in Bristol describes his experiences of reporting, first in London and then at Patchway:

They’re just awful... you go there and to access the building you need to have your ID, or a proof of your identity, and if your paper is, for example if you’re walking there in the rain and your wallet gets damp because you’re walking in the rain, and your photo gets damp because of the rain, they will say “it’s not our problem, you can’t access the building”. They can see what happened but he doesn't care, he doesn't want to hear anything... There were also two ladies who used to work at Patchway...

You can't even ask a question, it's like they start to aggress you, because they're in this Home Office uniform. (Interview, July 2017).

Here, Samuel describes the private security officers at the door of the reporting centre who, although not Home Office staff, are employed by the Home Office. Their behaviour in this instance demonstrates the levels of power and hostility possible within such a role. Not allowing individuals to enter the building, as described above, can have serious ramifications for an individual's immigration or asylum application, by being marked with non-attendance and therefore affecting their reputation before an immigration judge. Samuel's encounters also reflect the inability to challenge these forms of behaviour, for even in simply attempting to ask a question, he is met with aggression. This alludes to the 'silencing effect' (Feldman 2015:7) which bureaucracies - and, in this case border control procedures, impose. As I argued in the previous section, the bureaucratic compulsion for an unyielding adherence to rules, can serve to shield the official from the repercussions of their actions (Gill 2016: 33; Bauman 1989). As Cohen describes, 'evasions' are used to deal with our awareness of suffering, whilst refusing to accept its implications (Cohen 2001:8-9). In the case of those reporting, inevitably this type of behaviour also leads to a heightened sense of anxiety, for those who are already often deeply fearful when attending their appointments.

While research on bureaucracy has commonly been associated with 'studying up' powerful actors and processes, within the context of systems of border control, and in relation to Home Office officials, the dynamic is more complex (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019: 20). On the one hand, the relatively low-ranking Home Office officials I encountered at the reporting centre had very little decision-making power when it came to choosing whether or not to detain an individual. On the other hand, as these examples reveal, bureaucrats wield immense power over the migrants they are tasked with

monitoring, and officials often developed their own, at times, vindictive styles of operation.

Despite these examples of hostility and vindictiveness, not all Home Office officials I observed, utilised their power and ostensible anonymity in this way. Jack was the Home Office official who administered the reporting for the majority of the time I was at Patchway and, was generally liked by both signers and volunteers alike. He was young — most likely in his late 20s — and was liked in part due to his being one of the only relaxed Home Office staff members I observed. One example of this was the fact that when a signer arrived before or after their allotted time, which occurred relatively often, mainly due to the unreliability of the local bus traveling to and from Patchway, he would still allow them to report. He also made an effort to greet everyone by their name when they entered the office, which was also fairly unusual. More surprising was that he was also one of the more considerate officers during a detainment procedure, as the only Home Office staff member who would offer information to BSS volunteers. If a BSS volunteer asked, he would usually tell one of us which immigration detention facility the person was being taken to. On several occasions, when it was still unclear where the detained person was being taken, he even offered to telephone one of us, to inform us where he had been sent. This was a very unusual practice, as most Home Office staff at Patchway were highly suspicious of our presence in the reporting centre and seemed to wish to keep as much information from us as possible at all times. Therefore, in this regard Jack's behaviour was exceptional. In comparing his encounters of other Home Office staff, Samuel went on to describe Jack as 'an outstanding guy... He's above all others, I don't know if that's because he's still young, I don't know'. Samuel questions whether Jack's 'outstanding' character compared to the other Home Office staff might be attributed to his age, however Jack's behaviour seemed to demonstrate an example of what is possible when closer encounters between bureaucrats and those they govern are

enabled. As Jack interacted with those reporting on a regular basis, (he was the Home Office officer most commonly present), he was able to contract bureaucracy's innate distancing effect, thus demonstrating the 'non-rational, non-calculable urge to stretch towards others' (Bauman 1993: 247). With bureaucracy's supposed *raison d'être* being the exclusion of all unnecessary tasks and interests (Gerth and Mills 1946), Jack's behaviour contradicts the notion of non-involvement and neutrality as the 'axiom of bureaucratic ethics' (Berger et. al. 1973: 52), as it was characterised by the unmediated recognition and generous action without calculation (Josephides 2010, cited in Hall 2012). In another example, Natasha described a situation where a Home Office officer could no longer conduct her work at Patchway. Natasha shared:

We know about one who left who... she was an officer on duty who was friendly with the [Signing Support] group and then at some point she just left the job, she was like, "I couldn't deal with it anymore" (Interview, March 2017).

This example reflects a certain tension that existed within the officer at the reporting centre, between a duty to conduct her work, and a questioning of the ethics as well as the consequences of such deeds, a tension she appeared unable to resolve in continuing in her role.

Incompetence and malfunction

Perhaps equally commensurate with its reputation as a hostile institution is the Home Office's characterisation as chaotic, incompetent and malfunctioning. The media frequently feature stories on the tremendous backlog of immigration and asylum applications, lost documents including passports and birth certificates, and incorrect decisions, which come at a cost to the taxpayer (Gentleman 2018). Relating to detainment and removal decisions, The Guardian revealed that the Home Office was forced to pay £21million after mistakenly detaining 850 people between 2012 and 2017. Further

reviews of the now disbanded Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) concluded that delays in dealing with asylum applications incurred significant costs for the taxpayer (2004:30, cited in Rotter 2010:62).²⁵ Indeed the immigration and asylum system more broadly has seen increasing criticism from both sides of the political spectrum, as a system 'not fit for purpose' (Hunt 2020; Mulholland and Tempest 2006). Continual revelations of Home Office mismanagement, incompetence and gross inefficiency point to a deeply chaotic system quite unrecognisable from the Weberian image of optimum rational efficiency. Melanie Griffiths speaks of the general mistrust of UKVI arising from an immigration system that is both profoundly confusing and imbued with a high rate of error (2012). Drawing from her own research, she writes 'one frequently witnesses mistakes made by the UKBA [as UKVI was formerly known], from their use of multiple names or dates of birth for one person within a single letter, to extremes such as confusing which individual has been deported or incorrectly bestowing refugee status' (2012:10).

My own research confirmed that these blunders are still occurring, as people would frequently turn up at the reporting centre clutching letters from the Home Office peppered with incorrect information, often leaving them bewildered and anxious. Furthermore, the standardised wording, ubiquitous to refusal letters, suggests cases are not considered and assessed individually on their own merit, according to UKVI guidelines (Canning 2017). Also deeply concerning are the reports of individuals being refused asylum based on information gathered by the Home Office from out-of-date sources such as the Lonely Planet (Yeo 2020), and the innumerable unqualified and quasi-qualified Home Office personnel making potentially life-or-death decisions over asylum

²⁵ The Immigration and Nationality Directorate was replaced by the Border and Immigration Agency in April 2007, which was in turn subsumed into the UK Border Agency in 2008 and replaced by UK Visas and Immigration in 2013. The continual changing of departments I suggest, implies an acknowledgement of inherent problems within the system, despite the fact that this has not been explicitly voiced by government.

claims (Smith 2004). The fact that mistakes are made so often - and always appear to be made against the asylum claimant's favour - makes it more like a business-as-usual than an error.

Specifically regarding reporting practices, incidents that I observed varied from relatively mundane though frustrating inconveniences, to blatant harm with far-reaching consequences caused by this Home Office incompetence. Relatively frequent issues included the Home Office providing individuals with contradictory reporting times, and miscommunicating whether individuals were required to bring sureties to report with them. As the Patchway reporting centre serves the entire region of the southwest, individuals often had to make long and arduous journeys from difficult to access locations across the southwest. On one occasion, a woman was incorrectly told she must bring two sureties with her to report at her next appointment at Patchway, both of whom then needlessly travelled from rural Cornwall, a 300-mile round trip. More difficult to attribute to sheer incompetence or malfunction are the numerous examples of the Home Office detaining individuals unlawfully or without reasonable grounds, including those with a mental health condition. These detentions can often go directly against the current Detainment Guidelines. As well as the significant personal ramifications detention has on individuals and their families, these erroneous decisions have vast economic consequences, as the £21 million compensation figure quoted above indicates.

Home Office incompetence was a major topic of conversation during interactions with the asylum-seekers I met during fieldwork. Mohammed, the asylum-seeker from east Africa whose experiences of being made homeless I discussed above, shared with me his own encounter with Home Office malfunction. He explained that he was detained for a total period of 26-months, eight months of which were spent in Wandsworth Prison. This, he was informed by the Home Office, was due to insufficient space in an immigration detention facility. When I met him, his period in detention and in prison had

been deemed unlawful, and his solicitor was continuing to fight the Home Office on his behalf for compensation. As well as having spent over two years wrongfully detained, he had also undergone several (unsuccessful) deportation attempts and as described above, had also experienced bouts of homelessness due to the Home Office removing him from his supported accommodation. The personal cost of these experiences was evident in Mohammad's countenance; he looked visibly fatigued and explained that he suffered from deteriorating mental health, resulting in him contemplating suicide on a number of occasions.

Incidents reflecting Home Office incompetence and malfunction like Mohammed's were substantiated by my own observations of Home Office practice. One morning I was at Patchway when a young woman from China was detained. This was owing to the Home Office deeming that she had not submitted fresh evidence for her asylum claim. When her solicitor arrived at Patchway, she was furious and confirmed to the Home Office officer that the young woman had in fact submitted fresh evidence, showing him the 'further submissions' receipt; the young woman was immediately released. In this instance, it appeared that the Home Office did not have her updated file on their computer system. Often one to make a poignant witticism, BSS volunteer Sophy remarked frustratedly, 'their left hand doesn't know what their right is doing!'. These incidents of wrongfully detaining individuals at the reporting centre for failing to submit fresh evidence when in fact they had occurred relatively often. Lila too, explained how she was detained at Dallas Court reporting centre despite having submitted a fresh asylum application to the Home Office. She explains:

I had made a fresh application to the Home Office. We had the receipts to show that I had made the application, and usually once you apply you are not supposed to be detained. So I went into Dallas Court to [report], and they just told me that the way you go in, you're like a prisoner because they have to search you. They

give you a number and then you wait until your number is called. But on this particular day, when I went, I was taken to a private room, and I knew that they were going to take me to... a detention centre (Interview February 2017).

Besides the obvious breach of justice that these incidents represent, they also serve to expose the chaotic and disorderly culture that exists within the Home Office. Due to the frequency of these kinds of occurrences, they also reveal the extent to which these errors are profoundly institutionalised.

Other examples of the deep incompetence and inefficiency of the Home Office are also demonstrated by reports of a number of multi-million-pound Home Office database 'modernisation' schemes, which are most likely the result of these instances of outdated files at the reporting centre. As the Corporate Watch Research Group state: several of these systems are 'several years behind schedule'. This includes the Case Information Database (CID) which is the main immigration records database first developed back in 1995, and of which Corporate Watch report of continual complaints regarding it being out-dated, inaccurate and hard to use.

Between 2010 and 2013 the Home Office spent some £347 million on trying to replace CID and improve its casework systems, but ended up staying with the old system. The 'improvements' were criticised by the National Audit Office for "delays and problems" and "delivering significantly less than planned.". In 2014, the Home Office started yet another database relaunch, called Immigration Platform Technologies (IPT). Once again, this has experienced "slippage", and a new contract to lead another overhaul of CID was signed in April 2018, with Accenture (Corporate Watch, 2018: 174-175).

The report confirms that the Home Office's Border Force IT is notorious for inefficiency and costly upgrades which 'slip years behind schedule or never happen' (Corporate Watch, 2018:176).

Unexpected benefits

More positively, there were also unanticipated moments of malfunction which ultimately worked to the benefit of those reporting, whereby the unpredictability of the system worked in one's favour (James and Killick 2012). On one particular day that I had not attended Patchway, an incident occurred which BSS volunteer Sarah later recalled:

This woman turned up and I'd never seen her before, and I was doing my normal introductory stuff... and I said "Oh have you got a letter from the Home Office?" and she said "No." And then I was like... "Why are you here, why have you come?", and she was a very religious woman and so she was kind of going, "Well it's the spirit of God that's brought me here because I've been living a lie and I don't want to live a lie anymore, and I kind of want to confess to the Home Office that I've been here illegally"... So she went in and of course the young bureaucrat didn't have a clue what to do with her, you know, she'd never appeared on anyone's list, no one knew anything about her, no number, no nothing, you know? And then he sent her out again and I said, "Oh what's going on?" and she said "Oh he's going to ring somebody", and I was [thinking] like "Oh no, he's going to ring [Border] Enforcement, and then Enforcement are gonna rock up and take her away".

And I was on my own, so I said "Well let's just go outside and have a talk about this." One of the other asylum seekers, which has never happened before, but it was partly because I was on my own, he came out and he was chatting to us, and she told both of us her story, and he just said, "Well there's different kinds of lies. Some of them are small and some of them are big, but what I can tell you is in my experience, if you go in and tell them your story they're going to arrest you, and then you're going to be...", I mean he was really quite harsh, not in an unkind way, but he was just telling it like it is, you know? "They'll arrest you, they will detain you, you won't be able to talk to your son", because she's got a son here, "you won't be able to talk to your son very easily, da da da," and I had already rung one of the lawyers on our list to kind of say, "Look this woman really needs

to talk to a lawyer” and so this guy said “I think what you should do is, come with me, get on the bus and go home again” (Interview, September 2017).

Border Enforcement guards did not come and eventually, the woman did leave Patchway on a bus. Sarah told me that she suspects the woman would not present again. On another occasion, Joseph, an elderly gentleman from Zambia, on exiting the reporting office showed me a small business-card that he had just been handed by the Home Office officer. The card was an eye-catching lime green and featured the Home Office logo, and the words “Voluntary Return”, with a phone number to call beneath. Sarah, who was also standing next to him said, “Just chuck it in the bin if you don’t want to return. Do you want to return?” Joseph, who had been living in the UK for over a decade replied by saying he had previously rung the number, but nothing had ever come of it. In other words, the tactics employed by the Home Office in an attempt to make a return a straightforward procedure for migrants, in fact are often ineffective.

These cards, like Theresa May’s infamous “Go Home” vans I described in the thesis’ preface, represent the Home Office’s recent effort to promote “voluntary” returns largely for cost reasons, as arresting and detaining an individual in an immigration detention centre is significantly more expensive.²⁶ Yet, these incidents expose the absurd and oftentimes ineffective tactics through which the Home Office operate and reflect what Graeber terms the ‘comic senselessness of bureaucratic life’ (2015: 53). In effect, the bureaucrat’s role functions through highly schematised and blinkered processes which, at times at least, fail at the exact moment they are designed to succeed. In these examples, bureaucracy functions at such a level of abstraction, that the very thing it is supposed to achieve is impeded through the process itself. In essence, the Home Office bureaucrat is

²⁶ The Home Office has a preference for voluntary returns (Bolt 2015:2), in part because the average cost to the government of a voluntary return is £1,000, compared to £15,000 for an enforced return (Home Office, 2013:4).

hampered from accomplishing the task of organising the removal of migrants without the legal right to stay in the UK, because the bureaucrat is dealing with trying to remove migrants. The connection between a migrant presenting themselves as ‘illegal’ or ‘returnable’, and the paperwork (or computer work) through which these processes are actioned, become entirely detached to the point that the bureaucrat can no longer see what his job is ultimately about. Is his job to follow the procedures which depend upon the database or to work towards removing an ‘illegal’ migrant? As the prison-chaplain told K. in *The Trial*, ‘correct understanding of a matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter are not mutually exclusive’ (Kafka 1953: 258), implying that it is possible to act rationally, while all the time misunderstanding what it is all about. Zygmunt Bauman addresses these characteristics of bureaucracy in explaining how the division of labour into smaller and smaller tasks ‘extends the distance at which action is able to bring affects’ (1989). This distancing can have the effect not only of shielding bureaucrats from the outcome of their individual tasks, but of even comprehending what these tasks are ultimately for.

Furthermore, these incidents reveal the shift in power that can occur within bureaucratic operations in moments of surprise. The Home Office functionary is ostensibly prepared and predisposed to detain and remove individuals against their will and to use force when the individual is not expecting it, but as these encounters demonstrate, the Home Office are ill-prepared and ‘rendered stupid’ (Graeber 2015:49) in moments when individuals voluntarily present themselves for detainment or removal. In such moments, the relationship subtly shifts, for the individual is ultimately able to walk away.

It is important to note however, that many of the innumerable examples which appear to demonstrate Home Office inefficiency and malfunction are not to be understood simply as the workings of any chaotic bureaucratic system of governance. As I discussed

in the preface, these instances of institutionalised inefficiency and disorder are part of the ‘ramshackle construction’ (Yeo 2020: xvii) of Britain’s immigration system. There are, as Yeo iterates, architects and engineers behind it all, and the general way in which the present system operates is the result of established thinking, long-term policies and conscious choices (Yeo 2020).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the bureaucratic processes through which the Home Office operates, with a focus on Home Office reporting. By drawing on Arendt’s critique of bureaucratic systems of governance, I argued that her notion of non-thinking has continued relevance for critiquing Home Office practice, which can be characterised through a behavioural adherence to rules and duty above all else. I argued that this behavioural tendency also consigns individuals subjected to border control practices to the logics of necessity and automation. Contrary to du Gay’s celebration of bureaucracy’s propensity to treat people according to standardised modes of conduct, these bureaucratic encounters delineate the distinctive operative work of individuals, each with the power to show kindness or vindictiveness. These encounters complicate the oft-described notion of bureaucratic work as passionless, impersonal and rational, and reveal how Home Office officials wield significant power over the fates of migrants. I then focused on Home Office incompetence and malfunction, which I argued operates through a heightened level of abstraction, before exploring how these incompetencies can, on occasion, benefit asylum-seekers in surprising ways. Overall, by exploring asylum seekers’ encounters with reporting, as well as the bureaucrats which administer it, this chapter demonstrates how the normalised, often mundane codes and performances constituting these sites are not neutral but highly value-laden and hold the potential for causing immense harm to the lives of asylum seekers, subjecting them to logics and

processes which fail to account for the unique and often complex circumstances of their lives. Thus, I argue that these sites and how they operate negatively impact asylum seekers lives in often banal and discreet ways, yet as I will explore in the following chapter, constitutes the contemporary mode through which violence is imposed on unwanted migrants.

Violence

‘They appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they
require protection.’

— Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (2016: 26)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the bureaucratic context as well as the structures underpinning border control and management practices function through a series of logics which have the potential to cause immense harm over the lives of those subjected to them. This chapter builds on this argument further by contending that these processes are a form of violence in themselves. Having theorised bureaucracy as the mode through which violence is both enacted and concealed, I now turn to exploring the material processes of violence which are employed within and uphold the very system of reporting. Ines Hasselberg argues that reporting works on a symbolic level, both as a ‘reassertion of the signer's lack of status and a public display of their condition as someone who is not deemed worthy of being able to reside in the UK’ (2016: 100). However, while I agree that there is a symbolic dimension to its functionality, its role as a public display does not make sense when considering the largely concealed nature of this practice, as well as the

fact that reporting is an unknown phenomenon to the majority of the British public. As I examine through this chapter, at Patchway at least, reporting occurs out of sight from the public, and therefore a person can be detained whilst hidden from view. In this chapter I suggest that instead of operating merely as a symbol, reporting functions through creating a condition of precarity, steering individuals towards destitution, and making them more susceptible to detainment and removal. Through examining the site of reporting itself, as well as asylum-seekers' accounts of how reporting impacts their lives, my aim in this chapter is to explore how this administrative process functions as a powerfully violent technology that bears down subtly on asylum-seekers' lives, in ways that makes them increasingly susceptible to destitution, detainment and removal.

This chapter unfolds in three parts. First, I expound my framing of violence outlined in Chapter Two, to situate the lens through which I am understanding these processes to operate, and discuss how mobilising a feminist theorisation of violence locates the 'profoundly intertwined' (Pratt and Rosner 2012:1) material processes of harm I go on to describe. Second, turning to my empirics, I build on these theorisations to examine the ways in which violence and precarity are inextricably linked, and become wound into a particular set of spatiotemporal relations through reporting practices. Here, I draw and build on a framing of violence which points out the seemingly inadvertent, often concealed institutionalised harms enacted on individuals to argue that living in destitution - inhered within many people's everyday experiences of claiming asylum in Britain - is not to be considered incidental. By focusing on reporting's specific spatial and temporal features, I draw out these connections and the precarity it induces, to bring closer to home these various manifestations of violence and how they are linked (Pain 2014a; 2014b). Third, I inquire further into the processes of violence that constitute reporting by mobilising the feminist attention to evincing the threat of physical force as a form of violence in itself. By detailing the architectural components of the reporting space, I

highlight the distinct encoded features which emerge within the various spaces, and how they are instrumental expressions of physical force. I argue that whilst, for the most part, reporting operates within a guise of banal administrative activity, as a border control practice it is in fact underpinned by and ultimately relies upon the threat of and implicit use of physical force. This is because reporting centres remain one of the main sites for facilitating detainment procedures. I then show how these sites can be mapped as part of the elaborate continuum of physical violence, due to the possibilities for torture and death if forcibly returned.

Violence: a feminist lens

In Chapter Two, I contextualised the study of violence within academic scholarship, focusing on how its subtle, institutionalised, everyday form has been exposed and explored through theorisations such as ‘structural’ (Galtung 1969; Farmer 2004), ‘systemic’ (Butler 2020; Žižek 2009) and ‘slow’ (Nixon 2011) violence, before describing how feminist understandings seek to dissolve the customary boundaries and ‘collapse the scaling’ of different forms and sites of violence (Pain 2014b: 533; Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pratt and Rosner 2012). Here I briefly expound on what a feminist perspective on violence can add to this conversation, before describing how violence functions in administering border enforcement strategies.

A feminist understanding of violence, as well as highlighting gender as essential to understanding the origins of violence and the mechanisms through which it operates (Confortini 2006), also offers a way of comprehending the processual nature of violence, and the ways in which its non-physical forms are part of, and even essential to, its overall structure. This is because a feminist lens offers a non-dichotomous framework, in which violence is located, positioned and analysed through non-dualistic terms, across vastly differing sites and scales. As Doreen Massey's work highlights, if each is part of the

construction of the other, we must consider the inherent relationality of these processes (1994). This allows us to see how physical violence is both made possible by and relies upon the existence of other, less visible forms of violence. Encompassing non-physical forms of violence within this continuum also unearths how the threat of violence is a form of violent oppression which is ultimately nullified when the possibility for physical force is removed. It is in this way, for example, that David Graeber is able to describe force as simply a euphemistic way to refer to violence, and therefore identifies the state itself as an instrument of violence (2009; 2012).

As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) reveal, ‘understanding any act, violent or otherwise is never achieved solely in terms of its physicality and invariably includes the meaning it is afforded by culture’ (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, cited in Springer 2011: 92). This view defines violence as something flowing through the codes, structures and conventions which have symbolic meaning and significance to particular spaces, and not only in terms of the ‘corporeal outcomes’ of pain, dismemberment and death (Springer 2011: 92). I argue that this very dynamic exists within the state enforced system of reporting, whereby the processual, regulatory and coercive state-sanctioned structure, ‘acts upon bodies’, even if they do not always take the form of physical violence (Butler 2020: 1). Rather than locating a single conceptualisation of violence within this context, this chapter draws connections across these different forms of violence, precarity and insecurity (Graeber 2009; 2012; Pain and Staeheli 2014), and illuminates how the administration of violence in its widely variant forms, is enacted deliberately on those subjected to this practice.

Creating precarity

‘The asylum process is not a linear process that starts at one end and ends up with that person either being removed from the country or being granted refugee status. It drops people off the cliff then grudgingly picks them up again when all the evidence points to that they have to.’

- Rachel, Interview, May 2017.

In this section I argue that the spatial and temporal aspects of reporting, combined with the state-imposed financial challenges, including the increasing difficulties in obtaining financial support, and the inaccessibility of cash for refused asylum seekers, gradually steer individuals towards increasing precarity. Many of those I met during my fieldwork relayed stories of a ‘demeaning life’ (Mayblin et al. 2020:119), where often unseen, everyday acts and encounters gradually, and over time, made life increasingly unliveable. By connecting the threads of immigration policy, the implementation of mandatory reporting and the everyday accounts of unlivability, we can observe the constitutive role that reporting has in creating a politically induced condition of precarity. Exploring the spatial and temporal features of reporting make visible the ways in which all of the threads of violence come together, and exposes the often devastating consequences of living in a continued and intense state of precarity.

Violent Spatialities: Accessing Patchway

One of the many challenges that individuals reporting at Patchway face, is the sheer awkwardness of accessing it. I described in Chapter Three how Patchway police station has been the official reporting centre for Bristol and the surrounding area since 2014, having moved from its previous location at Trinity Road police station, in the centre of Bristol. Located in South Gloucestershire, Patchway is approximately seven miles from central Bristol, and for the vast majority of people required to report there, it is a highly inconvenient location to access. Indeed, I found that a common conversation starter when people arrive at Patchway and join the queue is: ‘Did it take you long to get here?’ or,

‘Isn’t it a pain to get here?!’.²⁷ The fact that most are required to report once every two weeks — though for some as often as two or three days every single week — forces this arduous journey on people on a regular basis.

Not only is the distance from central Bristol to Patchway highly inconvenient, the police station itself is also physically awkward to access. The bus stop is located at the side of a dual carriageway, where people are forced to make a run for it across a very busy road when there is a gap in the traffic. The police station is situated between a petrol station and a *Costa Drive Thru*, again demonstrating its lack of proximity from the city and reinforcing the lack of consideration given to people needing to travel there on a regular basis. This is especially true given that most people do not have access to a vehicle, and therefore are required to use public transport.

Another challenge is the financial cost of travelling to and from Patchway. Although seemingly a minor detail, signers must pay for their own travel to and from the reporting centre and for the majority of people who travel by bus, the journey costs between £4 - £6 for a return fare. This is a huge financial burden, as those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim are not permitted to work, and are excluded from claiming mainstream welfare benefits. In fact, as Mayblin points out, the United Kingdom opted out of the Recast EU Reception Conditions Directive proposed in 2008, which suggested member states grant asylum seekers’ access to the labour market after six months of waiting for a decision on their claim (2016:815). Instead, people seeking asylum are able to access Section 95 support in the form of housing and basic living expenses, which provides £37.75 a week, accessed as a cash deposit using an Aspen card,²⁸ administered by the private contractor Financial Services, Ltd. As reporting is a condition of bail, asylum seekers must prioritise getting to and from the reporting centre and many who

²⁷ Fieldnotes, May 2017

²⁸ The Aspen card was introduced in 2017 (replacing the previously named Azure cards), for those entitled to receive asylum support.

receive Section 95 support chose to purchase a weekly bus pass, which costs between £18.90 and £20 a week, over half of their weekly income.

The difficulties in travelling to reporting appointments are not confined to those required to report at Patchway. In recent years several Home Office buildings and local police stations have closed in order to consolidate resources and cut costs (Burrige 2019). For instance, the Home Office building in North Shields, situated on the outskirts of Newcastle in the north east of England, was closed in 2015. This resulted in those housed in accommodation in and around Newcastle being required to report in the city of Middlesbrough, an expensive journey taking an hour and fifteen minutes and which includes a change in trains (see Burrige 2019:201).

Refused asylum seekers are even more impacted by the financial cost of attending reporting, for many do not have any reliable access to cash whatsoever and are also not permitted to work. In principle individuals are entitled to receive Section 4 support, which is conditioned upon the destitution of the individual. Under the United Kingdom's 1999 Immigration Act, Section 95(3), 'a person is destitute if (a) he does not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it, (whether or not his essential living needs are met); or (b) he has adequate accommodation but cannot meet his other essential living needs' (cited in Bloom 2015: 80). In this case, destitute asylum seekers are also assigned an Aspen card for which they are allotted a weekly allowance of £35.39 but the cards only allow recipients to purchase a limited range of goods such as food, toiletries and clothing from participating shops and significantly these cards also prohibit the withdrawal of cash entirely, or the means to pay for other types of expense, such as transportation (Coddington 2018; Coddington, Conlon and Martin 2020). Section 69 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 states that the state 'may make a payment towards the cost of traveling expenses to comply with reporting restrictions', and asylum seekers living outside of a three mile radius of their reporting centre and who

are in receipt of asylum support are eligible to receive assistance with travelling expenses to the reporting centre (Home Office 2019b). However, many of the individuals I met at the reporting centre did not receive any financial assistance for travelling to and from their reporting appointments, as they were ineligible for asylum support in the first instance.

For some, the risk of being arrested for not attending their reporting appointment was outweighed by the financial burden that reporting entailed. Hassan, a middle-aged man from the middle east who, when I met him, had recently obtained refugee status, told me:

I found there is no news from the Home Office, every other week I went to the police station to sign. After four months I said I've ran out of money, I have no money to buy tickets, to come to the police station to sign. So I'm not going to come... I said I do not come anymore, I'm in my brother's home, you can come there if you have any problem, you can arrest me again (Interview, July 2017).

Indeed, the challenge of getting to and from the reporting centre and the financial burden it entails was, for many, one of the main struggles of their everyday lives. A young man from east Africa told me that he had to walk to Patchway as he could not afford the bus fare; he shared that once, afraid of missing his appointment, he had even walked the journey through heavy snow.²⁹ On another occasion at Patchway I met a very young man, no more than 20-years-old. He had recently been released from prison, and like many who are required to report, he told me he was not permitted to work, yet still had to pay for his own bus fare to the reporting centre: 'It's like they want me to commit another crime', he stated. This exclusion both from access to employment and from any channel to financial support confronts many with this double bind, essentially forcing them into 'informal' or 'cash-in-hand' labour which exacerbates their vulnerability to arrest and

²⁹ Fieldnotes, July 2017.

potential removal. The legal constraints placed on those waiting for an outcome on their immigration case, coupled with the sheer length of time this can take, means that seeking informal employment is for many, their only option for survival. Indeed, several of those I met at the reporting centre reported that they had served prison sentences for working without legal documentation.

Aside from the difficulty posed by the financial cost and the awkwardness of the location for people reporting, the fact that the centre is physically relatively remote further heightens their vulnerability to detainment, due to the unreachability of friends, family or legal professionals who may be able to advocate on their behalf. As Alison Mountz (2011) argues in her work on offshore detention centres, distancing works to exacerbate isolation and limits access to advocates and legal professionals. State actors are, argues Mountz, able to ‘exert more control over detainees’, information and people moving in and out of facilities (121) in these non-centralised, offshore sites. In a similar way, Patchway’s lack of proximity to the city, and its awkward-to-access location, means that those reporting remain hidden from view, both from their networks of support, and from the public at large. By perpetually drawing people to this remote site, and the physical and monetary challenges this entails, contribute to the additional multiple harms people experience in their everyday lives (Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi 2020).

Living without cash

‘[Aspen] cards function to make your life as uncomfortable as possible...you can't take a bus or have your hair cut, it really limits your freedom, you can't buy what you want’.

- Anna, interview, April 2017.

The budgetary constraints placed on asylum seekers means that the everyday can be a struggle for survival. I described in the preface to this thesis the story of Mercy Baguma who, in August 2020, was found dead next to her crying baby. Originally from Uganda,

Mercy Baguma had been living in extreme poverty, after she lost her job due to the expiration of her leave to remain. Unable to claim asylum support, Mercy was relying on food donations and charitable organisations while she applied for asylum (Brooks 2020). Rather than being an unfortunate anomaly, Mercy's experiences as an asylum seeker living in extreme poverty are all too familiar, through the state's continual attempts to make life unliveable for 'unwanted' migrants. Poverty is an everyday reality for asylum seekers unable to access asylum support. Yet, even for those entitled to receive asylum support, the welfare payment is around 50% of Job Seekers Allowance, which is itself set just above the poverty line (Mayblin 2016: 816). As such, 'asylum seekers are effectively forced into a situation of poverty and (often long term) unemployment' (Bales 2013; cited in Mayblin 2016: 816).

Many of the people I met at the reporting centre were destitute and were unable to receive any financial support whatsoever, and relied on friends and charity for basic survival. However for those that did meet the increasingly stringent criteria of 'destitution', were able access to an Aspen card and yet the effect of these cashless technologies was not limited to the difficulties they experienced in traveling to and from their reporting appointments. People described only being able to purchase food from large chain supermarkets, and not from their local grocery or markets where produce is significantly cheaper. The fact that many of the large chain supermarkets are not conveniently located, required them to have to travel there by bus. Felix, a young man from a country in central Africa recently released from immigration detention shared with me:

For me, I like so much the food from my country, a meal called Pondu. It is not in Tesco, not in Asda, just in the African shop... Where now I found that money to buy? (Interview, February 2017).

Felix's words, though describing a seemingly mundane restriction with regards to his inaccessibility to cash, reveal a profound fragility in seeking the simple comfort of being able to purchase and cook a familiar meal. Having suffered immeasurably before fleeing to the UK to seek sanctuary, followed by a period of detainment in immigration detention, the denial of this modest comfort seemed especially demeaning.

Others reported frequent problems with the cards when they did not top-up when they were supposed to, or being prohibited from buying certain items and the subsequent embarrassment and shame they experienced at the supermarket check-out. Bernadette describes her frustrations:

Anything you want to buy, the supermarket will be like, "no sorry you can't buy this". Sometimes you can't even buy clothes! Tesco, they are the worst!.. And then there won't be any money and then the supermarket will get angry. They will be taking your bag and putting back everything' (Interview, February 2017).

Others expressed the difficulties with being able to purchase clothing they could afford, as the Aspen card limited them to certain shops, which they deemed more expensive.

Elodie shared:

British Red Cross [the charity shop] is very expensive. It's very expensive. So how will you buy [clothes, with] just 36 pound? You need to use that money to eat food (Focus group, Manchester, February 2017).

In addition to these restrictions and the functional issues surrounding the cards, during numerous conversations and in interviews, the cards were often described as a source of shame for individuals. Rishika described:

It's supposed to automatically get topped up on a Sunday, but not all the time. On Sundays you can actually go to the supermarket and they tell you there's no

money and then you have to pack your bags again and put everything back, which is very shameful because people are looking at you (Focus group, Manchester February 2017).

Rishika's use of the language of shame to describe these experiences, demonstrates the potent impact of restricting people's accessibility to cash. Coddington writes that shame is a powerful technique of slow violence, which manifests through stigmatisation, and eroding people's sense of belonging (2019:538). These become tactics to humiliate and infantilise those reliant upon the card, as individuals are made to feel they cannot be trusted to buy what they need. As Coddington points out, part of the state's rationale in assigning these cards to asylum seekers is in enabling them to regulate what people buy, as it not only restricts them from buying certain items, it also produces data about what and where individuals purchase certain goods, and where their mobilities are 'registered in purchases' (Coddington et al. 2020: 13; Coddington 2019). In other words, the state are able, through these cards, both to locate and restrict what people buy. The provision of the Aspen card enforces a mundane yet humiliating restriction on people's lives through the inaccessibility to cash and constitutes another way through which violence is inflicted on them.

Furthermore, the financial and housing support for those able to claim Section 4 support is so low, that there is no opportunity for destitute asylum seekers to move out of destitution (Coddington et al. 2020: 12). Those dependent on the state for financial income, are forced to prioritise their meagre funds to pay for transportation to and from their reporting appointments, or risk losing their income and housing support entirely. Unsurprisingly, those without access to any official financial income become perceptibly more vulnerable, and become more likely to engage in informal labour, thus making them more vulnerable to detainment and deportation. Ultimately, the enforcement of reporting

on those with precarious and insufficient income makes the spatialisation of this violent practice even more patent.

Proving destitution

Alongside the various functional issues and indignities emerging from these cashless technologies is the increasing difficulty in proving destitution itself, and therefore in accessing asylum support in the first instance. Cuthill (2017) notes that there are over 285,000 destitute asylum seekers living without recourse to public funds, who inevitably become susceptible to homelessness, ill health and exploitation. As discussed in Chapter Four, while the difficulties surrounding accessing support for asylum seekers are often framed as administrative issues, within the context of these other aspects of precarity, it becomes easy to identify these challenges as part of the government's broader agenda in creating and contributing to an actively hostile environment. Coddington et al. (2020:13) term this 'destitution-as-deterrence', as the efforts of the UK government make 'daily life unliveable'. They show how deterrence is achieved through creating a generalised condition of discomfort, alongside a lack of opportunity and the threat of punishment. Like Section 95 support for asylum seekers who are awaiting an outcome on their claim, refused asylum seekers have to prove they are destitute. However the terms for proving destitution and therefore obtaining support, namely Section 4 support, have become increasingly difficult. As Elinor, an asylum support worker with over 15-years of experience explains:

The assumption with Section 4 is you've been in the country for quite a while, you might have been working, you might have a bank account, you've been in and out of destitution so how have you been living on thin air? [The assumption is] you must have some sort of income therefore we're going to disbelieve everything you say unless you prove otherwise. (Interview, March 2018).

A volunteer with Bristol Refugee Rights reiterates:

It's so difficult to access benefits because you basically have to prove that you're destitute. That sounds relatively straight forward in theory but in practice, how can you prove that you're destitute? It's really undignifying as the Home Office want to see letters from family and friends saying that they're unwilling to support you. They also want to see bank statements from a bank in your country of origin from say, ten years ago, when you might have left. If that country is Libya or Afghanistan, that's near-on impossible to obtain. (Fieldnotes, February 2018).

As well as these Kafkaesque administrative obstacles, further barriers to support have been implemented through the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016, including the elimination of free legal aid to asylum seekers. This essentially excludes a vast number of asylum seekers from accessing justice, as the financial means to pay for good legal advice is simply unattainable (Burridge and Gill 2017; Singh and Webber 2010).

Violent temporalities

As discussed in Chapter Two, central to a feminist understanding of violence is the way in which it functions through processual structures of harm, whereby violence occurs not through abstract, free-floating occurrences but is 'profoundly intertwined' across varying sites and scales (Pratt and Rosner 2012:1). An interconnected approach to understanding the violence of reporting, therefore, engages with the various ways violence is inflicted, across differing scales and sites (Pain 2014a; 2014b). Here I focus on the temporality of reporting, in order to understand how violence is inflicted on those exposed to the tactics underpinning immigration policies, including reporting practices, with the aim of further exposing the linkages between the implementation of reporting and precarity.

Melanie Griffiths (2014) describes the asylum process as a temporal moment of chronic uncertainty where people are situated within a precarious legal space. Those

awaiting a conclusion on their asylum claim often endure several years of uncertainty (BurrIDGE and Gill 2017; Conlon 2011; Hyndman and Giles 2011), and for many, the longest time is spent waiting to appeal against a refusal by the Home Office (BurrIDGE and Gill 2017: 23). As Rebecca Rotter's work iterates (2016), periods of protracted waiting imposed through asylum policies prevent people from engaging in a wide range of social and cultural practices including starting a career, marriage, and the ability to acquire any form of financial stability. Moreover, for asylum seekers, the effects of being deprived the right to employment leads to an increase in social exclusion and an inability to integrate (Briscoe and Lavender 2009; cited in Canning 2017: 22).

For those I met during my fieldwork, the lack of information on an outcome on their asylum claim caused immense anxiety. For Mohammad, living in this state of protracted waiting contributed to him contemplating suicide. The everydayness of these temporal tactics often leads to deteriorating mental and physical health. Rachel, cofounder of Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN), an organisation working to support destitute migrants in Bristol, describes the impact of chronic waiting on people's mental and physical health:

What we see is a deterioration of people's self-esteem, and self-worth, and a sense of the increasing ill health, stress, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, like symptoms in the body like IBS, or gluten-intolerance or something like that, those kinds of things which indicate the stress they've been living with for so long. Every day in destitution is an extra day of deterioration in that person's mental health... You end up with people who have been destitute in the asylum process, and coming out the other side; are they the ones that are getting their leave to remain and walking off into the distance and becoming a doctor? Very rarely. Most of the people who get leave to remain that have been destitute really struggle. They have a few moments when they feel great and have a big celebration when they get their papers, but then it takes people a couple of years to fall off the cliff and get back up again... that is kind of consistent with a lot of

people who get leave to remain. But if people come and get papers quickly and their families come quickly and they're not delaying everything for years and years and years, the lack of delay gives them an outcome so much better. There's hundreds of people, not just BHN people but before when I was working at BRR before, of all the people I've seen come through, those that have come with much quicker results on their asylum claim, and without delay and without not being believed, and distrusted and being called a liar in public and all this kind of stuff that deeply affects people's sense of self-worth, those people have gone off and done alright for themselves, and we don't see them anymore actually... they're not reliant on local charities for the rest of their adult lives (Interview, May 2017).

As Rachel's words indicate, the deterioration of people's mental and physical health is not instantaneous but occurs gradually over time and in different ways and places on the body. Several of the people I met continuously during my fieldwork suffered from physical and mental ill health and in two cases that I know of, had attempted suicide. Another person had obtained refugee status during that time but told me he continued to suffer from a mental health condition. After successfully obtaining employment in the UK, he told me he later had to quit because of his suffering mental health. He was a highly educated and intelligent man, and in his country of origin, he had been a schoolteacher.

The temporal violence of reporting

In the state-enforced creation of a hostile environment, reporting performs a crucially important role in both highlighting and exacerbating the precarity of those subjected to the practice. While reporting is framed by the Home Office as a temporary measure, this is very rarely the case. For many I met at the reporting centre, they had been reporting for several years, some for as long as six, seven, or even 12-years. As reporting is a condition of bail for those subject to immigration control, individuals are required to report to the Home Office until they receive a conclusion on their immigration status. Yet the lack of information on an outcome for their asylum claim meant that very few knew how long

they would be required to report. The policy on how regularly individuals are required to report is based on how likely the person is to ‘abscond’ according to the Home Office³⁰; however those with young children tend to be permitted to report less frequently. Another major factor which holds significance for determining whether an individual is required to attend more regularly is whether they have served a prison sentence. Due to the increasingly punitive restrictions on those without leave to remain, and the ramifications for engaging in informal labour, it is common for those required to report to have served a prison sentence.³¹

At Patchway, with its particularly awkward and difficult-to-access location, the temporality of reporting takes its toll on the most vulnerable. Sabir, an elderly man from south Asia, always greeted me with a formal handshake when he arrived to report. I attributed this relative formality to his age, as he was one of the oldest I had observed reporting at Patchway. As well as being destitute, he had been detained several times, and was physically frail, yet was required to report at Patchway every two weeks. Mohammed, whose experiences of being made homeless I discussed in Chapter Four, told me of his experience requesting to reduce his reporting appointments:

‘I say [to the Home Office] I’m signing almost four years every two weeks, please can you postpone make it one month [or] making it [every] six months, [or every] three months, some people signing three months. They say “no what’s the reason, are you sick?” I say no, but some people sign monthly or three months, I come every two weeks, you don’t pay me for the bus or nothing’ (Interview, February 2017).

³⁰ The Home Office define an ‘in country absconder’ as ‘someone who breaches one or more of the conditions imposed as a condition of immigration bail’, including attending reporting appointments and ‘whose whereabouts are unknown and all mandatory procedures to re-establish contact with the migrant have failed’ (Home Office 2018:6).

³¹ FNOs with leave to remain are deportable from the UK if convicted to a 12-month prison sentence or longer.

Seeking to reduce the frequency of one's reporting requirements is one way for making the ordeal more bearable, which in Mohammed's case was denied. Mohammed later told me, 'I'm tired of waiting, you can't have a life here, I can't have a wife or a girlfriend 'cos I can't get a job, I am poor. No one wants to be with someone like that.' His demeanour was resigned as he shared that he didn't know how much longer he could go on. Indeed, the temporal impact of reporting for years on end was evident in the demeanour of many people I met at Patchway. Each day I volunteered at the reporting centre I would witness an array of emotions displayed by those reporting including anger, despair, frustration and fear; but most often people appeared visibly fatigued.

Despite the fact that individuals are not physically incarcerated, reporting enforces extremely circumscribed lives for individuals who become tied to these sites of reporting (Schmid-Scott 2018), demonstrating the 'carceral continuum' (Moran 2013) that exists beyond the walls of the prison or detention centre. The temporal connotations of reporting therefore, can have the effect of confinement, as I will explore further below.

Making life unliveable

I described in the preface how the political justification for deliberately harsh policies is that they reduce the supposed 'pull factors' (Mayblin 2016) that are said to make Britain an attractive destination for refugees (Yeo 2020: 142). The inevitable precarity induced through these policies, including reporting practices, institutionalises an exclusionary logic, restricting access to welfare to the labour market, designed to deter asylum-seekers from arriving and/or remaining in the UK. However, Yeo points out that deterrence is in fact often not achieved (2020) and instead the impact of these policies makes daily life for those seeking sanctuary in Britain, intolerable. In other words, the government's motive to disincentivise asylum applicants is driven at least in part, by economic factors, yet these tactics for disincentivisation are largely ineffective. Moreover, economically

speaking, they arguably cost the government more than they actually save. As Elinor describes:

I think the government would say it's public funds and we're getting value for money by making sure people don't get support they're not entitled to, but that's very siloed thinking... The fact that absolute destitution costs loads of money to the NHS and social services is not relevant... and people do end up with social services because you get into that revolving door of mental and physical health breakdown and crisis and admission and mental health crisis services, and... it's not cost effective if that's what they're concerned about, which makes me think that's not what they're concerned about. (Interview, March 2018).

Rather than regarding precarity as an incidental manifestation of these economic and political structures, Elinor's words convey the incongruity between policies designed to be cost-efficient and the actual fact that they cost the government far more as a result of their implementation. Here, distinct parallels can be drawn between 'state-enforced destitution' (Waite and Lewis 2017: 969, cited in Coddington et al. 2020) and an asylum process designed to hurt. In this way, we can begin to observe the 'ricochet' effects of asylum policy, whereby the political realm which determines these processes become experienced in the intimate encounters of the everyday (Conlon and Hiemstra 2017:5). To use Butler's framing, 'they appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they require protection' (2016:26). The emotional effects of living in destitution are manifold and condition many for long-term mental and physical ill health.

As Rachel describes:

Those who have been destitute end up really struggling to make their own life, and plough their own furrow. What are you expecting when you have a policy in which destitution is a part of it? Are you expecting people to come out of the other side and suddenly become tax-paying, working members of society with their own homes? Where are you getting off? It's as though [the government] don't have

any idea what's real and what's true, and what is actually going to happen with people. I think they are making policies based on the public which is, 'we don't want those foreigners', and deciding that of that group they can exclude... the easiest target is destitute asylum-seekers so they make their life hell on earth... The flip side is that surviving destitution gives people a lot of resilience in life. But it's not a resilience that protects them from depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and PTSD; those things happen anyway because the system is designed to cause those in people, it's the perfect storm (Rachel, Interview May 2017).

Here, Rachel draws a distinct connection between immigration policy, destitution, and the resultant mental and physical ill health that many asylum seekers experience. In this way, the apparent contradiction between creating policies which are designed to afflict, whilst ostensibly not comprehending the inevitable suffering caused by such policies, can be attributed to non-thinking behaviours, as described in the previous chapter. In this context, within the decision to target an already vulnerable people group, there also resides a culture which defers only to the rational, and abstract logic inherent to the cognitive mode of behaviours I described.

Approaching the government's tactics towards asylum seekers as examples of a deference to this behavioural tendency also relates to Stanley Cohen's recognition of what he defines as 'implicatory denial'. This refers to the invisible structures that draw on 'evasion, avoidance, deflection and rationalisation' (2001: 9). Through his definition of implicatory denial, Cohen highlights those events or situations whose psychological, moral or political implications are denied or minimised, and which therefore lead to what he describes as 'rationalisations' or 'evasions' which we use to deal with our awareness of suffering, whilst refusing to accept its implications (2001:8-9). He writes that one can also chose to 'not know' about atrocities and suffering when that information proves too disturbing or threatening; what he calls a 'state of denial' (2001). In this way, the bureaucratic mode through which these processes operate enables a systemised state of

denial by extending the distance at which the action is able to bring affects (Bauman 1989).

Self-regulation and being made docile

Another effect of reporting is that it enforces individuals to self-regulate. In Kafka's account of K.'s behaviour in *The Trial*, K.'s submission is not obtained by force, but through a gradual surrender to the absurd yet repeatedly reinstated logics in which he becomes embroiled. During the course of my fieldwork, I would speak to people who were unwell on the day they were due to report, but afraid that missing an appointment might impinge on their immigration or asylum case, continued to attend. A woman with a sick young child turned up at the reporting centre one day, her child bundled under blankets in her pram, as she told me she felt afraid to miss her appointment. As a particularly extreme example, on one occasion I met a very young man from the middle east who arrived with a walking stick and was clearly in a great deal of pain. He didn't speak English but when he went into the office to report, his support worker who was attending with him told me that two months ago he had attempted suicide by jumping from a bridge and had broken his back. The fact that this young man still felt compelled to attend his reporting appointment despite his condition demonstrates the coercive and self-regulating nature of the reporting process. Whilst individuals are, to an extent, left to choose whether or not to comply with these regulations, albeit within an extremely limited set of choices (of course, some do go 'underground'), a significant majority still continue to attend their appointments, with an estimated compliance rate of 95% (APPG 2015), also demonstrating the extent of coercive power that reporting holds over individuals. According to Home Office policy, requests from individuals to reschedule a reporting event 'must be made in writing and supporting evidence must be provided either with the letter or in person' (Home Office 2019b). Yet, many of the reasons which might require

an individual to reschedule a reporting appointment concern issues which are near-on impossible to notify the Home Office in advance, especially in writing (e.g. sickness). People generally appeared not to trust that a message would be passed on to the correct person, and one man shared with me that he was afraid of being given some kind of 'black mark' if he did miss an appointment in the event of being unwell. These sentiments also expose the intrinsic lack of trust that many individuals hold towards the Home Office.

The power that the threat of being deemed non-compliant and the implications this holds for people's immigration or asylum case are made patent by observing the fact that so many continue to attend their reporting appointments for years on end. Individuals anticipate that, by attending their reporting appointments, they will be viewed as compliant, and therefore deemed a worthy asylum applicant. As Patrycja Pinkowska notes, compliant behaviour is often highlighted during appeals at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. A legal representative will often raise the matter of compliance in the form of attending reporting appointments to present their client to the judge in the best possible light (2019:145). Conversely, as mentioned above, the Home Office will also highlight missing reporting appointments as an example of non-compliance, therefore seeking to present the individual as troublesome and untrustworthy and therefore unworthy of asylum.

Over time, one of several emotionally difficult aspects of volunteering with BSS, for me personally, was seeing the same individuals each week, knowing they would very likely be there every week for months and years to come. In one way, it seemed to demonstrate the senselessness of the bureaucracy constituting reporting, which ensures individuals can be located for several minutes, on one particular day of the week or month. In this way, as Rachel from BHN explained, reporting 'does not do a very good job on keeping tabs' on people, for 'they don't know where they're living in between. If

they actually wanted to control [people], they would do it differently to how they're doing it now' she said (interview, May 2017).

Yet, over the course of my fieldwork, the apparent absurdity of reporting as a means of controlling people began to make sense. Individuals are repeatedly informed that reporting is a condition of their bail terms, and that those who miss their appointment face losing their asylum support, rendering them homeless and without financial support, or being detained and possibly removed. Being perpetually reminded of one's precarious condition, constitutes a subtle, banal form of violence, yet one which reconfigures the body and how positions itself in the world (Feldman 1991). The apparent boundedness of reporting begins to seep into everyday life, altering how one postures oneself. The effect speaks of Foucault's notion of being 'made docile' (Foucault 1984). For Foucault, docility works not '*en masse*' but 'individually'; exercising 'a subtle coercion' which results in 'an infinitesimal power over the active body' (Foucault 1984: 181). Reporting therefore, constitutes a powerful technique of coercion whereby individuals are compelled to comply or face the threat of destitution, detention and removal. In this sense, reporting is one way amidst a series of strategies through which individuals are controlled, and thereby making physical incarceration unnecessary.

However, the harms caused by these state-sanctioned policies work not solely through these drawn out banal strategies. While the depictions of violence I have given above clearly attribute to the state, the everyday suffering caused by asylum policies, and draw connections between seemingly distinct, disconnected modes of violence, they do not acknowledge the role that physical violence, or the threat of it, plays in the way such tactics are upheld. In other words, they occlude how the potential, or threat of physical force also constitutes a particular kind of violence in itself, which is ultimately how these political processes are implemented and sustained over time. As I will explore in the following section, the UK government's commitment to detaining and forcibly removing

migrants is arguably one of the few remaining forms of physical violence that western liberal democracies are able to legitimate.

Threat

‘I don’t understand why I should be stood next to a person who is wearing a bullet proof vest. I think why do you need to dress like this in the first place?’

- Natasha, Signing Support volunteer

Communicating threat

I explored above how violence is enacted through the various spatial and temporal logics at play within reporting practices, which together culminate to produce a certain kind of precarious subject, made increasingly and gradually more vulnerable and excluded. However, as a growing body of feminist scholarship has shown, conceptualisations of violence must also encompass how the threat of physical force also constitutes a particular kind of violence in itself (Pain and Staeheli 2014). I discussed at the beginning of this chapter how a feminist framing reveals the connections and processes through which violence becomes abstracted, as well as how different forms of violence become (re)produced. As feminists have argued, once one understands ‘structures’ as material processes, one can see that ‘direct violence is a tool used to build, perpetuate’ other forms of violence (Confortini 2006: 350; see also Graeber 2009; 2012; Massey 1994). Graeber suggests that to insist on a distinction between actual physical violence and the invocation of fear around the possibility of such an event occurring is ultimately futile, for these are both material processes in which ‘violence, and the threat of violence, play a crucial, constitutive role (Graeber 2012: 113; see also Confortini 2006). In other words, the threat of physical force is violent in itself because it is an expression of the structures of violence which constitute it, and enable it to exist at all. If the threat of physical force is necessary for the effective functioning of an institution, ultimately this dependence plays a crucial,

constitutive role in generating other, more overt or physical forms of violence (Graeber 2012). In this way, Graeber claims that the state is essentially an instrument of violence due to how it ultimately enforces the law through the imminent threat of force (2008; 2012).

While a feminist contribution to understandings of structural violence is absent from much of the analyses of violence within asylum scholarship specifically, it has important implications for this area of research, in particular for developing a critique of the processes and practices through which immigration and asylum policies operate. This is due to the fact that the threat of detention and removal is permanent for those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim and is communicated most patently through the site and processes of reporting. In this section, I develop the significance of threat in relation to reporting practices, focusing firstly on the architectural components of the reporting space at Patchway, and how individuals become successively exposed to the threat of detainment. This is followed by considering the ways in which threat is communicated beyond the reporting centre itself, and into people's everyday lives.

Architecture of reporting

Over the 11-month period I attended Patchway police station, the same woman, dressed in a police uniform would sit behind an elevated desk, and direct new signers to the area designated for reporting. The only immediate indication that a part of the police station becomes regularly repurposed for reporting was a typed and laminated A4 piece of paper which served as a makeshift sign, reading “IMMIGRATION”. This was blu-tacked onto the door of the office by the Home Office staff member each time the room was used for this purpose and taken down when it was not. The slightly askew angle at which the sign often hung gave the impression of a somewhat amateur operation in hand. More confronting was the seemingly disorderly queue of people who await their turn to enter

the office; aside from the occasional (Eastern European) Caucasian, all were people of colour, and as the queue trailed outside the office door, as it often did, it seemed to denote a perceivable dichotomy between those who belonged and those who did not (Hervik 2004). The queue almost seemed to reinstate the division between ‘rightful’ members and ‘rightless’ non-members (De Genova and Peutz 2010: 7), the ostensible irreconcilability of different cultures and ethnicities with Britain’s sense of national belonging. On my first visit to the reporting centre, I had thought to myself, if anyone is in any doubt that such a dichotomy exists, one need only regard this scene. Such an explicit demarcation of people who must continually reauthenticate their presence is rarely so explicitly seen. Indeed, that is arguably, precisely why the practice of reporting is concealed from public view.

“Welcome to the country!”

I mean it’s meant to be an administrative process, but when you claim asylum and you have an asylum claim outstanding, they’re not supposed to remove you but they give you an [IS96] saying you are liable for detention, it’s like “welcome to the country”

- Grace, Interview, January 2017

Until an individual obtains the legal right to live in Britain, usually in the case of an asylum claim through obtaining Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), they are subjected to a continually reinforced message that they may be subject to detainment and removal at any time. This occurs through an array of mediated modes of border enforcement, from specialised technical devices including surveillance, and electronic tagging, to what Darling (2014) calls, the more mundane and seemingly anachronistic mode of letter writing. Indeed, as I described in Chapter Four, bureaucracy saturates the lives of those seeking asylum in Britain, and the form of letters remains one of the main modes through which the Home Office reiterate state practices, discourse and authority to migrants (see Darling 2014).

Until January 2018, those who had made an asylum claim were given 'temporary admission' status and handed an IS96 document that recognised the person's presence in the UK without providing them with formal permission to stay in the UK under immigration laws. This status was provided while the Home Office decided whether that person met the rules for being allowed to stay in the UK, including whether they could stay as a refugee, and the document stated that they were liable to detention at any time. If a person were held in immigration detention, they could apply to the Home Office for temporary admission and could be granted 'temporary release' from detention. From January 2018, this type of status no longer exists, and now any person subject to immigration control who does not have formal permission to stay in the UK is granted 'immigration bail'.³² Therefore, the perpetual threat of detainment is permanent until either that person is removed or receives Indefinite Leave to Remain. Those awaiting an outcome on their claim are regularly reminded of the precariousness of their continued presence in the UK through appeal dismissals, the removal of other failed applicants and through reporting at the Home Office (Rotter 2010).

Alongside these other modes of communicating the potentiality of detainment, the reporting site and the practices which comprise reporting can be understood as an additional tangible facet of asylum seekers' insecurity. Attention to reporting sites expose the various ways in which this insecurity is communicated and its effects become materialised. One way in which the threat of detainment is conveyed is through informing individuals of a change in frequency in their reporting appointments. Elodie, an asylum-seeker, told me: 'When they start changing your time, be very careful, when they start putting you to every one week, two weeks'.³³ While this increase may not always be based on an actual decision to detain at the reporting centre, the fear it induced in people

³² See: https://miclu.org/glossary_definitions/temporary-admission-see-is96 [Accessed 2.11.2020].

³³ Interview, February 2017.

was fundamental to the structures of power and control constituting the reporting process itself (Pain 2014b). I will discuss this in more detail below.

In the following section, I observe the ways in which the architecture of the reporting space itself is designed and administered, to explore how the hovering possibility of the use of force towards those reporting is conveyed.

Liminal spaces

One of the distinctive architectural features of reporting at Patchway is the way in which the space itself is designed. As discussed in Chapter Two, Victor Turner's analysis of liminal spaces acting as a series of thresholds provides an analytical framework for thinking through the ways in which individuals are steered towards a gradually increasing threat of force within the reporting space itself. The different areas within the reporting space represent a series of thresholds, in which individuals become increasingly exposed to the threat of force, in the form of detainment and removal. The different spaces are significant for understanding the cumulative way in which the threat of physical force emerges within the space, through the various architectural features and the associated accoutrements.

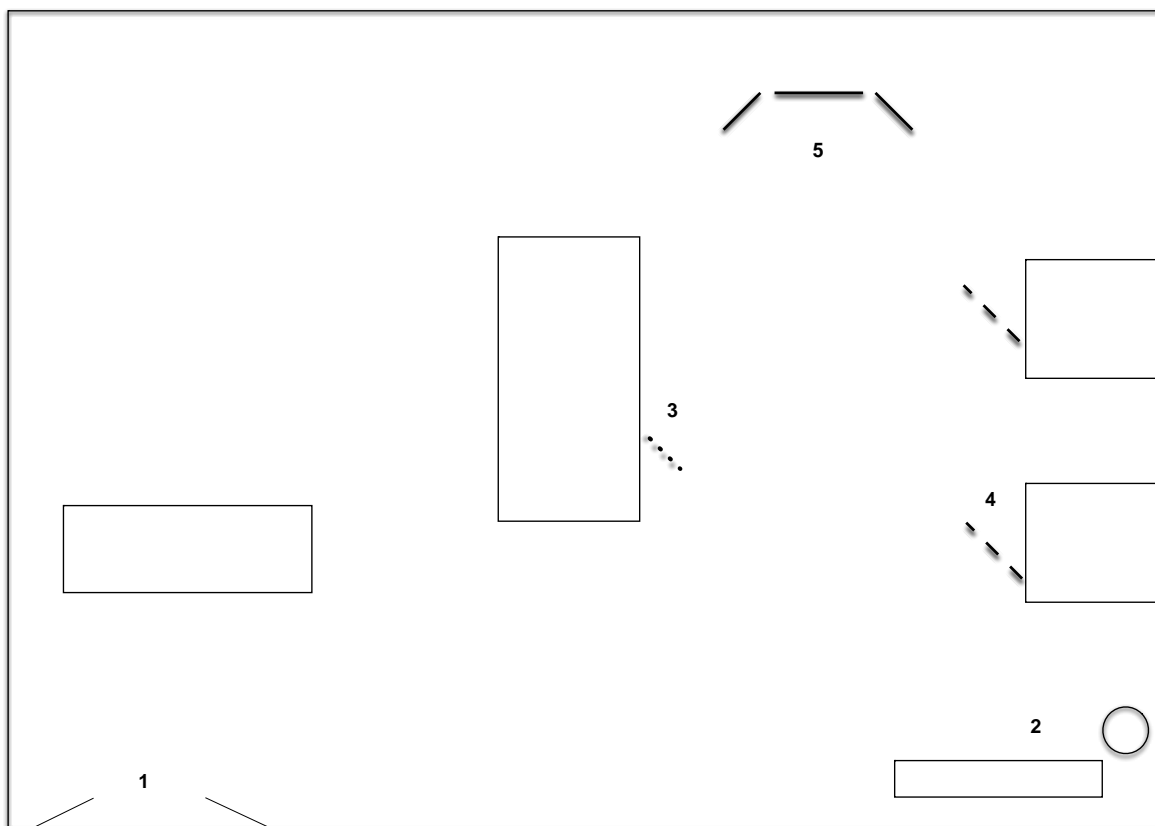


Figure 7: Birds-eye view of the reporting centre

Figure 7 offers a birds-eye view of the reporting space, marking points from where individuals enter through the main police station entrance, all the way through to where they may be taken in the event of a detainment procedure. The numbers correspond to the different spaces that individuals are orientated through as they enter. Once those reporting have entered the building through the automatic doors (1), most of what takes place on a typical visit to the reporting centre occurs in areas (2) and (3). People waiting to report queue outside the office (2) where they are subjected to visual and audio surveillance through a visible 360 degree camera and a microphone device which protrudes from the ceiling. (3) signifies where the actual reporting process takes place, within a small, enclosed office with a door operated automatically by the officer on duty. Once the person reporting is inside, the officer can confirm their attendance using the computer system, and usually that person can then leave. (4) signifies where individuals are led if they face further questioning by Border Enforcement officers and (5) represents the doors through

which individuals are led to the holding cells if they are being detained, and is where they await transportation to an immigration detention centre. The small office where the reporting takes place is officially 'out of bounds' to Signing Support volunteers, and those reporting either enter alone or with any family member also required to report. The door to the office locks automatically and can only be unlocked by a button operated by the officer on duty. As one signer vividly describes, 'they lock you in that room and have to let you out themselves, you don't know if you will be able to walk out'.³⁴

If an individual faces questioning by the Home Office, or a detainment is due to take place, the area where people queue to report is often where they are spotted by Border Enforcement officers. This first became apparent to me when I noticed the officers immediately following individuals into the office when they entered to report, signalling that they were identified and monitored as they arrived and were waiting in line. Border Enforcement officers then escort the individual from the reporting office into one of the interview rooms for further questioning. These rooms are prepared before-hand when the Home Office plan to conduct further questioning, indicated by various officers coming in and out, bringing in large amounts of printed paper work, a large black leather briefcase, and wearing bright purple latex gloves, worn for full body searches.

Whilst this map of the reporting space is limited - not only in its dimensional limitations, but also in its inability to capture the phenomenological experience of being within the space, in particular as someone without legal status - it goes some way towards illustrating the processual nature of how people become exposed to increasing levels of force through the reporting space, and how agency is gradually divested as they move through the various spaces. Even for signers not subject to questioning and detainment procedures, from the moment they enter the reporting space, they become exposed to surveillance and monitoring, a feature of reporting which I will explore further below. In

³⁴ Fieldnotes, July 2017.

the event an individual is subjected to questioning and further if they are then detained, the threat of force gets gradually ramped up, and the ability to resist becomes increasingly suppressed, in the form of automatically locking doors, Border Enforcement guards wearing heavy flak jackets, handcuffs and batons, and the eventual placement of the individual in a holding cell where they must wait to be driven to a detention centre in an Immigration Removal van.

Illustrating the reporting space in this way identifies how the different spaces correlate to the increasing threat of force individuals encounter as they are moved within the reporting site. Whilst physical force is most often one-step removed, the anticipation of violence is signalled through the encoded features and symbols within the different spaces - from the automatically locking doors, to the purple latex gloves, to the Border Enforcement officers wearing flak jackets and carrying batons. These symbols signal a violent act, yet rather than representing Agamben's notion of an absolute, impassable space (1998), demonstrate how individuals become temporarily yet successively exposed to an increasing threat of physical force, each time they enter. These indicators of physical force oftentimes deem actual force unnecessary.



Figure 8: Immigration Enforcement vehicle arriving at Patchway Police Station

Photo: Andrew Burridge

On several occasions, the features signalling the threat of violence were made more patent. It was a typical morning at Patchway when I witnessed my first detainment. Hazrat, a slender 18-year-old originally from Afghanistan, arrived with Fiona his housing support officer. Fiona later told me that Hazrat arrived in the UK as a young teenager and, like many travelling from that region, he had undergone an arduous journey where he had been separated from his younger brother. Recently, just before his eighteenth birthday, he received notice from the Home Office that he was to begin regularly reporting at Patchway. On this particular day, we watched as he was escorted from the office to one of the interview rooms by Border Enforcement officers and was questioned for over half an hour. The other volunteers and I waited anxiously and tried, unsuccessfully to obtain some information from the Home Office. Eventually, Hazrat re-emerged from the interview room, but, flanked by Border Enforcement officers, was quickly led through the double doors to one of the cells where he was detained. Later that day he was driven

to an immigration detention facility where he faced removal. Watching him being led away to the cells, Fiona broke down into tears. She told me they had been close, and it seemed clear she had been like a mother-figure to him since he had arrived as a young teenager. As I followed her outside the police station and we tried to contact his solicitor, a young male Border Enforcement officer wearing bright purple latex gloves came outside and informed Fiona who was still crying, that he would now be carrying out a full-body search on Hazrat. In this instance, besides the officer's more blatantly violent accoutrements of batons and handcuffs, his purple latex gloves served as an especially haunting indicator of violence.

On a personal level, as someone with secure immigration status inhabiting the reporting space, these encoded indicators of force were more subtle, and could be interpreted as purely bureaucratic. Indeed, as fellow Signing Support volunteer Sarah describes:

When people say, "Oh isn't it terrible being in a police station?" and I say, "well, to be fair...it's like being in a Travel Lodge reception area to be honest!"... So I don't feel like I'm in a police station, I've been in police stations and I've been in the wrong side of police stations, and I don't get that feeling there. [The Home Office] are bureaucrats.... Because the action all happens behind that door, so the moment someone goes behind the door, I think that's action now and that's serious. But the rest of it, as far as I can see, is like civil service administrative stuff.

Here, Sarah describes the apparent incongruity between what appears as purely 'bureaucratic' and the 'action' of being forcibly detained, alluding to the seeming incompatibility between what is bureaucratic and what is violent. Violence, therefore, only occurs behind 'that door', denoting the area where individuals are led to the cells, and await being taken to an immigration detention facility. In this context, the door acts

as a threshold towards further levels of threat of and actual physical force, obscured to those on the outside.

Yet the accounts of those who are reporting show how the levels of threat are felt and experienced by those who are differentially exposed to them. For instance, Aimee, an asylum seeker, shared, 'Every time I go, I am very full of worry. I wait and I wait, I think they are going to take me'.³⁵ Efram, who when I met him had recently received refugee status, told me that whenever he attended his reporting appointments: 'What's always in the back of your mind is if you're going to be detained'.³⁶ Indeed, I often noticed that many of those reporting displayed notable signs of fear when waiting in the queue, including not wanting to engage in conversation, biting their fingernails, and on occasion, displaying outbursts of anger. Unsurprisingly, witnessing others being detained at the reporting centre was particularly harrowing for those waiting to report.

I met Sami today, a young man from Iraq, looked in his early 20s, but could have been younger. I immediately thought he looked very nervous as he waited to report... I didn't recognise him so I asked him if this was his first time reporting. It was, and he shared he had just spent three years in prison and was now facing removal.... He waited outside the office looking on edge, wearing tracksuit trousers and oversized headphones; his big muscles gave away his time in prison. Despite his "tough" looking demeanour, his wide-eyes made him look young and exposed. Then the person before him in the queue was led away to one of the interview rooms for questioning, never a good sign, and Sami's anxiety erupted into anger. "If I get detained today I'm going to hit someone, I'm going to go fucking mental...I can't get locked up again, I can't go back in there", he said. He paced up and down, and it appeared to me like behaviour learnt in prison. Really, he was a young, scared man. (Fieldnotes, September 2017).

³⁵ Focus group, Manchester, February 2017.

³⁶ Interview, June 2017.

These instances where those reporting witness others being led away for questioning - which often indicates a detainment is due to take place - function very effectively to instil fear. Rachel Pain draws out this characteristic of violence in her work on domestic abuse, observing the constitutive relationship between physical violence and fear. She describes how fear has the potential to regulate immediate and future behaviour, so that physical violence is not always necessary to retain control (Pain 2014a; 2014b; 2014c). This reflects how Gainsborough describes the violence of states whereby the strongest states do not need to resort to overt violence, and only the weak states openly attack their own citizens: 'we can say that states which invoke violence less, or where it is the exception rather than the rule, represent a stronger form of power' (2010:188). In this sense, the fear of violence does the work of actual physical violence.

Returning to Foucault's notion of docility which operates through exercising upon the body a subtle coercive power (Foucault 1984), the apprehension of being detained can be understood as a tool used to build, perpetuate, and reproduce docility in this context. In observing the impact that witnessing a detainment had on others attending their reporting appointments, I saw that it had an almost universally traumatising effect, where fear and trauma appeared fundamental to the structures of power and control constituting the reporting process itself (Pain 2014b). Experiencing profound levels of fear at being detained at the reporting centre is the very feeling that, coupled with losing their asylum support, also means that individuals continue to attend. It is in this sense that sites of reporting make visible the ways in which both precarity and the threat of detainment and removal - seemingly incommensurate registers of violence - come together.

Fear beyond the reporting centre

These instances of witnessing a detainment also occur outside of the reporting context. Border Enforcement are known to appear at people's residence to detain them unexpectedly, at times when they suspect they will be at home. Bernadette, who lives in asylum supported accommodation along with other asylum seekers articulates how she continues to be afraid of being detained:

Even though I have Rule 35, I'm still looking through my window all the time. [Between] six o'clock until eight o'clock in the morning, that's what time they normally come. They've taken... four people in my house (Interview, February 2017).

'Having Rule 35', means a medical practitioner has deemed Bernadette's health 'likely to be injuriously affected by' being detained.³⁷ This is intended to protect her from arrest and detainment, however, clearly this assurance is overshadowed by the everyday fear she experiences, and which is continually re-embedded by witnessing those in her household and community being arrested. Bernadette goes on to describe how the people in her household:

went without saying bye... all of them they came to get them from the house. Then, management comes...looks at their clothes to take them and give them to a second-hand shop... they check on what is good and what is bad and the rest they put in a black bag (Interview, February 2017).

For Bernadette, witnessing these detainments from her own home had an almost haunting effect. The fear of being detained takes shape through these everyday sites and objects as

³⁷ Detention Centre Rules, 2001, see: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2001/238/article/35/made> [Accessed 2.11.2020].

both the people left behind, and their tampered possessions become ‘marked by attacks’ (Pain 2014b: 537). In these instances, through witnessing or anticipating physical force, a form of terrorism is imposed. Terrorism, as Pain argues, aims to control through invoking fear, and what she terms ‘everyday terrorism’ creates more fear and trauma because it is frequent, prolonged and ‘takes place within the intimate sphere’ (Pain 2014b: 540). While the reporting centre is a site recognised by asylum seekers as one of profound insecurity, Bernadette’s words demonstrate how the home also becomes a place of insecurity as individuals know it is where they can be found by Border Enforcement. In this way, the apprehension of physical force also seeps into the most private of spaces, contrasting with the normative notion of home being a place of safety. Although Bernadette herself has not experienced being arrested, regularly witnessing others being taken in the intimate sphere of her household, she experiences a form of violence through the resulting everyday fear of being arrested. In this sense, the repeated experience of witnessing others being detained had a cumulatively transformative effect, in creating a permanent state of fear. In this way, such visual displays of arresting and taking individuals from their homes become a powerful tool wielded by the state, to perpetuate, and reproduce docility (Foucault). In a similar example, Grace, an asylum support worker describes seeing an immigration raid on her road:

There was one on my road a few weeks ago, and I mean I’ve seen two raids... they’ve also changed the vans now so previously they were white, now they have ‘Immigration Enforcement’ written in bold letters on the side, and they are very visible. They went from being anonymous which you’d think would make sense, in terms of what they were trying to achieve, but now they’re very visible: Immigration Enforcement in bright letters, aluminous like things, you can’t miss that it’s an immigration enforcement van. So it’s like extending that kind of detention, sending it out from the detention centre and turning it into people’s streets and homes and adding to all of that, I mean certainly in London you see them a lot.

Here, it appears that by marking the vans, the Home Office seek to make immigration raids more visible, and thereby instilling more fear. As Pain's work shows us, fear and trauma are fundamental to the structures of power and control that create and compound insecurity (Pain 2014b). In this context, even where an individual is within their own home, an ostensibly safe place, these tactics of the state, in administrating clearly visible raids, effectively create more fear as no aspect of their life is felt to be safe (ibid.). I will explore this further below.

Oppressive visibility

By entering into the reporting space signers are made instantly detectable to the state, therefore, alongside immigration detention and electronic tagging reporting serves as an accompaniment to these other techniques of control and surveillance. Individuals are compelled to repeatedly engage in reporting practices for fear of being deemed an absconder if they miss an appointment, and therefore becoming a target for detainment. Therefore the threat of physical force - in the form of detainment and possible removal - is also fundamentally related to being made visible to the state.

As Foucault argued, the panopticon as depicted by Jeremy Bentham had the effect of 'induc[ing] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility, that assures the function of power' (Foucault 1995). The panopticon therefore served as a disciplinary device by subjecting inmates to surveillance in a form through which they did not know precisely when they were being watched. Thus, the surveillance itself was not necessarily permanent, but became permanent in its effect on the subject. This dynamic reinforced the subordination of the inmates to the warden.

In the context of reporting practices, Ines Hasselberg (2014) argues that the surveillance dynamic does not have the disciplining aim of the panopticon, but rather

demonstrates a will to exert control. Yet, she writes that detention and reporting have the effect of discipline, as power is exerted intensely and constantly over deportable lives (475). I agree that while the panopticon does not fully reflect the realities of the reporting centre, similarities can be seen in how reporting serves as an oppressive device, whereby surveillance, though not permanent, can be permanent in how it alters people's behaviour over time. Developing Foucault's conflation of surveillance with enhanced control, Marquez uses the term 'oppressive visibility' to describe how spaces of surveillance normalise subordinate roles and impose identities on participants (2012:8). Oppressive visibility occurs in spaces in which surveillance creates vertical and oppressive relationships of power and where individuals become constituted as subjects (ibid).

Despite the fact that the reporting space is only entered intermittently, the experience of unyielding surveillance was commonly shared. Bernadette's experiences, described above, of looking out her window every morning reveal how the sense of being monitored seeps into everyday life, even when the gaze is not permanently fixed, and again speaks to the sense of the transformative effect of fear. Signing Support volunteer Sophy articulated it as such:

It's like a shadow of control over you at all times. It may be two weeks to wait but it's still there. Or even six-monthly, it's still there. You're reminded, you're insecure, you're reminded that it's a hostile system that may send you back to a dangerous place (Interview, August 2017).

This oppressive visibility also continues into the intimate spheres of people's everyday lives, by reinforcing the notion that the border is everywhere (Lyon 2005). In January 2018, individuals began receiving text messages from the Home Office, informing them that if they miss their reporting appointments, they may face a penalty in the form of losing their entitlement to asylum support. The text message ended with a link directing them to an information page reinstating the facts on a dedicated webpage. Arendt argues

that, in the same way that one must have the right to appear, one must also have the right to non-appearance, or invisibility (Arendt 1958; Köhn 2016). By conditioning people's rights to asylum support and housing upon their regular attendance at the reporting centre, therefore apprehends individuals' ability to 'hide' or seek invisibility. Without exercising any degree of physical force or injury over individuals - for they enter into the reporting space voluntarily - these techniques render them visible to the Home Office. This reinstates the self-regulatory power of oppressive visibility itself, by rendering physical force unnecessary.

While the fear of being detained leads the majority of people to comply with reporting practices, others regard the potential threat of being detained as a reason not to attend reporting appointments, and as one participant shared: 'I stopped [reporting] because my lawyer told me that anytime I could be detained.'³⁸ Bernadette also told me about a lady in her asylum supported housing:

In my house, there was this Albanian lady, she told me that she went to [report], and maybe she was lucky, one immigration officer told her you have no case, if you come next time they will arrest you. So she came and told me this is my situation. So I told her, "so what are you going to do?" She said, she don't know but she's scared. So for one week I didn't see her, the following week I didn't see her. And then I realised maybe she's left. And now, it's been like two months (Interview, February 2017).

Reporting essentially forces people into a double bind; if they comply, they are made more vulnerable to detainment by being made intermittently visible to the state, as well as being exposed to the spatiotemporal violences described in the first part of this chapter; if they do not comply, they are also made vulnerable to destitution, detainment and removal, as the state conditions both their access to asylum support and their immigration

³⁸ Focus group, Bristol.

bail, on attending reporting appointments. Additionally, as mentioned previously, failing to attend reporting appointments is often presented by the Home Office as a reason not to grant asylum on the grounds of non-compliance, seeking to demonstrate the individual as troublesome and therefore unworthy of asylum (Pinkowska 2019).

Life and death

‘I mean people would often say, you know “on your first ticket you can maybe say no”, but after that they are forcing them on the planes.’
- Grace, interview, January 2017.

Migrant deaths have become a part of a global phenomenon that occur as a result of the combination of bureaucratic ineptitude, the desperation of migrants and the strengthening of border controls (Gill 2016: 2). In Britain, one of the most patent ways in which the violence of border control is revealed is in the use of physical force in the context of enforced removals. While the focus of this thesis has been on Home Office reporting, I turn here to focus briefly on removals, to demonstrate the violent continuum of the asylum experience, and of which reporting is a part. By presenting the ways in which reporting makes individuals more susceptible to detainment, by making them visible to the state, it becomes possible to connect how reporting is part and parcel of these encounters with physical force through removal. Several of the participants in this research had encountered removal attempts and one described to me his experience of being forced onto an aeroplane by Border Enforcement guards attempting to remove him from the country. In 2018, there were a total of 9,405 enforced returns from the UK and 8,979 in 2019 (Migration Observatory 2020b). As stated by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), in undertaking returns European states must ensure their actions do not breach any of their human rights obligations under international and European law (2005:4). Some people who no longer have a legal basis for remaining in the host country

for protection-related reasons do consent to return, however it is increasingly common for European states to use methods to induce or coerce such people to consent to return (ibid.). Methods for inducing return can include: threat of detention or continued detention and withdrawal of support in the host country (ECRE 2005), all of which are methods currently utilised by the UK. Indeed, in contrast to the majority of countries in Europe, individuals can still be detained indefinitely in the UK, and research has shown that the conditions that exist in detention, especially where there is not a time limit, push some detainees to take their own lives (Ellermann 2010; Hall 2012). While research has demonstrated that detaining a person for months or years at a time, constitutes a profound form of violence in itself (Ellermann 2010), my focus here is to highlight how enforced removals can be conceived as operating at the most extreme end of the violent continuum, and one of the only forms of physical violence still legitimated by western liberal democracies.

Antje Ellermann (2010) argues that, since states are obliged by human rights standards not to use physical force, they struggle to force migrants to leave. She writes:

Voluntary obedience... depends upon the availability of meaningful incentives that ensure that the benefits of compliance outweigh its costs. If the state cannot offer these incentives, it is forced to resort to hard coercion, the exercise of which, however, is constitutionally constrained... [B]ased on anecdotal evidence gathered by human rights organisations, we also know that there is an empirical gap between statutory protections and administrative detention practice, in particular concerning the use of physical force. We have insufficient data to judge whether known violations are better understood as isolated instances of abuse, or as the tip of an iceberg of systemic violence (2010: 409, 421).

Here, Ellermann points to the tension that exists between a country's obligations under international law, and its political agenda for removing deportable migrants. Efforts to appear nonviolent, as Springer has argued, constitute an integral part of the neoliberal

agenda, where violence is presented as occurring far away, therefore essentialising the notion that it is incompatible with western liberal democracies (2011). Clearly, and partly for this reason (alongside economic factors previously discussed), enabling voluntary returns is always preferable, yet, in specific circumstances enforced returns involving physical force continue to be used. In the UK, enforced returns are framed as a process of last resort, used in situations where a person refuses to comply to leave the UK voluntarily (National Audit Office 2020). A forced return is defined as the return for those who have not given their consent and who may be subject to sanctions or the use of force on removal (ECRE 2005). If implemented by European states, 'forced returns must be carried out in accordance with their human rights obligations' (ibid).

Indeed as enforced removals are presented by the Home Office as a practice of last resort, the detainee is framed as deviant, by intentionally refusing to leave, and therefore making force justified (Hasselberg 2012). The subject of non-compliance in the context of immigration detention has been researched elsewhere (Pinkowska 2019), and is not my concern here. My point is that the line between making it physically impossible to *resist* being escorted onto an aeroplane, is not very different from actual physical violence. As I have argued, the threat of violence, communicated through material signifiers of force, often does the work of actual violence. The fact that Border Enforcement guards and deportation escorts wearing flak jackets and carrying batons and tasers, escort handcuffed individuals onto aeroplanes, illustrates the extent to which detainees are unable or extremely unlikely to physically resist. This picture of enforced removals invokes the continuum of violence I discussed above, whereby such extreme and tangible indicators of physical force deem actual force unnecessary.

That said, media reports and anecdotal evidence suggests that on occasion, individuals are physically injured when refusing to comply with an enforced removal attempt (e.g. Bowcott 2010; Shaw 2013). When I asked Grace, who provides legal

support to asylum seekers in detention, if she had witnessed someone being removed, she shared:

Yes a few times. People would sometimes come back injured from being forced onto flights. I know of a situation where a heavily pregnant woman was with her husband in a detention centre and they couldn't force her onto the flight, because of her condition but they took him and he was removed from her whilst she was in the centre. So yeah physical force is regularly used on people, and many of those people are then later released so people that they are physically forcing onto aeroplanes even by their own rules would later be released... The legal process means that the UK government had to release them so they were put on the flight and in that process they were injured and couldn't go, and then they were returned to the detention centre or the hospital for medical treatment and then later they were released on bail... if you're then released why were they trying to force you onto a flight?

Returning to Graeber, these instances of physical force reflect his definition of 'legitimidist' violence, which make it impossible for the state to act violently, for acts of harm cannot be violent when it is authorised by properly constituted authorities (2009).

Furthermore, a distinction that is unique to asylum cases compared to other kinds of cases dealt with by immigration law is the potential for life and death ramifications, expressly with cases where there is a risk of being tortured and killed upon return. The fact is, it is very often not known whether a person returned to their country of origin has arrived safely, and whether they have faced persecution upon return (ECRE 2005). Several of the asylum seekers I met during my fieldwork had experienced torture before arriving in the UK, and had a very real fear of being killed if returned to their country of origin. Felix, whose experiences of living without cash I described at the beginning of this chapter, was one of the most visibly vulnerable participants I encountered during my research. He had recently been released from immigration detention when I met him in early 2017. In his country of origin he had been arrested and experienced torture for his

involvement in a political organisation critical of his country's government. The president of this organisation had recently been killed by government forces. After arriving in the UK, and an initial failed asylum claim, he spent 22 days in immigration detention and described to me his experience of facing a removal back to his country of origin:

If they deport me, the first problem is they will arrest me because I have many problems there. My name is on the list, yes. And other people just looking will try and arrest me... [The Home Office] give me the ticket for the plane, and you know the day when you go, there's someone who tell you the plane is ready. I go Saturday, one o'clock... There are planes flying... you're like ok the next one is mine. It's putting you in a mental pressure, very stressful.³⁹

Remarkably, Felix's solicitor managed to prevent his removal hours before he was due to be forcibly removed, and several months after I interviewed Felix, I discovered he had received Indefinite Leave to Remain.

In another example, Ahmed, an asylum seeker from Sudan who had been detained for over four months, also faced a forced removal back to a country where he faced possible torture and execution. Felicity, an activist in Manchester who became a close friend to Ahmed, relays his experiences of facing a forced removal:

He was detained for 128 days. And during that time there was three times that he was going to be flown back. And each time he thought he was going to be executed on his arrival. One of his brothers was being detained by the authorities and was actually being tortured you know in order to find out where he was... I mean [Ahmed] had this really good lawyer who was going through an appeal and then that got cancelled, the appeal, but it was right up to the wire on Friday and then they dismissed the appeal. And then what happened, why he didn't go on the flight was because he just refused. He refused so that the flight was cancelled and then the third time they said well this time we're going to escort you onto the plane.⁴⁰

³⁹ Interview, Manchester February 2017.

⁴⁰ Interview, Manchester February 2017.

Facing a forced removal within the context of an immigration detention facility, where individuals experience the palpable vision and sound of aeroplanes taking off, is undeniably immensely stressful, and unimaginably more so for those who face possible torture and death on return. For Ahmed this situation was made worse by the inconceivably insensitive posters stuck to the walls inside his room in the detention facility; one featured a world map so he could see where he was being flown back to; the other was a poster giving information on how to make a complaint, which featured a happy 'smiley' face and beneath it said, 'Don't worry, be happy'. The fact that the Home Office, who sanction these deportations, are aware of the circumstances within these countries that people are forcibly returned to makes these removal attempts difficult to justify. In another example, reports of the Home Office forcibly removing former child asylum-seekers back to Afghanistan when they turned eighteen, where they faced innumerable hardships and where some were killed, has been well documented (see Lyons 2018).

Where the UK government, along with their corporate allies, continue to remove people in these situations, including in contexts where people face torture, war and possible death upon return, they too engage in the violence of these events. These encounters of detainment and removal - whether coerced or forced - expose the ways in which reporting serves as the administrative component of these processes, which may for some, result in torture and even death. For if we understand violence as something which functions across differing scales and sites, we can see how reporting centres remain one of the principle sites for conducting the administrative components of such labour.

Conclusion

Through this chapter I have aimed to demonstrate the ways in which asylum seekers experience reporting as violent. Drawing from feminist understandings of violence, this chapter has argued that border control practices, including the mandatory practice of reporting, administrate a plethora of violences on individuals. I have argued that the implicit protractedness and fixity of reporting gradually increases people's precarity, by making them more vulnerable to destitution, detainment and removal, which together constitute the government's agenda for making life 'unliveable' in all its various forms. In light of the architectural features of reporting and drawing from the concept of liminality as a framework, I then argued that a mode of violence also exists through the increasing threat of physical force, and upon which reporting ultimately depends. In this way, the enforcement of regular reporting is both inherently and actively harmful, making individuals increasingly vulnerable to destitution and deportation.

Bureaucratic institutions and their localised practices retain their seemingly benign characteristic ostensibly designed for administrative convenience, whilst they are in fact tied to the political and economic projects that deliberately govern, oppress and inflict harm on those subjected to them. Attending to the spatiotemporal features of reporting and their everyday effects demonstrates how these violences are both enacted and connected, and reveals the structural and political forces that enable them to persist. Whilst academic scholarship has drawn distinctions between various forms of state violence and how they emerge within contemporary border control practices, this chapter argued rather that these forms can in fact be understood as different expressions of violence which are all part of a single, complex continuum, designed to make individuals easier to remove. By highlighting how the threat of force is a significant component to the way these spaces operate, and oftentimes the material indicators of force make it impossible to resist, it also becomes possible to locate how the administrative aspects of

border control practices are an integral part of this violent continuum, which for some results in injury and death.

Resistance

‘Politics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable’

- Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010: 37).

Introduction

Through the course of the previous two chapters, I theorised the various bureaucratic logics through which border control practices, with a focus on reporting, function, and examined the variant ways in which they enact forms of violence over individuals subjected to them. Yet, in seeking to understand these logics and the practices which sustain them, the political potential of the sites in which they occur emerges, revealing them not only as sites of abjection, but of politics (Isin and Rygiel 2007:184). My aim in this chapter is to examine what modes of resistance both asylum-seekers and Signing Support volunteers are able to forge within these sites. This chapter therefore inquires into how such sites can, in fact, provide the grounds for creative, often spontaneous political encounters which, in turn, enable opportunities for resistance. The starting point for this discussion is an appropriation of Rancière’s notion of political action — what he calls dissensus — defined not as the exercise of power but a particular kind of speech situation where those who are excluded from the political order or included

in only a subordinate way stand up and speak for themselves (Daniel 2012; Rancière 2010). In an attempt to disrupt totalising theorisations of spaces where border controls are enforced as sites of ultimate ‘abjection’ (Isin and Rygiel 2006; Millner 2013) and ‘exclusion’ where a state of ‘bare life’ is enforced (Agamben 1998), I show how those reporting may reclaim their political subjectivity, by making themselves seen and heard. Second, I appropriate Hannah Arendt’s theorisation of spaces of appearance discussed in Chapter Two, to convey how political community emerges in response to border control practices. Drawing from the experiences of Ammika, a Nigerian asylum seeker involved in the ‘Shut Down Yarl’s Wood’ campaign from inside Yarl’s Wood detention centre, I analyse how asylum-seekers articulate their own political agency within these sites through solidaristic acts of appearance. Drawing on these arguments, the third part of this chapter explores the ways in which Signing Support volunteers themselves also engage in acts of disruption within the reporting site. Through witness bearing, I show how this act of embodied presence enables, at least periodically, a subversion of power through their counter-gaze. Overall, I show that while, through a range of hostile border control processes, asylum seekers become entwined within these violent and oppressive systems and sites, I contend that moments of resistance are possible. Yet, I show how the scope of feasible resistance falls far short of the transformational standard of organised political action (Ellermann 2010).

The phone tree

At the beginning of my fieldwork, as I was still trying to gain a sense of the asylum-seeking network and community across the UK, I attended a number of events and workshops organised by my supporting organisation, Right to Remain. It was during this early stage of fieldwork that I first heard Lila, (whose experiences of being detained I described in Chapter Four), speaking at Right to Remain’s annual meeting, a gathering

of around 120 people which consisted mainly of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants without legal status as well as activist groups based around England's northwest. I remember at the time thinking how, as a woman in her fifties, Lila's frail, almost child-sized frame stood somewhat in contrast to her frank demeanour and no-nonsense way of speaking as she shared of her personal experiences of seeking asylum in the UK. Still waiting for legal status and without entitlement to asylum support, Lila had been living in destitution for several years, dependent on friends and a local charity for food and shelter. She was no stranger to the UK's increasingly hostile stance towards asylum-seekers and as she concluded her talk she entreated fellow asylum-seekers to stand together and to keep fighting against the system. As she spoke of not giving up on obtaining the legal right to live in the UK, I admired her obvious tenacity despite the extreme hardships she had encountered.

It wasn't until months later that I had the chance to interview Lila, but in the intervening time she had had another bruising encounter with the UK government's immigration system. During her regular visit to sign at Dallas Court, the Home Office reporting centre in Salford, she was arrested without warning and held for six hours without food. Lila was angry when we spoke. Keen to share of her recent experiences, she described how at Dallas Court Home Office Border Enforcement guards kept her locked up due to the growing crowd that were gathering outside, protesting her detainment. She shared:

There were different organisations, United for Change, Revive, all the organisations that I volunteer with... [Border Enforcement] kept telling me, it's your fault, that's why we are not moving you out! Because of your people outside. Because they tried before and failed, because my protesters blocked them and so we went back and they said that you have to tell them to leave but I refused. (Interview, February 2017).

Lila had to wait for six hours before she was eventually driven late at night to Yarl's Wood detention centre where she was detained for over three weeks facing removal. Lila pointed out that the broad activist network she is a part of in Manchester were responsible both for obstructing the Border Enforcement vans at the reporting and centre and also for eventually contributing to her release. Indeed, the local MP was contacted by fellow migrant activists, which led to a relatively high level of publicity surrounding her arrest and detainment.

Lila told me that one of the benefits of being part of this network, is how fellow asylum seekers are supported when they go to report. Distinct from the Signing Support group, which consists only of volunteers with secure citizenship status, this network is organised and self-governed by the signers themselves. Signers support each other through the use of a 'phone-tree': members share their mobile phone numbers through a dedicated WhatsApp group. If someone is detained, this information quickly circulates through the entire network and the group gathers as many people as possible outside the reporting centre, forming a visible presence of protest. They may also (coincidentally or otherwise) obstruct the Border Enforcement vans from driving to the immigration removal centre as Lila described. Part of this support also involves contacting the detained person's solicitor, and someone in the group will have access to their personal documents and may bring them to the reporting centre with the aim that they could help with the individual's release. The group will also assign someone to be responsible for looking after the detainee's accommodation and belongings and to organise a money collection for paying for their mobile phone charges while they are detained. In various interactions during my fieldwork, this practice of using the phone-tree to quickly rally a crowd and form a collective resistance was referred to and emerged as one strategy through which migrant communities came together to disrupt detainment procedures. Sometimes the phone-tree is also used in a pre-emptive way. Bernadette, another asylum seeker based in

Manchester, told me how she relies on the system every time she goes to report as a precaution in case she is detained:

If I'm going to sign, I'll call two of them, or send them a [message on the] Whatsapp. And then after one hour they will keep calling me... So if I call somebody or just text them before I leave and say "I'm going", if they don't see me they'll keep calling and calling and then they'll say "ah!" and then they'll start spreading the news...Otherwise before somebody used to go to detention for five days, and sometimes they get deported before we even know about it. (Focus group, Manchester, February 2017).

On the one hand, both Lila and Bernadette's experiences bear witness to the highly precarious nature of reporting described in previous chapters, and which, in Lila's case resulted in her being detained and facing possible removal. However, their accounts also testify to the distinctive ways in which migrant groups establish modes of self-organising and support for one another. In Lila's case, through using the phone-tree to contact friends and supporters she temporarily disrupts the Home Office's usual detainment practices, and despite the limited scope of resistance that is possible, is able to significantly delay her detainment.

While both Lila and Bernadette remained subjected to the strategies and tactics of the state, which are supposed to render them unable to act, the efforts described above evince the creative ways that migrant groups resist. These examples which focus on their agency reflect the possibilities for collective responses, and lead to a reconfiguration of what can be perceived of migrant communities without rights (Rancière 2010). This reflects Rancière's conception of dissensus whereby there occurs a dispute over the 'givens' of what substantive rights are and who may define them (ibid; Millner 2013). By refusing to passively accept her detainment, Lila demonstrates an alternative response beyond what appears possible (Millner 2013: 91). Positioning her as a figure not only

capable of causing such a disruption, but as one refusing to inhabit her assigned place on the margins, Lila's resistance temporarily disrupts the 'going-on-being' of the existing situation.

While waiting for six hours at the reporting centre, Lila describes not being given anything to eat or drink, which she attributes to the officers choosing to punish her for being forced to wait, an example of the displays of vindictiveness explored in Chapter Four. Such treatment, which on the one hand appears hostile and value-laden, on the other hand points to the political salience of such a disruption, whereby the framing of blame seeks to detract from the recognition that her resistance temporarily exceeds the logic of sovereign power (see Isin and Rygiel 2006:189; Nyers 2003, 2008; Squire 2009). Being attentive to these resistances and struggles reveals how asylum seekers contest a totalising reading of sovereign power as something which reduces the migrant to 'bare life' (Squire 2009: 152). For even those on the margins in spaces of great powerlessness and where the scope of feasible resistance is significantly reduced, disruption is possible (Ellermann 2010).

Being seen and heard

The conception of dissensus which Rancière invokes can be configured in a number of ways. As well as denoting such visible and creative modes of protest and contestation as those described above, it also encapsulates those acts which can be seen in the way migrants reclaim their political subjectivity through, as Arendt describes it, making themselves 'seen and heard' (Arendt 1958:50). If we look again at the argument presented in Chapter Four, I suggested that the Home Office attempts to impose order through relying on the logics of necessity and automation. I suggest here that this mode of operation is occasionally contested when individuals challenge this behavioural tendency. While I have argued that bureaucratic practices operate in a mode which refuses to grant

a voice to the person in front of them, for analytically speaking, the bureaucrat can only regard the person before them as a voiceless object to be managed and controlled in the abstract - I suggest that asylum-seekers also find ways to reclaim their subjectivity as visible, speaking and acting beings.

Elodie, a woman in her late forties and originally from a country in central Africa, was detained when reporting in Birmingham. She told me:

You need to know your basic rights, because you are not a criminal, you are an asylum seeker. So when you go to report, you are going to report. If they want to detain you, you have the right to ask “why am I being detained?”. That is what happened to me... With the little knowledge I had, I asked them, “why am I under arrest?”. They told me, “Follow us”, I said “No, you need to tell me”, because I know, I was not being extraordinary, I was just asking “why?”. (Interview, February 2017).

In a Rancièrian sense, Elodie is without rights and is therefore excluded from the political order, which renders her both invisible and inaudible. And yet by vocally responding to her detainment with the question ‘why?’, Elodie challenges the givens of who can speak and in what context, thus producing a shift in the ‘givens’ of a governed order (Millner 2013: 89; Rancière 1999: 70). Elodie went on to tell me that this practice of questioning the Home Office when they seek to carry out detainment procedures was a shared practice among United for Change members. In an effort to challenge these procedures, members of the group were taught how to confront and question the detainment officers, therefore compelling the officers themselves to provide a reasonable explanation for the detainment. “We can’t stop what they are doing but we can ask them why, and we have to”, she shared. In this way, they reclaim themselves as ‘speaking being[s]’ precisely because they speak at a time and in a place they are not expected to speak (Ranciere 2006:5).

More often than not, these contestations fail to result in a different outcome for migrants: in Elodie's case, she was still detained for over five months facing removal. However, the very act of questioning in this instance transforms her from her context's rendering of her as a non-speaking subject into one with political agency. By speaking up in this way, she demonstrates that her lack of rights does not negate her ability to act as a political subject (Isin and Rygiel 2006: 186). For it is in the very claiming of rights - rights that Elodie, and all those subjected to reporting practices do not possess - that these individuals in fact enact their political existence.

Gaining appearance: New roles

Migrants without legal status must often enact their political subjectivity within highly constrained conditions, and there are arguably none more so than those within the UK's nine immigration detention centres. While the main site of research for this thesis has taken place at a Home Office reporting centre, many of the participants involved in this research had experienced detainment. Here, I turn to immigration detention to explore the possibilities of resistance within these sites, as enabling migrants, in Arendt's meaning - to confront and contest given identities, by 'something into motion' (Arendt 1958:177), resulting in something 'unexpected' and 'unpredictable' (Arendt 2005a: 111-2; cited in Dikeç 2013:80). For Arendt, political subjectivity is created through the collective action of individuals which temporarily enables new roles and rules thus eluding the roles and rules that usually oppress them (Marques 2012). Visibility becomes meaningful when actors act for spectators within the space, for only then 'does the act generate relations of power' (Marquez 2012: 10; Arendt 1958). In contrast to the experiences of surveillance which, as I argued in the previous chapter, lead to a form of oppressive visibility, here appearance serves as a mode of political action.

Originally from a country in West Africa, Ammika was forced to flee and arrived in the UK in 2004. I met her in early 2017 during one of United for Change's weekly gatherings where a group of 15-20 asylum seekers meet in a church hall to offer support as well as to organise and campaign around issues affecting them. I began talking to Ammika towards the end of the session, knowing that she was a prominent activist and was heavily involved in pro-migrant organising. As we sat drinking tea in the cold, unheated church hall, she told me that during the one year she was detained at Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre, she had been one of the key participants in leading the 'Shut Down Yarl's Wood' campaign, initiated from inside the highly controversial detention centre. Interested in her involvement with the campaign, I asked her about how it was instigated. She told me:

I didn't want to organise anything because I knew that anyone who raised their head got deported. That's what I learnt after one year in Yarl's Wood. But because a woman was taken to the airport and held there against her will... that's when it happened (Fieldnotes, February 2017).

Ammika went on to describe how, when they learnt of a fellow detainee being removed later that evening, she and a group of other detained women felt compelled to action. Recognising the profoundly limited opportunities for protest within the confines of the detention centre, they headed towards the onsite UKVI office - the only tangible site representing the state available to them. Recalling the incident, she explained that as they started walking towards the office, the internal doors within the facility corridors 'just started locking, one by one'. In this moment, it appeared that the detention guards were trying to restrict the women's movement, even trying to trap them in the corridor, unsure of what they might do. She described how, as they walked:

the doors kept closing and [the office was] locked just before we arrived there. We just sat outside it for two days refusing to move, and my sister rang the police from outside [Yarl's Wood] and told them what happened. After that I was sent to prison; they tried to deport me and many were deported. I managed to escape being deported because I filed an appeal and they're not allowed to deport you when that happens. That's why I didn't want [the protest] to happen, because I knew that was the excuse they used to deport people. (Fieldnotes, February 2017).

Ammika was held in solitary confinement for a week following her involvement in the two day occupation outside the office, and as she describes, several other women involved in the occupation were removed from the country as result of their action. Her account exhibits the extent to which detention operates through a reliance on the threat of physical force. Firstly, Ammika reveals that the fear of expulsion was initially her reason for remaining compliant, for she knew 'that anyone who raised their head got deported', demonstrating one way in which an act of agency becomes framed within a narrative of non-compliance invoked to justify removal or deportation (Pinkowska 2017). Moreover, her description of the internal doors locking within the detention centre, itself reflects that, even when the women sought to pursue a relatively mild resistance strategy, they were suppressed, and essentially punished through the consequences of solitary confinement and enforced returns. Clearly, for the state's power to be challenged in this way, the women were regarded as requiring a reminder of their desubjectivation, for as I have argued, sites of oppressive visibility normalise subordinate roles and impose identities (Marquez 2012).

However, while Ammika admitted that, aware of the potential repercussions, she had not wished to organise anything, her response reflects an almost involuntary, reflexive reaction to the forced removal of a fellow detainee. Through what emerged as a spontaneous yet self-determined act of occupying the space outside the UKVI office, Ammika and her fellow protestors' actions laid claim to the construction of a 'space of

appearance' whereby they demonstrated an 'urge to appear', or to 'self-display' (Arendt 1978: 29), despite its intensely limited nature. By using their politically dubious yet physically present bodies as 'vehicles in struggle and resistance' (Sigvardsdotter 2012a; 2012b), their very presence is disruptive (hooks 2015: 156). As bell hooks articulates, the margin is simultaneously the site of struggle and radical possibility, oppressive while nourishing one's capacity to resist (156-157). While this may require a certain artificial equality in order to be a space of freedom, this action brings 'something into being which did not exist before' (Arendt 2006:150; Arendt 1970; Marquez 2012:12). Ammika's presence, together with her fellow detainees, appropriated their marginality through transforming it into a site of resistance. In this disruptive moment she demonstrated the possibilities for contesting the ways in which they are made invisible and inaudible, enacting her political subjectivity, thus temporarily enabling new roles and rules and eluding the roles and rules that usually oppress them (Arendt 1958; Arendt 2005a; Marques 2012). By momentarily disputing not only their detainment but their invisibility and silencing, Ammika's actions reflect a momentary disruption to the 'settled conceptions and practices of political community, governance and belonging' (Squire 2009: 159). In this way, their actions speak back to and challenge bureaucratic forms of governance described in previous chapters. As noted by Hughes (2019), conceptualising resistance as an emergent, spontaneous response to power, captures the ambiguous, uncertain and indeterminate conditions of political claim making possible within such environments. While these constrained sites all too often constitute the conditions through which asylum-seekers must act, this occupation highlights the contested aspects of political agency for asylum seekers, even in spaces of greatest powerlessness (Ellermann 2010).

Setting into motion

In its broader implication, this occupation instigated what became ‘Shut Down Yarl’s Wood’, a campaign that has since gained traction as a national activist movement with numerous mass demonstrations held outside the immigration detention centre and with many of the protesters being women who themselves had been detained there. Although the original action took place from inside the immigration detention centre and was carried out by ‘non-citizens’ in a highly oppressive and subjugated space, it continues to mobilise non-citizens to antagonise their own as well as others’ assigned depoliticised status. That is, in Arendt's language, it set something new, unexpected and unpredictable into motion (1958; 2005a; Dikeç 2013).



Figure 8: Women protesting outside Yarl's Wood. Source: Vice magazine

The political consequences of Ammika’s and her fellow protestor’s actions extend therefore, beyond the space of appearance itself. In an Arendtian sense, their actions reflect a freedom ‘which was not given... and which therefore strictly speaking, could

not be known, due to their existence on the polity's margins (Arendt 2006: 150; Ellerman 2010). This, through the women's continued collective presence in a space not assigned to them, symbolically transformed the space itself. Indeed, as this group of women created and held this space, thus laying claim to their political agency, they challenged their desubjectification and within the context of their own detainment, a new form of freedom was negotiated and enacted based on their capacity to do something unexpected. Isin and Nielson (2008) contend that acts such as these are marked by being a 'creative moment' in which habitus is disrupted, and in which institutionally embedded citizenship practices become open to question. 'To act is to take part in and be constituting part of the human community', and in today's global regime, 'membership in the current political communities is citizenship' (Sigvardsson 2012b: 25; Arendt 1958). These moments disrupt the givens of who can speak and in what context.

Almost ten months after I had met Ammika she was finally granted refugee status, in what ended up being in total a 13-year battle to remain in the UK. In an interview with a newspaper, she stated 'There are many people like me... who are facing huge insurmountable difficulties navigating the asylum system in the UK. I will continue to do my bit in amplifying the voices of people who can only shout so far'. Ammika's story, as well as drawing attention to the complex interplay of power, violence and precarity within the asylum process, represent the disruptive potential of solidaristic acts of visibility in enabling a new kind of political community to emerge. Although what is possible in detention is profoundly limited, Ammika and her fellow detainees challenged the hierarchical order by disrupting the obviousness and naturalness that attaches to order (May 2016).

Witness bearing

‘Witnesses refuse to look away...The goal is to demonstrate an ethical relationship between themselves and the people experiencing violence or disenfranchisement... it requires bodily presence and affective investment.’

— Elizabeth Currans, *Demonstrating Peace: Women in Black’s Witness Space* (2017: 92).

Both Arendt and Rancière offer a conceptualisation of politics as a mode of activity which emphasises its collective and its disruptive potential. In the following section, I explore Signing Support volunteers’ involvement both with those reporting and with the Home Office officers within the reporting space, in order to I examine how the volunteers engage in their own dissensual reconfiguration of the status quo.

Often defined in terms which capture its strong political associations, bearing witness is frequently heralded for its critical and therefore policy-influencing potential. While acknowledging the value of witnessing as a particular kind of speech act with potential for political transformation, I turn here to consider the less explored notion of bearing witness as a particular kind of embodied presence which has the capacity to unsettle or momentarily disrupt the going on being of border control practices. I approach the act of witness-bearing in the context of border control and management, extending my analysis of reporting practices beyond asylum seekers and the Home Office to consider the role of Signing Support volunteers.

During my fieldwork, I observed the significance the act of bearing witness held for volunteers who often struggled to articulate a more tangible or consequential meaning to their work. Many volunteers, who would regularly encounter asylum seekers being subjected to increasingly hostile practices; from having their asylum support removed and being made homeless overnight to witnessing individuals being detained at the

reporting centre, articulated a sense of helplessness and inadequacy about their role. Volunteers occasionally attempted to physically or verbally confront Home Office officers, either during a detainment procedure or during more general instances of malfunction and poor practice, but were often met with, at best, indifference and at worst, animosity and defensiveness. As a volunteer with the Signing Support group, I myself was perpetually troubled by the apparent ineffectiveness of our work, not only in altering Home Office practice, but in failing to challenge the more conspicuous acts of vindictiveness and incompetence the Home Office officers often seemed to demonstrate.

One example where a Signing Support volunteer sought to mildly challenge one of the more mundane practices of the Home Office involved a newly trained Home Office officer who, like the officer in the incident with Kerry described in Chapter Four, was not accepting signers that had arrived early despite there being no-one else waiting to report. On that particular day, Joy, a warm and ineffably friendly BSS volunteer in her late sixties was at the reporting centre. Half an hour and three bus arrivals passed and over 20 signers filled the waiting room. Joy popped her head into the office and asked the officer: ‘Could you see certain people who have come early?’. The officer replied curtly that signers must wait for their allotted time. At the end of her shift, this officer approached Joy and said angrily, ‘Don’t you ever tell me what to do, or put your head around the door again!’. Similarly to the incident with Kerry, this episode not only reflects the arbitrary logics through which signing occurs, it also articulates the difficulties in challenging such conditions where border control systems become augmented through every day processes of control which appear to be beyond reproach.

As I will explore below, one of the ways in which some volunteers felt able to justify their role amidst these encounters of indifference and hostility, was by being what they regarded as witness-bearers. Despite the obvious and numerous barriers to challenging the Home Office, the act of bearing witness to these everyday micro-practices

appeared to establish a mode of response which had its value in the act of being present itself, and not necessarily in its transformative potential.

Returning the gaze

I discussed in Chapter Two how the process of bearing witness constitutes one aspect of how we as human beings might articulate a particular kind of response to suffering. The act of bearing witness can thus be understood as an act of embodied presence, in defiance of the human inclination to turn away from an encounter with suffering. This, I suggest, in itself makes it political, by recognising it as a distinct form of rupturing from the usual order. Contrary to how bureaucratic mechanisms of power and governance operate as discussed in Chapter Four, where one can choose to deny, to ‘not know’, or to not consider another person’s suffering, bearing witness is a mode of response which actively chooses to look, to see, and to know. Bearing witness can thus be defined through its capacity to be confronted with reality. Foucault’s work on conceptions of visibility and surveillance explored in Chapter Five, in which certain kinds of visibility create oppressive relationships of power, is also salient here for understanding how power can be subverted through a particular dimension of witnessing I refer to as returning the gaze. While I have shown how acts of visibility possess different meanings in different spaces and contexts - which can be both highly oppressive, as well as (re)politicising - here I further examine visibility in terms of its disruptive potential in subverting power through a return of the gaze. I show how state actors, in enforcing visibility themselves become subjected to observation in the form of being witnessed. In the context of the reporting centre, the Home Office draw individuals into a space of surveillance, yet too draw ‘spectators’ to that space compelled by activist motivations, generating a mirror-like process. Home Office officials, in consigning asylum-seekers to processes of visibility and surveillance,

themselves undergo observation - albeit to a far lesser degree and with far less serious consequences.

Foucault's work on visibility deals with the hierarchy of power created through being watched, and builds on Lacan's notion of the gaze, in describing the anxious state that emerges when one becomes conscious of being viewed. In the context of border control sites, I suggest that Signing Support volunteers engage in a similar dynamic, through acting as 'witness-bearers'. In this way, volunteers temporarily disrupt the power hierarchy generated in the reporting space through the simple act of gazing back. 'To witness is to attest to something, to confirm a truth, to give context to a claim', writes Carole McGranahan (2020: 107). In a similar way, Signing Support volunteers use their bodies, or more specifically their gaze, to attest to the practices which occur within the reporting site, and the prevailing mode of secrecy through which they are conducted.

In her study of the checkpoint in the occupied Palestinian territories, Irus Braverman examines the role of the 'counter-gaze' in understanding how the women of the Jewish Israeli organisation Machsom Watch (MW in English, 'Checkpoint Watch') attempt to disrupt the 'binary constellation of power verses powerless' (2008:211) between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian residents. Twice daily, groups of two to four women are organised in shifts to visit over 40 checkpoints scattered through the occupied territories, observing, documenting and at times inquiring into what takes place. The women then follow up these inquiries by contacting commanders and reporters to inform them of what occurs there, while also posting the reports onto the MW organisation's website. Braverman herself interrogates whether this counter gaze has the potential to rupture the habitus of security within this space, before arguing that ultimately the interactions between the various gazes produced through the checkpoint system and the MW women's presence produce an increasingly complex set of what she calls 'hybrid gazes' that constantly shift the power dynamics at the checkpoint. While the checkpoint

itself is configured as a 'dichotomised space', a 'constant contestation between the powerful and powerless', producing 'docile and governable bodies' (Braverman 2008: 212), Braverman considers the women's counter-gaze as an 'act of citizenship', in how it transforms the political, social and ethical consciousness of its actors. By exposing the otherwise secretive and 'clandestine aspect of its existence' (211), Braverman contends that the MW women attempt to break the unidirectional checkpoint gaze, through their own counter-gaze, in what is therefore a highly politicised act.

Braverman's analysis is useful here for exploring the role of Signing Support volunteers at the reporting centre, who regard themselves as 'witness-bearers' to the injustices and malpractices of border control policy enacted over signers, and who, through their presence, temporarily interfere with the hierarchical power dynamic of the Home Office over signers. I suggest that, by introducing their own gaze into the reporting centre space, volunteers enter into a reconfiguration of the power dynamics of the reporting centre; disrupting the one-dimensional gaze of the Home Office. While Joy's encounter with challenging the Home Office described above indicates the pitfalls of entering into this power dynamic, it also suggests the discomfort that officers feel when they are under the gaze of the volunteers. The volunteers' return gaze ensures not only that what takes place there does not remain concealed, but as well subjects the officers - albeit to a far lesser degree - to a mode of surveillance. In speaking about their role at the reporting centre, volunteers would reflect on the significance of witnessing, which clearly provided a sense of purpose to their role and that went beyond their ability to alter Home Office behaviour and practice. As Sophy said when I asked her to reflect on her role as a BSS volunteer:

I think it is valuable that we are a presence. It's sort of symbolic clearly, because it's so limited. We can't stop what the Home Office is doing, even though it's so outrageous and not even according to their own rules (Interview, August 2017).

Sarah also shared, “there is this witnessing role to what we’re doing. [The Home Office] know we’re there. I’m not saying they would behave otherwise, but we’re there witnessing”. Gaie, another BSS volunteer in her sixties, articulated how she perceived their role at the reporting centre:

I guess the main reason we’re there is for the signers, but it may also feed into [the Home Office’s] conscience that we can monitor real excess; we may not be able to change it but I think being there may have a small effect... I think it’s a rebuttal of the awful press and the media, I don’t know how many asylum seekers read the dreadful press, and hear it, so I guess it’s sort of a rebuttal of those ideas and feelings (Interview, December 2017).

All three of these comments reflect the value the volunteers place on their mere presence at the reporting centre, despite acknowledging their limitations in being able to alter what occurs there. Importantly, although the reporting space and process, like the check point, is designed to surveil ‘outwards’, towards the ‘other’ (Braverman 2008: 212), the volunteers’ gaze destabilises that one-way mode of visibility, reconfiguring a complex and conflicted relationship between Home Office officers, signers and activists, and thereby demonstrating the evolving and fluid nature of power within the space.

Overall, I found that most of the volunteers were highly ambivalent about whether their presence altered Home Office behaviour; indeed as Gaie later reflected, “it’s almost impossible to know”. Yet, as Gaie suggests, their presence serves another purpose; a ‘rebuttal’ of the Home Office whose environment of hostility and unwelcome is, at least momentarily, challenged through a visible presence of acceptance. The presence of Signing Support volunteers therefore produces an additional gaze, alongside that of the Home Officers officers, challenging and reconfiguring the hegemonic gaze of the officers and by extension, of the state.

Prompting ethical conscience

My analysis of Arendt's notion of thinking verses cognition explored in Chapter Two is also relevant here for considering the role of Signing Support volunteers in prompting an ethical conscience. Gaie's comments indicate a sense that the sheer act of presence itself, might in some way prompt an 'ethical response' with the potential to disrupt the 'non-thinking', cognitive thought process through which the Home Office practices operate. For instance, in the example where Sarah questioned the Home Office officer, who had detained an individual with a provable mental health condition (see Chapter Four), the Home Office officer was clearly affected by Sarah's uninvited inquiry into the detainment. By leading Sarah around the corner and explaining to her privately that they would be releasing the individual the following day, the officer showed that she evidently felt a need to justify the act while clearly not wishing to cause a scene. This suggests that Sarah's and my 'gaze' and subsequent probing exposed the otherwise 'clandestine' practices of the Home Office, thus rupturing the typical functioning of reporting as operating out of sight, embedded in surreptitious and often complex structures of power and micro-procedures (James and Killick 2012).

As well, the example in Chapter Four in which Natasha described the officer at Patchway leaving her job because she couldn't "deal with it anymore". While it is not clear whether it was the explicit presence of the volunteers within the reporting space that prompted this particular officer to quit her job, Natasha's words reflect a certain tension that existed for the officer and which led her to question her role there.

Counter gaze

A significant critique of witnessing is, as Currans states, its potential for complacency (2017). In her chapter, *Demonstrating Peace: Women in Black's Witness Space*, Elizabeth Currans provides an analysis of the Women in Black, a worldwide movement where groups of women dressed in black conduct silent vigils in public spaces in order to question or contest their government's engaging in or sponsoring military violence. Whilst Currans' describes these acts as 'haunting urban spaces in wealthy countries by referencing the violence that enables prosperity and demonstrating another mode of engagement' (2017:94), she herself ponders, 'I continue to struggle with the question of whether Women in Black's witnessing is complacent or profound' (2017:108).

In seeking to understand the significance of the Signing Support volunteers' presence as witness-bearers, while there is undoubtedly a very limited level of intervention possible for volunteers within the reporting space, bearing witness constitutes an intentional act of embodied presence which I suggest, is a critical form of politics. While the power that exists within the reporting space remains decisively intact, with officers continuing to act in what can often appear highly spurious and problematic ways; after all, questionable detainments continue to occur, as evidenced with Sajeed's case described in Chapter Four. Yet, bearing witness accomplishes a distinctly important task. In witnessing these acts, volunteers suspend the one-directional gaze, and temporarily hold the officers themselves within their own space of surveillance. This act, in one sense demonstrates the manifold and cross-cutting ways in which power operates within the space, not as a bounded abject space, but one of contestation and complexity. Yet more profoundly, it can also be understood as a 'dissensual reconfiguration' of the status quo; through introducing their counter-gaze, volunteers rupture the one-dimensional gaze of the officers towards those reporting. To be a witness bearer in this context is to acknowledge that power and violence is conferred unequally on certain

bodies, and that as witness-bearers they themselves are not subjected to these same processes. Yet, their act of embodied presence and in refusing to look away, temporarily disrupts the usual secrecy and discreetness with which they are enacted and holds the Home Officers themselves within their own space of surveillance.

Dissenting activist stereotypes

In *Skin-tight: Celebrity, pregnancy and subjectivity*, Imogen Tyler considers the visibility of the pregnant body in relation to questions of ‘flexible subjectivity’ (2001: 71), that is how subjectivity becomes redefined through external forces. She argues that despite the proliferation of representations of the pregnant body, there remains an absence of the pregnant woman’s subjectivity, which is continually disavowed through processes which negate her body as political. Similar theorisations can be made of the ways in which the older woman is conveyed and understood in relation to her political agency and subjectivity, which has often remained rooted in notions of political disengagement.

Returning to Braverman’s analysis of the MW activists at the Palestinian checkpoint, she points out that all of them are women and from an above-average socio-economic background; they appear therefore, ‘out of place’ in what is a highly militarised and insecure space, most often occupied by young male military officers. Also Currans’ analysis of the Women in Black’s witness space, she speaks of the women as using their bodies to dis-identify with the silence expected of them as women in a male-dominated society (2017:93). Rather than contributing to the status quo, they attempt to transform the passivity expected of them in an active refusal to support or engage in violence (ibid.).

During my fieldwork it too occurred to me how incongruous the presence of the Signing Support volunteers often appeared within the reporting space itself. In refusing a limited notion of resistance, these dissensual moments can also be appropriated for understanding how the Signing Support volunteers’ presence ruptures the embedded

arrangements of their own hierarchal order, and by considering the visibility of the politicised ‘older’ women more broadly. Firstly, a significant majority of the Signing Support volunteers are retired women aged in their sixties to seventies, and most are from an educated, middle-class background. While, over the course of my fieldwork some told me about frontline activist work they had engaged in earlier on in their lives, most had not frequented the inside of a police station with any regularity; less still had they been in situations where they were required to liaise with guards wearing heavy flak jackets and carrying batons. By routinely visiting the reporting centre at Patchway, these women ventured into what is not only a highly policed (in Patchway’s case, a literal police station) but also a mentally and physically stressful environment. In one sense it appears therefore that, like the MW activists described by Braverman, in regularly attending the reporting centre they suspend their privileged status and its associated spatial and social boundaries.

While it is true to a degree that the Signing Support volunteers choose to enter a space not usually assigned to them, I suggest that rather than this representing a suspension of their privilege, instead the volunteers leverage their privileged status, in being able to enter the space without fear of physical harassment, unlike the signers. For instance, when referring to my engagements with the Home Office in Chapter Three, I described becoming aware of how my gender, relatively young age, and nationality could be perceived as ‘harmless’ in seeking to negotiate interviews with staff (see also Lindberg and Borrelli 2019). In other words, these were aspects of my identity which provided some purchase on how I was being perceived by those in power. In a similar way, I noticed how the Signing Support volunteers - mostly female, retired, white British - also became coded in a similar way by the Home Office, and which undoubtedly facilitated their initial access and continued presence within the reporting space itself. All of these various factors enabled the volunteers to leverage their own privileged identity and positionality in order to venture safely into the site. In this way, the volunteers both

challenge and leverage the normative beliefs around the political energy of the 'retired' female as activist, embodying their political subjectivity through how they choose to respond to current border control practices. These women, while they occupy privileged positions within society, claim the space as a witness space in a way that those subjected to border control tactics are not able to (Currans 2017).

This venturing, I suggest, can itself be understood as a political act, by throwing into question the hegemonic bureaucratic system which attempts, analogous to the Palestinian checkpoint, to 'monopolise access to and knowledge of' (Braverman 2008: 212) reporting spaces and their activities. Signing Support volunteers, therefore, engage in their own 'dissensual reconfiguration' of the status quo. This occurs not only by witnessing acts not intended to be witnessed and therefore challenging prevailing power relations through returning the gaze, but as well by leveraging their privilege, they repeatedly venture into a space intended for non-citizens.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, my analysis of border control practices has developed a diagnosis of violence as operating out of obscured and highly schematised, bureaucratic systems and sites of control and regulation. This chapter has examined what modes of resistance are possible within these sites, focusing on reporting, but also exploring the more distinctly repressive site of immigration detention. Guided by Ranciere's concept of dissensus, my analysis in this chapter has sought to highlight those acts which enable a disruption to the expected, going-on-being of how these spaces usually operate. In articulating those gestures which serve to temporarily unsettle the silencing and anonymising effect of bordering systems and processes, the theoretical emphasis in this chapter therefore has been attentive to momentary contestations, rather than seeking to

describe a transformational opposition to power. I have argued that these disruptions also emerge in ways which defy bureaucracy's rendering of individuals as invisible and inaudible, as they assert themselves as visible and speaking beings. I reflected on how I observed noncitizens contesting border control processes and the resulting social arrangements of 'exclusion', 'passivity' and 'inequality' to which they become consigned, appropriating political agency as existing precisely in that moment wherein one becomes a political subject; enacting or claiming the 'rights one does not have' (Isin and Rygiel 2006). These acts, while not necessarily transformational, can be understood as political, in how they challenge the expectations of those on the polity's margins.

Corresponding with Rancière's notion of dissensus, I also explored how Signing Support volunteers inhabit the reporting space, through their role as witness-bearers, which I argued temporarily disrupts the one-dimensional gaze of the Home Office towards those reporting. I showed how, through understanding witness-bearing as an embodied act of presence, they defy the inclination to turn away from suffering. While the bureaucratic mechanisms which constitute Britain's borders, including the techniques of reporting, render a form of silencing over individuals, as well as subject them to physical restrictions which substantially limit their agency (Squire 2009), these conditions also opportunities for dissensus and contestation, through spontaneous acts of solidarity, bringing into view the messy and complex processes at work in articulating political agency.

Conclusion

Last year, a friend and I were rushing to catch a train from Durham to take us the ten-minute journey back to Newcastle where my friend lived and I was visiting. It was raining and incredibly cold and we were relieved to see the train pulling into the station just as we were fumbling with the ticket machine to try and purchase a ticket. Unable to figure out the correct tickets and fearing we would miss the train, my friend suggested we could just buy our tickets on board, so we ran on to the train just as the doors were closing. Several minutes into our journey, the train conductor passed through announcing to the carriage, “Tickets from Durham”, and as he approached our seats, we requested two tickets from Durham to Newcastle. He replied that we were not able to purchase a ticket on board for this particular route, and that we were therefore subjected to a penalty fare. My friend, visibly confused, immediately questioned him: she had taken this journey many times and had often purchased a ticket on board. He then replied that due to a new policy introduced three weeks prior, this was no longer possible and the penalty fare therefore applied. Again, my friend contested, saying this was not a long enough period for people to be notified of such a change. At this, the conductor immediately proceeded to turn on his body camera and, with some degree of relish, informed us that we were now being filmed, and if we did not comply in accepting the penalty fare he would be contacting the transport police. He then followed rather

threateningly with, “I would just accept the penalty fare if I were you”. After several minutes of my friend and I debating with the train conductor on how (in)effectively this new policy had been communicated, the train pulled into Newcastle - our stop - and as we had still not accepted the penalty, we were marshalled off the train by the train conductor and another train staff member who seemed to appear from nowhere. Still being filmed, the two men escorted us to a more discreet part of the train platform and took our personal details before we eventually conceded and were handed a penalty fare ticket with the assurance that we could appeal if we wanted to.

Having been relatively passive about challenging these kinds of altercations in the past, at the time, I found this experience mildly amusing, albeit rather frustrating being faced with a penalty fare which I would in fact end up appealing, unsuccessfully. However I could not help thinking how this incident exemplifies, however innocently the rules have been breached, how quickly these kinds of ostensibly nonviolent institutions resort to threat and physical force. Clearly this example is mild in comparison to other examples of similar incidents (and to be considering this incident as amusing at all, itself reflects my privileged position with all the assurances of being someone with a secure legal status). Yet it does demonstrate, however outwardly benign and bureaucratic these institutions and the process upon which they rely may appear, once a certain threshold is crossed, physical force, or the threat of it is resorted to remarkably quickly. While in this instance, my friend and I conceded before we could establish exactly at what point actual physical force would have been used, there is no doubt that had we continued to resist, at some point police would have been summoned, and used whatever force might be required (Graeber 2012).

This encounter occurred as I was writing Chapter Five of this thesis, exploring structures of violence within the context of Home Office reporting, and I was endeavouring to articulate what I had observed happening at the reporting centre. On the

one hand, I could see that the reporting centre at Patchway was a typical administrative environment operating on the whole, through a plethora of mundane bureaucratic procedures. While I had recognised how the spatial and temporal aspects of reporting were enforcing people to live incredibly circumscribed lives, features which were contributing to their precarity, I was also trying to understand another dimension for how these various harms were being enforced. My incident on the train illuminated how the generative mechanisms of violence, for which the threat of physical force is central to its effectiveness, so often fall under the purview of bureaucratic state regulation. As Graeber points out (2009), regulations blend into laws and in enforcing the law, any defiance to this order is seen as essentially criminal. In this particular context, the train conductor was simply enforcing the law and therefore our behaviour became criminal and by implication, our defiance violent - which means that where force was used, it is assumed to be justified (Graeber 2009: 447-448).

In the context of understanding how border control and management is administered, the connections between law enforcement, physical force and violence are being continually navigated, as immigration law, the parameters for how it is applied and to whom are in continual flux. Throughout this thesis I have sought to join at least some of the dots between this global project, the administrative logics, sites and systems through which the border is (often, surreptitiously) enforced and the cumulative impact on those subjected to it. Making these connections also constitutes an important component of feminist scholarship, and the influence of feminist theory in geography has led to a broad understanding that intimate and international violence are closely related (Pain 2014a; 2014d; Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pratt and Rosner 2012). However, critical responses to immigration and asylum policy have still tended to reflect the separation of different forms of violence, thus preventing a recognition of how they are ultimately held together.

By exploring asylum-seekers' experiences of reporting and the Home Office bureaucrats that administer it, through this thesis I have illustrated the various modes of violence through which this administrative process operates. Inquiring into this often overlooked yet pervasive feature of claiming asylum, I have aimed to provide a more in depth understanding of the ways in which border control and management processes are experienced as violent, in ways that often evade critique and indeed culpability. Through attending to the bureaucratic logics, processes and sites which constitute Home Office reporting, I have outlined how reporting provides a critical site of study for understanding how the threat of physical force plays a constitutive role in creating a politically induced condition of precarity amongst asylum-seekers. Through repeatedly drawing individuals into a site which not only subjects them to logics and tactics that bear down subtly on their lives, but is also fraught with the perpetual threat of being detained, reporting reveals how the multiple violent mechanisms of border control practices are enforced and encountered in the everyday. Moreover, my analysis has shown how the multiple workings of violence are both imposed and obscured through the mundane, everyday administrative procedures of reporting practices. I argue that bureaucracy is the state's preferred method for imposing violence on those seeking asylum, concealing the interconnectedness of the sites where violence occurs. Violence therefore continues to be considered as irrational and only happening far away, therefore essentialising the notion that it is incompatible with western liberal democracies (Springer 2011).

The formulation of this critique has been inspired by Hannah Arendt's understanding of how bureaucracy and violence are indelibly tethered. Her notion that bureaucracy's dependence on the logics of non-thinking, necessity and automation reflect how they also become the foundations for violence, and are capable of causing 'more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together' (Arendt, 1963a). This is how Arendt perceived bureaucracies to threaten the ability for exercising discretion and ethical

judgement, for in failing to account for the humanity of the individual before them, together with their unique who-ness, also enables a selective indifference towards them. Since this is decided cognitively, and without allowing the silent conversation between me and myself, the voice of the person in front of me is also silenced. For Arendt, when describing Eichmann's crimes, what had become 'the banality of evil' was his failure to think. While according to Arendt, this resulted in Eichmann's ability to engineer mass genocide, the analysis in this thesis does not draw such a spectacular conclusion. Instead, I have shown that what we typically imagine as extreme or spectacular acts associated with violence, can distract from another dimension of violence that resides in the bureaucratic sites and procedures imposed on certain migrant populations.

However, even in such spaces resistance is possible, and by employing Rancière's concept of dissensus, I explored and analysed the ways in which individuals occasionally disrupt the going-on-being of these processes. The examples of dissensus I describe reflect the moments where both asylum seekers and Signing Support volunteers alter the 'givens' of a governed order (Millner 2013:89), and yet at the same time are reflective of the conditions of their exclusion, whereby the scope of what is feasible falls far short of what might be considered transformative political action (Ellerman 2010).

Thesis summary

This thesis has aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which bureaucracy functions as a violent technology within border control and management systems, focusing in particular on Home Office reporting. I first presented a political prelude for understanding the context for which this research was undertaken, followed by Chapter One which provided an overview of this thesis and its central claims. Chapter Two engaged with significant literature which provided the theoretical orientation of this thesis. I drew from Hannah Arendt's comprehensive writing exploring the logics

underpinning bureaucracy, which I argued has continued relevance for understanding contemporary forms of bureaucratic management and in particular the logics underpinning Home Office practice. Arendt's ideas have been profoundly influential throughout this research in excavating the links between bureaucracy and violence, and in particular her theorisation on the logics underpinning bureaucratic practice and their potential for wreaking havoc on our political systems of governance. I also brought together significant critiques of bureaucracy into conversation with how it has been typically heralded as a neutral and rational system, to complicate and confute these ostensible qualities of bureaucratic practice.

In Chapter Three, I detailed my research methods, beginning with an outline of the journey I underwent in constructing my research project, followed by a detailed discussion of the methods of enquiry I engaged with. While deciding to focus my research on reporting practices was the result of alternative, previously planned research avenues being, in the end, non-viable, conducting my fieldwork at the reporting centre provided a unique site for examining the administrative components of the control, detainment and removal of those without the legal right to remain in the UK. As noted in Chapter One, reporting is a condition of bail for those without the right to live in the UK. It is therefore inherited within many people's experiences of seeking asylum, and yet reporting centres and reporting practices constitute an understudied field of enquiry. As a volunteer with Bristol Signing Support, I was able to examine the everyday bureaucratic components of this practice by observing Home Office encounters, whilst also being able to engage with asylum seekers at the reporting centre.

Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis provided the substantive, empirically-informed basis of my argument, in which I reflected on these ideas through a thematic triad of bureaucracy, violence and resistance. These themes emerged relatively early on in this research project, as I engaged with the research participants and observed the

problematic aspects of the administrative components of their everyday lived experience of seeking asylum.

Chapter Four is guided largely by Arendt's critique of bureaucracy, where I demonstrated the continued relevance of her work in excavating the links between bureaucracy and violence, and in critiquing the administrative components of border control practices and their effects. By reflecting on the administrative components which facilitate the practice of Home Office reporting, and the generalised logics which prevail through this process, I argued that a behavioural tendency exists which tends to defer only to rules, and therefore fails to deal with the individual. I then challenged the popular notion of bureaucratic neutrality to expose how Home Office conduct towards asylum-seekers appeared highly value-laden, and oftentimes vindictive. From there, I complicated the oft-described notion of bureaucratic work as passionless, impersonal and rational to argue how, in the context of border control practices, Home Office functionaries hold immense power and with it a significant weight of responsibility over the lives of those they serve. I argued that, due to the nature of Home Office decision-making processes and the structures within which they operate, Home Office functionaries are, to a large extent, shielded both from the individuals whose lives they ultimately preside over, and from as well from the consequences of those decisions. I also reflected on the incompetence and malfunctioning of Home Office which both harmed and on occasion benefited asylum seekers in surprising ways. I argued that Arendt's concept of non-thinking articulates a profound understanding for how bureaucracies tend to defer only to the rule itself.

Chapter Five develops a further critique of reporting practices, by shifting focus from the bureaucratic logics, to a focus on the material processes which structure both the space and practice of reporting. In this chapter, I mobilised a feminist framing of violence to instate an attentiveness to the intertwined sites and spaces at which these dynamics

occur. By examining the spatial and temporal features of reporting practices, I have argued that both the inherent protractedness and fixity that reporting constitutes, steers individuals towards increasing precarity. I attend to the ways that reporting deliberately and actively administers violence over individuals, from the inability to afford a bus ticket and therefore walking almost 14 miles there and back to attend a two-minute appointment, to attending reporting appointments every week for four years, and having a request to reduce it blankly denied, to the need to apportion half of an already meagre weekly income on bus fare, and in the continually communicated threat of being evicted, detained and forcibly removed; I have shown that, through every reporting visit, individuals become exposed to a heightened risk of being detained. Britain's commitment to detaining and forcibly removing migrants is arguably, one of the few remaining forms of physical violence that western liberal democracies can legitimate. I show how many of these 'unseen' administrative acts and events remain hidden because they are carried out on people whose lives have already been deemed 'ungrievable'. Overall, my analysis in this chapter locates the ways in which reporting subjects individuals to a myriad of processes and practices designed to hurt, through deliberately and successively steering individuals towards state-enforced destitution, detainment and removal. How these sites and processes function are, I argued, inextricably tethered to the foundational logics of sovereign state politics and have become the contemporary means through which violence is both imposed and concealed.

Chapter Six explored what modes of resistance both asylum-seekers and Signing Support volunteers are able to forge within these sites. While I argued in the preceding chapters that the logics which structure reporting practices refuse to grant a voice to the person in front of them, in this chapter I showed how asylum seekers also find ways in which to unsettle their innate silencing effect and to enact their political subjectivity. Drawing from Rancière's appropriation of political action, I showed how individuals

reclaim their political subjectivity within the very spaces that are designed to remove it. By so doing, I showed how these spaces do not function simply as bounded violent spaces in which individuals are altogether divorced from political potential; instead on occasion, acts of dissensus occur.

Future research

This research advances previous research in the fields of critical refugee and asylum studies, by contributing to understandings of the bureaucratic components of the asylum experience. While this project has inevitable limitations in its scope, the themes of this research and its theoretical basis could be applied and developed in a number of ways, and which are applicable and useful for a range of future research projects.

Despite the proliferation of interest in the exclusionary politics of asylum, there exists a need for a more nuanced understanding of violence that sees it as operating across differing sites and scales. This thesis responds to this need, as both the theoretical basis and the empirical findings contribute to understandings of the intersections between bureaucracy and violence and which contribute to the asylum experience in Britain and beyond. My conceptual framework emphasising the links between bureaucracy and violence is an applicable and useful tool for refugee and asylum studies, in contributing to understandings of the everyday practices which structure the lives of asylum seekers and the variant ways in which they inflict harm. My engagement with Hannah Arendt's work and in particular her insightful critique of bureaucracy might provide new insights on the harms of bureaucratic governance within the asylum discourse as well as other fields of enquiry which engage with bureaucracy and its effects.

Conducting an in-depth longitudinal study across other UK reporting centres would provide a significant contribution to the judgments made concerning the reporting process, the logics underpinning Home Office practice within these sites, as well as

asylum-seekers' experiences of reporting and the modes of resistance they engage in. For instance, while I draw from participants' experiences of reporting in both Salford and Patchway, my ethnographic material focused on just one site of study (Patchway). Therefore conducting additional ethnographic research in North Shields in the northwest of England, for example, where recent changes to the location of the reporting centre are having a detrimental impact on asylum-seekers, would enrich and develop the claims made in this thesis and enable me to make a comparison to the ways in which reporting operates more broadly.⁴¹ The addition of interviews with Home Office staff, police officers, deportation escorts and staff at detention centres would profoundly illuminate some of the factors influencing their practice, and enable a more holistic understanding of the structures within the reporting process I describe. Moreover, centring on another Home Office administrative site, such as the main Home Office headquarters in Lunar House and where the Immigration Enforcement and Border Force currently operate, would aid a deeper understanding of the bureaucratic logics underpinning Home Office practice as a whole.

Besides the Bristol Signing Support group, there are several other Signing Support groups across the UK, however they are not operating across all 13 reporting centres. Therefore making a comparative analysis of Home Office behaviour and practice in other reporting centres, both with and without the presence of volunteers would also add to the discussion on the impact of their presence and the extent of ethical consciousness prompted by witness bearing, provided in the thesis. Another avenue which would enable more insight into the process from the perspective of signers might be to recruit and train an existing signer to become an active researcher at a reporting centre.

While the focus of this study addressed the administrative components of border control practice in the context of reporting, this thesis also contributes to academic

⁴¹ See Burrige 2019.

scholarship as well as wider political debates on the ostensible neutrality, efficiency and rationality of bureaucratic systems of governance more broadly. By complicating and contesting the capability for Home Office functionaries to perform their duties objectively or impartially, this research leads to further questions and concerns for the workings of other systems of governance, and the levels of power individual bureaucrats hold. With this insight, another avenue for research could be drawn in focusing on other bureaucratic operations in one or several other ministerial departments of the government or beyond.

Furthermore, in Chapter Four I drew from the theoretical language of liminality to consider how reporting sites repeatedly drew individuals into a series of liminal spaces. As a discipline that has laid claim to a specifically spatialised perspective, it is perhaps surprising that geography has not done more to engage with the significance of liminality as a way of scrutinising the construction of physical spaces associated with asylum, and how such spaces function. There has been little research specifically exploring the administrative, or ostensibly ‘non-carceral’ spaces which characterise the asylum experience in how they might be critically evaluated as spaces of liminality. While the concept has been applied in the asylum context to consider notions of legal liminality and living in ‘limbo’ (e.g. Khosravi 2009), it could also be extended to consider other sites in which seemingly infinite bureaucratic procedures reside at the margins of state. As the government continues to make the lives of asylum-seekers living in Britain intolerable, and is seeking to follow Australia’s immigration model, in moving its borders to other shores, the concept of liminality has continued pertinence in this area of research, for thinking about the ways in which state violence is enacted and encountered in different ways and places.

Another avenue might be to explore other ways of understanding resistance in the context of reporting, by considering the significance of those 5% of individuals who do not reporting and therefore remain under-the-radar. Also an exploration into the ways in

which individuals try to ‘play the system’ or undermine it in other ways such as bringing false documents to the reporting centre would extend the analysis on the ways in which people subtly contest the rules (Kerkvliet 2009).

A final remark

Hannah Arendt perceived the *sine qua non* of thinking is the elimination of conventional, standardised norms of conduct’ (Stivers 2015: 248). To think is to enable the potential for exercising critical judgement and is based on the capacity to imagine another person’s experiences— in other words, to have empathy. To have contact with our thoughts and to allow our thoughts to be weighed by others leads to an ‘enlargement of one’s own mind’ (Stivers 2008:64). In essence, Arendt’s arguments amount to a model of reason which urges us to ‘dare to know’ (Stivers 2008:12). As such, it stands in contrast to the bureaucratic tendency to shield off the outcomes of action from the actor’s sight (Bauman 1989: 24-25). Thinking is capable of considering alternative perspectives, by clearing the way for judging, which comes into play in the face of every new situation and therefore enables one to decide on an ethical course of action (Feldman 2015). Arendt’s plea to public administration was for bureaucrats ‘to take off the mask of neutrality, to reveal themselves not as anonymous ‘nobodies’ but as human beings... ready to give account of themselves as they make discretionary judgements about what to do’ (1971, cited in Stivers 2015: 250). This, wrote Arendt, ‘may prevent catastrophes’ (ibid). Neutrality in the context of state bureaucracy is, after all, just a mask.

The harm caused by contemporary systems of governance do not usually result in the horror of mass genocide to which Arendt denotes, for as Feldman points out in reference to Arendt’s claims, today there exists certain ethical and legal restraints which prevent a return to such horrors (2015). And yet, Feldman writes, the elements necessary for its manifestation ‘are still firmly with us’ (89). Indeed, Judith Butler (2011) notes that

Arendt's indictment of Eichmann reached beyond the man himself, to the world in which 'true thinking was vanishing', which Arendt perceived as going 'hand in hand with the systematic destruction of populations' (ibid).

This research has shown the consequences caused when true thinking subsides, and is instead replaced only by rules, clichés and stock phrases, which fail to account not only for the nuanced complexity of people's lives, but for their very humanity. These consequences are protracted, largely concealed, and often appear unconnected, yet are being experienced daily by those seeking asylum in Britain. I have suggested through this thesis that the discreet nature of these processes, in operating through such mundane administrative sites, reflect the workings of how a modern sovereign state governs the lives of those it wishes to exclude.

Our systems of governance must assume a heavier obligation to provide impartiality with regards to its decision-making processes, and in its responsibility not just for the survival, but for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of those making an asylum claim in Britain. In recognising the need to draw a line between the leader's responsible and those serving as mere instruments to these practices, a political mandate of exclusion and deterrence which functions through making life intolerable and unliveable for 'unwanted' migrants is untenable and as I have argued, lies at the heart of these systems and processes, which seek to make life unliveable. Yet as well, this research has shown that bureaucrats also bear an enormous weight of responsibility towards those they are in place to serve. Heeding Arendt, they must themselves take off their own masks of anonymity and show themselves as human beings. In so doing, perhaps then they might truly see the person before them, and as joint members of the human community, to imagine their experiences and maybe then, they can question the status quo.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Bristol Signing Support Information sheet



BRISTOL SIGNING SUPPORT GROUP FOR MIGRANTS

...VOLUNTEERS WANTED...

What do signing support do?

Bristol Signing Support is a group of volunteers who go with people when they have to sign with the Home Office at Patchway Police Centre.

We offer practical and emotional support to individuals in what can be a difficult, frightening and often isolating experience, as there is a risk individuals face detention and forced removal to their country of origin.

From experience we know that with good support and legal representation, individuals are able to challenge their detention and in many cases people have been released and won their legal right to remain in the UK.

Who can volunteer?

We invite people who share our belief that this system of signing is inhumane and wrong and wish to do something to challenge it. You do not need any prior experience but an effective volunteer would be able to communicate effectively and be sensitive to the kinds of issues and experiences faced by asylum seekers and migrants living in the UK.

Contact

For more info, please get in touch with Camila: bristolsigning.help@gmail.com

Thank you!



Amanda Schmid-Scott
Researcher, University of Exeter
Ph: 07859 041 859 | Email: amanda.detentionproject@gmail.com

Research Project

INFORMATION SHEET

About the project

This research explores the asylum system in the UK, focusing in particular on the everyday lived experience of seeking asylum.

What am I doing?

I will be conducting **group discussions** and **informal one-to-one interviews** (approx 45 mins) in which people can share their own experiences.

I will pass round a sign up sheet and to arrange this to happen at a place and time convenient for you; you are welcome to have a friend with you for the interview .

Confidentiality and consent

Interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device, unless you would prefer for it not to be, in which case I will make written notes (please let Amanda know).

The interview will then be written up and then read to see if there are patterns in the ways people experience the asylum system. Once written up, your interview can be sent back to you and you will be able to remove anything you do not want to be included.

All information collected in this study is for the purposes of research, and any information you wish to withhold, will be removed. Information gathered will be used for as part of a research thesis and may also be used to write reports, articles, blog posts and deliver talks and presentations. Any information given will be **anonymised as standard**; I will not record any names or any details which could identify you. All interview recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored using password protected software.

Background

This is an independent study and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)). The research is undertaken by Amanda Schmid-Scott, a PhD researcher in Human Geography at the University of Exeter. The research is supervised by **Professor Nick Gill**: N.M.Gill@exeter.ac.uk and **Dr. Bice Maiguashca**: b.maiguashca@exeter.ac.uk and is supported by **Right to Remain** (righttoremain.org.uk). All research activities are carried out according to the ethical guidelines set by the ESRC and the University of Exeter.

Appendix 3
Consent form



Amanda Schmid-Scott
Researcher, University of Exeter
Ph: 07859 041 859
Email: amanda.detentionproject@gmail.com

CONSENT FORM

[to be distributed alongside the INFORMATION SHEET]

Name:
Email address:
Tel:
Date:

INTERVIEW ONLY:

I confirm that I am happy to participate in the research, and to have my interview recorded on an audio dictaphone (unless I have requested for it not to be).

I understand that I only need to share information that I am comfortable talking about, and I can choose to withdraw from the research process at any time. I will contact the researcher if I decide to withdraw the information that I give, either in part or in whole, from the research. I understand that I can request to see a copy of the transcript following the interview if I wish to review or remove any of the information I have contributed to the research.

I agree that my interview may be transcribed (written up) and may be used in part, or whole and that it may be reproduced in part, or in whole, for the purposes of publication at a later date either in the form of a written report, online, or in a book or journal. I understand that none of my personal details will be published or associated with the research, and that the information I give will not be attached to my name in the research findings, unless I have chosen to opt out of the anonymisation measure, by ticking the box below.

I consent to my personal information being stored securely on the University of Exeter computer system, or locked in a secure cabinet, in line with the Data Protection Act. I understand that I can request a copy of this information at any time, by contacting the researcher.

If you understand and agree to the above, please sign the form below.

I _____ confirm that I understand and agree to the above.

Please tick this box if you do not require your interview to remain anonymous (e.g. name, organisation)

Please tick this box if you would like a copy of the transcript to be sent to you after the interview