

# **Geographies of asylum, welfare, and the state at the margins**

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## List of abbreviations

**BRP** Biometric Residence Permit

**COMPASS** Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services

**DWP** Department for Work and Pensions

**ESA** Employment and Support Allowance

**JSA** Jobseeker's Allowance

**HO** The Home Office

**HRT** Habitual Residence Test

**PIP** Personal Independence Payments

**RBH** Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

**UC** Universal Credit

# Abstract

This thesis explores how the state is experienced and reproduced through asylum and welfare governance in the UK. Over the past decade, the UK's asylum and social welfare systems have both been transformed by major organisational changes, funding cuts, and privatisations in austerity. With this, asylum seeker dispersals and the impacts of welfare austerity have become increasingly concentrated in already-impooverished, marginal urban areas such as Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Despite these parallels, academic analysis and commentary has tended to consider welfare and border regimes in isolation. In this thesis I address this gap by developing an empirically rich, geographical understanding of the everyday practices, performances, and lived experiences of governance that non-citizens and citizens negotiate at the margins.

The original empirical material was gathered through a twelve-month ethnographic study conducted in Rochdale and was focussed on two charity drop-in centres; one serving migrant communities, the other non-migrant clientele. Whilst catering to different groups, both organisations provided crucial assistance in dealing with the state's bureaucratic practices relating to housing, immigration and benefits applications and appeals. My role at the drop-in centres was one of both researcher and volunteer and the observations discussed here were based on my experiences shadowing service staff as they interacted with claimants. As well as participant observation, I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with service staff (n=14) and service users (n=11). In addressing this topic in this way, I seek to document the experiences of people and places that are too often overlooked in public and academic discourse.

The main findings are presented in five chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 concern lived experiences of asylum and welfare governance respectively; detailing how, under intentionally hostile regimes, both asylum and welfare claimants are subject to disciplinary expressions of sovereign power and systematically exposed to poverty and destitution. Chapter 7 concerns the actors involved in reproducing a 'peopled state' (Jones, 2012) and the outsourcing of asylum and welfare 'services' in austerity. Whilst the organizational and moral distance (Gill, 2016) of such bureaucratic arrangements aided the implementation of hostile governance, I also consider here how outsourcing and discretion created scope for important forms of contestation and subversion in these systems. Chapter 8 concerns the material-spatial dynamics of the state, arguing that – as well as bureaucracy, discourse, and people – state effects are negotiated through the presence and agency of various 'technical devices' in service encounters.

Here I explore the governmental implications of the technological shift from paper-based to digital state bureaucracies.

The final two chapters reflect on the many parallel governmental practices and shared spaces that exist between border and welfare systems. Whilst the border is reproduced through informal and formal modes of segregation, I draw attention here to everyday acts of solidarity and connection that exist across asylum and welfare systems. By deconstructing statist categorizations of citizenship, the thesis critiques the discursive and ontological separation of 'national objects' (Tyler, 2013) according to immigration status as a potent but fragile instrument of statecraft. In recognizing different forms of incoherence and contingency in the everyday reproduction of welfare and asylum regimes, I draw from poststructuralist state theory (Abrams, 1988; Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006) to challenge the widespread reification of states as monolithic political realities. Instead, I portray the state to be a product of shifting assemblages of governmental discourses, technologies, people, materials, and affects; arguing that the state is better treated primarily as a symbolic entity that is inherently uneven, inconsistent, and contestable (Painter, 2006).

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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The thesis itself perhaps owes most to the research participants I worked with in Rochdale; whose life stories and daily endeavours underpin this work, but whose voices too often go unheard in our society. The experiences recounted to me, and the hard work and struggles I observed remain a source of humility and inspiration and I sincerely hope this is reflected in my work. It is to them, and countless others experiencing or having experienced situations of crisis elsewhere, that this thesis is dedicated.

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# 1. Introduction

**Mail**Online

Home **News** U.S. | Sport | TV&Showbiz | Australia | Femail | Health | Science | Money | Video | Travel | Da

Latest Headlines | Royal Family | News | World News | Arts | Headlines | France | Most read | Wires | Discounts

## Town of Rochdale has more asylum seekers than the **WHOLE** of the South East of England

- Market town in the foothills of the Pennines houses 680 refugees
- The whole of the South East covering eight counties houses just 441
- Rochdale has one in 41 of all asylum seekers in the whole of Britain
- Calls for the burden to be 'spread fairly across the country'

By IAN DRURY and JAMES SLACK FOR THE DAILY MAIL  
PUBLISHED: 17:29, 2 December 2014 | UPDATED: 20:21, 2 December 2014

Share 3.4k shares 585 View comments

Figure 1. Screenshot from Mail Online/Daily Mail headline (Drury and Slack, 2014)

The idea for this thesis first came to me after stumbling across this *Daily Mail* headline (Figure 1.) whilst exploring potential research topics in 2015. When I first saw this assertion that Rochdale - a medium-sized town in Greater Manchester - housed more asylum seekers than the entire South East of England (pop. ~9 million), I was immediately suspicious. Given the *Mail's* reputation for manufactured outrage on this topic, I assumed this claim to be spurious or misleading at best and proceeded to fact-check it. Whilst certainly sensationalist in tone, according to Home Office statistics (Home Office, 2019) at least, the *Mail* were - to my surprise - right. Rochdale did in fact house more dispersed ('Section 95') asylum seekers than the entire South East region (*ibid.*). Along with other reports around this time (Precey, 2015; Wheatstone, 2016; Lyons, 2017) - the article noted that Rochdale was not unique in this regard. Many other smaller, poorer towns and cities outside of the South East had also experienced a disproportionate increase in asylum seeker dispersals over a period of a few years; with newspapers running headlines such as 'Poorest areas of Britain used

as 'dumping grounds' for asylum seekers as map reveals north-south divide.' (Wheatstone, 2016). Whilst the spatial distribution of asylum housing has always been uneven (Hynes, 2011), a new set of concerns were being raised about this apparent spike in asylum dispersals in such locations.

More analytical pieces correctly attributed this shifting geography of asylum to the privatization of asylum 'services' introduced by the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat government in 2012 (Precey, 2015; Lyons and Duncan, 2017; see also Hirschler, 2015). In short, cost-saving incentives for the new corporate asylum accommodation providers - G4S, Serco, and Clearsprings - had spurred an increase in asylum seeker dispersals to areas of the country with an abundance of low-cost housing (*ibid.*; Darling, 2016). A change in national government policy thus meant that many places located away from major urban centres and affluent Southern England quickly became major sites for refugee immigration, with little in the way of local consultation (Darling, 2016). Crucially, this issue became prominent at a time when a parallel 'north-south divide' in the impacts of austerity were becoming salient (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Pidd, 2015). Indeed, statistically, already impoverished areas such as Rochdale have borne the brunt of austerity measures, including swingeing welfare reform (Beatty and Fothergill, 2014; 2016) and cuts to Local Government and public services (Gray and Barford, 2018). It was partially with this justification then that local politicians in major dispersal locations voiced concerns about what they perceived as an unfair responsibility being imposed on places already struggling to cope with the pressures of austerity and long-standing economic decline. Rochdale's MP at the time, Simon Danczuk, complained in Parliament that the town had '... been dumped with an unequal share of the burden' (Hansard HC Deb., 03 May 2016), later arguing that '(y)ou can't cut the funding to public services to towns and cities like Rochdale... and then expect us to take over 1,000 asylum seekers...' (Lyons, 2017). Whilst this notion of asylum-as-burden (see Robinson et al., 2003) and the managerial framing of this debate is problematic for several reasons - it does draw much needed attention to the intersecting issues of asylum and austerity (Darling, 2016). However, when this link with asylum has been made, it has tended to treat 'austerity' as a matter of fiscal and organizational *context*, and largely misses connections with reforms to welfare governance that have also defined the contemporary era of austerity in Britain (see O'Hara, 2014). Despite their prominence as distinct issues then, analysis and debate has neglected this intersection; and the shared governmental logics, lived experiences, and geographies of asylum and welfare have remained curiously underexplored.

Yet even a cursory glance at recent debates on asylum and austerity in the UK reveal common themes. Beyond overlapping geographical distributions, one factor that is repeatedly mentioned in tabloid and academic discourses alike is the central role that the British state played in determining these reforms. Changes to the welfare system, asylum accommodation, and public funding were brought in by 'the government'; their apparent geographical convergence directed by the state. Indeed, borders, public services, and social welfare systems have always conventionally been understood as quintessential functions of modern nation-states (Gill, 2010; Jessop, 2016). And, as such, I place the state and its attendant research literature (see *ibid.*; Sharma and Gupta, 2009) at the centre of my analysis. However, whilst conceived at the level of the nation-state, their attendant effects are reproduced and experienced at much finer scales – that of the local and the embodied (Peck, 2002; Mountz, 2004). As the governance of different marginalized groups appears to converge, this thesis asks what the implications of this are for the people and places most-affected by these developments. With a specific concern for the emerging asylum-austerity nexus absent in both political and academic debate, this thesis offers an original scholarly contribution; exploring the diffuse governmental practices and lived experiences that constitute these systems, their intersections, and the state. To put simply, in this thesis I seek to better understand what happens when the lives of people divided by governmental status, but united by marginalization and shared space, meet.

The central contribution of this thesis is its exploration of asylum and welfare governance and their conceptual and empirical connections; understood through an in-depth case study of state-led marginality. Although a handful of studies from Sociology have begun to address this intersection in a UK context (Humphris, 2019; Mayblin, 2014, 2016), the thesis offers an original empirical contribution by focussing explicitly on the overlapping lived experiences of austerity and asylum, from a *geographical* point of departure. With research on immigration focussed on larger urban centres (Burrell et al., 2019), it is also novel in documenting the experiences of people that are often overlooked, from a type of place that is often overlooked, in debates on these topics. Although primarily empirical in content, the arguments I make synthesize contributions from state theory - challenging and deconstructing here both the a priori, statist separation of asylum and welfare issues in public and academic discourse, and the divisive implications of these framings. In doing so, I develop an inductive, grounded approach to the study of state power, sovereignty, and citizenship; ultimately contributing to broader understandings of where and how power and agency is distributed in society. Following Tyler (2013), what drives this thesis then is a concern for the making and unmaking of states in daily life (see Butler

and Spivak, 2007) and a desire to look at the state anew and contest the discourses and practices that reproduce its in/exclusions.

### **1.1 Aims and objectives**

To develop a sophisticated understanding of the overlapping issues of asylum and welfare governance, I have defined two primary aims for this thesis:

**1. Explore how the state is experienced and reproduced through asylum and welfare governance in the UK.**

**2. Investigate how the UK's asylum and welfare systems overlap and diverge.**

To achieve these, the thesis develops an in-depth, qualitative account of asylum and welfare governance based in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Conducted primarily in two charity 'drop-in' centres in the town – one serving the town's migrant communities, the other mostly UK-citizens – it captures workers and service users' lived experiences of governance through interviews and participant observation. I draw on this data, alongside existing research on asylum and welfare governance, to work towards the following four objectives.

Table 1. Research Objectives

<p><b>Objective 1.</b> Analyse how the state is encountered and experienced by asylum seekers and refugees, and welfare claimants in Rochdale.</p> <p><b>Objective 2.</b> Explore how asylum and welfare governance is practiced and shaped through different institutional and bureaucratic arrangements.</p> <p><b>Objective 3.</b> Demonstrate if and how these nominally separate systems of governance intersect and converge in terms of policy development, practice, and lived experience.</p> <p><b>Objective 4.</b> Critically reflect on the ontological separation of asylum and welfare governance in discussion and debates on these issues.</p>
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Objectives 1. and 2. relate primarily to the first aim. In the first of these, I seek to analyse how the state is encountered and experienced by asylum seekers and refugees, and welfare claimants. Studying the state 'from below' (Trouillot, 2001) in this way, the study departs from a national framing that is prominent in asylum (Mountz, 2004; Johnson et al, 2011; Darling, 2016) and welfare literature (see Peck, 2002; Newman, 2014; Johansson and Panican, 2016). Secondly, I seek to explore how asylum and welfare governance is practiced and shaped through different institutional and bureaucratic arrangements. More conventional accounts may frame

recent privatisations and funding cuts to asylum and welfare as evidence of a further retreat of the state (Krugman, 2012; Bramall, 2013); with state institutions *replaced* by the private and voluntary sectors and individual citizens (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). However, as essential state functions, both border and welfare systems are increasingly understood as consisting of a diverse and symbiotic array of state and non-state actors, and direct and indirect modes of governance (Gill, 2010; Darling, 2016; Peeters, 2019). The thesis contributes to these debates by exploring the situated practices, encounters, and negotiations that constitute asylum and welfare governance.

The final two objectives relate to the second aim. Objective 3. concerns connections between asylum and welfare governance, wherein I seek to demonstrate if and how these nominally separate systems of governance intersect and converge in terms of policy development, practice, and lived experience. Here, the thesis will explore how these systems and their subjects interact, both practically - in terms of encounters and crossovers in service provisions and practices - but also in a more abstract sense - with respect to their founding political logics. From this, the final objective is to critically reflect on the ontological separation of asylum and welfare governance in discussion and debates on these issues. With this, I consider how divisions based on citizenship status may be reproduced not only through policies and the state's categorizations, but also through the practices, performances, and discourses reproduced by different state and non-state actors. Here, theories of the state (see Jessop, 2016; Sharma and Gupta, 2009) are drawn on to consider how states are reproduced and reified through these means and discuss how their more exclusionary and divisive effects are contested.

## **1.2 Asylum, austerity, and the state in existing research**

Whilst this thesis is novel in connecting research on asylum, welfare, and the state, individually these themes have formed the focus of extensive and diverse research literatures that will be drawn on closely throughout. Since its formal introduction in the UK in 2000, much research on asylum seeker dispersals has been policy focussed and mostly studied at the national level; characterised by an empirical approach that has been concerned with policy efficacy, spatial distribution, and asylum-seekers' experiences of social exclusion and deprivation (Hynes, 2011). Importantly, the UK is not unique here and several European countries have adopted dispersal, or similar resettlement policies, since the 1990s (Schuhster, 2005); with researchers identifying similar issues of social exclusion resulting from the housing of asylum seekers in poor, remote locales with limited history of immigration (*ibid.*, Boswell, 2003; Campesi, 2018). Whilst this body of work is drawn from throughout the thesis, I engage more

intently with critical asylum scholarship that has focused analyses on the experiential and political dimensions of asylum, connecting these with prominent themes in political geography; including sovereignty (Salter, 2008, Gill, 2009), political exclusion (Squire, 2009), and governance (Darling, 2009). In exploring the diffuse practices and experiences that constitute dispersal, I also take forward work that has considered the re-scaling of borders – from 'lines in the sand' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2009) to local practices (Lebuhn, 2013), and the 'finer scale of the body' (Mountz, 2004: 323).

Similarly, much geographical research on austerity has also been policy orientated, and adept at mapping out how cuts to local government budgets and welfare reform has disproportionately impacted already deprived areas (Beatty and Fothergill, 2014, 2016) and certain marginalised groups (Hamnett, 2014; Donald et al., 2014). Yet, once again, the thesis will draw particularly from literature that has connected austerity to more longstanding debates on states and governance, including the shifting relationship between state and citizenry (Flint, 2015; McKee, 2015; Webster, 2019) and developments in welfare conditionality (Dwyer, 2004; Edminston, 2016; Wright & Patrick, 2019). Here, I note an important distinction between 'austerity', as a broader era of tightening public spending and reform, and 'welfare austerity', which more specifically refers to the reforms to the benefits system that have been a key feature of post-financial-crisis austerity in the UK (see O'Hara, 2014). Whilst wider public service cuts are significant and certainly not ignored in the thesis (as Chapter 6 sets out), it is the effect of austerity on welfare governance that I focus on. Perhaps most importantly for this thesis, what the research literatures on borders and welfare austerity both lack is a sustained consideration of their empirical and conceptual intersections.

Although connection between these literatures has been limited, I highlight several common and significant themes here. Both asylum seekers and benefits claimants alike have endured major cuts and changes in the way state support is organised and delivered under successive governments in the UK (Allsopp et al, 2014; Hamnett, 2014). Policy developments have increasingly been oriented towards deterring claims, and ever greater barriers and conditions have been placed on both benefits (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Watts et al., 2014) and asylum entitlements (Allsopp et al, 2014). Meanwhile, in keeping with the pre-existing neoliberal restructuring of the state (Larner, 2003; Evans et al., 2005), the management of both the UK's asylum (Darling, 2016) and welfare systems (Raco, 2013) have been outsourced to a wide array of private and non-governmental actors. In connecting these common themes, both

conceptually and empirically, the thesis is unique in offering a sustained synthesis of two important, but previously disparate research literatures.

Where notable efforts have been made to draw thematic connections between welfare and asylum governance in recent years, this has concerned the identification of parallels surrounding the cultural politics of marginalization. A notable contribution here has been Bridget Anderson's (2013) book *Us and Them?*, which proposes the need to consider the exclusion of people defined as non-citizens and 'failed citizens' together. Similarly, sociologist Imogen Tyler (2013) has argued that the state-led demonization and oppression of asylum-seekers since the 1990s has been mirrored in the treatment of working-class citizens in Britain. Whilst being conceptually innovative, empirically rich, and well argued, Tyler's (2013) *Revolted Subjects* stops short of an in-depth exploration of asylum and welfare's lived intersections and encounters. Although not framed as such, what both Anderson (2013) and Tyler (2013) identify is the unifying role of the state – or at least the idea of state (Painter, 2006) – in producing nominally separate, but ideologically and politically connected systems of governance.

This leads on to a final key area of literature which the thesis engages with – state theory. In challenging taken for granted categories of citizenship, I root my analysis of asylum and welfare governance in 'alternative understandings of the state' that have challenged the reification of states as concrete and coherent entities (Gill, 2010). In particular, I look to poststructuralist thinkers who see states as amorphous and fallible constructions; whose effects are contingent *not* upon neutral policy-implementation, but on often unstable assemblages of different actors, practices, discourses, institutions, materials and people (ibid.; Jones, 2012; Dubois, 2014; Fassin, 2015). Pertinently, such conceptualisations allow for analyses of 'state effects' that attend to their uneven and contestable presence in everyday life (Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006; Mountz, 2003). Returning to the aims set out above then, this theoretical work is pertinent as it facilitates an anthropological approach to the study of states as a matter of lived experience and encounter with governmental institutions and technologies (Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Jeffrey, 2015). The thesis thus focuses on asylum and welfare service encounters as key moments, and the drop-ins as key spaces, through which the making of states take place (Jones, 2012). From this, I am able to unpack how the state is assembled beyond the realms of policy, legal entitlements, and bureaucratic process (Higgins and Lerner, 2017).

### **1.3 The study**

Rochdale was chosen as the sole study site for two main reasons. The first relates to a broader concern surrounding the neglect of smaller, peripheral towns and cities in research on immigration and diversity. As Burrell et al. (2019: 21) have noted regarding the significance of so-called 'left behind' places in the 2016 Brexit referendum result and rising right-wing populism in the UK, '... the symbolic pull of metropolitan spaces has seen 'peripheral' post-industrial places, coastal towns and semi-rural locations going comparatively overlooked.'. The second reason follows from the media coverage outlined above, which frequently mentioned the town as an example of the rapid growth in asylum dispersals to smaller urban centres. Even as the Local Authority area with the second highest concentration of dispersals per resident (Home Office, 2019), Rochdale has yet to be the subject of any published academic research on asylum. Basing the study in Rochdale thus offers the opportunity for a novel empirical contribution to be made. And so, this thesis offers a chance to explore a salient but under-researched geographical issue. As with anywhere, Rochdale has a historical, spatial, and institutional context that shapes how asylum and austerity is practiced, experienced, and understood (see Chapter4). However, the broad patterns of long-standing economic and public-service decline, combined with the challenges of increasing diversity, will be familiar across many smaller settlements in the UK (Berg et al., 2019) and elsewhere (Raco & Tasan-Kok, 2019).

The insights produced by the thesis are rooted in qualitative data gathered during a year-long ethnographic study conducted between November 2017 and October 2018 in Rochdale. My time in the town was split equally between two charity drop-in centres. One was run by a local migrant support charity - that I call 'The Welcome Centre' here, for anonymity - whose clientele were predominantly asylum seekers or refugees. The other was a local homelessness drop-in centre - herein 'The Fortis Centre' - whose clientele were mostly UK citizens. In doing so, the fieldwork follows geographical studies of social and political in/exclusion in homelessness (Cloke et al., 2011) and asylum (Darling, 2011) drop-in centres. Whilst catering to different groups, the delivery of face-to-face advice and advocacy were core functions of both drop-ins, and the observations I gathered were of service encounters relating to immigration and welfare casework in these spaces. In the context of diminishing budgets for public services in austerity, the drop-ins were often the only place in which claimants could access such services without prohibitive waiting times or costs. As such, these organizations were key spaces, and important actors shaping claimants' relationship with, and experiences of, the state (see also *ibid.*; Cloke et al., 2011; Humphris, 2019). As well as participant observations, I analysed governmental documents and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-two members of staff and



service users; producing a rich qualitative account of the practices, encounters, and experiences that constitute welfare and asylum governance.

Before outlining the thesis structure, it is important to briefly define some key terminology pertaining to what, and who, the empirical study engaged with. With respect to the types of casework I observed, where I use the terms asylum and welfare 'systems' or 'services', I refer broadly to both government and non-governmental activities, organizations, and networks. This includes support with bureaucratic processes, such as asylum or benefit applications, as well as services that would conventionally be seen as support and advocacy work. The terms 'service users' or 'claimants', and 'service providers' or 'staff' refer to individuals in receipt of any kind of organised public or non-governmental support and the individuals who provide such support, respectively. Although these terms are taken directly from public and charity sector parlance, they are contested and the origins, connotations, and use of such a 'consumerist discourse' (Jung, 2010) has been critiqued for implying the presence of consumer choice (ibid.) and reproducing power hierarchies in service delivery (McLaughlin, 2009). Whilst I am wary of reifying or legitimizing this discourse, it is nonetheless relevant to adopt these terms whilst they remain in active use; albeit also reflecting critically on their problematic origins and uses (see Darling, 2016: 2). With the same critical eye, it is also worth noting here that participants will include both what the Home Office classifies as 'asylum seekers' - individuals whose asylum claims are ongoing - and 'refugees' - individuals who have UK residency or citizenship status. Whilst being aware of the crucial differences between these statuses, I argue that our understanding of the UK's asylum system and the significance of immigration status may be enhanced by recording perceptions from different stages of the asylum process. The complexity and scope of border and austerity governance makes categorising and defining groups for scholarly enquiry both epistemologically, as well as ethically, problematic (Sajjad, 2018; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Again, whilst not wanting to reify, reproduce or legitimise divisive governmental categorizations, it is nonetheless pertinent to *critically* frame analyses around them whilst they remain in active use (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

The thesis consists of ten chapters. The following chapter sets out the key theoretical work that the thesis engages with and contributes to. Forming the conceptual basis of my analysis, I provide an overview of some of the ways that states and the governance of marginalized groups have been studied in critical scholarship. This chapter reviews existing contributions to state theory (see Painter, 2006; Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Jessop, 2016), sovereignty (Nyers, 2006b; Cameron, 2006; Salter, 2008), and

governance (Rose, 1999; Bevir, 2011) from which I base my study of asylum and welfare.

In Chapter 3, I outline how the primary empirical material for the thesis was gathered and analysed. Here, I provide detail on research participants, sampling techniques, data collection methods, epistemological justifications and limitations, and practical and ethical concerns. As a participatory, ethnographic study, I also reflect here on the ethical and methodological implications (*ibid.*, Goerisch, 2017) of my role in the two charity drop-in centres on which the study was focussed.

Chapter 4 focusses on Rochdale, which I present as a lens through which the geographical dimensions and intersections of asylum and austerity can be better understood. I begin by profiling the town with respect to its position in the Greater Manchester region, the country, and its public image; examining its peripherality and long-standing economic decline. From this, I use Loïc Wacquant's concepts of 'advanced marginality' and 'territorial stigmatization' (2007; 2008) to help explain how places such as Rochdale have become symbolically and materially devalued over many decades. In this context, the effect of the recent age of austerity on the town is explored with respect to public service decline and the disproportionate impact of welfare reforms. I also collate a brief history of immigration in Rochdale, tracing the arrival of dispersal policy and asylum migration since 2000, the growth of local refugee services, and their deterioration in the wake of privatization and austerity since 2012.

The key empirical material is discussed across the next five chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on lived experiences of asylum and welfare governance respectively; detailing how asylum and welfare claimants are systematically exposed to overlapping forms of discipline and exclusion. Chapter 5 draws mostly from data collected at *The Welcome Centre* and details how restrictions on employment, income and housing placed asylum seekers in a default position of poverty and social exclusion in dispersal (Allsopp et al., 2014; Hirschler, 2015). Interview and ethnographic data also recall many of the less-tangible, emotional impacts of different Home Office practices, including pervasive threats of detention and deportation (De Genova, 2002; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Mavin, 2019). Similarly, the presence of different forms of surveillance and monitoring, and the demands placed on subjects to satisfy bureaucratic processes and routines is shown to aggravate feelings of stress and anxiety (*ibid.*; Fisher, 2018). Running through all these diverse bordering practices, I draw attention to the constant performative and symbolic dimensions of state power (Salter, 2007; Conlon, 2019; Griffiths, 2014).

Chapter 6 turns our attention towards welfare governance, drawing mostly from data collected at the homelessness drop-in, Fortis. It discusses how welfare governance had a significant impact on claimants' lives; which (as with dispersal) was characterized by economic precarity (Lansley and Mack, 2015; Patrick, 2017) and often insidious modes of governmental control (Dubois, 2014; Fletcher and Wright, 2018). I detail here how the lives of many welfare claimants in Rochdale were constrained by the material precarities and stresses seemingly built into the benefits system in the form of delays and suspensions of welfare payments (Dwyer, 2018; Reeve, 2017). As in asylum, I explore how benefits claimants were required to prove that they meet a multitude of conditions for state support, to which various, often intimate, details of their daily lives were monitored and recorded (Fletcher and Wright, 2018). From this, I demonstrate how the experience of claiming benefits was marked by chronic feelings of anxiety, often triggered by the threat of job search or incapacity ineligibility (Williams, 2019). Once again here, I identify the performances of state authority that pervade welfare governance (Auyero, 2011; Carswell et al., 2019).

Having discussed asylum and welfare governance in terms of lived experience, the proceeding two chapters refocus on the practices, encounters, and negotiations that reproduce these systems. Here, I consider how many of the experiences discussed in the preceding chapters were *not* engendered by policy per se, but the organizational arrangements put in place to enact them. At the centre of these discussions is a concern with bureaucratic structures and technologies that seemingly allowed the state to 'govern at distance' (Rose, 199). Yet, I also argue that the diffuse sets of practices and organizational arrangements that make up these systems of governance create scope for forms of negotiation and contestation. With asylum and welfare services increasingly outsourced to the private and charity sectors, Chapter 7 concerns the different actors involved in reproducing governance. With concern for the discretionary, 'peopled' character of the state (Jones, 2012), I identify two forms of distancing that allowed service providers and bureaucrats to conduct exclusionary border and welfare practices. The first is organizational distance, and stems from the separation of key decision makers from the human consequences of their actions (see Bauman, 1989). The second is bound up in the cultural politics and exclusionary discourses that surround asylum and welfare issues, which produce forms of 'moral distance' (Gill, 2016) between frontline workers and the claimants they encounter. Although the state is conventionally understood to have withdrawn its presence in austerity (Bramall, 2013), I argue that its bureaucratic and discursive powers remain significant in shaping governmental effects. Yet whilst organizational and moral distance facilitated exclusion, I also consider here how outsourcing and discretion created scope for important forms of contestation and subversion in these systems.

From this analysis of a 'peopled' state, Chapter 8 switches focus to the role that different technologies and 'technical devices' (Barry, 2001; Darling, 2014) play in producing welfare and asylum governance. Attention is drawn to the ways in which service encounters at the drop-ins were mediated through different technological forms. I recall how Home Office or DWP letters, application and monitoring documents, and the digital devices that are replacing these, all shaped how service encounters unfolded. Here, I explore some of the implications of the rapid digitization of state bureaucracies (Brown et al., 2014; Pedersen & Wilkinson, 2018). Developing a relational understanding of state encounters, the chapter demonstrates the symbiotic role that the material and discursive qualities of different technological devices play in producing governmental effects.

Having analysed asylum and welfare governance concurrently, the final chapters reflect on the parallel practices and shared spaces that exist between these systems. Chapter 9 begins by exploring the 'move on period' at the end of the asylum claims process (Carnet et al., 2014; British Red Cross, 2018), wherein new refugees face the task of navigating an entirely new and incongruent system of state support. Drawing from my observations of service encounters, I then consider the informal and performative means through which access to support and advocacy is restricted for non-citizens in Rochdale. In doing so, I explore how political membership is negotiated at the local and intimate scale of service delivery spaces (Humphris, 2019). The final part of the chapter destabilises this theme of segregation, focussing instead on encounters that inadvertently contested statist boundaries of citizenship and identity. Paying attention to more generative encounters (Massey, 2005), I show here how prosaic forms of solidarity emerge in spaces ostensibly abandoned by the state in austerity. The final chapter reflects on these findings and how they further our understanding of how the state and its divisive effects are reproduced and contested, where and when the politics of austerity and the border meet.

## **2. Critical theories of the state, and asylum, welfare: a literature review**

Before I discuss how the empirical material for the thesis was gathered, this chapter reviews key areas of scholarship that I engage with and contribute to. Although empirical examples of asylum and welfare governance do feature here, these policy areas and associated research literatures are reviewed in greater depth in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. I begin this review by introducing a selection of insights from critical state theory (see Jessop, 2016; Sharma & Gupta, 2009) that inform the theoretical basis of my analysis. Here, I review what Nick Gill (2010) terms 'alternative understandings' of the state that consciously deviate from the typical conceptual framings that underpin conventional policy studies and commentary on asylum and welfare. With this theoretical direction in mind, the next section discusses the concept of sovereignty and its significance in understanding the power dynamics of border (Nyers, 2006b; Salter, 2008) and welfare (Cameron, 2006) governance. Section 2.3 then reviews work that has conceptualized how states categorize and govern populations in practice; focussing on the concepts of governance (Foucault, 1991; 2004; Jessop, 1990; Rhodes, 1997), bureaucracy (Weber, 1978; Lipsky, 1983; Gill, 2016) and conditionality (Sales, 2002; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018), discussing how these shape my analysis. Leading on from this, I review work that has explored the cultural politics of asylum and welfare; drawing from Bridget Anderson's (2013) notion of the 'community of value' and Imogen Tyler's (2014) development of the concept of abjection as frameworks for studying the state-led marginalization of certain minority groups in British society. Looking especially to anthropological scholarship, section 2.5 reviews work that has explored the 'peopled' processes and encounters that constitute states (Jones, 2012). As well as offering a pertinent conceptual framework, in pursuing a finer scale of empirical analysis than most studies of the state (see Mountz, 2004; Johnson et al., 2011), I discuss these works here also because of their methodological influence on the thesis. Similarly, section 2.6 discusses scholarship on the embodied dimensions governance (Foucault, 2008; Mavin, 2019) and the concepts of affect (Anderson, 2009; Pile, 2010) and materiality (Navaro-Yashin's, 2002; 2012; Dittmer, 2013) in state encounters; before discussing assemblage thinking (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Müller, 2015) as a means of linking the different analytical concepts discussed across the chapter. I finish the chapter by outlining my contributions to these concepts and debates.

## **2.1 Alternative understandings and the everyday state**

Whilst the recognition and use of state theory varies across welfare (see Dubois, 2014) and asylum (see Gill, 2010) scholarship, refugee status (*ibid.*) and social security are both founded on the notion of a central state. Refugees claim sanctuary within a nation-state on the basis of being persecuted or neglected by other states (Gill, 2010). Whilst (in Britain, at least) social security continues to be administered through a centralized, national welfare state, and on condition of citizenship or residency. Yet the concept of the state is notoriously difficult to pin down (Painter, 2006; Jessop, 2016). Indeed, defining the state is problematic, and a large and diverse literature has grown around debates around what should and should not be thought of as 'the state' (Jessop, 2007; Sharma and Gupta, 2009). Although I remain attentive to the variety of forms that states take, in any definition, states do share a common and broad set of traits (Jeffrey, 2015). In its broadest sense, the state can be defined as a set of institutions or capabilities drawn on by a central (sovereign) power as part of its claim of authority over a population and territory. As Alex Jeffrey (2015: 62) emphasises, states are 'both a geopolitical and a biopolitical project, where the governance, control, and maintenance of territories and human communities intersect.'. Understood in such terms, most analyses of states or state practices would conform to such a definition (*ibid.*). However, debate arises here when considering how states relate to what we see as 'society'; where the boundary between the realms of the state and society lay, and whether states can exist in separation to the social at all (Painter, 2005, 2006). Although this thesis isn't underpinned by any specific conceptualization of the state or theoretical tradition, in studying and challenging the categorizations and practices that constitute the state's presence in everyday life, I draw from a literature that critiques conventional accounts in preference for what Gill (2010) terms 'alternative understandings of the state'.

Despite the prominence of critical theories of the state within asylum scholarship (see Gill, 2010) and beyond (see Painter, 2006; Dubois, 2014), states are still commonly treated as coherent entities that intervene in society from a position of impartial detachment. To its critics, such orthodox understandings fail to grasp the relational, socially contingent, and inconsistent character of states (Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010). Here, conventional analyses of governance and policy implicitly adopt an uncritical account that sees state institutions and actions as effecting society unilaterally, through direct interventions including legal, policy, and public spending initiatives. Whilst the bulk of policy-oriented studies are not concerned with the nature of the state, their implicitly uncritical stance takes the independence, coherence, and power of the state for granted (Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Gill, 2010). Even with many

avowedly critical policy analyses, their conclusions implicitly bestow states with '... competences and capacities that are independent from, and ontologically prior to (society)' (Gill, 2010: 628).

Whilst a conventional theorization of the state doesn't prohibit critical insight entirely, I shall avoid what Painter (2005; 2006) terms the 'separate spheres assumption' for two core reasons. Firstly, treating state practices as separate from society threatens to obscure the role that nominally non-state actors play in shaping policy development and the day-to-day implementation of state projects. Here, Gill (2010) draws attention to some of the ways in which different social actors reinforce border functions seemingly without coercion or direction from the state; arguing that, when discretion is afforded to border enforcement personnel, this tends to result in more hostile and exclusionary practices (see Gill, 2016). In challenging the ontological divide between state and society, an anti-essentialist understanding of states encourages insights into the social processes that shape governmental practices (Gill, 2010), whilst retaining the ability to critique their effects. Secondly, in overlooking inherent variations in state practices, conventional studies of states tend to reify their coherence and consistency (Painter, 2006). These accounts too often treat government policies as being implemented evenly; and thus fail to recognize the inconsistency that results from discretion and organizational differences across time and space, or what Gill (2010: 634) terms '... the fractured, multiscalar and peopled nature of states.'. Whilst welfare (e.g. Beatty and Fothergill, 2014, 2016; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Patrick, 2017) and asylum (e.g. Robinson et al., 2003; Allsopp et al., 2014) policy analyses offer important critical accounts, their conceptualization of states limits an awareness of the variety of practices that constitute them, including more subtle, ideational modes of governance (see Tyler, 2013).

Instead of relying on these approaches then, I draw from a theoretical field that consciously departs from reification and a separate spheres assumption (Painter, 2006). Deriving from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropology (Sharma and Gupta, 2009), political theory (Mitchell, 1991) sociology (Jessop, 1990; 2007; Humphris, 2019), and geography (Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010), these 'alternative understandings' of states have explicitly addressed the nature of the state in their analyses of policy and governance in a variety of contexts. Whilst diverse in terms of disciplinary background and empirical focus, the contributions I draw from in this thesis all share a common set of theoretical concerns. Drawing from the long and diverse field of critical state theory (see Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Jessop, 2015), alternative understandings all see the state not as a clearly defined entity that effects

territories and populations, but as an incoherent, socially contingent, and elusive phenomenon.

The nature of the state and its relationship with society has long been a concern of state theorists from a range of scholarly traditions (*ibid.*). Of particular influence here, sociologist Bob Jessop (1990; 2006; 2007) has drawn on Marxist (Gramsci, 1971, 2006; Poulantzas, 1976) and poststructuralist (Foucault, 1978, 1982) thinkers to trace a historical shift in the way that states operate with the scaling back of the post-war welfare state and advent of neoliberalism in the West since the 1970s. Jessop's (1990) work was novel in that it explored how state authority went from functioning through hierarchical *government* and direct action to more diverse and networked forms of *governance*. In what Jessop (*ibid.*) conceives as 'metagovernance', he thus challenged the notion of the state being a well-defined and proactive political force and reimagined it as a more amorphous and indirect guarantor of social relations and governmental practices. At a time of prominent claims surrounding the purported demise of sovereign authority in the context of globalization (Ohmae, 1990), Jessop (1990) and other poststructuralist thinkers (e.g. Mitchel, 1991; Abrams, 1988) reinvigorated debates surrounding the structure, purpose, and authority of the state throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Here, poststructuralist state theory became more concerned with the separate spheres assumption and directed scholarship towards the everyday functions of the state (e.g. Painter, 2006), and so it is these theoretical contributions that the thesis primarily draws from.

Following Abrams (1988) and Mitchell's (1991) work on reification, geographer Joe Painter (2006) mobilises the notion of 'state effects' to explore the prosaic manifestation of the state in everyday life. Here, Painter (2006) rejects the notion of states as coherent political entities, arguing that they should be perceived through its practices and effects:

'... it is possible to minimize the problem of reification through a focus on the production of state effects and, I want to suggest, through a particular emphasis on the practices through which such effects arise. Rather than focusing on formal and structural relationships, such an emphasis would examine in detail what the statization of social life involves and would describe the actual practices through which social relations of stateness are reproduced'

(Painter, 2006: 759)

In identifying the inherent difficulty defining or conceptualizing the state as a concrete reality, Painter (2006, 758) suggests that we should be more concerned with studying



the *idea* of the state as ‘... a symbolic resource on which (various actors and institutions) draw to produce their effects...(;)... an imagined collective actor (...) which is... the source of central political authority for a national territory.’. Here, the state is understood as a political or ideational project that is made real only in its effects on social life. For Mitchell (1991: 81), whilst state effects are diffuse and difficult to grasp, it is precisely this imprecision that has been the ‘source of its political strength as a mythic or ideological construct.’. As Jeffrey (2015) points out, like Benedict Anderson (1991) argued with respect to nations, states’ ideational basis does not make them illusory or insignificant. Instead, it should focus scholarship on *how* the idea of the state and its effects are reproduced (Jeffrey, 2015).

Expanding on the significance of state effects, Painter (2006) mobilizes the notion of prosaics to emphasise their mundane, fractured and processual character. Whilst departing from the more established critical framework of governmentality (see below, Foucault, 1991; 2004; Rimke, 2000), Painter points out that both perspectives share a concern with everyday practices. After discussing states’ multifaceted and amorphous character, Painter (Painter, 2006: 764) calls for greater attention to be paid to the consequentially uneven, contingent, and problematic nature of governance:

‘... if we agree that ‘the state is not a unitary object but is, rather, a set of practices enacted through relationships between people, places, and institutions’ (Desbiens, Mountz, & WaltonRoberts, 2004: 242), then our accounts must give full weight to the heterogeneity, complexity and contradictoriness of state institutions.’

From this, Painter calls for analyses that attend to the myriad process and practices through which the state permeates everyday life. He advocates this to challenge not only the separate spheres assumption or the reification of the state in academic and public discourse, but also the state’s own projection of stability and authority. As I shall discuss with respect to my data collection strategy in the next chapter, such a critique has been especially influential in anthropological studies of governance and social policy (Sharma and Gupta, 2009), shaping ethnographic methodologies and insights into the elusive social and cultural processes that reproduce states (Jeffrey, 2015; see Trouillot, 2001; Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Navaro-Yashin, 2002, 2012).

In drawing heavily from this strand of poststructuralist state theory (Abrams, 1988; Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006), the thesis answers Painter’s (2006) call to study the ways in which state effects are reproduced through mundane practices and myriad interactions between state bureaucracies and individuals. This is not to say that my

analysis seeks to reject the significance of macro-level process, more that I direct attention to the overlooked practices and encounters that reproduce states in everyday life. Yet, as this thesis' latter chapters argue, treating the everyday in isolation from the realm of policy, law, and statist dogma would be to ignore the significance of broader political and symbolic structures and ways in which micro and macro-level processes feedback and interact.

## **2.2 Sovereignty and the state of exception**

An ever-present focus for academic debate on states, the notion of sovereignty is particularly relevant here. An elusive and pliable concept, sovereignty somewhat loosely refers to states' legal and political status and authority (Suganami, 2007). Even as the importance of nation-states has been brought into question since the 1990s (Ohmae, 1990), sovereignty has remained prominent in academic literature. As Barkan (2015: 48) asserts '...as global forces and processes continue to buffet states, sovereign power remains a structuring influence on politics across and between local, national, and global scales.'. Where most meditations on sovereignty pertain to the latter two (see Krasner, 2001), in this thesis I focus on how sovereignty is practiced and performed at finer scales and through local and embodied encounters between subjects and state apparatus. In doing so I follow innovative contributions from political geographers (Nyers, 2006b; Johnson et al., 2011), amongst others (Edkins et al. 2012; Vaughan-Williams, 2009), that have critiqued a widely-held understanding of sovereignty as a stable and evenly distributed phenomenon. Leading from this critical standpoint, my analysis concerns how sovereignty manifests as an expression of power relations, whose form shifts with different temporal and spatial contexts (Nyers, 2006b). As Koskenniemi (2011: 63) writes, when grounded in this way '...we no longer see any magic in sovereignty... (i)t is merely a functional power possessed by a ruler or a government to rule a population for its own good.'. In de-mystifying sovereignty in this way, we can begin to deconstruct the widely held perception of states' absolute authority and consistency, and in turn address the question of how sovereign power is negotiated in everyday life.

To make best use of this critique of reification, I draw from Carl Schmitt's (1985) influential work on the notion of exception, which he argues to be the arrangement which predicates all sovereign authority. The 'state of exception' describes the paradox of states excusing themselves from the rules of conduct they espouse, to establish a monopoly over violence and repression in the name of maintaining societal order (*ibid.*). In doing so, the state also determines which groups and individuals are designated as exceptions, and which are included in the normal social order and afforded normative rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Cameron, 2006). As often

quoted, for Schmitt (1985: 5) the 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception'. As well as explaining the political basis of sovereign power, Schmitt's (1985) notion of exception is also evident in governmental practices (Suganami, 2007) and performances (Salter, 2008). In relieving itself of accountability, the state positions itself as an ultimate authority that demands deference from its subjects; and this asymmetrical political relation is reproduced performatively (Nyers, 2006b). For Magnusson (1996: 293), without 'continuous political activity' and governmental routines the sovereign state wouldn't be as enduringly effective, nor granted the same deference or permanence that it generally receives. The state's authority and perceived indispensability is thus dependent on the perpetuation of myriad practices and performances (*ibid.*). Evoking a poststructuralist understanding of the state then (see above; Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010), '... the concept/practice of sovereignty must be understood as being ontologically vacant, yet performatively rich.' (Nyers, 2006b: 26).

Practices and performances of sovereignty are, however, inherently uneven and vary significantly across space and between different social groups (Lake and Newman, 2002; Povinelli, 2011). Indeed, exception is based on processes of inclusion and exclusion. States do not only designate their own exceptional status, but also that of certain groups of people or individuals in their sovereign territories or spheres of influence (Agamben, 1998). As shall be discussed shortly, as bounded entities, nation-states are necessarily defined by both outside and inside, and thus define and exclude certain groups as a means of defining what and who is included within a national community (Anderson, 2013). It is here that the connection between sovereign power and social exclusion and inclusion becomes apparent, not only with respect to non-citizens, but also certain groups of citizens (*ibid.*). Whilst definitions of in/exclusion vary (Cameron, 2006), in this thesis I define political inclusion as 'normal' access to the socio-legal and material rights afforded to a majority of citizens in a given state (*ibid.*). In liberal democracies then, this encompasses equality in the eyes of the law, freedom from repressive state intervention, and a level of social and economic security that allows full, functional participation in society (Hayes et al., 2008; Buckmaster and Thomas, 2009). Although in/exclusion is not a simple binary, I understand exclusion broadly here as any state of affairs in which these rights and freedoms are formally or informally denied; or, as Cameron (2006: 402) writes regarding sovereignty: 'social exclusion provides the exceptional state...'

Perhaps the most apparent mode through which sovereign in/exclusion works is territorial. Indeed, the modern state is an inherently territorial entity, whose legitimacy and authority is predicated on a clearly bounded national territory over which authority and control is claimed (Elden, 2009). In order to ostensibly control

what and who is present inside sovereign territory, all states establish and maintain some form of border control. For Salter (2008: 365), '(t)he border is a permanent state of exception, which makes the 'normal' biopolitical control of government inside the territorial frontier of the state possible.'. As shall be considered in greater depth in Chapters 5 and 6, following Agamben (1998), the inside-outside binary upon which the in/exclusions of the border are predicated is, in practice, blurred; and many citizens and non-citizens who are nominally inside sovereign territory are excluded in different ways. Nonetheless, as the far-reaching effects of immigration restrictions in all their forms attest, the state's ability to use territory and border regimes to define social and political inclusion remain a potent expression of sovereign power (Salter, 2008).

Despite its relevance beyond the study of borders (Krasner, 1999), the concept of sovereignty has only sparingly been applied to matters of welfare governance (e.g. Cameron, 2006). Instead, the political relation between individuals with citizenship status and the state has more often been discussed with the language of social contract or 'social citizenship' (Keating, 2009; Shaver, 2002). Where discussions of sovereignty have figured in welfare scholarship, this has tended to focus more on individual sovereignty. For instance, with the expansion of welfare conditionality in recent decades, Shaver (2002: 331) has argued that '... welfare is being transformed from a limited social right to support provided on condition, and from treating the claimant as a sovereign individual to a subject of paternalistic supervision'. Yet, as Cameron (2006) argues, processes of sovereign in/exclusion also exist within the realm of welfare governance. States decide what traits, behaviours and actions entail good citizenship, and affords protections to those who prove these with social and economic security. States' increasingly restrictionist welfare policies and accompanying rhetoric position benefit claimants as existing outside of the accepted norm (Anderson, 2013) and are thus (like asylum seekers (Nyers, 2006)) legitimately excluded from many of the expected rights and protections of citizenship. Theoretically, it is the common notions of sovereignty, exception, and in/exclusion, that this thesis draws from to explore how governance was practiced, performed, and negotiated across the UK's border and welfare regimes.

### **2.3 Governance, bureaucracy, and distance**

For several decades now, scholars from across the social sciences have deployed the concept of governance when analysing the different means through which states operate (Jessop, 1990; Rhodes, 1997). A somewhat ambiguous term (Hughes, 2010), governance in its broadest sense refers to '... any kind of coordination between organizations, parts of organizations, groups and individuals, ranging from hierarchical

'command and control' systems to decentralized forms of interaction...' (Painter, 2009: 312). Whilst the concept has often been treated with such descriptive simplicity, the more conceptually nuanced analyses that I draw from here have attended to the complex arrangements of different actors and processes that constitute governance in a range of contexts (Jessop, 1990, 2007; Rhodes, 1997; Painter, 2000). Strongly influenced by Foucauldian thinking (1991; 2004), many critical scholars of the state have drawn attention here to novel technologies of control that have emerged with the development of neoliberal capitalism since the 1970s and '80s (Rose, 1999; Bevir, 2011). Notably, Jessop (1990; 2007) argued that period was defined by an epochal shift in the nature of the state from hierarchical *government* to non-hierarchical *governance*. In such a reading, it is the dispersed, networked, and indirect character of governance that distinguishes it from the more direct and discernible practices of government that characterised the pre-neoliberal age (Bever, 2011). As I shall explore, with this shift has come ever-increasing use of private and voluntary-sector actors in the delivery of public services (*ibid.*), and it is the complexity that arises from such arrangements that this thesis seeks to explore.

With respect to asylum and welfare governance, I pay close attention on the one hand to how governmental discourses and practices shape individual subjectivities and experiences. On the other, I also consider how welfare and asylum governance divides and marginalizes different sections of the population; both directly – through legal and policy instruments – and indirectly – through discursive and ideational constructions (see section 2.4, below). In this sense, my analysis touches on a concept deriving from governance and coined by Foucault (1991; 2004) which emphasizes the technologies and arrangements through which individuals and societies come to self-govern – *governmentality*. As demonstrated by the establishment of anti-welfare and anti-asylum consensus (Tyler, 2013; Slater, 2014; section 2.4), states maintain legitimacy through ideational and discursive forms of governmentality (Rimke, 2000). Yet this strand of Foucault's work also attends to how states' discursive power regulates everyday life and subjectivities through often opaque and surreptitious forms of self-governance (see Molé 2008). The concepts of governance and governmentality thus offer a pertinently flexible vocabulary to study the diffuse and shifting set of actors, spaces, discourses, and ideologies that make-up welfare and asylum regimes.

One fundamental and enduring feature of governance is its reliance on bureaucratic systems to collect, process, and act on information about populations and individuals. Traditionally, scholarly debates around state bureaucracies have hinged on Max Weber's (1978) assertion that the efficiency, objectivity, and rationality provided by

functioning bureaucracies represents an 'ideal' means of governing. For Weber (1978) detailed record keeping, highly regulated and hierarchical divisions of labour, and uniform decision making, means that bureaucracies are both the fairest and most efficient way to govern; an orthodoxy which reigned for half a century. However, in the post-war era this 'objective' detachment between decision makers and the human consequences of their decisions was argued by prominent thinkers such as Arendt (1970) and Bauman (1988) to have underpinned many of the state-led atrocities of the Second World War and Holocaust. As Chapters 7 develops in greater depth, from this critique, scholars have analysed how contemporary bureaucratic structures produce different forms of distance that facilitate draconian acts of state violence in both asylum (Gill, 2016) and welfare systems (Carter, 2018). Moreover, as Lipsky's (1983) seminal work on 'street-level bureaucracy' argues, bureaucratic systems rely on the work of individual employees at one or more stage and the consistent objectivity that Weber spoke of is thus illusory.

More recently, and moving beyond a concern with decision making processes, ethnographic studies in particular (see Sharma and Gupta, 2009) have attended to the often-overlooked importance of bureaucratic practices and technologies in everyday life. As Painter (2006: 753) observes:

The British state documents and monitors ... life by issuing a birth certificate, a health card, examination certificates, a National Insurance number, a driver's licence, a marriage certificate, an electoral register, an income tax file number, perhaps a passport and, in the not too distant future, an identity card. Behind each of these registration numbers, licences and certificates are yet more documents and records held in state archives tracking employment, earnings, criminal convictions, academic performance, visits to doctors and hospitals, ownership of vehicles and landed property and numerous other features of individuals' 'private' lives.

Painter captures here not only the prosaic and pervasive presence of state bureaucracies in everyday life, but also the technological forms that this takes. Indeed, with technological advances, states have mobilized ever more efficient and sophisticated practices and technical devices to document and control different aspects of subjects' lives (Henman, 2019; Lee and Zhang, 2017). As such, increasing attention has been paid to often subtle roles that different technological forms play in shaping experiences of governance in both asylum (see Darling, 2014) and welfare (Sheldrick, 2020 unpublished) regimes. Following these analyses, this thesis departs from the notion of bureaucracy as a consistent feature of states, to focus instead on the

dispersed, everyday practices and encounters that constitute what we perceive as states.

## **2.4 'National objects' and the cultural politics of in/exclusion**

To better understand how the parameters of governance and in/exclusion are drawn by the state, I follow two key texts that have explored the intersecting cultural politics of the UK's border and welfare regimes. The first is Bridget Anderson's 2013 book *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. In *Us and Them*, Anderson historicizes the cultural politics of immigration control and questions the taken-for-granted distinction between non-citizens and citizens in the public imagination and discourse. Here, she develops the concept of the 'community of value' to explain the value-laden limits of political belonging in the UK. For Anderson (2013), states are not merely constituted of sovereign territory and collections of people of shared socio-legal status, but are founded and reproduced around an imagined community of 'good citizens' who all share a common set of values, ideals, behaviours and cultural signifiers (of ethnicity, language and so on). In neoliberal democracies such as Britain, good citizens are defined by the prevailing culture as hard-working and law-abiding individuals and families who are net contributors to, rather than dependent on, social security. It is the protection of this community of value that impels many state interventions and justifies regimes of governance and control. Increasingly, the state posits that the community of value requires protection from malign incursions from outside sovereign territory - embodied in the form of migrants, or 'non-citizens' - with such dogma positioning them as an inherent threat to the normal national order. Citing Bonnie Honig (2001) here, Anderson (2013: 4) argues that 'the figure of the foreigner' thus defines the nation and any notion of a national community 'from the outside'. Here, immigration controls are seen not only as a matter of policy and socio-legal status, but also a cultural politics based around perceived worth and value. As Gill (2010: 626) remarks: 'What better way to recommend the worldwide system of nation states than through the abjection of those outside it?'

Crucially, Anderson (2013) doesn't only conceive of the community of value in terms of immigration status and extends her analysis to the exclusion of certain groups of citizens within the nation-state. Here, she adopts the term 'failed citizens' to refer to individuals who fail in one way or another to display the values and ideals of contemporary British citizenship; including the long-term unemployed, benefits claimants, and anyone deemed unproductive or criminal by society:

'The Failed Citizen is both a disappointment and threat to the local community and/or the nation. They have a problem of culture,

fecklessness, and ill-discipline leading to them making the wrong choices and also to welfare dependence.' (ibid.,: 4).

In this logic, as with the imagined external threat of non-citizens, the community of value also needs to be protected from the internal threat embodied by failed citizens. As Anderson (2013: 4) continues, 'The community of value is defined from the outside by the non-citizen, but also from the inside, by the 'Failed Citizen'.

Although failed citizens can't be removed from sovereign territory, as non-citizens are, they are systematically denied rights and entitlements to the economic security and freedoms afforded to 'good citizens'. It is from this conceptual framework that my analysis attends to the ways this political exclusion of failed citizens is reproduced through welfare governance specifically. Whilst Anderson's account is useful and innovative in recognising the lineage and blurred boundaries between excluded citizens and non-citizens, it is grounded mostly in discussions of immigration policy and labour markets at a national level, with less attention paid to the lived experiences welfare governance or its intersections with border governance.

With this lacuna in mind, I look to a second key text that examines connections between asylum and welfare governance - Imogen Tyler's (2013) *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. Tyler's (ibid.) work in large part focuses on the common 'abjection' of different socially excluded groups in the UK. Following Kristeva (1982), Tyler defines abjection as '... the violent exclusionary forces of sovereign power: those forces that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste...' (Tyler, 2013: 21). Crucially, *Revolting Subjects* (ibid.) grounds an account of abjection in an analysis of governmental practices and experiences across different marginalized groups in the UK. For this thesis, I draw especially from Tyler's analysis of the psychosocial dimensions and rhetorical foundation of abjection. More than this though, Tyler's reading of abjection provides a rare example of an analytical framework that consciously considers both border and social welfare systems concurrently.

Like Anderson (2013), Tyler explores how sovereign authority is predicated on manufactured threats to national security and prosperity that come from both within and outside of sovereign territory. Here, Tyler focuses on the construction of figures of derision and disgust that she terms 'national abjects' – scapegoats produced through hostile state and media rhetoric and perpetuated in everyday life. The first figure of national abjection that is pertinent here is that of the 'bogus asylum seeker'. This construct first appeared in the 1990s during a period when there was heightened public anxiety around immigration and national sovereignty, and Britain began to be



portrayed in the national press as a 'soft touch' to incoming migrants (*ibid.* see also Winder, 2004). The notion that British national sovereignty was being diminished due to an apparently lax immigration system was concurrent with the establishment of a 'disgust consensus' centred on the figure of the 'bogus asylum seeker'; which served as a byword for migrant illegality, disease and criminality, an invading and parasitic force threatening to overwhelm public services (*ibid.*).

Chapter 3 of *Revolting Subjects* draws heavily on secondary empirical research to evidence the scale and ferocity of the defamation of asylum seekers in print media especially. Words such as 'crime' 'horde' and 'monsters' featured repeatedly in newspaper stories about asylum (from ICAR, 2004); whilst Tyler (2013) also notes that one prominent tabloid publication -the Daily Express - ran twenty-two front-page asylum scare stories over a thirty-one-day period in 2003 (MRCF, 2011). Whilst manufactured by the media, Government politicians were also complicit in the establishment of this anti-asylum consensus (Dean, 2012) and political parties began to compete over 'tough' stances on asylum and immigration. Moreover, in establishing a separate socio-legal classification for asylum seekers in 1993 (see Parker, 2018) the state formalized their exceptional status in law. As I shall explore in Chapter 5, when it came to asylum seekers, this allowed governments to ignore normal rights, freedoms and entitlements and enact a series of punitive asylum policies from the mid-1990s onwards.

Alongside the vilification of refugees, Tyler (2013) also explores how abjection began to define the cultural politics of class from the 1990s onwards. Here, she identifies the establishment of a powerful consensus that poverty and worklessness was primarily a cultural phenomenon, and that reliance on state welfare was the result of individual, rather than structural, failures. With structural and class-based explanations of poverty increasingly ignored, Britain's poor were effectively imagined as *choosing* to live outside of the community of value, and therefore could legitimately be targeted by social policies that encouraged them to become 'good citizens' (Anderson, 2013). Akin to the cultural politics of asylum at this time, discursive processes were central to this mode of abjection and centred around 'the grotesque and comic figure of 'the chav'' (Tyler, 2013: 154). Once again, it was national media and television that drove the construction of this national abject forward, but Tyler also emphasises the role of Internet forums, chatrooms, and early social media platforms here as '(t)his figure moved relentlessly through public culture on a wave of mockery, contempt and disgust... shap(ing) and craft(ing) the chav as a knowable figure.' (*ibid.*: 165). This familiarity, fear and disgust created public consent for the punitive welfare reforms I focus on in Chapter 6. Crucially, these failed citizens - the chav (see also Jones,

2012b), the benefits scrounger (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2016) - provided an Other against which 'good citizens' could define themselves (Tyler, 2013). And so, both the manufactured figures of the bogus asylum seeker and the chav create consent for systematic exclusion and the production of 'human waste' at the margins of the state (Bauman, 2004; Wacquant, 2008).

Whilst Tyler builds her thesis around media discourse analyses, a concern with the state runs through her argument. Centrally, she makes a Foucauldian (1991; 2004) argument that contemporary state power relies not so much on overt acts and interventions, but indirect forms of subjectification; in this case, the cultural production of figures of abjection that effectively draw its boundaries of in/exclusion and legitimize its authority. Although attentive to states' discursive powers in this way, much of *Revolting Subjects* is dedicated to forms of contestation and a concern with '... how states, both states of being and nation states, are made and unmade through abjection (Butler and Spivak 2007).' (Tyler, 2013: 13). Despite being conceptually innovative and important here, Tyler's (2013) account is less focussed on the experiential connections between border and welfare governance as they intersect in everyday life. Whilst *Revolting Subjects'* case studies are insightful and pertinent to asylum and welfare as discrete governmental systems, the ways in which these meet in practice are (for this thesis) notably absent; and it is here that I seek to contribute to these debates.

## **2.5 State encounters and the 'peopled' state**

Underlying both Anderson's (2013) and Tyler's (2013) accounts of marginalization, and the rhetoric surrounding migration and welfare alike (see Humphris, 2019), is the matter of deservingness and moral worth (Sales, 2002; Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015). As well as justifying the increasing conditionality attached to both welfare entitlements (Dwyer, 2004; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018) and immigration status (Chauvin & Garcés-Masareñas, 2014; Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015), the moralistic discourses that Anderson (2013) and Tyler (2013) scrutinise also informally shape how, and if, individuals are afforded the protection of the state. Notions of the 'good', 'genuine' and 'deserving' claimant, paves the way not only for conditionality in policy, but also for personal judgments based on moral worth that function as the boundary of political membership (Humphris, 2019). As Chapter 9 discusses, the moral dimensions of service encounter practices (ibid.; Gill, 2016) and judgments of performed 'refugeeness' (Szczepanikova, 2010; Häkli et al., 2017) or efforts to find employment (Wright and Patrick, 2019) were crucial factors determining political in/exclusion; and service encounters thus form a key focus of my analysis.

In analysing interactions between state bureaucracies and individual subjects, the thesis draws from anthropological scholarship that has concerned the 'peopled' nature of states (Jones, 2012; see also Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Sharma & Gupta, 2009). Whilst this particular field of study has grown considerably over the past three decades, it follows a long tradition of scholarship that has studied interactions between people and states, much of which has drawn on the concepts of bureaucracy, governance, and governmentality (Sharma & Gupta, 2009). The drawing of connections between the peopled quality of states and broader analyses of governance has brought with it here a concern for the increasingly diverse array of actors involved in the delivery of public services and state interventions (Jones, 2012; Sharma and Gupta, 2009). Indeed, as seen with the outsourcing of both asylum and welfare services to the private and voluntary sectors, states have increasingly, but inconsistently, sought to achieve their objectives by shifting its operations and responsibilities 'outwards' to myriad social actors and institutions (Gill, 2010).

To better understand the role of different actors and interactions in shaping governmental practices and outcomes, scholars have increasingly engaged with the notion of encounter over the past two decades (Jones, 2012). Whilst efforts to define or conceptualize this hitherto vague concept have only recently been produced (Wilson, 2017), I follow Wilson's (2011) broad understanding of encounter as '... the coming together of myriad different bodies, things and spaces...' (Wilson, 2011: 55). From this, an analytical concern for 'bureaucratic' (Hasenfeld et al., 1987; Tsalapanatis, 2017) 'state' encounters (Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Jones, 2012) offer more of a focus on the implications of governmental arrangements and practices as they are manifested in the interactions and moments when subjects interact with states. Here, I follow Dittmer's (2013: 386) call to connect broader political debates with everyday practices, '...as a local, bottom-up set of processes that need to be studied as such – via disaggregation and attention to both specific sites and events...'. Pertinently, a concern with encounters allows critical analyses that move beyond reified studies of policy to draw greater attention to the everyday practices and performances that constitute lived experiences of the state (Sharma and Gupta, 2009; Tsalapanatis, 2017; Jones, 2012). Here, mundane acts and routines – such as form-filling, waiting in line, or attending a Job Centre interview - that may appear incidental in-fact reveal how states shape the daily lives of governed subjects (Trouillot, 2001).

Importantly however, attending to diffuse cases of encounter doesn't limit understandings to subjective experience but also captures broader power structures; as Hepworth (2014: 2) argues 'the 'encounter' is not a discrete spatio-temporal event; whether explicitly or implicitly, each encounter carries with it traces of broader power

relations...'. State encounters can thus be understood as significant both as events in and of themselves, but also as a means of understanding state power and governance more broadly. As Jones (2012) argues, analyses of state encounters can reveal the inherently inconsistent and contested nature of states, as evident in the discretionary interventions of bureaucrats (see Lipsky, 1987) and different forms of contestation of governmental processes. For Tsalapanatis (2017: 101)'...(t)he word 'encounter' itself hints at the adversarial qualities that are often present or at least perceived in (state encounters)... (T)hese can be spaces of contestation. Each individual approaches them with their own capacities, constraints and understandings which are transformed by the encounter.'. With contestation and discretion being a commonplace feature of bureaucratic encounters then, these interactions and their effects would best be understood as the product of negotiation, rather than the neutral implementation of policy or governmental practices. Indeed, states' ability to govern populations through making them 'legible' hinge on negotiations around what and how information about citizens is recorded (Scott, 1998). Whilst unpredictable, for Wilson (2017), encounters hold inherently transformative potential and can thus be thought of as in a continual state of 'becoming'. Although state bureaucracies are inherently presented as stable and consistent, the myriad peopled encounters that constitute them are inherently incoherent and variable (Jones, 2012; Dubois, 2014).

Empirical studies of state encounters have tended towards a concern with face-to-face interactions between citizens and the state actors (Dubois, 2014). For instance, Dubois's (2014) work on welfare encounters illuminates the significance of state agents' discretionary powers. Despite this discretion, Dubois (2014) also details how the restrictionist architecture of modern welfare governance means that governmental objectives regarding the punishment and control of claimants are consistently achieved. Conversely, however, Carolina Kobelinsky's (2015: 87) study of asylum adjudications in France observes how, on meeting refugees, some adjudicators 'displace the prevailing institutional logic, replacing the attitude of suspicion toward the applicants with the benefit of the doubt.' (See also Gill, 2016, on asylum adjudications and 'moral distance'). Although this type of divergence relies on the fickle prospect of a positive emotional response being elicited from state agents, it nonetheless shows the generative discretionary potential that exists within the peopled state. As Jones (2012) argues, far from being a stable entity, this contingency is indicative of states' inherent potentiality. In paying attention to the situated, 'in-between' moments of encounter between claimants and state bureaucracies (Bartels, 2013: 476), this thesis analyses these interactions to understand how they shape experiences and effects of asylum and welfare governance.

## 2.6 The body, affect, and assemblage

Accompanying a concern with encounter, both welfare and borders scholarship has increasingly attended to the embodied dimensions of governance. Drawing particularly from feminist thought (see Butler, 1993; 2006; Mountz, 2011) and Foucauldian biopolitics (see Foucault, 2008; Lemke, 2001), asylum scholars have explored the ways in which border governance is experienced and produced corporeally. For instance, geographers Gill (2009) and Darling (2011) have shown how the UK's asylum system operates by directing circulations of bodies between different sites of securitized accommodation. Whilst Mavin (2019) has argued that the physical and psychological consequences of sub-standard housing, enforced (im)mobility, surveillance and financial hardship, positions the body as a key 'political site' of the UK's asylum system. Similarly, developments in welfare governance have been criticised for targeting the bodies of claimants (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015; Sparke, 2017); with the precarities produced by welfare reform exposing claimants to physical and mental ill-health (Moffatt et al., 2015; Williams, 2019). Likewise, encounters with the British welfare state bureaucracy have increasingly become characterised by feelings of stigma and shame (Patrick, 2016; Patrick and Simpson, 2019). Whilst these contributions differ in terms of empirical themes, what these works on asylum and welfare governance have in common is a shift in the scale of analysis of states - from a macro-level concern with policy to 'the finer scale of the body' (Mountz, 2004: 323).

Within work on embodiment and governance, emphasis has been placed on the emotional effects of state practices and encounters. Indeed, a broader concern for how lived experience is phenomenologically 'felt' and the importance of emotions in structuring experiences of social and spatial phenomena has become an established theme in Human Geography (Thien, 2005). In a variety of contexts, Geographers have explored how spaces are experienced and understood through a range of emotions, including: ambivalence (Rose, 2004), anger (Smith et al., 2016), anxiety (Bondi, 2005), discomfort (McQuoid and Dijst, 2012), embarrassment (*ibid.*), despair (Smith et al., 2016), shame (Haylett, 2003), stress and distress (Morrice, 2013), familiarity (Kearney and Bradley, 2009), joy (Kern et al., 2014), and hope (Henderson, 2008), to name but a few (see Pile, 2010: 6). For Dawney (2011: 601), emotion is 'a sociocultural expression of this felt intensity'. Importantly for this thesis, insights here have moved beyond passive expressions of experience, with feminist Geographers (e.g. Bondi, 2005) also considering the role of emotions in reproducing and contesting (gendered) power structures and political subjectivities (Pile, 2010). However, the significance of subjective emotions in explaining embodied geographies of power and

social relations has been questioned, with scholars increasingly turning to the interpersonal and pre-cognitive concept of 'affect' (*ibid.*).

Definitions of 'affect' are elusive and contested (Pile, 2010; Dawney, 2011), but differ to emotions primarily in that affects are inherently relational; always 'transpersonal' and produced through the connections between different (human and non-human) bodies as they interact in proximity (Anderson, 2006). O'Grady (2018) argues that '(a)ffect prioritizes the body as a means for making sense of the world':

'... affect emphasizes reading the body as a means for expressing the state of affairs or situation it finds itself in. The body, for theories of affect, is at once both a faculty by which we make sense of the situations we find ourselves within and a medium that betrays the significance of the situation in which the body performs.'

(*ibid.*)

As relational phenomena then, affects are produced through the interactions of different bodies, objects, and spaces, and are thus made and unmade as components of these assemblages shift over time. Here there has been an interest in how affects collect into perceptible 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009) which 'erupt and decay' with changing configurations of bodies and energies (Bissell, 2010). Indeed, despite their elusive and detached appearance, states have the power to affect the world in myriad ways (Woodward, 2014). Yet, affects and the arrangements that determine them are often unclear and complex (*ibid.*). Here, Woodward (2014:23) develops the concept of 'state affects' to better understand the 'affective undercurrent to statist relations' that often shape bureaucratic encounter, identifying collective feelings of 'not knowing' that accompany states' often confusing bureaucratic processes. However, whilst identifying such trends, Woodward (2014: 26) is keen to emphasise the variability emerging from what he argues to be '... more contingent state affects that simultaneously leave bodies differently affected despite their assumptions of state unity and coherence.'. With this in mind, by attending to different governmental arrangements and scales of analysis, my thesis explores both individual embodied experience and collective atmospheres produced through state encounters.

Concurrent with scholarship on embodiment, affect and atmosphere, geographers have increasingly attended to the role that objects and materiality play in reproducing various socio-spatial phenomena and experiences (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Dittmer, 2013). This renewed concern for 'objects, bodies and matter' (Müller, 2015: 27) has coincided with calls to 'rematerialize geography' in the wake of the discipline's cultural turn and perceived preoccupation with discourse and representation (*ibid.*;

Anderson and Wylie, 2009). In political geography, the 'material turn' of the past decade has prompted an interest in how political space is co-constituted between human and non-human entities, including with respect to the state (Allen and Cochrane, 2011; Dittmer, 2013).

For the development of this thesis, work that has explored both materiality and face-to-face state encounters have been especially instructive (Navaro-Yashin's (2002, 2012; Wright and Patrick, 2019). Of conceptual and methodological importance here, anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin's (2002, 2012) innovative ethnographies of state practices in Turkey and Cyprus have examined how sovereign authority is conveyed and negotiated through subjects' (affective) interactions with government documents, materials and spaces (Jeffrey, 2015). From this, a handful of useful studies have explored how the material agency of governmental documents emerge in combination with the socio-legal and cultural modes of abjection and governance discussed above (Darling, 2014; Patrick, 2016; Wright and Patrick, 2019). Here, I look to relational theorizations that view materiality as closely imbricated with discourse; with the objects that underpin state bureaucracies (letters, application forms etc.) understood as '... material-discursive collectives...' that '... produce particular affective fields and to generate feelings, responses, and actions.' (Darling, 2014: 493; see also Barad, 2003; Dittmer, 2013). Similarly, for Müller (2015: 27), an appreciation of the emergent, co-produced capacity of state materials to engender powerful effects means that they are better conceived as 'socio-material', a 'co-constitution between humans and non-humans.'. As Chapter 8 argues, whilst little has been written with respect to material 'things' and welfare encounters especially, such an analytical concern for socio-materiality can usefully be applied to developments in this sphere too.

Linking a concern for governmental discourses, technologies, embodiment, affect, and encounter, geographical analyses of socio-materiality and governance have drawn on assemblage thinking to consider how different active components of states coalesce (*ibid.*). Stemming from Deleuze and Guattari (1980), the concept of assemblage became prominent in geographical scholarship in the 2000s (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011) as a means of conceptualizing how ever-changing human, representational, and material forces make and unmake different spatial phenomena. Whilst remaining less prominent in broader state theory, assemblage thinking has become increasingly influential in this respect in geography. For instance, Allen and Cochrane (2010) have argued for a topological understanding that conceives state power as reaching through multiple scales of governance, departing from conventional accounts vertically nested scales of government. Although conceptually pertinent, much of this work on state assemblages focuses empirically on nation states (*ibid.*), cities (McFarlane, 2011), or

particular policy areas (see Savage, 2019), with less attention afforded to diffuse governmental practices or encounters. Crucially, akin to Jones' (2012) theorization of state encounters, assemblage thinking allows for analyses that see states as shifting entities that are being constantly made and re-made through different social, institutional, and spatial contexts. Returning to a finer scale of analysis then, Painter (2006: 767) draws on assemblage thinking to argue that state effects are not actualized through direct governmental practices – as conventional policy analyses imply – but through assemblages of '...numerous prosaic relationships and activities...' that are '... necessarily hybrids of nominally state and nominally non-state institutions, practices, and actors.'. To better understand the nuances of how governance is experienced and reproduced in practice, this thesis seeks to mobilise assemblage thinking in this way – attending both to states' uneven and unstable nature, and the numerous shifting elements that constitute them.

Indeed, assemblage thinking is pertinent here in that it is concerned with how and why socio-spatial orders emerge, hold together, and fall part (Müller, 2015). For Passoth and Rowland (2010: 818) '... its contribution to state theory is in rethinking the character of modern states to be the outcome of actually performed assemblages of all those practices of building it, protecting it, governing it and theorizing about it.'. Whilst Dittmer (2013: 385) argues for '... a relational ontology that emphasizes the complex interactions among the elements of an assemblage... (,) interactions (that) produce emergent effects which themselves reshape the assemblage's elements.' with '... implications for understandings of agency, subjectivity, and systemic change.'. In this sense, assemblage thinking is not only conceptually pertinent – linking states' constitutive elements and the different analytical frameworks discussed in this chapter – but is also methodologically important in that it attends to the myriad contingencies that determine governmental practices and encounters, and their political implications.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the key literature guiding the proceeding empirical analyses. Forming the conceptual basis of this thesis, I have outlined a selection of 'alternative' understandings of the state (following Gill, 2010) that critically attend, in one way or another, to the multitude of discourses, practices and experiences that constitute systems of governance. Although the theoretical contributions reviewed here have been productive in analysing both the state more broadly and individual policy areas, there has been less work on the conceptual and empirical connections scholarly between different areas of governance; and it is first and foremost here that I make an original contribution. To return our attention to the second aim of the thesis,



whilst the concepts reviewed here have all informed the study of asylum and welfare governance to some extent, these topics have mostly remained separate in scholarship on governance and the state. In exploring the intersections of asylum and welfare austerity then, I take forward state theory's critique of the separate spheres assumption (see Painter, 2006) to question the customary isolation of scholarship according to predetermined governmental divides. Whilst Anderson (2013) and Tyler's (2013) accounts are insightful and innovative in recognising the lineage and blurred boundaries between excluded citizens and non-citizens, these critiques are less focussed on the experiential connections between border and welfare governance when and where they intersect in everyday life; and it is here that I seek to ground and enliven these debates. In this way, I also contribute to critical state theory more broadly, and the well-established reification critique in particular (Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006), by identifying and challenging tendencies to silo analyses of governance according to the state's own contrived and exclusionary categorizations.

A second notable contribution to critical state scholarship that I make concerns connections between broader power relations and everyday practices and experience (Dittmer, 2013; Hepworth, 2014). In exploring how sovereign power is negotiated in everyday life I seek to de-mystify sovereignty and challenge the widely held perception of states' consistent and evenly distributed authority (Painter, 2006). With this critical ontology, the insights produced through studying state encounters are not limited to subjective experience but also capture broader power structures (Jones, 2012; Hepworth, 2014) and the important ways in which micro and macro-level governmental processes feedback and interact (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Dittmer, 2013). Returning to the first specified aim of the thesis – regarding how the state is experienced and reproduced through governance – rather than defining a pivotal conceptual paradigm here, I draw from all of the analytical concepts and frameworks discussed in this chapter. Whilst diverse and somewhat disparate, taken together, I argue that these fields offer a suitably pliable conceptual basis for exploring the diverse and disparate sets of practices and experiences that reproduce asylum and welfare governance and their intersecting impacts. With this empirical focus in mind then, I now turn our attention to how I collected the primary data for this thesis.

### 3. Methodology

As a topic that has yet to receive much scholarly attention, studying the intersections of asylum dispersals and welfare austerity has necessitated the collection of primary empirical data. With the nuances of governmental practices, encounters, and lived experience also primary concerns of this thesis, I designed a multi-method research methodology based around the collection of ethnographic, interview, and documental data. Reconciling the collection of good quality, reliable, and relevant data with practical and ethical concerns surrounding the 'messy' reality of this type of methodology (Plows, 2018; Fisher, 2018) required careful consideration and planning. With such challenges in mind then, this chapter details how I collected the primary empirical data for the thesis. I begin here by describing the two charity drop-in centres where most of the data was gathered. The next three sections describe and explain the chosen data collection methods – ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and the gathering of documentary evidence. I then discuss the ethical dimensions of the study and researcher positionality, before describing how the data was coded and analysed.

Although I designed this methodology anew, I took inspiration and direction from previous pieces of research that have deployed similar methods (Darling, 2009; Garthwaite, 2015; 2016; Wolferink-Schaap, 2017; Fisher, 2018). The diversity of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical traditions, and empirical themes that have contributed to research on austerity, asylum, and the state is reflected by the variety of methodological approaches represented in these literatures; which include many quantitative (e.g. Beatty and Fothergill, 2014;2016; Stewart, 2012; Cheung and Phillimore, 2017) and mixed-method studies (e.g. Allsopp et al., 2014; Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani, 2011). However, reflecting my focus on everyday experiences of governance, the studies that have informed this methodology are all qualitative in nature. It is also worth noting here that, as a more established and defined field of study, a number of specific methodological and fieldwork guides for research with refugees (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Temple and Moran, 2006; Voutira and Doná, 2007) have been drawn upon; however, no such general guidance for researching welfare governance have been found and so all such examples have been collated here anew.

The data collection process was based around a year-long ethnographic study conducted between November 2017 and October 2018 in Rochdale, Greater Manchester; totalling over 1000 hours of fieldwork. My time in Rochdale was split equally between two charity drop-in centres, where the majority of the data was

gathered. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I decided to conduct the study in Rochdale due both to the recent and rapid increase in asylum dispersals to the town and its position as the type of smaller, peripheral urban areas that have been neglected in research on immigration and diversity (see also Burrell et al., 2019). Whilst I did originally plan to conduct the research in another location in the North West, I ultimately opted for a single site study as I felt that I would be able to produce a more detailed, richer account with the time and resources I had available. Similarly, I had originally hoped to conduct the research with government organizations (primarily the Home Office and DWP) and outsourced service providers (primarily Serco – the asylum housing provider) however, all the representatives that I contacted declined to be interviewed or grant any access for observations or document analysis. Government institutions are typically more secretive and guarded than NGOs or community organizations (Monahan and Fisher, 2015) so this was more of a hope than an expectation. The methodology was thus designed with this eventuality in mind and charity organizations form the focus of the study.

Given their marginalized position in British society, numerous and substantial barriers arise when conducting ethically sound research with welfare claimants (Smith, 2008; Carey, 2011) and refugees (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007). As a well-established way of engaging with marginalized groups in a variety of contexts (Bilger and Van Liempt, 2009; Cohen and Arieli, 2011), the recruitment of research participants was conducted using purposive, 'snowball' sampling. I began this process by contacting 'gatekeeper' organisations who worked closely with these groups. With such service providers often holding a unique position of trust with hard-to-reach and vulnerable populations (Temple and Moran, 2006; Emmel et al., 2007; Smith, 2008) and without prior personal familiarity with local support networks, this approach was needed both to find organizations where I could base the ethnography and to secure the ethical recruitment of participants.

The two drop-ins where the ethnography took place were chosen mainly due to their positions as one of only a handful of charities offering face-to-face asylum and welfare support in the Rochdale area. After researching local services online, I approached the centres' managers via email, introducing myself and the research, and arranged an introductory meeting with them. Establishing these relationships was crucial, and the majority of the primary empirical data was produced during my time at the two drop-ins, where I spent a year working closely with staff and service users as both a researcher and volunteer. The descriptions that follow may appear vague as I have omitted any details that could identify the drop-in organizations, their staff, or service users.

### **3.1 The Welcome Centre**

The first of these drop-in centres shall be referred to as The Welcome Centre. The Welcome Centre was an independent community organization providing advice, advocacy, employment, and counselling to migrant communities in the Rochdale area. The Centre was run by two managers and a handful of part-time volunteers and was funded by a combination of private donations and grants from national charities and (to a lesser extent) public bodies - most of which were short-medium term and linked to specific projects. At the time of the study, the Welcome Centre retained a broad support remit, with the services they offered split between community health and well-being programs and drop-in advice and advocacy services, the latter of which ran two days a week and formed the focus of the research. Whilst describing its drop-ins as an employment focused 'work club', these essentially functioned as a service in which local residents could access free advice and support with a range of issues relating to employment, housing and benefits applications and appeals, and asylum and immigration claims.

Although the Welcome Centre provided separate family-oriented services and service users occasionally brought their children with them, the drop-in was geared towards adults of any age group. Even so, perhaps reflecting the demographic makeup of asylum seekers in the UK (see Home Office, 2018), most drop-in attendees were men of working age (18-66). Service users found out about the drop-in either via informal referrals or word-of-mouth and engagement ranged from one-off visits to regular attendance dating back several years. Although the drop-in catered to clients with a range of immigration statuses, the Welcome Centre's service users were mostly asylum seekers or refugees from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle-East, reflecting the demographic profile of these groups at the time of the study (ibid.). In-line with the organization's values and remit, the result was a diverse and inclusive space in which service users and volunteers from a range of countries of origin, religious and linguistic backgrounds encountered and interacted with each other.

Physically, the drop-in was centred around a public waiting-room type space, which was used both to deliver less sensitive casework (such as job searches and housing applications) and as a waiting area and social space. This main room featured a welcome desk by the entrance, where the volunteer leading the drop-in would sit, with the rest of the room set out around desks equipped with a few desktop PCs, and a handful of seats filling the remaining space. A couple of private offices, used for one-to-one casework, were accessible from the main room and featured desks equipped with a phone and desktop PCs, around which claimants and service staff sat either side - much like a traditional doctor's office layout.

Although some service users would call ahead to arrange an appointment at the Welcome Centre, it mostly operated on a conventional drop-in basis. Typically, service users who required more routine support - such as completing jobs or housing applications - would arrive and be served by Patrick, the lead volunteer, or myself in the main room using the desktop PCs and office phone. For more complex and sensitive matters - such as immigration or benefits applications and appeals - service users would normally be asked to wait to be seen by the drop-in manager, David, in one of the private offices.

### **3.2 The Fortis Centre**

The Fortis Centre is a local charity providing housing and welfare related advice and advocacy services in the Rochdale area. Although Fortis served a different marginalized demographic to the Welcome Centre, the delivery of face-to-face advice and assistance in dealing with the state's bureaucracy were also one of its core functions. As with the Welcome Centre, Fortis' services were funded by a combination of private donations and grants from and local government and national charities; most of which were short-medium term and linked to specific projects. Their services were split between outreach initiatives, emergency provisions for food and clothing, and a drop-in advice and advocacy service. As above, it was the drop-in that formed the focus of the research, which essentially functioned as a service in which local residents could access free advice and support with a range of issues mainly relating to housing and benefits applications and appeals.

Unlike the Welcome Centre, Fortis operated a strict adults-only policy and, whilst promoting its services widely and inclusively, most of its service users were White British and were born or grew up in the local area. Reflecting the gender and age makeup of homelessness service users more broadly (Bretherton, 2017), as above, most drop-in attendees were men of working age (18-66) who also usually found the Centre through informal referrals and word-of-mouth. Fortis' service users were generally categorized by staff as conforming to one of two groups; those who accessed the drop-in during acute periods of personal need or crisis, and a group of regulars who struggled with longer-term addiction and/or mental health issues that left them chronically dependent on their services.

Physically, the Fortis Centre was split between a social space that served as the venue for the organization's outreach and group programs, and a service area where one-to-one advice and casework was conducted in private offices. Whilst I spent a good deal of time in the former, getting to know and building trust and rapport with staff and service users, most of the observations analyzed here were made in latter, where

the work of dealing directly with the state's welfare bureaucracy took place. This area was set out much like a typical medical practice, with a waiting room and private consultation offices, furnished with desks, office equipment, and functional décor.

Although Fortis took pre-booked appointments, their advice and advocacy services were mostly accessed on a drop-in basis. Often staff would identify service needs through their outreach work and invite service users to attend the drop-in. But typically, service users would arrive at the Centre and ask to speak to a member of staff about an issue, usually regarding housing or benefits applications. Sometimes issues were straightforward and solved in one visit, although many cases required repeated visits, with cases often drawn out over a period of weeks or months.

It was in these service delivery settings, at both drop-ins, that the state encounters I draw attention to took place; as social citizenship and in/exclusion was negotiated between claimants, staff and the state's governmental demands. This thesis draws on my observations of these service encounters at Fortis and the Welcome Centre in order to study the practices and performances that constitute governance 'in-between' (Bartels, 2013) subjects and the state's bureaucratic form.

### **3.3 A service encounter ethnography**

In the context of public service decline in austerity (see Chapters 1 and 4), the two drop-ins were often practically the only place in which claimants could access advice and advocacy services. As such, the drop-ins and their staff were spaces and actors that profoundly shaped claimants' relation to the state and access to social security (see also *ibid.*; Cloke et al., 2011; Humphris, 2019). In this sense, I follow geographical research conducted in a variety of contexts that has studied drop-in centres as spaces in which the constitutive experiences, social relations, and in/exclusions of governance are negotiated and (re)produced (Conradson, 2003a, 2003b; Parr, 2000; Darling, 2009, 2011; Cloke et al., 2011). Whilst varying topically, these contributions share a concern for the micropolitics of encounter, performance and practice that make up these spaces (Darling, 2009). This shared focus is reflected in analogous methodological approaches based around ethnography, that I have developed and adapted here. More broadly, I also draw from ethnographic methodologies featured across asylum and welfare research literatures, deploying participant observation and unstructured or informal interviews and discussions as data collection methods (Hynes, 2007, 2011; Brady, 2011; Farrell, 2012; Piacentini, 2012; Darling, 2014a, 2014b; Garthwaite et al., 2015; Hall, 2015).

The purpose of ethnography is to gain an understanding of social phenomena by positioning oneself in the setting in which they take place, whilst they take place -

making data collection unavoidably obtrusive and participatory in nature (Laurier, 2003; Megoran, 2006; O'reilly, 2012). Ethnography has been chosen here to speak to this thesis' focus on lived experiences and fulfil the stated aim of exploring how asylum and welfare governance is reproduced through different institutional and bureaucratic arrangements. Indeed, ethnographic methodologies feature prominently in studies which have sought specifically to trace the less-overt means by which states shape everyday life (Brady, 2011; Darling, 2014a). Following Trouillot (2001) in this way; ethnography allows us to study the state 'from below', giving us the ability to observe and analyse important practices, performances, and affects that are often imperceptible or overlooked with other methods.

The ethnographic observations I made during my time at the drop-ins were focussed on service delivery, producing a contextualised understanding of the processes, interactions, and negotiations that shaped experiences of asylum and welfare governance. Practically, observations were made in three ways. Primarily, these were made by sitting in on and watching – or, to borrow a Social Work term, 'shadowing' – drop-in staff whilst they delivered services. This usually took place in the drop-ins' private service offices, where, after ensuring service users' informed consent (see below for details), I would sit to the side of the office desk and take handwritten notes on the particulars of the casework and the discussions and body language of those present. Through observing service delivery *in situ* in this way, and the encounters and interactions such work entails, the ethnography produced insights that participants often omitted in our interviews.

Observations were also produced through my experience of providing services in my role as a volunteer-researcher at the drop-ins. Increasingly, as I gained sufficient knowledge about their services, the drop-ins were happy for me to provide some services myself and use this for my research. At both drop-ins, staff did not have the requisite qualifications to offer formal legal advice regarding *specific* application and appeals cases. However, with permanent staff experienced at seeing how asylum and benefits cases tended to unfold, in practice they routinely provided general advice and guidance about how certain issues with on-going cases were best dealt with, and also occasionally wrote supporting statements and advocated for service users in-person where needed. When discussing the limits of my role with both drop-in managers, we agreed that it wouldn't be appropriate for me to offer such services given the potential consequences should this be done incorrectly. But, for what could be categorized as more practical help wherein no formal training, qualifications, or professional experience was needed (filling out initial benefits applications and appeals forms, explaining governmental correspondence etc.), I was able to. Whilst this mostly was

limited to more straightforward, less critical casework, this allowed me to collect direct observations and first-hand insights into the practices and performances that made up service encounters. As with shadowing, I ensured that service users provided informed consent for me to make anonymised handwritten notes about the casework, our interactions, and my reflections on these as part of my research (See *Ethics* below for more details). Both drop-in centres had had Social Work students on placements working in a service delivery capacity in the past, and so both staff and service users were used to having a student working in such a '... space of betweenness... (as) both an insider and an outsider' (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2015: 752). Nonetheless, adopting the role of volunteer-researcher involved a careful methodological and ethical consideration surrounding my positionality and reciprocity with service users (see Goerisch, 2017; Garthwaite, 2016; Wolferink-Schaap, 2017). As well confirming my intention to use my observations and reflections on our encounter for the research, I felt it necessary only to make notes after service users had left the office so as not to prolong or disrupt the appointment, nor make them feel self-aware in any way. Despite these efforts, and my commitment to ensuring that observations didn't diminish what I could offer as a volunteer, as with any participatory methods, the fact that both myself and service users were aware that our encounters were being recorded for the research meant that the data produced was necessarily (inter-)subjective and partial, and are treated as such throughout the thesis (see *Analysis* below).

Although constant efforts were made not to alter the practices and encounters I was recording, these participatory methods required a particularly acute awareness of positionality and how my presence and actions had the potential to impact what was observed (England, 1994; see *Ethics and Positionality* below). Whilst forming the majority of the ethnographic data discussed in the thesis, negotiating access for service observations took several months and much of my time at the drop-ins was spent informally getting to know and generally 'hanging out' (see Wolferink-Schaap, 2017; following Browne and McBride, 2015) with staff and service users. As well as service observations then, the ethnographic data also includes my recollection of informal discussions and observations made in social settings away from the service offices. Making notes on informal exchanges and interactions were neither practical nor desirable for this final mode of observation, and so again, these were recorded from memory as soon as I was able to do so after they occurred (see Walford, 2009; Kawulich, 2012).

### **3.4 Interviews**

To build an account of asylum and welfare governance, I thought it important not to rely on ethnographic data alone and conducted semi-structured interviews with staff



and service users as an additional method. Interviews feature prominently in both asylum and welfare research not only due to the depth of detail of individual accounts that can be gathered (Longhurst, 2003; Miles and Gilbert, 2005), but also because of their suitability for discussing sensitive and complex information (Kissoon, 2006, Miles and Gilbert, 2005). Semi-structured interview techniques especially are valuable as they allow for nuanced and unforeseen responses to be explored further where relevant and useful (Omidian, 2000, Miles and Gilbert, 2005); and it was for these reasons that I chose this as a second method of data collection.

In total, I conducted twenty-two interviews with frontline staff and service users in Rochdale. The interviews lasted between 30-minutes and an hour and were audio-recorded in private service offices, with the full informed consent of interviewees (*Ethics and Positionality* below for details). Thirteen of the interviewees were either service users ( $n=7$ ) or staff ( $n=6$ ) at the two drop-ins, and the remaining nine were from other charities. Three interviewees were staff from a social work charity, whom I contacted via email with a request to participate with the research. I also interviewed two staff members from a national humanitarian aid charity who operated several advice drop-ins for asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester. I recruited a further three participants from a regional asylum housing advice charity, where I interviewed an advisor and three asylum seekers that she had contacted about participating with the research on my behalf. For the two drop-in centres, I interviewed one asylum seeker and two refugee service users ( $n=3$ ) and two staff members ( $n=2$ ) at the Welcome Centre. And at Fortis, I interviewed four service users ( $n=4$ ) and four staff members ( $n=4$ ).

I used a purposive sampling technique to recruit interviewees, selecting participants based on a combination of recommendations from service staff and my own judgments of suitability. This was largely because many of the service users from both drop-ins were either infrequent attendees or considered to be potentially vulnerable or unsuitable for interview. In particular, some of the younger attendees at Fortis struggled with behavioural and substance abuse issues, whilst the level of spoken English amongst some of the service users at the Welcome Centre would have required the use of an interpreter for effective interviews to be conducted. Whilst recording accounts from these groups is certainly important and desirable, the practical and ethical demands of this meant that I simply didn't have the ability or resources to do so. As such, the service users I interviewed from the two drop-ins were regulars whom I had come to know well and who I, and the drop-in staff, thought would be able to provide insightful interviews.

As a non-probability sampling technique, this approach has inherent methodological limitations surrounding sampling bias (see Robinson, 2014). However, efforts were made to reduce over-dependence on a single network (see Bloch, 1999) by recruiting participants from more than one organization. Yet, as an exploratory ethnographic methodology, this thesis does not claim to offer a universally representative account of welfare and asylum governance. Instead, I seek to give voice to different accounts that I weave together to highlight common themes and offer an illustrative and nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of asylum and welfare governance (see Hirschler, 2015; Stewart, 2005). Nonetheless, the study aimed to include roughly equal numbers of service users and service providers, and asylum and mainstream welfare service contexts. The total number of interviewees (n=22) was chosen as this was in line with averages from similar studies (see Hynes, 2006; Clayton et al., 2014, 2015; Hirschler, 2015). Exclusions in terms of age; gender; sexuality; religion; disability; English language proficiency; country-of-origin; or residency status were minimized, however, given the limited sample sizes, representation in this respect was restricted. Perhaps most notably, all of the asylum seekers and refugees I interviewed, and three of the four service users at Fortis, were men. With the goal of maximizing representation and inclusivity in mind, I had planned to interview an equal number of men and women, however due to service users being mainly male and the separation of women's services at both drop-ins (due to matters of perceived vulnerability and the prevalence of gender-based violence amongst both groups) I didn't develop a sufficient level of familiarity and trust where I felt comfortable recruiting female interviewees (see *Positionality* below). The one interview I conducted with a female service user – Kirsty – at Fortis, was only possible as she was also a volunteer and we had therefore worked together and built a high level of trust and rapport over several months. Likewise, I didn't set out to select interviewees based on levels of spoken English, and this is also acknowledged as a limitation of the methodology. It is also worth noting here that participants included both what the Home Office classifies as 'asylum seekers' – individuals whose asylum claims are ongoing – and 'refugees' – individuals who have UK residency or citizenship status. Whilst being aware of the crucial differences between these statuses, I argue that our understanding of the UK's asylum system and the significance of state-prescribed immigration status may be enhanced by recording perceptions from different stages of the asylum process.

As mentioned, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method which does not restrict responses to predetermined themes. In line with the first thesis aim, this data collection method allowed for an exploratory analysis of the state and experiences of governance. Whilst, interviews were structured around prepared questions relating to the defined aims and objectives, they were always phrased open-endedly so that

unanticipated discussion topics weren't curtailed in anyway. Arrangements for interviews were made around time and location preferences chosen by the participants, providing participants with convenience and reassurance of choice and control over the encounter (see also below discussion on participant autonomy below).

### **3.5 Documents**

Alongside interviews and observations, I also recorded and analysed a range of documents and 'technical devices' (Barry, 2001) that were important for service delivery practices at the drop-ins. Documents have been shown to be a critical reference point and source of information and for both service users and providers within the context of different governmental systems (Saugeres, 1999; Painter, 2006; Jones, 2012; Darling, 2014a). As sources written without the input of the researcher, document analysis provided the opportunity to triangulate findings with the ethnographic and interview data (see Bowen, 2009; Jones, 2012); providing data on the context in which participants operate, and tracing when and how governmental practices have shifted with changes in policy and practice (Bowen, 2009). The type of physical documents I recorded and analysed included government documents (e.g. legislative frameworks, asylum or benefit applications, case correspondence and decision letters) as well as (nominally) non-state documents (e.g. charity food and clothes vouchers, internal training and practice literature). With governmental correspondence and processes increasingly moving online, I also analysed the digital correspondence and platforms and the devices through which these were accessed and processed (See Chapter 8 and Sheldrick, 2019 for greater detail).

Recording and analysing governmental letters, forms, and digital correspondence allowed me to consider the role of these 'technical devices'(Barry, 2001) in asylum and welfare governance (see also Darling, 2014; Sheldrick, 2019). Following previous cognate studies, the documents were subject to an analysis that focuses on their discursive content and effects (Saugeres, 1999; Jones, 2012). Where pertinent, documents were also referred to as discussion points and prompts in interviews in order to gain an understanding of their perceived use in and influence over practices and experiences of governance. Whilst, in combining discourse analysis with observations of service encounters, I was able to explore how the discursive, material, and affective qualities of documents (see Chapter 8) shaped how governance was practiced and negotiated in the 'bureaucratic reality' in which participants operated (see Saugeres, 1999: 96; Bowen, 2009).

Documents were sourced either online or at the drop-in centres and were chosen for analysis based on their pertinence to the research questions and the service

encounters and practices I was observing. Most of the application forms and legislative documents, and the digital governance platforms, were publicly available and accessed online. However, sourcing case-specific asylum and welfare correspondence and the drop-ins' internal documents was more complex as this required a protocol for ensuring anonymity and participants' informed consent (see *Ethics and positionality below* for details). When I asked to record documents relating to specific cases I made sure that participants were aware that I was doing this for my research and that anonymity and data confidentiality would be maintained. As an 'unobtrusive' method (Bowen, 2009: 31), consent and anonymity are indeed the main ethical issues with document analysis, and the gathering of documents was treated in the same way as the recording of interview and ethnographic data in this respect. To ensure anonymity, any identifiable information was immediately removed from any reproductions of documents. Despite the ostensibly unobtrusive nature of this method, documents were still sampled purposively and researcher positionality with respect to how documents were selected, analysed and interpreted have also been factored into the following analysis chapters.

### **3.6 Ethics and positionality**

Conducting research with potentially vulnerable and marginalized groups naturally brings with it significant ethical concerns, which required careful consideration and planning to negotiate. My approach to this was underpinned by three broad concerns: to ensure transparency and fully informed consent from participants, to guarantee participant autonomy, and to aim not only for no harm to be done to the individuals or organizations I worked with, but that the overall impact of the fieldwork was positive (Mackenzie et al., 2007). In addition to the aims and objectives set out in the introduction, from the outset this thesis had an ethical goal of giving a voice to marginalised individuals and groups who are often overlooked in accounts of asylum and welfare governance (Mackenzie et al., 2007; Ghorashi, 2008). Along with a personal desire for the research to have a direct and positive impact in Rochdale, this methodology had to be pre-approved by the University of Manchester's Research Ethics Committee - a process completed in July 2017. This section details the ethical demands of the data collection process and the practical measures taken to ensure these were met.

Determining what measures were needed to ensure the research was ethically sound first required an understanding of the potential impact of involvement on participants, which I put into three categories. Firstly, following similar studies (Temple and Moran, 2006; Hirschler, 2015), my approach recognized the potential for emotional or psychological harm or distress that may be triggered when recalling traumatic

experiences surrounding involvement in immigration or welfare regimes. Secondly, my methodology took seriously the potential for my research activities to impact negatively on individual cases, and participants' personal or professional lives more broadly. Finally, the research design recognized the importance of ensuring participant autonomy. In this context, autonomy refers to a participant's capacity and right to self-determination and self-control over their contributions and involvement in research (Mackenzie et al., 2007). As such, the voluntary basis of participation was clearly communicated in the gaining of informed consent and reiterated throughout the data collection process.

### **Informed consent**

When conducting primary research, informed consent refers to participants being '...fully and adequately informed about the purposes, methods, risks and benefits of the research and that agreement to participate is fully voluntary.' (Mackenzie et al., 2007: 301). In trying to ensure this, I put in place a policy in which I communicated my position as a researcher when first meeting staff and service users, making clear that participation would be on a voluntary and anonymous basis. To protect participants' identity and anonymity, all names that appear in this thesis are pseudonyms allocated by myself. Following the suggestion of Hirschler (2015: 21) regarding participant empowerment and autonomy, I set out with the intention of giving participants the option of choosing their own pseudonym. However, this wasn't practical with respect to observations and, after trying this with the first few interviewees, I found that participants seemed to find this request slightly awkward and onerous, and preferred to just be allocated one.

For the ethnographic data collection at the two drop-ins, the purpose of my engagement and the intention to observe service encounters and interactions for research purposes was disclosed both verbally and by distributing information sheets. Written consent for participation was not deemed necessary for document analysis or participant observations by myself or the Research Ethics Committee as these methods were non-intrusive (i.e. I did not interact with, or ask participants to act or contribute any differently than if I was not present), conducted in semi-public spaces, and the recorded data was anonymized. However, verbal informed consent from all present individuals was obtained prior to the recording of any observations or documents. During my initial visits to the two drop-ins, and with the consent and permission of staff, I introduced myself and the research project to service users, making clear my intention to observe and make anonymized notes on service activities. As part of this initial introduction I emphasised that people could freely choose not to be included in the observations and notes for any reason, at any point,

and without any consequences. It was also made clear that observations would not be made until the following week at the earliest, allowing people the opportunity to ask questions about the research and decide on consent. In addition to this initial consent process, I also asked permission on each occasion that I intended to make observations of service encounters.

For the interviews, written confirmation was deemed a necessary step in ensuring informed consent. As well as the requisite signing of a consent form, an information sheet detailing the aims of the project and a profile of myself as the lead researcher was produced in easy-to-understand and unambiguous terms. Having gotten to know service users at the two drop-ins, I consulted with staff about approaching individuals who we thought would offer insightful interviews. Although this helped to ensure fully informed consent and the comfort of familiarity with me as the interviewer, the use of gatekeepers in this way can be problematic as service users may feel obliged to participate at the request of service providers (McAreavey and Das, 2013). As such, I ensured that interviewees read the information sheet and consent form independently, confirming in-person that the information included on the documents were fully understood and that participation was voluntary and retractable. In line with the University's ethical guidelines, interviews were restricted to an hour without a break and interviewees were reminded that they could pause or finish interviews at any point. All participants gave both written and verbal consent for the interview to be recorded using an audio recording device, with the option to withdraw this at any point within six months of the interview. In this way, participant consent was ensured from the point of initial contact and throughout the fieldwork phase (see Mackenzie et al., 2007, on 'Iterative consent').

### **Beyond no harm**

Underpinning these concerns for participant autonomy and informed consent was an awareness of the potential negative impacts of the research on participants who belong to vulnerable and marginalised groups (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Temple and Moran, 2006). One potential impact I sought to avoid and mitigate against was participant distress when discussing experiences of seeking asylum or claiming benefits (see Mackenzie and McDowell, 2007; Decker et al., 2011). Given the project aims, it was difficult to avoid discussing topics that may provoke distress completely. Fortunately, this never occurred; however, to minimize this risk, I made sure to inform interviewees of discussion topics in the consent process and had a procedure in place for stopping the interview and acquiring the appropriate support should this have happened. In the case of ethnographic observations, as these were non-intrusive

– in that participants were never asked to act any differently for the purpose of the research – this was not deemed necessary.

After building relationships with participants over an extended period, another concern regarding the goal of no harm related to ending the fieldwork phase (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). Indeed, given the complex and unpredictable reality of researcher-participant relationships in the field (Darling, 2014b), negotiating the impact of my role as a temporary volunteer-researcher was something I was constantly aware of. To mitigate against any dependence on my presence at the drop-ins, the length of my involvement with participants was made clear throughout and the exiting phase was purposefully gradual. In my capacity as a volunteer service provider, this meant that I took the decision to refer cases requiring more professional and longer-term support to the permanent drop-in staff. However, often there is a potential for a greater risk of harm to be done through emotional detachment or distance when an appropriate degree of care may be preferable (Baillot et al., 2013, cited in Hirschler, 2015: 27). And so, to ensure that there was no detriment to the drop-ins' services in this respect, I made sure to always put the quality of the services and care I provided ahead of any research interests. Whilst this meant that sometimes I was unable to record observations - either as I felt it inappropriate to disrupt services by asking for consent, or necessary to refer cases to the drop-in staff - this was needed to ensure no harm was done to service users or the organizations I worked with.

Even with such carefully planned mitigations and Research Ethics Committee approval, given the profile of participants and the harmful effects of asylum and welfare regimes, it is never possible to eliminate the risk of harm or distress completely when researching such topics. However, this risk was positively balanced with a range of potential benefits for participants, both directly, as mentioned, but also indirectly, in contributing to knowledge and understanding of asylum and social welfare systems more broadly. As a guiding principle then, the fieldwork followed Mackenzie et al. (2007) in transcending conventions to go 'beyond "do no harm"' and bring tangible, reciprocal benefits for participants; not only through advocacy and support as a volunteer, but also by providing a way of listening to and 'giving voice' to participants (Temple and Moran, 2006).

With these intentions guiding my approach to the fieldwork, positively impacting the organizations and individuals I worked with was a core part of my role in Rochdale and was evident in several ways. Much of this was achieved through my volunteering and was made up of various informal and smaller-scale contributions to service delivery practices. For instance, at the Welcome Centre I helped Patrick (a volunteer for whom English was an additional language) refine the templates and guidance used to develop

service users' CVs and job applications. Whilst, on occasions when non-citizens accessed Fortis' services, I was able to draw on my background reading and experience at the Welcome Centre to offer insight on immigration related issues. Similarly, as I was building a network of contacts and connections across the Rochdale area, and across both migrant and non-migrant services, I often made the drop-in managers aware of upcoming events and programmes for them to promote and engage with; including inter-agency meetings and consultations, and community leisure, well-being, and health initiatives.

Also at this inter-organizational level, I spoke at several voluntary sector meetings put on by the local council, raising issues to do with support provision and my initial findings to an audience of local councillors, funding bodies, and charities. With respect to policy making at the national level too, in September 2018, I drew on my findings and experiences at the Welcome Centre and wider reading to write a 7,000 word critical analysis of the contracts for the 'New Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC)' (Home Office, 2019) on behalf of a national asylum campaign organization. And so it was in these tangible ways that I went beyond doing 'no harm' in the field (Mackenzie et al., 2007); assisting individual cases on a daily basis, informing the work of the two drop-in centres more broadly, and mobilizing participants' voices and experiences in asylum and welfare activism.

### **Positionality**

As a participatory methodology, researcher positionality was a primary ethical and epistemological concern throughout the fieldwork process and something I took a reflexive approach to dealing with. In explaining its methodological importance, Kim England (1994: 83) defines reflexivity as:

'... (a) self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher... critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions. A more reflexive and flexible approach to fieldwork allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork almost inevitably raises.'

With these points in mind, I worked reflexively not only to take account of the necessarily interpretive and collaborative nature of the fieldwork, but also as it fits with the thesis' exploratory approach to the research topic. The observations I made were intended to be all-encompassing and interviews participant-led, with interviewees encouraged to raise topics and themes based on their own experiences,



interests, and goals for the research process (see Doná, 2007). Nonetheless, the unavoidably participatory nature of qualitative fieldwork (see Sultana, 2007) and my positionality has been acknowledged throughout this thesis. This is not to say that efforts at minimising objectivity and interference in activities and interactions were abandoned, but that an awareness and critical reflection of how the data collection and analysis was shaped by my experiences and interpretations guides the upcoming discussions. Indeed, in practicing 'interpretive reflexivity'(Lichterman, 2017) in this way, I make no attempt to hide the interpretive nature of my research and many of the thesis' key insights incorporate my experiences of witnessing and delivering services at the drop-ins. Finally, this reflexivity also has an ethical significance surrounding participant consent. For even with ethically sound intentions and protocols, as relatively privileged 'outsiders', researchers may inadvertently draw on this to coerce participation (Sultana, 2007); and this is something that drove the robust consent procedure outlined above.

Whilst it is difficult to ascertain exactly what staff and service users initially thought of me, as an unfamiliar outsider (*ibid.*, 2007), the identity I exhibit to others is that of a socially secure, White English male, in his 20s. With my identity differing to most the participants I was working with in these ways, my positionality and the power relations this generated was significant and required careful consideration as per three 'fixed categories' (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014). Firstly, was nationality and race. With nearly all the staff and regular service users at Fortis being White British, this was primarily a concern with respect to my position at the Welcome Centre. Being White and British-born, I stood out in a space where more-or-less all the staff and service users were first- or second-generation refugees. In this sense, I occupied a position of privilege and relative power with respect to race and citizenship status, which I had to navigate of in terms warding against coerced participation with my research and building trust and rapport. Significantly, in terms of my racial and class identity, and from the perspective of people with experience of British immigration and/or welfare control, to some service users I likely projected an identity more like that of a state official (a Serco, Home Office, or Job Centre employee) than an ally, friend, or neutral observer. With no scope for genuine common ground on these terms, or 'racial matching' (Sin, 2007; see also Gunaratnam, 2003; von Unger, 2006, for critiques of this strategy) ethical participation recruitment and the building of trust thus required time and careful consideration of my social position; something I navigated in two ways.

The first was achieved through my work and commitment as a volunteer, directly assisting with the support and advocacy work of the Welcome Centre. This was helped in the early stages by Patrick (a fellow volunteer) and David (the drop-in manager)

vouching for me if they noticed service users being hesitant when I introduced myself - ‘... he’s here as a student and also helping us...’ (Patrick, field notes, November 2017). Quite quickly my privileged national and linguistic background meant I was seen by many of the service users as a practical asset and resource on which they could draw in navigating immigration, welfare, and employment systems. Having helped service users deal with governmental applications and correspondence, it became clearer that, whilst I wasn’t seen ‘... as one *of* them’, I was seen as ‘...one *with* them’ (Rotter, 2010: 37). And so, it was through my consistent efforts to listen to, understand, and improve service users’ experiences of asylum and welfare governance that I gained their trust and overcame possible barriers relating to racial difference and privilege.

The second way I achieved this also required time spent in the company of participants in a service setting and emerged from a shared disagreement and dissatisfaction with how the welfare and asylum systems worked. Having read up extensively about the exclusions and injustices of the UK’s welfare (e.g. Fletcher, 2011 O’Hara, 2014; Watts et al., 2014) and asylum systems (e.g. Squire, 2009; Hynes, 2011; Allsopp, 2014; Hirschler, 2015) in the first year of my PhD program, I began my time at the Welcome Centre with an awareness of general sentiments towards the DWP and the Home Office from claimants and advocates. With this, and growing first-hand experience of dealing with these systems, my personal critical opinions became apparent to participants. As Rotter (2010: 37) discusses, ‘(t)he researcher’s perceived political allegiance is of particular importance in research with refugees...(W)ere I to be seen as sympathising with the government’s stance on immigration, I would most likely be regarded with suspicion or animosity’. And so, despite having the privilege of secure citizenship status, in this small way I was able to find common ground and build trust and rapport with staff and service users. Overall, my ethnicity generally went unmentioned in my time at the Welcome Centre, and service users, staff and I bonded not only over opposition to governmental exclusions and bureaucratic obstacles, but also our family lives, food, football, and what would be seen as all the usual workplace chitchat. In time, my position as an advocate and ally was such that jokes were made about me being an undercover agent from the Home Office. Despite this kind of rapport, I have and could never have experienced being subject to UK immigration controls and its effects, and so the interpretations of these experiences and systems are from a position of racialized privilege, and are understood as such throughout.

With most service users and all permanent staff being White, racial difference was not as significant at Fortis. However - whilst certainly not irrelevant to my work at the Welcome Centre - social class was a more prominent point of social difference at Fortis. Service users and most staff members at Fortis would conventionally be described as

coming from working class backgrounds. Whereas I – a PhD student based at a Russell Group university – would probably be described as middle class. My outsider position in this respect was made immediately apparent to me during my first few visits to Fortis, where staff joked that they thought I was actually ‘the secret millionaire’ – referring to a TV format in which wealthy aspiring philanthropists go undercover in deprived communities to decide how to donate large sums of money. Similarly, during my first week at Fortis a few service users asked if I was an undercover police officer, to which a member of staff, Sophie, shrugged and confirmed that ‘...you do have that look’. This gives some insight to how my identity was initially perceived at Fortis; whilst not ‘posh’ or obviously upper or middle class, I clearly differed to the class identity service users and staff identified as and performed.

However, whilst not being local or working class, having a regional midlands accent, and not being Southern possibly meant class barriers were less pronounced and building trust and rapport were less of a barrier as it could have been. Nonetheless, as with the Welcome Centre, this took time, familiarity and work to establish myself as a known advocate and ally to the staff and service users at Fortis. Additionally, I felt it important not to express judgment or disapproval of service users in anyway. Especially as, ostensibly, UK citizens didn’t face the legal exclusions of insecure citizenship status (rights to work and choice of housing etc.) that I witnessed at the Welcome Centre. In this sense, and with a lack of empathy and understanding of more subtle, informal exclusions and disadvantages faced by many benefits claimants (Patrick, 2017; Wright & Patrick, 2019), this could have been issue when working with these groups (Patrick & Simpson, 2019).

Finally, race and class identity weren’t the only categories that shaped how I conducted the fieldwork, and gender was also important here. As mentioned above, both drop-ins were highly gendered in the way they operated. Fortis and the Welcome Centre had separate women’s group support and social programmes, with these being gendered safe spaces. And so, unlike class and race difference, time, familiarity and advocacy didn’t have the same impact on my ability to ethically navigate gender positionality in the same way. As such, there was much less scope for me to ethically develop one-to-one relationships with female service users. When reflecting on my progress at the drop-ins, and with the permanence of this barrier increasingly apparent, I took the decision to adapt my methodology to take account of this. Although I made efforts to ensure female voices and experiences were heard - interviewing female staff and observing service delivery with female service users when possible and appropriate - the data is skewed towards a male perspective and necessarily, unavoidably the product of a male interpretation of the data.

Fundamentally, my relationships with participants required constant consideration and reflection, with ethical obligations needing to be balanced with an awareness of these relations, my social position, and the way in which these shaped the data I gathered. As such, this recognition calls for a consideration of the relationship between my social position and the claims made (Lichterman, 2017). Rather than merely mentioning and categorizing my positionality, practicing 'interpretive reflexivity' (*ibid.*) makes the research more transparent and more accurately communicates how interpretations were produced. Indeed, this thesis's findings are, and could only ever be, the product of my interpretations, my social position, and the fieldwork relations that this engendered.

### **3.7 Analysis and coding**

With participants' consent, interviews were recorded using an audio recording device. Recordings were transcribed in full in Microsoft Word and labelled with the biographical details of participants (name, age, gender, organisation or service use, immigration or welfare status), date, time, and location. A spreadsheet containing this data for all interviewees was also used as a database for the entire fieldwork process. Identifiable information for individuals and organizations were anonymised from the transcription phase onwards and participants given a pseudonym. All non-anonymised and anonymised data was handled and stored securely in line with legal and University requirements.

In line with the thesis' exploratory approach, data analysis was inductive in nature. That is to say, the insights and themes discussed here stemmed mainly from interview responses and ethnographic observations. As such transcripts and field notes were coded thematically according to prevalent topics and themes featured in the data. The identification of such themes began in the field and continued in a more systematic manner during and after I transcribed recordings and field notes. With reflexivity in mind, the thesis recognises qualitative data analysis as inherently subjective and contingent on predetermined research themes, methodologies, and researcher positionality (England, 1994; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). And so, despite coding the data around distinct themes, I also adopted aspects of a discourse analytic method of interview analysis (Talja, 1999) that took account of how the data were necessarily contextualised and communicated as interpretations of subjective experiences and my research agenda. With ethical concerns surrounding reciprocity and autonomy too, individual accounts that did not fit with common themes identified across the data set were not ignored or discounted. As such, a narrative analytical approach (see Riessman, 1993; Braun and Clarke, 2006) will be drawn upon to ensure that such accounts are discussed or 'heard' (Rubin and Rubin, 2011) wherever

possible. By combining aspects of different analytic methods, my analysis adopts what Braun and Clarke (2006: 8) describe as 'Thematic decomposition analysis... a specifically-named form of 'thematic' discourse analysis which identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorises language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social.'

This chapter has detailed how I collected and analysed the primary empirical data for the thesis, outlining my choice of methods and how I approached the fieldwork process and negotiated the methodological and ethical challenges this presented. I began the chapter by introducing the two charity drop-in centres where most of the data was gathered, before discussing how the chosen methods – ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis – were able to capture the everyday experiences and intersections of asylum and welfare governance. The final sections then critically reflected on the ethical dimensions of the study, researcher positionality, and how this shaped the data that I collected and my approach to data analysis and coding. In sum, this chapter has presented this multi-method, qualitative methodology as a necessary and fitting approach for addressing the research aims and object outlined in Chapter 1; whilst critically reflecting on the key ethical and methodological challenges of this complex and demanding process. Before discussing the insights that were produced through this methodology, the following chapter provides greater detail on the study site, Rochdale, and how the intersections of austerity and asylum have shaped both the town and the direction of this thesis.

## 4. Rochdale

In this chapter I profile the town of Rochdale, which formed the sole study site for this thesis. I begin with a potted history of the town and its position in the Greater Manchester region and the country, highlighting here the town's peripherality and enduring social and economic struggles. From this, I use Loïc Wacquant's concepts of 'advanced marginality' and 'territorial stigmatization' (2007; 2008) to help explain how places such as Rochdale have become materially and symbolically devalued over a period of several decades. With this context of marginality in mind, the effects of the recent age of austerity on the town is then explored with respect to public service decline and the uneven impact of welfare reforms. In this sense, I highlight how Rochdale fits the profile of the socially and economically 'left behind' towns that have become widely associated with Brexit and rising anti-immigrant political sentiment in the UK in recent years (see Rhodes et al., 2019). The final parts of the chapter build on this link to collate a brief history of immigration in Rochdale; tracing the onset of asylum dispersals since 2000, the associated growth of local refugee services, and their deterioration in the wake of privatization and austerity since 2012. In drawing attention to this multidimensional marginality, I highlight the somewhat fraught reputation of Rochdale as a town struggling with the overlapping issues of interethnic tensions and swingeing austerity and economic decline. Across the proceeding discussions then, I present Rochdale as a lens through which key national policy developments and the geographical intersections of asylum and austerity can be observed and better understood.

### 4.1 Rochdale and the urban margins

Rochdale is a town of around 100,000 people in Greater Manchester, Northern England. Located at the edge of the conurbation and the foothills of the South Pennines, it is the largest settlement and administrative centre of the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, one of Greater Manchester's ten boroughs. The wider borough incorporates several neighbouring, but distinct, settlements and has a total population of 218,400 (Rochdale Borough Council, 2019). Rochdale came to prominence during the Industrial Revolution as a major centre for textile production. With industrialization, the town's population boomed from 8,542 to 83,114 between 1801 – 1901 (McNeil and Nevell, 2000) and received Borough status in 1856 (GB Historical GIS, 2017). It was in Rochdale's industrial heyday that the town reached something of a peak in terms of wealth and prominence. The town is widely seen as the birthplace of the Co-operative Movement, when in 1844 The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society

was established and the 'The Rochdale Principles' drafted – a guide which underpins co-operative movements globally to this day (Van Opstal, 2010; Walton, 2015).

The textile industry and town then went through a slow decline during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and very little remained of the region's traditional industries by the new millennium. Whilst Rochdale's decline proceeded more gradually than neighbouring cities and towns (McNeil and Nevell, 2000), its heavy reliance on textile production left the town particularly exposed to the socio-economic turmoil of post-war de-industrialization. Along with most of 20<sup>th</sup> Century industrial Britain, the town's prospects suffered greatly when compared to the more diverse, service-based local economies of much of Southern England. An acceleration of economic downturn coincided with notable demographic and physical changes in Rochdale in the post-war era. Commonwealth migrants – most notably from Pakistan - began arriving and working in the town's cotton mills from the 1950s, whilst the town's central areas were physically transformed by 'slum clearance' and the building of large-scale, modernist housing estates. However, as with much of Northern England, rapidly declining industry and rising unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s brought entrenched social deprivation; a decline widely seen as accelerating under the free-market, anti-interventionist industrial policies of Thatcherism. Between 1978 and 1982 alone, 43% of Rochdale's textile workers were made redundant, in a period when 38 of the town's textile mills closed (Penn et al., 1990).

Some of the most striking imagery capturing the physical and social trauma wrought during this period can be read in the BBC2 poem-film 'Xanadu' by the (now) Poet Laureate Simon Armitage (Armitage, 1992) – who worked as a Probation Officer on the now-demolished Ashfield Valley housing estate in the late-1980s – early-1990s. In it, Armitage depicts the 1960s-built estate as an eerily intimidating and hollowed-out place, abandoned at the physical and social hinterland, and a product of post-industrial decline and the state's failings. Whilst a dramatic and stark embodiment of Rochdale's decline, this era was something of a low ebb for the town. The fate of Ashfield Valley – replaced with a retail and business park, complete with cinema, bowling alley, and fast-food chain restaurants - perhaps encapsulates the partial recovery and diversification of Rochdale's economy and built environment since the 1990s.

However, much of the economic growth and investment in the region during this time has been unevenly distributed - skewed towards central Manchester (Folkman et al., 2017; Bailoni, 2017). Along with other outer-lying boroughs, Rochdale has not fared so well in the transition to a post-industrial knowledge-intensive economy; an inequity exacerbated by its peripheral location (*ibid.*). Seen in this way, Rochdale is typical of the socio-economically 'left behind' towns that have become a somewhat condescending byword for the political dissatisfaction and anti-establishment sentiment attributed to the result of the UK's 'Brexit' Referendum in June 2016 (Rhodes et al., 2019) – in which Rochdale firmly (60%) voted 'Leave'.



Figure 2. A view over Rochdale, dominated by the 'Seven Sisters' tower blocks. The textile mills of the industrial era are also prominent. As is one of the new retail warehouses in the background. Source: Getty Images Europe, Christopher Furlong

Today Rochdale appears a typical post-industrial Northern town; a mostly residential settlement with a handful of office blocks, various municipal buildings and a struggling shopping district at its centre. Alongside the derelict or repurposed mills and red-brick terraced housing of the industrial era (see Figures. 2 and 3), post-war housing developments still dominate the built environment - most strikingly with the town centre's 'Seven Sisters' tower blocks (see Fig. 2). Whilst the jobs market has bounced back, Rochdale still has the highest rate of unemployment – 5.4% in 2019 – of Greater Manchester's ten boroughs (ONS, 2019). The growth in employment has been driven by the prevalence of precarious, low-skilled work in the service-sector, most notably in the area's large retail warehouses; '...dark satanic mills of the 21st Century' that have gained national notoriety for some of the most alarming excesses of deregulated, non-unionized employment in Britain today (BBC, 2019). Unemployment and precarious work contribute to Rochdale being ranked as one of the most socially deprived local authority areas in England according to several indices (Smith et al.,



2015). The town's central wards are some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (Public Health England, 2018).

Despite Rochdale's general obscurity, the reputation of one area – Lower Falinge - has attracted notoriety in the national press as something of an archetypal 'sink estate' (Halliday, 2016) and 'welfare ghetto' (Gilligan, 2010); albeit due perhaps as much to its brutalist aesthetic as to a prevalence of deprivation and unemployment (Perraudin, 2018). Much of this discourse is centred on defamatory tropes around the deviancy and moral failures of welfare claimants in general and, by proxy, the town's inhabitants. One Daily Mail piece on deprivation on the estate leads with the headline 'In Rochdale, the £4.70 breakfast includes a Stella (a premium strength lager)' (Hull, 2010). Such a caricatured depiction would perhaps hold less purchase without the successful re-framing of 'the council estate' as a byword for a 'new class of problem people' in political discourse, repeated by successive governments since the 1990s (Tyler, 2013: 162; Slater, 2018). The town has also recently become synonymous with two high-profile child sexual abuse cases that came to light in 2012: one involving the town's Member of Parliament from 1972-1992, Cyril Smith, and the other perpetrated by a 'street-grooming' gang of men from the town<sup>1</sup>. Later inquiries found that both crimes were the result of systemic failings and cover-ups by local Police, Social Services, and schools (Griffiths, 2013; Jay et al., 2018). Although caricatured, mis-represented and in many respects unwarranted, Rochdale's public image (when recognised at all) is one of decline, abandonment, and failure - on the part of its public institutions, the economy and even the character of its people.

### **Urban marginality and territorial stigmatization**

The work of Loïc Wacquant (2007; 2008) offers a helpful framework in developing a geographical understanding of how and why places such as Rochdale become stigmatized and marginalized through intersecting economic, political, and cultural forces. In his comparative sociology of US ghettos and French *banlieue*, Wacquant (*ibid.*) identifies a new regime of urban marginality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in which 'relegated neighbourhoods' have emerged as the combined product of both material and symbolic processes of marginalization. He outlines three key, interconnected processes defining 'advanced marginality': labour precarity; increasing spatial concentration of poverty, and heightened 'territorial stigmatization' attached to these spaces (Rhodes, 2012; Tyler, 2013). Although Wacquant grounds his framework in France and the US, and stresses the significance of national and local context,

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<sup>1</sup> The case was the subject of an award-winning three-part BBC television drama *Three Girls* in 2017.

Rochdale's marginalization over the past three decades also encompasses all three of these features (see also Rhodes, 2012; Tyler, 2013).

Taking the first two – labour precarity and 'socio-spatial polarization' (Rhodes, 2012: 685) – Northern England's peripheral, post-industrial towns tend to fit this profile of economic marginalization (see *ibid.*). Rochdale's unemployment rate is nearly double the national average (Office for National Statistics, 2019) and its residents are more than twice as likely to live in a neighbourhood ranked in England's poorest quintile (20%) than the national average (Public Health England, 2018). Regarding Wacquant's third feature - territorial stigmatization – these material processes are compounded by the symbolic force of stigmatization, expressed through a defamatory discourse that characterises marginalized spaces as dangerous, inept, and immoral. The aforementioned headlines describing a local culture of benefits dependency and indulgence are one example of this in action (see above, e.g. Hull, 2010). Importantly, stigmatization is not only perpetuated by journalists, but politicians too (Wacquant, 2008). Tyler (2013) traces the stigmatization of the inner-city social housing estate back to Tony Blair's first address as Prime Minister, delivered on the Aylesbury Estate in London in 1997. This precipitated something of a media obsession with what became widely known as 'sink estates' (Slater, 2018), contributing to '... the formation of a moral panic about the 'culture of worklessness' which estates were said to both reproduce and represent' (Tyler, 2013: 160). Such was the hold of this notion that it has become a common-sense basis for government policy, with then-Prime Minister David Cameron pledging to arbitrarily demolish 'the worst 100 sink estates' in England in 2016 (Slater, 2018). In an article announcing the plans, Cameron (2016, cited in Slater, 2018: 890) provided a classic example of the stigmatizing discourse surrounding urban marginality in modern-day Britain:

Step outside in the worst sink estates, and you're confronted by brutal high-rise towers and dark alleyways that are a gift to criminals and drug dealers. Decades of neglect have led to gangs, ghettos and anti-social behaviour. One of the most concerning aspects of these estates is just how cut-off, self-governing and divorced from the mainstream these communities can become. And that allows social problems to fester and grow unseen.

It is in analysing such statements that Wacquant's framework - and the notion of state-led territorial stigmatization in particular - can be used to unpack the role of the state in processes of marginalization. Wacquant develops Bourdieu's (1991) notion of the 'symbolic power' of authorities in "making and unmaking groups' by cutting up social space in ways that (de)mobilize putative members' (Wacquant et al., 2014: 1271). It is the spatial dimensions of these 'classifying and naming powers of the state' (Slater, 2018: 881) that helps us to understand how announcements such as David Cameron's work to place deprived areas as outside the norm and therefore requiring state intervention, discipline, and control. Importantly, for Wacquant, stigmatization does not follow on linearly from a foundation of economic precarity, but legitimizes and reproduces material degradation, marginality and displacement. In Rochdale, following the launch of the Cameron Government's 'Estate Regeneration Fund' in 2017,



Figure 3 Terraced housing and Arrow Mill, Queensway, Rochdale. Source: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk>

residents of Lower Falinge and neighbouring College Bank were informed of the planned demolition of large swathes of the estates; news which was met with the objection of many residents and accusations of state-sponsored 'social cleansing' (Halliday, 2017).

#### **4.2 Rochdale and the uneven distribution of austerity**

As I will unpack later, the spatial logics of dispersal policy overlap with those of Wacquant's account of urban marginality in many respects. Whilst symbolic and material processes of marginalization have also been mirrored in the uneven distribution of austerity and welfare reform over the past decade. As Hancock and

Mooney (2013: 46) argue, punitive welfare reforms and housing policies have been justified through spatialized narratives of 'the broken society' and 'welfare ghettos'; diverting attention away from structural and institutional factors that reproduce deprivation whilst legitimizing '... increasingly pervasive state interventions to regulate and control working-class lives and communities'. And so it may come as little surprise that the impacts of austerity have been more keenly felt in already marginalized places such as Rochdale. The implementation and lived experiences of welfare austerity are taken up in detail later in the thesis. However, it is instructive for this thesis to grasp here the geographical dimensions of welfare reform and appreciate how Rochdale specifically has been affected by austerity.

The current period of austerity in Britain emerged in response to the global financial crisis of 2008-09, subsequent recession, and a rising budget deficit. Despite an initial fall in income for wealthy elites at this time (Wisman, 2013) and a political rhetoric of being '...all in this together' (Ridge, 2013), contemporary austerity has been defined by an acceleration of socio-economic inequality as certain places and demographic groups bear the brunt of spending cuts and reforms (Hamnett, 2014; Donald et al., 2014; Beatty and Fothergill, 2016). One area of government that austerity measures have targeted has been social welfare, with a suite of transformational policies intended to slash total welfare spending introduced through the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. The reforms are pitched not only in terms of improving system efficiencies, but also focus on enhancing work incentives and eradicating fraudulent benefits claims. Measures have included: Housing Benefit rule changes and caps; replacement disability benefits featuring more stringent time-limits and medical tests; tax credit, council tax and child benefit freezes and cuts; and a total household cap and freeze for working-age benefits. Beginning in 2013, most of these reforms have been incorporated into the phased introduction of Universal Credit – a digitally-administered benefit that combines six previously-separate benefits into a single monthly payment. Whilst these reforms can be seen as a continuation of neoliberal welfare state restructuring dating back to the 1980s (see Peck, 2012), together they mark what Geographer Chris Hamnett (2014: 490) describes as 'the most radical reshaping of welfare policy since 1945'.

Many of the most-pressing inadequacies, exclusions, and hardships wrought by these reforms are experienced individually and are discussed in the following analyses. It is these accounts that are placed at the centre of this thesis, and that I seek to draw most attention to. However, the spatial distribution and financial scale of welfare austerity is stark and worth highlighting. Across the UK, welfare reforms between 2010 and 2021 will have generated a loss of personal income amounting to £27 billion a

year, or the equivalent of £690 per year, per working-age adult (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016). These losses are, however, unevenly distributed across the country. Both the amount and proportion of personal income arising from benefits payments has for a long time varied between different regions and localities (Hamnett, 2014). Although policy has been applied consistently across the UK, poorer de-industrialized areas – where more people are reliant on social welfare – have been hardest hit, whilst already wealthier areas with lower claimant counts have escaped relatively unscathed (Beatty and Fothergill, 2014; 2016). Rochdale is a prime example of the former, with one analysis ranking the town as the 13<sup>th</sup> most-affected local authority area (of 378) in the UK since 2010 (*ibid.*, 2014). By 2015, Rochdale had lost the equivalent of £680 per year for every working-age adult, compared to an average of £470 (*ibid.*). Between 2015 and 2021, the loss is projected to be a *further* £470 p.a., compared to just £130 in the wealthy district of Hart in Hampshire, Southern England (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016). It is important to emphasise that these figures are calculated as an average of working-age adults for each local authority area, and that the financial loss for benefit-claiming households and Rochdale's most deprived inner-wards has been far greater. Nonetheless, these figures highlight the disproportionate shock that welfare austerity has had on Rochdale and the uneven distribution of welfare austerity in Britain as a whole.

### **Austerity and service decline in Rochdale**

Whilst unprecedented, welfare is only one area in which government spending cuts have been made. Austerity has also dramatically reduced funding for communities and local government. In fact, of all government departments, it is Local Government that experienced the biggest real-term funding cuts from the Treasury from 2010–2011 to 2015–2016, at 51% (IFS, 2015). Funding cuts were accompanied by government rhetoric promising a new localism and the increased devolution of responsibilities to Local Authorities. Greater control over local economic development has long been sought by Local Government (John, 2014; Meegan et al., 2014, in Hastings et al., 2015) and some commentators have seen newly devolved responsibilities as enabling Local Authorities to deploy locally-specific, tailored solutions to shocks associated with austerity (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013). Nonetheless, as Donald et al. (2014) point out, this greater control over economic development is often compulsory and not always welcomed. Here, this new localism represents devolution of risk and responsibility without any sought-after de-centralisation of control. As Lowndes and Pratchett (2012: 28) eloquently remark, the Government's '...assault on centralism has a hollow feel to it whilst Whitehall continues to control 75% of local government revenue spending' (cited in Wilson and Game, 2011: 237). As such, this new localism

is viewed broadly as a thinly veiled mechanism through which austerity and state retrenchment are realised (Hastings and Matthews, 2015; Meegan et al., 2014).

The scale of funding shortfalls has transformed how Local Government operates, with restrictions in the range and quality of services that Local Authorities are able to provide increasing in austerity. Early forecasts of a trend towards Local Government providing only base-level statutory services, with less apparently urgent services in terminal decline, have proved largely accurate (Stoker, 2012). Local Authorities are increasingly scaling back or even abandoning services that have traditionally underpinned the day-to-day functioning of civil society, with advice, education, housing, culture, health, and leisure services dwindling or even disappearing in many areas. In 2018, one Local Authority - Northamptonshire County Council - announced that it would only be providing the base-level services it was obliged to by law and nothing more (Gray and Barford, 2018). Such are the impacts of budget shortfalls that even those services mandated by law - including adult and child social services and education - have had to cope with significant funding cuts, despite rising demand (*ibid.*).

As with welfare reform, the impact of these cuts has been distributed unevenly across the UK. And once again, it has been poorer Local Authorities - under dual pressures of less-secure local revenue streams and soaring demand for services in austerity - that have experienced the biggest falls in service spending (Gray and Barford, 2018). Between 2010 and 2015 Local Government spending fell by an average of 27% (HM Treasury, 2010). In Rochdale, spending fell by 35% (Etherington and Jones, 2017), which ranked as the 17<sup>th</sup> biggest cut in Local Authority service spending in England (based on 2009-2010 to 2016-2017 figures) (Amin-Smith et al., 2016, cited in Gray and Barford, 2018: Figure 8). Many wealthier districts experienced spending cuts below 10% over the same period (see Gray and Barford, 2018).

Austerity has also had a tangibly negative impact on funding for voluntary and community sector services in Rochdale (see Damm and Sanderson, 2017). This is partly due to cuts in direct central government funding - departmental spending for Communities was cut by 30% between 2010 and 2015 (IFS, 2015) - and increased competition for charitable grants; but also indirectly from funding cuts from the local council. Whilst often discussed as separate entities, voluntary sector and local government services in Rochdale operated with a great deal of interdependence. Rochdale Borough Council delivered a range of services through funding charity and community organizations - including funding advice and homelessness services at The Fortis Centre. The stresses of austerity for NGOs - diminishing central funding, increasing responsibility and demand for services - were thus intertwined with those

of Local Government (Williams et al., 2016; Clayton et al., 2016; Macmillan and McLaren, 2012; Jones et al., 2015; DeVerteuil, 2015, 2017).

One consequence of this has been that non-statutory services in Rochdale – whether outsourced or delivered directly by the council – have diminished, and particularly welfare and legal advice services. Following cuts in funding cuts from the local council (Fitzpatrick, 2011), by 2019 one of the borough’s two Citizens Advice branches had permanently closed and the other was no longer operating a face-to-face service (Manchester Evening News, 2012). The town’s Law Centre (a free legal aid service) had also stopped taking new cases on during the fieldwork period in 2018, after funding from national and local government was cut, and was due to close entirely at the time of writing. It was also towards the end of my time in Rochdale that the Fortis centre began closing its drop-in service at 2.30pm due to staffing shortages. Vicky, Fortis’ drop-in manager, spoke in our interview about the threat of closure the drop-in faced due to funding shortfalls in austerity, attributing this directly to funding insecurities that had largely arisen due to larger, longer-term grants from the local council no longer being available:

‘The complication we’ve got here is, over many years we’ve had one large pot of funding that’s funded anything and everything we’ve ever done. Now we’ve got *five* different funding streams... and it makes it really difficult ... you can’t rely on any funding for long periods.... ever!... I think, you know, those kind of days are gone, so everything’s kind of year by year... I don’t think we can sustain that open door, because, as I said, we can’t fund a lot of the work we’re doing.

(Vicky, interview, October 2018)

Here, the impact of austerity can be seen filtering through to the way local government and charity sector services operate; it has not only been service availability that has been impacted but the very way advice and welfare services are delivered on a day-to-day basis (see also Kirwan, 2016). Troublingly, local austerity is set to continue, with the council’s social and welfare advice and legal services being cut by 10% and community centre funding cut by half in 2019-2020 (Rochdale Borough Council, 2019b). After almost a decade of austerity, Rochdale’s service landscape has been transformed, with both the availability of welfare and legal advice services declining and demand for such services rising with the consequences of welfare reform.

Rochdale’s experience of austerity is a familiar one, mirrored in less-wealthy areas across the country (Beatty and Fothergill, 2014; 2016; Wolferkink-Schaap, 2017). Indeed, one of the most striking features of austerity has been to widen already-

existing gaps in prosperity between long struggling post-industrial Britain and wealthy, economically robust areas, concentrated mainly in Southern England (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016). Whilst such inequalities and increasing 'spatial polarization' (Wacquant et al., 2014: 1272) was not produced by contemporary austerity, it certainly appears to have accelerated it. Recession and austerity has impacted mostly in places that were already marginalized through de-industrialization, uneven economic investment and growth, and stigmatization going back decades. Even now, the service decline and welfare reforms that define austerity are not the only features of spatial polarization that have been accelerated through the actions of the state in recent times. Alongside the work of the Treasury and DWP, policy shifts in the UK's asylum and immigration system has also brought about overlapping changes at the urban margins, including through dispersal policy.

### **4.3 Dispersal and immigration in Rochdale**

Whilst the *formal* dispersal of asylum seekers to Rochdale only began in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, immigration to the town in fact predates this by several decades. The town has a history of international immigration that is typical of many Northern Mill Towns (see Swanton, 2016; Rhodes et al., 2019). Rochdale's rapid population growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was driven mainly by migration from surrounding rural areas, with only relatively small levels of international migration coming mainly from Ireland (Penn et al., 1990). It wasn't until after 1945 that Rochdale experienced significant immigration from further afield when labour shortages and a brief boom period for the textile industry in the post-war years brought mainly Commonwealth migrants to the town (*ibid.*). Most of these workers were from Pakistan and settled almost exclusively in Rochdale's inner wards, close to the cotton mills that lined the canal (*ibid.*). The South Asian population grew steadily throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and became an increasingly visible presence in central Rochdale; reflected in the establishment of shops, restaurants and a number of mosques. By 2001, 9% of the town were recorded as being ethnically 'Pakistani' (7.7%) or 'Bangladeshi' (1.3%); apart from 'White Irish' and 'Other White', no other minority ethnic group made up more than 1%, and Rochdale remained 86.1% 'White British' (Rochdale Borough Council, 2012).

As the local economy declined in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, South Asian migrant communities suffered from systemic discrimination in terms of housing, jobs, and education (Penn et al., 1990) and Rochdale appeared to become increasingly racially segregated, with the perception of distinct 'White' and 'Asian' areas becoming



widely acknowledged (Simpson et al., 2007; see also Rhodes, 2012). Stoked by the activities of the far-right National Front, British National Party, and some parts of the media, racist attacks and tensions between Asian and White communities in many Northern towns became a prominent issue (Amin, 2003; Rhodes, 2012). Whilst Rochdale escaped widespread dis-order, in the Summer of 2001 neighbouring Oldham and other towns in the region experienced significant civil disturbances fought between groups of Asian and White 'youths' and the police, in what were described as '... the worst racially motivated riots in the UK for fifteen years.' (Ritchie, 2001: 2).

Following several official inquiries, local and national government invested in a range of 'community cohesion' initiatives in the 2000s, and there has been no repeat of the scenes of 2001. However, racial tensions have not gone away entirely and the far-right still operate in the area. Since the Brexit referendum in 2016, Home Office figures have shown a spike in hate crime nationally and 'race-related' crimes saw a 36% increase locally in 2016/2017 (Quaynor, 2018, cited in Rhodes et al., 2019: 30). Rochdale has in recent years also been the focus of national debate surrounding the purported racial dimensions of several high-profile child sexual abuse cases involving the grooming of predominantly white girls by networks of men of mostly Pakistani heritage. Since the conviction of nine men in Rochdale in one such case in 2012, the town has witnessed a number of anti-Islam protests from organizations seeking to stir up racial tensions over the case; some featuring signs reading "Refugees Not Welcome" (see Rucki, 2016). With increasingly vocal anti-immigrant sentiment particularly prominent in towns such as Rochdale in the wake of the 2015 refugee 'crisis' and the Brexit referendum (Rhodes et al., 2019), this atmosphere represented a direct challenge to asylum support and solidarity efforts (Piacentini, 2016). Despite headlines around such flashpoints and a problematic politic rhetoric condemning the 'parallel lives' of Asian and White communities (Cantle, 2001; see also Casey, 2016), through what Swanton (2016: 125) refers to as 'interethnic intimacy', I found daily life in Rochdale to be characterised more by mundane cohesion and conviviality (see also Rhodes et al., 2019, on neighbouring Oldham) than any palpable tension.

### **Dispersal and the NASS system, 2000 - 2012**

In the 2000s Rochdale became gradually more diverse with all sub-categories of ethnicity apart from 'White British' (-5.8%) and 'White Irish' (-28.8%) increasing slightly as a percentage of the population in the 2011 census (Rochdale Borough Council, 2012). This has been spurred by the continued growth of the town's South Asian population, some migration from Eastern Europe, but also increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees since the introduction of Dispersal Policy in 2000 (*ibid.*). Prior to dispersal, Rochdale had relatively little history of refugee immigration.

Until the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, refugee migration to the UK was dominated by quotas determined by the UK government that granted status and immigration for a set number of refugees in response to specific conflicts or crises (Kushner and Knox, 1999). However, as the number of non-quota asylum claimants arriving spontaneously from several different countries rose sharply in 1990s, public support for refugees waned (Robinson et al., 2003; Hynes, 2011). In response, the government changed its approach by integrating refugee resettlement with immigration control and border security regimes. This approach was designed around a renewed remit of deterring applicants (Schuster, 2005), making for a 'qualitatively new environment for asylum seekers' (Hynes, 2011; 19).

Since 2000, dispersal has been a formal part of the state's migration control regime (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Squire, 2009), with around 60% of asylum seekers typically being housed in towns and cities away from London and the South East of England (National Audit Office, 2014) on a 'no-choice basis' (Hynes, 2011). The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act formalised the 'one-size-fits-all' legal category of 'asylum seeker', fundamentally changing dispersals from this point on (*ibid.*). With the stated intention of relieving pressure from areas of London and the South East of England (where most asylum seekers chose to live) the 1999 Act made financial support conditional on asylum seekers agreeing to be dispersed to a location of the government's choosing - making dispersal compulsory for those unable to support themselves (Robinson et al., 2003). This was accompanied by the creation of a centralised government agency - the National Asylum and Support Service (NASS) - which was set up by the Home Office to organise dispersals and financial support for asylum seekers. NASS functioned as the government's arbitrator in regional consortia - mainly consisting of local authorities, social housing providers, and NGOs - which negotiated and implemented dispersal accommodation contracts. Despite tensions surrounding conflicting interests and NASS and the Home Office dominating this process (Hynes, 2011), the consortia system did at least allow for some consultation with local dispersal actors (Darling, 2016b).

Many of the new dispersal areas had little or no history of refugee immigration, and often no notable migrant communities or established support networks to speak of (Hyne, 2011). The enforced shift in resettlement from areas with established support and social networks remains one of the most prominent criticisms of dispersal policy and is cited as contributing to asylum seeker exclusion and isolation (Spicer, 2008; Stewart, 2011). The suitability of accommodating vulnerable and visible minorities in such areas has long been at the centre of criticisms, with racist attacks and harassment in new dispersal locations being a prominent issue (Athwal and Bourne,

2007). Whilst access to health (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Johnson, 2003; Feldman, 2006) and education services (Rutter, 2003) have both been hindered by a lack of previous experience and preparation for the needs of asylum seekers (Sales, 2002; Hynes, 2011). Dispersal has also been widely criticised for its isolating effects, with the policy diminishing Refugee Community Organizations' role in mediating integration as asylum seekers were housed away from established social and support networks based mainly in London and other large cities (Griffiths et al., 2005; Zetter et al., 2005). This said, the contribution of new refugee communities to the regeneration of dispersal areas has been well documented (Phillimore & Goodson, 2006) and social and support networks have successfully developed in many new locations following dispersal (Zetter et al., 2005; Wren, 2007). However, these networks are more likely to be informal and still do not exist for many refugee groups at many dispersal locations (Hynes, 2011).

Rochdale in the early-2000s was in many ways typical of one of the new dispersal locations, as Marion – a refugee and co-founder of The Welcome Centre – made clear when recalling her experience of being dispersed to the town in our interview:

'...there were no black people at all around where I was living ... at all!  
... then in Rochdale centre, I started seeing a few - there were a lot of  
Asians, but very little (few) black (people)'

(Marion, interview, June 2018)

The Welcome Centre's other co-founder, David, explained how a lack local services catering to new groups of asylum seekers prompted the establishment of The Welcome Centre at this time:

'...when I arrived here in England, there used to be a need (...) people  
we met at that time didn't know how to cope with the system here... so  
they were living isolated... and there was a big language barrier too... so  
they couldn't really understand the system here... because most of  
them... they couldn't even read... they didn't go so far at school... and  
they was coming to me to ask for help ... most of the people were asylum  
seekers, so they just arrived in the country... err... trying to find their  
way... you know?'

(David, interview, October 2018)

With support from Rochdale Council, Marion and David, founded The Welcome Centre as a charitable trust and - alongside a handful of other small charities and community

organizations - the town established a working refugee support network during the 2000s.

Until 2012, dispersal was co-ordinated by the council's designated 'Asylum Team', which consisted of four employees who worked from an office on the Lower Falinge estate. According to Marion, asylum housing was based almost entirely on the Lower Falinge and Freehold estates close to the town centre, and the Asylum Team were based there to provide easily accessible housing and welfare support for asylum seekers. The council also accommodated a cohort of Congolese refugees through the government's Gateway Protection Programme<sup>2</sup> in 2006 who were supported through the Asylum Team, with apparently notable success (see Evans and Murray, 2009).

### **Privatised Dispersal: 'COMPASS' and Serco, 2012**

In 2012, there was a significant shift in the way dispersals were managed, both nationally (Darling 2016) and locally. Following Home Office budgetary constraints and issues with contract negotiations with regional consortia in 2010, the newly elected Coalition Government announced that it would not be renegotiating existing contracts (Hirschler, 2015). To replace the NASS system, they initiated a tendering process for corporate accommodation providers. Darling (2016b) has argued that the new 'COMPASS' (Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services) arrangement has depoliticised asylum governance through a neoliberal framing of asylum as an issue not only of border control, but also of marketization and fiscal discipline. With these motives at the fore, matters of integration and engagement with local stakeholders were effectively relegated to a secondary concern for the Home Office, alongside the welfare and rights of asylum seekers. Although private providers housed asylum seekers under the NASS system, the involvement of local authorities and Asylum NGOs were now essentially bypassed with the new system (*ibid.*; Hirschler, 2015).

Contracts were awarded to three new private accommodation providers – G4S, Serco, and Clearel – on a regional basis, coming into effect in 2012. Of these, only Clearel had any previous experience housing asylum seekers, and so the COMPASS regime placed new private-sector actors at the heart of dispersal's day-to-day implementation. The transition phase from NASS in particular was condemned for

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<sup>2</sup> The Gateway Protection Programme, along with the Mandate Refugee and [Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement \(VPR\) Programme](#), form one part of what has been described as a 'two-tier' asylum system; with the other tier being the in-country claims route that this thesis focuses on. This split system has been widely criticised for effectively punishing in-country claimants with a more exclusionary and precarious package of state support and freedoms, compared to the government resettlement schemes (Karyotis et al., 2020)

operative failings and for diminishing the quality of service provision in a number of reports (House of Commons, 2014; National Audit Office, 2014). However, inadequate and dangerous housing and poor welfare and advice standards persisted under COMPASS, with the accountability of private providers also a systemic issue (Hirschler, 2015). The conduct of COMPASS providers has even made headlines in the national press on occasion. In Cardiff, asylum seekers were made to wear distinctive plastic wristbands in return for food (Taylor, 2016); and in Middlesbrough a Home Office sub-contractor painted the doors of all their asylum houses a bright red, marking the properties and occupants out for attack (see Bates, 2017). And so, with new corporate actors came new forms of precarity, abjection and '... the emergence of new assemblages of authority, policy and governance' (Darling, 2016b: 230).

The new regime was also accompanied by a shift in the spatial distribution of asylum accommodation across the UK. Availability of low-cost accommodation was always a primary driver of dispersal, with local authorities' decisions on involvement with the NASS dispersal program and allocation of houses guided by the presence of hard-to-let housing in their jurisdiction (Robinson et al., 2003; Kissoon, 2010). A similar motivation on the part of the new providers has also been the central force influencing housing locations under COMPASS (Hirschler, 2015). A change in the geographical distribution and concentration of accommodation soon became evident, as areas with the lowest-cost procurable housing experienced a vastly disproportionate rise in dispersal numbers in the first few years of the new system (*ibid.*: 123-127). Serco - the provider the North West dispersal region - declined to participate in this research and so establishing the exact process behind their accommodation procurement strategy has not been possible. But Rochdale - with its relatively abundant supply of low-cost housing - is typical of the peripheral locations which witnessed a sharp rise in dispersal numbers with COMPASS.

The number of dispersed asylum seekers housed in Rochdale Borough tripled between 2012 and 2015, from around 300 to over a thousand (Home Office, 2019b). Despite this rise, privatisation effectively ended Rochdale Council's formal obligations and stake in matters of asylum welfare and integration, as the new contracts operated directly between Serco and the Home Office (see Darling 2016). This brought about the closure of the Local Authority's four-person Asylum Team as Serco took over all responsibility for dispersal housing and asylum services across the North West region. Given that asylum seeker and refugee welfare is not a specified legal responsibility of Local Authorities - and in the context of increasing budgetary pressures - the council didn't replace the Asylum Team and, as of 2018 didn't employ any staff with an asylum or refugee-focussed role. With the COMPASS system separating

accommodation contracts from support and advice services, and with no Migrant Help office in the region, the new provision also offered no comparable drop-in type services, either locally in Rochdale or elsewhere in Greater Manchester. As a former Asylum Team employee noted when discussing this shift, privatisation brought with it a decline in the availability of local ASR services:

' ... it was working really well... really well, in terms of how things were coordinated. And, to be honest, this is something missing now, because we've seen the change (...) because they (could) come and knock on our door between nine, nine and five, sometimes we were even working 'till late - so they know that the support is there. I'm not saying that, with Serco, there is no support (laughing)... but, it was just intensive (...)'

(Anonymous Asylum Team former employee, interview, June 2018)

Such service decline was exacerbated by the closure of a local refugee support charity in 2016 due to funding shortfalls. Although a national humanitarian aid charity opened a drop-in service in the town in September 2016, this was only open for five-hours, one day a week; whilst The Welcome Centre could only afford to open for two days per week at the time of the study. As the effects of austerity, privatisation, and centralisation converged in Rochdale, what resulted locally was a spike in the number of dispersals but a reduced asylum service landscape.

In this sense, the privatization of asylum accommodation not only emerged from austerity but mirrored its effects in producing the dual stress of increasing demand and declining services. It is also worth noting how the origins of these forms of marginality are shared. Long-standing economic marginalization and depressed property prices provide the conditions both for concentrated welfare austerity and privatised dispersals. Dispersal feeds into processes of symbolic marginalization too. With higher concentrations of asylum seekers, housed in the most-deprived neighbourhoods, these groups become more prominent as visible minorities in these locations, and even become a marker of deprivation in certain discourses. To return to the territorial stigmatization of Rochdale in the national media discussed earlier, it is no coincidence that this discourse conflates (albeit with very little nuance or sound evidence) immigration to the town with welfare dependency:

'... the number of immigrants in Rochdale soared from 4,000 to 15,000 during Labour's time in office.

While the overseas workers took the minimum wage jobs on offer, the Brits simply got paid more to sit at home on the dole.'

(Hull, 2010)

The justification for dispersal locations are bound up in the same processes of material and symbolic marginalization that mark places such as Rochdale as areas in which the state can legitimately intervene; as devalued, deviant containers of problem populations, existing outside of the norm (Tyler, 2013). It is difficult to imagine the same rhetoric been said of - or the same numbers of dispersals been sent to - wealthy parts of the Home Counties, nor well-heeled parts of Greater Manchester. And so today, the intensifying 'polarization of the metropolis' (Wacquant et al., 2014) is evident in Rochdale through both austerity and asylum.

This chapter has introduced Rochdale as a place in which the intersecting forces driving marginality and in/exclusion in the UK are particularly visible and acute. Returning to the original rationale and central aims of the thesis, the town thus represents a valuable case study for exploring how the overlapping spatial distribution of asylum dispersals and welfare austerity, and their governmental parallels, are experienced and understood. Following Wacquant (2007; 2008), I have argued that these intersecting geographies weren't merely a consequence of comparable marginality, but were intrinsically bound up with processes of marginalization themselves. The primary determinant for dispersal location choice -low-cost accommodation - is itself partly the product of processes of material and symbolic degradation (ibid.) that devalue and stigmatize places such as Rochdale. And, from this, marginalized urban areas have become legitimate containers of problem populations (see Tyler, 2013). In the analyses that follow, I seek to explore not only how these governmental regimes were experienced in Rochdale, but also what occurs when groups who are divided by immigration status and positioned as being in competition with each other (Darling, 2017b) are 'throwntogether' (Massey, 2005) in such a way; beginning with an exploration of asylum governance.

# 5. Asylum Governance

## 5.1 Sovereignty, deterrence, and the 'reach' of the border

This chapter addresses Objectives 1 and 2, focusing on the lived experiences and practices of asylum governance from the perspectives of asylum seekers, refugees, and charity service providers. These accounts are taken from interview data and observations made at the Welcome Centre, the asylum seeker and refugee drop-in centre I worked in in Rochdale. Discussing my findings, I emphasize the ways in which asylum seekers are systematically exposed to overlapping forms of governmental discipline and exclusion in dispersal. I begin the chapter by outlining the political discourses and policies that have underpinned the UK's increasingly restrictionist, deterrence-based approach to asylum over the past three decades. Following this, I discuss how punitive restrictions on employment, income and housing placed asylum seekers in a default position of poverty, social exclusion and liminal belonging (Allsopp et al., 2014; Hirschler, 2015; Hynes, 2011). In the latter passages, I then discuss many of the less-tangible, embodied, and performative processes surrounding different Home Office practices; including pervasive threats of detention and deportation (De Genova, 2002; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Mavin, 2019) and forms of surveillance and monitoring that are shown to aggravate feelings of stress and anxiety amongst asylum seekers (ibid.; Fisher, 2018). Running through these diverse bordering practices, I draw attention to the performative and symbolic dimensions of state power in border governance (Salter, 2007; Conlon, 2019; Griffiths, 2014) that, combined with formal restrictions to produce a powerful and multifarious 'politics of discomfort' in asylum (Darling, 2011). The chapter begins by tracing the political context from which the restrictionist turn in asylum governance emerged.

### **Constructing the asylum threat and restrictionist immigration reforms in the 1990s and 2000s.**

The preceding focus on Rochdale introduced dispersal policy as an explicitly spatial form of asylum governance. However, dispersal is also significant in that it commenced alongside a suite of increasingly restrictive and punitive immigration policy reforms throughout the 1990s and early-2000s. What I term the restrictionist turn in asylum governance emerged in the context of rising numbers of asylum applications across Europe (Bloch and Schuster, 2002). In Britain, asylum gained political saliency that, with the assistance of an increasingly lurid tabloid press, devolved into a something resembling a national moral panic during the 1990s (Welch and Schuster, 2005). Whilst the UK had been receiving asylum applicants under the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees for four decades, it was not until 1993 that Britain



established any specific asylum legislation (Parker, 2015). With forced migration low on the political agenda, before the 1990s asylum seekers received formal rights and entitlements similar to those of British citizens and were able to access mainstream benefits and social housing with few restrictions. As Zetter and Pearl (1999: 252, cited from Darling, 2009) commented regarding this pre-restrictionist era: '... when the challenge has been conceptualized in terms of long-term refugee resettlement, rather than a crisis of asylum seeking, the policies have been reasonably benign, if not particularly proactive, in Britain...'. However, only a decade after asylum legislation commenced this position was transformed almost beyond recognition, and asylum seekers came to exist in a separate socio-legal sphere in which access to mainstream welfare, housing, and paid employment was curtailed, and detention and deportation became a matter of routine (Schuster, 2005).

The wording of government announcements accompanying legislation at this time made it clear that the production of 'enforced destitution' (Cholewinski, 1998) was designed to deter asylum seekers coming to Britain (Ibid.; Schuster, 2005; Da Lomba, 2006). Indeed, to understand how an intentionally hostile and repressive asylum system became politically possible, it is instructive to briefly return to discursive processes underpinning abjection discussed in Chapter 2. At the beginning of the 1990s, asylum garnered little public attention, but by the new millennium asylum seekers were quintessential figures of 'national abjection' (Tyler, 2013). Central to this was the framing of asylum seekers in political and media discourse as a burden and a threat - both to national security and to a fraying welfare state, which 'bogus asylum seekers' were coming to Britain to exploit. Bound up with this rhetoric was a series of political responses to what was now widely deemed the 'problem' of asylum (Tyler, 2006). This occurred at a time of perceived crisis for the welfare state (Bloch and Schuster, 2002) that followed years of restructuring under the free-market reforms of Thatcherism. Thus, with rising numbers of applications, asylum became strongly associated with social welfare and specifically framed as a burden on increasingly scarce welfare state resources (ibid.; Parker, 2015). Nick Gill (2009) offers a useful, if brief, discussion of the ideational and discursive effect of dispersal policy on this discourse. In particular, he argues that depictions of asylum-seekers as 'copious' and 'burdensome' results from their geographic dispersion to deprived areas, with such representations exerting a degree of power over influential actors, and thus legitimizing forms of exclusion and mistreatment (Gill, 2009: 187).

This goes some way to explaining the focus of the first restrictions in the Acts of 1993 and 1996, which set asylum seeker benefits entitlements at 90% and 70% of UK-citizen entitlement, respectively (Parker, 2015). Nonetheless, asylum seekers and UK-

citizens were still supported by the state through the same social welfare system. It wasn't until the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act that asylum seekers were excluded from mainstream access to financial support and social housing, with the establishment of a separate support system and NASS (see above). Critically, it was this status-based separation that paved the way for an array of exclusionary and precarity-inducing policies in the 1990s and 2000s, including the replacement of cash benefits with a voucher system in 1999, a ban on paid employment since 2002, and the limiting of Leave to Remain to 5 years in 2006. Here, the 1999 Act also formalized the establishment of an 'immobility regime' for asylum seekers (Turner, 2007) - based around deportation, detention, and dispersal (Bloch and Schuster, 2005) - that was made possible by the creation of the exceptional socio-legal status of asylum seeker.

Such a separation was made possible by the rhetorical demarcation of asylum seekers as dangerous 'polluting' outsiders; a figure onto which anxieties around national security and prosperity were projected (Darling, 2008; Malloch and Stanley, 2005). As well threatening the welfare state, the figure of the asylum seeker increasingly became associated with matters of national security, 'criminality' and 'risk' (Malloch and Stanley, 2005); a trend heightened the wake of 9/11 and the escalating 'war on terror' (Welch, 2004). Running through this hostile government and media discourse was also the normalization of a default position of disbelief as to the veracity of asylum claims. As Lynn and Lea (2003: 433) conclude: 'the concept of the 'bogus asylum-seeker' is one that has become so 'naturalized' within the UK, that from an argumentative viewpoint it is perhaps no longer necessary to defend the accusation that many asylum-seekers are not fleeing from oppressive and hostile conditions in their home country'. Thus, the discursive construction of asylum as a migratory choice and its perceived threat to the national order paved the way for the establishment of an immigration system based on deterring asylum applicants through increasingly hardline asylum policies in the 1990s and 2000s.

### **Agamben, Sovereignty and 'bare life'**

A prominent way in which scholars have sought to understand increasingly restrictionist asylum regimes has been through the concept of sovereignty and the work of philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998; 2005; Mountz, 2013). Agamben bases his work on Carl Schmitt's (1985) analysis of sovereignty and the role of the sovereign as the arbiter of exclusion and inclusion in the social order of the nation-state. Agamben (2005) argues that, as the arbiter of the 'state of exception', the sovereign perpetuates a state of emergency through which it can act to restore order by suspending the rule of law with regards to itself and objects of exception. In an era of heightened anxieties over immigration, asylum seekers have become arguably the

most discernible example of such objection. Here, it is this power to decide exceptions that allows the state – legally and politically – to treat certain non-citizens in ways which it could not with respect to ‘good’ UK-citizens and members of the national ‘community of value’ (Anderson, 2013).

Beyond the foundational political logics of sovereign exclusion, asylum scholars have also drawn from Agamben’s work when analyzing the manifestations of sovereign-subject power geometries and everyday experiences of asylum governance. Following Foucault’s (2004) conceptualization of ‘biopower’ – in which human life itself is an object of power struggles – Agamben develops the notion of ‘bare life’ to refer to the ultimate condition of sovereign exclusion in which human life is stripped of all rights (Agamben, 1998). It is such a position that relegates abject outsiders to what Agamben (1998) calls ‘homo sacer’ (‘sacred man’) – a figure whose lack of political status and rights has rendered them dispensable and reduced them to ‘bare life’. Importantly, Agamben uses the example of the figure of the refugee here, and this strand of Agamben’s work has subsequently been used to highlight the extremity of abjection experienced in asylum regimes (see Darling, 2009; Hirschler, 2015). In a UK context, Hirschler’s (2015) recent study of experiences of dispersal in many ways substantiates this application of the notion of ‘bare life’. Here, interviews with dispersed asylum seekers uncover a picture of overwhelming and unrelenting abjection within the COMPASS housing scheme, made possible by the removal of the rights and freedoms afforded to citizens and the spatialized exclusion of dispersal. As Hirschler (2015: 210) concludes:

The isolation of being moved out of metropolitan centres far from support, the emotional and developmental ramifications of constant moves for children in school, the unsanitary conditions in dispersed properties, feelings of being ‘dumped’ and ignored by housing staff – these endurances suggest a life exposed to death, a ‘living dead man’ (Agamben, 1998: p. 131).

Despite compelling empirical evidence and the resonance with Agamben’s work here, Hirschler also echoes major criticisms of the ‘bare life’ thesis and its applications. Specifically, he follows Tyler (2006), amongst others, in questioning the effacement of refugee agency and the depiction of the state’s totalizing and uncontested power that defines many Agambenian analyses of asylum governance (see also Owens, 2009). Indeed, many authors have argued this framing to be empirically invalid, highlighting studies of refugee protest (Tyler, 2013) and demonstration (Walters, 2008), successful legal challenges (Wilsher, 2011; Flynn, 2016), and the generative ‘sociology of camps’ (Sigona, 2015) as evidence here. Others have criticized

Agamben's work for negating the possibility for political challenges by refugees and refugee advocates against what is presented as the totalizing force of sovereign power; with what Mills (2004) sees as the counter-productive notion of a 'messianic event' being necessary to overcome political exclusion in any meaningful way (Darling, 2009). And so, whilst influential, many Agambenian analyses of asylum regimes have been critiqued as both empirically inadequate and politically problematic - lacking nuance with respect to distributions of power and agency. Nonetheless, when considered with nuance, Agamben's understanding of exception remains useful in appreciating how the stripping of normal rights and freedoms from asylum seekers is made politically possible through the primacy of sovereign power and distinctly spatial forms of exclusion.

### **Spatialized exclusion and the extended camp**

The power of the sovereign to define asylum seekers as an exception is evident in the carceral character of UK's asylum system, which manifests in three interlinked forms of spatial control: dispersal, detention, and deportation (Bloch and Schuster, 2005). Whilst generally being understood as separate strategies of deterrence, Bloch and Schuster (2005) argue that these methods of immigration control overlap and combine in the spatialized exclusion of asylum seekers. As a total removal from the state's territory, the most overt form of exclusion here is deportation, which leaves little doubt as to the position of those individuals in the eyes of the state. The practice of detention is more complex. Whilst the UK's 'detention estate' (Gill, 2009) exists entirely within national territory, detention centres are physically enclosed, prison-like spaces designed to strictly control and limit detainees' mobility. As spaces of exception and enclosure then, detention centres have many of the key traits of refugee camps - spaces conventionally imagined as a feature of the Global South. Agamben (1998: 168) discusses the camp as a 'spatial arrangement' where a contradictory inclusive exclusion is produced within national territory (Darling, 2009) and in which 'bare life' is most clearly exposed (Hirschler, 2015). Whilst, more recently, Davies et al. (2017) have observed how the French state has responded to informal camps in Calais through forms of violent *inaction*, with migrants allowed to live in such sites but their welfare intentionally neglected. Following Diken and Laustsen's (2005) development of Agamben with respect to such contradictions, detention centres can likewise be seen as spaces which demarcate in/exclusion of individuals within sovereign territory.

Generally, the abjection and exclusion produced by detention and deportation appears more extreme compared to dispersal and has thus proved more of a concern for scholarly enquiry and a focus for political protest. Most studies in this vein have tended to focus on these explicitly exclusionary spaces and associated practices of detention

(see Edkins and Pin-Fat, 2005; Minca, 2005; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008). However, a handful of Agambenian analyses have explored exclusionary governance away from the space of the camp. Diken and Laustsen (2005; Diken, 2004) have conceived the camp as a 'non-space' that encompasses more than just the physical territory of camps to include - amongst other entities - the practice of dispersal and dispersal sites. Writing on dispersal, they describe in distinctly Agambenian terms how dispersed asylum seekers are still subject to the same 'inclusive exclusion' visible in more clearly bounded spaces of exception:

'... the strategies of dispersion directly aim at *not* integrating asylum seekers, neither in the local context, labor market, nor in schools, keeping them in limbo in sites of confinement until they acquire the status of refugee, which clarifies whether they are going to be sent 'home' or not. Indeed, from the systemic point of view, refugees embody those people who are excluded from several function systems at once and thus whose lives are reduced to bare life;...'

(Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 87 original emphasis).

Regarding the fate of destitute asylum seekers, Darling (2009: 651) similarly argues that the abandonment of state support and right of appeal for unsuccessful asylum applicants represents 'the production of bare life' at dispersal sites.

Whilst Dispersal represents a more subtle - and perhaps more insidious - part of Britain's 'immobility regime' (Turner, 2007), it is still a strategy of deterrence that produces marginalization and abjection, albeit with a more diffuse spatial distribution and complex implications for political belonging. Hirschler (2015: 36) picks up on this nuanced picture with respect to the exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream state support; pointing to dispersal as relegating asylum-seekers to an '...interstitial space between recognition and abandonment; their presence ... acknowledged only insofar as they were actively banned from involvement with and engagement in British society'. Whilst not physically excluded from national territory, dispersed asylum seekers are thus 'inclusively excluded under sovereign authority' (ibid.).

Mark - a refugee caseworker who had previously worked for an asylum charity in Australia - eloquently captured a similar nuance when comparing the more conspicuous abjection of Australia's detention-by-default (see Hyndman and Mountz, 2008) system with UK dispersal policy:

'... its equally as challenging, but for completely different reasons... the most crude example, or analogy that I could give, would be that... over there is waterboarding, and over here is Chinese drip, water torture...'

(Mark, interview, July 2018)

Whilst by-definition being practiced in diffuse locations, dispersal remains a part of an interconnected system of spatialized exclusion alongside detention and deportation. As I shall evidence shortly, this is not only a conceptual connection; the very real threat of being detained or deported with little or no notice was an unending feature of daily life for dispersed asylum seekers in Rochdale. So, with dispersal, nominally non-carceral spaces come to be experienced as spaces of enclosure and an extension of the logic of the camp (see Turner, 2016).

### **The re-scaling and reach of the border**

This 'campization' (Kreichauf, 2018) of myriad mundane, marginal spaces is rooted in exceptions conceived at a different scale – that based around notions of a coherent (but imagined) national community and clearly bounded sovereign territory. Over the past two decades political geographers have increasingly drawn attention to a broader re-scaling of borders; from checkpoints at the territorially fixed boundaries of nation-states, to a range of border practices taking place away from seemingly outmoded 'lines in the sand' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2009). Contra the influential "borderless world" thesis of the early 1990s (Ohmae, 1990), political geographers have since developed the broad concept of 'bordering' to capture emerging expressions of nation-state sovereignty that have arisen at a distance from borders themselves (Johnson et al., 2011: 61).

In many ways contemporary borders are defined by their diffused and often pervasive array of functions - the central tenet of Philosopher Étienne Balibar's (1998) polemic assertion that "borders are everywhere". In this vein, political geographers have drawn attention to states' relocation of border functions outside of their national territories; as evident in offshore immigration processing (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008) and pre-emptive border controls (see Amoore, 2013). Similarly, border practices have also increasingly moved *within* nation-state territories with the proliferation of different forms of in-country immigration checks, controls, and policing (Johnson et al., 2011; Bigo, 2000; Coleman, 2007). Much work here has focussed on local border practices in urban areas (Lebuhn, 2013), where cities have been targeted by sovereign authorities as '...strategic location(s) for the enforcement of border control 'within' the nation-state' (Darling, 2017: 183). In doing so, 'cities are increasingly becoming the

frontier zones of the globalised world' rather than spaces shielded by national borders (Fisher, 2018: 274; Balibar et al., 2002; Sassen, 2013).

Whilst the urban dimensions of forced migration have generally formed a minority focus in forced migration research (Darling, 2017), the spatialized exclusions that constitute the British asylum system represent a prime example of this shift. Despite being physically present in towns and cities within sovereign territory, asylum seekers are subjected to techniques of governmental control that attempt to reconcile this with motivations to restrict inclusion and mobility (Walters, 2004). Practices of categorization thus take place in cities and the everyday spaces through which access to services and the social and material infrastructures of daily urban life are negotiated (see Young, 2011; Bousetta, 2008; Garni and Miller, 2008; Hiemstra, 2010, Darling, 2017). Viewed topographically – understanding that 'power has both location and extension' (Allen, 2011: 284) – the state exhibits extensive spatial reach here, as border functions extend across myriad prosaic spaces within sovereign territory.

With expanding spatial reach has come a diversification in the array of actors involved in the daily reproduction of borders. As Johnson et al. (2011: 62) remark: 'Just as the "where" question is complicated by unconventional border sites, the seemingly simple question of "who borders?" entails an increasingly complex answer since bordering practices are less and less the exclusive domain of the state and its agents'(see also Humphris, 2019). Again, dispersal and asylum in the UK offer a clear example of this (Darling, 2016b), with the national press, charities, and private accommodation providers all constituting the asylum system in diverse and profound ways. Although a minor concern within refugee scholarship, an increasing number of studies have scrutinised the often opaque relationships between state and private actors that have emerged as governments increasingly outsource immigration 'services' to nominally non-state organizations and personnel (Darling, 2017). Here, Flynn (2016) has explored the motives of a range of actors involved asylum regimes at what he terms the 'corporate-state nexus' (p. 80), as the state seeks to achieve its objectives by shifting its operations and responsibilities 'outwards' to social actors (Lahav and Guiraudon, 2000; Gill, 2010).

Importantly, in the context of a far-reaching 'hostile environment' for migrants (Webber, 2019), these actors are not only corporate (Humphris, 2019). Restrictions on access to healthcare and adult education has meant that government staff have also been obliged to carry out immigration checks and, where needed, charge for or deny services. Landlords too are now required to establish immigration status when determining whether to provide homes to rent to non-citizens (Crawford et al., 2016). Whilst universities are required to check international students' visas and passports

when registering on a course and academics tasked with monitoring attendances in class for immigration purposes. As Burrell and Schweyher (2019) show with the case of Polish migrants, the UK's hostile environment has variable impacts not only between, but also within certain citizenship statuses and groups; with class, gender and race all shaping how restrictionist border practices are experienced. As I shall cover shortly, whilst experiences varied, with the wide-ranging deterrence-based restrictions of asylum, the bordering practices that asylum seekers are subject to are particularly carceral in character – curtailing rights to work and mobility in the UK as a matter of law. When it comes to accessing public services and basic freedoms as an immigrant in the UK today, Balibar's assertion (1998) that "borders are everywhere" begins to appear less polemic and more a fact of daily life for dispersed asylum seekers.

### **Everyday bordering and the 'politics of discomfort'**

Many studies concerning lived experiences of asylum highlight how spatialised modes of control are accompanied by various associated forms of exclusion and abjection in daily life. Partly in response to the criticisms of Agamben outlined above, some of this work has drawn on Foucauldian notions of biopower and governmentality to explore the power dynamics permeating asylum regimes and shaping refugee experience (Muller, 2004; Gill 2010). Here, Gill (2010) recognises an 'emerging critical asylum geography' that emphasises the everyday, situated practices that are central to the reproduction of state effects, and which recognise nominally non-state entities as key sites of governance and the negotiation of sovereign power relations. At the heart of much of this work is a relational spatial ontology that attends to the 'complex geographies of connection and disconnection between different sites, practices and assemblages through which asylum and refugee governance is achieved' (ibid.: 638), and which is thus attentive to both territorial and non-territorial forms of power. Such a concern sits within a broader conceptual interest in what Painter (2006: 75) terms 'prosaic stateness' - the ability of the state to permeate into even the most mundane aspects of daily life. Conceptualized in this way, the state exhibits not only *topographical* reach in exerting territorial control, but also *topological* reach in shaping subjects' daily lives (Allen, 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2010). Here, the increasingly diffused, indirect, and embodied forms of asylum governance can be seen as prime examples of how 'power-topologies' allow the state to make its authority felt regardless of physical or institutional presence (see Allen, 2004).

The disciplinary and punitive effects of housing provisions, employment restrictions, enforced poverty, and forms of surveillance experienced in dispersal have all featured prominently in critical asylum scholarship. Here, Darling (2011) argues that conditions



in dispersal serve to assert sovereign authority over asylum seekers, providing a constant reminder of their liminality through the biopolitical production of insecurity and a 'politics of discomfort'. With influences from Feminist critical thought, several asylum scholars have attended here to the ways in which such forms of discomfort are produced and negotiated corporeally (Conlon, 2010; 2019; Mavin, 2019). As Gill (2009) argues with respect to the UK's detention estate, the state actively asserts its authority through its ability to control mobility; regulating circulations of certain bodies or types of bodies in the name of security (Darling, 2011). Border practices are seen here to encompass the body itself; something plainly evident in the deployment of biometric border technologies (Amoore, 2006), but also in the affects engendered by immigration controls.

In a similar vein, scholars have drawn on theories of the body and performativity to explore the power geometries and lived, embodied, experiences of borders. For Mavin (2019) the embodied experiences of sub-standard housing and the emotional, psychological strain of living indefinitely under a regime of enforced (im)mobility, surveillance and financial hardship, means that the body functions as a key 'Political Site' of the asylum system. Here, Mavin (2019) pays attention to the performative capacity of bodies in both expressing obedience to and dependency upon the state, but also in contesting precarity and abjection through embodied expressions of resistance. In this way, shifting the scale of analysis of borders, from the global or national to 'the finer scale of the body' is effective in uncovering and understanding power relations and lived experiences of migration (Mountz, 2004: 323) as a 'peopled' and contingent sphere of governance.

Thus far, this chapter has drawn on existing research to outline the key policies and discourses that have positioned asylum as a societal threat to the UK and subject asylum seekers to a 'politics of discomfort' (Darling, 2011) as means of deterring claims. As the preceding discussions explain, this restrictionist approach to asylum produced a hostile and intrusive array of constraints and exclusionary border practices that had a major effect on different aspects of asylum seekers' lives. The following analysis draws from and develops these debates on the spatialized and everyday dimensions of contemporary asylum regimes to explore how dispersal was experienced by asylum seekers in Rochdale.

## **5.2. Dispersal, discomfort, and liminality**

### **Enforced mobility and state affects**

Totalling over 40,000 individuals in September 2018 (Home Office, 2019), most asylum seekers in Britain are accommodated through dispersal, which usually begins immediately upon arrival in the UK. Following an initial Home office screening interview in Croydon, dispersed asylum seekers are sent to a regional Initial Accommodation Centre until dispersal housing within an allocated region becomes available. In the North West, this initial accommodation is in Liverpool and operated by Serco. This phase of dispersal usually takes 2-3 weeks, but is often longer (House of Commons, 2017). Following this, asylum seekers are meant to be allocated semi-permanent accommodation whilst their applications are being processed by the Home Office; however subsequent moves are commonplace (*ibid.*). Asylum-seekers have no right to choose the location and timing of moves, which are decided between Serco and the Home Office.

In our interview, Patrick described the upheaval and disruption he experienced during this process as he was moved three times over a 10-month period after applying for asylum:

'Government decided to move me from London to Liverpool... it wasn't my opinion, it was government's opinion. They moved me... government decision, every time... I was thinking to stay in London, but when they moved me, I was very sad. So, when I came to Liverpool, I really enjoyed (it). Because I started playing football. But after that, ... so they moved me, I didn't know that they... they didn't let me know before, but the same day, in the morning they say "you are moving from Liverpool to Manchester". So, again, I was very sad. ... I was ready in the morning to go to English class, but in the early morning, Serco officer says "no, you have to move to... you are going to Manchester". So I ask them "why didn't you let me know before?" because I want to go to school, to English class. They said "no, you are moving, you don't stay anymore here" ... I... didn't disagree... because that was the decision for everyone, they decided when they want to give you address, and move you where they want to move you. You need to obey that.'

(Patrick, 21, asylum seeker and Welcome Centre volunteer, interview, June 2018)

Here, Patrick recounts several disciplinary and punitive features of the dispersal process that were routinely experienced by the asylum seekers and refugees I spoke to in Rochdale. Firstly, was the power imbalance between state and subject that underpinned the no-choice basis of dispersal. With every move coming as a

governmental decision, Patrick recognised that he was in no position to 'disagree'. Secondly, was the obscure and sudden means through which asylum seekers were informed of relocations. For Patrick, no communication was made regarding when, where, and why he would be relocated until the morning of the move. As he alludes to, not knowing if, when or where he was going to be moved meant that he felt unable to plan and structure his participation in matters of everyday well-being and social inclusion. Following Woodward (2014), such a Kafkaesque condition of 'not-knowing' forms part of a 'politics of confusion' that serves the purpose of paralysing those who are subject to such measures. More specifically here, this state-imposed confusion contributes both to a re-assertion of sovereign dominance and the creation of an affectively hostile environment for asylum seekers.

Indeed, as well as socio-political *effects*, states have the power to engender embodied *affects* (*ibid.*). This can be seen in Patrick's reflection on the interconnected social and emotional impact of being uprooted from nascent connections to dispersal areas. From the time we spent together at the Welcome Centre, it was clear that playing football was central to his social life, well-being, and sense of belonging. Similarly, alongside volunteering, education was his main occupation and he attended English classes at two colleges in the Rochdale area. And so for Patrick, '... the fickle affectivity of statist encounters...' (Woodward, 2014: 23) he described was experienced in feelings of sadness and lingering frustration at the upheaval of the dispersal process. This also draws attention to how, as an exercise of sovereign power, dispersal is inherently an embodied form of governance; being meted out through control over movement of bodies (Darling, 2011) and experienced through emotional disruption and upheaval (Mavin, 2019).

### **Enforced stasis and sub-standard housing**

The significance of embodiment in asylum politics was also apparent in the daily experiences of living in Serco's dispersal housing, much of which was of sub-standard quality. The routinely poor quality of often unsafe homes, inappropriate home-sharing arrangements, and disciplinary staff-tenant relationships have been scrutinised by several studies and reports (Hirschler, 2015; Zill et al., 2018). As this literature details, the physical quality of housing under COMPASS provision has been poor in many respects, with vulnerable occupants routinely exposed to harm as a result of poor equipment, maintenance, safety and security standards (see Hirschler, 2015; House of Commons, 2014, 2017; National Audit Office, 2014). In one notable example from Rochdale, Khaled described how he, his pregnant wife, and young child, were housed for five weeks in a rodent-infested house in Oldham, despite repeatedly requesting to be re-housed:

'(...) because my wife was pregnant, with the second child, they moved us to proper house in Oldham. And... because the house was... there were rats and... you know... and my wife, she didn't like to stay in that house because she was pregnant and, you know, she's scared of mice and rats... so Serco transferred us to Rochdale... (...) those five weeks were some of the worst five weeks of my life. Because, because my wife - every time she went to the toilet, if she see mice, she's screaming. (...) And I explained to them my situation, because my wife is suffering depression, and everything and... I was ashamed every time, they say "we move you, we move you". Anyway, I pressure them and they say "we move you", but if you don't keep pressuring them, they may ignore you, they may forget you.'

(Khaled, 50, asylum seeker, interview, December 2017)

Albeit in a reverse situation of enforced stasis, the emotional distress Khaled and his family experienced echoes Patrick's case in being experienced as a deeply uncomfortable, embodied affect of dispersal. Here, the emotional and physical health implications of exposure to such abject conditions becomes shockingly pertinent when considering the stress and depression that his pregnant wife suffered. Whilst, on a less-urgent basis, the state's removal of Khaled's ability to protect his family from such exposure to harm also engendered feelings of shame on his part. As Khaled describes, because his concerns were repeatedly disregarded by Serco housing staff, acting to escape these conditions required confidence and persistence. As Hirschler (2015) aptly argues with respect to dispersal housing, whilst being stripped of the right to free choice of accommodation and exposed to abject conditions, asylum seekers were not without agency. However, given the disciplinary bureaucratic and power structures built into the asylum system, many suffering occupants understandably felt unable to raise issues and often stayed in sub-standard housing for extended periods before seeking assistance, either from advocates or directly from Serco.

In Rochdale, this issue was made clear at a meeting of local community organizations, where a representative of a community centre raised the case of an asylum seeker family who had been housed by Serco in a deprived outer-area of the borough with very little history of immigration or asylum. The family had been living there in isolation for several months in inadequate housing and only became known to local community support workers after a point of social and mental health crisis had been reached. Similar issues relating to the location of dispersal housing were also raised at the Welcome Centre, where a number of occupants sought help after being housed

in neighbourhoods where they felt isolated or intimidated by anti-social behaviour. Disconcertingly, whether more asylum seekers were in similar positions was simply unknown to services, as Serco were unable to provide details of where asylum seekers were housed in the borough due to contractual obligations surrounding privacy with their 'client', the Home Office.

The no-choice basis and endemically sub-standard quality of asylum accommodation has also been argued to discipline and govern asylum seekers' daily lives (ibid.; Conlon, 2010; Darling, 2011). Here, Darling (2011) argues that the inadequacies endemic in dispersal accommodation serves to assert sovereign authority over asylum seekers, providing a constant reminder of their subjugation through the biopolitical production of insecurity. To borrow Patrick's words, when it comes to dispersal housing, 'You need to obey that.'

### **The work ban and enforced poverty**

For often long periods, this assertion of sovereign power through stasis (Gill, 2009) was deployed alongside enforced liminality, as asylum seekers were made to wait indefinitely in dispersal with a series of curtailed rights and freedoms. At the heart of this was a ban on paid employment for asylum applicants – in place since 2002 – that exacerbated a broader position of precarity brought about through the asylum system (Lewis et al., 2014). Given the paltry subsistence payments they received whilst their applications were being considered, being excluded from employment has significant implications for the health and well-being of asylum seekers (Burchett and Matheson, 2010). The result of this was not only an inevitable condition of poverty and precarity (see Allsopp et al., 2014) but the denial of opportunity to meaningfully participate in society and establish a sense of belonging (Burchett and Matheson, 2010), as Patrick attested:

'I'd want to work, but I'm not allowed, so ..I feel sad (...) I don't feel well about that, I joined the country three years ago. We get £35 every, £37 every week, but we have a lot of things to do... you can't eat every day with £37, so that's why... you want something, but you don't have money, you don't have enough money.

(Patrick, 21, interview, June 2018)

Importantly, the poverty enforced by the ban on working was not experienced in separation from other forms of exclusion. As Patrick elaborated with respect to his shared Serco accommodation, the consequences of the work ban were imbricated in the social arrangements and exposures endemic to dispersal housing:

*Patrick:* For me, Its just for allowing asylum seekers to work. Because if some asylum seekers get quickly, the decision, and others take too long, so they don't work. If they don't work, we are very frustrated, and think bad things.... '

*Interviewer:* What do you mean by "bad things"?

*Patrick:* When I say bad things... you can steal something for... you can steal something by lack of money, or... like that... some people have done that (...) That was happening to me. So, I lost my clothes, and my bike. So, I told them (Serco housing staff)... they say "OK, we'll check on the camera" but they didn't find the person who stole my bike.

(Patrick, 21, interview, June 2018)

Asylum and refugee support staff spoke about how the ban on work often triggered mental health crises for asylum seekers; especially men, who's sense of identity and self-worth was often rooted in being a breadwinner for their family (cf. Gupta & Sullivan, 2013). This frequently had a detrimental knock-on impact on family members and formed a focus of much of the interventions and counselling work delivered by the Welcome Centre. As seen with Khaled's experience of being denied the chance to provide a safe home for his young family, the state asserts the power to permeate even the most prosaic and fundamental dynamics of family life and social reproduction. For Allsopp et al. (2014) these compounding exclusions produce an inevitable and endemic position of poverty that serves as a means of deterring asylum applications. With enforced and indefinite deprivation, and no legal means of escaping this whilst their applications are being processed, dispersed asylum seekers live in an absurd position in which they are both marginalized by, and entirely dependent on, state support (Mavin, 2019).

### **Spending monitoring and surveillance**

Accommodation arrangements, poverty, and exclusion were not the only factors producing an embodied 'politics of discomfort' for asylum seekers in Rochdale. Forms of everyday surveillance conducted by the Home Office also contributed to feelings of unease and anxiety. One stark example here involved the monitoring of asylum seekers' spending and whereabouts through their 'ASPEN' cards (asylum support payment debit cards). The ASPEN card was introduced by the Home Office in 2017 to replace cash subsistence payments for asylum applicants (section 95 support) and the 'Azure' card for refused asylum seekers (section 4).

Adeeb - a 30-year-old living under section 95 support - was subject to surveillance through the new payment system and showed me a letter he had received from the Home Office demanding that he account for why his ASPEN card had been used outside of Rochdale (in Manchester and Derby) "... within seven working days of receipt of this letter to enable the Home Office to decide whether to suspend or discontinue your section 95 support...". For Fisher (2018: 280), surveillance within the dispersal system differs from that of other border practices in that "...this intent to control the borderspace is worked into the existing architectures of surveillance (Rose 1999)' in cities; in this case involving everyday infrastructures of consumption. Adeeb spoke in desperation about how the surveillance of his movements exacerbated his mental illness, compounding issues that had emerged with other precarities and exclusions produced through dispersal:

I'm already suffering mental health problem, I can't sit down in that property 24-7 and the people (the Home Office are) asking "why did you went to Manchester? how did you...". It's local... I can't go for fresh air... but without visa, without work, seriously, life is shit, you know? I can't do (anything)... I can't even survive with £36, seriously. If I get any job, I love to work, I'd love to find a job. My sickness... my sickness... I want to destroy these things. But I'm sick, you know?

(Adeeb, 30, asylum seeker, interview, December 2017)

Here, the despair that Adeeb spoke of emerged as a result of draconian restrictions imposed on different facets of his daily life. The abjection that he felt emerged from forms of exclusion that on their own might have been tolerable, but in combination, and with indefinite perpetuity, became unbearable. Hirschler (2015: 37; citing Turner, 2007: 289) attributes such methods of surveillance and exclusion as being part of an 'immobility regime' extending beyond the walls of the camp, establishing an "enclave society' where 'governments and other agencies seek to regulate spaces and ... immobilize flows of people, goods and services". For Adeeb, the feeling of having his movements monitored and restricted was yet another mode of deterrence that restricted daily life in dispersal.

The Home Office's deployment of the ASPEN card was also central to more mundane forms of exclusion. Whilst the ASPEN card could be used to withdraw cash and worked as a debit card at more outlets than previous asylum payment cards (see Fisher, 2018), it couldn't be used for online payments. With meagre levels of subsistence allowance, this was significant as card users couldn't access often cheaper goods from online outlets. To get around this, some asylum seekers at the Welcome Centre would

give cash to friends and acquaintances to make online payments on their behalf; effectively stripping them of normal financial independence and potentially exposing them to financial dependency and abuse. In many ways the in/exclusions of the ASPEN card encapsulates dispersed asylum seekers' position of being indefinitely caught in an 'interstitial space' at the threshold of belonging in dispersal (Hirschler, 2015). Whilst the multiple exclusions of the asylum system often combined to produce acute crisis situations and conditions of abjection - as with Adeeb's position - for many asylum seekers the enforced stasis of dispersal was defined more by a monotonous discomfort and liminality, punctuated and bookended by periods of upheaval and crisis

It is instructive to note here that, under the ban on paid employment, the only form of subsistence available to asylum seekers was therefore contingent upon compliance with such invasive forms of surveillance and monitoring. Yet, what Kate Coddington (2019) describes as 'the slow violence of life without cash' represents but one part of dispersal's pervasive system of exclusion and discomfort. As the following section details with respect to Home Office reporting requirements, dispersed asylum seekers were also subject to other everyday forms of monitoring and threat.

### **5.3. The threat of destitution, detention, and deportation.**

Fundamentally, the dispersal system's myriad exclusions discussed above were underpinned by a precarity of immigration status. But forms of governmental discipline were not confined to dispersal itself whilst asylum applications were being considered. Although dispersal has often been analysed as a distinct part of UK's border regime (see Bloch and Schuster, 2005), in deportation and detention, the threat of other deterrence strategies were a constant feature of daily life for dispersed asylum seekers in Rochdale. Writing on deportation, De Genova (2002: 439) reminds us of the connections between the socio-legal basis of immigration status and the affective power of governmental threat:

'Migrant "illegality" is lived through a palpable sense of deportability, which is to say, the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state... What makes deportability so decisive in the legal production of migrant "illegality" and the militarized policing of nation-state borders is that some are deported in order that most may remain...'

In dispersal, such threats were explicitly built into the routine of scheduled reporting to the Home Office (see Fisher et al., 2018), which for asylum seekers in Rochdale



involved travelling to Dallas Court – an immigration reporting office around 15 miles away in Salford. Ostensibly this was required for monitoring purposes, with asylum seekers effectively required to confirm their presence between intervals ranging from a week to six months. Issues with reporting were encountered regularly and were a common reason for people seeking help and assistance at the Welcome Centre. This was in large part due to the punishments and investigations that were triggered if asylum seekers missed or arrived late for appointments. Punishments here were often draconian, and even included detention and deportation proceedings in some cases. Understandably then, the high stakes of reporting procedures manifested in a great deal of anxiety and stress, as the following research diary excerpt illustrates:

José [asylum seeker, 51] came to the Work Club today and came straight to me to ask if I could call the Home Office for him because he couldn't make it to report to immigration in Salford. He seemed extremely stressed and anxious and thrust his immigration bail letter [Home Office IS96] at me, pointing to the phone number to call. Anticipating some interrogation from them, I asked him why he couldn't make it. His English isn't great, but I picked up something about not having enough money for transport and him being too ill to walk, which took me back a bit given the distance to Salford.

(Research diary extract, Welcome Centre, May 2018)

Whilst José was permitted to change his appointment date on this occasion, the stress he felt even at having to request this speaks volumes as to the power of the reporting process to evoke embodied feelings of panic. In the context of enforced inactivity in dispersal, the reporting regime thus had a looming presence in dispersed asylum seekers' daily lives. Such a pervasive 'state affect' (Woodward, 2014) was intensified by the fact that the Home Office would quite often change people's reporting dates and intervals without explanation. In a position of *not-knowing* (*ibid.*) the demands and schedules decided by the Home Office, fears of plans for detainment were a depressingly rational reaction. Here, Immigration Bail letters formed a focal point through which disciplinary threats were meted out and had the power to trigger acute episodes of fear and panic. The threat of detention was made unequivocally clear in the language and form of Immigration Bail letters, in which the words 'NOTIFICATION TO A PERSON WHO IS LIABLE TO BE DETAINED' appeared in uppercase as standard; a threat which was never accompanied with an explanation as to the stipulations in which asylum seekers would be detained. As David discussed in our interview, such communications were not merely disciplinary threats, and some of the Welcome

Centre's former service users had indeed been detained whilst reporting at Dallas Court before being deported without notice:

'(...) they're living with this constant stress, you know, you need to go and sign and ... when you are going to sign, you don't know if they are going to... catch you, and ...errr...err, detain you, you know? They *live* with this, and people don't imagine this... but asylum seeker(s), they live with this constant... constant stress... even when they go... when they have to go to Dallas Court to sign...errr... they need to, before going they need to tell one friend 'I'm going to sign, because I don't know if I'm coming back...' you know? So its like, that night, that person won't sleep, you know? He's gonna stay awake, to say 'tomorrow's gonna be fine!' And then when he goes there, and comes back, he's like... waiting for the next...signing time...'

(David, Welcome Centre manager, interview, October 2018)

Here, David also captures how the reporting process conditions the routine of asylum seekers' lives whilst living in dispersal - in a recurring pattern of waiting, worry, and short-lived relief. Precarity of status is experienced through a pervasive, everyday emotional register in this way. As Fisher et al. (2019) argue, with access to legal representation systemically curtailed within this system of reporting and detention, such distress can lead to delays that limit any opportunity to appeal detention and deportation. The insidious character of controls and monitoring of mobility thus served 'to produce embodied subjectivities' reminding asylum seekers of their subjugation to the state (Mavin, 2019: 206); 'In this sense, deportability can be understood as more than a legal designation: it is also an embodied experience that crafts specific forms of subjectivity.' (*ibid.*:195).

Even in the ostensive limbo and stasis of waiting on asylum decisions in dispersal, the state still demanded that journeys had to be made to immigration offices. In the context of enforced inactivity and an absence of routine in dispersal, Patrick spoke with some gratitude about the 'calendar' for reporting dates that the Home Office provided; demonstrating not just its insidious, cross-cutting character, but also the absurd contradictions produced by this practice of sovereign discipline. With the background threat of detention and deportation, dispersal is paradoxically experienced by many as both an indefinite monotony of waiting and a pervasive anxiety of status.

### **Destitution and the effective absence of the state.**

Whereas detaining and deporting people required concerted state interventions, in the deliberate removal of asylum support, a further disciplinary threat in dispersal is ostensibly predicated on the converse: the deployment of inaction. The production of 'enforced destitution' (Cholewinski, 1998) has been used as a deterrence strategy in the UK since the 1990s (Ibid.; Schuster, 2005; Da Lomba, 2006). Due to systemic bureaucratic delays and failings, destitution is common at every stage of the asylum process, but as a strategy of deterrence and hostility is explicitly targeted at refused asylum seekers whose rights to appeal have ended. Here, destitution is used as an intensified form of deterrence for asylum seekers, as section 95 support (including Serco housing) is removed after 21 days of being notified of refusal. With no access to the labour market or mainstream welfare, this creates another powerful means through which sovereign power asserts its authority to decide in/exclusion through the asylum system.

Homelessness is one of the most common and immediate consequences of enforced destitution. With short eviction notices from Serco accommodation and no recourse to public funds or social housing, refused asylum seekers are forced to seek emergency accommodation, stay with friends or acquaintances, or face street homelessness. As Amanda, a housing caseworker for a national humanitarian aid charity summed up:

'I mean, I find it difficult on a personal level. You, its a human being who's phoned you up saying that they're homeless, and they've got nothing. And we can't provide accommodation. Knowing that that person is sleeping on the street... (...) 'cause you do say 'is there anybody that you can stay with?', and *generally* people may have sofas they can surf on. but again, it's not an ideal situation but it's better than being in the street homeless. ... for people who've been through the system - maybe they've had their asylum decision refused, they've maybe not had the chance to put in an appeal - again leave their Serco accommodation, they become street homeless. There needs to be a net for those people... some people who've put in their appeal - so they should still have accommodation and they should still have Home Office support, but haven't got anything - like those things just shouldn't be happening.'

(Amanda, asylum housing caseworker, interview, July 2018)

As well as homelessness, removal of state support exposes asylum seekers to exploitation at the hands of criminal employers and landlords (see Waite, 2017). With the other deterrence strategies discussed above, destitution works in combination with

other exclusions to produce discomfort and despair in its targets, as Dawit captured in our interview:

'...I'm homeless, I don't have accommodation, I don't have money, I don't have work, I don't have home, my case is fully closed, I'm struggling, I'm struggling, I'm struggling. (...) what am I gonna do now (...) they stop everything, even study...'

(Dawit, 23, refused asylum seeker, interview, December 2017)

As Dawit draws attention, his refused 'no recourse to public funds' status removed entitlements ranging from housing and income through to education. For destitute asylum seekers such as Dawit, his position was not so much liminal (Hynes, 2011), but totalizing in its exclusions.

At the time of our interview, Dawit was still living at his old Serco accommodation in Rochdale, sleeping on the sofa in the shared living area. According to Dawit, Serco were aware and unofficially tolerating this - a practice which caseworker Laura and Amanda both told me was routine with refusal cases. This meant that support cessation did not necessarily exclude asylum seekers from forms of domestic surveillance and monitoring - as Dawit declared with respect to Serco staff '... any emergency, day or night they come - very (big) headache for me...'. Refused asylum seekers were also still required to report to the Home Office, usually at more frequent intervals, yet with no additional funding to cover travel costs to the reporting centre in Salford. Destitute asylum seekers thus faced a choice of remaining under the threat of forced detention and deportation, or illegally absconding from the gaze of the Home Office and exposing themselves to myriad precarities and forms of exploitation.

Lived experiences of destitution in Rochdale also reveal how the state uses abandonment strategically as a deterrence strategy alongside intersecting precarities of housing, labour, service decline in austerity. Following Gill (2010: 637), in this sense, asylum governance provides insights about the broader workings of the state:

'Hence, a focus on the strategic 'absence' of the state promises not only to offer important lines of inquiry relating to the treatment of asylum seekers who are positioned in ambiguous non-places and understood in terms of the non-categories that result, but also to problematize claims to the presence or non-presence of the state itself.'

As a deterrence strategy, the precarity and exposure that defines destitution evokes what Hyndman and Mountz (2007) consider '... the strategic 'non-presence' of the state... as an explicit strategy of refugee control and asylum-seeker exclusion' (cited

in Gill, 2010: 636), something that, as mentioned above, has more recently been seen in the 'violent inaction' of the French state in Calais (Davies et al., 2017). Whilst not explicitly spatial, destitution is still a practice in which the state governs mobility by selecting where it is present and absent (*ibid.*). With respect to basic subsistence and protection of asylum seeker welfare and rights in the UK, the state chooses absence; with respect to policing mobility and surveillance, it sustains or expands its presence. As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 7, the state often exhibits an ability to govern indirectly and at distance (Rose, 1999; Gill, 2016; Carter, 2018)- with its varying forms of inaction in ensuring the rights and welfare of asylum seekers being a key example of this. In one sense, such absence evokes the punitive 'cutback and crackdown' logic of austerity governance more broadly (Tonkiss, 2013: 315); wherein the neoliberal restructuring of the state has long been conceived of as the selective retreat or withdrawal of government intervention (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Indeed, as I will come to explore in the following chapter and later when addressing the second thesis aim, 'violent inaction' (Davies et al., 2017) is not an exclusive feature of border governance and is in fact an important and overlapping feature of both asylum and welfare regimes.

In this chapter I have explored how asylum governance was experienced and practiced in Rochdale. I have demonstrated here how the combination of a ban on paid employment and insufficient subsistence payments placed asylum seekers in a default position of poverty and social exclusion (Hynes, 2011; Allsopp, 2014); with these restrictions exacerbated by the no-choice, sub-standard provision of dispersal accommodation (Hirschler, 2015; Zill et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, this combination of restrictions had a notable impact on the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers; whilst it also constrained the extent to which they were able to participate in social and economic life in Rochdale. For the people living in dispersal then, daily life was constrained by state-enforced poverty that curtailed not only their economic security, but also their sense of self-worth, agency, and belonging (see Burchett & Matheson, 2010; Hynes, 2011; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Much of this was produced directly, through policies designed to deter asylum claims that were underpinned by media and political rhetoric that was overtly hostile to asylum. However, everyday experiences of asylum were also shaped informally by performative and symbolic expressions of state authority and dominance; most notably in the form of pervasive threats of detention and deportation (De Genova, 2002; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Mavin, 2019) and forms of surveillance and monitoring that exacerbated the harm caused by formal restrictions (*ibid.*; Fisher, 2018). For the asylum seekers I worked with in Rochdale, experiences of the asylum system were thus characterised by a combination of symbolic subordination and exposure to material poverty and exclusions. Overall,

asylum governance was in many ways defined by a 'politics of discomfort' (Darling, 2011) and deterrence (Allsopp, 2014); reproduced through overlapping legal, material, performative, and embodied forms of exclusion. Having explored lived experiences of precarity and political subordination in the UK's asylum system, the following chapter now asks the same questions of welfare governance.

## 6. Welfare Governance

*I, Daniel Blake* - Ken Loach's (2016) film exploring the lived realities of British welfare austerity – follows the experiences of a 59-year old joiner from Newcastle in his attempt to secure out-of-work benefits. On the advice of his doctor, Blake is unable to work following a heart attack but is denied disability benefits after being judged fit to work at a Work Capability Assessment. What ensues is a nightmarish journey through a governmental regime (re-)built to deter reliance on benefits through seemingly never-ending sequences of refusals and demands for arbitrary bureaucratic tasks in support of claims (see O'Brien, 2018). Here, Loach effectively captures both the Kafkaesque absurdity of the UK's welfare bureaucracy and the many precarities that benefits claimants are routinely exposed to (May et al., 2019); taking in reliance on foodbanks, housing insecurity, and exposure to criminal exploitation. In this way, *I, Daniel Blake* portrays an experience familiar to many of the people I worked with in the development of this thesis.

As with the preceding analysis, this chapter concerns Objectives 1. and 2.; this time focussing on the lived experiences of welfare governance from the perspectives of out-of-work benefits claimants in Rochdale. Most of these accounts are taken from interview data and observations made at Fortis – the homelessness drop-in centre I worked in - where the vast majority of attendees claimed at least some state benefits. Many of the findings chime with the material manifestations of poverty and bureaucratic demands portrayed in *I, Daniel Blake*. However, I also pay particular attention to the symbolic and political functions of welfare governance; exploring how the embodied, performative character of encounters in welfare austerity served to re-assert state authority in different ways. In a regime similarly re-designed for deterrence and hostility, the forms of welfare governance and experiences I discuss echo many of those evident in dispersal, with analogous implications for how power operates in the modern welfare state. The chapter begins by tracing the political context from which the recent era of restrictionist welfare reforms arose.

### 6.1 Welfare conditionality and bureaucratic 'proof'

#### 'Anti-welfare commonsense' and the criminalization of benefits recipients

Contemporary welfare reform in the UK has been rooted in a growing 'anti-welfare commonsense' amongst the general public built up over the past three decades or more (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Patrick, 2016). In what Tom Slater (2014) terms 'the

production of ignorance', this has been concomitant with a political and media rhetoric centred around an imaginary prevalence of fraudulent, 'scrounging' benefit recipients (Garthwaite, 2011; McKenzie, 2015; Patrick, 2016) and 'welfare ghettos' (Hancock and Moody, 2013). In recent years, such tropes have not only been propagated by politicians and print media, as the 'scrounger' narrative has been cemented in public consciousness with the rising popularity of 'poverty porn' television; a genre seemingly designed to provoke outrage by sensationalizing the alleged decadence and depravity of welfare dependency in the UK (Jensen, 2014; Patrick, 2016). For Imogen Tyler (2013), this classic moral panic has its focal point in the caricatured figure of the 'chav' - a pejorative name for an imagined modern-day underclass '... of sloth, ignorance and welfare dependence...' (166; see also Jones, 2011). As Tyler continues:

we need to theorize the figure of the chav as 'a figure of consent' constituted by 'a disgust consensus' (...), a figure through which ideological beliefs (the underclass), economic interests (the erosion of the welfare state) and a series of governmental technologies (media, politics, policy, law) converge to mystify neoliberal governmentality by naturalizing poverty in ways that legitimize the social abjection of the most socially and economically disadvantaged citizens within the state.

(Tyler, 2013: 170-171)

Rooted in a quintessentially neoliberal conception of citizenship (see also Hindess, 2002), for Tyler (2013), anti-welfare rhetoric works to delineate the boundaries of political membership to what can be understood as a national 'community of value' (Anderson, 2013). Specifically, this discourse reproduces an imagined divide between the genuinely deserving and worthy, and the underserving, deviant 'other' that has roots going back centuries (*ibid.*; Bauman, 1998; Peck, 2001). On one side are the figures of the deserving, genuinely needy welfare recipient, and the economically productive 'good' citizen. On the other are welfare-dependent 'failed citizens', who threaten a social safety-net built on the sacrifices of 'good' citizens, past and present (Anderson, 2013). From this, the discursive distinction between 'strivers' and 'shirkers' (Patrick, 2016) has been positioned at the heart of what constitutes social citizenship in the UK. In evoking threats to the welfare state, a 'framing consensus on welfare' as being inherently problematic has emerged as an important political battleground and provided the justification for swingeing welfare reform in austerity (*ibid.*).



## **Targetted welfare reform and conditional citizenship**

Much like the 'problem' of asylum, in the 2000s (Dwyer, 2004), in the run-up to the 2010 general election, major political parties competed on who would take the toughest stance on welfare dependency; accelerating decades of gradually expanding restrictions and 'creeping conditionality' placed on state assistance (*ibid.*; Edminston, 2016). Despite a degree of continuity in this respect (see Peck, 2001), the reforms introduced by successive Conservative-led governments since 2010 have been the most radical for generations (Hamnett, 2014); both in terms of the regressive targetting of lower-income and vulnerable groups and in the extension of punitive benefits suspensions and withdrawals (Edminston, 2016).

In a further parallel with the restrictionist turn in asylum politics, one of the founding myths for welfare reform has been the notion that claiming out-of-work benefits is a matter of individual choice, and that therefore citizens can - and should - be deterred from doing so. The barriers to receiving benefits established with the reforms attest to this. As Fletcher and Wright (2018: 336, following Wacquant, 2009) argue, recent welfare reforms in the UK are '... a clear example of a deterrence strategy using 'degradation of the recipient self and glorification of the working self' (Wacquant, 2009: 101)'. Exhibiting this neoliberal framing of welfare dependency (see Whitworth, 2016), welfare reform has indeed been regressive; targeted at low-income groups whose eligibility for benefits could most-easily be framed as fraudulent or a lifestyle choice. Presented under the guise of reducing welfare dependency and government spending, a suite of reforms deterring benefits claims have thus been introduced since 2010 - key examples of which are listed in table 2 below.

Two groups that have been especially targetted through these reforms have been jobseekers and housing benefit recipients. Real-term cuts, entitlement re-calculations, outright disentitlements, and punitive sanctions have meant that many poor households saw their incomes fall by over £1000 per year in the first few years of the reforms alone (Beatty and Fothergill, 2014; Daguerre and Etherington, 2014). Low income and unemployed recipients of housing benefit have also seen incomes fall through the implementation of 'the bedroom tax' since 2013, with research linking this directly with detrimental impacts on health, wellbeing and homelessness (Gibb, 2015; Moffat et al., 2015; Beatty et al., 2015).

**Table 2. Key Welfare Reforms introduced in the UK, 2010 -2016**

Policy	Description
Universal Credit ( <i>i.</i> )	New single benefit that merges six means-tested benefits. Paid monthly, instead of weekly, and in arrears. Claimants expected to make and manage claims online ( <i>i.</i> ). Replaces income-based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA); income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); Income Support; Child Tax Credit; Working Tax Credit; and Housing Benefit. Phased local implementation since 2013 (ongoing as of 2019).
Claimant Commitment ( <i>i.</i> )	Claimants receiving JSA, Income Support or ESA, or those transferring to Universal Credit, commit to work-related requirements they must meet before they can get their benefit ( <i>i.</i> )
Social Fund Part Abolition and Localisation ( <i>i.</i> )	Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans have been abolished; local authorities have now the voluntary responsibility to provide these as part of local welfare schemes ( <i>i.</i> )
Closure of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) ( <i>i.</i> )	Provided financial support since 1998 to fund care and support to some of the most severely disabled people in the UK to ensure they could live in their communities rather than in residential care homes. From 1 July 2015 responsibility for supporting ILF users in England passed to local authorities, and so subject to local budget cuts. ( <i>i.</i> )
Personal Independence Payment (PIP) ( <i>ii.</i> )	Phased replacement of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for working-age claimants, including more stringent and frequent medical tests. ( <i>ii.</i> )
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) ( <i>ii.</i> )	Replacement of Incapacity Benefit (IB) and related benefits by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), with more stringent medical tests, greater conditionality, and time-limiting of non-means tested entitlement for claimants in the Work-Related Activity Group ( <i>ii.</i> ).
Housing Benefit Reforms ( <i>i.</i> )	Increased caps and conditions on Local Housing Allowance rates in the private rented sector (PRS); cuts to working age social renters deemed to be under-occupying ( <i>i.</i> ), more commonly known as 'the bedroom tax'.
1% up-rating cut	Limit in annual up-rating of value, for three years (2013-16) for most working-age benefits and for two years for Child Benefit and the Local Housing Allowance element of Housing Benefit. ( <i>ii.</i> )
Tax Credits cuts	Reductions in payment rates and eligibility for Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit paid to lower and middle income households, including increase in working hours requirement for Working Tax Credit. ( <i>ii.</i> )
Child Benefit freeze	Three-year freeze and withdrawal of benefit from households with a higher earner. ( <i>ii.</i> )

Compiled from sources: (*i.*) Hodkinson et al. (2016: 3); (*ii.*) Beatty and Fothergill (2018: 951)

Another targeted group that has endured particularly egregious changes has been disability benefits claimants. The replacement or termination of several long-standing disability benefits has introduced new forms of job-seeking conditionality, means-testing for payments, and the increased regularity and stringency of incapacity assessments (Grover and Piggot, 2013; Beatty and Fothergill, 2018). It has been calculated that by 2022, the reforms will have reduced the income of families with a disabled adult by about £2,500 per year, and families with a disabled adult and disabled child, by over £5,500; compared to a drop of about £1,000 for non-disabled families (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017). The results, according to some calculations, mean a total of up to 3.7 million disabled people will be affected and will have lost £28.3 billion in support by 2018 (Cross, 2013). Echoing the outsourcing of both asylum and employment services, incapacity assessments have also been increasingly practiced by corporate assessors, with questionable competency and incentive mechanisms (*Ibid.*; May et al., 2019). Alarming cases of severe deteriorations in failed claimants' mental and physical health and a growing number of deaths have been attributed to reforms since these have been rolled out (*ibid.*; Cross, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Mattheys, 2015).

Such are the political and social impacts of reforms, that many analyses have argued that the 'dual logic of cutback and crackdown' (Tonkiss, 2013: 315) in welfare austerity amounts to a qualitative shift in the state-citizen social contract (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Flint, 2015; Edminston, 2016). With unemployment and even incapacity framed as an individual failure or choice, benefits have become increasingly conditional on proving certain traits and activities, ostensibly targetted at getting claimants into paid employment (Whitworth, 2016). It is this personalization (instead of an acknowledgement of structural causes of unemployment) that has underpinned the recent intensification of behavioural governance that emphasises conditionality, the activation of claimants, and supposed independence from the state (Edminston, 2016; Whitworth, 2016; Millar and Bennet, 2017; Fletcher and Wright, 2018). Yet in addressing the dubious and vague problem of inactivity through conditionality, states have paradoxically expanded the breadth and depth of interventions into low-income citizens' lives (Fletcher and Wright, 2018).

### **Sanctions, surveillance, and the lived realities of welfare governance**

Documenting lived experiences of welfare reform and its accompanying poverty has been a prominent feature of social policy research in recent years (Edminston, 2016; see Lansley and Mack, 2015; Patrick, 2017). This body of work has detailed how benefits cuts, sanctions, higher-demands for 'proof' of eligibility, and systemic delays in welfare payments has produced levels of precarity and destitution not seen in the

UK for generations; characterised by fuel poverty, social isolation, housing insecurity, and mental and physical ill health (ibid.). One particularly visible consequence of welfare reform has also been increasing food insecurity, with the UK's largest foodbank NGO reporting that it had distributed emergency food parcels to seven times as many people in 2013-14 than 2011-12 (Loopstra et al., 2015). Soaring levels of homelessness since 2010 have also been attributed to welfare reform; with sanctions and housing benefit disentitlements leading to debt and eviction for young adults especially (Beatty et al., 2015). As well as making welfare austerity politically possible, the criminalization of benefits recipients mean that this poverty has been experienced with damaging feelings of stigma and shame at receiving benefits (Patrick, 2016; Wright and Patrick, 2019).

For many benefits recipients, worsening poverty and social exclusion has been accompanied by pervasive modes of surveillance. With the introduction of the 'Claimant Commitment' and more frequent and stringent demands for proof of job search activities (see Dwyer and Wright, 2014), job seekers' daily routines have become more tightly controlled. Whilst the monitoring capabilities enabled by digital jobsearch practices – present with both Universal Credit and the preceding 'Universal Jobmatch panopticon' (Fletcher and Wright, 2018) - have meant that a regime of conditionality has reached ever further into the domestic sphere (Crossley, 2016). Beyond this domestic reach, welfare conditionality for job seekers also involved compulsory attendance at work-related appointments and employment training programmes, some of which take place over several weeks. Most of these programmes were delivered by private providers (Carter and Whitworth, 2017) in which job seekers' attendance, activities and attitudes are monitored and reported to the DWP. For jobseekers then, the experience of welfare reform was that of a pervasive surveillance regime, mobilised through an array of actors and technologies.

Alongside poverty and surveillance, benefit claimants' day-to-day lives have been affected by the expansion of a punitive sanctions regime. Since 2012, welfare reforms have increased the severity and frequency of benefit payment suspensions or withdrawals, with these 'sanctions' being imposed on claimants when they are deemed to have failed to meet the conditions attached to their claims (Edminston, 2016). For many low income and vulnerable claimants who fall foul of welfare conditionality, this has meant the entirety of their income being lost for weeks or months at a time. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of conditionality as a lived experience has been '... the extreme and intractable suffering related to experiences of sanctions' (Wright and Patrick, 2019: 605); with rising levels of homelessness, foodbank dependency, and mental ill health, since 2010 all linked directly to these financial

punishments meted out by the state (Beatty et al., 2015; Loopstra et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019).

After five years of modest increases, sanction rates surged following the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, with nearly a million claimants referred for sanctioning and half a million receiving penalties between 2012 and 2013 alone (Watts et al., 2014). For the unemployed, the number of JSA sanctions issued grew 69% between 2008 and 2014; for claimants of disability-related ESA, it was 84% (DWP, 2016, cited in Edminston, 2016). Between 2010-2015, 24% of JSA claimants were sanctioned at least once (National Audit Office, 2016). Whilst JSA and ESA sanction rates have since fallen, analysis of DWP statistics since 2016 suggest that they have remained high with the switch to Universal Credit (Webster, 2019). As I will evidence in this chapter, for many more claimants who escaped sanctions and the destitution they engendered, the threat of such punishments alone loomed large in their lives, producing often intense disciplinary affects. The deeply embodied experiences of welfare austerity have thus been conceived as a consequence of neoliberal governance and the product of a state project to engineer more economically productive, less dependent subjects (See Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Flint, 2015; Edminston, 2016).

The disciplinary motivation behind welfare reform is perhaps most apparent in the patent inefficacy of exposing claimants to precarity and poverty. Governmental discipline is especially evident here in the encounters that take place between benefits claimants and the personell tasked with judging eligibility for claims (*ibid.*). As Wright and Patrick (2019) detail, a seemingly default position of disbelief and disapproval at the activities and behaviours of claimants by staff are shown to impede employment prospectives. Such encounters are significant as benefits decisions and sanctions remain profoundly contingent on the personal judgments of 'street-level bureaucrats' (Hansen et al., 2018), even with the state's demands for supposedly objective documental 'proof'. And so welfare governance has an inherent performative dimension, with access to benefits, or the precarity of denial, dependent on claimants proving eligibility and worthiness (see Humphris, 2019). As with embodied interactions between asylum seekers and the state, welfare encounters thus have the effect of re-asserting the dominance of the state (see Auyero, 2011; Carswell et al., 2019) as the arbiter of biopolitical in/exclusion.

## **6.2 Job search governmentalities, performing activation**

### **Job search routines and documenting 'proof'**

Whilst proof of job seeking activity has been a prominent feature of unemployment benefits since the 1980s, the work-related conditions attached to claims has become

more stringent and more closely policed under welfare austerity (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). For both JSA and Universal Credit claimants who are judged to be capable of working, receipt of benefits is based on the condition of actively searching for paid employment. The governance of jobseekers thus revolved around demonstrations of activation and the production of prescribed forms of bureaucratic proof (Wolferink-Schaap, 2017). With JSA, the most prominent way in which job seekers were asked to do this was in the routine of recording tasks such as job searches and applications in a paper workbook - usually a 'My Work Plan' booklet produced by the DWP (see Fig. 5, p. 162). As Kirsty described in interview, this usually entailed the recording of at least three job applications per-day, but curiously appeared to vary between claimants:

*Kirsty:* .... So you've got to prove how much work... how much jobs... You've got... - say I saw three jobs at three different schools, I'd have to write them down. Erm... but... I usually do... - well my daughter does about five pages! - I used to do about three...

(Kirsty, interview, June 2018)

Kirsty's account describes both the compulsion to 'prove' activation through the ritual of writing down job applications and the varying demands placed on individual claimants that were constant features welfare governance. Rather than a motivation to help claimants in to work, this variability points more to the arbitrary nature of demands for 'proof' of activation; perhaps exposing a prior concern with monitoring and controlling behaviour and conduct (Wolferin-Schaap, 2017). The arbitrary nature of the 'proof' requested by the Job Centre - and its detachment from genuinely helpful support in finding employment - was a conspicuous burden for claimants at both the Welcome Centre and Fortis. However, what made this coerced performance of activation significant was its effect in structuring and constraining daily life for JSA claimants, as Joe - a 51-year-old JSA claimant and Fortis service user- described:

... I thought there'd give me breathing space - I mean, It's not *hard* doing... but constantly spending hours looking through bloody... job-boards like... you know? (sighing despondently) ...

(Joe, interview, June 2018)

Joe's experience was typical of many jobseekers', who's daily routines were shaped by the satisfaction of demands for bureaucratic 'proof' of activation. This performative, disciplining function was also especially evident at the Welcome Centre's Job Club, where the standardized proof that was requested by the Job Centre was a written

record of three job applications per day. So long as this was done, claimants could receive their benefits payments, regardless of any evidence of efficacy:

(...) The aim of the search is to find three jobs to apply for to write in the workbook. (...) Patrick tells me that it's the Job Centre that has told claimants that three is the minimum amount that they must write down. I asked what would happen if they did less and he says that they can 'get in trouble' and be sent back to complete the three. (...)

(Research Diary, Welcome Centre, November 2017).

The threat of benefits suspensions and resource constraints at the Welcome Centre meant that they were often limited to satisfying the Job Centre's instructions, with little room left for more effective, individualized support and guidance. Here, powerful governmentalities were produced in large part through the monitoring capabilities of the government's Universal Jobmatch website. In DWP staff touting the ability to compare job seekers' online account to their workbooks, the state exhibited influence over conduct that reached not only into the day-to-day routines of individuals, but the practices of entire support operations. As Fletcher and Wright (2018: 338) remark '...Universal Jobmatch operates as a modern day panopticon with a disciplinary gaze that ensures self-administered surveillance...'. Although the government closed the Universal Jobmatch website in May 2018, this capability continued with the new 'Find a Job' website and Universal Credit.

### **Job Centre encounters**

The experiences of unemployment benefits claimants at the Welcome Centre and Fortis attest to the power of work-related conditionality to produce self-governing subjects. As shall be taken up in Chapter 8, this was partly produced technologically, however participants also emphasized the enduring influence of face-to-face state encounters in shaping experiences of claiming benefits (see also Wright and Patrick, 2019). Indeed, the compulsion to adhere to the state's arbitrary demands for bureaucratic 'proof' was partly produced through disciplinary encounters at the local government Job Centre in Rochdale too.

One of the core requirements of JSA and work-related Universal Credit was to attend fortnightly appointments with Job Centre 'Work Coaches', where checks on claimants' job seeking activities were made. As Joe describes, jobseeker governmentalities were re-produced through embodied interactions with Job Centre staff:

*Joe:* (The) last time I signed on it was OK getting the money but they were stricter in your job search – I don't know if they're short of staff or

something, I don't know what's going on! (...) she was trying to sanction me 'cause she thought I wasn't doing enough job searches, I said "I am! But I'm on this course, it doesn't finish 'til, whatever it was – 4, or 5 O'clock – I can't", you know?... She's thinking I was avoiding job searches, I was like "Nooo..." ... they wasn't communicating... my 'coach', or whatever they were calling them then, was on holiday and this one... but I think she was a horrible person, anyway...

(Joe, interview, June 2018)

Despite Joe adhering to the requests of the Job Centre in attending an employment course full-time, the Job Centre staff member he encountered still took exception to a lack of job searches that he had written down. As Wright and Patrick (2019: 606) argue, welfare conditionality produces encounters that are suffused with such threats and disciplinary relations between state and welfare subject '... by instilling fear in claimants to spur on job search(es)...'. Despite more procedural, forgettable, and even positive encounters being recalled to me, threatening or demeaning encounters and their disciplinary governmental effects were endemic to Job Centre visits (see also *ibid.*).

Staff at Fortis also often took exception to what were perceived as the hostile and judgmental attitude of Job Centre staff, as Molly - a Fortis caseworker- recalled:

*Molly:* I can't *stand* the job centre people... they're *awful*, they're ignorant and they look down on people. I don't like it. I signed on, and I came out of there crying! *Awful...*

*Interviewer:* How are they awful?

*Molly:* Just the way they speak to you... you know?... they're just *cruel*. But I can't imagine what they say to some of the people that come in 'ere... you know?...

(Molly, interview, October 2018)

Molly speaks insightfully here about the subordinating, embodied affects produced through Job Centre encounters. Beyond any discursive threats, I was often told by claimants how the Job Centre staff made them feel judged, pressured, or demeaned at appointments. As Patrick and Simpson (2019) identify, such judgmental encounters in the age of welfare reforms are bound up with the broader stigmatization of benefits claimants outlined above. Claimants were looked down on as 'scroungers' (*ibid.*) and 'chavs' (Tyler, 2013) who warranted disciplinary intervention by the state. Attesting to the enduring effects of such encounters, as with Molly and Joe's accounts, these



experiences were often recalled from years ago. Importantly, these encounters were pervasive to such an extent as to shape claimant conduct; engraining performances of activity and the production of bureaucratic proof in Job Seekers' daily routines, even long after this had been requested. Given the limited utility of such tasks for actually securing employment (see also Wolferink-Schaap, 2017), it is perhaps this performative, disciplinary function of conditionality that drives its continued deployment.

### **Coerced activation, workfare, and surveillance**

Another condition increasingly placed on jobseekers in welfare austerity has been coerced 'volunteering' placements. As Kirsty described when recounting her experience of Job Centre appointments, whilst the formal purpose of 'volunteer' placements was often unclear, these were widely understood as being mandatory:

*Kirsty:* I had just the same person every fortnight... well I had to go every week, and he said "well we think you should do a bit of volunteering" (...)

*Interviewer:* Did they tell you why?

*Kirsty:* No... no, they just said that I had to do it... I must admit, I was a bit... reluctant... I was a bit... wasn't happy, to be honest...erm... then when I actually started here, I really liked it... they said I didn't have to do every day, I could just come in once a week... but I thought... 'well, if I'm getting back into work, I'm going to need to get me self... to get up in the morning, going to need to get in a routine every day' so I decided to come in every day. Get me into a routine of -getting up early...

(Kirsty, interview, June 2018)

Kirsty describes here the disciplinary effects and coercion involved in unpaid work postings as a mode of conditionality. In '... helping the recipient develop the labour market discipline associated with full-time employment...' (DWP, 2010, cited in Fletcher, 2015: 331), Kirsty's coerced activation encapsulates the governmental intentions of the new era of workfare in Britain (*ibid.*). Whilst Kirsty ultimately came to value her volunteering post, it was initiated through a disciplinary state encounter based on the asymmetrical, paternalistic relationship between state and welfare subject (Whitworth, 2016; Edmiston, 2017; Webster, 2019). This practice therefore served not only to shape conduct, but to re-enforce a sovereign dominance that had the power (see Friedli & Stearn, 2015) and reach to shape something as private as the time claimants woke up in the morning.

In addition to coerced 'volunteering', welfare reform also brought with it the expansion of welfare-to-work 'training' schemes delivered by private companies. Whilst these schemes were purportedly meant to enhance claimants' well-being through improving their chances of finding paid employment, their mandatory basis and disciplinary underpinnings were often counter-productive in this respect (Carter and Whitworth, 2017). Jack – a service user at Fortis - described his experience of one such placement on an outsourced employability course he was ordered to attend; in which demands for 'proof' of activation and the surveillant character of job search conditionality (Friedli & Stearn, 2015) were intensified:

'... you go there, they make you look for work, like ten jobs a week – but you've got to go five days a week, for half a day... I was going there Monday to Friday, nine 'till twelve, and applying for ten jobs in the first hour. And sitting there for the rest of the four days like that (miming inactively sitting at a desk).... I was being told "well, you've applied for that job now, so phone 'em up, see what's going on". Well, I said "I've just sent off for the job, literally, 10 seconds ago, I'm not gonna pressure them, I've done my part"....

(Jack, interview, June 2018)

Even when recalling his experience in interview, Jack was visibly frustrated here at having to adhere to what he considered the arbitrary and counter-productive demands placed on him. Jack went on to describe the forms of surveillance and intimidation through which performances of activation were policed on the programme; including occasions when staff took exception to his 'attitude' and body language:

... I was tired because I hadn't slept, and I just went like this (mimes a heavy sigh)... and the manager, the bloke running it went "you alright mate?" (in a menacing tone) – I said "Yeah I'm fine". He said "You sure you're alright, you sure?" constantly at me. And he just kept going on – "You sure you're alright? You sure?" (...) and it turned into this big argument. And he said "well step outside then"... because he was a big lad. "We'll deal with this outside" (...) I was in a pretty good place with my depression at the time, and my anxiety, and that just sent me right down. And I actually ended up back on the sick (incapacity benefits), with my depression.

(Jack, interview, June 2018)

For Jack, the exhaustion, frustration, and stress of these surveillant practices and arbitrary demands for proof of activity damaged both his health and his chances of securing employment; demonstrating "... how power and inequality... affect and reach into the very psyche of the individual" (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 30). In the closely monitored and disciplinary space of the employment agency, something as innocuous as a sigh was enough to signal a lack of proper commitment or disaffection and trigger a barrage of intimidation and threats. Here, job search governmentalities were pervasive in such a way as to reach beyond discursive and bureaucratic demands, with the discipline and control being produced and experienced through an embodied, emotional register. For it was not only the completion of prescribed tasks and the production of documental proof of activation that was policed here, but the perceived demeanor and attitudes of welfare subjects (see Friedli & Stearn, 2015).

For the jobseekers that participated in this research, the benefits system had a pervasive influence on daily life, disciplining conduct and producing self-governing subjects through a combination of coerced performances of activation and invasive forms of monitoring and surveillance. In disavowing citizen empowerment and independence from state intervention, this contradicted one of the supposed cornerstones of neoliberal welfare reform and was often counter-productive in encouraging employment. Citing Bourdieu and Wacquant (1996: 112), Wolferink-Schaap (2017: 18) argues that job search governmentalities represent a form of 'symbolic violence' – 'a form of power monopolised by the state, which means that the state has "the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given "nation" ... a common set of coercive norms". Such a symbolic function can also be seen in the coerced job search routines and performances of activation detailed here, in which a relation of sovereign authority and subject deference was reproduced through welfare conditionality.

### **6.3 Bureaucracy, waiting, and the threat of destitution**

Unemployment benefits claimants weren't alone in being targeted with more stringent conditions and demands for proof of eligibility. People claiming out-of-work benefits due to illness or disability were also subjected to similar governmental practices. For this group, demands for documental 'proof' of inability to work often meant for lengthy, protracted, and invasive application and appeals processes. Prior to the introduction of Universal Credit (in May 2018 in Rochdale), incapacity benefits were mostly based on ESA and PIP (see table 2.). The application processes for these benefits were extensive and required comprehensive and intimate disclosures of claimants' health conditions and treatments; and this generated a great deal of demand for, and dependence on, Fortis' services. Whilst application forms set out a

typology of health conditions and impacts, many claimants required assistance in recognising both what conditions to divulge and how to describe and record these. As the following cases demonstrate, this was often a lengthy and demanding process:

Barbara (50-year-old female service user) needed help completing her PIP application (...) She knew the basic conditions she had – spinal injury, anxiety/depression – but struggled with the language, length and format of the ('PIP2') form. (...) I made sure to write down things that she discussed but didn't think to include – e.g. paracetamol she had to take making her nauseous, and how her anxiety/depression was linked to her immobility and her inability to clean and Hoover (...) when we'd finished she thanked us and said that she just 'couldn't have answered half of these' (...)

(Research diary, Fortis drop-in, July 2018)

The 'PIP 2' form in question here was 33 pages long and required intimate details about complex and intersecting health conditions and treatments that ill and vulnerable claimants often couldn't understand or communicate without assistance. Whilst Universal Credit was supposed to streamline the application process by replacing six previously separate benefits (including ESA), this failed to materialize as PIP remained separate and the new online forms demanded a similar level of detail and documental proof as before.

As the following case involving Liam – a long-term homeless ESA claimant – illustrates, the bureaucratic demands of the application process had the potential to entrench poverty and vulnerability:

Liam came to the office for the first time in a good few weeks. (...) Molly told him that they would have to do a UC application. Liam reacted really badly to this, putting his head in his hands and mentioning that he was worried about not getting paid for weeks, having to get a new sick note from his GP, and having 'to be running 'round everywhere' to collect the requisite documents. (...)

(Research diary, Fortis, June 2018)

Liam's attendance at Fortis was sporadic and his whereabouts and welfare were a constant concern for staff. Along with a chronic heart condition, Liam suffered from long-term mental health problems, meaning he struggled with the lengthy and complex process involved in proving incapacity. Applications also required constant updating; in-fact, not for the first time to make a new benefits application here was

due to an ESA 'fit note' expiring. The bureaucratic demands of claiming effectively left Liam destitute without any benefits for extended periods of time. As Jack described in interview, such bureaucratically enacted barriers and delays were often experienced with feelings of stress and anger:

... I was given a form and told "you have to do a self-referral". How do I know how to do self-referral?! He's my doctor. He knows what's wrong. He knows what to put down on the forms... It was about a year. I heard nothing back from it. I filled the form in and obviously it wasn't good enough to get referred there... so I'm stuck in this rut at the moment where I'm going round and round in circles... I'm getting angry at myself, and getting angry at people around me...

(Jack, interview, June 2018)

Applications also required more mundane forms of documental proof to even be considered, including I.D. and proof of address, which were particularly demanding for homeless claimants. As caseworker Suzanne explained in our interview, the bureaucratic demands brought about by UC exacerbated this issue and served to increase delays for benefits applicants:

... This Universal Credit, it's horrendous... The time waiting for payments, the things that they need to do, they're not computer literate. They're (the DWP) just not thinking about ... a bigger picture. They expect everybody to have a mobile phone and a bank account, and it's not the case. It's not the case... You're just hitting barriers all over the place.

... people aren't getting their benefits now.... Especially for those that are NFA (No Fixed Address).

(Suzanne, interview, October 2018)

In addition to more difficult I.D. checks, Universal Credit could only be paid into conventional bank accounts, which required documental proof of address to be opened. This created a huge issue for homeless claimants who had no fixed address. Fortis assisted homeless claimants by offering letters confirming their premises as a 'care-of' address, however, acceptance of these varied between banks, and even individual bank staff. The result was lengthy delays in completing UC claims, with some service users at Fortis waiting for over two-months until they could be sent. Whilst recent welfare reforms intensified such indirectly punitive practices, they have their origin in an entrenched state hostility towards mobile, unsettled groups dating back centuries (Anderson, 2013). Marked out as a threat in political discourse, the

welfare state's increasing bureaucratic demands have the effect of rewarding and coercing the stasis and legibility of subjects; punishing 'failed' citizens' (*ibid.*) mobility, and illegibility in the process.

With UC in particular, delays persisted even after bureaucratic demands were met. Even when applications were complete, claimants had to wait a minimum of five weeks (35-days) before receiving a first payment as these were now paid only in arrears, after a seven-day waiting period. Although advanced payments were available to claimants, in practice this was very poorly advertised and was issued as a loan to be repaid as a deduction from future benefits payments. This meant that many claimants either couldn't, or chose not to, access advance payments and were effectively left to survive with no income for five or more weeks at the start of claims.

### **Threats of destitution and the politics of waiting**

As well as exacerbating economic precarity, waiting and requirements to attend appointments also served a symbolic, political function in welfare governance. Indeed, temporality mediates state power (Ghertner, 2017), and the ability to make citizens attend, wait and return for various appointments often functions as a mode of citizen subordination in welfare systems (Auyero, 2011). As Carswell et al. (2019: 598-599) argue in their analysis of Indian welfare routines, '(r)epeated cycles of referral and deferral shape seemingly endless circulations that constitute people's experiences of citizenship and state encounter... Power is never 'just there' but is produced through control over people's time and movements.' Seen in this way, and given the prevalent threat of destitution in welfare austerity, the asymmetrical power geometries of welfare bureaucracies allow state control to be articulated through the production of 'docile' 'patients of the state' and highly disciplinary encounters (Auyero, 2011). As the cases described here attest, seemingly benign and irritating administrative demands and periods of waiting were often protracted; experienced as a "chronic" state of despair, fear or expectation.' (Carswell et al., 2019: 599). For claimants at Fortis, waiting for welfare decisions was not merely 'lost' or 'dead' time (Jeffrey, 2008) but experienced as an affectively potent form of precarity, characterised by feelings of frustration, anger, and despondency.

In addition to indirect bureaucratic modes, waiting was also practiced through the overtly disciplinary practices of benefits sanctions and suspensions. Even when benefits were obtained, the very real threat of destitution was ever present in claimants' lives as they were continually at risk of having their benefits suspended. Such a threat had a pervasive, disciplinary effect on daily routines and actions of claimants; something witnessed in the job search rituals of many jobseekers.

Importantly, these were not idle threats; as Mo's experience attests, the fear of sanction and suspension was well-founded:

(...) my benefits got stopped, and I had to appeal against it, I had no money at the time, I was struggling and that... I wasn't paying my way... I got thrown out on the street, you know what I mean? (...) I was at the job centre, and a staff member said – about me – 'excuse me one second while help this vulnerable gentleman out' – that was how bad I was. This was whilst I had the appeal going – I had no money from January until May... (...) so... its making it worse for people like... and you're getting sanctioned – you know if you're late for your appointments, so you've got no food, no electric and you're relying on the foodbank and all that, so that's the big thing...

(Mo, interview, June 2018)

A combination of bureaucratic barriers, systemic payment delays, and punitive suspensions meant many of the people I met at Fortis were constantly at risk of destitution and reliance on charitable assistance. For someone such as Mo, who was living in supported accommodation and suffered with significant mental health and addiction issues, the punishment of sanctions was ultimately counter-productive, serving only increase dependence, precarity, and suffering (see also Dwyer, 2018). As Reeve (2017: 72) concludes in her study of homelessness and welfare conditionality, '... homeless people often have vulnerabilities that make it difficult to navigate the bureaucracy of formal systems, have a multitude of other commitments (seeking and applying for housing, appointments with drug advisors, health workers and support workers), and do not have the resources required (internet access, suitable clothes)'. With welfare governance, it was a cruel paradox that disabled and ill claimants, who struggled most with such tasks, faced the most demanding application processes (see Fletcher, 2011).

Whilst punishing claimants such as Mo generally failed to alter their conduct, the broader consequences of welfare austerity did produce indirect disciplinary affects. As Farad – a Welcome Centre service user - described, the influence on conduct produced by the threat of destitution could be indirectly realised through visible, local markers of state-abandonment:

... I see it, they become homeless... why is that? Because they're depending on the system. As soon as the system stops, they don't have any savings and then life completely changes... I see it everywhere, even

in Rochdale sometimes... living in the streets... in the shelters, under bridges...

(Farad, interview, June 2018)

Here, the highly visible presence of precarity that partly characterized welfare austerity disciplined Farad into feeling the need to avoid benefits dependency and even accumulate savings. Whilst unlikely to be a *specific* intention of welfare conditionality, in the broader context of (neoliberal)austerity, such a disciplinary affect can be seen as what Ben Anderson considers ‘... part of the formation of neoliberal reason and the structures of feeling that condition how particular neoliberalisms actualize’, (2015: 734). Ultimately, most benefits claimants don’t experience abandonment and destitution in the way Farad witnessed. As with bureaucratic delays and waiting then, fear as a disciplinary state effect can be thought of as chronic and symbolic in character and function. However, threats of destitution still operate as a pervasive and potent part of claimants’ lives, both as an affective experience and as a symbolic expression of sovereign dominance.

#### **6.4 Incapacity assessments and welfare’s confessional complex**

In welfare austerity the chronic impacts of governmental threat and waiting were punctuated by more acute disciplinary encounters. As discussed, Jobseekers had to account for themselves and their claims at Job Centre appointments and training programmes. However, for disability benefits claimants, judgments about eligibility were even more invasive and politically potent. At the heart of these were requirements to record and account for health conditions, treatments, and their effects on claimants’ bodies. In practice this meant for the analysis and judgment of claimants’ intimate, bodily experiences of illness and disability. And so, in addition to documental proof, incapacity benefit applications usually involved the completion of invasive assessment practices.

##### **The Work Capability Assessment**

For ESA claimants, ‘Work Capability Assessments’ were conducted by a corporate provider – Maximus - on behalf of the DWP in central Manchester. As Jack recalled, these were often judgmental encounters in which the chances of success and the default disbelief of assessors were well known to claimants:

*Interviewer:* You know your current ESA medical you had on Monday, how are you feeling about that? are you optimistic about that?



*Jack:* Not really... not really...because it's happened too many times... you know, I know how these agencies think. And... yeah, they don't really give a shit.

*Interviewer:* How does it work when you go to the medical, normally?

*Jack:* You go there. They ask you questions like – obviously, filling in the forms – they ask you all these questions, you tell 'em what's wrong with your life...

*Interviewer:* What are the questions based on?

*Jack:* On your illness. She goes to me "how does your depression affect your life?". I said "well... I have good days, and I have bad days"... you asking me "are you always depressed?" Yes, I am always depressed, but yes, I can cope with it some days... do daily things, be around people... but most of it, I'm in my room, locked away, keeping myself away from people – I can't live like that, you know what I mean? I need help to get off... you know what I mean? (...) a lot of it – they'll ask you a question, type it down, and then – next question. ...but... I can't see myself passing it, I'd like to... but... it's one of them... nowadays, they wanna get everyone off benefits, and that's all they care about. It's getting peopled into work.

(Jack, interview, June 2018)

Jack's concerns over an assumption of disbelief were well founded - the outsourced assessment system has been widely critiqued for incentivising application rejections (see Griffiths and Patterson, 2014) and 67% of ESA and 68% of PIP decisions are overturned on appeal (Galloway et al., 2018). Even so, the added waiting time, stresses, and seemingly arbitrary rejections involved in this process served to increase applicants' suffering (see *ibid.*; Griffiths and Patterson, 2014) and re-assert claimant subordination. Fortis staff too suspected that the primary purpose of the assessments was to catch claimants out with supposed contradictions in their claims; with assessors often using 'crafty' means to do so. Concerns were also raised about the lack of medical expertise and qualifications of individual assessors employed by Maximus, and their predecessor Atos (Galloway et al., 2018; May et al., 2019).

Like Jack, for Joe, assessments were mostly a box-ticking exercise geared towards processing (and rejecting) applications as quickly as possible:

*Joe:* ... I've been a few times... I dunno, they're just trying to get people off it quickly...

*Interviewer:* What makes you think that?

*Joe:* Because they didn't ask me many questions (laughs)... like I said, it was like ticking boxes again, so...

(Joe, interview, June 2018)

Other ESA claimants and Fortis staff also often felt that the assessments were arbitrary as they mostly appeared to repeat what was already detailed in application forms. The experience of these encounters – based around rigid, 'tick-box', calculations – reflected the formulaic points-based system used to determine capability to work (see Griffiths and Patterson, 2014). Given this method of assessment's patent inaccuracy – evident in the high rate of successful appeals – such a design fails to provide an appearance of fair and impartial adjudication. Yet the assessments have remained a core part of disability benefit applications; again drawing attention to their performative utility – in which claimants must attend to the state's demands, however arbitrary they may be.

### **Home visits and embodied confessions**

Such performances of sovereign authority extended beyond Work Capability Assessments. For PIP applications too, the DWP had a contract with corporate providers (Capita and Atos' Independent Assessment Services) to conduct home visits to assess the validity of applications for additional financial support; something Kirsty had recently experienced:

*Kirsty:* (...) They usually come in twos, but because I was a low-risk person – 'cause they probably have people who kick-off... they usually go in twos – but she was really nice... she said that – I didn't really understand why, 'cause most of the questions they asked me, I'd already filled in in the form. So, I didn't really understand that.

*Interviewer:* What kind of questions do they ask?

*Kirsty:* How I cope with day-to-day life. How I ... what affects... how everything affects my eyesight. Like, I have problems with light, all sorts of light, natural light, artificial light...(…) but I can't change it. We need light (...).

*Interviewer:* Do they ask anything else, or is it mainly about your disability?

*Kirsty:* Yeah, it's mainly about my disability and how I cope with things. If I'm in a strange place I... I get a bit anxious... erm... I sometimes panic

a little bit. If I'm on me own. If I'm with somebody, I'm OK, 9 times out of 10, I *need...erm* somebody with me...(...) I'm hoping I get the high rate, but... (they) didn't give any indication... ..she didn't say it in so many words, but she sort of said *erm*, that I might get it. But she didn't actually say that... I was making some bolognaise... and as I was emptying the spaghetti, I burned me breast and it got infected, so... when she came for the PIP, to interview, she said that I should go to the doctors... because I was trying to sort it out myself, 'cause I thought, well the doctors have enough to do, but its luckily I did go, because it did get infected ...well it was the PIP woman who told me to go... because on the form you've got to write down what doctors you go to, *erm*, how often you go to your doctors... *erm*... but I went the day after, so perhaps they got in touch with my doctor...

(Kirsty, interview, June 2018)

In order to establish the veracity of her claims Kirsty was required to divulge and even demonstrate intimate aspects of her home life that she struggled with – cooking, cleaning, commuting, taking medication – to the state. For Crossley (2016), such incursions into the domestic sphere represent an important shift in the spatiality and reach of welfare governance in austerity '(f)rom the desk to the front-room':

In the place of the constrained, desk-bound civil servant, then, comes ...a new breed of bureaucrats, characterised by their 'persistent, assertive and challenging' approach, and their ability to 'get in through the front door' (Crossley, 2016: 202)

As he elaborates, writing on the government's Troubled Families Programme, home-visit practices '...the close-up intimate nature of the interactions between family workers and members of 'troubled families' in the domestic space of the home perform a number of symbolic and political functions.' (*ibid.*, 2016: 201). Kirsty's experience highlights the opacity of such functions from the perspective of the welfare subject; she couldn't say which organization the visitors were from (most likely one of the outsourced providers), who they were in communication with regarding her case (her doctors), and – as with the Work Capability Assessment - seemed to mostly revisit what had already been detailed in the application form. Such interrogative and asymmetric encounters - in which welfare bureaucrats were well versed in both adjudication processes and individual case files and welfare subjects left guessing (see Dubois, 2014) - thus reproduced the state's dominance in an subtle but potent way. With the level of intrusion and self-awareness this engendered, the invasive practice

of home visits similarly encapsulated the reach of the state beyond demands for detailed documental proof and into the homes and domestic life of claimants. As I shall focus on in the following chapter, with the outsourcing of assessments and an entrenched culture of suspicion, such reach and ostensive intimacy often resulted in less empathy and understanding, and more 'distance' (Gill, 2016), than one might expect.

With disability benefits claims processes we can see the invasive and embodied character of the state particularly clearly. As seen in the asylum system (Mavin, 2019), for disability claimants the body itself becomes a site of governance; an entity to which the state demands legibility and on to which it bases decisions of biopolitical in/exclusion. Whilst performed with the ostensive purpose of 'legal rigour' in determining eligibility (Dubois, 2014), application and appeals processes possess a potent symbolism in which the state re-asserted itself as the arbiter of decisions, with the right to keep its processes hidden and the power to demand that welfare subjects' disclose some of their most private bodily experiences. As the accounts here attest, these demanding and uneven performances of subject deference were experienced and reproduced through embodied and emotional registers, characterized by interrogation, suspicion, and discomfort.

Whilst rarely discussed in such terms, the political dynamic existing between sovereign and subject seen here is akin to '... the confessional complex...' evident at the heart of asylum governance (Salter, 2007; 2008: 365). Drawing from Foucault's (1990) work on the potency of this technique of governance, Deirdre Conlon writes the following:

Individuals become visible and legible as asylum seekers through repeated acts of "confession", a practice that Foucault describes as pervasive in governmental society. He notes, confession is "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth ...in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life and in the most solemn rites ...one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, what is most difficult to tell' (Foucault, 1990: 59). At every stage of the asylum process, individuals must tell and retell, in other words, confess, private, personal details and histories that account for their fear of persecution.

(Conlon, 2019: 389)

For disability benefits claimants, evidence is similarly personal, and interrogations similarly invasive. Whilst '... what is most difficult to tell...' is not persecution, but intimate details of ill health and daily struggles. Just as repeated bureaucratic

encounters produced asylum seeker subjectivity through demands for confessions and detailed 'evidence' of claims (ibid.), so too was welfare subjectivity realized.

### **Conclusion: Material and symbolic subordination**

This chapter has detailed how benefits claimants have been exposed to different forms of precarity and discipline in welfare austerity. Underpinned by a strong anti-welfare political consensus, much of this was produced directly through a more stringent welfare conditionality regime designed to control the conduct of claimants. However, many of the governmentalities produced through welfare reform appeared more incidental - enacted through indirect bureaucratic barriers and delays. For jobseekers and disabled claimants alike, much of the lived experience of welfare governance was characterized by chronic, low-level threats and periods of waiting in which claimants were at the behest of the state's bureaucratic procedures and demands. The protracted and quietly insidious condition of 'waiting for the state' (Carswell et al., 2019) was also punctuated by high-stakes assessments. In these invasive encounters, claimants were required to disclose detailed, often intimate proof of their eligibility in a confessional relationship to the state. In these ways, sovereign authority was reproduced through the performative character of welfare governance in which the state played the role of arbiter of demands and decisions over inclusion, to whom welfare subjects were required to wait, prove their worth, and confess on command. For the claimants I worked with in Rochdale, welfare governance was thus experienced as a combination of symbolic subordination and exposure to material poverty, precarity and dependence on charity.

In many respects, lived experiences of welfare governance resembled the asylum system's politics of discomfort discussed in the previous chapter. Just as asylum seekers were subject to a hostile environment based on direct and indirect deterrence measures, so too were citizens who claimed economic security from the state. As subjects framed as a threat to a national order in public discourse, non-citizens and 'failed citizens' (Anderson 2013) alike could justifiably be subject to invasive forms of monitoring and control and, ultimately, exposed to poverty and destitution. These parallels and areas of convergence are explored in greater depth in Chapter 9 and, whilst stopping short of comparing welfare and border regimes here, debates surrounding the degradation of citizenship in austerity have offered useful insights into thinking about the fragile basis of political in/exclusion with respect to welfare governance. If citizenship and social inclusion involves basic rights to economic security and welfare as standard, then the precarious conditions produced by welfare governance could be seen as an effective denial of citizenship (Edminston, 2016; see also Dwyer, 2004) akin to that witnessed in border regimes. Such comparisons – and

important differences - will be explored in greater depth later. However, for reasons that will be explained shortly, this thesis explores border and welfare governance concurrently from here on in. Having explored lived, embodied experiences of precarity and political subordination, the following chapter turns our attention to role of different actors involved in the day-to-day production of asylum and welfare governance.

## Chapter 7. Governing at a distance?

The preceding two chapters have primarily addressed the first thesis objective, exploring experiences of asylum and welfare governance, respectively. Focussing more on the second objective – concerning the ways in which governance is practiced – this chapter marks a departure from this discrete analysis of welfare and asylum governance for two broad reasons. The first is empirical and follows from my wider observations working in Rochdale, where non-citizens were not siloed into any one system of governance indefinitely, but, in practice, moved between them. Indeed, over half of asylum applicants eventually secure protected status (Walsh, 2019), giving access to employment and benefits akin to British citizens. As I will detail in Chapter 9, limited employment opportunities meant that most refugees were subject to forms of welfare governance for at least some time following the granting of status. Moreover, many of the logics, techniques, and material consequences of asylum are echoed in welfare governance. Thus, in terms of lived experiences of the state in its broader sense, it makes sense in these terms to explore these systems concurrently. This approach is also partly a matter of critique. As the preceding chapters detailed, the separate socio-legal categories of citizen and various non-citizens are inherently exclusionary and, whilst their effects should and have been acknowledged as distinct, structuring an analysis solely around such divisions risks re-enforcing them. Instead, I hope to show how experiences and techniques of asylum and welfare governance align and overlap in different ways; drawing insights into broader questions of how, where, and through who state power operates (Painter, 2006; Sharma & Gupta, 2009; Gill, 2010).

### **Outsourcing as governing at distance.**

A defining feature of modern governance (Rose, 1999), one of the most arresting parallels between the UK's welfare and asylum regimes is the extent to which the work of delivering services and enacting governance has been outsourced to private and voluntary sector actors. Indeed, many of the forms of social and political subjugation discussed in the preceding chapters were enacted not by government employees, but by non-state organizations and personnel. As we have already touched upon, both asylum accommodation (Hirschler, 2015; Darling, 2016b) and benefits assessments (Griffiths & Patterson, 2014; Galloway et al., 2018; May et al., 2019) were delivered by corporate providers in austerity. And so, whilst directed by processes and standards curated by central government, the frontline enactment of governmental discipline and judgments of in/exclusion were performed by private sector actors. For many critics of what has been termed this 'New Public Management', the incorporation of

market ideas and mechanisms in public services throws up serious questions surrounding the incentivization and accountability of 'new agents of the state' who are endowed with significant discretion and influence over access to state support (Benish, 2014: 113).

Similarly, states have also increasingly sought to outsource the delivery of public services to the voluntary sector. Most recently branded as part of 'The Big Society' by former Prime Minister David Cameron in the wake of the 2008/09 global financial crisis, several economic and welfare state 'crises' have prompted the state's outsourcing to the voluntary sector since the 1970s (Baker and McGuirk, 2019). This outsourcing has occurred in two ways; formally – through contracts for the delivery of public services, and informally – through increased demand for charitable assistance that has accompanied government service retrenchment. With charities increasingly becoming responsible for the delivery of welfare services, the state and voluntary sectors have become progressively interdependent, and the boundary between them blurred (*Ibid.*). DeVerteuil (2017: 1527), following Wolch (1990), has thus concluded here that the voluntary sector has '... emerged as a component of the subservient shadow state'. However, recent research into the governmental dimensions of foodbanking reveals variation between charity organizations and even individual staff that challenges such a singular diagnosis regarding what outsourcing means for the reproduction of the state (Williams et al. 2016; May et al., 2019). This chapter explores the some of the implications surrounding the personnel who produce governmental practices and routines in an era characterised by opaque arrangements of outsourced governance.

Nikolas Rose excellently captures the geographical dimensions of this trend for outsourcing in Western democracies, in what he terms 'governing at a distance':

'Political forces instrumentalize forms of authority other than those of 'the state' in order to 'govern at a distance' in both constitutional and spatial senses – distanced constitutionally, in that they operate through the decisions and endeavours of non-political modes of authority; distanced spatially, in that these technologies of government link a multitude of experts in distant sites to the calculations of those at a centre – hence government operates through opening lines of force across a territory spanning space and time.'

(Rose, 1999: 49-50)

Rose encapsulates here something that has become a central concern for scholars of governance – the concept of distance. In this chapter I focus on two key forms of



distance evident in outsourcing across asylum and welfare governance; what Nick Gill (2016) has conceived as organizational-spatial distance, and moral distance. Whilst Gill grounds his study of governmental distance in the British asylum system, others have shown how the same governmental structures and subsequent propensity for dehumanizing encounters with the state also characterize the modern welfare state in the UK (May et al., 2019). Following Bauman (1989), Gill (2016) shows how, by institutionally and physically separating policy and case decision makers from the consequences of their actions, this type of bureaucratic structure lays the foundation for many of the exclusionary, dehumanizing effects of the UK's asylum system discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, as I shall evidence, this type of institutional segmentation conversely allows organizations and individuals who come face-to-face with the subjects of governance to absolve responsibility and guilt by deferring to systems and decisions made far away and outside of their control. As Gill (2016) untangles, this type of 'moral estrangement at close quarters' is not only a matter of bureaucratic distance in this way, but also as a psychological coping mechanism for frontline staff tasked with enacting governance.

### **Street-level discretion and the state**

Something fundamental to matters of distance, my analysis also draws from work that attends to the way in which the state itself, as a lived reality, is produced as a negotiation between the people and systems involved in its constitution. As discussed in Chapter 2, following a range of critical theories of the state (e.g. Abrams, 1988; Jessop, 2007; Mitchell, 1991; Rose, 1999; Allen and Cochrane, 2010), I challenge conventional understandings of states as coherent and monolithic entities that act objectively on society from a position of separation (Gill, 2010). For Jones (2012: 819), "The state' that comes into view when thinking in these terms is not in any way a stable and enduring structure; it is, rather, a peopled state of momentary and spatialised encounters.'. And so, through an empirical focus on the encounters and personnel 'at the heart of the state' (Fassin, 2015), the remainder of this thesis attends to the mutability of what is a 'peopled' (Ibid.) and spatially contingent (Painter, 2006) entity.

In calling for a sustained study of the relational 'in-between' moments of interactions between street-level bureaucrats and citizens, Bartels (2013: 476) treats the face-to-face service encounter as '... not simply a communicative void for the neutral transmission of information but, instead, a multifaceted process of interwoven situated performances which enables or disadvantages the actual abilities of public professionals and citizens to make claims, influence decisions, and understand each other'. It is from these analyses that we can think of welfare service encounters as

key moments, and drop-in centres as key spaces, through which states are practiced and citizen-state relations understood, produced, and negotiated - regardless of institutions or actors being considered as *nominally* part of the state or not.

With the discretion to fundamentally shape state effects, the frontline workers discussed here evoke Lipsky's (1980) 'street-level bureaucrat' - a figure charged with implementing governments' distant instructions but impelled to (literally) face the subjects of these instructions (See also Gill, 2016). As I shall demonstrate, when the delivery of bureaucratic hostility is outsourced to non-state actors, greater discretion and contingency emerges across both welfare and asylum systems. From this, the final parts of this chapter examines how, for voluntary sector advocates, most instances of street-level discretion intervened positively on behalf of governmental subjects; departing, and even subverting the exclusionary architecture of asylum and welfare systems. However, I also detail how discretion was imbricated in judgments and disciplinary encounters that re-enforced, and even extended the reach of exclusionary governmental logics (see Humphris, 2019). And so much of what I found in Rochdale reinforces the preceding chapters, evoking what Vincent Dubois (2014) regards as governance *par excellence* - the state's ability to effectively meet its governmental objectives. Before I address the role of voluntary sector actors in the negotiation of state effects, I begin by analysing Serco's position as a pseudo-state provider of 'asylum services' and mediators of the politics of discomfort that characterised dispersal (Darling, 2011).

## **7.1 Implementing hostility: Serco and organizational distance.**

### **Bureaucratic hostility**

The politics of discomfort in asylum was not only produced through the social-legal exclusions and denial of rights discussed in Chapter 5. As with welfare governance, much of the hostility experienced in dispersal was in fact enacted through delays and denials resulting from the asylum system's organizational and bureaucratic arrangements. For instance, at the end of refused applications, poorly communicated options for appeals or support for refused asylum seekers worked to exacerbate policy-imposed destitution. As David mentioned in interview, the Home Office routinely failed to communicate appeal and support options for refused asylum seekers, producing feelings of panic and despair:

'(...) so people were thinking, you know, the Home Office is like... the *big monster*, who is waiting for people, just to catch them and send them back - you know? (We) say 'No, there is a process, there is a law there,

you can follow the... the appeal process, you can make a *fresh* claim, (... there is lots of things ... a lot of opportunities.'

(David, Welcome Centre manager, interview, October 2018)

This further production of confusion and 'not-knowing' (Woodward, 2014) is partly realised through Home Office and Serco letters, whose form clearly emphasised impending eviction and support cessation over options for appeals and supports (see case study in section 8.1). Here, inadequate communications and administrative processes also meant that exposure to destitution was not confined to the deliberate, formal removal of support but was also evident in the Kafkaesque bureaucratic practices of asylum.

Laura – an asylum housing advocate – similarly spoke about the prevalence of a destitution gap in which applicants for Section 95 (dispersal subsistence) support were often left with no income for several weeks. This was due to the incongruity between an average two-month delay for initial payments and the Home Office's requirement that asylum seekers prove an impending position of destitution arising within a maximum of two weeks. Many applicants would thus apply for support two weeks before any savings had run out, only to wait months for a payment. Many new asylum seekers who had not applied for asylum on arriving in the UK consequently accumulated debts with landlords and utility companies and delays resulted in widespread reliance on foodbanks, with some applicants waiting up to five months in this way. In response to complaints about these delays, the Home Office would usually refer asylum seekers to emergency accommodation in Liverpool, which displaced families with children in local schools or individuals dependent on specific local health or social services. Whilst exposed to similar conditions, this form of destitution was ostensibly incidental and the consequence of bureaucratic delay and incompetence rather than a direct deterrence policy.

Less systemic techniques of bureaucratic obstruction were also evident in more isolated cases of appeals and requests during the waiting phase of the asylum process; most prominently with respect to housing relocation or maintenance requests, as Laura described regarding the Home Office's arbitrary demands for doctors' letters:

'(...) the Home Office will often say no, or the Home Office will always ask for a doctor's letter, you know, if it's a medical reason, they'll ask for anything that will delay it. Even if it's obvious, anything that's going to delay them having to do something, you know. Like when we apply for support, sometimes they ask the most ridiculous questions, or sometimes just repeat what the application asks, just to be asking a

question, just because it will take, you know, a couple of days to get to us, we have to reply to that, even if we reply straight away to say “this is ridiculous”...’

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

Similarly, other caseworkers described how replacement Application Registration Cards (ARC) (asylum seeker I.D cards) and ASPEN cards were intentionally delayed or even not administered, working as an indirect form of deterrence. As these cards were the only available forms of I.D and payment card that most asylum seeker had access to, this had significant and drawn out exclusionary effects during the middle, waiting phase of the asylum process. In constructing such arbitrary administrative barriers and delays, the state is able to produce conditions of discomfort indirectly through a kind of bureaucratic hostility that forms a supplementary level of deterrence. Importantly, such obstructions were often the product of the discretionary demands of Home Office bureaucrats, rather than formal state policy or directives.

### **Serco and embodied hostility**

Through both direct and indirect practices, hostility was contingent on encounters and communications between asylum seekers and the people implementing dispersal. Most ostensibly prosaic state encounters within COMPASS involved Serco’s staff and bureaucratic processes. Unsurprisingly, given the rationale of dispersal, whilst Serco had no formal role in asylum claims, these encounters often had the effect of reproducing the inherently hostile character and architecture of the wider asylum system.

This was perhaps most evident with respect to housing requests and complaints; which Serco staff often ignored or took unreasonable amounts of time to respond to. Such cases provided a constant source of work for staff at the Welcome Centre and the regional asylum housing charity. Khaled’s experience (see Chapter 5) of living with his pregnant wife and young child in a rodent-infested house for five-weeks provides one striking example of this. Other cases I encountered in Rochdale included protracted issues with heating and sanitation, and occupants being left in houses in which they felt unsafe or uncomfortable in the presence of other occupants or anti-social neighbours. Detailed evidence of the same issues elsewhere with COMPASS suggests systemic neglect or indifference, rather than isolated issues (see House of Commons, 2014; National Audit Office, 2014; Hirschler, 2015; Mavin, 2019). Here, Hirschler (2015: 202) goes as far as to remark that ‘... the ‘politics of discomfort’ is perhaps better described as a ‘politics of disregard’. Whether the consequence of governmental intent or deliberately austere service provision, deterrence remains the underlying

motive behind such mistreatment (*ibid.*). Whilst, paradoxically, another prominent issue I recorded in Rochdale involved the practice of Serco staff visiting properties unannounced and without invitation, exacerbating feelings of being monitored; to repeat Dawit's recollection of this practice '... day or night they come - very (bad) headache for me...'. Thus, it would often seem that Serco staff were frustratingly absent when desired and conspicuously present when they weren't.

Beyond the frustration of feeling interrupted or disregarded, more overt disciplinary interactions were also an issue within dispersal. As Laura recalled in our interview, this occasionally amounted to threatening reminders of asylum seekers' abjection and precarity of status being meted out by Serco staff.

'...there was another one (Serco Housing Officer) I made a complaint about, who was very threatening to a new family (...) he basically... he shouted at them all the way - "come one! Get your stuff, get your stuff in" - no... not polite at all. And then sat them down and said "if you get a TV they'll put you in prison, if you do this they'll put you in prison" and it's kind of, roughly true but, you know, not telling them half the things they need to know, so they were terrified...'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

According to the COMPASS contracts, housing providers were required to provide services in a '... polite, sensitive, and orderly manner...' (Home Office 2012, cited in Hirschler, 2015). However, accountability surrounding face-to-face interactions was inherently limited and providers were only required to manage the quality of service delivery internally (*Ibid.*, 2015). In practice, it was thus left up to charities and advocates to hold Serco to account regarding quality of service and provoke action in individual cases. Worryingly, Laura mentioned here that the family in this case were only likely to have been able to make a complaint as they were well-educated and fluent in English, and she expressed concern about the potential number of similar instances going unreported. Whilst not as common as the more subtle disciplinary practices of monitoring and neglect, such cases serve as a stark reminder of the subordination and pervasive threats built into dispersal and expressed here through the peopled encounters between asylum seekers and Serco. As Hirschler (2015: 202) concludes, citing Foucault (2004), with such arrangements '... 'tactics of domination' (*ibid.*,: 34) do not need to be delineated through stated aims of exclusion or repression; they can be expressed through the interaction between individuals'. What is particularly striking here is how unnecessary such interactions were for Serco staff to do their job, and what is seen here is the extent to which the dehumanization of

asylum seekers and moral distance were evident at close quarters in dispersal (Gill, 2016).

In a surprising contrast to evidence here and elsewhere (Hirschler, 2015; House of Commons, 2014, 2017; Mavin, 2019), interviewees who had lived, or were living, in Serco accommodation often spoke positively about their interactions with housing staff. However, on closer reading, interviewees' positive remarks spoke more of low service expectations; and the hierarchical, disciplinary nature of their relationships with Serco staff were clear to see. For instance, Khaled – the asylum seeker whose young family were made to wait five weeks to be moved out of an unsafe, rodent-infested house – spoke positively of his interactions with Serco staff. This, and his description of his housing officer as his 'manager' alludes to the reverence with which he held Serco staff:

'I don't know with Serco...but, when someone is your manager, you don't have that space, to talk with or to... just to deal with them, when you are dealing with them for proper things (..) because he's your manager. If something happens in the flat, you tell him about it.'

(Khaled, 50, asylum seeker, interview, December 2017)

Whilst Khaled felt able to raise issues with his accommodation, his understanding of his position as an occupant and asylum seeker was one in which his living conditions were ultimately determined by his Serco 'manager'. Similarly, Burhan spoke highly of Serco staff's assistance with navigating the move on period after his positive asylum decision. This came despite him having to be housed in an emergency homelessness hostel in Rochdale following eviction from his Serco accommodation, whose staff it was that belatedly guided him through the processes needed to access secure housing and mainstream welfare.

'Serco people... yes... they tell us 'use this system' and 'use this code' ... and even (homelessness hostel)... staff was amazing, they call job centre, they... write letters for me... told my solicitor, I think, they do everything for me (...) but this (is) government, RBH is government, Serco is government... (...) from first second when I enter Airport, I felt everything's coming from government...'

(Burhan, 49, asylum seeker, interview, June 2018)

Burhan's words offer two pertinent insights with respect to the interactions between a peopled state and subjects of border controls. First is the reverence with which asylum seekers are conditioned to hold government personnel (Serco included), whilst

expecting little in the way of support or respect in return. Second, is the ubiquity of peopled governmental interventions that asylum seekers face through the asylum and dispersal process; as Burhan remarked ‘... everything’s coming from government...’. Here, it becomes clear how, regardless of the institution they work for, nominally non-government staff are central to the daily reproduction of discomfort and deterrence in dispersal - ‘... be this members of staff acting as ‘everyday border guards’ or the residential environment (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018)’ (Zill et al., 2018: 10).

Importantly, in Rochdale, these disciplinary interactions within the COMPASS system were all enabled by the distance that was produced through the organizational structure of asylum accommodation provision in the town. In our interviews, David and Marion both emphasised how the lack of a Serco office in the town itself created a barrier to communication between asylum seekers and housing staff, ultimately resulting in a reduction in the quality of service compared to the previous local council-led provision.

*David:* With Serco, it’s a bit difficult, because Serco they... they just work with an officer, a housing officer, so it’s not just like they have an office where you can go and meet, and send people...

*Interviewer:* Did this change from the old system?

*David:* Yeah, because the (local council) asylum team was different. The asylum team was putting refugees together. If you had a problem, there was the team taking care of all kind of situations. But actually, with Serco, its more mainly housing and your benefits or your money from the NASS system. The rest, everything... regarding your immigration (application), regarding your... even for school or children, they’re not really involved. They need to go to other organisations, to (the Welcome Centre), for them to help them. ... its like they’ve abandoned this field (...) so, the client comes to us...’

(David, Welcome Centre manager, interview, October 2018)

David draws attention here not only to the institutional absence of Serco in Rochdale, but also to the spatial distance and segmentation of support areas that was established with the introduction of regionally based private providers into the dispersal system (Darling, 2016b). COMPASS effectively split Home Office-supplied subsistence payments and housing from all other support areas, complicating the coordination of social welfare and integration efforts and putting extra pressure on local charity-sector services. With a relatively attentive and holistic support system being replaced with a

more distant asylum accommodation regime under COMPASS, as well as organizational distance, this arrangement appears another selective withdrawal of the state in which discipline is maintained but support cut back.

The segmentation and dehumanizing encounters extended by COMPASS are prime examples of Gill's (2016) notion of organizational and spatial distance, in which the people making decisions around asylum claims and housing provision are shielded from facing its human consequences. Yet, such distance is limited in explaining instances of unwarranted threats and apathy towards asylum seekers in close proximity. Instead, this discretionary hostility suggests the presence of more insidious forms of dehumanization and 'moral distance' at close quarters (*Ibid.*). Through this form of distancing, Serco staff embodied an exclusionary state, as governmental hostility and performances of sovereign dominance and reach were enacted and experienced through peopled encounters in the asylum accommodation system. As I shall detail next, this wasn't only observed in dispersal, and analogous forms of hostility in frontline encounters were also a feature of welfare governance, where I was able to closely observe how judgments were at the heart of uneven and contingent access to state support.

## **7.2 Shadow state? Judgment and moral distance at Fortis**

### **Welfare gatekeepers**

In Chapter 6 I detailed how staff at the Job Centre and corporate assessors produced welfare governance as a regime characterized by punitive bureaucratic practices and the exposure of claimants to different forms of precarity and discipline. However, public service decline in austerity and the bureaucratic demands of welfare applications mean that voluntary sector organizations have also emerged as important actors in the day-to-day delivery of welfare (Corcoran et al., 2018). In Rochdale this meant that the delivery of welfare - including support for benefits applications and appeals, and thus claimants' primary interactions with government - were mediated by voluntary sector personnel and service encounters. As I discuss here, such mediation existed both formally - wherein Fortis received funding from both the local council and occasional short-term grants from central government - but also informally, through the discretionary judgments of service staff.

For claimants needing to navigate complex and lengthy bureaucratic processes, Fortis's services were a crucial resource facilitating access to welfare. And yet Fortis staff didn't simply act as a neutral intermediary between claimants and state



bureaucracy, but often profoundly shaped what information was included in welfare applications and correspondence. What information was made known to the state therefore depended on embodied encounters and relationships often built-up over long periods of time, as this observation demonstrates:

Kevin came in again this afternoon to do his ESA Work Capability Form that was meant to be due back with the DWP last week. More than usual, I noticed Molly suggesting different responses to the form for certain questions where she thought Kevin was underplaying his conditions. E.g. when they got to the questions on mobility, Molly intervened to suggest he might lose his balance walking more than 100 metres, to which he nodded in agreement. At the section on mental and cognitive capabilities, Molly, Kevin and Suzanne [another staff member present in the office] chatted for a while about Kevin's forgetfulness in attending appointments etc. and Suzanne suggested that he try and get a diagnosis for alcohol(related) dementia, to which Kevin shrugged his shoulders as if to ask what the point would be.

(Research diary, Fortis drop-in, March 2018)

Kevin was a regular at the drop-in and had known Molly and Suzanne for several years. It was this familiarity with Kevin's health issues - gleaned through past conversations and casual observations of his mobility in the drop-in space - that determined the evidence that was provided in his ESA application. In this way, whilst being nominally non-state actors, Fortis staff served as key 'gatekeepers' to welfare access (see Humphris, 2019), and such encounters were key moments in which citizens' relationship with the state were determined. Advocates and claimants didn't merely 'mirror' (Hay, 1995) or fulfil the demands of the state bureaucracy here, but reached back (Jones, 2012) to shape claim outcomes and the daily re-production of welfare governance. Despite the illusion of 'discursive mirroring' (1995, cited in Ward, 2000: 173) and bureaucratic and procedural neutrality then, service relationships and encounters can instead be seen as mediating forces that reproduce the state itself.

Whilst such encounters demonstrate how the state is co-produced by (nominally) state and non-state actors in this way (*ibid.*), the disciplinary architecture of contemporary state welfare was still a potent force shaping how Fortis staff approached their work. Beyond assisting with bureaucratic processes, Fortis also provided advice and guidance to claimants. In the context of restrictionist welfare, staff would often make efforts to manage the expectations of success with claims. Whilst warnings of this kind were motivated by care and compassion, they also re-produced some of the hostile

affects of welfare reform by reminding claimants of a default disbelief of the veracity of claims and the positioning of the state as distant arbiter of in/exclusion. For claimants with less-visible disabilities in particular, Fortis staff would often warn claimants of their limited chances of success during the form-filling process:

PIP(Personal Independence Payments). A lot of people come in for PIP. We don't know 'em. Don't know any history, any medical history, no nothing. I do... I am quite blunt with people that have got a ... er... anxiety... or depression. Erm ...because, absolutely not a chance are they gonna get it, for PIP. Its really, really hard at the moment. And I do say to them "You probably won't do this.. probably won't get this" you know? "by all means if you want to go in for it, go for it, but its gonna be a long slog (...) It's hard. Because on DLA (Disability Living Allowance), on DLA, they got everything. You only need to say "I'm on depression tablets" and they got it. But they're not classing that as a disability. It all depends on the level of the depression and anxiety. That's the ones who have got a lot of medical back-up, when they've been in a lot of services, they're the ones that are getting 'em. I just say it as it is. I really do. I'm just one of those that'll say "listen, this is what we've seen, do you wanna carry on and go on with it, then fair dos" ... erm "we'll help you though it, but it's gonna be 99% that you probably won't get it".

(Suzanne, Fortis interview, October 2018)

As well as inadvertently re-asserting the performative dynamics of sovereign dominance, Suzanne describes the understandable tendency for staff to refer to the restrictionist nature of the welfare state in austerity when interacting with claimants. As she explained, support with applications were provided regardless of perceived chances of success. Yet staff also felt the need to prepare claimants for negative decisions and protect themselves against the implications of such outcomes. In this way, the somewhat insensitive character of such warnings is akin to Gill's (2016) notion of moral distance as a form of self-care, in which the people compelled to enact state discipline and exclusion defer to the demands of the state as something of a personal coping mechanism.

Yet this form of moral distance as self-care also blended with more judgmental impulses as Fortis staff openly discussed (both in interview and casually at the drop-in) how levels of assistance were determined by the perceived veracity of claims from unfamiliar service users, as Molly explained:

(...) I explain "I'll only be writing what you said, word-for-word"... erm... they said they wanted us to put the words in, what could help them... get the benefit, the right wording. So ... which to me... we don't know these people. We can't put our name to anything. If it was someone that came to breakfast every morning, that I sat with and chatted with and knew their life, knew what medication they were on, knew the troubles that they have, I get it. I could put it in my own words, as someone from an outside that can see them. But for someone that you don't know to walk in a building and to ask... well... well basically, to ask "can you fraudulently do this?" – No! I don't... I don't think it's correct.'

(Molly, interview, Fortis, October 2018)

Molly's explanation reveals a default suspicion that was often evident during service delivery at Fortis. Along with the other staff at Fortis, Molly was a compassionate and effective advocate, and her motivation for taking such a stance was born out of self-protection as much as any moralistic and judgmental impulses. As I shall explore shortly, many Fortis staff incorporated such caution and suspicion as a routine part of their practice. Indeed, when I was being taught how to assist claimants with applications myself, I was warned not to elaborate on claimants' descriptions of health conditions, with vague mentions of staff elsewhere being caught-up in benefit fraud cases cited as the reason for this. However, this form of self-care was also often imbued with moralistic judgments based around subjective assessments of deservingness in service encounters (see Humphris, 2019). Contrasting this with Kevin's service encounter, it is also evident that practices varied according to prior staff-claimant relationships (or lack thereof); which often influenced the evidence provided in claims for state assistance. Therefore, as gatekeepers of the welfare state, Fortis staff shaped more than just the moral character of service encounters, but also had a meaningful impact on the substantive content of benefits claims. The amount and quality of evidence that claimants provided, and hence their chances of success were contingent on inherently uneven, often haphazard service encounters and relationships.

### **Judgments and contingency**

With the increasing reliance on voluntary sector actors to implement welfare governance, similar ethical burdens and negotiations were also evident in ostensibly non-state bureaucratic processes too. At Fortis this was most notable in practices surrounding the issuing of foodbank vouchers. Whilst foodbank entitlements varied between organizations (May et al., 2019), Rochdale's foodbank was conventional in

that it worked on a voucher system in which trusted service professionals were required to verify the need for assistance on a case-by-case basis (see Cloke et al., 2017). For Williams et al. (2016: 2291) such processes mirror the type of restrictions and conditionalities for assistance discussed in the previous chapter, and foodbanks ‘... continue to operate within a set of highly restrictive, and stigmatising, welfare technologies...’ (see also Cloke et al., 2017; May et al., 2019). As a trusted provider of foodbank vouchers, Fortis staff were also effectively tasked with assessing service users’ claims for food aid, and the corresponding service practices I observed at Fortis also mirrored the inherently judgmental character of the referral system:

Just before an SU – Harry, 67 – came in to do a foodbank voucher today, Sarah mentioned to me that she was aware that Harry was on ‘a lot’ of money through PIP and ESA and so was concerned about why he needed a food voucher. Sarah sees Harry as vulnerable and was concerned about where his money is going. She also mentioned recently seeing him behaving strangely in the town centre, standing in the middle of the road for no apparent reason.

As she was filling in the form she probed as to why he needed the voucher, mentioning that he was on a lot of money, even more than she was. He looked a bit taken aback by this and said that he’s in debt. Sarah suggested that he needs to seek some debt advice, handed him some information and invited him to come in if he needed any help. She then finished off the voucher and made the point that she couldn’t really tick ‘low income’ because he wasn’t on a low income and would have to just tick ‘debt’.

(Research diary, Fortis drop-in, May 2018).

In one respect, Sarah’s intervention here was motivated by a concern for Harry’s welfare. However, this interaction was also patently judgmental, and Sarah directly challenged the legitimacy of his claim for assistance. As Williams et al. (2016) and May et al. (2019) show, as with state welfare, the bureaucratic demands of foodbanking often have the effect of blurring the lines between care and discipline in service encounters. Although being ostensibly detached from the benefits system, the judgmental character of service encounters shows how the disciplinary architecture of contemporary (state and non-state) welfare reaches beyond systems conventionally thought of as the domain of the state. Whilst effectively outsourcing the provision of food security and citizen welfare in austerity, here, the state can be seen to retain

governmental influence through its reach and influence over bureaucratic practices and conditionality (See Williams et al., 2016; May et al., 2019).

Indeed, by imposing conditions on foodbank access based on assessments of genuine need, the referral voucher system inadvertently prompted more judgmental exchanges between claimants and frontline workers, as their role effectively shifted from advocate to assessor. Just as Fortis staff referred to restrictive state welfare when delivering warnings to claimants, so too did they refer to foodbank vouchers when passing judgment on claimants. The active role of documents and other 'technical devices' (Barry, 2001) (including Fortis' own voucher scheme) in shaping service encounters are explored in greater depth in the following chapter. Yet it is important to demonstrate here how bureaucratic arrangements have the power to influence the peopled character of service encounters. In accounting for the disciplinary affects and moral distance witnessed in non-state spaces of care, we can again see here how dehumanizing, judgmental encounters can emerge from bureaucratic systems, rather than the purpose and identity of service personnel alone (Gill, 2016).

However, frontline staff are not impervious to wider discursive framings and stigmatization surrounding welfare (May et al., 2019), and the influence of an anti-welfare consensus on service practices were also evident at Fortis. Tellingly, Sarah's suspicions were communicated as a complaint comparing her own income as a full-time employee, to Harry's as a benefits claimant. In this way, Sarah evoked a trope at the heart of the moralistic 'shirkers' vs 'strivers' narrative (Patrick, 2016) that I discussed in Chapter 6; a framing in which she positioned herself as a 'good', deserving citizen and Harry as an underserving, 'failed' one (Anderson, 2013). Although significant, these types of overtly disciplinary interaction are not representative, and most service encounters were completed with little perceptible, or at least more subtle, judgments. However, the positioning on opposite sides of the deserving-undeserving divide was something I noticed being discussed casually amongst staff at Fortis on a regular basis; and on occasion I observed this shaping the political character of service encounters in significant ways.

As well as levels of familiarity with claimants, moralistic judgments could explain why service practices and levels of assistance with welfare claims varied between different staff and claimants. As witnessed with instances such as Kevin's ESA application above, staff regularly intervened to shape what and how evidence for claims was presented. Many encounters with new, unfamiliar attendees at the drop-in also involved this type of pro-active advocacy. Whilst this was usually reserved for cases where ill health or incapacity was more visible, I also witnessed this more broadly with

some staff members who didn't share the same concerns around 'fraudulent' claims as Sarah and others. For caseworker James, this variety in approach was put down to the political outlook of staff, to which there was a known, but usually unspoken, divide amongst staff:

*James:* ... when other workers, that work for Fortis, have discussions, my point is quite good to put into the mix. 'cause if you've got a lot of... erm... - this is gonna sound mad - leftwing tree-huggers... all talking, you're gonna hug trees all day! So you need someone that's going to chop a tree down, into the mix. That's just my way of putting it!

(James, interview, Fortis October 2018)

To some extent, the political persuasion of staff in this sense was reflected in their service practice. For instance, James, like Sarah and Suzanne, tended to fit the mould of what Zacka (2017) refers to as an "enforcer" in street-level bureaucracies – frontline workers who uphold the rules and restrictions set out by the state. Whilst the 'leftwing tree-huggers' of James' account tended more often to enact discretion in favour of clients when assisting them make applications and appeals. However, these roles were not fixed and morphed depending on staff members' relationship with clients and what judgments were made of them, either over time or during a given visit. Such value judgments are likely bound up in class, race, age and gender positionalities that are contingent upon the persons present in any particular encounter (Silver, 2010, cited in May et al., 2019). Yet, as I shall evidence further in the next chapter, stigmatizing representations of benefits claimants and a broader anti-welfare consensus also underpinned moral distance and proximity in service encounters and ultimately affected how welfare advice services were delivered. As May et al. (2019: 1260) conclude, '(w)hatever the outcome, the discretion of street-level bureaucrats in and of itself thus undoes any conception of "blind justice" and reveals bureaucratic systems and processes as always already entangled with unequal relationships of power.'

In being dependent on personal relationships, welfare outcomes were inherently unpredictable and uneven. With access to basic income and subsistence often hinging on the outcome of bureaucratic processes formed through service encounters, for many welfare claimants, social security was contingent on something as haphazard as who served them at a charity drop-in centre. It is here that we can see the state as a necessarily uneven and peopled entity; far from the consistent, monolithic institution of popular imagination (Painter, 2006).

### **The voluntary sector and governing at a distance**

In many ways, the outsourcing of welfare services to the voluntary sector represents the production of organizational distance and separation between the state and welfare subjects. Yet the reach of restrictionist bureaucratic processes and discursive framings have meant that many of the broader restrictionist motives of welfare austerity are actuated by voluntary sector actors. In this sense, the institutional distancing of the state from frontline welfare delivery was not concomitant with diminishing governmental control, as may be assumed. In fact, the reach of state interventions into the lives of welfare subjects can even be seen to have extended in some respects.

Even as the state withdrew institutionally, in co-opting voluntary sector actors it was able to maintain its spatial reach (Allen and Cochrane, 2010). To return to the above observation, Sarah mentioned that the origins of her concerns and judgments regarding Harry were prompted both by her prior service relationship and casual encounters with him around Rochdale town centre. This kind of situated familiarity with claimants is arguably something that only locally rooted organizations such as Fortis were in a position to develop; and, whilst this was often mobilised for advocacy, it also exposed claimants to indirect forms of statist surveillance in this way. And so, as much as outsourcing involved the formal withdrawal of the state, in deferring judgments to street-level bureaucrats who share banal spaces with welfare subjects, governmental control is retained. When this is concomitant with forms of conditionality and judgments of deservingness rooted in welfare state restrictionism, the exclusions of welfare austerity are re-asserted through nominally non-state service encounters.

Increasingly it is the convergence of state and voluntary sector practices and personnel that makes up welfare systems (May et al., 2019). So much so that, as Baker and McGuirk (2019) observe, the nominally state and non-state actors that constitute the state itself become difficult to disentangle:

'Rather than the voluntary sector existing in a uniformly subservient, subjugated relation to the state, there is an interplay of influence that determines the capacity to govern. Formal state agencies and agenda undoubtedly continue to remake the voluntary sector, but so too the voluntary sector remakes the state....'

(Baker and McGuirk, 2019: 4)

With state and non-state roles in delivering welfare becoming blurred, any notional boundaries between what are conventionally labelled 'the state' and civil society become increasingly hazy (Jones, 2012). Yet in acting both as the arbiter of decisions over welfare claims, and the propagator of an anti-welfare consensus and prevailing

bureaucratic practices, the influence of the state was evident to see in outsourced welfare services. However, as I shall turn to now, the same structures that underpinned governance at distance also produced scope for forms of negotiation and contestation against state hostility and exclusions.

### **7.3 Advocacy, negotiation, contestation**

Although inherently uneven and messy, the advocacy work practiced by Fortis shaped both the substantive outcome of welfare claims and how the face-to-face manifestations of the state were experienced. Seen in this way, Fortis intervened to diverge encounters from governmental objectives regarding deterrence and discipline. Whilst Serco performed a more overtly securitizing role, with the interventions of asylum advocacy similar negotiations around state effects were evident in dispersal too. As Chapter 5 detailed, bureaucratic, embodied, and spatialized forms of hostility were integral in the production of discomfort and liminality in dispersal. However, in being contingent on processes of bureaucratic and embodied encounter, dispersal was not produced without deviations from state objectives (Gill, 2010). As a governmental project then, the border was thus far from consistent and was profoundly contingent on various forms of contestation and negotiation (see Gill, 2010; Elden, 2006). Asylum seekers, welfare claimants, and their advocates were not passive actors in the reproduction of border and welfare regimes, and deployed tactics of subversion and avoidance in order to challenge the disciplinary effects of these systems. In this section I draw attention to the negotiations that co-constituted the border as an everyday 'state effect' (Mitchell, 1999; Painter, 2006); in doing so challenging notions of total deference to the state or governance 'par excellence' (Dubois, 2014).

For instance, where the mistreatment of asylum seekers in dispersal could be directly attributed to breaches of standards, advocates were able to use this as leverage to secure tangible improvements for their clients. To pick up on the case involving the overtly threatening Serco housing officer above, Laura continued:

(...) the head of Serco (North West regional manager) came out to apologise to the family, and they got moved....(...) they were, you know, quite an intelligent family, and good English as well, so they knew that they had been responded to inappropriately... (...) they told me all about it, and I said "this really should be a complaint" (...) they came in because they wanted to move, but not because of that reason. (...) the house was right next to a graveyard (...) and the mother had mental health problems anyway, she was quite anxious, (...) she couldn't sleep, she couldn't... settle, being in that house at all. So I thought, it probably



is quite reasonable, if you're not used to it, and you've already got anxiety issues and depression (...) and they told me everything about what the housing officer did – well, that's probably the bigger issue, we can probably get you moved because... so both of them together. I think if I had just said about the graveyard – well, they would have just said "get a doctor's letter"...'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

In this case, a complaint resulting from the discretionary (mis)behaviour of a housing officer was turned around to positively shape how discretionary power around housing choice was used. Despite the overarching disciplinary architecture of the dispersal process, a different relationship to that of a unilateral state control and subjection can be seen here. Rather than an imposition of policy, Laura and the family of asylum seekers negotiated not only a preferable practical outcome, but also disrupted the symbolic relationship of deference to the state that defined asylum governance.

The discretionary power of street-level bureaucrats to disregard normal process was also evident in more severe instances of trauma and exclusion, including somewhat absurdly in cases in which the harm was caused by the cruelty of the asylum system itself. In one especially striking example, discretion was even extended to influence an asylum claim – reaching back into the symbolic heart of sovereign arbitration; as caseworker Mark recounted regarding the abnormal responsiveness of the Home Office's safeguarding team:

'(...) they'd come in (to a drop-in centre) and said "I've tried to kill myself by jumping out of my window a couple of days ago", so our sort of, first ... protocol there is to identify a safeguarding issue, suicide intervention skills, all that kind of stuff (...) once all that is covered, we then notified Serco that – who were then... I don't feel like they do... much off their own initiative, but if we bring something to them, they're quite responsive (...) Then we contacted the Home Office – actually, I think it might even have been Serco, that contacted the Home Office - and they kept us in the loop to say that 'this person has now been signposted to this person at the safeguarding team at the Home Office, who said that they not only started to address their mental health issues, by arranging them GP appointments and mental health assessments, but they'd also consider fast-tracking the asylum claim (...) because - now I don't know if that's a blanket response - but I think... one of the... key, sort of, I

guess, triggers, and also protective factors, was related to getting this person settled status so they could get family reunion...'

(Mark, caseworker, national humanitarian aid charity, interview, June 2018)

As well as the alarming extent of psychological trauma experienced by asylum seekers in the system, this instance shows how Home Office action and discretion was not only determined unilaterally but could be shaped by asylum subjects' expressions of dissatisfaction and, in this case, despair. To define such a desperate case as any kind of empowered negotiation would be inaccurate, however it attests to how Serco, as a frontline intermediary of asylum governance, were positioned to prompt discretionary action that reached beyond their ostensive remit. Importantly, such instances challenge the consistency of the state's ability to achieve its objectives at a distance. Moreover, positive articulations of discretion were not only the product of organizational distance inherent in the outsourcing of border functions. Laura also attributed simple physical proximity between Serco staff and asylum seekers as potentially being behind their generally more 'reasonable' attitude to requests, compared with the Home Office:

'(...) I think they're just more reasonable (...) for the Home Office it's a policy to make life hard for people, this 'hostile environment' and they won't do anything unless they have to, or when they feel they really have to, because they could get challenged or something. They're not going to do something just because it might make someone's life a bit easier, so... But Serco are quite... maybe because they have that connection with the people, whereas the Home Office are all in some office in Leeds or wherever and they never see people, I don't think they see people as human beings, you know, half the time they just say numbers, or whatever so...so often the housing officer will say "I'll see if something else 'comes available on my patch", "I'll do a bit of a shift around" or whatever, and you know, they will often try and help people out'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

Rather than 'moral distance' reigning at close quarters then (Gill, 2016) - Laura points here to the possibilities for contestation that proximity can engender with regards to dispersal's exclusions. As Gill (2016) and others (Kobelinsky, 2015) have detailed with respect to asylum adjudication processes, whilst bureaucrats do occasionally work to overcome systems designed to produce this distance, such occurrences are extremely

uneven. Likewise here, despite being disciplinary in design and purpose, approaches and communications within COMPASS varied and state effects were highly contingent on situated assemblages of people, institutions, and bureaucratic systems. As discussed earlier, many interactions with Serco staff were disciplinary and even overtly threatening in character, however these encounters were also sites of negotiation. Through contracting out asylum accommodation services, the Home Office remained detached from the consequences of its edicts. Whilst COMPASS allowed the state to govern at a distance, outsourcing also produced space for benevolent manifestations of discretion.

### **Subverting bureaucratic hostility**

Whilst discretion disrupted established relations of subordination in dispersal, contestation was perhaps more unequivocally expressed through acts that subverted the bureaucratic architecture of governance. Asylum seekers and advocates often used the organizational distance produced by outsourcing in COMPASS to improve case outcomes. For instance, Laura recounted how she had learned to use Serco staff's lack of knowledge of the asylum application process to her advantage:

Interviewer: What's (Serco) housing officers' knowledge of the system like?

Laura: '... it varies... reasonable... but it sometimes works in our favour(...) we say we're launching an 'appeal' they hear appeal and think it's an application appeal, really it's a support appeal (laughing) (...) often they just hear the word appeal and say 'OK, we'll give them another week, or whatever.'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

Whilst privatization was problematic with respect to service delivery, this tactic of contestation of was made possible by the separation of accommodation provision and the application process under COMPASS. Here we can also see how the 'politics of confusion' produced by the state (Woodward, 2014; see above) could be subverted to benefit its targets of subjugation.

Advocates similarly developed tactics of controlling how information was provided to the Home Office in order to prompt certain actions, as Laura enthusiastically recounted:

'Yeah! Copying the Home Office in? yeah (...) Sometimes if you ask Serco to do something you get every excuse under the sun, ask them again with the Home Office copied in and its done the next day. Like, we had

a family in an absolutely awful house, I copied the Home Office in, with pictures, and they were moved later that day... quite amazing (...) You just have to play them off against each other, or use them to your benefit sometimes (chuckling).'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

During periods of duress in particular, asylum seekers themselves were also selective in what personal information they provided to the state, for instance when required in order to secure release from detention:

'(...) people get detained for a short period and have nowhere to go... they go back to their old dispersal accommodation but it's often been re-let (...) they often end up sleeping on sofas (...) people agree to anything to get out of detention so they (detention centre staff) agree that they can be released, so they give, you know, any mates address or their old address, or whatever.'

(Laura, asylum housing advocacy worker, interview, November 2017)

The first thoughts here pertain again to the precarities asylum seekers face in and around Britain's detention estate. Yet, as well as an expression of desperation, the refusal to adhere to the demands of border personnel also, momentarily at least, allowed asylum seekers to reclaim control not only over their mobility, but also over their legibility to the state. Thus, this type of manipulation of state records can be seen not only as an avoidance of surveillance, but also a prosaic expression of resistance.

Likewise, this type of administrative subversion was similarly commonplace with respect to welfare governance at Fortis, where I observed staff manipulating forms of communication and processes established to enact disciplinary state power:

Dom - a 29-year-old rough sleeper - ... came in to make a UC application... When he was going through the form, I mentioned that claiming back to a previous date might mean providing proof of job searching for this period. He said that this is why he hasn't claimed yet, because there's no way he can get or look for a job whilst sleeping rough. I asked Molly about this and she told Dom just to put down that he's 'been going to the library or whatever' and he nodded and carried on...

(Research diary, Fortis drop-in, September 2018)

Sophie was sorting out an SU's (service user's) ESA decision appeal for tribunal today. The deadline to send in the tribunal request form [SSCS1] to the DWP was last week but Sophie was on holiday and the SU had waited until she was back, so Sophie wrote an accompanying letter explaining why it was late. The form was actually sent to the SU's old address and redirected to her so Sophie mentioned this as the reason why it was late, placing the blame on the DWP. She also dated the letter as the 24<sup>th</sup> May (six days prior), whispering "they won't know" to me when I asked her if she meant to put this.

(Research diary, Fortis drop-in, May 2018)

These tactics of subversion and manipulation reveal the contingent and malleable reality of ostensibly rigid state bureaucracies, through which advocates were able to contest governmental control. The instrumental role of technical devices in such situated negotiations of state effects shall be explored in greater depth in the next chapter. I use this example here to show that, although government employees are afforded discretion, the closer relationships formed at Fortis - as a space of pseudo-state encounter - produced a propensity for a kind of technical subversion that was unlikely to have arisen in the tightly controlled space of the government Job Centre. As Lipsky (1980) astutely identified, autonomy and scope for discretion are needed for street-level bureaucrats to effectively do their jobs within the broader remit of the state. Yet, such freedoms also provided scope for subversion, particularly in less disciplinary spaces of outsourced service delivery.

In all these cases, we can see a distinction between what I consider to be acts of subversion and discretion. Discretion shapes state effects with the complicit involvement of state or pseudo-state actors, who bend rules and intervene in processes of governance. Whilst being politically significant in disrupting domineering power relations between subject and sovereign power; with discretion, state agents were a conscious partner in negotiations and, ultimately, remained the arbiter of how discretion unfolded. Subversion differs in that it avoids the implied approval of the state to use the bureaucratic and organizational structures of governance to positively liberate subjects' agency. Whilst often leading to similar practical outcomes, subversion thus expresses a different symbolic relationship regarding where power is located in systems of governance.

### **Conclusion: Distance, unevenness, and the peopled state**

In being attentive to the diffused and peopled encounters that constitute contemporary welfare and asylum governance, we can begin to see how the state (as

both a political relation and lived experience) is produced not via unilateral impositions of policy, but through situated and peopled negotiations. To quote Jones (2012: 805), as the boundary between what is conceived of as the state and civil society blurs ‘... citizens... reach back to influence the peopled qualities of ‘the state’’. And, whilst the state exhibits topological reach through discursive and bureaucratic influences over these peopled negotiations, in exposing governmental processes to discretion and subversion, its incoherent, contingent, and uneven nature becomes apparent (Painter, 2006). To borrow Zacka’s (2017) characterizations of street-level bureaucrats here, neither non-state ‘enforcers’ nor ‘caregivers’ were consistent in their approach. Instead, ‘stateness’ was negotiated through inherently uneven processes based on the relationships and judgments of the people at the heart of its everyday reproduction (Painter, 2006).

This chapter began by exploring the capacity of the state to govern through private and voluntary ‘shadow state’ actors, showing how hostility and abjection was not the product of policy alone. In both asylum and welfare regimes, private-sector staff and advocates alike were tasked with the discretionary, face-to-face implementation of policies and thus embodied governance to varying degrees. Following Bauman (1989), this provokes questions surrounding how and why street-level bureaucrats are often able to justify their role in producing state abjection without any perceptible reservations, and occasionally with apparent relish. Here, I identified two forms of ‘distance’ (Gill, 2016) that lay the foundations for the embodied enactments and performances of sovereign exclusion and dominance that I have detailed the preceding chapters. The first of these was organizational distance, which not only separated government bureaucrats from human consequences of their instructions, but also propagate bureaucratic systems that service personnel would refer to when justifying governmental hostility and exclusions. Whilst there were also occasions when this could better be attributed to a form of moral distance (see Gill, 2016), with personal judgments that evoked dehumanizing discourses of asylum and welfare being evident in service encounters. Therefore, although the state withdrew institutionally through outsourcing and service cuts in austerity, its bureaucratic processes and ideas remained a present and potent force in the production of state effects.

However, as the preceding section argued, the outsourcing of government service delivery and discretion to non-state actors also produced scope for empowering forms of negotiation and contestation. Private and voluntary sector personnel both used their discretionary powers to produce positive service outcomes through negotiations with state actors and bureaucratic systems. Whilst, through the subverting of the bureaucratic arrangements that facilitated ‘governing at a distance’ (Rose, 1999),

similar outcomes were also occasionally achieved without such knowledge or consent on the part of government. Yet these prosaic acts of contestation were inherently uneven processes, contingent on service encounters and relationships that dovetailed with powerful discursive and bureaucratic technologies of governance; and were hence only relatively rarely observed. Nonetheless, whilst the state exhibited topological reach in shaping non-state service encounters, such sporadic governmental outcomes attest to its fragile and inconsistent character (Painter, 2006) and how this was made more so with the outsourcing of asylum and welfare services.

As power ebbed and flowed in these ways, we can see how the state itself – in both its substantive and performative effects – is inherently an uneven and peopled entity. As Baker and McGuirk (2019; 4) argue:

‘... rather than operating with coherent identities, agenda and capacities to exert authority, states are complex terrains of contestation marked by incompleteness, compromise and regular failure (Robertson, 2010), and by an uneven capacity to enact authority across territories and domains. Diverse, sometimes contradictory, political projects are differentially assembled and operationalised via networks of people, institutions, knowledges, texts, technologies and practices...’

It is to the latter three of these constituent elements of the state that I will now turn to. In the next chapter I draw on observations of service encounters to show how – in addition to bureaucratic systems and peopled negotiations - ‘technical devices’ (Barry, 2001) of governance also profoundly shaped how the state was assembled and experienced.

## Chapter 8. State encounters: Technologies and Materiality

In this chapter I focus again on the thesis' second objective, concerning how asylum and welfare governance is practiced. Having detailed the organizational and 'peopled' (Jones, 2012) arrangements at work in this respect, this chapter produces an ethnographic account of the everyday 'socio-material' processes (Müller, 2015: 27; Barad, 2003) and different 'technical devices' (Barry, 2001) involved in governmental practices at the two drop-ins. In doing so, I follow a handful of recent studies in the social sciences that have attended to the continued 'agential capacities' of both paper (Darling, 2014: 486) and ICT (Pors, 2015) technologies in shaping face-to-face service encounters in both welfare (*ibid.*; Wright and Patrick, 2019) and asylum (Darling, 2014) contexts. In analysing the role governmental letters play in an asylum drop-in centre, Darling (2014) draws our attention to the material agency of physical documents relative both to their discursive content and the particular social and spatial settings in which they are read and understood. Whilst, engaging with debates surrounding discretion and welfare state digitization (see Buffat, 2015; Henman, 2019), Pors (2015) has explored how the physical arrangements of ICT equipment in welfare offices shapes the peopled character and power dynamics of service encounters (see also Hansen, 2018; Schou and Pors, 2018). Reflecting wider theoretical work on materiality and affective agency (Barad, 2003; Navaro-Yashin, 2012; Dittmer, 2013; Müller, 2015), these strands of work on governance draw attention to the ways in which service encounters are mediated through the spatial, material and discursive entanglements that are shaped by different technological forms. By capturing the nuances of such assemblages (Passoth and Rowland, 2010; Dittmer, 2013), this chapter considers the ways in which different technological forms produce particular 'state affects' (Woodward, 2014) and relations to the state, beyond binary diagnoses of digital inclusion/exclusion or curtailed/enabled discretion (Buffat, 2015).

In an era of sweeping government digitization (Brown et al, 2014), I argue that a focus on the discretionary and spatially contingent processes observable in service encounters can help further understandings of the ways in which statecraft is changing with and through new technological forms. Whilst the implications of digitization for such matters are still being understood, more anachronistic governmental technologies and specific technical devices have long been a focus of studies of bureaucratic governance, including with respect to the production of distance. For



instance, as Gill's reworking (2016: 33) of Bauman (1989) contends: 'In the case of the mediating effect of technology, Bauman equates modern technologies that are able to reduce humans to 'graphs, datasets [and] printouts' to 'moral sleeping pills''. Yet despite attempts to centralize state control using new technologies, face-to-face discretion on the part of 'street-level' – and later, 'screen-level' – bureaucrats (Henman, 2019) and technologically mediated encounters with citizens remain highly contingent moments through which state effects (intended or otherwise) emerge; and it is to such moments that this chapter turns.

The study took place at a time of significant change in terms of the technical devices involved in welfare governance in particular, with six separate 'legacy system' benefits being replaced with Universal Credit's all-in-one digital platform. The latter parts of the chapter explore the implications of this move towards more transactional, digitally mediated service relationships. In doing so, I ultimately consider how a focus on the technologically mediated character of state encounters can inform longstanding debates surrounding the contingency of state practices and the re-centralization of bureaucratic power (See DeVerteuil et al., 2002; Minas et al., 2012). And so here, I remain attentive to welfare service encounters as key moments, and drop-in centres as key spaces, through which states are negotiated, contested and reproduced (see also Conradson, 2003a, 2003b; Parr, 2000; Darling, 2009, 2011; Cloke et al., 2011). I argue this insight to be particularly pertinent to this chapter, firstly as the drop-in services studied were often the only places where clientele could receive face-to-face support with their benefits claims, but also – with digitization especially – one of only a limited number of accessible places in which the technology needed to do so was available. Before exploring how the material and political dimensions of service encounters shifted with digitization, the following section considers how the state – as a lived, affectively potent phenomenon (Woodward, 2014)- was produced through assemblages of spaces, bodies, and the discursive and material agency of documents (Passoth & Rowland, 2010; Dittmer, 2013).

### **8.1. The affective power of paper**

#### **Discursive power, affect and legibility**

The following excerpt is taken from my fieldnotes at Fortis.

Molly asked me to help a new SU [Service User] – Linda - out with an Attendance Allowance application form to claim for the higher rate this afternoon. Molly tells me that she's about 70 and just needs help filling out the form.

It was her first time visiting [Fortis] and when I let her in, she seemed slightly nervous as I welcomed her and helped her up the stairs. (...)

She explained that she needs help as she's confused and a bit intimidated by the questions and length of the form. It was suggested that she should be on more than the lower rate by a nurse and so applied but the [local NHS clinic] were understaffed and so she was referred here.

(...) When we moved on to the more detailed questions on health conditions. The form asks for quite a lot of detail – dates of surgeries and when conditions started etc. – that she can't remember as they go back years, and some seemingly irrelevant and vague questions that I try to explain the possible relevance of.

She struggled to remember exact details of her health conditions and medicines/treatments and I asked her if we could use her prescription to help. To make sure we had included everything, I went through the prescription list one-by-one, asking her what the medicines were for and googling them when she wasn't sure. For one of these the google search result suggested it was for incontinence, something she hadn't yet mentioned. I paused, pretending to scroll down the page whilst I weighed up how to approach this delicately and asked whether it "could be for something incontinence-related?". She moved uncomfortably in her seat and tentatively confirmed that she had had some incontinence problems recently.

Later, the form asked for more invasive detail of how much difficulty and assistance she needs relating to her health problems, including repeated questions asking how many times problems occur each day. I could see why she couldn't complete this section by herself, and it was an arduous process trying to translate her often vague answers ('every now and then/' 'sometimes') into the quantitative response the form asks for. One of the repeated questions asks for a figure on how often the claimant has difficulty 'concentrating' and 'motivating myself', which was also difficult to explain and try to quantify.

This section was especially uncomfortable when it came to the parts on toilet/incontinence needs and the help she needs bathing and getting dressed. Her responses here were understandably vague, and she kept mentioning 'how good' her husband is to help her, or that 'he really has

to do a lot', despite mobility issues of his own, to which I tried to delicately ask or suggest a number of times per-day she would say her husband helps her, which often didn't make any sense as a response to what she'd just said.(...)

(Research diary, Fortis, July 2018)

This excerpt recalls the affectively potent experiences that accompanied the completing of an application form for state support. Led by the details demanded of the form, this seemingly banal, bureaucratic process of form-filling was imbued with embodied feelings of discomfort and embarrassment for both claimants and service staff. And so, these encounters not only played a role in making claimants' bodies legible to the state (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013), but also embodied the discomfort and embarrassment of ill-health through the confessional performances needed to satisfy the demands of the state (Salter, 2007, 2008; Conlon, 2019). It is in such demanding moments, and through the bureaucratic technologies it deploys, that the state is assembled as a lived reality (Navaro-Yashin, 2007, 2012; Passoth & Rowland, 2010).

I make this point here to show how many of the potent state affects discussed in the preceding chapters are produced through the discursive prompts of governmental letters and application forms - an often-neglected facet of the state (Darling, 2014). As my encounter with Linda demonstrates, application forms were symbolically and affectively potent in obliging uncomfortable lines of conversation; something also noted by Fortis staff:

*Molly:* ...I don't like doing ESA forms.

*Interviewer:* How come?

*Molly:* 'cause it's their medical history innit, you know? stuff that's happened, there's... there's... something about ... it's as if they look at it and don't read it, and just put 'zero-point, zero-point, zero-points'... and its... it's the rigmarole then of having to do a mandatory [reconsideration form], then you have to do an appeal, you've got these people that clearly - some of 'em can't even walk! - clearly disabled. They're worrying at home, and ... I just think its cruel. They drag it on for that long. There's no need for it. So ... but I hate doing them forms!

*Interviewer:* Because of how harsh the system is?

*Molly:* Yeah.... And because of the questions they ask...

*Interviewer:* Like, what kind of questions?

*Molly:* ... like... how long have they being going on... - I dunno... I just don't... just general questions that... they want the in-depth, on the questions...

(Molly, interview, Fortis, October 2018)

Here, Molly's expressions of discomfort and her notable hesitancy in detailing the exact provocations of her dislike of the ESA form perhaps also speak to the emotional demands of the form's discursive content, dealt with here through avoidance. Molly also notes here how her frustrations and discomfort were partly triggered due to the numerical logic of the form; exposing here the disconnect between the embodied acknowledgements demanded of the face-to-face support encounter- '... some of 'em can't even walk! – clearly disabled...' - and the type of moral distance that a distillation of bodily experience into numbers, tick-boxes (see Boyle, 2020), and bullet-points prompts (Lupton, 2016; Gill, 2014; 2016).

However, as discussed previously staff played a key role in negotiating how forms were completed, and support encounters were not only shaped linearly by the demands of the forms' discursive content. Instead, staff were routinely tasked with translating the content and demands of forms to be understood by claimants, whose spoken responses and embodied presence were routinely interpreted and communicated in the filling out of forms. Given the generally disciplinary content and tone of governmental documents, staff translations and explanations often carried with them warnings and threats pertaining to what was being asked of claimants. Although this was administratively necessary and prompted by letters and application forms, warnings also sometimes appeared to be motivated by duty and paternalistic care. The conflicted position of staff in this way encapsulates the interstitial role of the drop-ins- in both embodying state conditionality and bureaucratic distance whilst offering care, guidance and advocacy (see Williams et al., 2016; May et al., 2019 on foodbanks). Whilst the discomfort that Fortis staff shared with claimants in this way highlights how the role of street-level bureaucrats is not only one of conduit of governmental discourse, but one that negotiates how the state is understood and experienced. Nonetheless, the discursive content of governmental documents was more often than not a potent force in communicating the state's demands and re-asserting its symbolic and affective dominance in service encounters. For Linda and I,

the form in question demanded the quantification and recording of felt, bodily experience and intimate details of daily life into tick-boxes (see Gill, 2014; Boyle, 2020). Given such incongruence and the spectre of stigma (Patrick, 2016; Wright and Patrick, 2019), it is no surprise how encounters pertaining to disability applications were especially prone to the production of uncomfortable atmospheres (see McQuoid & Dijst, 2012).

Yet discomfort wasn't the only feeling prompted by governmental documents, and such affects were also evident when attending to ostensibly banal, administrative demands unrelated to intimate matters of bodily functionality. The below excerpt exemplifies how application forms' assumptions and demands for detailed legibility were sometimes completely incongruous with the lived experience of many claimants (Gill, 2014; Boyle, 2020), producing feelings of anger and frustration:

... The form was huge and demanded a lot of time to fill out. The most difficult part was trying to complete the address history section, which asked for 5-years of previous addresses. John had a history of homelessness and had moved between tenancies, sub-letting, and being 'NFA' [no fixed address] so many times that he couldn't recall most of his addresses. He grew increasingly impatient and frustrated with repeatedly trying to recall addresses, dates of residence, and reasons for leaving properties... Just this part of the form took nearly an hour and when we went on to the next section of the form and started with some questions on his financial record he suddenly stood up, said that he'd come back to finish the form another day, and left the office.

(Research Diary, Fortis, February 2018)

The emotional capacity of paper documents was something recognised by Fortis and represented a significant area of concern around their service practices, as Vicky, the drop-in manager mentioned:

'Something that I'm always quite conscious about, is that we have the power to, kind of, traumatise people, you know, in terms of our regimes, our paperwork processes and expectations, and that people relive their, you know, most tragic events, and their darkest, kind of, periods, in their life.'

(Vicky interview, Fortis, October 2018)

Negotiations around what and how information about citizens is recorded have long been recognised as crucial processes that underpin all states' desire to govern

populations through making them 'legible' (Scott, 1998). Contemporaneous technical devices – from handwritten ledgers to networked digital records - have always been deployed as states strive to rationalize and centralize control over processes of population data recording and classification (Henman, 2019; Lee and Zhang, 2017). With this, technological change has been linked to what Elwood and Leszczynski (2013: 544) have termed 'knowledge politics' - that is '... the use of particular information content, forms of representation or ways of analysing and manipulating information to try to establish the authority or legitimacy of knowledge claims.',. Here, we see how such demands have the power to produce powerful 'state affects' (Woodward, 2014) – of anger, and discomfort - in service encounters that 'erupt and decay' (Anderson, 2009) between different human bodies, governmental documents, and discourses.

To here, I have discussed what Woodward (2014:23) refers to as the 'affective undercurrent to statist relations' that surrounded the use of application forms. Yet letters too were potent in creating atmospheres (Anderson, 2009; Bille et al., 2015) of urgency and placing demands on staff to act and negotiate crises prompted by a hostile state. As the below case details, the content of certain documents and the demands of certain cases could overwhelm the capacity of the drop-ins in this way:

A destitute Asylum-seeker (Senait, 26) came in for the first time today looking for help as she'd just received a letter informing her that her Home Office support is ending, along with an eviction notice from Serco.

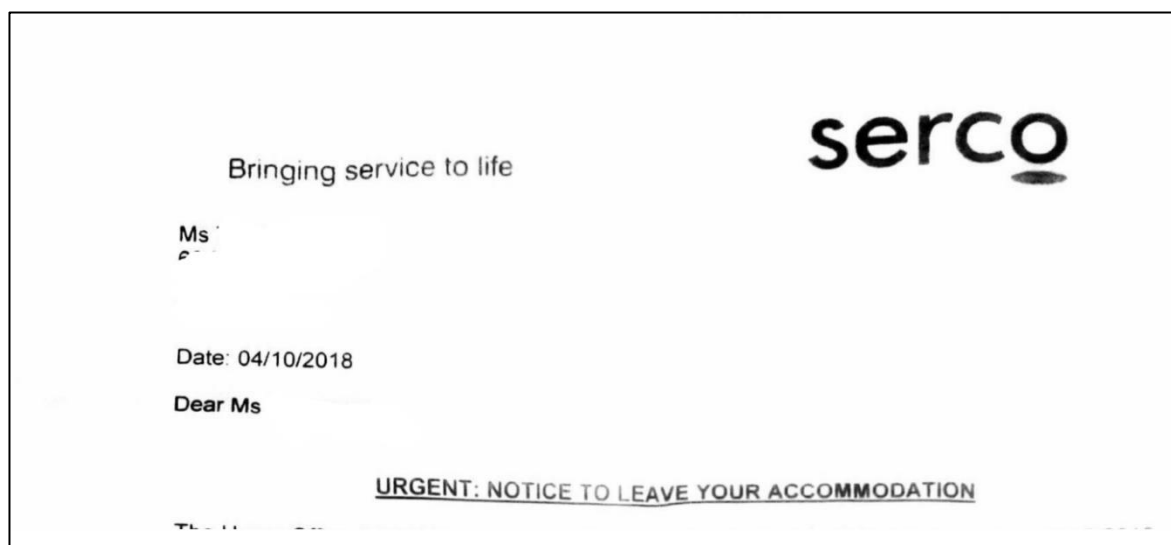
I brought the letters through to David's office and he read over them. As he read them he kept shaking his head, tutting, and said that we should probably refer this to the Refugee Council's Children Section [Senait has a two-year old daughter]. David and I went back into the Work Club room to talk to Senait. She mentioned that she lives at the Serco property with her Partner, her daughter's father. His asylum claim is on-going and he hasn't received the same letter. Another SU started chatting with Senait as David read back over the letters, occasionally glancing at me with concerned looks.

He motioned at me to come with him to his office and told me that she was out of options and that, realistically, her having a child that was born here 'is the best hope'. I asked him about her partner and he showed me that neither letter make any mention of him. Although Senait said that Serco knows that he lives there, David suspected that this might not be an official arrangement and urged caution in terms of

disclosing this to other agencies. Because of the urgency of the support situation and the child, David took copies of the letters and referred the case on to a contact at the Refugee Council.

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, October 2018)

The content of the letters in question were formal but clearly written and formatted, it would seem, to cause alarm and spur immediate action, seen here in the capitalised and underlined title, dwarfed only by the Serco corporate logo (Figure 4):



*Figure 4. Serco eviction letter, October 2018 (edited for anonymity)*

An accompanying letter - confusingly featuring the Serco corporate insignia but being addressed from a housing sub-contractor (see discussion on outsourcing in Chapter 7)- threatened impending legal action, mentioning that Senait 'will be trespassing and will have no lawful right to remain in the Property' if she didn't vacate her house by the 15<sup>th</sup> October. In such instances staff were often left with a dilemma; with a duty to communicate the content of documents and their implications but an inclination to care and advocate for their clients. Here, the discursive content and form of the letters placed demands on David and the drop-in that they could not act on directly, creating a rarely perceptible atmosphere of abandonment in a space usually defined by unconditional assistance.

### **Material-discursive agency and routines**

However, it was not the discursive content of letters alone that produced these 'state affects' (Woodward, 2014) and the governmental power of documents was also evident in their material presence in encounters. As Darling (2014) unpacks, in symbiosis with discourses, the materiality of letters has the power to affect and maintain subjects' position within the state. As governmental letters arrive at a

subject's address and demand to be opened and read, they re-assert a material connection to states as they are stored, carried, and shared (Ibid.). At the drop-ins, governmental documents acted as a physical manifestation of state power, placed at the centre of state encounters. My observations of service encounter routines captured how the political and affective character of encounters was shaped by a symbiotic relationship with the material form of the technologies present (Navaro-Yashin, 2007, 2012; Müller, 2015). For instance, as governmental documents were read, discussed, and modified across desks, they were often *physically* referred to as an agential tool of government:

(...) When they got to the question [of the 'PIP 2' form] that asks if the claimant needs another person to help them mix with other people, Dan H [claimant] looked at Suzanne [caseworker] with total bewilderment, so she turned the form around, pointed at the form and said that she's just asking what's written down.(...)

(Research diary, Fortis, January 2018).

Paper documents were worked on in shared-view on desks and, in testament to their material agency, were often held-up or pointed to when staff felt the need to explain why certain questions were being asked. Whilst this reasserted the centrality of state bureaucracy in encounters, the physical presence of governmental documents also furthered the engagement of claimants in this way. Here the application form can be understood as a material-discursive resource (Darling, 2014), drawn on to reduce anxiety around such encounters and deflect implicit accusations of intrusion away to a (imaginary) distant state and its demands. However, I also observed the physical presence and condition of paper documents having the power to provoke or exacerbate crises and feelings of anxiety and stress during support work, something many staff members were acutely aware of and routinely had to negotiate. Critically, such feelings of anxiety and stress revolved around the material form and organisation of documents, in combination with their discursive content:

An SU – Helen, aged around 50 – came in to the office extremely distressed about a failed mandatory consideration request for her [rejected] ESA application. (...) She had brought a bag full of very disorganised letters with her. (...) she was pulling out random bits of paper and rubbish and putting them on the desk and became increasingly teary and stressed about not being able to find all the pages she needed (...) She [Sophie] comforted her whilst trying to piece together the bits of paper and make sense of the specifics of the claim



(...) but had to eventually, but politely, interrupt as she needed to clarify some points and try and find some missing pages.(...) She went about organising all of Helen's documents as best as she could into A4 folders to give back to her which seemed to calm Helen down a bit.

(Research diary, Fortis, April 2018)

Here Sophie recognised the traumatizing affect the physical presence and arrangements of the documents were having as she worked to advocate for and console Helen. As mentioned, the material agency of documents in support encounters was not, however, always understood as creating an atmosphere of unease, and such affects varied. Whether appearing neutrally, producing distress, or being used to placate stress, the material presence of documents worked with their discursive content to profoundly shape how the state was experienced in many cases.

Another technical device which played a central role in the material constitution and routines of state encounters was the Job Centre's 'My Work Plan' booklet (see Figure 5). Here, claimants or Work Club volunteers would write details of what claimants had done to look for work in the booklet as documented proof that they had met the requirements for Job Seekers' Allowance, with the notion that the booklet would be inspected by Job Centre staff at claimants' fortnightly interviews.

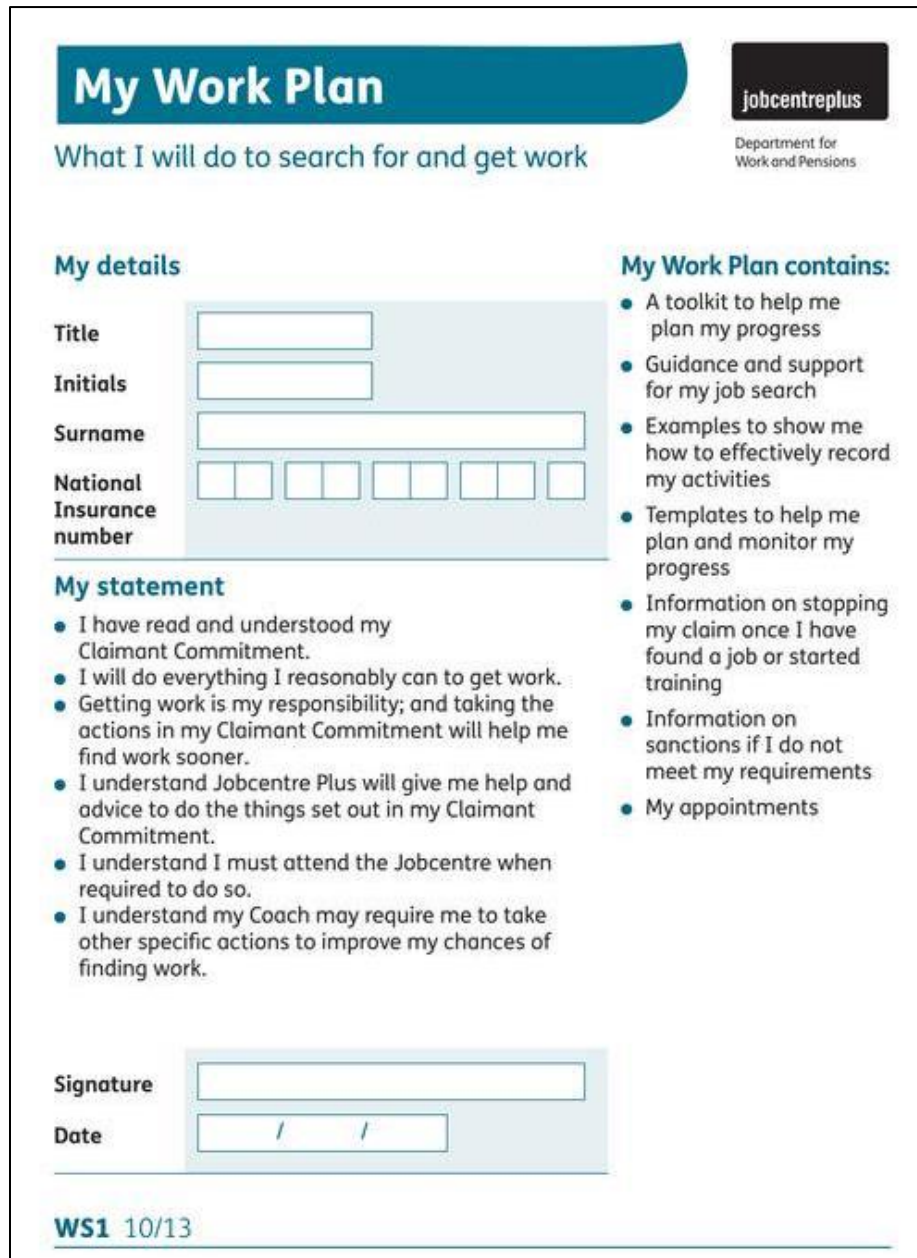


Figure 5. A blank front cover of the Jobcentre Plus 'My Work Plan'

The booklets were particularly fundamental to encounters at the Welcome Centre's Work Club, where they were central to the club's routines and rhythms. Service users would come up the stairs in to the Work Club room, say hi to Patrick (the Work Club lead volunteer) and myself, sign their names in the visitor book, and hand over their My Work Plan booklet to either of us to fill in. This sometimes involved further conversation about what type of job the service user was looking for, but if they were regular attendees then assumptions were made based on previous visits and what was written in previous pages in the booklet. As well as the suggested personal information – name, National Insurance number, signature, date – the front page of the booklet also featured hand-written login details – username and password – for their

government-ran *Universal Jobmatch* or (its replacement) *findajob.gov* accounts. In a routine rarely deviated from, Work Club volunteers would log-in to these accounts, apply for three jobs using the CV saved to the account, write down the job title, company, and reference number for each of these on one of the pages of booklet, and then hand the booklet back to the claimant.

The Work Plan was also regularly used as device through which the Job Centre referred newly settled refugees to access the Work Club and were occasionally used to send more explicitly disciplinary messages:

Alexandrine was sent back from her Job Centre interview today with a note written in her work plan: 'Please do not apply for warehouse jobs' written in red pen. Patrick said this was because she couldn't do 'physical' jobs and the Job Centre are aware of this, so he applied for a cleaning job, wrote this in the work plan and said that she should take it back to show the Job Centre.

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, January 2018).

The A5-sized Work Plan is designed to be mobile and taken with claimants, serving as a spatial record of their weekly job-search routines as they, or third parties, wrote 'attended Welcome Centre (or other) work/job club' during each visit. Whilst primarily serving as a technical device of control over job-search practices, as these examples show, they were also used by the Job Centre as a means of deferring responsibilities to the Welcome Centre when language barriers were recognised. The result is that these documents – in their discursive and material content – shaped the spatial routines of refugees, demanding that they be active (see Whitworth, 2016; Carter & Whitworth, 2017) in visiting work clubs and that such activity be recorded.

However, the use of the Work Plan as a material-discursive device of control (Darling, 2014) in this way was experienced differently from one person to another and many claimants were not asked to use the Work Plan as proof of their job-search activities whatsoever. For instance, Farhad expressed an especially confident approach in dealing with the Job Centre in this respect:

*Farhad:* no no no, I don't show my workbook(My Work Plan) to them, I'm just writing the dates, because I told them what I'm doing, I don't write anything on my book. (...)

*Interviewer:* So they just take your word for it?

*Farhad:* Yeah (...) Everybody's different, because maybe they have different situation, is not the same, so maybe they have to show this to them, but I don't need to show it because I know what I'm doing.

(Farhad, interview, Welcome Centre, June 2018)

However, the reverse was evident in the routines of other, usually older, claimants, who often continued the routine of filling out the Work Plan and carrying it with them. Claimants would routinely bring physical correspondence with them to service encounters and these letters, statements and application forms would often inform claimants of their status and relationship with the state, even if assistance was needed to clarify and act on claim details. The fragmented bureaucratic structure of the legacy system was often the source of stress and confusion for claimants and service staff (see Woodward, 2014), as collections of documents and the records of different government departments were often contradictory or incomplete.

Whilst unwelcome, such effects are testament to the material-discursive agency of paper documents. Such agential material connections affect subjects beyond social encounters (see Bennet, 2010) as documents are carefully and closely carried with them (Darling, 2014). The compulsion to retain a such a material documental connection to the welfare state was disclosed by legacy system claimants when discussing the use of work plans to record proof of job search activities to bring and show at Job Centre appointments:

*Burhan:* (...) I feel they respect me. Because they understand ... along with that I'm showing my book full, always. (...)

*Interviewer:* And do you *have* to do that book?

*Burhan:* No, I... because I'm doing these courses. But still... - so last time, I told you, a new person I met...

*Interviewer:* ...Because you used to have the same person every time?

*Burhan:* Yes! "Good – you are doing this *and* searching for job also". So I think they understood... they understand that I'm not just ...waste time, I have plan.

(Burhan, interview, June 2018)

'... I've got a book, it's me own book. ... they do give you a book, erm.. I don't present that anymore – well, they don't ask for it anymore...

Yeah, they're pretty lenient with me, I think, because I write everything down for them. I make it quite easy for them. (...) I suppose it's like anything – you help them, they'll help you, I suppose.'

*(Kirsty, interview, June 2018)*

Perhaps evoking here what Daniel Miller (2008) conceives as 'the comfort of things', both Kirsty and Burhan describe here how they continued the practice of writing down and presenting records of their job search activities, despite being told that written 'proof' isn't needed in their case. However, the performance of writing down job applications and bringing the material evidence of their work to the Job Centre had become part of their routine interaction with the state. Although their use of work plans re-affirmed their position as governed subjects (Darling, 2014) in this way, they also served as a material-discursive resource which they could draw on to prove they had been active in meeting the conditions of their claims. As claimants self-governed their behaviour and routines, the work plan acted as a material-discursive artefact of welfare state governmentalities. Whilst, as a document that travelled with claimants between different agencies, the work plan can be understood as central to material-discursive-*spatial* entanglements that states were assembled around; an example of the affective interactions between governed subjects, government documents, materials and spaces through which sovereign authority is reproduced in the everyday (Navaro-Yashin, 2007; 2012; see also Dittmer, 2017, on 'Diplomatic material').

## **8.2 Technology and ethical demands**

At the time of the study in 2017-2018, the UK's welfare system was going through a technological overhaul in which benefits began to be administered on a 'digital by default' basis (see Schou and Pors, 2018). Digitization is a key feature of Universal Credit (UC) – the Conservative government's flagship welfare reform policy and, as I demonstrate here, has had profound implications for the governmental dynamics of welfare service encounters and wider state-citizen relations. As established routines centred on physical documents were supplanted with less-accessible digital technologies, I observed a shift towards a more transactional mode of service encounter and the emergence of new forms of distance. However, before I analyse this in greater depth, I consider the agency of another somewhat anachronistic and ostensibly insignificant technical device that was routinely used at the drop-ins – the telephone.

### **Ethical demands**

Compared to the ostensive rigidity of hand-written or on-line forms, phone calls differ both in demanding an immediate response and in implying the possibility of greater discretion when navigating bureaucracies. Despite clear attempts by government to discourage phone enquiries, the possibility of discretion and promise of some kind of immediate response meant that this was often the preferred means by which staff and claimants engaged with the state bureaucracy. Despite this, previous ethnographies of the state and state practices have not focussed specifically upon phone calls, or telephones as devices, in much depth. Yet, in the support encounters I observed, the phone played a significant role as an object that was passed between staff and service users in the drop-in offices.

(...) There's a definite routine involved when SPs (Service Providers) ring the council/ DWP/ Home Office for an SU (Service User). The SP dials, chooses an option, and then waits on-hold from anywhere from around 10-minutes to an hour. (...) When they get through the SP hands the phone to the SU to answer some security clearance questions and give permission for the SP to discuss their personal information and the SU hands the phone back to deal with the issue. Depending on the SU and their particular issue, they either sit back and occupy themselves with something else or stay close or lean-in to try and hear what's going on.

(Research diary, January 2018)

For claimants, this routine often involved little more than the granting of permission for staff to advocate on their behalf, as personal information and control over claims were exchanged. With service staff positioned as more knowledgeable and experienced at dealing with the demands of the state than service users, this was a standard practice I observed at both drop-ins. However, the production of claimant distance in this way was not always present, and there were occasions when their frustrations or desires to intervene, clarify information or express points of contention prompted phones to be passed back, repositioning service users at the heart of encounters. As Urry (2003: 155) argues with respect to information technologies more broadly:

... moments of physical copresence and face-to-face conversation, are crucial to patterns of social life that occur 'at-a-distance', whether for business, leisure, family life, politics, pleasure or friendship. So life is networked but it also involves specific co-present encounters within specific times and places. 'Meetingness'... (is) central to much social life,

a life involving strange combinations of increasing distance and intermittent co-presence.

As a method of communication and governmental practice, phone calls imbued such 'meetingness' (*ibid.*) with an ethical demand for immediate responses and reactions. As the following observation recalls, reflecting their position of subjugation within the broader state bureaucracy, this was both a challenge for advocates and claimants but also an opportunity for negotiation:

José [Asylum-seeker, 51] came to the Work Club today and came straight to me to ask if I could call the Home Office for him because he couldn't make it to report to immigration in Salford. He seemed extremely stressed and anxious and thrust his immigration bail letter [Home Office IS96] at me, pointing to the phone number to call. Anticipating some interrogation from them, I asked him why he couldn't make it. His English isn't great but I picked up something about not having enough money for transport and him being too ill to walk, which took me back a bit given the distance to Salford.

As usual, when I rang, the Home Office staff asked to speak to José to pass security for me to speak on his behalf, but proceeded to ask him directly why he couldn't go to Salford. José said that he was too ill and the Home Office staff replied by asking how he had got to where he was to make the phone call, which he didn't understand and couldn't properly reply to. The Home Office staff became frustrated and José passed the phone to me. I was greeted by an exasperated 'I can't understand him!' and I explained that he only lived in the next-door block of flats, to which they replied by stating that he would need GP confirmation of his illness. I felt a bit put-on-the-spot at this and tried to change the subject slightly by politely asking if he could go tomorrow instead. Surprisingly, they just agreed, dropped the interrogation, and we ended the call.

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, May 2018)

In contrast to paper or digital forms, phone calls demand an immediate response from correspondents. On the one hand, this allows less time to think through what is communicated; but on the other, it facilitates scope for negotiations around governmental outcomes. In this sense, significant moral proximity (Gill, 2016) is produced through phone calls compared to paper-based devices, as claimants, advocates, and government employees were prompted to react to a human voice in real-time.

As shall be discussed shortly, digitization fundamentally changed this. Whilst the DWP's UC helpline was called from time-to-time, the digital portal effectively eliminated the need to telephone government offices in pursuit of claim information for most enquiries. As well as closing off a mode of potential negotiation, this removed what was a significant component of legacy system encounters: waiting on hold for often lengthy periods of time:

'(...) under the old system, clients would come to you with a carrier bag full of paperwork, of which 98% wasn't relevant, and, very often, you wouldn't be able to find the paperwork that was relevant, and that would mean a phone call, and you'd be on hold to the DWP for 50 minutes, taking up a huge amount of time. If someone comes to you with Universal Credit, and their log-in details, its brilliant, because everything's there for me to see. (...) I can see right through what's happened...'

(Michael, charity caseworker, interview June 2018)

Michael draws attention to way in which different technological forms define the temporality of service encounters. As with the diminished reliance on paperwork (see section 8.3 below), not having to spend so much time waiting to get through to government departments over the phone was enthusiastically welcomed by service staff. However, such time was not necessarily unproductive with respect to matters of care and moral proximity. Time spent waiting on hold was often used in subtly productive ways as service staff often engaged in conversation with claimants. Whilst some conversation could be considered as relatively inconsequential small talk, staff regularly took the opportunity to enquire about claimant welfare. When further information was needed, dialogue initially related to the awaiting phone call but routinely moved on as staff checked up on various aspects of claimant's lives, health, and welfare:

(...) Whilst they were waiting on hold Molly asked Luke if the abscess on his leg was healing. He said 'not really' and showed it to her. It looked infected and Molly winced and demanded that they book him a GP appointment before he left.

(Research diary, Fortis Centre, June 2018)

Time spent waiting on hold here was used by Molly to gather and act on tacit knowledge about Luke's health. As with the routine of sorting through collections of



documents, such digressions could be productive beyond a fleeting exchange and the service encounter's original purpose, allowing staff to 'know more' (Pedersen and Wilkinson, 2018) about claimants. Even ostensibly inconsequential small-talk was a significant facet of waiting time; helping to build meaningful staff-claimant relationships and enabling service organisations to gain a deeper understanding of claimants' lives.

Furthermore, as small talk blurred with claimant outreach, service staff would sometimes enquire as to the welfare and whereabouts of other attendees. This was particularly prevalent at Fortis, where partial and rumoured accounts of incidents in the community and the sporadic attendance of vulnerable attendees were a constant concern for service staff. Staff would thus use waiting time productively in this way to develop a tacit understanding of the shifting social networks and welfare needs of their clientele. Along with the work of sorting through documents, time spent waiting on hold thus worked to reduce moral distance between staff and claimants and broaden the reach of service encounters beyond the confines of service offices. And so, waiting in this context was, somewhat surprisingly, more beneficial and morally generative than the chronic and disciplinary forms of waiting more commonly discussed in both welfare (see Chapter 6; Auyero, 2011; Carswell et al., 2019) and asylum scholarship (Chapter 5; Rotter, 2010; Mountz, 2011).

### **Technical inefficiencies, morally demanding encounters**

Despite the welcome relief expressed by staff from what was deemed an administrative burden, the work needed to comprehend disordered and partial collections of documents similarly formed a subtly productive facet of service encounter routines. The legacy system's opaque and inefficient bureaucracy impelled staff and claimants to inspect and organise documents together in working towards understanding claims. In doing so, documents, questions and suggestions were exchanged and considered across office desks as issues with claims and welfare needs were diagnosed. The conversation thus often extended beyond what was revealed to be the source of the issue and impelled claimants and staff to discuss numerous facets of claims and dealings with different government departments. While understandings resulting from such exchanges were often partial and haphazard, the routine of sorting manifold documents thus often had practical advantages:

(...) As David looked through the pile of letters that Soban brought with him, he pulled out a school place allocation letter for Soban's daughter and asked him if he claimed child tax credits or child benefit. He didn't

know he could apply for the tax credits and David suggested that he come back to do the application on Friday (...)

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, February 2018)

Here, it was the legacy system's multifarious structure and the process of organising an incoherent collection of letters that resulted not only in David and Soban having to work to comprehend and manage his relationship with the state more effectively, but also in the potential for an ongoing staff-claimant relationship. Whilst placing pressure on claimants and services, the bureaucratic inefficiency of the legacy benefits system can nonetheless be seen to inadvertently produce encounters that moderated the distancing effects of an increasingly transactional welfare system (Cottam, 2011; 2014).

In a further ethically demanding affect, the type of knowledge such encounters uncovered was also seen to extend through bureaucratic inefficiency, as the prolonged and exploratory sorting of documents produced situated and embodied understandings of claims and claimants:

(...) Whilst sorting through the bits of paper she [Sophie, caseworker] asked if it was OK to mention how the [benefits application and appeal] rejection had affected her [Helen, claimant] mental health in the tribunal request, as she could clearly see that it had so done quite badly. She [Sophie] comforted her whilst trying to piece together the bits of paper and make sense of the specifics of the claim (...)

(Research diary, Fortis, April 2018)

The work of reading and sorting through an apparently burdensome pile of letters here enabled not only the factual details of Helen's case to be understood and acted upon, but also the emotional and embodied manifestations of her relation to the state. The demands of the legacy system's bureaucracy thus resulted in a protracted, closer, and more intimate encounter than would likely have occurred with more administratively efficient technologies. These observations thus illustrate how the legacy system's deployment of cumbersome paper correspondence prompted an intimacy and understanding that reached beyond the immediate issue at hand or the stated facts of the claim according to the state's records. The relations between the legacy system's technological forms, staff and claimants are thus shown to have opened up the potential for more productive, 'morally demanding' encounters (Gill, 2016: 82) and for staff and claimants to 'know more' (Pedersen and Wilkinson, 2018) of their relationship with/within the state.

Importantly, different technical devices operated together in producing such demands:

Terri came in to enquire about a reduced ESA [Employment and Support Allowance] payment this afternoon. She was sure that she'd paid off her budgeting loan a few months ago - which she had written confirmation of - but the DWP were apparently unable to confirm why her payment had been reduced. While she waited on hold, Molly [drop-in caseworker] read through her letters and discussed other possible reasons for the deduction, like previous overpayments etc., but Terri had no idea. (...) Eventually she realised that it could be a payment of court fines from last year, which they [the courts] confirmed after another wait on the phone.(...)

(Research diary, Fortis Centre, July 2018)

This observation encapsulates a typical legacy system service encounter; in which service staff and claimants would discuss and work through often convoluted and contradictory collections of documents pertaining to different arms of government - whom they would also need to call and wait on hold for enquiries to be answered. Here, bureaucratic opacity demanded diagnostic and exploratory exchanges in which claimants were often impelled and able to offer comprehensive, narrative accounts of their position in relation to the state. Terri was impelled to consider and discuss her relationship with different arms of the state, covering the benefits system, employment, health, probation and her living arrangements and family life. In doing so (and in a contrasting manifestation of waiting to that discussed in the previous chapter), waiting on hold and sorting through documents created absorbing, demanding encounters between welfare claimants, service staff, and governmental technologies.

### **8.3 Digitization and distance**

Hamza came in to Work Club this morning wanting to know why his UC payment was less than he was expecting. He told David [drop-in manager] that he was expecting at least £700 but only received around £630 and told him his login details so he could check his account. Whilst he checked his journal and to-do-list, Hamza chatted away quietly with another Service User in Arabic. His account stated that there was a deduction being taken from his monthly payments to pay back the advance that he'd received when he first applied. David interrupted his

conversation to explain the situation and he nodded in realisation. He asked how long he'd have to make the repayments and seemed disappointed when David told him it will be for another year. He didn't need help with anything else, so David logged out, he thanked us and left.

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, September 2018)

This contrasting encounter highlights a shift in the way the welfare state was practiced as phone calls and physical documents were replaced with an all-in-one digital management platform. Both Hamza's and Terri's issues were similar and typical of the work of both drop-ins, however digitization brought with it the establishment of a new routine wherein service staff were usually able to promptly understand and act on an issue as it appeared on screen. As Hamza's encounter demonstrates, this routine entailed UC claimants explaining the issue they needed addressing, followed by the staff member asking for the claimant's UC login details or offering that the claimant login on the desktop PC for the matter to be investigated. For digitally literate staff members (which all were), the UC account portal was easily navigable and enabled Hamza's claim history to become immediately legible on screen.

As the more ethically demanding and protracted character of Terri's encounter reminds us, this contrasted with the legacy system's demands and routines, as shaped by the anachronistic technical devices of paper and telephones. The ease and immediacy of UC's digital portal reduced the need for concerted dialogue, which diminished the ethical demands placed on encounters. A form of moral distance between claimants and service staff was therefore produced through technological change (see Bauman, 1989; Gill, 2016), as conversational requirements for claim information to become intelligible were condensed into the simple act of transferring login details. However, before I discuss this distancing in greater depth, it is important to briefly place this shift in the technological architecture in its policy context.

### **Universal Credit**

The study took place during an era of austerity and significant welfare state restructuring in the UK, at the centre of which was Universal Credit. Unveiled as the UK Conservative government's flagship welfare reform policy in 2010, UC has sought to transform the way benefits payments are governed and administered. It aimed to simplify and secure the system and incentivise paid employment by replacing six separate 'legacy' benefits with one monthly payment; all managed through a centralised digital portal. Public commentary and analyses of UC have been critical of a policy beset with significant ICT system issues, concerns over its financial impact on

vulnerable claimants, and numerous delays with implementation (Harwood, 2018). Whilst policy delivery issues have dominated this discourse, there has been limited consideration of the policy's design, underlying principles, or governmental effects (Millar and Bennett, 2017). Nonetheless, a handful of studies have critically analysed UC's potential to exacerbate the digital exclusion of vulnerable groups (Hodkinson et al., 2016), its advancement of punitive welfare conditionality (Dwyer and Wright, 2014), intrinsic disciplinary logics (Fletcher and Wright, 2018), and its contradictory underlying assumptions (Millar and Bennett, 2017).

Returning then to the points discussed in Chapter 6, a founding contradiction at the heart of UC's design is also apparent between the state's overseeing of a new support architecture (see DWP, 2018) and claims regarding UC's ability to empower citizens' independence from the state. In analysing UC's design principles, Millar and Bennett (2017: 169) explore this contradiction through a focus on 'the deepening widening control of claimant's lives' as enacted through new employment-oriented conditionalities and the shift from fortnightly to monthly payments. Through an empirical analysis of UK welfare reform more widely, Wright (2016: 246) explores a similar contradiction, evidencing how benefit payment cuts reduce claimants' ability to 'exercise agency', thus 'de-activating' claimants through exacerbating poverty. Whilst, in a broader analysis of contemporary governance, Jones et al. (2013: 159) have also argued that emerging 'psychological techniques of governance' threaten citizen agency and have the potential to create 'a new breed of passive subject' as individuals are coerced into certain patterns of behaviour (also Friedli and Stearn, 2015). It is such forms of distance and contradictions between the championing of citizen independence and an unwarranted 're-centring of power within the state apparatus' (Jones et al., 2013: 159) that this analysis of technological change in welfare encounters can help bear out.

In the 'e government' literature, the capacity for digital technology to shape state encounters has largely concerned an exclusionary 'digital divide' in citizen access and proficiency (Hodkinson et al., 2016; Hansen et al., 2018; Schou and Pors, 2018), or has debated shifts to digital technologies in terms of curtailing or enabling bureaucratic discretion in decision making (Buffat, 2015). Whilst this debate recognises the work of 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) in co-producing a compromised state, much of this literature erroneously frames the advent of digital forms as triggering an abrupt end to face-to-face contact (Hansen et al., 2018; Pedersen and Wilkinson, 2018) and established bureaucratic practice (Hull, 2012). This chapter instead looks to Hull (2012: 262) in critiquing both the unquestioned desirability and 'ahistorical rhetoric' that underpins the taken-for-granted march towards 'digital by default' modes of

governance (Schou and Pors, 2018). However, and reflecting a wider dearth of analyses of digitization and governance (Henman, 2019), none of this work has explored in depth the governmental implications and lived realities of UC's switch to a digital management platform. And so, given the prominence of its technological overhaul, UC offers a salient case study for advancing understanding of the changing nature of citizen-state relations and the political and spatial implications of the seemingly universal drive towards digital government (see Hull, 2012; Henman, 2019).

The findings here cover the period before and during the compulsory implementation of UC 'Full Service' for new benefit claims, which began in Rochdale in May 2018. Despite UC being drastically modified on a number of occasions (Harwood, 2018) and specific conditionalities attached to social security shifting with policy priorities, the march towards 'digital by default' government looks set to continue apace (see Schou and Pors, 2018). The findings discussed here thus focus not only on the particularities of a specific policy phase regarding governance and distance but have relevance to broader trends towards digitized government.

### **Material distance**

The first form of distance that I observed as developing in service encounters with digitization was explicitly material and spatial in character. Despite a dearth of critical empirical analyses of 'e-government' in this vein, Pors (2015) observes how the introduction of a catch-all online platform and the re-positioning of ICT equipment recalibrates the roles of service professionals and their interactions in Danish 'citizen service centres'. Service professionals' tasks became 'de-specialized' and efforts to rearrange government welfare offices resulted in more informal encounters as interpersonal 'distance' was replaced by a more collaborative mode of working using shared desk space (Ibid.). Pors' (2015) thus observes a departure from established tendencies of bureaucracies to maintain 'moral distance' (Gill, 2016) between government staff and subjects (see also Weber, 1978).

However, what I observed with respect to UC was the opposite of this. Returning to the preceding observations, whilst Terri and Molly read and shared letters and statements as they worked to understand her situation, Hamza was compelled to sit on the other side of a screen and chat to his friend whilst David investigated, unwittingly placing Hamza in a position of passivity and distance. As such, the reduced compulsion to actively engage with different aspects of claimants' relation to the state was tied up with the move away from physical documents – letters, statements, application forms – and towards the screen-based, all-in-one digital portal. The

replacement of paper documents with UC's centralised digital portal effectively shifted the material locus of service encounters and, in turn, their material-spatial dynamics. As the following excerpt shows, the orthodox set-up of the drop-in offices, with a desk-top computer screen facing away from the claimant, placed them in a default position of inactivity as staff navigated UC accounts on screen:

(...) He [Garry, a claimant] said that he'd come in as he didn't even have an email address, let alone the ability to do the UC application without help. (...) It took James [caseworker] a while to set up the email address and UC account and Garry became a bit restless not knowing exactly what James was doing on the computer. James clocked this, explained that he had just set up his email and turned the screen round so Garry could see.

(Research diary, Fortis, July 2018)

As James accessed the account digitally, he was able to view a breakdown of Garry's payments and entire account history through a clearly ordered interface. However, whilst administratively efficient, the typical position of screens in relation to staff, claimants, and the physical setting of the service offices tended to limit the propensity for claimants to actively engage with their claims. As Garry's reaction demonstrated, such tendency towards passivity was often unwelcome and had the power to unsettle claimants who were adapting to the lack physical documents; contributing here to an affective 'politics of confusion' (Woodward, 2014) around the benefits system.

A similar affective relation between claimant, staff, and screen was also described by Burhan when asked about his experience of Job Centre appointments:

(...)I asked him [Burhan] how he knows that the work coach [Job Centre staff] checks that his workbook matches the Universal Jobmatch [gov.uk job website]. He said that he can see his eyes flicking across the screen and back to the workbook on the desk. (...)

(research diary, conversation with Burhan outside the Job Centre, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

Both Burhan and Garry's experience being placed on the other side of computer screens highlights a new barrier to 'activation' (Wright, 2016) and a form of technological distancing that accompanied the switch to a digital platform. Unlike paper documents - which remained visible on desktops - service staff inadvertently controlled if, and when, claimants saw claim information on screen as they decided whether to rotate screens around. As these examples show, as the state is performed

across desks and through screens and keyboards, a disparity in control of information becomes apparent.

In replacing physical documents with a centralised digital portal, claimants therefore lost an important material resource through which they were able to understand and actively engage with their bureaucratic relationship with the state. With UC's digitization, claimants were often unaware of any of the details of their claims until they accessed their accounts through service encounters. Although they would usually leave with a greater understanding of their cases, they would have to wait until they were able to login to their portal again for any updates. In this, distance was exacerbated as service encounters often became the sole moments through which claimants could engage with their claims.

Whilst the discursive content and format of electronic communications mirror that of physical letters and application forms (Hull, 2012), they have a more ephemeral (see Haber and Sander, 2018) material and spatial presence, activated only when and where online accounts are accessed and viewed. The governmental effects of UC's digital platform therefore depended on a user's propensity and ability to access their accounts. Whilst UC purportedly requires claimants to login regularly, this was not widely or punitively enforced during the period of UC's initial rollout in Rochdale. For claimants who were digitally-literate and owned or had access to a smartphone or PC at home, UC's disciplinary presence was ostensibly more pervasive than the legacy system, as text and email prompts and live updates extend what has been understood as a wider 'digital panopticon' (Sparks, 2013: 32). However, for the mostly digitally-excluded claimants who attended the two drop-ins, accessing and navigating the online portal marked a new barrier to their ability to comprehend and act upon their claims. Many claimants therefore became increasingly reliant on service encounters, as experienced through new technological arrangements.

Such a concentrated dependence mirrored UC's centralizing transformation of the benefits system. Each of the six separate benefits that UC replaced were accompanied by physical correspondence – application forms, entitlement statements, letters – which claimants would read and would prompt particular actions, including visits to the drop-ins where assistance was needed. UC reduced the number of government departments (from three, to one) and, subsequently, the lines of communication through which the welfare state was administered. UC worked to rationalize and streamline an administratively demanding system in this way and consequently condensed 'game(s) of citizenship' (Valverde, 2010: 226; following Rose, 1999, 2000) into the moments, spaces, and materials that constituted service encounters. Yet, claimants remained bound to meet the conditions of their claims, albeit without the



means to understand their claims outside of these moments. Digitally excluded claimant thus came to be governed at distance through the advent of a digital-only state bureaucracy.

### **From the relational to transactional state**

Beyond matters of materiality, the subtly demanding but generative effects of technical *inefficiency* in the ways discussed above also contrasted significantly with UC's digitized efficiency with respect to the peopled character of the state. Echoing Michael's sentiment above, another advice caseworker, Mark, encapsulated in our interview the distancing effects and more transactional character of encounters that resulted from the hastened availability of claim information with UC:

'From a caseworker perspective, Universal Credit's way easier, because... language skills - interpreter present or not - in the old system it can take quite a long time to assess what the issue is. (...) now "oh! OK! That's what it means, right." And then the next letter- "because that's happened it's had a knock-on effect..." (...) ... whereas if someone comes in here - "I've got an issue with my payments" - before I ask them anything I say "log on to your account, show me your journal- what's it say there? - show me your payment history - what's it say there?" and you get a clear picture a lot faster, you know? (...)'

(Mark, interview, Refugee caseworker, July 2018)

In the context of time and resource pressures, staff largely welcomed the shift away from having to sort through and read often incomplete and partially relevant collections of documents pertaining to separate benefits. Yet they appeared to be unaware of the potential for this to diminish the caring character and depth of their relationships and interactions with claimants.

The account of the UC service encounter with Hamza above similarly illustrates how such productive digressions were largely lost as claim information became immediately available on screen. Once David accessed the portal, the immediacy with which Hamza's claim information became known eliminated the need for the investigative work of sorting through letters and discussing different aspects of his claim, broader welfare needs, and his manifold relation to the state. To re-emphasise caseworker Michael's words, access to the portal allowed staff to almost instantly '... see right through what's happened...' with claims. For a digitally literate user - as service staff were - the portal was easily navigable, featuring a home page with tabs through which users could instantly access different aspects of unambiguous claim

information. In payment-related cases such as Hamza's, staff would simply navigate through a couple of clicks to the payment statement to view a breakdown of allowances and deductions.

Whilst important, such efficiency was not achieved through digitization alone but was also effectively multiplied through the conflation of the six separate legacy benefits. The impact on service encounters was thus substantial, as the work needed to understand and address issues and enquiries shifted from being reliant on 'relational' dialogue to 'transactional' confirmation of facts (Cottam, 2011; 2014); evoking Weber's 'ideal' bureaucracy (1978), achieved here through digitization. Here, the narrow, page-by-page focus that the portal was built around was reflected in the relatively restricted and stunted exchanges that accompanied many UC service encounters. Something Muellerleile and Robertson (2018: 188) have drawn attention to in the compartmentalised, binary logic of the digital and Weber's (1978) ideal of bureaucratic 'efficiency, objectivity, and rationality'.

### **Conclusion: Technology and Re-centring power?**

In studying the technologically mediated practices and negotiations that give rise to state effects, this chapter has drawn further attention to the state's distributed, incoherent, and malleable character (Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010; Jones, 2012). Building on the preceding analyses of policy, bureaucracy, and the peopled state, I began by detailing the symbiotic role that technical devices' material and discursive qualities played in producing state affects. And, particularly, how governmental documents produced affective atmospheres of discomfort, embarrassment, frustration, and anger in service encounters and routines. Yet - as with policy, organizational, and personnel arrangements - the use of technological devices varies over space and time. Recognizing this, I argue that digitization and the simplification of the UK's benefits system has strengthened the state's presence at the locus of service encounters as the established dynamics of welfare service delivery were disrupted. Here, new routines and governmental effects emerged as the pre-existing technologies through which the welfare state was understood, negotiated, and produced were bypassed. Contravening stated policy intentions, UC's digital-only access instigated a new barrier to claimant empowerment, supplanting the physical documents through which citizens understood and engaged with their welfare claims. As computer screens and keyboards became the primary technological devices through which claims were managed, claimants were placed in a default position of passivity and distance.

To some extent, the legacy system's reliance on paper and phone calls can be seen to have shaped service staff in the mould of Lipsky's (1980) 'street-level bureaucrat'. Yet

technology mediates this role. In dealing with the incoherence of the legacy system, street-level bureaucrats engaged in exploratory and digressive conversations; with the clarity of UC's digital portal, 'screen-level bureaucrats' (Hansen et al., 2018) were impelled only to input and confirm on-screen information. This not only undermined bureaucratic discretion (Buffat, 2015), but advanced welfare reform's inclination towards more distant, transactional encounters '...when what is actually wanted is something more human, caring and time rich.' (Cottam, 2011: 136). Although legacy system encounters were also directed by the demands of bureaucratic forms - which were closely recreated by UC portal's content (see Hull, 2012) - its administrative incoherence opened-up the potential for ethically demanding dialogue. For it was often through the work of understanding and navigating such incoherence that productive and meaningful relationships between claimants and service staff were built.

In concluding, it is important to consider briefly here the intentionality of these findings. One could confidently argue that the observations discussed here point to an ignorance on behalf of government towards the relational and technologically mediated means through which states are often encountered by many claimants. As anachronistic but more-widely understood technologies and lines of communication are abandoned in the march towards 'digital by default' government (Schou and Pors, 2018), the gaps between the lived realities of poverty and ill-informed attempts to re-design the benefits system to be more 'like work' (Millar and Bennett, 2017) become apparent. Yet it is highly unlikely that the state sought to achieve (or had the capability to engender) such specific effects on voluntary-sector service encounters; especially given its contradictory outcomes regarding claimant activation. The effects discussed here instead speak more to the often contingent, contradictory, and unpredictably messy nature of state practices, as conducted through a myriad of state and non-state actors and spaces (see Painter, 2006; Jones, 2012). Or, to borrow the terminology used by caseworker Michael, much of what is being discussed here can be understood in terms of the policy's unforeseen, unintentional "system issues", as opposed to UC's intentional, overarching "design issues". Following Darling (2014: 489), I therefore see it as important to '... be wary of overstating the governmental intentions of this material, whilst being alive to (...) governmental effects...', for even if effects are solely the product of administrative process, they may still exist as a powerful force in people's experiences of the technologically mediated state.

However, separating effects entirely from intentions would be to ignore the formative governmental logics that shape everyday, lived experiences of the state and their political and spatial implications. The effects observed in this chapter cannot be detached from motivations for reform and system rationalization that seek to both

deter welfare claims and cut administrative costs, whilst concurrently striving to maintain control of legibility and bureaucratic records. Whilst this dual imperative - to rationalize and centralize processes of legibility, whilst (at least appearing to be) acting to reduce welfare spending - does not demand de-humanizing distance specifically, it is based on logics and technologies that facilitate the efficient gathering of, and control over data. For the architects of UC, unintended effects such as increased distance and claimant passivity were likely discounted - or possibly not considered at all - so long as system rationalization and the gathering of 'factual' proof of success was assured.

The governmental effects of technological change were also spatial in character. As record taking shifts from the handwritten inputs of caseworkers in welfare service offices, to tick-boxes on screens - to be processed through automated, algorithmic calculation (Henman, 2019) - technological change can be seen to shift not only *who* determines what becomes legible to the state, but also *where* such negotiations and decisions take place. In this sense, I have shown how paying attention to spaces and technologies through which the state is practiced can contribute to longstanding debates surrounding the (de)centralizing effects of welfare reform (DeVerteuil et al., 2002; Minas et al., 2012) and technological change (Henman, 2019). As the generative effects of more time-rich, relational service encounters bears out, technological inefficiency facilitated a degree of discretion in terms of what and how claimant information was made legible to the state's records. Time spent sifting through collections of documents and waiting on hold enriched negotiations around what was divulged to the state, and can be seen as dispersing agency and discretion over state records and practical welfare outcomes to the more intimate spaces of local service offices. In contrast, the immediacy and clarity of the digital portal can be seen to have (re)centralized (Minas et al., 2012) and ceded such discretionary and record-making processes to the increasingly automated, algorithmic calculations (Henman, 2019) of central government.

Whilst distancing and centralizing tendencies are an inherent feature of modern bureaucracies (Minas et al., 2012; Lee and Zhang, 2017), these effects are shaped by the particular technological forms and formats through which records are managed and calculations made (Gill, 2014; 2016). Ultimately, what emerged as an effect of digitization were forms of bureaucratic distancing (Gill, 2016) in which - despite unchanged physical proximity - reference to unambiguous and immediately available data foreclosed potentially productive and ethically demanding dialogue between claimants and staff. Drawing on Muellerleile and Robertson (2018) analysis of digital bureaucracies, the portal's central presence in service encounters operationalised a detached and rational logic that defines both 'the digital' (Miller and Horst, 2012) *and*

Weber's (1978) 'ideal' bureaucracy. As technologically mediated distance came to characterise service encounters, the agency of these moments in shaping state effects and relations moved beyond a matter of curtailment of discretion (Buffat, 2015) and risked limiting the drop-ins' ability to relate to and understand their clientele beyond collections of pre-determined data categories. Conversely, for digitally excluded claimants, the welfare service encounter becomes the primary - and in some cases, sole - moment through which citizens' relationship with the welfare state can be understood and acted upon. Whilst the practices that make up the state remain dispersed and constituted relationally between different human, material, and discursive actors; the state's administrative power was strengthened through digitization.

## **Chapter 9. Converging Geographies of Asylum and Welfare**

In this chapter I address the second aim of the thesis, focussing my analysis of the state on the shared spatial dimensions of asylum and welfare austerity that first inspired this research topic. The preceding four chapters have detailed how many of the governmental logics, practices, and exclusionary consequences of the UK's asylum system are echoed in welfare governance. Over the last three decades, the UK's asylum (Hynes, 2011; Parker, 2015) and welfare systems (Dwyer, 2004; Edminston, 2017) have both become more exclusionary and restrictive in character, featuring several analogous traits. Where the asylum system exposed its subjects to poverty and destitution by restricting rights, the welfare system produced similar precarities through new punitive conditions attached to welfare access. Asylum seekers were barred from employment and forced to survive on paltry subsistence payments (Allsopp et al., 2014) and if their claims were refused, they were left with no means to survive at all (Cholewinski, 1998; Kissoon, 2010). Whilst, if welfare claimants failed to 'prove' either the pursuit of employment or the inability to work, they had their income suspended or removed (Fletcher & Wright, 2018; Dwyer, 2018). Secondly, across both systems, governance was practiced by an increasingly diffuse array of state and non-state actors and technologies, characterized by forms of bureaucratic and moral distance (Gill, 2016). As Chapter 7 discussed, asylum accommodation and benefits assessments were delivered by private companies, with communications and claims processed through bureaucratic and technological arrangements that separated decision makers from the human consequences of their work. Finally, at the root of all of this was an analogous cultural politics in which asylum seekers and welfare claimants were positioned as threats to a contrived national order (Tyler, 2013). Here, the contrived figures of the benefits scrounger (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2016) and its non-citizen equivalent - the bogus asylum seeker (Goodman & Speer, 2007; Tyler, 2013) - constituted the boundaries of in/exclusion along with more tangible polices and governmental practices.

With these exclusionary parallels in mind, it perhaps comes as no surprise that asylum seeker dispersals and the impacts of welfare reform have become increasingly concentrated in already-impooverished, marginal urban areas such as Rochdale (see Lancione, 2016). Yet, as set out in Chapter 2, academic analysis and commentary has tended to consider welfare and border regimes in relative isolation. As I will demonstrate, this ignores the ways in which the border and the welfare state overlap and intersect in the lives of many non-citizens. Turning to the thesis's final objective

here, such an ontological separation is thus something that this chapter seeks to explicitly challenge by considering the experiences, spaces and encounters that were shared across governmental systems and categories. In doing so, I contribute to a generally neglected empirical and theoretical junction in geographical study. Indeed, researchers have only recently started to place localised, lived experiences of the intersection of austerity and migration management in conversation (Darling, 2016); or more broadly considered if, and how, recent shifts in border and welfare regimes have changed the geographical dimensions of political membership, marginality and the state (see Humphris, 2019). This chapter addresses this lacuna by exploring the intersecting geographies of asylum and welfare governance in the UK; considering if, and how, this apparent convergence has reshaped negotiations of in/exclusion at the margins.

Although I focus on the parallels and intersections between border and welfare regimes, this chapter begins by discussing how formal and informal bordering practices remained important beyond the restrictions of the asylum system itself. The first section details how bureaucratic incongruity during the 'move on' process (Carnet et al., 2014; British Red Cross, 2018; APPG, 2017) at the end of asylum claims exacerbates precarity for new refugees. Here, I demonstrate how the welfare state's bureaucratic demands and foreclosures had the effect of punishing new refugees for forms of precarity, mobility, and illegibility that were caused by their non-citizen status and the border controls placed on them by the state. In the context of service decline in austerity, section 9.2 then discusses how the in/exclusions of the border were performed in service settings (Szczepanikova, 2010; Fisher, 2018) as non-citizens remained informally excluded from mainstream support services in Rochdale. Building on recent work by Rachel Humphris (2019), I explore here how the ideas of deserving/undeserving migrants (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas, 2014; Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015) and worthy/unworthy benefits recipients (Anderson, 2013; Patrick, 2016) overlapped in the work of frontline service providers, with the successful performance of these intersecting qualities forming a significant barrier to advocacy and support. However, cases in which such barriers seemed inconsequential provoked questions about the boundaries of inclusion and political membership: Why were some non-citizen cases taken on at Fortis, and others not? How were the boundaries of inclusion transcended? From this, the final section destabilises this theme of separation, focussing instead on the situated encounters between non-citizens and 'failed citizens' (Anderson, 2013) that transcended divisions of citizenship status and identity. Paying attention to the spatial dimensions of these more generative encounters (Massey, 2005), I show how prosaic forms of solidarity emerge through spaces notionally abandoned by the state in austerity. The aim of this chapter then is

to unpack how informal, situated mechanisms of in/exclusion operate where and when the politics of austerity and the border meet. In doing so, I explore how political membership is negotiated at the local and intimate scales of service delivery settings, and ultimately consider what this reveals about the reach of the contemporary border and the state.

## **9.1 The 'move on' period**

### **Universal Credit and the 'Destitution gap'**

The overlapping precarities engendered by the UK's border and welfare systems were perhaps most apparent in the so-called 'move on period' at the end of the asylum process (Carnet et al., 2014; British Red Cross, 2018; APPG, 2017). Whilst indefinite and often lengthy, the asylum process was ultimately temporary, and (following any appeals) asylum applications were finalized with either a positive or negative decision. Some of the implications of negative decisions – including destitution, detention, and deportation - were discussed briefly in Chapter 5. However, nationally, 55% of asylum applicants ultimately received a positive decision (Walsh, 2019); something that granted immediate access to mainstream welfare and employment rights. From the date of notification, new refugees were given 28 days of asylum financial support and housing, during which they had to try to secure housing and income. Reliable statistics regarding how many new refugees initially claim out-of-work benefits aren't available, however, systemic disadvantages in the labour market (Bloch, 2007; Cheung & Phillimore, 2014) mean that a majority of new refugees were reliant on benefits for income and housing for at least some time following the 28-day move on period (see APPG, 2017; British Red Cross, 2018). Yet claiming benefits was not a straightforward process and most asylum seekers faced delays and often exposure to destitution at this point in the asylum process (Carnet et al., 2014; British Red Cross, 2018; APPG, 2017). Whilst the legacy benefits system involved significant bureaucratic barriers to access -including issues with BRPs (Biometric Residency Permits), Habitual Residency Tests (HRT) and National Insurance Number (NINo) allocation (see Carnet et al., 2014) – Universal Credit (UC) has exacerbated such bureaucratic incompatibilities with asylum support cessation (APPG, 2017; British Red Cross, 2018).

With UC, incompatibility is most explicitly evident in what the British Red Cross have termed the 'destitution gap' (British Red Cross, 2018). Even in a best-case scenario - in which UC claims are made on the day the BRP is issued - asylum support is discontinued after 28 days, whilst UC payments take a minimum of 35 days, leaving *at least* one week of destitution, assuming everything is processed on time. At the Welcome Centre, UC claims were very rarely made immediately on receipt of BRPs,



often due to systemic administrative delays and incompatibilities. Mistakes with or mis-delivery of BRPs were one such delay that commonly contributed to destitution, as typified by Tesfay's experience:

(...)Tesfay got his LTR (Leave to Remain) on 13<sup>th</sup> July but only received his BRP 2 days ago as the HO(Home Office) sent it to his solicitor by mistake. He's been staying with a friend as his NASS support stopped on 24<sup>th</sup> August. He came in to book his first UC interview over the phone (...) the DWP worker explained that it's a 'biographical interview' – which I hadn't of heard before – and so he needs to bring 3 forms of ID. Luckily, Tesfay has a bank statement and HO letter, which they should accept (...)

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

(...) I asked him (Tesfay) about his UC interview and it turned out that the 'biographical interview' was in-fact a HRT (Habitual Residency Test), which means he hasn't received any payment yet and still has to book and attend the 'claimant commitment' interview too (...)

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

With Tesfay's asylum support discontinuing on 24<sup>th</sup> August, the delayed receipt of the BRP added to UC's in-built 35-day payment delay, meaning that he was ultimately left without income or accommodation for over six-weeks. This type of administrative delay was an issue encountered almost daily at the Welcome Centre, and regularly forced new refugees into having to wait substantially longer than the standard five-weeks for a first UC payment. With the new system also demanding more in the way of documental proof of address, residency, and identity (see Chapter 8), the chances of such delays and time spent without any income increased.

### **The 'Habitual Residency Test' and joint applications**

Tesfay's case also highlights the opaque and inconsistent deployment of the DWP's 'Habitual Residency Test' (HRT) for new refugees, or what DWP staff referred to as a 'biographical interview' in this case. Supporting other research that has criticised the inconsistent deployment of the HRT (British Red Cross, 2018), many new refugees I worked with were not required to take the HRT, whereas others, such as Tesfay, were. Attesting again to the uneven and peopled character of the state here, this varied not only between different Job Centres (*ibid.*), but between different individual cases or staff at the Rochdale Job centre. This perhaps reflects the fact that the DWP publishes

somewhat vague guidance on whether new refugees should be subject to both parts of the HRT; stating that its second (and lengthier) stage 'may' have to be completed for those with discretionary leave status, and indefinite or limited leave to remain, but offering no further details as to why certain cases require the HRT (DWP, 2018b). Whilst this perhaps explains the inconsistency, whenever I enquired about this, I was told by DWP staff that whichever process (partial, full, or no HRT) was being implemented in a particular case was standard practice. Although in practice the legacy benefits system similarly involved HRT being deployed unevenly (see Carnet et al., 2014), DWP guidance was at least more explicit in stating that this shouldn't be necessary (DWP, 2015). Moreover, due to shorter delays in payments with the legacy system, the deployment of the HRT was not as significant a factor in contributing to destitution as it was with UC.

In contrast to legacy system out-of-work benefits (JSA and ESA), UC claims for couples can only be made on a joint basis and both claimants would therefore have to pass any requirements before payments could be received. In practice, this meant that any complications leading to delays were effectively twice as likely to occur for couples. As Makena's experience illustrates, this meant that refugees were sometimes exposed to destitution due to familial ties, even years after receiving secure residency status themselves.

(...) Makena moved in with her partner (who had just arrived on a spousal visa) two weeks ago, which she reported, meaning that her tax credits were stopped. I rang HMRC to check and they confirmed that she needed to make a new UC application due to the change of circumstance. (...)

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018)

(...) She had also yet to receive any UC payment at all. Her (UC) account stated that an ID still hadn't been verified, but she told me she had already done this at the JC(Job Centre).

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, 17th July 2018)

Makena came in this afternoon as she *still* hadn't received her UC payment. (...) Her partner had failed the HRT. Rather than write a (UC journal) message I rang up the UC number. When I got through, I told them that her partner's status shouldn't exclude her and the children from all the other (housing, child tax credit, Jobseeker) allowances and that the payment needs to be made immediately and backdated. They

seemed concerned about the length of delay – since June – since the application was made but said it would take a couple of hours to investigate before a note would be made on her journal. (...) I asked her how she was coping and she mentioned her children crying about not having shoes for school. I could see how exhausted she was from the whole process and made sure that she knew to come back before close. (...)

(Research diary, Welcome Centre, October 2018)

Importantly, this delay to all of Makena's benefits payments (excluding Child Benefit, in this case) would not have occurred with a legacy system claim, as JSA is made to individuals rather than as a joint payment. At best this exposes a lack of consideration for cases complicated by immigration and familial ties on behalf of the government. However, whilst determining intentionality is difficult here, such an access issue is rooted in a benefits system becoming both increasingly hostile to non-citizens and increasingly geared towards normative familial structures (Cain, 2016; Wilkinson, 2013). Whilst some border practices are part of UC's design, these are mostly targeted at EEA 'economic migrants' (see Dwyer et al., 2019; Kilkey, 2017) rather than refugees. Nonetheless, in practice a preference for normative residency and familial arrangements is particularly incongruent with the asylum system and lived realities of cross border mobility. It is in such cases that we see the restrictionist logics of asylum and welfare governance converge, and their exclusionary effects overlap and combine.

### **Bureaucratic incompatibility**

Administrative barriers also reached beyond the bureaucratic requirements of the benefits system. In contrast to legacy benefits, which could be paid in several ways, Universal Credit could only be paid into a bank account, which presented particular barriers for new refugees. Primarily, these revolved around banks' proof of address and I.D. requirements. In practice, banks often refused to accept BRP cards as a form of identification. As BRPs were usually the only type of formal I.D. that new refugees had access to, this precluded them from opening bank accounts at some branches, or even when encountering certain bank staff. With the inherent residential instability that characterised the move-on period, the bank account applications that UC demanded usually also came at a time when new refugees were either homeless or moving out of Serco accommodation. With new refugees unable to provide the proof-of-address required by most banks to open an account, they would often have to speculatively try different banks until they found one that accepted a Serco letter as proof, albeit risking bank correspondence being sent to an address they no longer

lived at. Alternatively, many new refugees tried to get correspondence sent to friends and acquaintances' addresses. As UC allowed the first payment to be made to a bank account under someone else's name, new refugees were often effectively forced to rely on others' trust to make a UC claim during the move-on period. Whilst I never witnessed any abuse of such arrangements, this denied new refugees financial independence and exposed them to the possibility of theft or coercion, alongside a protracted period waiting for UC payments. Although existing benefits claimants were able to use DWP letters as proof-of-address, UC's 'digital by default' set-up meant that letters for new claims were not sent until a claim had been made, which in-turn required proof-of-address. And so even in the cases in which new refugees found permanent accommodation and a reliable address, they still encountered Kafkaesque administrative barriers and delays when trying to open a bank account. With new refugees already disadvantaged in the labour market (Bloch, 2007; Cheung & Phillimore, 2014) and systemically exposed to exploitative work practices (see Dwyer et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2017), all this effectively meant that the bureaucratic exclusions of the benefits system collided with the established exclusions of asylum to produce amplified, intersectional precarities in the move on period.

In response to mounting criticism over the impact of payment delays, in January 2018 the DWP increased the amount new UC claimants could receive as an advance from 50% to 100% of their monthly payments. Effectively an interest-free loan, the DWP points to 'Advance Payments' as a safeguard against destitution, however they cannot be administered without claimants first registering a bank account or passing the HRT (when it is deployed). As a result, new refugees very rarely accessed advances, which excluded many refugees from the only formal means of income that they were able to access whilst the claim was being processed. In practice, advances could not be requested through UC's online system before a Job Centre visit due to the Government's online 'GOV.UK Verify' I.D. verifier system not accepting BRPs. At the same time, language barriers and a lack of confidence meant that many new refugees did not request an advance at Job Centre appointments, even in cases when opening a bank account and the HRT weren't an issue. This informal barrier also appeared to arise due to a limited awareness of the existence of advances; an exclusion likely aggravated by DWP and Job Centre practices which failed to proactively promote or offer Advance Payments in application and appointment processes (see British Red Cross, 2018).

Whilst such reticence was also experienced by UK-citizens, a lack of English language proficiency meant that the likelihood of many new refugees requesting AP in-person was diminished, even with the input and encouragement of service providers. Indeed,

numerous barriers for new refugees have previously been analysed with respect to navigating new information landscapes (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2017) and digital systems (Alam and Imran, 2015), and were commonly encountered by new refugees when making benefits applications. This was evident in something as prosaic as the requirement for an email address to be set-up and registered when making a UC application, which was a routine, but demanding service provided at the Welcome Centre. Similarly, the density and demands of the security clearance processes with UC's digital system also presented barriers for non-English-speaking claimants in particular. Whilst such barriers could eventually be overcome with assistance, such demands often resulted in delays to completing applications when issues couldn't be resolved in a single visit to the drop-in.

The numerous demands of UC's 'to-do' list also often meant claims being cancelled and applications having to be started again. If, for any reason, the appointment-booking stage of UC or JSA applications were not reached within seven days then they would be cancelled and claimants would have to start the process again, re-starting the minimum 35-day waiting process. Due to the multiple administrative and informal barriers that new refugees faced during the move-on period, this was something that regularly occurred at the Welcome Centre. For instance, new refugees would often start a claim only to have to wait more than seven-days to obtain a BRP or proof-of-address to open a bank account, thus forcing them to restart both their application *and* the wait for a payment; all whilst the 28-day limit of asylum support was ticking down. In all of these examples then, we see the restrictionist practices of welfare governance that I discussed in the preceding three chapters (notably payment delays and various burdens of 'proof') converging with the hostile border practices detailed in Chapter 5 - defined by insecure citizenship status, segregated accommodation, and work restrictions.

### **Exposure to destitution and local crisis services**

The UK's benefits system is a system (re)orientated towards normative assumptions of settled living arrangements and a recent history of salaried work (Millar and Bennet, 2017); and thus essentially discounts both the reality of commonplace administrative delays and the inherently dislocating experience of dispersal. Dispersed asylum seekers are, by Home Office definition, 'destitute' – unable to support themselves financially and thus entitled to asylum support. Coming from an often years-long period of state-recognised destitution; the in-built assumption that new refugee benefits claimants would have previously been earning - and could therefore rely on their last pay-cheque - is a contradiction and (state-imposed) impossibility.

Many of the administrative barriers of the move on period echoed those faced by British welfare claimants who had unstable housing arrangements (see Chapters 6 and 7). However, additional barriers rooted in non-citizen status compounded bureaucratically enacted exclusions to welfare for refugees. As with many 'failed citizens' (Anderson, 2013), the welfare state's increasing bureaucratic demands have the effect of punishing non-citizen precarity, mobility, and illegibility; favouring the fixity and legibility of subjects. Given the small proportion of UC claimants that are new refugees, such incongruencies could be put down to asylum and welfare being administered through separate government departments; or equally a symptom of ignorance of the asylum move-on period, rather than a facet of policy design. Nonetheless, the exacerbated exclusions detailed here can be seen as a legacy of the asylum system itself; a system which places asylum seekers in a separate socio-economic category, excluding them from employment and mainstream social security and housing them in no-choice, temporary accommodation. In this sense, we see the logic of sorting and selectivity that characterizes both border and welfare regimes combining to condemn new refugees to a state of failed citizenship (Tyler, 2010).

The move on period didn't only expose refugees to a new system of insecurity in these ways, but also introduced them to a new institutional landscape of services and spaces in Rochdale. Firstly, the administrative demands of the move-on period required a negotiation of local amenities. This included banks, who effectively acted as gatekeepers to benefits access with respect to the access to UC. With Serco letters variably accepted as proof of address for bank accounts, keeping track of which branches were accepting Serco letters at particular times became part of navigating the local institutional landscape:

'... some banks are better than others... (...) every time I hear of a good one I send everyone there, and then they come back a couple of months later and say 'they're not helping me anymore'...'

(Mark, Refugee caseworker, interview, July 2018)

Whilst the same demands were faced by British claimants without a fixed address, with the case of new refugees this was a direct consequence of dispersal and the outsourcing of state bureaucratic practices to non-state actors. Here, insecurity in the move period can thus be seen partly as a consequence of the devolution of administrative process away from central government and towards the types of local actors and individuals that I discussed in Chapter 7.

Beyond these bureaucratic intersections, I also observed how the forces shaping migrant support and advocacy in Rochdale dovetailed with the broader economic logics

and the effects of austerity. At the Welcome Centre, resource constraints and a diminished relationship with the Job Centre meant that the type of connections that could have smoothed Bank and HRT processes (See British Red Cross, 2018:32) were largely absent in Rochdale. Instead, what was evident was an uneven local landscape of welfare access, characterised by a disconnection between organizations that was exacerbated by local service cuts; resulting in greater friction and exposure to destitution during the move on period. Exposure to destitution in turn meant that new refugees would often be referred, or self-refer, to local crisis services and spaces of care - most notably homelessness services. Indeed, as Patrick mentioned in our interview, homelessness was so common as to be an expected outcome of the move on process:

... so, the person will move after two weeks. And he will go to claim (at the) job centre. And job centre will find the place for him, or he needs to go to RBH (Rochdale Boroughwide Housing), to complain to them that... in two weeks, he doesn't have a place to live. RBH will find a place for him to live.

(Patrick, interview, June 2018)

As Burhan recalled, delays in successfully finding and applying for housing and benefits during the move on period meant that new refugees were routinely made homeless upon leaving Serco accommodation and transferred directly to emergency accommodation:

*Burhan:* (...) so then we got our papers together ... in April... and they send me to ... (the local council's) homeless hostel...

*Interviewer:* And how quickly after getting Leave to Remain did they send you (the local council's homeless hostel)?

*Burhan:* ... around... two weeks, ... errr... because they try to send me direct to flat, but because I am single, not easy to get single here ... I got paper, in April... and... then, (hostel) staff, also very good... They help me a lot to get... flat, and I get flat here, Falinge, and I came here August..., August I came here, so I stay in (Local council homeless hostel) around ... three months...

(Burhan, interview, June 2018)

Burhan's experience typifies the insecurity and liminality that was an almost routine outcome during this phase of the asylum process. Due to a combination of access barriers and availability of appropriate social housing in Burhan's case, securing

independent accommodation took three months whilst he was living in emergency accommodation. For single adults, this meant being housed in the local council's homeless hostel – an institution with a bad reputation, and where Fortis staff would only refer service users to as a last resort. As I shall come to discuss, whilst an alarming indictment of the move on process, the accessing of non-migrant specific services also produced positive encounters that contested insecurity and the state-led separation of citizens and non-citizens. Yet despite having formal access to mainstream welfare, many refugees' position within the local service landscape in Rochdale remained partial and liminal, as they were routinely directed away from mainstream local services.

## **9.2 Referring away and the performative border**

With the rise in dispersal numbers and the decline of migrant-oriented services in Rochdale, one might have expected non-citizens to be notably present at mainstream services in the town. Yet, as my time at Fortis uncovered, this was not the case and non-UK citizens only rarely accessed their services in the same way as their British clientele. Resource constraints limited Fortis' ability to promote their services to a wider audience and provide casework expertise to non-citizens, despite both an expressed desire to do so and an official ethos of unconditional access. Moreover, staff at Fortis generally lacked the training, experience, and working knowledge of non-citizen service needs and the complex bureaucratic demands of immigration-related casework. Yet whilst non-citizens made up a small proportion of attendees at Fortis, very rarely did a week go by without any non-citizens attending the drop-in seeking assistance. Language barriers were often significant in restricting full access to services here. Whilst a lack of expertise and confidence on the part of staff in dealing with non-citizen casework also represented a barrier to sustained support and advocacy. Although Fortis staff comfortably provided non-citizens with primary welfare services - such as food and clothes vouchers - the typical response to more complex matters for non-citizens was to refer them on to other organizations deemed more capable with helping beyond basic assistance. As Molly described, the standard outcome for non-citizens who required more sustained casework was to signpost them elsewhere:

*Interviewer:* Do (Fortis) often work with asylum seekers?

*Molly:* No. No. Not at all.... We've had a few in. I think we had one in last week, but we generally send `em... to... what's it called?...



(Molly, interview, October 2018)

So, when non-citizens did access services at Fortis, these tended to be fleeting, often one-off, encounters. As the final part of this quote alludes to, this routine was problematic due to the decline of migrant services in Rochdale and the low profile of those services that were still operating. The general picture that emerged then, was a local service landscape divided along lines of citizenship, with marginalised UK-citizens and non-citizens accessing separate support networks. Whilst also having to adhere to welfare conditionality, new refugees were thus routinely referred away from many of the spaces in which British citizens in need of support frequented in Rochdale. This being despite *formal* entitlements to both mainstream welfare and charity services being the same for non-citizens and citizens alike. To criticise Fortis for being neglectful or somehow shifting responsibility in this way would be overly critical. Whilst non-citizens were routinely referred away, in the context of severe budgetary constraints, their presence was just not routine enough to warrant investment in the requisite expertise. Moreover, when immigration status was pertinent in casework, it was in all likelihood in service users' best interest to receive specialist advice. Instead of a flaw in voluntary sector service provision, this occasional, intermittent demand for services can be more accurately seen as a manifestation of dispersal policy more broadly – as a policy designed to 'spread the burden' of asylum reception (Robinson et al., 2003). With this routine referring away from mainstream services then, the manifestations of asylum dispersals and welfare austerity converged here, producing a form of everyday segregation when and where the exclusion of non-citizens and service decline met.

It's important to emphasise here that I never observed Fortis staff refusing assistance to non-citizens when requested, in line with an organisational ethos of unconditional support. In fact, as observed with voluntary sector service providers elsewhere (see Cloke et al., 2011), staff often exhibited feelings of concern and anxiety at the fate of the people they referred on in this way; as Vicky – the drop-in manager at Fortis – highlighted in interview:

'(...) it can take hours, and this person, you know, is just sat, lost .... And sometimes, which is really distressing, is that the outcome is no better than when the person presented in, you know, you can imagine from a staff perspective, that is ... that's really not a nice thing to have to say 'we're sorry, we don't know what else we can do' and, you know, 'we can get you to the (prominent homelessness charity) in the centre of Manchester' but this person's got no idea how to get there, or, its

probably taken 'em a week to find out where we are! ... errr... so it's difficult. It's really difficult.'

*(Vicky, interview, October 2018)*

Here, Vicky also highlights a spatial expression of this segregation of support. A common consequence of the routine of referring non-citizens on was them being sent away from Rochdale altogether for migrant-focussed support, usually to central Manchester or neighbouring towns. This meant that non-citizens would often have to wait longer to find support in times of crisis and were at greater risk of not accessing support altogether. Also, whilst Fortis were able to provide vouchers for bus tickets when referring service users on, any repeat visits to services in central Manchester or elsewhere would likely have to be paid for by people who could ill afford to do so.

In many ways, such spatialized exclusions are a consequence of service decline in austerity. However, they can also again be attributed to the residual logics and priorities of both dispersal and privatisation. Since its introduction in 1999, dispersal has been criticised for locating asylum seekers away from support networks that had developed in larger urban centres (Hynes, 2009; Squire, 2009); whilst privatisation of asylum accommodation effectively ended the formal interest local government had in asylum and refugee services (Darling, 2016). In all these ways, we can see how asylum policy shaped in/exclusion, even when and where border controls were no longer ostensibly pertinent. Here, the everyday internal reach of the border (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018) constrained entitlements and equitable political membership in Rochdale, far beyond the formal jurisdiction of the Home Office.

### **The performative border and 'refugeeness'**

The preceding discussions have detailed some of the ways in which non-citizens became excluded from local advocacy and advice services through the bureaucratic demands and lingering exclusions of the border. However, this segregation was far from total. Whilst referring non-citizens on was something of a default routine at Fortis, I also observed some notable exceptions to this separation, when mainstream service providers proactively took on non-citizen cases. The existence of cases in which the barriers discussed here seemed somehow irrelevant provoke further questions about the boundaries of inclusion and political membership: such as why some non-citizen cases were taken on, and others not, and how boundaries of inclusion were transcended. The following section analyses some such cases, in which - by focusing on these anomalies - I unpack the more subtle, informal, and contingent barriers to inclusion that operate alongside the bureaucratic and policy-led exclusions discussed above.

On first viewing, austerity represents a challenge to notions of a domineering, far-reaching state (Bramall, 2013). As governments appear to withdraw their institutional presence in society, and the day-to-day delivery of a range of services is taken up by nominally non-state actors, logic follows that the influence of the state will regress. Yet, as the preceding chapters have argued, boundaries of inclusion and political membership are often determined through the discretionary practices of frontline staff and volunteers, whether formally deployed by the state or otherwise (Jones, 2012). 'Street-level' bureaucrats don't only draw from formal bureaucratic procedures and rights when making decisions about levels of support, but from case-by-case, personal judgments of entitlement (*ibid.*; Lipsky, 197; Humphris, 2019).

Studies of refugee subjectivity have long considered the importance of performance in shaping such judgments (Zetter, 1991; Nyers, 2006). Work on this theme has focussed on the need for refugees to demonstrate the authenticity of their claims in-line with the requirements of receiving states – that is, being a 'genuine' victim of persecution or abandonment by their state of origin. And so, as well as objective, bureaucratic evidence, the embodied performance of normative refugee traits – victimhood, vulnerability, fear – have been shown to be a critical factor in asylum adjudications (Zetter, 1991; Nyers, 2006; McKinnon, 2009; Luker, 2015). Whilst much of this work has been critiqued for depicting refugees as passive recipients of refugee identity in this way (Jeffers, 2008; Haikli et al., 2017), studies have increasingly produced more nuanced perspectives that recognise refugee agency in such performances (Haikli et al., 2017). Part of this more critical departure concerns performances of 'refugeeness' in encounters beyond spaces of formal border control, to internal border sites and dispersed negotiations of political belonging (Szczepanikova, 2010), including in cities (Darling, 2017; Haikli et al., 2017). In this analysis I develop these themes by considering how performances of refugee identity shaped informal judgments of service entitlement in Rochdale.

In doing so, I pay particular attention to the '... rhetorical structure of refugee recognition...' (Luker, 2015: 107) as access to support is negotiated. Given the dominance and pervasion of ideational and discursive categories delineating what a deserving recipient of state support looks like (Tyler, 2013), the state's discursive power upholds much of its influence, even in its formal absence in austerity (Humphris, 2019). However, as I will argue, statist constructions of highly governable subjects do not operate neatly in distinct discursive categories. Instead, my analysis considers the interplay of discursive constructions of both 'refugeeness' and assimilationist notions of the 'good', economically productive immigrant (Anderson, 2013). Here, I return our attention to how service access was negotiated through performative encounters 'in-

between' (Bartels, 2013: 476) staff, service users, state bureaucracies, and discursive constructions of nation-state in/exclusion.

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'(...) So I sat with her, and I said "this is how it is. They will look at sending you back to Pakistan." And she literally said to me: "If they send me back to Pakistan, I will kill myself, and the children". So, I got everybody on board again, and I spoke to the Home Office and they said "we would like to speak to the lady, let her come in" (...)

However, the good thing about her is; she will learn the English language, she will find employment, 'cause she wants to. She's absolutely so grateful to be in this country. Erm, some people may see her story and (see) her...erm... as ... just... someone else who's come into the country that is taking benefits, that's using the resources. But, you see it on TV, and you can have your opinion about it, and you can think "hmm, you know, that's somebody else, who's adding on to the benefits trail". But as soon as you get to know who's behind that ... story, like I did. It's completely different.'

*(Gabby, charity support worker, interview March 2018)*

This quote is taken from an interview I conducted with Gabby, a support worker at a local family support charity in Rochdale, where she describes how she came to take on the case of an asylum seeker. Here, Gabby spoke with a lot of pride about one of only a handful of non-UK citizens that she could recall having worked with. I have chosen to analyse this account not as a representative case study of Gabby's work, but as an anomaly that highlights some of the performative negotiations of in/exclusion that constituted everyday bordering practices in service settings. For Gabby, it was not *formal* entitlements and process that assured her advocacy; but a performative demonstration of vulnerability and a commitment to integration and self-reliance that justified her support. In this case, rather than being referred on, a refugee successfully performed the requisite traits and behaviours that represented a boundary to political membership at the intersection of welfare austerity and border governance (Humphris, 2019).

Importantly, successfully gaining the support of service providers could have direct practical consequences for non-citizens' relation to the state. As Gaby described here, she came to advocate and negotiate on an asylum seeker's behalf with the Home

Office; ultimately shaping how her claim for asylum was processed by the state. Whilst it is impossible to say if this intervention was needed to prevent refusal and deportation, advocacy and discretion on the part of border agents have been shown to be a powerful factor in asylum application success (Luker, 2015; Gill, 2016). The vignette is thus significant in that it captures the performative processes shaping how an asylum seeker was able to obtain substantial support from Gabby and surpass the usual routine of referring on discussed above. The emphases in Gabby's description are telling here. Rather than formal entitlements, it was the threat of harm to herself and her children that prompted Gabby to '(get) everybody on board again...' and proactively negotiate with the Home Office on her behalf. In the first instance then, it was a successful demonstration of desperation, urgency, and vulnerability that prompted Gabby to act.

Recent work has shown how constructions of refugee victimhood are prominent in charity advocacy work, and instrumental in challenges to more overtly hostile narratives of asylum seeking (Wroe, 2018). However, the victimhood performed here corresponds to constructions of what Peter Nyers (2006: xv) sees as a pervasive trope of '..."authentic" refugeeness...' that often works to surpass formal entitlements and condition who is afforded political membership and the protections of the state (see also Luker, 2015). In this case, an asylum seeker successfully performed what Gabby perceived as genuine victimhood and vulnerability that placed her in binary opposition to the threatening figure of the 'bogus asylum seeker' (see Lynn & Lea, 2003; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Tyler, 2013), and therefore worthy of proactive advocacy and assistance. Here, we see how refugee subjectivity and discursive constructions of genuine refugeeness police and determine mobility not only across national borders (Kallio et al., 2019) but also through the internal, everyday borders of statehood (see also Szczepanikova, 2010)- evident here in service delivery settings.

Indeed, Gabby's account was not an isolated case. The following excerpt from my research diary details a second pertinent example in which 'performing refugeeness' (*Ibid.*) prompted advocacy beyond the normal levels afforded to non-citizens. In another case involving domestic violence, advocacy was obtained here not only from a charity, but from a quintessentially statist institution - the police:

A new SU - (Barsha), 34, asylum seeker from Bangladesh -came in (to the Welcome Centre drop-in) this morning for help writing a letter to the HO (Home Office). She'd missed two HO interviews as she didn't think she needed to attend since her six children had been taken into care a couple of months ago.

(...)She needed a letter explaining to the HO why she had missed the appointments and passed me a similar letter from her social worker explaining the situation with the children. I asked her for any details she has of her husband's arrest and conviction. She showed me a piece of paper with a crime number and personal contact details for a police detective, explaining that he told her to refer 'any questions from the Home Office' to him to sort out.

*(Research diary extract, Welcome Centre, March 2018)*

The acquisition of a handwritten note and personal contact details from a police officer was a surprising expression of advocacy. Such an intervention was above and beyond the duty of a resource-constrained and generally hostile state institution, for whom apathy towards refugee rights and the use of more formal channels and generic, departmental contact information were the norm (see Weber, 2013). However, once again, it was the stark - and gendered (see Judge, 2010) - expression of victimhood and vulnerability that enabled Barsha to effectively perform her refugeeness and transcend the usual borders of in/exclusion here.

This account is also significant as it highlights how this performance became cemented in bureaucratic form. The police officers note served as a kind of proof of Barsha's authenticity as a refugee, as she carried this proof and exercised agency in adopting this identity when seeking advocacy and support around Rochdale (see Häkli et al., 2017). And so, we can see here how discursive constructions of 'authentic refugeeness' (Nyers, 2006) were re-produced and negotiated locally; expressing the everyday reach of the border in shaping political belonging through embodied performances that appeared far removed from formal, legal rights and entitlements.

Yet it is important to re-emphasise that such cases are included here as illuminating anomalies, and - as with all service encounters - inclusion based on such performances was inherently uneven and contingent on the reception of particular audiences and situations. Moreover, discursive constructions of authenticity have a binary opposite in the figure of the 'bogus asylum seeker' that are embodied and routinized through a default mode of suspicion and/or apathy (Nyers, 2006; Tyler, 2013). As such - and in the context of privatisation and austerity - the default routine of referring on effectively excluded non-citizens from advocacy within local service networks in Rochdale, unless they were able to successfully perform certain normative traits in line with discursive constructions of the 'good' migrant (Anderson, 2013).

### **Demonstrating moral worth**

Indeed, the second discursive construction that worked to police the boundaries of political membership in this way was that of the figure of the 'good', economically active and independent migrant. Rooted in a quintessentially neoliberal conception of citizenship (Hindess, 2002; Tyler, 2013), this construction's binary opposite is the figure of the unemployed, benefits-claiming migrant, who unashamedly leeches off a welfare state paid for by hardworking 'good' citizens (Anderson, 2013). At the heart of this powerful and emotive narrative is an idea of hospitality that places an imperative on migrants to express gratitude – 'She's absolutely so grateful to be in this country.' (Gabby – see *above*)- at the acceptance and tolerance of their presence in the 'host' society (Gibson, 2016). As Gabby's account alludes to, one way in which this gratitude is expected to be expressed is through a commitment to learn English and pursue employment and independence from the benefits system. For Gabby to commit to advocate in this case then, the asylum seeker had to successfully pass this test of moral worth (Humphris, 2019) – proving deservingness along these assimilationist and economically-oriented parameters.

Such was the ubiquity of this intersecting framing of immigration and welfare dependency that service staff often casually emphasised the assimilationist value of their non-citizen clients without a prompt for any kind of explanation or justification, which even served as a kind of mark of success and source of pride for staff. Although expressed openly as a marker of inclusion, by drawing from the binary discourse of deserving and undeserving migrants (Sales, 2002; Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015) these boundaries nonetheless shaped service practices in exclusionary ways. During my time at Fortis I often heard comments in-passing alluding to such boundaries and judgements of moral worth. Sometimes this took the form of gripes, out of earshot of service users, when staff would question why certain non-citizens they encountered were apparently failing to pursue work or improve their English. Other times, as with Gabby's account, staff members' support was justified vocally with the caveat that their non-citizen clients were worthy – '... he's worked, so I'll help.'. What can be seen here then is a default position of suspicion at the underlying motive and deservingness of non-citizens that mirrors that which pervades not only the wider asylum adjudication system (Gill, 2016), but also the increasing conditionality of benefits in austerity (Dwyer & Wright, 2014; Watts et al., 2014). Once again, I never observed these boundaries of the unworthy- worthy, undeserving-deserving migrant resulting in outright refusal of assistance (as witnessed elsewhere, Humphris, 2019). However, this often shaped the level of services offered and ultimately whether non-citizens were referred on for help elsewhere.

The performative nature of borders in relation to discourses of both moral worth (*ibid.*) and refugeeness (Szczepanikova, 2010; Häkli et al., 2017) have been scrutinised elsewhere. However, what I have shown here highlights how these discourses operate together, forming a multifaceted ideational border to political membership as access to state support is negotiated. Rather than distinct discursive constructions of deservingness, these ideas are conflated and shape the performative border simultaneously, as refugees would need to paradoxically demonstrate both helplessness and economic agency. In Rochdale then, formal entitlements and ethos became less relevant as ‘... a more salient tension appear(ed) with the opposition between legalization based on vulnerability and that based on civic performance...’ (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014: 426).

The pervasive effect of these discourses on public judgments of both refugees and benefits claimants are not to be underestimated (Tyler, 2006; Finney and Simpson, 2009; Jensen, 2014; Masocha, 2015); whilst we must also remind ourselves that the people who act as gatekeepers to state support are as much members of the public as they are the state. As Gabby mentioned when confirming her client as *not* belonging to the category of the burdensome non-citizen - ‘... you see it on T.V....’. And, importantly, these discursive constructions are not the product of the media alone, but bound up in states’ foundational ideologies, political rhetoric and technologies of governance (*ibid.*). And so here we can see the very real manifestation of the discursive power of the state. Or, what Imogen Tyler (2013) has critiqued as the state-led ‘abjection’ of certain unwanted others, to be governed through:

‘... novel modes of (re)classification – refugees transformed into bogus asylum seekers, unemployed young people into feckless chavs, people with disabilities into welfare cheats – that cut deep into popular consciousness...’ (Tyler, 2013: 211)

Whilst these discourses are framed with the sanctity of the nation-state at the fore, I have shown how such constructions are reproduced at the local and intimate scale of the charity drop-in centre. Importantly, this produces very real effects on political inclusion in the context of local migrant service decline. Performances of refugeeness and moral worth were not only required for belonging to the nation-state, but also for local citizenship and inclusion. Although a handful of non-citizens successfully transcended these discursive classifications, the majority were either unaware, unable, or unwilling to successfully perform the requisite traits and were usually referred on elsewhere.



### 9.3 Shared spaces & everyday solidarities at the margins

So far, I have detailed the performative boundaries that thrived in the absence of formal processes of entitlement in austerity. In some sense, this is evidence of the state's ability to govern and impose its border regime at a range of scales, and without the need to deploy more overt governmental technologies (Foucault, 1991; 2004; Rimke, 2000). However, such a conclusion would be incomplete. The state is never so coherent and comprehensive in meeting its aims (Desbiens et al., 2004; Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010), and these discursive, performative foreclosures were far from omnipotent. In the final part of this chapter I now detail how the retreat of the state's institutional presence in Rochdale also opened up the potential for contestation of these divisions, as opportunities for familiarity and nascent forms of solidarity came to the fore at the margins.

Diversity and the presence of non-citizens is often seen as a challenge to both organized and informal forms of social welfare and reciprocity (Oosterlynck et al., 2016), particularly in the context of austerity and a framing of different groups as competing for scarce public resources (Darling, 2017b). However, critical citizenship scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the prevalence of forms of solidarity that are practiced across divisions of status and identity (*ibid.*, Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Turner, 2016; Maestri and Hughes, 2017). Much of this work has followed Isin and Nielsen's (2013) development of the concept of 'acts of citizenship', as events in which non-citizens express forms of agency and make political claims akin to citizens. Acts of citizenship thus '... disrupt habitus, create new possibilities, claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones; pose their claims in enduring and creative expressions; and, most of all, are the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order' (Isin and Nielsen, 2013: 10).

Pertinently, some of this work has focussed on the spatial dimensions of such acts, highlighting how claims and solidarities often emerge from marginal spaces (Turner, 2016; Maestri and Hughes, 2017). For instance, Maestri (2017; following Squire, 2009) has explored how Roma in Italy have built solidarities with non-Roma citizens through protests over rights to housing that are based on shared socio-economic marginality. For Darling (2017b: 732) '(s)uch forms of solidarity and alliance building across difference are critical in examining how citizenship is contested, both from those on the margins and through connections forged by shared experiences.'. Similarly, in exploring the links between marginality and the political, Turner (2016: 141) argues that citizenship regimes can both disenfranchise non-citizens and engender '... new political possibilities which are not always orientated towards 'inclusion''. It is such

generative possibilities (Massey, 2005) of shared urban marginality that the remainder of this chapter explores.

As David Featherstone (2012) has argued, for centuries now, commonalities and relationships between seemingly distant spaces have been integral in the development of international solidarity movements. Whilst urban environments have been recognised here as influential in providing opportunities for solidarities between citizens and non-citizens to arise, this work has mostly concerned organized movements or events (*ibid.*; Brown & Yaffe, 2014; cf. Lancione, 2016). I focus here instead on ad hoc and everyday practices and moments of solidarity that developed through shared experience and spaces of marginality (*ibid.*, 2016). In doing so I produce an alternative understanding of solidarity as emerging through ‘... an entirely different spatiotemporal register, namely that of the everyday places and practices in which people engage across ethnic and cultural boundaries’ (Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 764). Rather than seeing the urban margins as geographical *context* then, I see negotiations around political in/exclusions and the border as taking place *through* the social and material makeup of the city. In being attentive to the shared spaces, encounters, and intersecting lives of groups divided by state classifications, I contend that this perspective allows for an acknowledgment of the fragile and contingent nature of borders and states.

### **Service encounters and familiarity**

As discussed earlier, the state’s institutional withdrawal in austerity is particularly pronounced at the urban margins. Whilst this has many negative consequences, this also leaves such spaces with more uneven and contingent institutional arrangements, freer from some of the formal restraints of state actors. In this sense, a geographical focus on ostensibly abandoned spaces may attend to the potential to transgress the bureaucratic, ideational, and performative foreclosures discussed in the preceding section. Indeed, support or solidarity wasn’t exclusively obtained by non-citizens through performances of refugeeness and moral worth. When non-citizens happened to present cases that were particularly familiar to staff at Fortis, this also occasionally prompted them to proactively take on non-citizen cases. For instance, Molly expressed great satisfaction at having successfully won an appeal case involving a service user who had been denied benefits and made homeless due to an issue with his citizenship status:

‘...he went to sign on for his passport... he lost his flat, he lost all his benefits, ended up in a bed and breakfast, on nil-income... they made

somebody homeless, really... for 12 months... it must have been horrendous really... no wonder he drank!

*(Molly, interview, October 2018)*

Here, Molly emphasised a familiar consequence of state abandonment – homelessness and alcoholism – that she encountered daily with her UK-citizen clients at Fortis. Whilst the bureaucratic basis of this loss of support was also commonplace and made up a lot of the casework load for staff. In recognising a familiar impact of the state's hostile and punitive bureaucracy here, Molly felt both motivated and able to take on this immigration-related case, where otherwise she may well have referred the service user on to migrant-specific services elsewhere. Whilst only a very occasional issue at Fortis, Molly went on to contextualize her frustrations with respect to the broader housing issues that the move on process caused for new refugees:

I tell you what I don't agree with, with the asylum seeker housing, is once they get allowed (status), that they're pretty much... on the street... once they're given... £30 a week, is it? They're given a flat, then they're given a month's notice and... and that's it. And I think that's quite *disgusting!* ... I think its cruel they don't have, a list - let's just say, they had a separate list at RBH, that had, right, these house, these 10 houses, this month, they're for asylum-seekers, when they've, you know, passed, to stay. Then move them from those, into proper tenancies... because I think they're just creating more issues and more problems...

*(Molly, interview, October 2018)*

Once again, Molly emphasises that it is a familiarity of housing insecurity, exposure to destitution, and institutional inaction that underpins her feelings of disgust for the asylum system and the precarities it engenders. Returning to the case involving Gabby earlier, this type of familiarity across divides of citizenship status was also occasionally evident on a more personal level, as moral distance was overcome through meaningful encounter:

But it did start getting... I think the boundaries did start blurring a bit, because - I used to bring her my clothes in, and, my own clothes, my kids' clothes.... But I knew that her daughter was the same age as mine... and I think she was expected to survive off £5.65 a day. I think that's what it was..., they get that little card, don't they? So, i'd take advantage and give them biscuits and coffee and what-not, when I

could... It did go personal on that one. But I thought - I'll see it out. And she's got Leave to Remain.

*(Gabby, charity support worker, March 2018)*

Whilst the asylum seeker partially had to perform her refugeeness to retain Gabby's support, their service encounters also fostered a recognition of shared experience, as mothers who had to clothe, feed, and provide care for their children. Importantly, whenever frustrations and concerns with asylum and immigration systems were mentioned by service providers in interview, it was such instances of familiarity that came to the fore. For Wilson (2011), familiarity is a crucial focus point of tolerance and positive encounters across difference. Following Spinosa et al. (1997), Wilson (2011: 51) makes a distinction between habit – as 'passive 'doing' of the expected' and familiarity, which is more 'active'. I argue here that, just as familiarity fosters everyday tolerance (*ibid.*), in service settings so too does it have the capability to prompt advocacy and foster solidarity across pervasive divisions of citizenship and identity.

### **Everyday solidarities at the margins**

Beyond service relationships, I also observed generative recognitions of familiarity when non-citizens and 'failed citizens' (Anderson, 2013) themselves encountered each other through crisis service spaces. One such case involved Ryan – a regular, long-term, service user at Fortis - and Ali – a Moroccan-born non-citizen.

Ryan brought a Moroccan guy – Ali – who spoke very little English and had NRPF (no recourse to public funds) into the office today just before closing. Ryan explained that Ali was homeless and the staff at (local homeless hostel) had been letting him stay informally on the floor of a shared living space over the weekend, but that he couldn't stay again. Ryan was frustrated after 'trodding with him round everywhere' trying to get emergency accommodation for him since 8am, but nowhere could help due to Ali's NRPF ('No Recourse to Public Funds) status.(...)Whilst waiting Ryan mentioned how he was outraged that (local homeless hostel) charge ~£300 a week rent to housing benefit. I asked him if he'd applied for a flat but he became angrier, explaining that the bureaucracy, waiting times, and broken promises – 'like dangling a carrot on a stick' - made him totally disengage with any application or referral processes, shaking his head in frustration as he spoke. (...)

*(Research diary extract, Fortis, July 2018)*

During my time at Fortis I had gotten to know Ryan quite well. He had been homeless for several years and was effectively barred from most local government and third sector homelessness services in Rochdale. Having spent time in prison and being brought up in the foster care system, he had a deep mistrust of anything even resembling government institutions or bureaucratic practice. Ryan had nonetheless spent the entire day alongside Ali, trying in vain to negotiate what were effectively the same bureaucratic barriers and some of the very same institutions that he himself struggled approaching on a daily basis. In this way, Ryan's long-standing frustrations and fraught relationship with local services and state institutions was almost replayed through the foreclosures brought about by Ali's status and the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' printed on his residency permit. Through Ryan's revisiting of institutions and past experiences of rejection, this encounter can be seen as a spatial manifestation of some of the parallels between the hostile governance of non-citizens and 'failed citizens' (Anderson, 2013; Tyler, 2013). With such familiarity of institutional and bureaucratic foreclosures, came a powerful moment of ad hoc solidarity across difference.

Such expressions of commonality between marginalised citizens and non-citizens also emerged through more informal spaces of destitution in Rochdale:

This afternoon Suzanne asked me if I knew anything about a 'group of Africans, or men of African appearance' sleeping rough in the bin store area at the bottom of one of the Town Flats blocks.(...) She explained that she hadn't seen them herself when she had been to check on outreach walks, but that she had received reports of the group from other SUs. Apparently, Tommy (a regular Fortis attendee) had tried to speak with them a few times but none of the group spoke English. And he had asked her a few times why no one from Fortis or the council was doing anything about it, rather than there being any evidence of tension (...)

*(Research diary extract, Fortis, June 2018)*

Like Ryan, Tommy was also a long-term regular at Fortis who had a fraught relationship with local institutions and was struggling with mental health and substance misuse issues. After encountering (what we can assume to have been) a group of destitute non-citizens sleeping rough in the bin stores of one of the town's tower blocks, Tommy repeatedly expressed dismay at the inaction of any authorities to find the group assistance or accommodation, and effectively lobbied the Fortis staff to act on the matter.

In contrast to widely held assumptions surrounding attitudes of hostility towards migrants amongst Britain's 'white working-class' (Dawson, 2018), bar occasional grumblings about the visible presence of immigrants in Rochdale, this wasn't something I witnessed at Fortis. Whilst service users at Fortis generally had little to say on the issue of asylum, on occasions when it was discussed, hostility or disapproval was not in any way prominent. Instead, the topic generally failed to provoke much in the way of impassioned opinion and was most often met with shrugs or expressions of a kind of ambivalent tolerance. When I managed to probe further, I generally found people to be conscious of national framings of asylum as a 'problem' but either unaware or broadly tolerant of asylum seekers' and refugees' presence locally (see also Dawson, 2018). Anecdotally, this could partially be put down to the fact that service users at Fortis generally faced pressing issues - around housing, poverty mental health, and addiction - that simply didn't allow them to consider wider social and political issues beyond their personal situation. However, positive encounters in shared marginal spaces also appeared to ameliorate underlying tensions or suspicions. For instance, there were a few occasions when service users from the Welcome Centre attended Fortis' breakfast club or other social events and would play pool, drink tea or coffee, and chat with the regular attendees. Whilst one service user who was an enthusiastic volunteer at a local community garden boasted to Fortis staff and service users when two refugees from Iran had started volunteering there.

Such quietly generative encounters and everyday 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2013) also appeared to occur sporadically in the town's public spaces. For instance, one regular at Fortis, Mo, once told me about how someone he assumed to be an asylum seeker once came to his aid after he was assaulted in the street, explaining that this act changed his perspective of asylum as an issue:

'Talking to (Mo) about asylum seekers in Rochdale... he said that before (he was helped) he was "like everybody else... "what are they doing here, there's no room for them here"..." but that it "opened my eyes a bit..." and that "everyone deserves a chance"'

(Research diary extract, Fortis, June 2018)

Whilst the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in Rochdale didn't register as a major concern at Fortis, these observations do challenge popular narratives surrounding anti-immigrant sentiment amongst Britain's so called 'left behind' (see Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Ishkanian, 2018). Instead, what I found in Rochdale chimes more with recent studies suggesting that lower income earners actually express marginally less hostile attitudes to immigration than those on middle incomes

(Dawson, 2018; Ferguson and Fearn, 2019). Establishing why this may be the case is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, as seen with more formal and organized movements elsewhere (Featherston, 2012; Raimondi, 2019), what I have recalled here shows that everyday solidarities across divides of citizenship can emerge through shared spaces and familiar experiences of marginality. From this, what the more proactive expressions of solidarity discussed above point to is something equally as spontaneous, but more oppositional in character - the recognition of a common struggle and position of undesirability or abandonment in the eyes of society and the state.

For Oosterlynck et al. (2015), struggle makes up one of the four 'sources' of solidarity - alongside 'interdependence', 'shared norms and values', and 'encounter'. Here, they argue that '... solidarity is related to unequal power relations and their capacity to give rise to collective action. Solidarity is then rooted in a joint struggle around common interests against a shared enemy ...' (*ibid.*:768). Returning to the incident involving the group of homeless non-citizens above, Tommy expressed frustration not at the presence of the destitute non-citizens, but at the familiar absence of effective government assistance or support, and conditions of destitution. Similarly, Molly and Ryan both recognised a familiarity in the bureaucratic and institutional barriers that the non-citizens they were helping faced.

Significantly, this familiarity was assembled through spaces ostensibly vacated by the state in austerity. With this focus on spatiality then, we can see how the institutional, bureaucratic and discursive power of the border was demoted in '... the triangulation occurring between homeless people's bodies and the socio-material and discursive means of service provision' (Lancione, 2016: 367). In such instances of productive familiarity, the power of the state to reproduce divisions along lines of citizenship fell away, as more immediate commonalities came to the fore. Indeed, to return to Wilson's (2011) geographical reading of tolerance and familiarity, all of these instances of generative encounter took place through everyday encounters in social spaces in Rochdale, in which shared experiences of marginality and struggle became most abundantly evident - the charity drop-in centre, a homelessness hostel, the town's streets and public space.

Before concluding, it is worth noting that these re-articulations of difference were not the product of formal, organised activism or attempts to foster solidarity between citizens and non-citizens. Instead, such 'minor' political acts (Darling, 2017b) emerged organically from - and in protest at - the conspicuous inaction of state actors or institutions. In recognising governmental abandonment as a kind of rallying point of opposition then, we can see austerity beyond only context, but as constitutive of

states' inherent incoherence and fragility (Painter, 2006). Whilst the border's ideational and discursive constructions remained pervasive, in this sense, the emergence of such transgressive acts of solidarity are testament to the fragmented reach of the state (Allen, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how everyday political belonging was negotiated as the UK's hostile welfare and border regimes overlapped and converged. As with myriad other contexts (Lancione, 2016), Britain's towns and cities face the challenge of how to cohesively accommodate diverse others, with ever diminishing public resources. In this vein, Rochdale's recent experience of managing a tripling of asylum seeker dispersals alongside austerity-driven service cuts represents an illuminating example of intersecting marginality. Despite this - and the many analogous governmental logics, practices and lived consequences examined in previous chapters - border and welfare governance are too often analysed and discussed in isolation. In paying empirical attention to the shared geographies and experiences of asylum and welfare austerity, I have challenged such an ontological separation that is rooted in the state's own categories of citizenship status and governmental orderings.

I began this critique by examining the incongruent 'move on' period between the asylum system and mainstream welfare. In focusing on the lived experiences of the people I worked with at the Welcome Centre, I demonstrated how the precarities and exclusions of asylum support didn't abruptly end with the granting of status, but lingered and bled into the many bureaucratic exclusions that characterised restrictionist welfare. Beyond bureaucratic incompatibilities, the border's enduring presence was also evident in less apparent and direct ways, as non-citizens were informally segregated from mainstream support services. With limited resources in austerity, and the exclusionary cultural politics of asylum and welfare converging, staff at mainstream service organizations were often reticent in taking on non-citizen casework and routinely referred such cases on elsewhere. Once more the town's peripheral position in Greater Manchester meant that migrant service retrenchment was keenly-felt and non-citizens were often referred on away from Rochdale when seeking assistance. Although this effective 'absence' of the state (Hyndman and Mountz, 2007) in the form of funding cuts is unlikely an explicit governmental tactic of immigration control, it is in keeping with the spatial logics and consequences of a dispersal policy (Squire, 2009; Hynes, 2011) that seek to dilute non-citizens' presence within the sovereign territory of the state. And so, the enduring experience of dispersal was thus one of liminal belonging for marginalized non-citizens (Hynes,



2011); exacerbated by service decline in austerity and the overlapping moral coding of the UK's border and welfare regimes.

Yet despite widespread liminality, segregation along lines of citizenship status was not ubiquitous in service settings. Here, my ethnographic account of service delivery detailed the more discretionary and performative character of local bordering practices, rooted in discursive and ideational boundaries of inclusion. If and how meaningful assistance was provided to non-citizens locally was often determined through personal judgments of deservingness based on performances of certain traits based on binary figures of the deserving and genuine, versus the unworthy and bogus refugee. Whilst similar points have been made before with respect to marginality and difference more generally (Humphris, 2019; Lancione, 2016), this chapter has also drawn attention to the particularities of refugee subjectivity (Zetter, 1991; Nyers, 2006; McKinnon, 2009; Szczepanikova, 2010; Luker, 2015; Haikli et al., 2017) and what non-citizen support entails for service providers, both practically and politically. In this way, it has further contributed to geographical literature on the workings of modern states as contingent and 'peopled' (Jones, 2012) entities that operate with an inescapably blurred separation between 'state' and 'society' actors (Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010). Instead of being reproduced through overt enforcement and state agents, the borders of the state can be seen to function here more through its discursive, ideational constructions of who deserves social citizenship and who doesn't. In this sense, the state has not so much retreated in austerity (Bramall, 2013), but has restructured how its borders are policed - and by whom this is done - with some degree of efficacy. In thinking about the multi-scalar geographies of states (Allena nd Cochrane, 2010; Raco & Tasan-Kok, 2019) here; whilst the decentralised institutions and personnel policing the border in this way are all nominally 'local', non-state actors, their judgments and the political membership of non-citizens were shaped by notions of deservingness, segregated bureaucracies, and austerity measures that were determined at the scale of the nation-state.

However, with the dispersal of authority and discretion, came contingency and imperfection in the implementation of state power and space for contestation (Painter, 2006; Gill, 2010; Jones, 2012). Whilst my findings draw attention to the divisive power of statist categories of citizenship (Anderson, 2013), important instances of commonality were also apparent at the urban margins, where the internal reach of the border appeared to fragment in austerity. Although restrictionist governance and institutional abandonment made precarity more acute for citizens and non-citizens alike, it was through such processes and spaces of marginalization that informal articulations of commonality emerged. Such commonality was made apparent in

service settings when citizens and non-citizens recognised familiarity in the governmental demands and bureaucratic foreclosures of hostile border and welfare regimes. In this way, *where* asylum and austerity governance converged became instrumental; for it was in shared spaces of concentrated dispersals and institutional abandonment that the state's imagined categories of citizen and non-citizen began to fall apart. I am, however, cautious here as to the possibility of any kind of formal coalition-building between citizens and non-citizens emerging directly from such encounters. To do so would risk romanticizing marginality, ignoring both the sparsity of such encounters and the acute disenfranchisement and isolation of the groups and services in question. However, being attentive to the sociality of shared spaces of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005) at the margins can provide tangible evidence that attends to the fragile and contestable nature of divisions along lines of citizenship; or, to borrow Bridget Anderson's (2013: 5) words - '...purged of its moral claims, the distinction between some categories of non and failed citizens begins to look more hazy.'

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

This chapter discusses how the research aims and objectives have been met and the thesis' key contributions to scholarship on asylum, social welfare, governance, and the state. It proceeds in four sections. Sections 10.1 and 10.2 pertain to the first aim of the thesis: how the state is experienced and reproduced through asylum and welfare governance. Having produced an in-depth, qualitative account of asylum and welfare governance in Rochdale, the first section concerns Objective 1. and outlines the thesis' primary empirical contribution in this respect. Here I summarize how both the UK's asylum and welfare regimes were defined by a 'politics of discomfort' (Darling, 2011); reproduced through overlapping material, embodied, and symbolic forms of exclusion. In capturing the multi-dimensional character of governmental in/exclusion in this way, I argue that the thesis makes an important empirical contribution to research on the impacts of state-led marginalization.

The next section addresses the second objective and recaps my analysis of some of the key institutional, bureaucratic and technological practices that make up Britain's asylum and welfare systems. In doing so, I summarize here how the outsourcing of asylum and welfare practices to non-state actors tended to distance governmental decision makers from the consequences of their actions and the variably exclusionary effects this produced. In reflecting on the situated and contingent state encounters and practices I recorded in Rochdale, I argue that the precarities highlighted in this thesis are best understood as the product of shifting assemblages of institutions, personnel, discourses, technologies, and practices.

The final two sections of the chapter concern the second thesis aim: to investigate how the UK's asylum and welfare systems overlap and diverge. Section 10.3 considers the third objective and reviews my empirical findings regarding connections between the ways in which experiences and practices of asylum and welfare governance intersect and converge. Here, I highlight how I have contributed to literature on borders, welfare, and governance more broadly by producing a novel account of asylum and welfare systems' shared geographies, governmental logics, discourses, practices, and lived experiences. I pay attention here to the instances of everyday solidarity that I observed and the implications of this for debates on diversity and encounter in marginalized spaces (Massey, 2005; Lancione, 2016). From this, the final section addresses Objective 4.; reflecting on the separation of border and welfare governance in discussion and debates on these issues. Here, I round up the contributions I have made to critical state scholarship and long-standing debates on the reification of the state (Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006; Jessop, 2016) by identifying and challenging tendencies to silo analyses of governance according to the state's own

contrived and self-serving categorizations. I finish the chapter by considering the wider implications of these insights for activism, solidarity, and the politics of support in the context of diverse and intersecting marginality.

### **10.1. The politics of discomfort and exclusion**

Returning to the first thesis aim and objective, this thesis has produced a detailed account of how marginality is experienced by some of the people and places most affected by increasingly restrictionist governmental regimes. In studying the state 'from below' (Trouillot, 2001), I have detailed how both the UK's asylum and benefits systems produce concentrations of precarity and exclusion through a myriad of material and symbolic processes (Wacquant, 2007; 2008). Materially speaking, marginalization was most readily apparent in the economic precarity that asylum seekers and welfare claimants were systemically exposed to. On this, Chapter 5 detailed how a combination of a ban on paid employment and insufficient subsistence payments placed asylum seekers in a default position of poverty and social exclusion in dispersal (Hynes, 2011; Allsopp, 2014). These financial restrictions exacerbated a broader position of precarity rooted in immigration status and the no-choice, often sub-standard provision of asylum accommodation (Hirschler, 2015; Zill et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, this combination of restrictions had a notable impact on the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers; whilst it also constrained the extent to which they were able to participate in social and economic life in Rochdale. For the people living in dispersal then, daily life was constrained by state-enforced poverty that curtailed not only their economic security, but also their sense of self-worth, agency, and belonging (see Burchett & Matheson, 2010; Hynes, 2011; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Whilst benefits claimants received slightly higher subsistence payments, their incomes usually placed them within even the government's own definition of poverty. Once more, as Chapter 6 outlined, increased conditionality, financial punishments, and systemic delays meant that claimants' incomes were inescapably insecure. As the prevalence of food bank use and homelessness (both nationally and in Rochdale) attests, economic and housing insecurity and their attendant impacts were also a prominent feature of life under welfare governance (Beatty et al., 2015; Reeve, 2017). For both welfare claimants and asylum seekers then, daily life was constrained by the material precarities produced through restrictionist governance; and poverty, in its different forms, was a very tangible and prevalent feature of daily life for most the people I worked with in Rochdale.

Governance was not only experienced as material exclusion and I have also explored how poverty intersected with political and symbolic exclusions that augmented the malevolent presence of the state in subjects' lives. Poverty was produced in tandem

with various governmental controls and restrictions that profoundly shaped asylum seekers' and benefits claimants' lives; and governance was experienced through more than just tangible social and economic exclusions. In qualitatively recording lived experiences and encounters, I have detailed how the experience of claiming asylum and welfare were often significant in affective terms, with the systems' impacts being felt through embodied, emotional registers, as well as more tangible precarities (Clayton et al., 2014; Mavin, 2019). Notably, a commonly experienced and pervasive affect evident across both systems was one of threat (De Genova, 2002; Da Lomba, 2006; Wright and Patrick, 2019), with feelings of anxiety being produced as a result of implicit and explicit threats made by the state. There was the threat of punishment - for failing to satisfy job search requirements or attend Home Office appointments; the threat of destitution - at the end of asylum claims, or the suspension of benefits payments; and the threat of disentanglements - of sanctuary and welfare entitlements. Such threats engendered both acute and chronic feelings of anxiety and distress. Acute episodes came in response to moments of decision and encounter with state agents or technologies of governance -at the job centre or work capability appointments. Whilst chronic anxieties were evident in the pervasive fear of rejected claims or punishments for a failing to satisfy the conditions attached to state support (*ibid.*; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Concomitant with pervasive threats and their anxiety-inducing effects was the presence of different forms of surveillance and monitoring in subjects' lives. Benefit claimants' behaviours and activities were monitored through demands to perform or prove the pursuit of work, often in close and invasive detail (see Fletcher & Wright, 2018). Whilst asylum seekers' whereabouts were monitored through signing-in requirements, the activities of Serco staff, and the tracking of payment cards (Fisher, 2018). Pervasive surveillance and monitoring practices thus aggravated the broader threat of status and security by disciplining conduct and serving as a constant reminder of the state's presence and authority. It is in such practices that we see the tangible and direct effects of policy dovetailing with more political and symbolic expressions of sovereign dominance in subjects' lives. Indeed, material and social exclusions, and their effects, cannot be detached from the asymmetric power relations upon which claims for state support were contingent (Dubois, 2014; Salter, 2007; 2008). Notably, many of the most impactful and affecting elements of border and welfare governance emanated from the demands placed on subjects to satisfy lengthy and convoluted bureaucratic processes and routines (Carswell, 2019; Auyero, 2011). In welfare governance especially, the state demanded extensive, often detailed documental 'proof' of eligibility for benefits - be it incapacity or the proactive search for employment (Fletcher, 2011; Wolferink-Schaap, 2017). These demands shaped

claimants' daily routines, prompting them to record prescribed instances of work-related activities, or details of health conditions, at intervals requested by the DWP. Providing documental proof of eligibility and attending compulsory events were thus a regular and time-consuming feature of governance and a source of stress for claimants. Once more, the demands of claiming became especially affecting through the performative dimensions of state encounters - defined by a '...confessionary complex...' between a state which demands legibility and subjects who have little choice but to disclose whatever is requested of them (Salter, 2007; 2008: 365; Foucault, 1990; Conlon, 2019). In something of a paradox with these incessant demands, the state was also effective in its tendency to make subjects wait (Auyero, 2011; Tsalapanatis, 2017), often indefinitely, for governmental decisions or support provisions. For asylum seekers and benefits claimants alike then, seemingly benign and irritating administrative demands and periods of waiting were often experienced in a 'chronic' state of despair, fear or expectation.' (Carswell et al., 2019: 599). And so, waiting for the state to act was not merely 'lost' or 'dead' time (Jeffrey, 2008) but experienced as an affectively potent form of precarity that exacerbated feelings of frustration, anxiety, and despondency. Unlike the imposition of poverty and monitoring regimes, such practices and demands were not *explicitly* deployed for the purpose of security or deterring claims. Yet these bureaucratic processes and performances still profoundly shaped how governance was experienced; at the heart of which was an asymmetric relationship between subjects and the state, in which the latter's authority was reproduced symbolically and performatively.

For asylum seekers and welfare claimants alike then, lived experiences of governance were in many ways defined by a 'politics of discomfort' (Darling, 2011) and deterrence (Allsopp, 2014; Fletcher & Wright, 2018); reproduced through overlapping material, embodied, symbolic forms of exclusion. Whilst untangling and attributing intentionality to these intersecting and often indirect governmental effects is difficult, through a focus on welfare and border subjects' lived experiences, I have shown how their cumulative effects powerfully shaped how governance was experienced. By studying experiences of governance in this way, I have contributed to the existing research literature on asylum and welfare governance by producing an in-depth and holistic account that captures the multi-dimensional character of governmental in/exclusion.

## **10.2 Governmental technologies: distance, discourse, and negotiation.**

As well as parallel experiences of governance, referring specifically to the thesis' second objective, I have also sought to understand how governance was practiced. Here I have explored the analogous means through which exclusion and marginality was produced across the UK's asylum and welfare regimes. In answering the broad

question of *how* the state was able to influence subjects' lives in such profound ways, I have argued that the deployment of particular bureaucratic structures and technologies allowed the state to 'govern at distance' (Rose, 1999; Carter, 2018). As I've just mentioned, many of the exclusionary governmental effects were not engendered by policy *per se*, but the organizational arrangements put in place to enact them. Exposure to, or worries about, destitution for new refugees and benefits claimants often emanated from bureaucratic incongruencies and delays. Whilst threats to status or economic security were conveyed through bureaucratic lines of communication. In this vein, Chapter 8 observed the role that different technical devices – including governmental letters, application forms, and IT equipment – played in welfare and asylum governance, drawing attention to the ways in which service encounters are mediated through different technological forms. In doing so, I demonstrated the symbiotic role that technical devices' material and discursive qualities (Barry, 2001; Dittmer, 2017) played in producing exclusionary governmental effects and affective atmospheres of discomfort, embarrassment, frustration, and anger. Here, letters from the Home Office (see also Darling, 2014) or the DWP, application and monitoring documents, and the digital platforms that are increasingly replacing these, all played a key role in prompting actions, routines, and embodied experience. As Bauman (1989) has noted, states' use of technical devices has always had the effect of distilling human life into legible records; thus producing moral distance between state actors and subjects, and paving the way for dehumanizing acts. With the study taking place at a time of far-reaching technological change in governance (Brown et al., 2014), I argue here that digitization represents a step towards greater administrative efficiency but more morally distant state encounters.

Governmental effects and distance weren't produced by technology alone, however, but were also contingent on the people delivering governmental services. In both asylum and welfare regimes, an array of government, private, and voluntary sector actors were tasked with the day-to-day implementation of governance. With dispersal, it wasn't Home Office staff who came into regular contact with asylum seekers when they dealt with the state, but the private accommodation provider – Serco – or voluntary-sector advocates. Whilst in welfare, incapacity assessments and employability training were delivered by private providers, and advice and assistance with claims mostly offered by charities. With the work of governing outsourced in these ways, I identified two forms of distance that aided exclusionary governance here. The first of these was organizational; with government bureaucrats separated from the human consequences of their instructions. The second was a form of moral distance (see Gill, 2016) in which the discretionary judgments of gatekeepers created informal barriers to state support. And so, although the state appeared to retract institutionally

through outsourcing and service cuts, its bureaucratic processes and ideas remained a present and potent force in the everyday reproduction of governance; evidencing here some of the ways in which micro and macro-level governmental processes feedback and interact (Allen & Cochran, 2010; Dittmer, 2013).

By paying close attention to the situated encounters and practices that constituted asylum and welfare regimes, I argue that restrictionist *policies* constituted but one factor shaping experiences of governance. Instead, the exclusions and precarities highlighted in this thesis are better understood as the product of shifting assemblages of institutions, personnel, discourses, technologies, and practices, which varied over time and space (Jones, 2012; Darling, 2014; Dittmer, 2017). It is in studying these state assemblages (Allen & Cochrane, 2010; Savage, 2019) in practice that this thesis makes a significant contribution to the study of governance and the state. Whilst inherently variable, such assemblages tended to distance (Gill, 2016) subjects from the people whose decisions and actions shaped their experiences of governance and in/exclusion. Regarding the matter of intentionality, it is unlikely that the state either sought, or had the capability, to influence such a diffuse array of interactions and assemblages. Nonetheless, even if the effects I have analysed were entirely incidental, they were still experientially significant. Moreover, separating outcomes entirely from intentions would be to ignore the formative governmental logics that shape even ostensibly unplanned governmental effects. The effects observed in this thesis cannot then be detached from restrictionist governmental imperatives that seek to both deter claims for state support and to control and monitor those individuals considered as national objects (Tyler, 2013; see also Scott, 1998, on 'seeing like a state'). Whilst specific exclusions may seem bureaucratic in origin, they always occurred within a hostile policy arena in which certain groups are marked out as requiring discipline and scrutiny.

### **The cultural politics of exclusion**

Much has been written about the role of rhetoric in shaping the development of exclusionary governance (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Wodak, 2008). Here, the dominant narrative explaining the restrictionist turns in both asylum and welfare governance contends that hostile media and political discourse paved the way for draconian policy reforms since the 1990s (Tyler, 2013). Indeed, the parallels between the establishment of an anti-asylum and anti-welfare consensus are immediately apparent (*ibid.*). Both issues gained political saliency after being presented in public discourse as a growing societal problem which required intervention and reform. As Chapters 5 and 6 respectively argued, the 'problem' of asylum was pitched as a threat to the sanctity and security of the nation-state and the 'problem' of welfare dependency



pitched a threat to a straining welfare state. However, whilst conventionally understood as distinct, these discourses also intertwined as asylum seekers and refugees specifically were depicted as a burden on the welfare state and accused of being 'put to the front of the queue' for benefits and social housing (see Moore, 2012; 2013). As I highlighted in Chapter 2, at the heart of this rhetoric were two defamed figures of abjection – the bogus asylum seeker (Tyler, 2013), and the benefits scrounger (see Patrick, 2016). Picking up from long-standing constructions of the deserving and undeserving poor (Anderson, 2013), these compelling caricatures depicted asylum seeking and benefits claiming as a matter of personal choice, establishing a default assumption of illegitimacy and suspicion towards claimants. Whilst the purported lifestyle of these groups – as lazy, feckless, and criminal – constituted what Tyler (2013) terms a 'disgust consensus' towards these deviant Others. For Anderson (2013), this produces a binary that defines boundaries of belonging within the national 'community of value' (made up of productive, taxpaying citizens, and genuinely 'worthy' recipients of state support) from the outside by 'polluting' non-citizens (Darling, 2008; Malloch and Stanley, 2005), and the inside by 'failed citizens' - the 'them' to our 'us'. To protect the community of value from these deviant, threatening Others, these figures could and should therefore be deterred from claiming state support and their mobility and behaviours monitored and controlled if they are to do so. And so, with different groups framed as competing for scarce public resources (Darling, 2017b), the establishment of an anti-welfare and anti-asylum common-sense paved the way for restrictionist reforms over the past two decades.

With the discursive foundations of hostile asylum and welfare policies prominent in scholarship on these topics, this thesis has moved these insights forward by tracing some of the ways that these discourses are influential beyond policy development. Here, I have evidenced how the tropes and stigma attached to asylum and welfare permeate the different technologies, practices, and encounters that constitute these systems of governance. Exclusionary logics inform legal and policy instruments that define rights for different groups and the conditions placed on state support. Conditionalities and a default position of suspicion regarding the veracity of claims (Nyers, 2006; Tyler, 2013) creates swollen adjudication systems in which a high burden of proof is placed firmly on claimants (Gill, 2016; Wolferink-Schaap, 2017). Whilst many of the dispersed encounters that determine access to support are imbued with judgments rooted in the defamatory tropes and restrictionist assumptions that characterize border or welfare discourses (Humphris, 2019). The cultural politics of asylum and welfare don't only *precede* exclusionary governance then, but also permeate back and forth through its constituent practices and negotiations. There is then a feedback loop observable here in which exclusionary discourses produce

exclusionary governmental practices, which in-turn reproduce 'problem' populations who appear to fit the mould of those foundational figures of abjection (Tyler, 2013). Returning to Wacquant's account of advanced marginality (2017; 2008) and the *Daily Mail* headline I opened the introduction of thesis with, this feedback operates in a distinctly spatial dimension; with exclusionary governmental practices and processes of marginalization reproducing the representation of places such as Rochdale as neglected and 'burdened' (Lyons, 2017).

### **Contestation and negotiation**

As Chapters 5 and 6 detailed, the UK's asylum and welfare systems were produced through sophisticated combinations of direct and indirect modes of governance, and were a powerful force in many subjects' lives. However, the enactment of governance was rarely unimpeded, and I observed subjects and their advocates contesting exclusionary state effects in a variety of ways. At a very basic level, advocating on behalf of groups who are deemed in need of discipline disrupts assumptions of statist authority. Problem populations are supposed to show deference and acquiesce to state demands, not push back and pose questions. Instead, with the outsourcing of governance and discretionary practices, I regularly witnessed governmental directives being negotiated and contested, often with positive outcomes for claimants. As well as advocacy, more oppositional interventions were also evident in tactics of subversion and manipulation of the state's bureaucratic processes, working without the knowledge or consent of government. Although discretion is needed for street-level bureaucrats to operate effectively (Lipsky, 1980), such freedoms also provided scope for the subverting of bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, as Chapter 7 details, many of the same modes of subversion – delay, avoidance, and misdirection etc. – were evident at both drop-in centres and across asylum and welfare advocacy. These insights thus speak not only to migrant (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Briskman, 2020) and welfare (Pacewicz, 2018) rights advocacy and activism *respectively*, but also to campaigns to recognise and act on shared marginality in the name of solidarity and collaboration across these divides (see Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016; Siim et al., 2018).

In studying the dispersed encounters that make-up systems of governance, I have shown here how the state is produced not via unilateral impositions of policy, but through situated and peopled negotiations involving a myriad of state and non-state actors. Often, the experiences and outcomes of asylum and welfare claims were determined by interactions taking place at the drop-in centres as much as they were by policies or centralized adjudications. With asylum seekers and welfare claimants able to '...reach back...' and effect their relationship with the state, the conventionally imagined distinctions between state and society appear decidedly blurred (Jones,

2012: 805). Contrary to popular imagination then, the thesis reveals the contingent and malleable reality of ostensibly rigid state bureaucracies (Gill, 2016; Dubois, 2014), through which governmental authority was challenged and subverted.

In Rochdale I observed an array of different actors, and bureaucratic and technological arrangements involved in the day-to-day reproduction of governance. With these constituent parts varying over time and across space, the thesis has drawn attention to the contingent and malleable character of ostensibly rigid state bureaucracies. In being dependent on discretionary relationships and encounters, the effects of governance were inherently unpredictable and uneven; and inclusion within the state was contingent on something as haphazard as the personnel on duty at a charity drop-in centre at a particular time. It is here that we can see - in more concrete terms - the state as a necessarily uneven and peopled entity (Jones, 2012); far from the consistent, monolithic institution of popular imagination (Painter, 2006). Importantly, this is true of both asylum and welfare governance, across which there were remarkable similarities not only in the experiences induced by these regimes, but also in their routine practices and organizational arrangements.

### **10.3 Parallels and the significance of the border**

The third defined objective of the thesis concerned the ways in which practices and experiences of welfare and border governance connected and converged. Whilst many forms of governance and their effects were analogous across asylum and welfare systems, there remained several important distinctions. Although asylum seekers' mobility and employment activities were closely controlled and monitored, their behaviours and daily activities were not routinely scrutinised to the same ends as benefits claimants. Where the state demanded that asylum seekers prove stasis and inactivity (Gill, 2009), benefits claimants had to frequently prove either work-related activation or the inability to work in often fine-grained detail (Whitworth, 2016; Millar and Bennet, 2017; Fletcher and Wright, 2018). Bearing in mind the high burden of proof - of vulnerability, victimhood and destitution - regarding asylum seekers' *past* lives in asylum adjudications (Nyers, 2006; Luker, 2015), they certainly didn't escape detailed scrutiny by the state. Yet, asylum and welfare conditionalities did diverge in form and temporality. Perhaps most importantly though, the implications of asylum adjudications were more definitive. Both groups could have state protections denied, yet for citizens this was only ever temporary, and ultimately, they remained inalienably bound to the state through citizenship. For non-citizens however, the state reserved and regularly exerted its ability to detain or remove non-citizens from its territory indefinitely (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; De Genova, 2012).

Indeed, citizenship status remains significant in shaping political in/exclusion in different ways, and the border remains a powerful force in the lives of non-citizens and the production of marginality more broadly (Weber, 2013; Mayblin, 2016). This presence is particularly apparent in the draconian spatial controls to which asylum seekers were subject (Gill, 2009). As Chapter 5 detailed, when asylum seekers weren't detained or deported, they were effectively offered the choice between destitution and dispersal to an area of the country and specific housing on a no-choice basis; housing that was often sub-standard or unsafe. This 'immobility regime' (Turner, 2007) not only removed asylum seekers from important social and support networks, but also worked to reiterate sovereign authority and control. Whilst benefits claimants were required to prove a 'local connection' to access social housing in Rochdale (see Johnsen et al., 2018), they were still formally free to choose where they lived. For asylum seekers, however, draconian, no-choice housing provision and the very real threat of detention or deportation constrained mobility in an overtly exclusionary and disciplinary way. As Anderson (2013) points out, whilst only a relative privilege, citizens – however marginalized – retain certain rights and privileges based around ancestry (including secure residency) that migrants have no recourse to.

Despite analogous experiences and techniques of governance being evident across asylum and welfare regimes, citizenship status still determines levels of in/exclusion and fundamentally shapes how the state is encountered and experienced. Where this thesis has been novel is in drawing attention to how such differences are produced both formally - through exclusionary policies, socio-legal classifications and diverging entitlements of rights – and informally – through situated, performative manifestations of the border (see also Humphris, 2019). As Chapters 7 and 9 detailed the border was often re-enforced through the discretionary powers afforded to frontline workers and gatekeepers, whose personal judgments regarding the moral worth or authenticity of non-citizens' claims could surpass formal entitlements. Rather than being reliant on documental proof of inclusion alone, bordering practices were also contingent on situated performances of 'refugeeness' and how these were understood by street-level bureaucrats (McKinnon, 2009; Szczepanikova, 2010; Luker, 2015).

Yet whilst border practices excluded non-citizens in such ways, these processes were not insulated from the restrictionist ideas that underpinned welfare governance; with anxieties about an overstretched welfare state affecting how immigration was understood and dealt with by frontline workers. Such cases embody the analogous cultural politics in which asylum seekers and benefits claimants are positioned as threats to a defined national order (Tyler, 2013), of which both the welfare state and territorial sovereignty are central pillars. As I also discussed in Chapter 9, a more

concrete example where this intersection emerged was in the so-called 'move on period' at the end of the asylum claims process (Carnet et al., 2014; British Red Cross, 2018). In practice, the border and its constraints do not neatly disappear with the granting of refugee status. Instead, the separation of asylum seekers from mainstream rights and support systems makes for an incongruent and precarious move on process. And so, having ostensibly escaped the restrictions of asylum, most new refugees were effectively transferred into a seemingly new, but essentially parallel, system of restrictionist governance.

Beyond immediately evident, practical intersections, the thesis has also drawn attention to how the governmental logics, techniques, and lived experiences of asylum are mirrored in welfare governance. As discussed, both regimes exposed their subjects to poverty and forms of governmental discipline, and daily life for both groups were marked by the ever-present threat of state support being removed. Although conditionalities and threats were predicated on a different legal basis, experientially, the pervasive character of such threats and their lived effects were analogous. Likewise, with both asylum and welfare subjects compelled to become highly legible to the state and perpetually wait for decisions on claims, the state's presence loomed large in their lives (Conlon, 2019; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013). Asylum adjudications required detailed accounts of past traumas and, whilst living in dispersal, asylum seekers' movements were tracked. Out-of-work benefits claimants were required to record their job search activities daily, whilst disability claimants had to disclose health issues in intimate detail. Recording and processing such information across both systems required the deployment of bureaucratic arrangements and specific technical devices that were both probing enough to monitor, control, and judge subjects, and sufficiently detached to ensure an often dehumanizing level of efficiency and distance (Bauman, 1989; Gill, 2016). Moreover, the work of governing asylum seekers and benefits claimants was carried out by a diffuse array of state and non-state actors that obscured accountability; producing forms of organizational and moral distance that made the enactment of draconian policies feasible (*ibid.*). Boiled down to these parallel and intersecting practices and experiences then, asylum and welfare governance begin to appear somewhat indistinguishable, with their differences more a matter of nominal sorting than empirical reality.

### **Converging geographies and everyday solidarities**

Returning to the original rationale of the thesis regarding concerns around increasing concentrations of dispersals in some areas (pages 1-2), these governmental parallels and intersections were reflected in the spatial distribution of asylum dispersals and welfare austerity. As I argued in Chapter 4, this pattern wasn't merely a *consequence*

of comparable marginality, but was intrinsically bound up with processes of marginalization themselves. The primary determinant for dispersal location choice - low-cost accommodation - is itself partly the product of processes of material and symbolic degradation (see Wacquant, 2008) that devalue and stigmatize places such as Rochdale. From this, marginalized urban areas become legitimate containers of problem populations (see Tyler, 2013). Here, I have sought to explore what occurs when groups who are divided by immigration status and positioned by statist rhetoric as being in competition with each other (Darling, 2017b) are 'throwntogether' (Massey, 2005) in one such area. With these categorizations in mind, one might have expected to find encounters across divisions of citizenship status to be marked by rejection or hostility. Whilst this was evident to some degree in the informal segregation of migrant and non-migrant services in Rochdale, as I discussed in Chapter 9., when service staff recognized a familiarity in the consequences and techniques of border governance, such boundaries quickly diminished in significance. Similarly, interactions between 'failed' citizens and non-citizens themselves generally passed without any palpable hostility and were sometimes even generative in fostering impromptu acts of solidarity. When common experiences of abjection were conveyed, and a shared position of subjugation and abandonment by the state understood, citizenship status and identity ceased to be of primary importance. Instead, when profoundly marginalized subjects encountered each other - in hostels, drop-in centres, and on the street - the state's intentionally divisive constructs were often ignored, and even informally challenged, through prosaic acts of solidarity (see Isin & Nielsen, 2013). Recognition of shared struggle, and a shared enemy in the state, paved the way for interactions which brought the illusory basis of national identity to the fore; perhaps most evident in marginalized citizens' expressions of frustration *not* at the presence of non-citizens, but at the repressive actions and inactions of the state. As seen with more formal and organized movements elsewhere (Raimondi, 2019), with shared spaces, encounter, and familiarity put to the fore, the power of the state to reproduce divisions along lines of citizenship status fell away as more immediate commonalities emerged. When considered abstractly, the exclusionary logics, governmental practices, and lived experiences of asylum and welfare were closely aligned. Looking at a snapshot of everyday life under either system, one might even struggle to distinguish which was which, and the boundaries between asylum and welfare governance begin to appear somewhat illusory (Anderson, 2013). Yet, the instability of these boundaries was also evident empirically - in the generative encounters and recognitions of common subjectivity that occurred across divides of citizenship status and identity. In this way, I have contributed important empirical evidence of informal and everyday solidarities across difference to recent debates that

have often discussed this matter in abstraction (Anderson, 2013) or with respect to organized solidarity movements only (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Raimondi, 2019).

Just as shared space was elemental in producing ad hoc expressions of solidarity and resistance, so too was a geographical approach in recording and understanding them. Whilst recent studies from other disciplines have begun to explore the lived intersections of border and welfare governance (notably sociology: Mayblin, 2014; 2016; Humphris, 2019), my approach and findings are novel in that they concern the spatial dimensions of these nascent solidarities. With this focus on space, we can see how the power of governmental discourses and practices waned as commonalities were discovered through spaces ostensibly vacated by the state in austerity. *Where* asylum and austerity converged was not only contextual, but instrumental, as it was here that generative encounters across difference and the contrived categories of citizen and non-citizen began to fall apart. Methodologically too, an open, explorative analysis that proceeds from a specific geographical case study has the power to deconstruct a priori categorizations of citizenship or welfare status (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013). Through focusing on shared spaces and experiences of governance, I have demonstrated how divisions based on citizenship and identity are only stable when they are treated as such; by different Others, street-level bureaucrats, and scholars alike. Once shared marginality is recognised, I argue that the contrived, imaginary nature of divides between citizens and non-citizens dissolves and we can begin to attend to the prosaic commonalities that can also characterize the intersections of marginality and diversity. In being attentive to the shared spaces, encounters, and intersecting lives of groups divided by state classifications, my findings allow for an appreciation of the fragile and contingent character of these categories (*ibid.*) and, more broadly, the state itself (Painter, 2006; Jones, 2012)

As I outlined in Chapter 2, Bridget Anderson (2013) conceives that political inclusion is delineated 'from the outside' by the exclusion of non-citizens, and 'from the inside' by 'failed' citizens. Yet these categories are inherently fluid and relational. Yes, citizens retain the relative privilege of ancestry and its attendant rights; and formal and informal border practices still determine social and political in/exclusion for many non-citizens. However, the category of failed citizen is unstable, and the figure the worthy welfare claimant can easily be recast as the deviant benefits scrounger (*ibid.*). Likewise, the authentic refugee can easily become the bogus asylum seeker (Nyers, 2006; Tyler, 2013). For both groups, this impermanence exists with respect to both individual cases and longer-term cultural-political trends, to which the responses of personal and collective audiences vary (Fletcher, 2011; Fassin, 2015; Parker, 2018).

What I have argued is that another layer of instability exists *between*, as well as within these categories.

On the one hand, I have shown how the in/exclusions of citizenship are successfully reproduced through both socio-legal instruments and more informal practices and performances. However, both in terms of lived experience and techniques of governance, there are remarkable similarities between Britain's asylum and welfare regimes. Experientially, for people living under different systems of governance, whether they were labelled as a failed citizen or a non-citizen often made little difference to their day-to-day quality of life. For Tyler (2013), draconian changes to the UK's immigration system have served as a kind of test bed for reforms of citizen governance. Indeed, the restrictionist turn in asylum politics discussed in Chapter 5 did precede that of welfare by around a decade. Whilst determining the extent to which the DWP's reforms were influenced by those of the Home Office is difficult to establish and lies beyond the scope of this thesis. What this thesis has done is shown how daily life for different 'national objects' and systems of governance are more akin than popular framings and analyses acknowledge.

#### **10.4 Unstable categories and the fragile state**

In critiquing the reproduction of a priori categories in this way, I recall here the final objective of the thesis regarding the ontological separation of asylum and welfare governance. Whilst the practices and experiences that define border regimes should not be ignored, I have followed Bridgette Anderson (2013) in questioning the utility of framing analyses and understandings of governance around statist divisions of citizenship. As Anderson (2013: 8) contends:

'What is common is the centrality of subject making in the study of the Migrant and the Citizen, and this is manifest across disciplines: when does the use of the category 'migrant' obscure more than it reveals, and what does it tell us about the status of 'the Citizen'?'

Where Anderson argued this from a more abstract position, I have critiqued the implicit reproduction of these framings with an in-depth empirical approach; namely, through an analysis that has attended to the many parallel and intersecting processes of subject making evident across border and welfare regimes. From this, I argue that, as scholars we should re-evaluate the somewhat compartmented ways in which we approach the study of governance, not only to acknowledge abstract parallels, but to better attend to the lived realities of intersecting marginality.



Doing this is valuable for several reasons. As discussed, empirically it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore connections between border and welfare systems when the spatial distribution of their practices and effects are increasingly concentrated in the same locations. Once more the practices, performances, and observable consequences that constitute asylum and welfare governance are largely analogous - save for the government departments that steer them. As a scholarly exercise then, connecting insights from asylum and welfare literature has been mutually beneficial in several ways. For instance, work from borders scholarship on sovereignty and the performative dimension of immigration enforcement (Salter, 2008; Luker, 2015; Fisher, 2018; Conlon, 2019) has been useful in thinking about how state authority operates in welfare regimes. In critiquing distinctions based around citizenship, I have shown how experiences and techniques of asylum and welfare governance align and overlap in different ways; drawing insights into broader questions of how, where, and through who state power operates.

However, critiquing the analytical separation of border and welfare governance also holds ethical and political significance. Researching governance is important first and foremost as it provides opportunities to challenge its exclusions and injustices, at the heart of which are divisive categorizations (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013). Categories of citizenship are inherently exclusionary and, whilst its effects should be acknowledged as distinct, structuring an analysis solely around such divisions risks re-enforcing them. This thesis has highlighted both the illegitimacy and fallibility of these categories, partly in the hope of discouraging their reification in public discussion and debate. For Anderson (2013), a concern for the treatment of non-citizens highlights 'what is at stake' for citizens; in this vein I contend here that scholarship should attend to parallel and intersecting marginality, not only for empirical worth, but also with a desire to promote solidarity across difference. Whilst we certainly shouldn't ignore the distinct importance of border or welfare governance, it is for this reason that I argue for a move towards recognising and understanding them as constitutive and interwoven parts of what we understand as the state.

Although this is not a treatise on the state, the analysis and insights produced regarding the instability of governance contribute to broader scholarship in this area (see Jessop, 2016). Whilst the border's ideational and discursive power was pervasive, the emergence of transgressive acts of solidarity are testament to the ultimately fallible and fragmented nature of state authority (Fassin, 2015; Allen, 2016). With governmental practices and encounters dispersed and constituted relationally between different human, material, and discursive actors, the state itself is inherently contingent and negotiable. Whilst this is evident in various forms of contestation, I

have also shown how the state's incoherence and contingency is perhaps seen most clearly in the contrived and unstable basis of its governmental categories. In this sense, the thesis follows a tradition in critical state theory that has long challenged the widespread reification of states as monolithic political realities (Abrams, 1988; Mitchell, 1991). Instead, the state that has come into view here is a product of shifting assemblages of governmental discourses, technologies, people, materials, and affects; and something better treated primarily as a symbolic formation that is inherently uneven, inconsistent, and contestable (Painter, 2006).

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